

SUPPORTING STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT ON THE MENACE OF LAND GUARDS BY HONOURABLE KOJO ASEMANYI, MP FOR GOMOA EAST, BY HON SARAH ADWOA SAFO, MP FOR DOME/ KWABENYA - 16 FEBRUARY, 2017

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I commend the Hon Member who made the Statement for bringing to the fore this rather worrying menace that we have had to live with all this while. I would want to prefix my argument by saying that the activities of land guards in this country, looking at our legal framework, are criminal from the onset.

The possession of small arms and inflicting harm on other persons are criminal. Even going to another person's property without permission is also trespass. Whichever angle that you take it, I do not believe that any one of us would ever say that such activities are justifiable in one way or the other. Our Criminal Act is there clearly in the various sections to support this argument.

Mr Speaker, having said so, the Police has a very good and important role to play in this respect. Law and order and security of our nation are actually in the hands of our security agencies of which the Police Service of Ghana is at the apex. So, we want them to start acting.

We should not be marred in the process by any political colours coming up because what is wrong is wrong. If it is wrong today, was wrong yesterday, it means that same act would be wrong in the near future. The earlier we deal with the menace, the better for us as a country.

Mr Speaker, my constituency, of which you happen to be my predecessor and have judicial notice of some of these facts, is one of the areas where activities of land guards are rather on the increase. You would believe that it should rather decrease because of the rate of development going on, but it is a menace in most constituencies, especially in the Greater Accra Region.

When the former Deputy Minister for the Interior rose, he spoke about the Property Fraud Unit of the Ghana Police Service. We should equip this unit of the Ghana Police Service to take care of land fraud which includes activities of land guards in this country.

There are many interests in land that if you want to look at broadly and legally, they encompass interests in land that belongs to the stool or skins per our legal framework that governs our land and customary law. We have stool lands, family lands and those that belong to the State or public lands.

Most of these public lands are actually taken from their allodial title owners which are usually a family or stool for public good. If all these interests are not managed properly under our land administration process, this is where you would find many people having other things to do on other people's lands; I mean land guards.

So, it dawns on us as a country that our land administration system should improve. The Government that is led by Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo would ensure that the Land

Administration Project (LAP) started by the previous Administration to ensure that the land administration process is improved and fastened would be completed.

At the Appointments Committee, when the Minister for Lands and Forestry appeared before us, he assured the Committee, Mr Speaker, your Committee and for that matter, the whole House, that he would complete that project.

Under that Land Administration Project (LAP), a client office has been created currently at the Lands Commission where people can walk in any day, any time with their land titles and inquire about the status of these land titles; whether those lands they seek to register have already been registered or those persons who are proposed to have sold it to you are not the original owners of the land.

This is currently going on at the Lands Commission and that is part of the Lands Administration Project that was started. We would continue and make sure that, we get to a level where one can sit in the comfort of one's home or office and search for a title on the internet. It would pull out all those who have registered that land and who the rightful owners of those lands are. This is so that, this issue of land guards coming in today and tomorrow, harassing people and killing people over mere land would be over.

Mr Speaker, the Bible says, just as we came naked, we would go naked. So, why kill somebody over land that at the end of the day, when you go into the grave, you would not take that land or house along?

We should value our lives as a country. I believe that if we go on to improve that system, it would help us.

Mr Speaker, the previous Parliament, which is the Sixth Parliament, successfully passed the Land Use and Spatial Planning Act, which is also another legal regime to check how land is used and acquired.

Mr Speaker, unfortunately, there was another Bill that was introduced but could not be passed, which is the Real Estate Agency Authority Bill. I am sure that as we properly constitute a Government, we would have a relook at this Bill and reintroduce it. The purpose of that Act was to introduce a sales certificate for all land owners.

This sales certificate would only be given by a lawyer or an officer approved by that authority, so that people do not go to other places to buy lands, knowing that they would not get that certificate. If one gets that certificate from that authority, it would be the only justification for registration at the Lands Commission or Land Title Registry.

Mr Speaker, I believe that if we are able to pass all these laws and not pass them and leave them on the shelves, but rather make sure that these laws are properly implemented by the relevant institutions, we would do away with this menace of land guards.

Mr Speaker, having said this and with the many voices that have been heard this morning, respectfully, you would give directives in this regard, to ensure that the lives of the people who have toiled, suffered and saved money to acquire lands, do not end up being brutalised by land guards, losing their lands, which is the only investment that they have.

Many pensioners go through this hustle every day. They save to go through the processes and take their pensions, buy lands in various places, and because they are old and fragile, we have all these able-bodied men go in there and torment their lives and leave them with nothing.

Mr Speaker, I believe that this is a country of law and order and same must be seen to be done. We also urge the courts to ensure that land litigation matters are not overly delayed in our courts.

Mr Speaker, with you as a senior member of the Bar, I believe you know about this problem I am talking about. Many land cases have even travelled to 20 and 30 years and are still in our courts —

Mr Speaker, we are urging our Judicial Service, the Chief Justice in particular, to expedite some of these land litigation matters, so that the prolonged judgements which give these land guards the room — because there is no judgement anyway, and so people take the law into their own hands. Even in cases where injunctions have been placed, we see them flouting the laws and the injunction order by a court of competent jurisdiction. People take the law into their hands and do as they please.

Mr Speaker, our systems and institutions must be seen to be working, and together as Members of Parliament, and as the representatives of the people, we have a role to play as well.

Mr Speaker, I thank you.

Mr Speaker, I cannot end without saying that the current Government, which we are properly constituting and the Appointments Committee continue with its vetting processes, we would want to urge this House and actually give them the assurance, that as we complete the LAP started, we are going to put in place very good reforms in our land administration process, to make sure that at the end of our first term, which we know by the grace of God, the people of Ghana would give us the second nod —

Mr Speaker, respectfully — I was just concluding. I was not going to talk about your earlier ruling. But I was on the verge of my conclusion, when the Hon Member

actually rose, and per the practice of this House, when Leaders are on their feet, we do not see Hon Members rise —

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, everything starts on the land and ends on it. The earlier we look at our land administration process well, the better. And by the way, what I talked about is in our Manifesto, and that is what we are going to work with.

I thank you —