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IN THE ANNALS OF GHANAIAN ELECTIONS

✍ **Editors' Note**

Ghana experienced its second peaceful transition of power from incumbent party to opposition party on January 7, 2009, when President John Kufuor of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) handed over the presidency to John Atta Mills of the National Democratic Congress (NDC). A new NDC-led parliament was also installed the same day. Already somewhat unique among new African democracies for remaining politically stable after four successful presidential and parliamentary elections (in 1992, 1996, 2000 and 2004), the latest peaceful transfer of power confirmed Ghana's place as a beacon of hope for democracy in Africa.

Coming on the heels of troubled elections on the African continent, particularly Nigeria, Kenya and Zimbabwe in recent years, the Ghanaian experience also helped to defy the trend of botched elections in Africa and countered the growing pessimism in some circles over the suitability of democracy as a form of government for African nations.

Notwithstanding this significant achievement, the December elections also revealed the fragility of the political and institutional arrangements in Ghana's 4th Republic. A number of developments prior to, during and immediately after the elections pointed to the real possibility that,

without serious reform of the state, its political institutions and culture, Ghana may not be as fortunate the next time round. They include the following:

The 2008 presidential and parliamentary elections were characterized by deep political polarization, high levels of mistrust, and mutual suspicion, especially between the two leading parties—the NPP and NDC. The election was nearly compromised by flaws and weaknesses inherent in Ghana's political arrangements, processes and practices, especially the over-dominance of the executive, weak governance institutions and significant civic education gaps which, in turn, created the conditions for electoral conflict and violence. Also, there was too much negative and non issue-based campaigning, especially in the presidential run-off election. Some political parties and candidates, aided by elements within the media and civil society, mobilized ethnic hatred. Parties and candidates declared their respective so-called strongholds “no-go” areas for their opponents.

These developments may be fairly normal in competitive elections such as the one Ghana went through in December. Indeed, Ghana's 2008 election experience was certainly much better than that of many African nations. It is also sobering to think that this was also the fifth election in the 4th Republic and one among many since the country's

independence. Seen in this light, the flaws and weaknesses in the elections raise many questions not just about the quality of our electoral process, but about the strength of our democracy. At the very least, the negative experiences in the December elections raise questions about whether Ghana is staying on course with her record of progressively successful elections from 1992 to 2004. They also raise the question as to whether Ghana's democratic development has reached some sort of a plateau.

Democracy Watch undertakes a review of the quality of the 2008 polls, highlighting some of its key moments. It also makes suggestions for addressing such problems in future elections. This edition reflects on two major developments in the December election cycle: the 'Limited Voter Registration Exercise' and 'Election Conflicts'. ■

Worrisome developments in the 2008 polls

The Electoral Commission (EC) conducted a voter registration exercise between July 31 and August 12, 2008 to register Ghanaians who had turned eighteen since the last registration. The exercise also targeted other Ghanaians who, for excusable reasons, did not have their names in the voters' roll. Referred to as 'Limited Voter Registration,' the objective was to enfranchise eligible Ghanaians and enable them to vote in the December 7, 2008 general elections. However, the process was plagued by grave operational difficulties, including shortage of registration materials, registration of minors, a slow registration process and, in some cases, commotion and violence. The exercise was deemed unsatisfactory and its legitimacy openly doubted even before the final tally was out.

The number and length of queues formed at the registration centers throughout the period (especially in the urban centers) was unprecedented. Prospective registrants slept overnight to improve their chances of ensuring early registration the next morning. But the ridiculously high number of voters that was finally captured in the provisional register at the end of the exercise went beyond the worst expectations of the election administrators. The EC announced that it registered 1,835,417 voters during the exercise as against about one million originally expected. This figure represented an increase of about 290 per cent over a similar exercise in 2006 which had recorded 632,087 voters. The voters' register for the December 2008 election, then, stood at a record number of 12,822,474, out of an estimated population of about 22 million. This would

represent an increase of 16.7 per cent over the 2006 electoral list of 10,987,057 and a statistically improbable percentage of about 58% of the total projected national population.

