

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

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POLITICAL

GHANA

Constitutional review forum calls for reduction in voting age

Participants at a public forum at Salaga in the East Gonja District on the Constitution, on Wednesday called for the review of Article 42 of the document to reduce voting rights from 18 to 15 years.

They argued that registration of minors were common features during voter registration exercises and had always been characterised by open confrontation and some times leading to deaths. The programme on the theme: "Enhancing Constitutionalism through effective citizen's participation for good governance," was meant to collate views on the public for a possible review of the 1992 Constitution, which had been in existence for almost two decades. The participants explained that minors of modern time were mature in thinking and could participate in elections to choose a government of their choice.

The participants also called for a review of the provision in the Constitution to disallow Members of Parliament (MPs) to be appointed as Ministers of State since it contravened the principle of separation of powers, which says the "Legislature shall be independent from the Executive". According to them, MP Ministers who attend Cabinet meetings could use their influence to manipulate State documents and devote little time to the business of parliament.

They also suggested the need for the review of provisions in the Constitution to elect District Chief Executives.

Others expressed the need to minimise the powers of the President in the appointment of people to the District Assemblies. Mr. Alhassan Mumuni, District Chief Executive called for more copies of the Constitution to be made accessible to Ghanaians to help them to know more about their rights and the laws of the land. He appealed to Ghanaians to attach seriousness to the Constitution Review to ensure that the exercise succeeds saying, "The failure and success of the Constitution Review depends on all citizens." Mr. Mumuni asked the people to participate in this year's District Level elections to improve on Ghana's local level governance system. Kumbun-Naa Yiri II, Naa Alhaji Iddrisu Abu, a member of the Constitution Review Commission noted that the exercise is not political motivated and that those who would sit on the fence would be jeopardizing the progress of the country.

He appealed to the citizenry to get involved in the exercise in order to deepen the country's democracy and good governance.

Majority Leader apologises for late start of sitting

Mr. Cletus Apul Avoka, Majority Leader on Wednesday apologised for the late start of proceedings in Parliament but the Minority said it was uncalled for. Proceedings started at about 1100 hours, which contradicted his announcement last week that the house would initiate business on time. "I apologise for the late start today, it is because the minority is having caucus meeting," he said. Mr. Ambrose Dery Deputy Minority Leader commenting on the matter said the Majority Leader should have apologised on behalf of the house but to single out the minority as the cause of the delay was a problem. He said matters that took place behind the scenes should not have been made public. Mr. Papa Owusu -Ankoma Member of Parliament for Sekondi expressed wonder why the Majority Leader could not apologise yesterday (Tuesday) since proceedings started at 1025 hours. Mr Avoka argued that following his announcement about the timely sitting of parliament last week he deemed it important to apologise since proceeding could not start at 1000 hours. The Speaker, Mrs. Joyce Bamford-Addo who ruled on the matter said the Majority Leader had apologised on behalf of the whole house and called on members not to drag the issue.

Participate fully in constitution review programmes - DCE

The Asikuma-Odoben-Brakwa District Chief Executive, Mrs. Georgina Nkrumah Aboah, has urged every citizen to contribute their views towards enriching the national Constitution. Mrs. Aboah made the call at a forum, organised by the Constitution Review Commission with the District Assembly and the National Commission on Civic Education, (NCCE) at Breman Asikuma. The Programme was well attended by a cross-section of people including traditional rulers, heads of departments, assembly members and students of the Breman Asikuma Senior High School.

The DCE said the President and the National Democratic Congress Administration deserved commendation for instituting the Commission, adding, that the move was in fulfillment of a campaign promise. She, therefore, appealed to the NCCE to ensure that copies of the 1992 Constitution were made available at the markets for Ghanaians to have access to it. Mrs. Aboah called for adequate resources for the NCCE to enable it to undertake its constitutional duties for Ghanaians to know their rights and responsibilities. The DCE also urged the people in the district to participate fully in the up-coming 2010 Housing and Population Census. She said the data that would be acquired during the Census would help effective planning and implementation of policies and programmes towards the development of the country.

