



**ELECTORAL COMMISSION  
GHANA**

**SPEECH BY MRS CHARLOTTE OSEI, CHAIRPERSON OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION GHANA AT THE KAIPTC COLLOQUIUM ON NON-VIOLENCE ELECTION HELD AT THE KOFI ANNAN INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING TRAINING CENTRE, ON WEDNESDAY 7<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2016.**

**THEME: REDUCING THE INCIDENCE OF VIOLENCE IN ELECTION 2016 AND BEYOND**

**Our distinguished chairperson and my lecturer, Prof HJAN Mensah-Bonsu,**

**Your Excellency Dr. Mohammed Ibn Chambas, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa,**

**The Commandant, KAIPTC**

**Your Excellency Christine Evans-Klock, the UN Resident Coordinator**

**Chairman of the National Peace Council, Most Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Asante**

**The representative of the Inspector General of Police and Director General of the CID, Mr Prosper Agblor**

**The representative of Her Ladyship the Chief Justice, His Lordship Dennis Adjei,**

**Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic Community;**

**Heads of the security agencies and public institutions**

**Nananom, Nii Mei, Naa Mei**

**Representatives of Political Parties, Civil Society, and the media**

**Distinguished Invited guests, good morning.**

It is my pleasure and honour to represent the Electoral Commission at this august dialogue on a topic of critical importance to the progress of our beloved country and the success of this year's elections. On behalf of the Electoral Commission, I would like to extend my heartfelt commendations to this Centre



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for the trailblazing role you are playing in ensuring that Ghana remains peaceful in this election year and beyond.

We are exactly 90-days away from the highly anticipated 2016 Elections. We are all in agreement that this year's elections will be the fiercest and most closely monitored elections in the history of our nation; flowing from two immediately preceding very close presidential elections.

Everywhere in the world, elections are the most hotly contested activities in a nation's political life. Since the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic, electoral competition has been nothing new to us. Indeed one would have expected that Ghanaians may be at the point of suffering from elections fatigue by now. But somehow, the political stakeholders have mastered the unique art of keeping the public interest so high in the electoral process from one election to another. And this year's is no different. And sometimes we may even forget the essence of elections in a democracy.

Elections are primarily about each of us exercising our right and privilege to choose our political leaders. And Elections should always be non-violent competitions. Nonetheless, past experiences have taught us the need for a robust electoral security system to ensure the security of the election equipment and materials, to prevent compromise; to guarantee voters the atmosphere to vote freely without any fear or intimidation; to uphold the rights of the marginalized and vulnerable groups in our society; and ensure the safety of lives of candidates, election officials and the electorate and safeguard property and materials used in the elections belonging. And so security is an integral part of the electoral process and begins way ahead of Election Day.

**Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**



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Every election is unique in its own right. Each is primarily shaped by the political culture, history and socio economic factors of the particular country. In Ghana, a history of six successful peaceful elections in the past 24 years should not be the basis for complacency, because we seem to have an increasingly volatile political culture. We have two very strong political parties among 25 registered parties who seem to dominate our political landscape. We are going into elections where one party believes it must win, and the other believes it cannot lose the elections.

In his country, we have extremely high levels of press freedom and media accessibility. Reporters without borders ranks Ghana at 26th of 180 countries globally in media freedom. Political discourse in the media especially in local languages gets very animated with a string of independent media and serial callers who set the political agenda daily on radio and television.

Into these peculiar circumstances of our political culture, there are other national factors which also affect our elections and the security of lives and property during elections.

- ✓ Statistics indicate that at the end 2015, Ghana went through a demographic transition and our youth population hit an estimated 5.3m, constituting about 20% of the population. This literally qualified Ghana for the dreaded youth bulge - the phenomenon believed to lead to social unrest, war and terrorism.
  
- ✓ The World Bank has reported that over 47% of the active youth population between 15-24 years are unemployed. Overall African youth unemployment rates are high, with no jobs for 50% of graduates on the continent.
  
- ✓ Another factor that is worth highlighting is the proliferation of illegal small arms in Ghana. A report conducted for the Small Arms Commission by our very same KAIPTC in 2014 informs us that there are over 2.3 million weapons in circulation in Ghana, 1.1 million of which are illicit. The



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troubling reality is that the proliferation of illegal small arms creates the convenient environment for the proliferation of political and criminal violence.

- ✓ Statistics from the Narcotics Control Board also indicate a disturbingly high and growing rate of drugs and alcohol abuse.. The most affected demographic is again, the youth population.
  
