Working together, Building Trust for Free, Fair, Credible and Peaceful Elections: The Role of Stakeholders

Remarks By Kofi Bentil

WE HAVE A DUTY

Whether we sought to be leaders or leadership was thrust on us, those of us here are part of Ghana's leadership with the duty to help get through this election safely and put our country on a path for development.

We have let a lot slip in the past, but its already upon us, so we need to figure out some short-term actions and then think about Longer term issues to make elections in Ghana routine and un-eventful.

The die is cast almost too firmly for much to be done about this election except extreme vigilance, and honestly, I am more interested in the longer-term measures, so I will dwell on those, after make my proposal for this election.

[PROCEED WITH DISCUSSION OF PROF. ANING'S PRESENTATION]

MY OWN REMARKS

For the short term (i.e. 2024 elections)

Everyone MUST GET INVOLVED WITH ENCOURAGING THE EC (by focused moral suasion and broad coercion) TO HOLD SERIES OF MEETINGS WITH THE POLITICAL PARTIES, SELECTED CSOS, PEACE COUNCIL AND FEW RELEVANT BODIES TO IRON OUT PROCESSES TOWARDS A FREE AND CREDIBLE 2024 ELECTION.

EC

I key institution which has unfortunately become too autocratic, opaque, impervious to reason and unaccountable.

Transparency and accountability has been sorely lacking in the present EC, they have carried themselves as if any call for accountability is an interference in their duty! It is not… They even refute facts from their own records as if to say, '*you cant do anything to me*' the EC's attitude is a clear danger and affront to democracy.

Example:

The Present EC submitted reports to The Auditor General etc., where they admitted purchasing some equipment many times between 2011 and 2019.

Yet they never responded to Imani's claim that they replaced equipment and therefore their kits cannot be obsolete as they claim. They flatly denied it and went on to supposedly procure over $100m of "new equipment'

Despite several calls and enquiries, based on abundant records at multiple levels, from the auditor general to parliament, the EC refuses to properly account to the good people of Ghana.

They have stuck to a clearly untrue position that until their procurement activity in 2020 all the electoral equipment were <u>obsolete</u>, which is patently and provably false! Such brazen mendacity destroys confidence in the election process, there's no reason why the EC must not be transparent.

Such impunity and disregard for the diligent work of CSOs who are not political and truly want the best for the nation, breed serious distrust and suspicion and corrodes the integrity of our elections.

AFTER THIS, WE HAVE TO TACKLE THE LONGER-TERM ISSUES TO BRING THEM UNDER CONTROL MORE SYSTEMICALLY

I'm not sure we can exhaust everything today so I will put out my ideas before I discuss them, if I don't finish, we will continue somewhere else when we meet.

ACTIONS NEEDED for ensuring Free, Fair, Credible and Peaceful Elections in the future.

1. **Review the constitution to deal with**
    a. **POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING,**
    b. **PARLIAMENTARY REFORMS**
    c. **LOCAL ELECTIONS REFORMS**
    d. **TWEAKING UNIVERSAL ADULT SUFFRAGE (UAS)**

1) POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING

a) **Let NCCE do the candidate education and familiarization to the citizenry**
b) **Let Political Parties do the Persuasion campaign with resources provided through NCCE**
c) **Each party will have time alone to use platforms (created by NCCE) to do persuasion campaigns. Platforms will be physical (rallies) and electronic (Radio, Social Media and TV)**
d) **There must be strict laws requiring ALL Political parties to submit their audited accounts at the end of each year disclosing their sources of finance faithfully at the risk and pain of suspension from elections till its properly and authentically done.**
e) **There ought to be a law capping the amount of contribution each individual or entity can make to a party.**
f) **We must never allow corporate and group financing of elections.**

2) PARLIAMENTARY REFORMS

a) **We must stop allowing EC to CREATE NEW CONSTITUENCIES, and increase number of Parliamentary seats.**
b) **We must APPOINT HALF OF THE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT from recognizable groups and ELECT THE OTHER HALF, not more than 100 (US has 2 senators per state).**
c) **English language proficiency must be a requirement for lawmakers (i.e. entry into parliament), but not DCEs.**
d) **We must not allow ministers to be selected from parliament (strict separation of powers, to effectively hold executive accountable).**