Mr. Clement Akapame, leader of the resource persons, took participants through discussions on the Executive, Legislature, Judiciary, Chieftaincy, Decentralization and Local Government, the Retiring Age and Pension of Public Officers, and the Indemnity

Clause. During open discussions, the Chiefs and people of the area added their voices to calls that chiefs should not take part in active partisan politics to avoid losing their respect and credibility in the society. They also suggested that the President should continue to appoint the District Chief Executives to enable them to implement his policies and programmes and also be accountable to him. Most of the students said that the rights of children as enshrined in the constitution should be enforced to protect them from all forms of abuses.

NPP party executives should be neutral towards aspiring flag bearers

Mrs. Agnes Asangalisa Chigabatia, Upper East Regional Chairperson of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), has appealed to the Regional executive members, to be open minded towards the presidential aspirants of the party.

She made the appeal during a meeting with the Regional and Constituency executives in Bolgatanga. Mrs. Chigabatia asked the executives not to declare openly, which flag bearer of the party they support, saying such acts would not serve the interest and growth of the party and affect its electoral fortune in 2012. She urged them to support any of the aspirants who emerged as a presidential candidate of the NPP by working hard to win more souls for the party. "Our ultimate goal and concern is to capture power. In the next election," she said.

Mrs. Chigabatia said although there was bound to be disagreement within the party such acts should not be allowed to destroy it. She entreated the party executives to use the party structures to address their grievances instead of resorting to negative things that would affect internal cohesion. Mrs. Chigabatia asked the executive members to support capable people in their constituencies who are interested in contesting for the forthcoming District Assembly election scheduled to take place during the last quarter of the year.

NDC sets out strategies to retain power in Elections 2012

The ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) at the weekend intensified strategies to retain power in Elections 2012 with the inauguration of the Greater Accra Regional Women's wing of the Zongo Caucus in Accra.

The wing tagged "Magajia" was tasked to replicate the caucus in every constituency with a mission to mobilise, educate, canvas and propagate the "Better Ghana," agenda of the government in order to attract more members to the party.

Alhaji Muhamed Yusif Captain, National Coordinator of the Zongo Caucus, noted that the parameters for contesting Election 2012 had change and needed a dynamic vibrant electoral machinery to retain power. "We must not over focus on the advantages of

incumbency to be complacent; we must visit every hamlet, village, town, household and community to defuse opposition propaganda and infuse them with the noble achievement of Professor John Evans Atta Mills' government," he said. He reiterated calls for the Zongo Caucus, especially the Magajias, to map-out schemes to expand and solidify its dominance in the Moslem Communities nationwide.

The scheme includes educational campaigns to plug all loopholes for rigging and cheating at the polling station level, empowerment of women and youth from the Zongo communities, and special programmes to make the NDC attractive especially within the Moslem Communities. Alhaji Muhamed Captain, who is also the NDC Greater Accra Regional Vice Chairman, called for unity on the women front and urged them to use internal mechanisms for redress; "you must avoid jumping to the media for help anytime there is a misunderstanding".

Alhaji Alhasan Bene, National Secretary of the Zongo Caucus, tasked the women to work hard and bring on board personalities and other instrumental personalities for the development of the party to ensure its revitalisation. He tasked the national leadership to draw up an elaborate programme to win back all NDC supporters especially those from the Zongo communities. "Politics is a game of numbers, and for that matter, we will from now on resolve all matters that threatened the support base of the party so that none of our supporters would either remain on the fence or join other political parties," he said.

Mr. Kofi Adams, a Deputy General Secretary of the NDC, underscored the importance of Zongo communities to the party's quest to retain power and urged the women to work hard in unity for victory in 2012. Hajia Amina Seidu, National Women's Organizer of the Zongo Caucus, said the Magajias will adopt a strategy aimed at propelling the party to retain seats and win back all other seats that were lost marginally to opponents in Election 2008.

She said: "The strategy, among other things, would empower and increase our impact in constituencies we lost marginally during Elections 2008, while we consolidate our operational impact in other constituencies we won with marginal votes". The twelve-member Executives is headed by Hajia Hajara Mohammed Adams as the Magajia, whilst the 16-member Magajias' working committee is headed by Rekiya Salifu. The Disciplinary Committee is headed by Hawa Abdulai, while the Finance Committee is headed by Rabiatu Adama and Welfare Committee by Janma Hamidu.

Parliament blamed rain for lateness of MPs.

