

PRESS STATEMENT

October 10, 2024

WADEMOS AND WAEON JOINT STATEMENT ON THE PRE-ELECTION SOLIDARITY MISSION AHEAD OF THE DECEMBER 7, 2024 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN GHANA

1.0 Introduction

Elections are the cornerstone of democracy, providing legitimacy and authority to elected leaders and offering citizens a platform to demand accountability. They also allow citizens to engage with politicians and measure them against their campaign messages, ideologies, goals and expectations. The 2024 general election in Ghana is the ninth since its transition to multi-party democracy in 1992. The election which is scheduled for December 7 2024 will provide the opportunity for about 18 million registered voters in Ghana to elect the President and members of Parliament. Nine (9) political parties and four (4) Independent Candidates will be contesting in the general elections for the office of the President and 275 seats in the Parliament. The elections will be conducted in approximately 40,000 voting points across the 267 districts and 275 constituencies in the 16 regions.

The constitution of Ghana provides for a four-year term of office for the president for a maximum of two terms. Accordingly, the incumbent President Nana Akufo-Addo is term-limited and thus ineligible to run again. The 2024 Ghana elections is projected to be a highly competitive election within a polarized environment, with the political environment primarily dominated by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Ghana operates a Majoritarian two-round electoral system for the presidential elections requiring a candidate to secure more than fifty percent (50%+1) of the total valid votes cast. Where no candidate secures more than fifty percent of the votes, the Constitution mandates that a second round of the election will be held within twenty-one days where the two candidates with the highest number of votes will contest. In Ghana's fourth republic, the Presidential election has mostly been concluded in the first round of elections except during the 2000 and 2008 general elections which were concluded in the second round of elections. The parliamentary elections require candidates to secure the highest number of votes under a single-member-district/ first-past-the-post system.

1.1 About the Solidarity Mission

The West Africa Democracy Solidarity Network (WADEMOS) and the West Africa Elections Observers Network (WAEON), embarked on a joint pre-election solidarity mission to Ghana, from October 8 - 10, 2024, ahead of the country's general elections on December 7, 2024. The Mission was in acknowledgement of the solidarity and the cooperation among Civil

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Society in the Economic Community of West Africa State (ECOWAS) sub region. The Mission follows similar WADEMOS pre-election and election-day Missions in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia (in 2023) and Senegal (in 2024), and provided an opportunity for civil society from across the sub region to deepen learning, share experience and exchange knowledge with other key stakeholders in elections.

The Pre-Election Solidarity Mission entailed a series of meetings and briefings with key election stakeholders including the Electoral Commission of Ghana, the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), the National Peace Council (NPC), the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), the Coalition of Domestic Election Observers (CODEO), the Institute of Democratic Governance; the Civic Forum Initiative (CFI), the West Africa Network on Peacebuilding (WANEP), the NPP and the NDC.

The Ghana's pre-election comprises: **James Lahai**, the National Coordinator of National Election Watch (Sierra Leone) and Chairperson of the West Africa Elections Observers Network (WAEON); **Alioune Tine**, Executive Director of AfrikaJom (Senegal) and Independent Expert on Human Rights with the United Nations; **Cynthia Mbamalu**, Director of Programs, Yiaga Africa (Nigeria); **Dan Torkamawon Saryee**, Executive Director of the Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD-Liberia) and Vice Chairman II, WAEON; **Marr Nyang**, Executive Director of Gambia Participates (The Gambia) and **Mr Alpha Issiaga Diallo**, Deputy National Director of Political Affairs and Electoral Administration (Guinea Conakry).

2.0 Key Observations

Based on the meetings and consultations with the stakeholders and desk review, the Mission makes the following observations:

2.1 Electoral Legal Framework and the Electoral Commission

The country's election is regulated by the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, The Public Elections Law, the Electoral Commission Act, Constitutional Instruments (CI), and the Guidelines and Policies of the Electoral Commission of Ghana. The Mission acknowledges the preparations by the Electoral Commission ahead of the elections as well as the execution and conclusion of some of the election activities including the release of both the electoral calendar, the provisional voter register and the conclusion of the voter register exhibition. According to the Electoral Commission, the voter registration exercise added about 704, 360 new voters to the voter register increasing the number of voters to about 18 million registered voters.