It was no wonder that senior officials of the EC described the 2008 limited voter registration exercise as unprecedented in their experience with exercises of this nature. The political parties roundly condemned the exercise as disappointing; and independent non-state domestic election observers, including the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), declared the exercise unsatisfactory. Indeed, the limited registration exercise proved to be one of the most contentious issues in the 2008 elections. The tensions and frustrations experienced in the process as well as the surprisingly large number of new voters on the provisional voters' register hugely aggravated the mistrust and mutual suspicion between the two leading political parties (NDC and NPP) and in particular, the NDC on one hand and the Electoral Commission (EC) on the other.

Several reasons were advanced for the unexpected outcome of this important aspect of the electoral process aimed at a credible and a conflict-free election. The EC is blamed for poor planning. Administrative and logistical structures put in place for this exercise, particularly the number of registration centers, were highly inadequate; and the innovation to physically rotate the centers from place to place created panic and confusion among anxious registrants. As expected, the political parties blamed the EC for ignoring their suggestions and views on specific aspects of the process from the Inter-Party Advisory Council (IPAC). At the same time, the political parties, especially the NPP and NDC accused each other of being complicit in creating the mess —organizing and busing supporters from one area to another and mobilizing minors to register in a desperate bid to illegally increase the number of voters, especially in constituencies where the party's support was weak or limited.

The statistical basis upon which the EC made its projections, which in turn informed its planning for the registration exercise was also questioned. Concerns were raised especially about whether the EC had factored in its projections, the current high rate of rural-urban migration (which possibly explains why the urban centers had been worst affected).

Poor voter education was also cited as a key factor. From anecdotal evidence, a large number of those who went forward to register in the exercise did so for reasons other than electoral. Some of them already had their names on the voters' roll but went to the centers because they had misplaced their voter identification (ID) cards. Others,

especially the youth, had gone for new voter ID cards because the cards could also be used for identification in transacting other businesses in the formal sector (such as opening bank accounts). The overall effect was that the registrants seemed utterly ignorant or cared less about the purpose of the exercise and its target population. There was unnecessary panic and tempers easily flared among prospective voters who thought that they were being deliberately disenfranchised.

Political parties and candidates who mobilized minors to illegally register betrayed their own lack of commitment to democracy. But that so many Ghanaians had been willing to be mobilized to register illegally and/or irregularly indicated the lack of dedication to their civic responsibilities and ultimately a reflection of weak civic and democracy education in the political system.

It is true that EC took steps to clean the voters' register as it had done in the past. The EC's cleaning process helped to expunge as many as 500,000 names from the provisional voters' register, despite a lack of cooperation from the parties, candidates and the public at large. The political parties displayed appalling apathy towards the voters' roll cleaning process. The CODEO pre-election observation report covering the period noted that there had been no party representatives in about 75 percent of the 525 centers observed. Citizen participation in the voters' register exhibition exercise was equally low: registrants failed to turn out in their numbers to verify their names and/or assist the EC to rid the register of the dead voters and multiple registrations. Even the concession of non-prosecution extended to persons to voluntarily own up to multiple registrations was largely ignored by the culprits.

NDC allegations that the EC had connived with the NPP to inflate the voters' roll in the Ashanti region well before the exercise took place had already created an impression of a bloat in the 2008 voters' register. Although the allegation was investigated and appeared to have been put to rest, the suspicion lingered and continued to fuel speculation among NDC supporters that the ruling NPP party was plotting to rig the election. The NDC added this to the litany of electoral grievances it had which constituted a potential basis for rejecting the final results of the election.

“A perfect voters' register may well be utopian. However, a reasonably credible voters' roll is a key pre-requisite for peaceful and credible elections.”

It is extremely worrying when the margin of error in a voters' roll is so much higher than what is statistically permissible, as was apparently the case in this voter registration exercise. The messy nature and outcome of the 2008 limited voter

registration presents a number of lessons to be learned for future elections and for Ghana's democratic development. A fundamental recommendation going into future elections is for the EC to do more to ensure that recurrent disputes over voter registration become history. Indeed, *Democracy Watch*, in principle, shares the position that the development of a credible voters' roll is the responsibility, not only of the EC, but also of the political parties and the citizenry at large. It is gratifying to note that the EC has indicated plans to apply biometric technology in future registration exercises. The EC must, as a matter of urgency, procure the necessary software for its Information Technology (IT) department to enhance its capacity to deal with multiple registration (*something the EC has admitted having problems dealing with*).