The issue of punctuality in attending to the business of Parliament (MPs) took another turn on Friday, when Mr. Cletus Avoka, Majority Leader explained that the lateness of some members was due to the rain.

Mr. Balado S. K. Manu, Member of Parliament (MP) for Ahafo Ano South on a point of order said the reason was untenable because the reason created the impression that MPs were not responsible. He explained that if other civil servants gave such excuses for their

lateness to work, would be inconsistent with the President's commitment to punctuality.

Although the issue generated a debate from the few MPs present, the normal business of the house went on uninterrupted including deliberations on the Plant Bill which was at the consideration stage.

Public Office-holders must declare assets to show honesty

Dr Ebenezer A. Ayerebi-Acquah, a former member of the Erstwhile National Commission for Democracy, on Friday, urged public office holders to willingly declare their assets in line with the principles of the "June 4 Uprising".

He said the values of Probity, Accountability and Integrity and Transparency that June 4 espoused in 1979 were still relevant and it was important for Ghanaians to entrench themselves in those values in our efforts towards national development today.

Therefore, those who voluntarily offered to serve the nation in leadership positions must demonstrate their honesty, integrity and transparency through public declaration of their assets. Speaking in an interview with the Ghana News Agency (GNA) on the relevance of "June 4", Dr Ayerebi-Acquah, explained that if both past and

serving public office holders, subjected themselves to public accountability and integrity, they would be demonstrating the philosophy of leadership by example.

Justifying the relevance of "June 4", Dr Ayerebi-Acquah said it was a historic event of national importance but its observance should be limited to somber reflection on the principles it stood for and the mourning of those, who lost their lives in the line of duty or as victims for Ghana to become a better place.

He said the activities marking the day must not show joyous celebrations or actions that would hurt the sensibilities of the victims or their relatives, but show appreciation to them and a national commitment to sacrifice and patriotism. Dr Ayerebi-Acquah said: "the June 4 Uprising was a painful, and traumatic event but absolutely and absolutely necessary event to shock us

into the realization that something was fundamentally wrong with our trend of national development.

"However, we must be mindful in our commemoration of the day that it is contrary to our culture to malign the dead or have a celebration that would offend our sensibilities."

The Former Deputy Minister for Defence said "June 4" was an exceptional coup d'état to bring the nation back on course after the overthrow of Dr Kwame Nkrumah because Ghanaians had deviated from the national objectives of upholding patriotism, being hardworking and meeting our civic responsibilities as ascribed in our motto of Freedom and Justice.

"The interpretation the educated ones gave to Freedom was limited to the enjoyment of

democratic ideals such as Freedom of Association, Expression , Movement, Assembly etc, without the corresponding responsibilities to selflessly, work hard and sacrifice for the common good," he said. Building of the aspirations of the French Revolution, he said, "June 4" came as an event to rally the nation to focus on building a nation based on equity, justice, fairness and peace. "Without equality and peace, there cannot be justice and without just ice there cannot be national security and freedom," he said.

Dr Ayerebi-Acquah said Ghana at 53, is still a relatively young country, as compared to democracies like France and the United Kingdom and, therefore, has the opportunity to re-orient citizens with the core and requisite values for a solid democratic and developed nation. Dr Ayerebi-Acquah said: "Freedom if it critically interrogated means

people must do their work with commitment, protect national assets and render selfless services to the nation.

"Ghanaians must be educated to accept their civic and patriotic responsibilities and then Ghana would be truly and truly independent, self-reliant, great and strong as enshrined in our national anthem." The 31st Anniversary of the "June 4" Uprising is being commemorated in Tamale in the Northern Region. Wreaths were laid at the Flags Staff Square in Accra.

LIBERIA

Threshold Bill Suffocates, as Citizens Demand Passage

The Upper House of the 52nd National Legislature has again failed to passage the Population Threshold Bill into law due to another Writ of Prohibition filed before the Full Branch of the Supreme Court of Liberia.

Following series of debates last Tuesday, the Senate set Thursday, June 3, 2010 as the day to take vote on the matter.

In a motion filed by Bong County Senator, Jowel H. Taylor to concur with the Lower house to set the Population Threshold at 46.000, the Senate could not carry on the debate to concur with the lower House or to set a new Threshold.

Many Senators also raised concerns that the Bill is in court and there was no need to debate it. Other senators argued that the bill came from the Lower House needed concurrence to set new population threshold.

