



## BREAKING THE CYCLE OF VIGILANTISM IN GHANAIAIAN POLITICS

### Snap Report

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On Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> October, 2018, the Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) as part of efforts aimed at contributing to the intellectual discourse on major socio-economic and political issues, organised a roundtable on the theme, “**Breaking the Cycle of Vigilantism in Ghanaian Politics.**” The purpose of the roundtable was to deliberate on effective ways to end the increasing pace of vigilante activities in Ghanaian politics before the upcoming 2020 presidential and parliamentary election.

The roundtable brought together professionals including security experts, law enforcement agencies and other stakeholders. The panelists of the roundtable include; ACP Dr. Benjamin Agordzo, Director, Transformation Programmes Office, Ghana Police Service; Dr. Festus Aubyn, Researcher, Faculty of Academic Affairs, Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC); and Mr Emmanuel Sowatey, Independent Security Analyst.

In an opening statement the Chairman, Major General Nii-Carl Coleman (Rtd), Chairman of the Civic Forum Initiative (CFI), indicated that the vigilante groups were mostly made up of young. He added that the groups often start of offering internal security at the request

of political party leadership, but later degenerate into tools owned by party members and used to intimidate political opponents.

He also said that the political interference in law enforcement has led to mistrust of the security apparatus by political parties when in opposition. This, he believes has led to a proliferation of vigilante groups. General Coleman indicated that whether in government or in opposition both the NDC and NPP rely heavily on these groups to intimidate opposition. Coleman advised that the country's political history shows that the activities of these groups threaten national peace and democratic stability and called for the total disbandment of all vigilante groups.

A member of the panel, Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) Dr Benjamin Agordzor, Director of Transformation Programmes Office of the Ghana Police Service, indicated that the police have the authority to arrest and prosecute vigilantes but are constrained by interference from political leaders. He also mentioned that the current constitutional arrangement of appointment and removal of the police leadership did not empower police chiefs to act impartially. ACP Agordzor advised that if the menace was not stopped Ghana will see the emergence of the "rule of political parties instead of rule of law."

Dr Festus Aubyn of the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre, pointed out that youth joined vigilante groups mostly as a result of unemployment and poverty. According to him, the phenomenon was worrying because such a large number of the country's young population are unemployed.

An independent security analyst, Mr Emmanuel Sowatey noted that vigilante activities in the past were often providing a security service that state institutions had failed to provide. He added, however, that currently vigilante groups and activities were motivated

by different circumstances, the groups engage in activities to pressure parties they assisted to give them jobs as rewards for their assistance during campaigns. He cautioned against the gradual normalization and societal acceptance of violence as the means to achieve socio-economic gains.

At the end of the day's deliberations, these are some of the recommendations to break the cycle of vigilantism in Ghanaian politics:

- The 1992 Constitution should be amended to make the position of IGP competitive rather than appointed by the President,
- The IGP should have a fixed term of office and a clear mandate spelling out grounds for termination to prevent against capricious removal by any appointing authority, and
- The Police Service should have an independent Commission to replace the current Police Council.

Clearly, amending the 1992 Constitution to give the Ghana Police Service (GPS) independence to operate and protect the citizens from violent groups is a long-term solution. The recommendation from the group was that, in the short-term, the police service ought to discharge their constitutionally mandated duties of maintaining law and order, and protecting life and property fearlessly and impartially.