The extraordinarily fractious nature of the voter registration and the cleaning process in the 2008 polls suggests a failure on the part of the EC and the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE) to provide voter and civic education as mandated by the 1992 Constitution. The experience confirms the need for the EC, the NCCE and others to significantly improve voter/civic education in future elections.

Lack of horizontal coordination between the EC and the NCCE is one of the main problems with voter education in Ghana. The two bodies appear to do their own education on their own terms. Sometimes, there is no clarity in the information delivered to the public, which ends up confusing the electorate. As the main constitutional body responsible for conducting civic education in Ghana, the NCCE has often done a less than adequate job. For its part, the EC considers itself solely responsible for conducting voter education in Ghana. While this may be true *de jure*, it is unhelpful in practice as the EC as presently resourced, cannot mount effective and efficient voter education without the help of others.

The reluctance of the EC to share or cede voter education to other agencies with the capacity and interest may stem from fear of potential misrepresentation and misinformation of voters. But nothing stops the EC from proactively offering training to public agencies such as the NCCE and the Information Service Department (ISD), as well as like-minded civil society organizations in the type and nature of voter education it wants these bodies to undertake prior to the commencement of each electoral activity.

The problematic 'limited voter registration' and 'voter register exhibition' also reflect a perennial deficit in public policy planning and implementation in Ghana. The former exercise was postponed twice from its original date of implementation. On each occasion, the EC gave different reasons for the postponement, including the non arrival of

requisite materials for the exercise. This raises questions about the quality of the planning that led the EC to fix the various dates without knowing when crucial materials would be available. It also raises questions about what the EC and its senior staff, particularly the Commissioners, do in between elections. Why must they wait until the ‘last hour’ before they rush to do things when experience suggests that the execution of electoral events are often impaired by logistical issues (shortage of materials, late arrival of materials and officials, among many others)?

It is good to note that, for once, lack of resources was not an excuse for the lapses in the voter registration and voter register cleaning exercises. But it is disappointing that past experience failed to inform the EC and other public agencies directly or indirectly responsible for elections in Ghana that poor planning, complacency, weak civic and voter education and political opportunism are the enemies of credible elections. After all, CODEO and other reports on the 2000 and 2004 elections had identified some of these same factors, as well as civic and voter education as crucial deficiencies in Ghana’s electoral process. The 2008 ‘limited voter registration’ exercise confirmed the persistence of these avoidable gaps. ■ ■

Tensions, conflicts and violence in the December polls

It was generally assumed that the 2008 elections would generate conflict and possibly violence. This assumption was partly based on experience with previous elections. It was also based on the expectation that the 2008 polls would be closely contested between the two archrivals in the politics of Ghana’s 4th Republic—the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC). Vicious post-election violence in Kenya earlier in the year and election-related violence in Zimbabwe and elsewhere on the continent intensified apprehension over the possibility of similar developments in Ghana’s elections.

The growing spate of partisan disputes over various pre-election activities foreshadowed later developments: NDC allegations of ruling party election-rigging schemes, including the circulation of the alleged rigging document to foreign missions; and the grandstanding over the allegedly bloated voters’ register. The intemperate postures of political leaders, especially on opposition platforms, did not help matters. And violent clashes between NPP and NDC supporters in the Gushiegu and Tamale areas of the Northern Region and in Berekum in the Brong-Ahafo Region seemed to confirm the worst fears of Ghanaians of

possible electoral violence. These fears mounted as the December 7 date drew closer.

Reports emerged of the NDC mobilizing sympathetic ex-army chiefs in readiness to defend the interests of the party by military means if necessary. The Kufuor administration announced a ban on several pro-NDC retired senior military officers from visiting any military/security installations in the country, including the 37th Military Hospital, following reports that some of them had convened a “secret” meeting at the home of ex-president Rawlings. The immediate effect of this intemperate government action was to further militarize the electoral contest and deepen mutual loathing between the ruling party and the main opposition NDC. Both NDC and NPP leaders entreated their supporters to defend their rights and interests, even if it meant doing so physically.