The diverse views of the senators sparked off serious debate across the Chambers of the Senate; with many of the lawmakers holding secret meetings and consultation on the matter. Vice President Joseph Boakai intervened to cool down tempers.

Finally, a committee to hold consultation with the Lower House was set to brief the Senate Plenary on Friday of this week in a special session.

Grand Cape Mount Senator Abel Massage blamed the delay in the passage of the bill on Lawmakers of the ruling Unity Party. He however warned the UP Lawmakers saying "...the danger in playing political game with the passing of the Threshold is that we all were elected far tenure by law, we competed with people who equally wanted to be where we are, so it behooves on us to do those things that legally fall in our preview to insure that elections are head on time."

Senator Glorious Scott of Maryland said the bill has been discussed in the context of what had happened in Maryland concerning the lack of roads in the county that led to the death of some citizens on the Atlantic Ocean after a boat they were traveling on capsized.

Few hours after the adjournment of the Liberian Senate, the Chief Clarke of the House of Representative Atty. James Kabe informed journalists that the Supreme Court has invited the National Legislature and Certus Youth (the group that filed the rate of prohibition to the Supreme Court) to a conference on Monday.

Meanwhile a group of citizens yesterday stormed the grounds of the capitol Building with placards and banners to demand the unconditional passage of the Threshold bill.

The group which comprises of representatives from the National Democratic Institute (LDI), WAPNET, and the Federation of Liberian Youths (FLY) among others, converged at the Capitol Building to force the lawmakers to pass the bill.

Mr. Dan Sayah of LDI said the delay in the passage of the bill poises serious treat to the conduct of the 2011 general and presidential elections. He added that Liberians are not willing to setup another interim government to lead the state and will not accept unconstitutional election in 2011.

Mr. Sayeh said Liberians will not accept additional lawmakers in the National Legislature. He said the economy of the country can not afford to pay addition lawmakers and their staffers.

On arrival from the United State of America, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said she will use her constitutional mandate to set the threshold if the lawmakers fail to do so.

The President on two occasions vetoed the Threshold Bill on constitutional and financial grounds.

At the same time, the Chairman of the National Election Commission, James Flomoyan, has said there will be no election in the absence of the passage of the bill.

United State Ambassador Linda Thomas Green-Field also threatened serious consequences if lawmakers do not pass the bill.

President Sirleaf Receives Rousing Welcome

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf returned home Wednesday evening to a rousing welcome, greeted by thousands of well-wishers, including Cabinet Ministers and other Government officials, executives and supporters of the ruling Unity Party, diplomats, traditional leaders, a cultural troupe, schoolchildren and more.

Following an enthusiastic welcoming ceremony at the Roberts International Airport, the President's first stop was to the Winners' Chapel International, in Oldest Congo Town, where she participated in a Thanksgiving and Intercessory Service for her safe return from successful visits to the United States, Switzerland and France. The celebration continued late into the evening at the President's Residence.

The SN Brussels flight carrying the Liberian leader and her delegation touched down at 7:08 p.m. and they were greeted by thousands of jubilant Liberians on the tarmac, in the VIP Lounge, and along the roadside. All had gathered to see their President returning home, safe and sound and successful.

At the airport to receive President Sirleaf and her delegation were: Defense Minister Brownie J. Samukai, Jr., who served as Chairman of the Cabinet in the absence of the President; the Ministers of Commerce and Industry, Lands, Mines and Energy, Internal Affairs, Transport, and Youth and Sports, and the Chairman of the National Investment Commission. Also on hand were the Superintendents of Margibi and Grand Bassa Counties. Members of the President's delegation included the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, and the Chief of Protocol, R.L.

In the airport's VIP Lounge, President Sirleaf and delegation were greeted by members of the National Traditional Council of Liberia, the Liberia National Cultural Troupe, the Crusaders for Peace Cultural Troupe, the Lower Margibi County Women United for Peace and Development, and students from Lower Margibi County. The Unity Party, too, had a line-up of its leadership and partisans.

Speaking briefly to the media, the President said her trip had been successful, and she urged all to do the right thing for the Liberian people.