The Mission however notes the need for the EC to adhere to the election timetable and its commitment to provide information in a timely manner. In addition, there is a need for the EC to make public a clear system to correct results during the elections and to provide information

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on the results management system. This will enable transparency to inspire public confidence in the electoral outcomes.

2.3 Trust in the Electoral Commission

The interaction with the electoral stakeholders highlighted some concerns with respect to trust in the Electoral Commission. These concerns include the potential conflict of interest of members in the EC with an alleged history of engaging in political party activities. In addition, is the ability of an officer of the EC to unlawfully transfer voters and the reported theft of sensitive electoral materials (voter registration laptops and biometric devices). While the EC confirmed that the unlawful transfers have been reverted with the officer sanctioned and the theft was being addressed by the Police, these incidents raise concern on the level of vulnerability of the Commissions systems. Also, the gap in the ECs communication with the general public beyond the political parties.

2.4 Gender and Inclusion

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana guarantees women's political rights; however, there continues to be significant poor female representation in various public offices. While the number of women in leadership roles in Ghana has shown marginal improvement over time, it remains disproportionately low. Despite constituting more than half of the Ghanaian population as well as the Ghanaian electorate, women occupy only 40 of the 275 seats in parliament, and this figure is projected to decline in the 2024 general elections. The Mission notes the action of the government and people of Ghana for the enactment of the Affirmative Action Act, 2024 which aimed at promoting gender equality and women empowerment by addressing the systemic barriers that have hindered women in Ghanaian society. The Mission urged the government of the Republic to put systems in place to actualize the Affirmative Action Act.

2.5 Electoral Misinformation and Disinformation

While the Mission notes the efforts of traditional media, there is a lack of coordinated efforts in countering misinformation and disinformation around the elections. The Mission acknowledges that electoral disinformation has the potential to amplify voter confusion, decrease voter turnout, exacerbate social divides, suppress the political participation of women and other underserved groups, and erode trust in democratic institutions. The sharing of news online and through social media is propagating information at speeds, distances, and volumes previously unseen in past Ghana electoral cycles.

2.6 Voter Registration and Voters' Register

The Mission notes unresolved concerns around the provisional voters' register, for instance, concerns around voter transfer, eligibility of voters, indelible ink and alleged dead people voter register and the commitment of the EC to produce a credible voters' register for the election.

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2.7 Campaign Finance

The mission notes that there is a limited legal and regulatory framework on campaign financing which creates a system of unregulated spending during the campaigns. This has also enabled voter inducement as observed and reported in pre-election activities and may enable vote buying during the elections. Electoral stakeholders also stressed the need to curtail “incumbency advantage” to ensure an equal playing field for all candidates and political parties in the election.

2.8 Electoral Violence and Other Conflict Issues

The political rhetoric of both the NDC and NPP have the potential to heat up the political climate especially with both parties claiming outright wins in the election. Other disturbing factors are the suspicion around the deployment of the military and the police on election day with the potential for voter suppression, the reluctance to resort to the court for addressing electoral grievances and refusal in the signing of the peace pact which though not legally binding could contribute to reducing the heightened tension characterizing the political environment.

3.0 Recommendations

The Mission recommends as follows:

3.1 Election Management Body:

The Electoral Commission of Ghana should:

1. Coordinate effective stakeholders’ engagements before, during and post-election to strengthen confidence in the electoral system and specially the trust in the electoral management body.
2. The Electoral Commission should ensure the comprehensive and final voter register are provided to political parties as soon as possible to allow political parties to plan their activities around it accordingly.
3. Strengthen its communication strategies to ensure timely and proactive dissemination of electoral information this will also counter disinformation and misinformation.
4. Strengthen collaboration with other institutions, for instance, the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE), the National Peace Council (NPC) and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) for improved civic and voter education.
5. The Commission should strengthen its oversight systems and safeguard measures to prevent staff members undertaking actions that undermine the integrity of the electoral process.