Given these circumstances, it did not really come as a surprise on the eve of the December 7 polls, when the country’s eastern borders with the Republic of Togo were closed. But that action also created more problems than it solved. It contravened assurances Ghana’s Foreign Ministry had given to ECOWAS leaders. Worse still, it smacked off governmental arbitrariness, abuse of power and discrimination against sections of the country. This feeling was obviously strongest in the Volta Region, which happens not only to lie along the eastern border but also known to be a stronghold of the NDC.

The December 7 election itself was largely peaceful, though there were a few violent clashes between supporters of NDC and NPP, notably in the Akwatia constituency in the Eastern region resulting in the suspension of voting. But the December 28 presidential run-off election, which was constitutionally required to be conducted following the failure of any of the presidential candidates to obtain more than 50% of the vote in the first round, proved far more challenging for the Electoral Commission. The two contestants in the re-run presidential polls made noticeable revisions in their campaign strategies. They resorted to negative and non issue-based campaigning. NPP propaganda insisted that a future Mills/NDC administration would cancel the National Health Insurance Scheme and other popular social intervention programs initiated by the NPP government. Also, agents of the incumbent party produced and circulated a bogus hit-list purported to have been authored by the NDC targeting prominent Ghanaians for assassination. It was an obvious attempt to link the Mills campaign with the human rights atrocities of the earlier Rawlings military administrations.

The NDC, for its part, attempted to stir up hatred for the NPP among non-Akan minorities by depicting the NPP as the party of Ashantis and the affluent. The Mills/NDC campaign also reportedly reminded voters in the Central Region (Mills' home region) that it was the only real opportunity since independence for the country to elect a Fante president (a sub-group of the majority Akan ethnic group). Both parties embarked on flagrant mobilization of ethnic votes, virtually declaring their respective strongholds (Ashanti Region for the NPP and Volta Region for the NDC) as "no-go" areas for their opponents.

Threats of violence and intimidation, which surfaced during the first round campaign among so-called "keep-fit clubs" (serving as para-military vigilantes for parties and candidates and sparking violent pre-election clashes reported in Bawku, Cape Coast and Accra), escalated as the date for the run-off drew closer. Former President Rawlings appeared to have taken charge of the NDC "popular resistance" movement: his campaign messages virtually exhorted party supporters to take up arms, and he led emotionally charged rallies flanked by retired military commanders. Such rallies often climaxed with the militaristic Christian hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers."

The run-off election ultimately took place under generally orderly and peaceful conditions, yet there was relatively more than the first round intimidation and violence on that day, especially in the Volta and Ashanti regions. Noteworthy cases of violent behavior occurred in the Ashiaman Constituency in the Greater Accra Region. Angry NDC party supporters wielding clubs, stones and machetes had allegedly besieged a private hotel in the area to protest against what they suspected to be collusion between the police and elements within the NPP to rig the polls by snatching ballot boxes. NPP polling agents in parts of the Volta Region were reportedly attacked and prevented from observing the polls by militant vigilante groups in those communities incensed by rumors of 'strangers' visiting the polling stations to snatch ballot boxes. According to CODEO observation reports, voting irregularities and negative incidents increased by 17% and recorded incidents of violence, intimidation and harassment also shot up significantly, compared to the December 7 polls. There were reported cases of disorder at some polling stations nationwide which resulted in clashes between party supporters and suspension of voting. Cases of ballot box snatching by party supporters in some constituencies were also reported.

The three-day wait for the final electoral verdict to be officially declared would prove to be another period of tension and threats of violence. There were sporadic, possibly orchestrated, acts of intimidation and violence by

NPP and NDC supporters against each other and against the EC. Some media establishments embarked on Radio 'Mille Collines' (of Rwanda fame)-style hate-mongering, exhorting their listeners to take the law into their own hands, thus adding to the foreboding sense of impending doom. Radio Gold used its medium to mobilize NDC supporters to form a human shield at the premises of the station in defense against possible attack and closure of the station by state security agents. NDC supporters, incited mainly by Radio Gold, marched on the Electoral Commission and camped there overnight to demand the declaration of the results in the party's favor— while the Commission was in the process of cross-checking and certifying December 28 votes. Similarly, NPP supporters, also incited by Oman FM, besieged another local radio station to protest the station's projection of the NDC to be leading in the vote tally.