Upon reaching the capital, President Sirleaf attended a Thanksgiving and Intercessory Service at the Winners' Chapel. The service included a Homily; a Thanksgiving Prayer; Special Prayers for: Her Excellency, the President; the Government; and the Nation; selections by the Winners' Chapel Choir and by Liberia's Music Ambassador, Marron Cassell, who sang "We Celebrate You Mama, Our President."

In attendance were the Vice President, members of the Legislature, the Chief Justice and members of the Judiciary, members of the Cabinet and other Government officials, members of the Diplomatic Corps, the Clergy, and the Winners' Chapel congregation.

In her remarks, the President called for a moment of silence in memory of the compatriots who lost their lives at sea in the recent boat accident between Sinoe and Maryland Counties, and to praise God's blessings for those who survived.

The President said "a big thank you" to all those who came out to welcome her – to the Vice President and other organizers of the program, and to fellow Liberians who came out to greet her.

"God has blessed our country," the President said, adding that her mission had been not for herself but on behalf of the Liberian people. "The success we've had, the confirmation of support we received, and our participation in events were because we've been blessed. The peace we've enjoyed, going on seven years, that those entering first grade will not know the gun and will not have to run, is a blessing," President Sirleaf said, and called upon all Liberians to uphold the peace.

The United States, Switzerland and France can help us, the President went on to say, "but we must do for ourselves." It was important that Liberians reach out to one another. "When we do that, we'll receive support and assistance from our partners."

We'll talk about the details of the trip later, the President said. "This night is to say thank you, Lord, for all your blessings, for all you've done for the Liberian people." She called upon the Clergy to pray for the country, knowing that "with God's guiding hand, we can build a new Liberia."

The President departed the country on May 14th for the United States, where she participated in a number of events and consultations with U.S. Government officials, business executives and other partners. On Thursday, May, 27th, President Sirleaf held bilateral talks with U.S. President Barack Obama at the White House, and discussed issues of mutual importance. The Liberian leader also met with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and other high-ranking Congressional leaders.

The President's summary message was this: "On behalf of all Liberians, I stand here today to say thank you to the American Government and the American people for your support in allowing Liberia to emerge from conflict, to rebuild and to prosper.

"I said four years ago, upon my first visit to Washington, D.C., as President, that, "but with God's will, the hope and the capabilities of our people and sound governance, Liberia would rise up again; and Liberia has.

"Liberia has demonstrated that democracy can work, even under the most challenging conditions, and that from what was once a breeding ground for crime and conflict, a

country can emerge and become a partner in shared security and in the promotion of shared interests and values.

"Gains must be institutionalized for future generations. So I am back in Washington this week to ask the U.S. Government to continue to be our partner. It is our goal, it is our intention, it is our promise that in 10 years, if we stay on the path of reform, Liberia will no longer need foreign assistance and be able to self-finance its own development."

While in the United States, the President received honorary degrees from Rutgers, Georgetown and Yale Universities, and delivered a Commencement Address at Georgetown.

Among other activities, the President traveled to Geneva, where she delivered a keynote address to the 63rd World Health Assembly on May 18th. Before returning home, the President stopped over in Nice, France, to participate, along with other African leaders, in the two-day Africa-France Summit hosted by President Nicholas Sarkozy of France.

COTE D'IVOIRE

Ongoing Political Impasse Hampering Peace Process - UN Envoy

The ongoing political impasse in Côte d'Ivoire contributes to heightened tensions and hampers efforts to normalize the situation in the West African nation, which has been trying for eight years to overcome the crisis that split the country, a senior United Nations official said today.

"This political stalemate is hardly encouraging," Y. J. Choi, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Côte d'Ivoire, told the Security Council as he briefed the 15-member body on the latest developments.

"Indeed, during the eight years since the outbreak of the crisis, perennial delays in implementing the various peace agreements have been a source of deep frustration for the Ivorian people as well as the international community," he stated.

"It is all the more so since the elections appeared to be within our grasp until several months ago."

Côte d'Ivoire, which became split by civil war in 2002 into a rebel-held north and Government-controlled south, was making progress toward the holding of elections - which were supposed to have been held as far back as 2005 but have been repeatedly postponed.

The country witnessed the publication of the provisional electoral list throughout the country, the launch of the appeals process, and the validation of all major candidates for the presidential election.

