



## **THE MENACE OF POLITICAL PARTY VIGILANTISM IN GHANA**

### **REFLECTIONS FROM ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS HELD IN WA, UPPER WEST REGION**

**Media Briefing addressed jointly by Sheikh Arimiyawo Shaibu, a CODEO Advisory Board Member and Mr. Albert Kofi Arhin, CODEO National Coordinator held on Tuesday, July 18, 2017 at Nuoyong Empire Hotel, Wa, Upper West 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 about political party vigilantism in Ghana. We are grateful to you for honoring our invitation.

#### **Background**

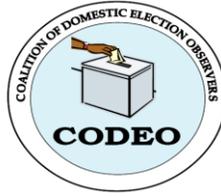
As you may be aware, the phenomenon of political party vigilante groups and their activities have gradually found its way onto the centre stage of Ghana's electoral politics, particularly under the Fourth Republic. Over the years, the level of violence that has characterized the activities of party vigilante 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 after the post-election stakeholders review meeting, 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 Ghana Police Service should ban and disband these groups immediately as a matter of national security.



- The leadership 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 consultative.

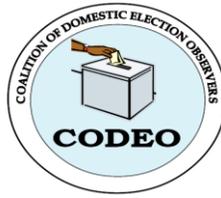
### **Going forward**

In order to 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 is embarking on a nationwide public engagement through Regional Roundtable Discussions on this growing 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.

After engaging with stakeholders in four other regions, the CODEO team held the fifth in the series of Roundtable Discussions on political party vigilantism on Monday July 17, 2017 at the Nuoyong Empire Hotel in Wa, Upper West Region.

Views collated from stakeholders are as follows:

- Apparent mistrust of the security services particularly the Police who are perceived to be biased against opposition political parties.
- Inadequate resources both human and material hamper the efforts of the Police Service to effectively combat lawlessness including political party vigilantism.
- Mode of appointment of heads of security agencies and recruitment of security personnel is fraught with political interferences which tend to affect their neutrality and professionalism.
- As expressed by participants in the previous regions, the winner-takes-all syndrome in the body politic of Ghana remains a contributory factor in the upsurge of political party vigilante groups.
- Unequal and unfair level playing field for political parties underlies the formation of political party vigilante groups.
- Existence of political party vigilante groups in the region is not in doubt but not of a combative nature as manifested in some other regions.
- Failure on the part of political parties to apply sanctions against youth groups who fall foul of the law according to their party code of conduct encourages the phenomenon of political party vigilantism.



- Unofficial financial support often provided by interested groups and individuals within the party to vigilante groups hinders the attempt to bring the phenomenon under control.
- The use of religious affiliation and sentiments to the disadvantage of political opponents was recognized as a threat to peace and stability in the region.
- The media is not very circumspect in their reportage with regards to the activities of political party vigilante groups.
- As identified in other regions, successive governments' inability to generate enough jobs to absorb the teeming youth was also listed as one of the root causes of vigilantism.

Participants recognized the harm that political party vigilante groups posed to the nation and called for the disbanding of these groups. The following views were shared as recommendations to curb the phenomenon:

- Security Services particularly the Police are entreated to show professionalism in their conduct and maintain political neutrality in the discharge of their duties.
- The government should as a matter of urgency provide the Police Service with adequate resources both human and material to enhance their capacity in dealing with the scourge of political party vigilantism in the short and long term.
- The appointment of security heads, particularly the Inspector General of Police (IGP) should be done by an independent body and security of tenure for the office holder should be guaranteed.
- As part of the efforts to address the phenomenon of political party vigilantism, political stakeholders should open up dialogue on the winner-takes-all practice that characterizes Ghana's governance.
- In the long term, the Electoral Commission (EC) and Inter-Party Advisory Committee (IPAC) should consider enhancing the support given to parties to complement their cost during election campaign periods as a means of leveling the playing field for all political parties.
- Disbanding of political party vigilante groups should be done meticulously in phases in order to avoid the security threat that they might pose to the nation.
- To regulate the activities of their youth wings, political parties as a matter of urgency should introduce deterrent sanctions against perpetrators of lawlessness.
- Religious dialogue (at the inter-faith and intra-faith levels) needs to be considered seriously as one of the means of curbing political party vigilantism.
- The media should endeavour to be very circumspect in their reportage about the activities of youth wings of political parties. Caution should be taken not to consider all youth groups as vigilante groups.
- The media should take up the cause of an anti-vigilantism campaign.
- Parliament should consider introducing a law that outlaws political party vigilante groups in Ghana.
- Government should create more job avenues to absorb the unemployed youth.



### **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 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, National Coordinator, CODEO

Dated: Tuesday, July 18, 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).