The situation became even more volatile following the Electoral Commission's announcement of an electoral deadlock: neither candidate had yet obtained with certainty the requisite percentage of votes, necessitating a wait for the votes from one constituency (Tain) which could not participate in the December 28 run-off for logistical reasons. The inconclusive outcome of the December 28 runoff and the re-run of the polls in Tain appeared to have been helpful in narrowly averting a looming violent face-off between NPP and NDC supporters. But this residual runoff election was not without its own drama. Almost all the leadership and 'hawks' within the NPP and NDC (including strongman J.J Rawlings) converged at Tain, resulting in escalation in tension, intimidation and threats of violence.

In the meantime, confusion erupted at the premises of the EC when polling figures of doubtful provenance from four pro-NPP constituencies in Kumasi (Manhyia, Nhyiaso, Bantama and Kwadaso in the Ashanti region) were presented and which purported to turn the results in the favor of Akufo-Addo. The NDC representatives objected to these figures. They argued that these figures did not tally with what had been originally declared at the constituencies' collating centers. This further infuriated the supporters of NDC. On the counter offensive, the NPP also alleged that its party agents were attacked and prevented from observing the polling in some parts of the Volta region. The infractions, according to the NPP, made the polling process and election results to lack credibility. Both parties petitioned the Electoral Commission to investigate allegations of irregularities and to exclude votes in the strongholds of their opponents. Further confusion was created when the NPP filed a last-minute lawsuit seeking to place an injunction on the Tain election and to restrain the EC from declaring final results of the elections until allegations of irregularities in the Volta Region had been fully investigated.

The NPP's decision to boycott the Tain constituency second round presidential election after failing to get the court injunction, citing security concerns for its leadership and supporters, may have saved the country from violent collision between the two parties. But nearly twenty-four hours of palpable anxiety passed after the Tain polls had been decided in favor of the NDC presidential candidate before Akufo-Addo would concede defeat. Before then, rumors circulated about NPP hawks pressuring Akufo-Addo not to concede defeat and the possibility of President Kufuor declaring a state of emergency in the face of fast deteriorating national security conditions. Election related violence continued even after the swearing-in of John Atta Mills as the new president of Ghana on January 7 2009. Violent clashes occurred between supporters of the victorious NDC and defeated NPP. The violent attacks on NPP supporters at the Agbogbloshie market in Accra and their subsequent displacement and refuge at the NPP national headquarters marked the height of post-election violence in the 2008 polls. ■ ■

Lessons to promote violence-free and peaceful elections in Ghana

Tension, conflict and violence may be a normal feature of multi-party elections in emerging democracies, especially where they are as competitive as Ghana's 2008 election. It may be unrealistic to expect these negative aspects of democratic elections to disappear soon. However, the extreme tension and high incidence of election-related conflicts and violence in the December polls, even if limited to a few constituencies and party supporters, are a cause for worry. They bring into sharp focus some of the major flaws and weaknesses inherent in Ghana's democratic institutions and processes. They also point to some of the institutional and structural impediments that must be addressed if Ghana multi-party democracy is to be sustained. ■ ■

Resolving violent communal conflicts more comprehensively

The elections may have intensified conflicts and triggered some violent incidents. But the real causes of electoral violence, in many cases, had nothing to do with the elections. The violence that occurred in the Northern regions had little to do with the voting but much more to do with unresolved issues arising from earlier conflicts surrounding chieftaincy. For example, the clashes that took place in

Tamale and its environs were largely grounded in the unresolved Yendi chieftaincy dispute and regicide of April 2002. The same can be said of the pre- and post-election violence in Bawku. It is noteworthy that conflicts in both places had been highly politicized and only partially resolved. Politicians had used those disputes to further their political interests; traditional rulers in the areas had become involved in partisan politics and caused their subjects to be divided along party lines.

Even more troubling is the fact that the Government was unable or unwilling to take serious steps to apprehend and prosecute perpetrators of crime in these conflicts, especially where those perpetrators were regarded as partisans of the government. Protagonists in these politicized local conflicts were readily available to be mobilized for violent action in the December elections. In short, we reaped the grim dividends of a culture of disregard for the rule of law and impunity fostered over the years through partisan and incomplete management of communal conflicts in the December polls and its aftermath not only in the Dagbon, Mamprusi and Kusasi areas in Northern Ghana but also in the Agbogbloshie market and Old Fadama in the Greater Accra region. The key lesson is that we must avoid politicization of local conflicts and seek to adjudicate them equitably and comprehensively so they do not become the platforms for electoral conflict and violence in future elections.