The political impasse began in early January after the production of the second electoral list. Political tensions began to mount after voter registration was suspended due to violence and President Laurent Gbagbo dissolved the Government and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) in February.

Despite the establishment of a new Government and Electoral Commission since then, the electoral process remains stalled as the differences on how to address the issue of fraud and resume the interrupted appeals process on the provisional voters list persists.

"The events of February and March 2010 have demonstrated that the continuing failure to hold elections in Côte d'Ivoire and materialize the reunification of the country contributes to heightening tensions and hampers constitutional, political, economic and social normalization," said Mr. Choi.

He noted that the reason for the impasse is that the three major protagonists of the crisis are now dealing with their core interest - the presidential camp wants reunification before elections; the opposition wants elections before reunification; and the rebel Forces Nouvelles wants identification before reunification.

As agreed by the parties in 2008, a de facto reunification is to be completed two months prior to the presidential election.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in a recent report, noted that the lack of progress in resolving the impasse has led some to start questioning the relevance of the framework of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreements, the 2007 blueprint for political reconciliation forged in the capital of neighbouring Burkina Faso.

He warned that any unraveling of the Ouagadougou framework would be a cause for serious concern, noting that there is currently no alternative framework to these agreements.

Mr. Ban also recommended maintaining the UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) until the end of the year - with the same current total strength of its military and police components - "in order to give Côte d'Ivoire a chance to walk the final mile to the elections with the full support of the United Nations."

If the Council approves such an extension, Mr. Ban also suggested an adjustment of the mission's mandate to allow it to focus on helping the parties to implement the remaining priority tasks, including those related to elections, disarmament and all aspects of the reunification of the country.

Last week the Council extends UNOCI until 30 June, as it continues to consider possible revisions to the mission's mandate.

Mr. Choi noted that, in the meantime, the mission will maintain three priority objectives for the immediate future: maintaining peace and stability in the country, including the protection of civilians; safeguarding past achievements, in both the elections and reunification domains; and helping to establish the definitive electoral list as expeditiously as possible.

UN Boss Warns of Renewed Violence in Country

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has expressed scepticism over the holding of Ivorian elections and warned of imminent violence.

"It is clear that the country remains a tinderbox that could ignite easily if the root causes of the conflict remain unaddressed.

I would like, at the outset, to appeal to all Ivorian parties to avoid taking any actions that may reverse the significant progress they had made and risk plunging the country into renewed violence and instability," he said in his latest report this week.

Mr. Ban's statement follows a failed meeting last between Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo and opposition leaders over a precise date for the elections.

On Tuesday again, the embattled Ivorian leader lashed out at reporters when they revisited the issue.

"They'll be carried out by Ivorians, for Ivorians and only when Ivorians are ready...I'm always surprised when people come and question me on this subject as if they're more worried about the Ivorian elections than us," he whined.

"It's not about what I would like but what has to be done. What has to be done is in the process of being done. We won't leave the year 2010 without having elections. I'm certain about that," he sounded his umpteenth promise.

In his latest report, Mr. Ban urged Ivorian politicians and alluding particularly to the president, to resolve the ongoing impasse in the country, revive the stalled electoral process and tackle the root causes of the conflict, warning that "further violence remains a real threat."

He expressed grave disappointment that the hope the Ivorian government had given the world that the conflict was ending by the late 2009 had waned.

Elections were supposed to have been held in Cote d'Ivoire as far back as 2005 but were finally billed for early in 2010.

In November 2009, a bitter row erupted among Ivorian politicians over the provisional electoral list published by the Independent Electoral Commission.

The list which had about 5.3 million voters confirmed and an estimated 1 million needed to be confirmed.

The ripples of that episode plus the unresolved issue of the disarmament of rebels belonging to Prime Minister Guillaume Sore continue to rock the Ivorian electoral system to date.

Hence, Mr. Ban notes that "the lack of progress in resolving the ensuing impasse which has dragged on for almost five months, has led some to start questioning the relevance of the framework of the Ouagadougou Peace Agreements."

The 2007 Agreements were approved by Ivorian politicians and the international community as the sole blueprint to hook Cote d'Ivoire out of the quagmire.

Last month, President Gbagbo, who wanted it postponed until after an African Development Bank meeting.

The march was to protest against the blocked electoral process had been a cause of tension between the government and the opposition in the world's top cocoa grower.

