

STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT ON THE POLITICAL LESSONS FROM GHANA AT 60 AND THE WAY FORWARD BY HONOURABLE DR ALFRED O. VANDERPUIJE, MP FOR ABLEKUMA SOUTH - 7 MARCH, 2017

Mr Speaker, as Ghana celebrates its sixtieth (60th) independence anniversary this year, every citizen is enjoined under article 41 of the 1992 Constitution to perform a duty or an obligation to promote the prestige and good name of Ghana, foster national unity, uphold and defend the Constitution and many others. It is in the light of this civic burden that I put forth this Statement for consideration by this Honourable House; the nature of the Ghanaian political dispensation since the promulgation of the 1992 Constitution.

A look at the past, the current situation on the governance system in Ghana, and the way forward shall be the main headings for the Statement. Areas such as how Government in Ghana is formed, the constitutional term of office guaranteed for a President, appointments, the costs of running elections to defend incumbency, transitional challenges and recommendations for the future shall be discussed in this Statement. The purpose is to reflect on the progress, contributions and challenges made in the past years and suggest some proposals to strengthen our democracy and deepen governance in Ghana.

Mr Speaker, since independence, Ghana has been governed by five Constitutions, namely the 1957, 1960, 1969, 1979 and the current 1992 Constitution. The political governance under 1957 and the 1960 Constitution granted so much executive powers to the President. The 1969 and 1979 Constitution followed a similar fashion. The experiences under these past Constitutions impliedly promoted incumbency, 'winner takes all', and short term of office for an elected Government.

Mr Speaker, the 1992 Constitution provides under article 1(1) that "The Sovereignty of Ghana resides in the people of Ghana in whose name and for whose welfare the powers of government are to be exercised in the manner and within the limits laid down in this Constitution. "

This means, it is a trite law in Ghana that the fundamental principle regarding all powers of Government must spring from the sovereign will of the people. To wit, it is provided under article 55(1) that the right to form political parties is guaranteed. It is also equally provided that every citizen of Ghana of voting age has the right to join a political party and participate actively in its activities.

Mr Speaker, another challenge to the current political dispensation is the constitutional term of office of the President. Article 66 (1) reads and I beg to quote: "A person elected as President shall, subject to clause (3) of this article, hold office for a term of four years beginning from the date on which he is sworn in as President."

Article 66(2) says, and with your permission, I beg to quote: "(2) A person shall not be elected to hold office as President of Ghana for more than two terms."

The effects of the above provisions are that, every elected, Government in Ghana has four years in which to serve and achieve all manifesto promises made, to the electorate. Within this four-year term, activities such as transition from the outgoing Government to the new Government elect under the Presidential (Transition) Act, 2012 (Act 843), appointments of Ministers of State under article 78, appointments of Deputy Ministers under article 79, appointments of Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives under article 243(1), budgeting and many others take place. In effect, the first year of the four years is occupied with preliminary activities ushering the Government into active governance.

Mr Speaker, the second year of administration of every Government is the active period within the Government's term of office. The third year is characterized by gathering financial resources and marshalling political strategies towards general elections. This statement calls such activities as 'the defence of incumbency'. The fourth year is an electioneering period. The strategies in the third year are implemented in the fourth year. The amount of resources, time and money that goes into the defence of incumbency is worth re-stating.

Another challenge, Mr Speaker, to the governance system transitional periods marred with serious discrepancies such as seizure of some public offices, burning of State properties, disengagement of Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives from office until new ones are appointed.

This situation is worrying. Regarding the disengagement of the District Chief Executives, it is admitted that even though the Constitution warrants their appointment and removal by the President under article 243(3), (b), it is submitted that considering the structures in place under the local government system, the MMDAs become non-functional in the absence of these Chief Executives. Thus, more often than not some regime issues letters of removal of District Chief Executives to go home right after change of Government.

This action of the Executive arm of government leaves a vacuum in the various MMDAs in their day-to-day administration. The problem encountered by the various MMDAs just to make mention is the lack of effective supervision of day-to-day administration of the various Districts. Mr Speaker, in the light of these challenges, it is proposed for the consideration of this House the following:

There is the need to vote for a constitutional amendment to increase the tenure of office of the President to 'a six-year one term of office.' That is, a critical consideration must be given to the article 66(1) and (2), which seeks to limit the term of office of government in Ghana to a term of four years unless re-elected for a second term. The term of four years has its obvious consequences.

It is a well-known fact that, since the promulgation of the 1992 Constitution, anytime a President is elected, time and resources are spent to defend a one-term four years incumbency. This comes with its associated financial burden on the State. Going by this precedent, it is submitted that the term of office as it exists under the current Constitution is woefully insufficient for any

Government to seriously consider improving the economy. Organising elections in every four years is a financial pest and a drain on the limited State resources.

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, even though Ghana is currently practising a multi-party system, which allows the electorates to vote for their preferred President, the tenure of office of the President is insufficient for effective planning and maximum development of the country under a Presidency. To quote Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah, "Ghana 'face neither East nor West: we face forward ... and that, the best way of learning to be an independent sovereign state is to be an independent sovereign state."

This Statement proposes, for the consideration of this House; a six-yearone term of Presidency without any opportunity for reflection. This will in the long run promote greater development, save the nation from huge financial burdens in organising elections and promote proper accountability to the electorates.

In addition, Mr Speaker, it is submitted that, this House must also consider the transitional provisions of the law as it currently exists, with the view to ensuring that effective transitional steps are put in place to allow effective governance without any lapses and issues of Presidential benefits are well laid out. Mr. Speaker, in a one-term presidential situation, transitional matters could be resolved from six-months prior to the end of the Presidential term of office.

Mr Speaker, it is my personal belief and that of many other Ghanaians that this Statement will provide the basis for the necessary constitutional reforms needed to improve our country's political advancement, especially in the areas of national development and transitional matters.

I thank you, Mr Speaker, for this opportunity.