Another area of concern for the peaceful management of election conflict and achievement of electoral peace in Ghana revolves around the Regional and District Security Councils (REGSEC/DISEC). The REGSEC and DISEC are key executive branch institutions for the resolution of local conflicts, including election conflict resolution. As Executive Branch institutions under Ghana's Constitution, they are chaired by Regional Ministers (RM) and District Chief Executives (DCE) who are both appointees of the President. This injects partisanship into the management of regional/district electoral conflicts and peace-building efforts. In particular, partisan political considerations override decisions regarding the arrest and prosecution of electoral offenders in the region and district, thereby compromising the integrity of REGSEC/DISEC. This is much worse in those places where the incumbent Regional Ministers or DCEs are contesting in their own right as candidates in the same elections.

This problem can best be resolved by scrapping the requirement that RMs and DCEs chair REGSEC/DISEC generally, and requiring that they recuse themselves from them in election years. Going into election 2012, it will be useful to review the composition of the district and regional security councils and reconstitute them in a manner that would respond effectively to genuine concerns of over-

politicization and partisanship in regional and district election security issues.

The violence that manifested in the election also exposed inherent weaknesses in the Ghana Police Service. Although the Police, together with other security agencies, were on hand to maintain the needed peace and stability on polling-days, its overall role in the 2008 election was below expectation. The ineffectiveness of the service in combating crime, particularly election violence, was exposed. As an institution mandated by the Constitution to assess the security situation in the country, adopt appropriate measures to prevent, control violence and also ensure peace and stability, its performance during the pre-election period in anticipating and preventing election violence was often disappointing. The Police administration came under heavy criticisms for lax enforcement of the law. The Service was accused of not acting decisively to arrest and prosecute offenders of crime and instigators of violence. Indeed, the overall professionalism and neutrality of the Service have become subjects of national interest during the past years. The complicity of top police hierarchy in the MV Benjamin cocaine scandal and government's approach to the management of it had impacted the Service's image negatively. It also increased public perception of partisan influence in the work of the Police Service following the failure of the Kufuor administration to act decisively on the recommendations emanating from the Justice Georgina Wood Committee on the cocaine scandal. ■ ■

Depoliticizing district election security management to enhance police professionalism and neutrality

The challenges facing the Police Administration can be grouped under external and internal factors. Externally, the political arrangements of the State that have provided the executive with enormous powers and large discretionary application thereof have facilitated political control of the Administration, especially its top chiefs. The practice of placing the regional or district police chief under the supervision of political appointees of REGSEC and DISEC compromises their neutrality. Also, the process of appointments, promotion, transfers and the punishment of police offenders have become politicized over the years. This, then, draws them into partisan politics and creates the environment in which the public reads politics into their actions and decisions. This is exacerbated by the tendency on the part of ruling governments to protect police offenders who are politically aligned to the ruling party (as the recent narcotics scandal has demonstrated).

Internally, the Police Service has suffered from chronic resource challenges. Successive governments have neglected the Service's conditions of service, training and capacity building processes. Inadequate internal upgrading of the Service's human resource and equipment has left the Service with weak capacity to engage in objective intelligence gathering, analysis and projections. The Service has, over the years, exhibited inadequate proficiency in preventive policing and riot control. The capacity and skill of the Service in evidence gathering that could be used to effectively prosecute suspects has also been poor. The incidence of 'catch and release' during the election year may have been, partly, the result of weak evidence gathering. Apart from the technical deficits of the Service, public image has also been deeply compromised as a result of widespread perceptions of police corruption and bribe taking tendencies.