Presidential polls meant to reunite the country have been delayed indefinitely because of rows over voter registration and rebel disarmament.

The government had requested the opposition delay the march until after an African Development Bank summit in Abidjan from May 24-28, but opposition leaders had vowed to go ahead with it.

Mr. Gbagbo had been in negotiations with opposition Democratic Party of Ivory Coast (PDCI) leader Henri Konan Bedie.

Gbagbo Says Elections Will Take Place in 2010.

In an exclusive interview with RFI, Côte d'Ivoire President Laurent Gbagbo has pledged that long-delayed elections will take place before the end of the year.

He also indicated his wish that the headquarters of the African Development Bank, which was relocated from Abidjan in 2003, return to the West African country.

Gbagbo sacked the government and electoral commission in February before Prime Minister Guillaume Soro was able to name a new cabinet after mediation talks.

A new electoral commission is now organising voter lists and the Ivorian President told RFI's French service that the presidential elections, which have been repeatedly postponed since 2005, will definitely take place in 2010.

"They'll be carried out by Ivorians, for Ivorians, when Ivorians are ready," he said. "I'm always surprised when people come and question me on this subject as if they're more worried about the Ivorian elections than us.

"It's not about what I would like but what has to be done. What has to be done is in the process of being done. We won't leave the year 2010 without having elections. I'm certain about that."

Gbagbo, who has been in power for ten years, was speaking to RFI at the recently-concluded African Development Bank meeting in Abidjan. He said the economic crisis was not the only reason for the high turnout of 2,200 delegates at the summit.

"Some people wanted to see the condition Abidjan is in, the condition the Côte d'Ivoire is in," he said. To see if the insecurity that they were told about is still ongoing, to see if the situation is getting back to normal. And we're happy. The city of Abidjan is not more dangerous than a lot of others where there is no war."

The African Development Bank moved its headquarters from Abidjan to Tunis soon after a civil war broke out in the Côte d'Ivoire.

GUINEA

Niger, Guinea Remain Suspended From Ecowas – Hong

In line with the provisions of the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS, protocol on democracy and good governance, the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Aliyu Idi Hong, has restated that Niger and Guinea remain suspended until constitutional order was restored in both countries.

In his welcome address at the 64th ordinary session of the ECOWAS Council of Ministers, held at the ECOWAS Commission in Abuja, yesterday, Hong said that mediatory efforts were move is already yielding results as plans were being made to organise elections in both countries.

Recalling that Guinea and Niger's membership were suspended following coups and violation of democratic order, the minister said that despite the suspension, the ECOWAS was committed to helping them implement transition programmes that will lead to credible and transparent elections.

He added that the sub-region, under the chairmanship of Nigeria, had witnessed tremendous success in the areas of economic stability and peace, as attested to by the mediatory efforts in Guinea Bissau and Guinea.

In the case of Guinea, he said, as a result of persistent dialogue and negotiations with stakeholders, the interim president, Brigadier-General Konate Sekuba, had promised to return the country to democratic rule, with presidential election scheduled to hold on June 27, 2010.

In the case of Cote d'Ivoire, the minister said the chairman of the authority, in conjunction with ECOWAS, is in dialogue with stakeholders to devise a time table as soon as possible to return the country to constitutional order before the end of the year.

The minister noted that West African region was faced with challenges of food, energy and financial crisis. He added that only collaboration can solve the problems by re-energising the integration process in the sub-region.

SIERRA LEONE

18 Personnel Join PPRC Ranks

The political parties registration commission (PPRC) has appointed 18 new core members to beef up the staff strength of the commission countrywide.

The staff recruited, according to a release by the commission, includes the registrar and four senior managers; internal auditor, administrative and human resources manager, finance manager, and mediation and programmes manager.

The new personnel alongside 18 support staff will be assigned to work at one of four PPRC offices in Freetown, Bo, Makeni or Kenema.

The staff were recommended and approved by the acting chairman, Roland Ade Caesar, NEC commissioner Dr. Christiana Thorpe, and PPRC commissioner Muctarr Williams after a competitive recruitment which ended on April 12 with over 700 applicants.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is facilitating the expansion of the office space of the commission and also providing office equipment as well as customized IPAM training courses and training in electoral processes for the new staff.

