

**“SAFEGUARDING A FRIENDLY AFRICAN DEMOCRATIC
BEACON: WHY & HOW THE US MUST ASSIST GHANA’S 2016
ELECTION”**

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I: Introduction

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Bass, other members of the Africa Subcommittee: As always I am deeply grateful. Please know that it is not just me. Every time I express appreciation for the moral and material help that you--assisted by brilliant, hard-working and gracious staff—continue to give to Africa, I am plugged into the sentiments of speak for hundreds of millions.

Today, there is more. The personal gratitude is special. The focus of this hearing is the reason. Yes, every single Africa-impacted issue that you have ever worked on, every single hearing that you hold, is vitally important, a matter of life and death. Still, I believe that democracy in Africa is simply foundational and instrumental. It has its own innate value because it guarantees that Africans are governed only with their consent and only in a dignified, respectful manner. In addition, democracy is also the best system for responding to Africa's many other challenges effectively and sustainably. Put another way, I believe strongly and deeply that Africa will significant and sustainable progress only when it embraces, deepens and prioritizes democracy.

I am acutely aware that this is a controversial, even contrarian, viewpoint. A handful of current strongmen in Africa, for example, would beg to differ. But it is not just Africa. As African voters and citizens have demonstrated time after time, they want to hire and fire those who govern them. Most of the strongmen are supported by powerful outside entities and groups who should—and do--know better. It is in this environment that I am very happy that this hearing is examining how to improve US democracy efforts in Africa.

Naturally, I am even happier that you are examining why and how Ghana, my birth-place, might be assisted to protect its democratic gains in the up-coming elections. Of course I am both flattered and humbled that you have solicited my thoughts. Thank you

II: Political rivalry and violence in Ghana: a truncated short history

Mr. Chairman, in this Hearing, my core message is simple: The US will serve its interest by boosting its support and closely monitoring Ghana's current electioneering campaign which will culminate in the November 7 ballot for president and parliamentarians.

I will make my case in two main segments. One will lay out the reasons this must be done; the other will be recommendations of how.

Before either though, brief comments about some past elections and political violence in Ghana may be illuminating. The November 7 2016 elections will be general election number 7 under Ghana's Fourth Republic. That Republic kicked off in 1992 when military ruler J. J. Rawlings got a new constitution written and adopted and elections held. Two rival political parties—NPP and NDC—have dominated in the ensuing 14 years, even though countless small, vanity parties keep springing up and withering. The NDC is the party that resulted when Mr. Rawlings transformed the PNDC (the body through which he had governed militarily since he seized power at the end of

1981). To a great extent the NPP too is the light transformation and renaming of a preexisting political party and movement. An earlier incarnation had been UP, the right-of-center United Party, which had fiercely battled Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and his socialist CPP in the early 1960s. The UP had been led by Dr. Kofi A. Busia, the great rival of Nkrumah. The Nkrumah-Busia rivalry saw a continuation of serious political violence in Ghana. That violence had first erupted not long after Ghana's independence in 1957, after Nkrumah had convincingly won all three back-to-back elections which the British colonial rulers insisted on before accepting him as the people's choice. In the violence of the early 1960's, several assassination attempts were made on Nkrumah's life. At least one seriously wounded Nkrumah after killing the little school girl about to hand flowers to Nkrumah. On its part, the Nkrumah government jailed large numbers of critics and opponents—small as well as big, including former close aides--without trial under the special law, the Preventive Detention Act. Many Nkrumah opponents fled Ghana into exile. This included Dr. Busia. The Ghana military overthrew Nkrumah in 1966. In the first elections thereafter, a returned Dr. Busia recreated his party, naming it the Progress Party, and led it to victory, becoming Prime Minister. The military overthrew Busia too, triggering a series of short lived military coups. The second successful Rawlings coup of December 31, 1981 against Dr. Hilla Limann was the last. However, it is credibly reported that about a dozen unsuccessful attempts were made to overthrow Rawlings himself.

Mr. Chairman this history of political violence in Ghana could serve as a valuable cautionary tale. For example, it could spur Ghana and friends to be extra vigilant and guard against violence during this seventh election under the Fourth Republic.

The commendable truth, however, is that all 6 previous presidential elections in Ghana since 1992 have been largely peaceful—even if closely fought and even if most had ended in the electoral equivalent of photo finishes that had often been disputed. Those results had another characteristic which has won major African and international praise and esteem for Ghana—including from US President Barack Obama himself. That admired feature is the gracious acceptance of bitter loss and the peaceful transfer of government power to the rival political party. Specifically: As a twice-elected elected civilian president, Jerry Rawlings served 8 years at the head of the NDC administration. However, in 2000, he peacefully handed national power over to John Kufuor the NPP candidate who had defeated the NDC contestant, John Atta-Mills. In 2008, power again changed hands peacefully in Ghana. President Kufuor of the NPP passed power to the NDC's Atta-Mills who had defeated the NPP's Nana Akufo-Addo.

