

## PRESS RELEASE

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#### **1.0 Introduction**

Ghana Integrity Initiative, the local chapter of Transparency International, a civil empowerment organization that focuses on the fight against corruption, has followed, with trepidation and worry, the conduct of party congresses which elected party flag bearers and parliamentary candidates as well as the recent voter registration exercise.

#### **2.0 Alleged Electoral Malpractices**

In the just-ended voters' registration exercise, some political parties were allegedly bussing potential voters from neighbouring countries and enticing minors to register. In many cases, these minors were allegedly allowed to register with impunity while other citizens with names that looked unfamiliar in certain areas were prevented from registering. Some registered voters were also allegedly registering again or even registering more than once this time. Again, some party chairpersons were alleged to be registering voters from their houses with the connivance of some unscrupulous electoral officials. There were cases of violence in a few areas where some party officials and supporters tried to prevent the alleged malpractices while the Electoral Commission officials appeared helpless. **GII condemns these practices in no uncertain terms as they are not conducive to the growth of our fledgling democracy.**

The alleged electoral malpractices were not the prerogative of any one political party. However, the two leading parties were largely blamed for the occurrences. The presidential candidates of these two leading parties were silent on the accusations and counter accusations that went on. One would ask: Were they endorsing and encouraging these malpractices? As flag bearers vying for the leadership of this country, GII expected them to condemn the practice and call on their membership and supporters to put a halt to the alleged malpractices.

The worrying aspect of these allegations was that some security agencies were said to be compromising their neutrality and/or turning a blind eye to some of these malpractices while even some electoral officers were suspected of being involved in the malpractices.

#### **3.0 GII's Concerns and the Future**

GII is concerned about these allegations because they border on political corruption and abuse of power, where political parties and candidates are using money, power and influence to tilt the political scale in their favour in expectation of power, potential riches and other benefits. This is not only illegal but also morally wrong. How can people who promise to make Ghana better want to get Ghanaians' nod through foul means and without any qualms? It must be condemned by all patriotic citizens. Our traditional rulers and religious leaders must vehemently condemn these practices. The moral values of Ghanaians and even those seeking to lead this country seem not to matter any longer.

Attempts to bloat the voters' register amounts to designing a strategy to possibly rig the elections by some political parties and candidates. Registration of minors would not only ensure that more Ghanaians vote for a particular party or candidate but would also cover up attempts to inflate elections results. Allegations of ballots exceeding numbers of registered voters have been made in the past. Thus, registering minors and double registration would cover up this means of rigging. One cannot even rule out the possibility of devising a means of cleaning the indelible ink to enable people vote more than once in the elections.

Ghana can not allow political corruption to destroy our fledgling democracy, especially the degree and pervasiveness that it has assumed during this registration exercise. The allegations of violations and alleged intimidation of perceived opposition supporters and the media as well as patriotic citizens who try to check some malpractices are dangerous and must be condemned by all.

We must remember that severe political corruption and election fraud, including the use of bloated voters' register, can generate intense pre- and post-election conflicts that can and have even degenerated into violence and civil war in some countries in recent times. We can not, therefore, rule out civil strife in Ghana. If it has happened elsewhere, why do we think Ghana is different? Moreover, electoral corruption can corrode the legitimacy of the election/democratic process, of the political system at large, and even that of the party or government perceived to have won its victory through foul play. What respect would Ghanaians have for a President that has won the elections through foul means? How can constituents respect their Parliamentarian when it is widely known that he/she rigged the elections?

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

The EC must learn from what has happened during the just-ended registration exercise and plan better for the December 2008 elections. Some parties are likely to take the law into their own hands and try to prevent so-called unqualified voters from voting. The use of "macho men" must be seriously addressed. Swift action must be taken against election officials found wanting in their duties. The Police, other security personnel and the general public must be well schooled as to what is expected of them on the day of the elections. The Inspector General of Police must instruct his men and women in uniform to behave professionally in the impending elections and do what is expected of them.

But most important of all, all eligible voters must not only be honest but also vigilant to ensure that no cheating is allowed to take place. We need a better Ghana and it can only be achieved if we have clean, fair and peaceful elections in December, 2008.

**Signed by**

**Vitus Azeem  
Executive Secretary - GII**