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6. Ensure the adequate deployment of trained electoral officials, especially the ad-hoc poll staff to promote the transparency of the process.

3.2 Security Agencies:

The Mission:

1. Note the visibility of the security agencies ahead of the elections, and caution against any action that may instill fear in the electorates, thereby undermining the integrity of the electoral process.
2. Urges the Ghana Police Service to maintain its lead on election security, while following the rule of engagements. We further caution other security agencies, especially the Armed Forces to avoid the militarization of the elections while also avoiding presence at the polling stations on election day.
3. Notes that Military professionalism is key to strengthening democracies around the world, and acknowledges a strong Civil-Military relation in Ghana. We urge the Armed Forces to continue to maintain its constitutional role.

3.3 Political Parties:

The Mission notes that political parties:

1. Effectively deploy and train party/poll agents and especially party members on electoral ethics, including the do's and don'ts of the electoral system. However, the Mission advises against the deployment of any kind of illegal groups to election-related activities.
2. Refrain from uncontrolled spending and inducement of voters, which has the potential of triggering electoral violence, especially in the growing economic challenges. The Mission urge the political parties to respect the legal requirements on campaign financing
3. Political parties are strongly advised to avoid all forms of hate speeches and the deployment of electoral disinformation mechanisms.
4. Despite the grievances of the different political parties, we urge all political parties and candidates to sign the peace pact.

3.4 Media:

The Mission acknowledges the work of the media, urges the parties:

1. Maintain a balanced reporting of electoral campaigns for all political parties as media bias has the potential of derailing Ghana sustained democracy.
2. Avoiding the broadcast or reporting of unverified information, especially the spread of misinformation and disinformation.

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3.5 Citizens/Voters:

The mission calls on:

1. All registered voters to turn out to vote for the candidates and parties of their choice, without fear or favor.
2. The Mission urged citizens to only share information they can independently verify.
3. Refrain from being used as a tool to disseminate misinformation and disinformation for political propaganda

3.6 CSOs and other Electoral Stakeholders

The Mission:

1. Urges the Civil Society Organizations, CODEO, IDEG, CFI, WANEP etc to continue to maintain the role of watchdog on the electoral process; while supporting all efforts at ensuring peaceful, fair and credible elections before, during and after the 2024 general elections.
2. Notes the National Peace Council (NPC)'s backend diplomacy role, urging the Council to continue to work with all electoral stakeholders; including the security and law enforcement agencies, particularly in the signing of the peace pact.

3.7 International Community

1. The Mission urges ECOWAS and AU to enforce its Supplementary Protocols on Democracy and Good Governance, particularly relevant sections regulating.

4.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, we appreciate the voters and all electoral stakeholders in Ghana's electoral landscape, for the sustained democracy in the Country. We commend Ghanaians for their peaceful conduct so far in the pre-election phase and call for the continued engagement in the electoral process as the people remain sovereign in Ghana's democracy.

As WADEMOS, we believe in democracy and continue to call on Ghana to remain a beacon of hope in the consolidation of democracy within the West-African sub region and Africa as a whole.

We wish Ghana a peaceful, free and fair elections on December 7, 2024.

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About WADEMOS

WADEMOS is an independent and non-partisan network of diverse national and transnational civil society organizations and civic groups working to promote and defend democracy, good governance, and inclusive development in the West Africa region. WADEMOS mobilizes, coordinates, and leverages the collective voice and power of civil society and other pro-democracy actors, resources, and opportunities within the West Africa region to advance its mission. The current membership of WADEMOS stands at 47 spread across West Africa. The WADEMOS Secretariat is based in Accra, Ghana.

About WAEON

The West Africa Election Observers Network (WAEON) is an independent, non-partisan and non-religious organization that aims at strengthening and supporting Citizens' Election Observation Groups (CEOGs) in the sub-region. WAEON comprises independent and non-partisan CEOGs in West Africa that subscribe to the Declaration of Global Principles for Non-partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations. Established in 2010, the network seeks to strengthen the technical capacities and provide moral support to member organizations to conduct non-partisan citizen election observation, champion electoral reform and advocacy to promote credible elections in their respective countries.

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