- ✓ Finally, the existence of other simmering conflict issues – chieftaincy disputes, tribal and ethnic tensions and how they seep into our national culture creates a highly volatile election conflict map.

For this year's elections, we have designated 81 of our 275 constituencies as flash points or places where there is the potential for election-related violence. This scenario requires a concerted effort by all political actors, state institutions, media and of course, the Electoral Commission to work towards a more civilized political culture for peaceful elections. In the limited voter registration exercise earlier this year, there were over two dozen incidents of violence resulting in injuries, and the destruction of registration equipment and materials belonging to the EC. Again last month, an office of the Electoral Commission was set on fire in a suspected arson matter, following a dispute between political parties during the continuous voter registration exercise.

As Napoleon Bonaparte reminds us: "If they want peace, nations should avoid the pin pricks that precede cannon shots". Clearly, we have a high number of pin pricks. We cannot allow them to grow into cannon shots. All around us, we have seen the devastating consequences on nations when political leaders place their personal ambitions and sectional interests above national interest. We therefore call on the leaders of our political parties to engage their supporters, especially their youth wings, and lead the process for a peaceful electoral process. Political party leaders should also take responsibility for the actions of their supporters and condemn bad behaviour where they occur.



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As a state institution responsible for conducting free, fair, transparent and peaceful elections, we are working very hard at achieving that. So far this year, we have collaborated closely with the security agencies to institute measures aimed at guaranteeing the security of the polls. These include:

- ✓ The formation of Election Security Task Force by the Ghana Police Service at the National, Regional and District Levels;
- ✓ We will be providing the list of polling stations to be used for the 2016 General elections to the Security Services ahead of time.
- ✓ Provision of the list of Flash Points to the Security Services
- ✓ Reduction of the number of Voters on the voters register by increasing the number of polling stations to 29,000 to avoid long queues and voting extending into the night.
- ✓ In the creation of additional polling stations, minimizing conflict and enhancing accessibility were the key criteria;
- ✓ Early voting modalities have been discussed and the process commenced with the Security Services to ensure that they will be available for duty on Election Day;
- ✓ Security personnel will be available to man all polling stations;
- ✓ The National, Regional and District Offices of the Commission and election materials including Electoral Commission installations are to be given adequate police protection;
- ✓ Provision of adequate security at Constituency and National Collation Centres;
- ✓ Adequate Police protection of Ballot Papers at the Printing Houses contracted to print ballot papers;



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- ✓ We have worked very actively with the Judiciary to ensure a credible voters register, and to adjudicate challenges and objections during the voter registration and exhibition of the voters register, in line with laid down laws.
- ✓ We have arrangements with the Police Service to ensure escort and secure custody of ballot papers on arrival at the Regions and Districts prior to Election Day.

And this evening, we air the first episode of our weekly one hour TV platform at 8.30pm on GTV and other networks, for engaging and educating the electorate on the electoral process. We believe that public education on the process reduces the knowledge gaps and suspicion and builds public confidence in the process and thereby reduces the opportunities for confusion and conflict.

It is clear from the foregoing that the Electoral Commission and other state institutions are putting a lot of effort into ensuring peaceful polls. But we cannot do it alone. It is the responsibility of everyone of us here to ensure a peaceful election. The Security Services must ensure that the whole conduct of the election is peaceful. All stakeholders including candidates, political parties, media, election officials, electorates and observers must be assured of their safety. The media must also support peaceful polls by creating platforms for voter education and not allowing intemperate language, hate speech and unsubstantiated allegations on their networks.

We call on leaders of FBOs, chiefs and queen mothers, professional associations, civil society to support us as we work to ensure a peaceful electoral process.



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**Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

According to Mother Theresa (now Saint Theresa) "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other." As we inch closer to the elections, we must remember that there are no victors in chaos, only victims. In most cases, our mothers, our sisters, our children and brothers and sisters living with disabilities who are the most vulnerable in society and stand to suffer the most. They do not deserve that. Our country does not deserve that.

Our lives are more precious than the pain of losing elections. No matter how painful, it will never be enough justification for killing ourselves. We owe our nation and the children of Ghana the duty to ensure peace and stability before, during and after the elections.

Political parties need to be reminded that elections are a contest to govern, a contest of ideas, a contest of preferred solutions. There is no governance during war and the electoral competition is for the opportunity to govern and not to rebuild a nation destroyed by war. The people of Ghana deserve nothing less than peace and stability. That must be the ultimate outcome of this year's election. And it will take all of us gathered here this morning to achieve that. Let us not fail our country.

I thank you for the time and attention you have given me this morning. God bless you all and God bless our homeland Ghana.