



THE MENACE OF POLITICAL PARTY VIGILANTISM IN GHANA

REFLECTIONS FROM ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS HELD IN CAPE COAST, CENTRAL REGION

Media Briefing addressed jointly by Mr. Nicholaus Akyire, CODEO Advisory Board Member and Mr. Albert Kofi Arhin, CODEO National Coordinator held on Friday, July 28, 2017 at the Ridge Royal Hotel, Cape Coast, Central Region

Salutation

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen from the Media

Introduction

On behalf of the Advisory Board of the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), I welcome you to this media briefing on political party vigilantism in Ghana. We are grateful to you for honoring our invitation. This media briefing is the seventh in the series of engagements CODEO has had since it started the regional discussions in Koforidua, Ho, Tamale, Bolgatanga, Wa and Takoradi.

Background

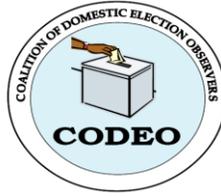
The phenomenon of political party vigilante groups and their activities has been an aberration in Ghana's politics, especially in the Fourth Republic. Over the years, the level of violence that has characterized the activities of party vigilante groups during each phase of the electoral cycle has increased, especially since the 2000s. The 2016 Presidential and General Elections of Members of Parliament were without exception. The immediate post-election phase also witnessed some incidents around the political transition, nearly marring the almost smooth process. Unfortunately, the manifestations of political party vigilante groups have continued from the transition and into the governing period.

At its post-election national stakeholder workshop, held at Aqua Safari Resort in Ada in the Greater Accra region from March 27-29, 2017, the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) made this subject of political vigilantism one of the pressing post-election issues for discussion and deliberation. This was in recognition of the danger that political party vigilante groups pose to the country's electoral politics and democratic development.

CODEO's stance on political party vigilantism

In a communiqué issued on April 6, 2017 in Accra following the post-election stakeholders review workshop, CODEO condemned this growing feature of the country's electoral politics. CODEO further called on political parties to disband these affiliated groups. It urged other stakeholders, particularly the security agencies, to address this growing menace. Specifically, CODEO stated that,

- The existence of political vigilante groups is illegal and the Government should ban these groups immediately as a matter of national security.



- The leaderships of the NPP and the NDC who are largely responsible for the emergence of these groups in the 4th Republic should own up to their responsibilities and work together with the police to disband all politically affiliated vigilante groups.
- In the medium to long term, there should be a concerted effort amongst key election stakeholders to make the Inspector General of Police independent by insulating him/her from political interference by securing his/her tenure across regimes and ensuring such appointments are transparent and genuinely consultative.

Going forward

To broaden and sustain the conversation on ridding the country's political space of party vigilantes and their activities, and to prevent the matter from being overshadowed by other governance developments, CODEO has embarked on Regional Roundtable Discussions on this phenomenon. This series of public engagement, made possible with the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), seeks to create awareness of this phenomenon, and thereby contribute to civic and voter education on it. These engagements will also be used to collate views from regional level stakeholders on the phenomenon that will be used to develop comprehensive policy recommendations for stakeholders and relevant institutions to implement. CODEO has so far organized six regional discussions in the Eastern, Volta, Northern, Upper East, Upper West and the Western regions.

The seventh in the series of RTDs was held at the Ridge Royal Hotel, Cape Coast in the Central Region on Thursday, July 27, 2017 to deliberate and collate more views on the phenomenon. Participants shared the following perspectives:

- Reservations about the trustworthiness and credibility of the justice system. Increasingly, people do not report attacks suffered to the police but prefer reprisals.
- Increasing politicization of the work of the security agencies that affects their professional conduct.
- Security services, particularly the Police, have inadequate resources for effective discharge of their duties.
- Personnel from the Police Service are not well motivated which dampens their morale and attitude to work.
- Strong perception of political interference with regards to recruitment, transfer and promotion of security personnel.
- Unanimous admission that all political parties have vigilante groups, and participants asked that the activities of these groups be halted before they grow to become terrorist groups.
- Unfulfilled promises by political parties to vigilante groups lead to the aggression in their demands.
- Suspicion on the part of vigilante groups that the party executives enjoy all rewards to their neglect when they win political power is one of the identified causes of the aggression displayed by the vigilante groups.