While it may be the case that the external political control may have negatively affected the capabilities of the Police in responding effectively and efficiently to electoral violence, it is also the case that the internal challenges, including the professional outlook and non-partisan posture of the Service, deserve serious attention for reform. While calling for a nationwide debate over the composition and, in particular, the chairmanship of the various REGSEC and DISEC, *Democracy Watch* urges the new Mills government to seriously address the weak resourcing and capacity of the Service. The Police Administration must also put in measures to enhance its professional outlook and neutrality. This may be addressed by instituting internal mechanisms that seek to build a culture of non-partisanship and promoting a Service that draws its powers and mandate from the Constitution and not from individual politicians or political figures. ■ ■

Enhanced civic education and democratic citizenship

The frequency of election-related violence in Ghana's electoral politics, again, attests to civic and voter education deficits in Ghana's democracy. It is instructive to note that perpetrators of election violence are mostly the youth who blindly follow their irresponsible political leaders. An example of this comes from Tamale in the Northern region where party youth groups who were blamed, for the most part, for the election violence that occurred in the metropolis were named after party leaders (e.g. the NDC's Azorka Boys named after one Azorka and the NPP's Addoo Boys named after Addoo, both leading personalities of the respective parties in the region). Indeed, most of these

political parties' leaders and politicians are also uninformed of the electoral rules and procedures, thereby confusing their supporters the more. Even where the political parties have appended their signatures to their own agreed upon code of conduct, they behave differently in contravention of the provisions that seek to forestall election violence.

To reduce election violence in future elections, it is vital that civic and voter education be taken seriously, not only among party leaders and supporters but also in the media and among journalists on election peace and conflict prevention. State institutions, particularly the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), as well as civil society and media organizations must give greater attention to continuous education of Ghanaians about the virtues of peace and coexistence among all Ghanaians and political parties. In addition to preaching virtues of peace, these institutions must join the EC to engage in voter education, focusing on electoral rules and political parties code of conduct. ■ ■

All key stakeholders in Ghana's elections must and must be made to take responsibility for their actions

A fundamental lesson to learn from the 2008 and all previous elections is that violence-free, transparent and credible polls is a shared responsibility for all key stakeholders and the public at large in a democracy. It is important that the EC, political parties and candidates, the media and government take responsibility for their actions. The EC obviously bears enormous responsibility in this matter. For instance, the rules covering the constituency-level collation of polling station results and mode of transmission to the EC headquarters must be reviewed and clarified. Enhanced transparency in the process of transmitting polling station results to the constituency level and to the EC head office will reduce unnecessary disputes over figures. Similarly, the EC must address the issues surrounding the neutrality and professionalism of the over 100,000 temporary election officers employed to handle polling day processes. The EC may not be able to directly arrest and prosecute election offenders. But it must take effective actions to ensure that those who violate electoral laws are punished. It will be extremely helpful if the EC made public the names of individuals, candidates and parties whose conduct contravene electoral regulations at any point in time, impose sanctions on them or refer to them to the appropriate state institution. The parties and the public have the right to know the exact circumstances under which a party agent could be legitimately prevented by another party

or EC polling official from being present at a polling station to observe the polling and verify results. The incidents in some parts of the Volta Region that the NPP complained about and which the EC seemed to concur as bordering on criminality would have been avoided if those provisions had been clarified and adequately publicized.

The political parties and candidates must also assume responsibility for the behavior of their supporters. Leaders of political parties have primary obligation not to engage in any acts that contravene the electoral rules, not to incite their supporters to engage in violence. They must not mobilize their supporters for unlawful protest as the leaders of both the NDC and the NPP did when they urged their supporters to defend their rights and interests by all means, including converging on the premises of the EC. It may be necessary to hold political parties and candidates criminally liable for any violence and other illegal acts committed by their supporters and over exuberant party agents.

The 2008 elections amply underscored the dangers associated with unrestrained and unchecked propagandistic use of the media. The ease with which some media platforms were used to peddle misinformation and incite party supporters to engage in actions that threatened to destroy the polls was disturbing. It was alarming to see some radio stations employing methods similar to what had been used in Rwanda to incite genocide. The appropriate state institution with oversight responsibility over media regulation would have to call such media houses to order to forestall a repetition in the future. The broadcasting standards put in place by the National Media Commission some years ago appear to have lost their effectiveness or relevance to media operators. That being the case, it is critical that appropriate new laws with actionable sanctions are put in place before 2012.

Above all, the government of the day must ensure that the rule of law works and state institutions are well resourced and left to function as required of them by the laws that established them. The government must allow the independent functioning of these institutions that are mandated to provide security, promote peace and justice. Excessive and partisan political control of these institutions, especially the Police and Judiciary, compromise the neutrality of these institutions and render them ineffective in the discharge of their functions towards preventing election violence.