3) LOCAL ELECTIONS REFORMS

a) **We must elect DCEs, (either partisan or non-partisan elections)**

4) TWEAKING UNIVERSAL ADULT SUFFRAGE (UAS)

THOSE WHO PREACH Universal Adult Suffrage (UAS), DO NOT PRACTICE IT!!

i) **US – Electoral College**

ii) **UK – Parliamentary Constitutional Monarchy - The Queen Choses the PM (PMs can be appointed by Parties without elections, elections are held quickly without much campaign)**
iii) **EUROPE – The Coalition System where parties get together and form government. (France went through 2 elections in as many months)!!**

These reforms will have the cumulative effect of lowering the tensions and stakes in our elections and make them more credible free and fair, and it will attract better quality persons into government

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5) THE PROBLEMS

a. **Our constitution has created a predatory political elite who have made democracy a threat to nationhood. Although the 1992 constitution has delivered political stability, it needs urgent review to make it deliver development. let's stop talking about review, and do it.**

b. **Regarding '*Working together*, as in the title, lets now work TOGETHER on a new constitution. Note that we all did not write the 1992 constitution, a significant section boycotted the Consultative Assembly, we can now work together in a review.**

c. **We now need to focus on making the constitution meet our extended needs beyond stability (development) without compromising stability.**

d. **We need to use more ORIGINAL/FIRST PRINCIPLES THINKING to craft a constitution which fits us uniquely. For e.g. we must understand that we aren't bound to implement UNIVERSAL ADULT SUFFRAGE. Those who preached it and imposed it DO NOT practice it, they have tweaked it to fit their unique circumstances, we can do so too.**

e. **We need to correct the system we have set up; a system that generates Poli-preneurs (people who enter politics for self-enrichment) and not leaders.**

To Build Trust for Free, Fair, Credible and Peaceful Elections for the future,

1. **Bold Leadership is required, it is particularly lacking in Ghana.**
2. **Let decide what must be done and no matter how hard, lets do the hard things that need doing.**
3. **We have to start and give it our best shot, sincere effort is required, not success, others will pick up if we don't finish the job but we must start!**

If we can do the above, our elections will be more credible free and fair, and gain a better chance to deliver development than what we have now.

Proceed with this discussion if time permits

THE PROBLEM:

1. **Our elections have become a threat to our national coherence and security,** we created this problem by the structures we put in place. Let's fix them.

2. **<u>Free, Fair, Credible and Peaceful Elections are IMPOSSIBLE if we keep this present system because it is structurally designed to create HIGH TENSION, HIGH STAKES, DO OR DIE ELECTIONS.</u>** Today, many of those who lose elections are looking at 8 years of unemployment and penury! Unless you managed to "***Annex***" enough money to store for the opposition period. How many previous politicians are in gainful employment, one of the saddest things to see is Ex-Parliamentarians begging for financial and other support!! If you win however, you can set yourself up for the rest of your life! Through ANNEXING STATE RESOURCES AND INFLUENCE PEDDLING!! This is active encouragement of corruption; we are making corruption necessary! It is a recipe for disaster. We must change it.

3. **<u>Inequality in power, finance and other resources</u>** (mostly due to incumbency) create an imbalance, which make elections inherently unequal, and therefore not truly fair.

THE PROBLEM EXPRESSES ITSELF AS

A. <u>AN UNTOUCHABLE CLASS OF SUPER PEOPLE</u>

The high stakes in our elections is a clear and present danger because it has bred and continues to breed a class of persons who are elections financiers and who by virtue of their importance to politicians are effectively above the law. Worse still there is a growing culture of foreign financiers of our local elections who then become puppet masters of our leaders. This untouchable class of people are a clear and present danger! When people get frustrated because these people are above the law, they will seek to topple the whole system! It is a dangerous situation we need to solve. This dynamic is part of what is driving western societies against democracy and into the arms of strong men and despots. In our parts of the world it is breeding coups!