- Apparent lack of internal mechanisms and rules to regulate the conduct and activities of vigilante groups.
- Political parties do not trust each other.
- Lack of proper structures of communication within the parties often lead to wayward behavior by the grassroots supporters.
- There was expression of apprehension that vigilante groups are getting more equipped than the regular security agencies, a situation if unchecked, could lead to them growing to become mercenary and terrorist groups.
- The youth see politics as a lucrative venture and many aspire to be associated with, and be recognized by the political parties.
- Lack of adequate jobs to absorb the teeming youth population and the belief that 'party big men' can negotiate their employment leads to the growing youth party activism, and the formation of more political party vigilante groups.
- Vigilante groups mostly retaliate with similar attacks they might have suffered while in opposition and which were not punished.
- There is a correlation between 'verbal vigilantism' and 'physical vigilantism' where verbal attacks and unguarded utterances by party leaderships trigger physical attacks at the grassroots level or by the grassroots.
- There is growing mistrust in the work of the Electoral Commission (EC) and its professional conduct.
- There is seeming institutional breakdown at all levels in the country.
- The winner-takes-all syndrome was identified as a major cause of aggression during elections. The President for example wields overarching constitutional powers and can, therefore, favor any group of people through political patronage.
- The traditional system of governance is not effectively utilized in dealing with some of the anomalies around the country's body politic.
- Participants expressed worry about the silence of civil society, religious bodies, and eminent personalities on atrocities meted out by these vigilante groups.
- Participants noticed increasing sectionalism and ethnocentrism in national discourse to the detriment of nationalism or patriotism.

The key issues outlined by participants at the Roundtable Discussion indicate that political party vigilantism poses a serious threat to Ghana's peace and security and thereby reinforce the call to disband such vigilante groups. **Based on these key issues, the following recommendations were espoused by the participants:**

- The Police Service should be resourced, equipped and maintained in accordance with Article 200 (3) of the Constitution to be able to perform its functions effectively.
- The Police Service should be insulated from political manipulation and interference, especially in relation to recruitment, transfers and promotions.



- There should be security of tenure for the Inspector General of Police (IGP) and all heads of other security agencies.
- There is the need to transform the Police Service in line with modern trends of policing, and to improve upon their professional standards.
- The Police Service must educate their personnel to be able to distinguish between electoral offenses and criminal cases to enable them to speedily prosecute the latter. This will have a deterrent effect.
- Politicians should make realistic campaign promises to manage the high expectations of their grassroots supporters.
- Political parties should institute internal mechanisms to regulate the activities of their grassroots supporters including sanctions against negative conduct.
- As expressed in previous regional roundtable discussions, the Electoral Commission (EC) is enjoined to be more transparent, professional and independent in the conduct of its activities. The EC should open up to more consultation on critical electoral issues to avoid suspicion from stakeholders.
- Local and traditional authorities should be actively involved in the education and fight against political party vigilantism.
- The government is entreated to build strong national institutions and resource them accordingly to improve upon their efficiency and also to avoid political interference.
- The Regional Peace Councils (RPCs) should intensify their peacebuilding activities in between election periods.
- The National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) should lead in the development of content on patriotism, nationalism and issues on sectionalism and involve the media and civil society to educate and sensitize the public.
- Other organized groups including civil society, religious bodies and eminent personalities should constantly condemn all acts of criminality including vigilantism.
- The public should name and shame individuals and politicians who form, fund or patronize the activities of vigilante groups.

The Conclusion

CODEO's primary and broad objective is to complement the efforts of Ghana's Electoral Commission and indeed all stakeholders in ensuring transparent, free, fair and peaceful elections in the country. CODEO will continue to advocate for peaceful and credible elections during and in between elections. CODEO calls on all stakeholders, including the political parties, security agencies, and the public at large to, as a matter of urgency, address this growing menace. CODEO calls on all Ghanaians to work together to support this crusade against political party vigilantism in our electoral politics. CODEO further calls on the media to make this subject critical for public discussion and urge them not to allow this matter to disappear from the public discourse until it is eradicated.



Finally, CODEO again acknowledges the generous support of the American People through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for supporting CODEO's post-2016 election activities.

Thank you and God Bless Ghana!!!

Signed by:

Albert Kofi Arhin, CODEO National Coordinator

Dated: Friday, July 28, 2017.

About CODEO and Election Observation in Ghana

The Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) is an independent and non-partisan network of civil society groups, faith-based organizations, and professional bodies, which observe Ghanaian elections. It was established in the year 2000 under the auspices of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) to mobilize citizens of Ghana to actively participate in the electoral process and to complement the efforts of Ghana's Electoral Commission in ensuring transparent, free, fair and peaceful elections. With twenty-two founding organizations in 2000, CODEO currently comprises 42 organizations (*See CODEO Brochure for the list of CODEO member organizations in your folders*) CODEO has become a platform for citizens and groups to participate in the Ghanaian democratic process. CODEO is a member of the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM). CODEO is also a founding member of the West African Election Observers Network (WAEON).