Going into elections in 2012, Ghanaians have an obligation to remind one another that the objectives of this democratic ritual are, essentially, to give practical meaning to the democratic principles of representation, participation and accountability. It also seeks to provide the democratic space to invigorate deliberative politics as citizens are given the

opportunity to interrogate and assess candidates based on policy issues they articulate which will, in turn, inform their decisions and choices on polling day. This civil and rational democratic practice, under normal circumstances, need not generate conflict and violence. In other words, election processes must and should be peaceful in all cases. Where it becomes challenging for Ghanaians to conduct this civil process peacefully, the political and institutional arrangements, such as the Police, must intervene in a lawful, non-partisan and an impartial manner in resolving conflicts that may arise. To be able to do this effectively, the Police and all the other security agencies require an image that evokes neutrality and inspires public trust and respect.

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Major Activities held by the Center in the first half of 2009

- **Kronti ne Akwamu** – The Center held the 5th Annual Democracy and Good Governance Lecture on 17th March, 2009 – Delivered by Dr. Kwadwo Afari Djan, EC Chairman on the topic: *The Challenges to conducting Free and Fair Elections in Emerging African Democracies: The Case of Ghana*.
- The book **Watching Democracy in Ghana**, a compilation of articles from the first ten years of *Democracy Watch* articles was launched at the Coconut Grove Regency in Accra on 26th February 2009.
- **Koforidua Election Review Conference** - A workshop to evaluate all aspects of the 2008 election was held in Koforidua on February 20 – 23rd 2009.
- **Media Policy Review Conference** – A conference on the role and performance of the media in the 2008 election was held at the Coconut Grove Regency Hotel on 25th March, 2009.
- **An evaluation of the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO) Election 2008** activities took place between 23rd – 27th of February, 2009.
- **Afrobarometer Global Release** - The Global Release of the 4th Round of Afrobarometer results was held on 22nd May, 2009.
- The Executive Director made formal briefings on *the 2008 election* to representatives of the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and the German Development Service (DED).
- The Executive Director and staff of CDD attended workshops and made presentations in Berlin, Bonn, Brussels, Dakar, Freetown, Johannesburg, London, Madrid, Maputo, Rotterdam and Washington DC.
- The Center collaborated with other consultants to undertake a **governance and corruption assessment** for the Royal Netherlands Embassy and hosted researchers from the Hewlett Foundation and the International Budget Partnership to conduct research on budget accountability in Ghana.
- Work on the **Local Justice Delivery** research stream of the ODI supported **African Power, and Politics** project began in February. The research led by Prof. Richard Crook of the Institute for Development Studies at Sussex University kicked off with scoping visits and brainstorming on methods and selection of cases.
- Work on **HIV and AIDS Anti-Stigmatization** and **Human Rights Initiative** continued with meetings of the Project Advisory Team and development of training materials for the training of members of the Police, Prisons and Judicial services.
- The Executive Director and staff participated in an **Election Assessment Seminar** that focused on Election Management Quality in Africa. It was organized by researchers from Aarhus University, Denmark led by Prof. Jurgen Elklit and it took place at Coconut Grove Hotel, Elmina from 9th to 11th May, 2009.
- CDD-Canadian High Commission symposium on **decentralization** at the British Council Auditorium on 28th May, 2009, funded by the CHC.

Upcoming Activities

- The fieldwork for the 2009/2010 research streams: **Local Justice Provision** and **MPs Accountability** of the African Power, Politics and Policies Program will begin in June 2009.
- **Culture and Disability Conference** on 10th June, 2009 at the Kofi Annan ICT Center with sponsorship from the Cultural Initiatives Support Programme (CISP).
- **HIV/AIDS Anti-stigma training workshops** for the judiciary, the police and the prisons service which started from the last week of May, 2009 is ongoing. It ends in the second week of July, 2009. This is being funded by USAID. ■ ■

Democracy Watch is the official Newsletter of the Ghana Center for Democratic Development. The publication tracks Ghanaian democratization and highlights areas of progress, stagnation and retrogression.

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Established in 1998, the Center for Democratic Development [CDD-Ghana] is an independent non-governmental research-based and policy-oriented institute dedicated to the promotion of democracy, good governance and economic openness in Ghana and Africa. Its core values are independence, non-partisanship, objectivity, accountability, integrity and equal opportunity.

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