III: Rationale for assisting and monitoring Ghana's 2016 elections

Some might be tempted by this sterling picture to ask: Given this recent admirable electoral performance in Ghana, especially when compared to its peers, why allocate limited American and other donor resources and attention to Ghana? Why not allocate these to more challenged African countries?

In response, I offer the following 5 reasons. They are of uneven importance and weight. Taken together, they constitute my case for external donor assistance and attention to Ghana's 2016 elections.

Today, Ghana is again a close friend of the US. This has not always been the case. This link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OzMa79TXTM> connects to an arresting Youtube video. It shows President John F. Kennedy, on March 8, 1961--only 7 short weeks in the White House--going to the airport to meet and welcome President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana to Washington DC. This indicated warm US-Ghana relationship did not last. Today, many in the US and in Ghana still believe that the CIA had a hand in the 1966 overthrow of Nkrumah. Consequently, American assistance to and presence at Ghana's elections would simply be "what reconciled friends do."

Ghana is still an influential African trend-setter: Good examples set by Ghana in a few fields have been praised and even emulated by its African peers. Liberation from colonial rule is the pre-eminent example. But even the bloody second Rawlings coup which publicly executed many senior generals--allegedly for corruption--has been praised by countless Nigerians to my face. Ex-President Rawlings remains surprisingly popular in Nigeria. More to the point, many African countries and democracy activists have expressed strong admiration for Ghana's embrace of democratic governance. Burkina Faso and Nigeria are examples here. Thus the US would be indirectly helping advance democracy across Africa when it assists Ghana to continue the trend of peaceful well-run elections.

Previous highly-regarded Ghanaian elections may have been less pristine than initially assessed: To repeat an earlier point, recent Ghanaian elections have been declared free and fair, and Ghana has received significant praise and even material benefits. And yet later assessment have suggested that significant flaws and problems had been over-looked. And these suggestions have not come from credible international experts and researchers, not just from the losing Ghanaian contestants. A clear implication here is that the 2016 elections and subsequent ones must be more closely monitored and scrutinized than past ones. In turn, this calls for more electoral assistance for Ghana's up-coming elections.

Tension and threats of violence are rising in the campaign now underway in Ghana and the aroused passions could be a good omen--or a bad one: The November 7, 2016 Ghana elections are 6 short months away. And there is evidence everywhere that the campaigning is fierce and heated with rising tensions and threats of violence. The two main parties have been trading allegations and accusations. Recently, the government detained South African experts invited in by the NPP, ostensibly to help protect Nana Akufo-Addo. Supporters of the ruling NDC accused the detainees of entering Ghana to foster electoral violence. Arguably the fiercest argument is over the registration of voters. An in-depth report and recommendation by respected elders has not persuaded opposition parties to drop demands for a brand new register from scratch. Neither has a recent ruling by the Ghanaian Supreme Court. Also partisans have reportedly warned (threatened?) that large scale violence will ensue, if the results do not meet their expectations. Are these suspicions and allegations good omen or bad for the 2016 polls? They would be good if they are sounding alarms about real emerging problems that must be nipped in the bud. Conversely, they could constitute bad omen. This would be the case if they reflect an entrenched sore-losers' attitude. Assistance and attention from the US and other donors would help Ghanaians deal more effectively with this situation.

Attitude of US (& other donors) must shift from “our democratic work in Ghana is done” to “let’s re-engage in Ghana to protect our investment:” It is undeniable that donor agencies reduced electoral assistance to Ghana as the country had seemed to have made a habit of good peaceful elections. The excellent DC-based NED is but one example. As officials there told me recently, *“The NED Africa program did not submit a budget for Ghana in FY 2016. For many years, our assessment has been that the country is stable and democratic, so that we have focused our limited resources on more difficult countries, although NED has maintained contact with several partners in Ghana.”* This clearly reflects an attitude of “Ghana is in a safe electoral zone; our job is done.” But prudence could suggest that a different attitude may be more appropriate. That could be phrased thus, “We should return to Ghana in 2016 to protect our prior investment and minimize the chance of backsliding.” That would be my fifth and final reason for why the 2016 Ghana election must garner increased assistance and attention from the US.

IV: Suggested steps for improving electoral programs in Ghana

Through what new suggested ways and approaches, if any, should increased electoral assistance and attention be channeled to Ghana’s 2016 elections? I can think of only a couple of suggestions here. This should be taken as an acknowledgement that donor agencies and officials are already deploying the best methodologies and approaches in Ghana.

Diversify local recipients and partner NGOs: In Ghana, an effort should be made to improve the competence and capacity of smaller NGOs, especially newer organizations led by women, as a way of diversifying recipients and grantees from the current narrow base.

Design responsive and effective electoral projects that are implemented during lull periods in the election cycle, when no campaigning is taking place and no votes are being cast. We should avoid running projects only during the hectic brief voting period.

The US and other donors should encourage and then Ghanaian elections stake holders to search for innovative local solutions