B. <u>ELITE ESCAPISM AND CITIZEN DESPONDENCY</u>

There's a sense that nothing works except what the elite want, and they have created for themselves a different way to survive the system (ESCAPE FROM OUR COMMON REALITIES), and left the citizens to struggle (DESPONDENCY. We see that everywhere… from Polytanks to escape water shortage, to V8s to escape bad roads! recently the uproar against the proposed law to exempt parliamentarians from road regulations is an example. Meanwhile the people have to deal with the problems every day!! The worst of all these escapist schemes is written into our constitution as the obscene Article 71 which has to be deleted entirely!!! Article 71 will be top of the list as the reason for anyone who overthrows this constitution!!! Lets remove that canker.

SOLUTIONS

i. Fortunately the problem has a clear source and can be well defined, therefore it can be solved. Before we can solve them, we need to deal with a major obstacle to problem solving in Ghana, leadership inertia and Lethargy !!
Capt. Koomson put it this way "*Ghana has a preponderance of cowards as leaders*" ie most of our leaders refuse to take action and rather throw their arms in the air and say…'that's how things are, what can I do'??? until and unless we deal with this, we wont solve anything, ironically, we will rather chase out the bold ones who want to solve problems!

<u>WHAT MUST WE DO ?</u>

2. We are like the managers of an Asylum, (***The Right-thinking ones***) who have allowed the inmates (***The Bad Actors***) to take over the asylum and are refusing to take it back because we are afraid of the inmates!!

   We need to sit up and know that "the right-thinking ones" are the proper mangers and not the 'bad actors" the right-thinking ones have allowed the bad actors to take over and instead of getting them into line they are allowing them to convert them into accomplices and agents for wrong doing. We know what is right but refuse to do it, first because of fears (cowardice), and then because of small rewards!!

   We need to break that attitude, take our rightful place as leaders in our society (*people even refuse to admit they are Middle Class!! as if it's a sin)!* and confront our challenges and solve them. We need to take back the asylum from the inmates and run it as managers and put the inmates in their place. Those inmates who reform can join us till then we should lock them up. We should take charge.

   There's the Longer-term set of action needed and the short-term actions required for ensuring a safe and credible 2024 election.

   We must appreciate that we have not done well as leaders in holding the EC to a high standard of performance, and resolve to be more engaged in holding them accountable on all levels from staffing. Operations, procurement of technology and other systems, finance, and communications and relations with the public and political parties.

If we find our courage to make the changes needed these are the things we must do:

optional

WE HAVE AN EXAMPLE OF BOLD LEADERSHIP – worth emulating.

1) Alban Bagbin, The present Speaker, (I am not praising him for inviting me here, if you know me, you know I speak my mind)…

2) I have held these views privately and some of my friends know that Alban Bagbin is my favorite Speaker. Fortunately my reasons are public, because we all see him work.

3) He came into the office of Speaker NOT as a favorite! so he has no sense of entitlement,

4) His seat was 'fought for' and so he doesn't owe it to anyone per se.

5) Interestingly, and ironically he is not hopelessly beholden to those who fought for him, we all saw him fall out with his own party people. He has stood on his principles several times whether right or wrong, and stared people down on all sides. Remember '*what number are you*'?

6) If we had more bold leaders who were prepared to stand on principle regardless of whose ox is gored, we will be in a better place now.

7) We all saw him start his Speakership with a bold decision to break from the dress code established for decades before him!! That showed me that he is a person with ideas of his own, which he is prepared to implement and defend; and he defended his action in very erudite and

clear terms. The Speaker's robe he inherited, is based on a foreign dress concept, which has no resonance in our culture. The Dress code he adopted has resonance and relevance in our culture. A Chief in our culture, is a type of 'Speaker' who sits between Elders and moderates their discourse, it makes sense that our Speaker dresses as a chief! That has cultural relevance and resonance, immediately I saw that, started watching him closely. I have not been disappointed.

8) What he teaches us is that we as leaders must take our roles seriously and come to it with **original thinking** and a problem-solving attitude, we must be prepared to take action where needed, break from the past if it makes sense to do so, and be prepared to lead the rest of the nation to the place we believe is better than what we met.

   May we all push the boundaries like Speaker Bagbin and do even better. Ghana can rise again if we are prepared to lead