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A MESSAGE FROM THE GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE (GCBC) ON THE CURRENT SPATE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN THE COUNTRY

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ!

We, the Catholic Bishops of Ghana, have observed with dismay the spate of violence during the current Voters' Registration Exercise being conducted by the Electoral Commission of Ghana.

We note with great concern the acts of politically orchestrated violence in the Ejura-Sekyere-Odumase Constituency in the Ashanti Region, Kasoa in the Central Region, the Asutifi South and Tano South Constituencies in the Ahafo Region, the Dormaa West Constituency in the Bono Region, Ho West in the Volta Region and Fadama and New Town in the Greater Accra Region, just to mention a few. These sparks of violence have sadly claimed the life of an innocent Ghanaian at Banda Ahenkro in the Bono region with many others injured.

The latest action on Monday, July 20, 2020 of the Special Development Initiatives Minister and Member of Parliament for Awutu-Senya East Constituency in the Central Region, Mrs. Mavis Hawa Koomson, is very disturbing. While the police take action on this matter, we hope that the appropriate sanctions will be taken against her by the Executive and the Legislature.

It is an indictment, to say the least, that after 27 years of democratic governance under our Fourth Republic Constitution, Ghana is still experiencing political party-related violence whenever polls are conducted to elect leaders and, in this case, the compilation of a voters' register.

We would like to remind all Political Parties, particularly the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the National Democratic Congress (NDC), of the agreement they signed against vigilantism and restrain their members from engaging in acts of violence in the name of politics. Political Parties should show their commitment to the agreement by handing over to the Police members of their party who misconduct themselves or act in ways that will disrupt the registration exercise. The acts of violence engulfing the country constitute a breach of the Vigilante and Related Offences Act, 2019, Act 999, which was passed by Parliament with the aim of disbanding armed partisan hooligans from carrying out violent activities and its contravention making political vigilantism an offence punishable by a prison term.

We, therefore, urge the government to have the courage to implement the Emile Short Commission's recommendations on the Ayawaso West Wuogon By-Election violence, especially the sections that refer to instances of criminality. This, we believe, will serve as a deterrent to these criminals who otherwise will continue to act with impunity.

Anything short of this will make the Code of Conduct against vigilantism prepared by the National Peace Council and signed by the political parties useless. This code and Act 999 should not be just documents but must be enforced to the letter to ensure that political vigilantism is curbed for the good of the citizenry.

We urge all political parties, particularly the ruling party the NPP and the major opposition party, the NDC, to exhibit political maturity and commitment to their signing on to the National Peace Council's document that outlines the pathway to peace. We urge them to stay away from acts that cause violence to enable us to have a peaceful environment for both the current Voters' Registration Exercise and the Presidential and Parliamentary elections in December.

Acts such as bussing people and illegally registering people at various polling centres will always create some form of violence, as both parties will not agree to that and hence may ignite some form of violence.

The Electoral Commission has put in place a mechanism for all political party agents or any person who wishes to challenge an applicant based on ineligibility to fill a challenge form for the necessary action to be taken. Please let us all be civil in our actions and adhere to this directive.

To the Police, we ask you to carry out your work in a more professional manner by doing the right thing without fear or favour. The Police and the other security agencies should not be seen to be shirking their responsibilities. If some people commit criminal activities with impunity and get away with it, this may lead to loss of confidence by the victims in the State to provide them with the safety and peace for which reason they may be compelled to devise their own individual means of protection. This ultimately has the tendency of creating chaos and eventually a lawless state. Our beloved country should not be allowed to go down this road.

If care is not taken, these acts of violence by political vigilante groups will draw back the nation's democratic and socio-economic gains. To the youth, we advise you to not allow yourselves to be lured into violence by selfish and greedy politicians for their personal interests.

Finally, we exhort all Ghanaians with these words of St. Paul: "... Agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11).



MOST REV. PHILIP NAAMEH
METROPOLITAN ARCHBISHOP OF TAMALE &
PRESIDENT, GHANA CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

WEDNESDAY, JULY 22, 2020.