The new personnel resumed duty effective June 1.

ECONOMY

GHANA

Government will not turn against cocoa industry.

The government would not turn against the maintenance and production of high quality cocoa, despite the discovery of oil in Ghana.

Mr. Samuel Ankomah, Central Regional Cocoa Extension Officer, made this known at separate meetings with cocoa farmers at Breman Jukwa, Twifo Hemang Lower Denkyiran, Asikuma-Odoben Brakwa Districts and Lower Bobikuma in the Agona West Municipality, as part of his tour of the Region to educate farmers about the maintenance of their cocoa.

He said adequate measures had been put in place by the government to ensure sustenance of cocoa production which is the back bone of the nation's economy.

He cited the rehabilitation of infested cocoa farms, supplying of fertilizers to farmers, mass spraying exercise and payment of compensations to farmers whose farms were affected by swollen shoot virus as some of the measures.

"Cocoa is Ghana and Ghana is cocoa" Mr. Ankomah said, and assured farmers that government would not neglect its duty towards cocoa farmers because of the oil find.

He said the revival of the Cocoa Extension Division of the Ghana Cocoa Board would boost and promote the production of cocoa. Mr. Ankomah said the government had also appointed local cocoa extension facilitators in all cocoa growing communities nationwide to offer technical advice on methods of improving production. He pointed out that the measures would assist the country to hit the expected target of 1,000 million metric tones of cocoa by the year 2013. Mr. Ebenezer Agyin, Jukwa District Cocoa Officer, expressed concern about the refusal of some farmers to cut down their infested cocoa trees and appealed to them to rescind the decision. He said if the farmers continued to refuse to allow the officials from Cocoa Swollen Shoot Disease Control Unit (CSSVDCU) to destroy infested farms, it would derail the aims and objectives of the government's cocoa rehabilitation programme.

The District Cocoa Officer said about 1.8 million cocoa trees had been infected with the disease in the Jukwa District and asked the chiefs and opinion leaders to impress upon the farmers to co-operate with the authorities. Mr. Philip Bedgyera, Asikuma-Odoben-Brakwa District Cocoa Officer, said hybrid cocoa seedlings were ready to be supplied to the farmers at a reduced price to enable them to plant their farms. He cautioned farmers not to use the fresh cocoa pods to plant their farms without approval from the Supply Production Unit (SPU), adding that most of the pods were infested with cocoa diseases which posed a danger to their farms.

Ghana lost \$36 million of gold revenue

Ghana, between 2007 and 2009, lost approximately €36 million, in mining revenues that have been repatriated without the necessary taxes to government, a new report on mining has said..

This loss became possible as a result of alleged transfer mispricing and fixed low local revenues in Ghana, which the report also says had affected the fixing of royalties to the country by mining firms.

The two Danish Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) DanWatch and Concord who conducted the research in Ghana released the report in Copenhagen last week, under the heading: "Golden Profits on Ghana's Expense- An example of incoherence in EU policy"

"Money lost to tax evasion by African countries, indirectly plunged back to the European and North American economy, is calculated to be ten times more than money spent on development aid for Africa. According to new research, in the period 1970 to 2008, Africa lost \$ 854 billion in cumulative capital flight. From 2000 to 2008, illicit outflows from Africa accelerated by 25% coinciding with a boom in mineral prices," it revealed.

The report went further to reveal how tax evasion and capital flight from developing countries is outnumbering development aid by a factor of one to ten, using the case study of how Ghana sees little revenues from its immense gold riches.

It also demonstrated how multi-national companies generate great revenues from Ghana's rich gold resources without leaving sums worth mentioning in the country. "International tax havens make it possible to dupe Ghanaian coffers," it added.

"Ghana is a major mining country, and export of minerals and metals in 2007 made up 43% of Ghana's total export revenue. Bauxite, manganese, diamonds and gold are all extracted in Ghana, the report stated, adding that in 2007, Ghana produced 83.6 tonnes of gold.

"But, less than 10% of Ghana's total tax revenue came from the mining industry and mining operations only contributed an estimated five percent to the Ghanaian GDP, according to the Ghana Minerals Commission," the report added. The report quoted from a work by Charles Ayamdoo and Thomas Akbzaa: "Towards a fair and equitable taxation

for sustainable development (2009) that from 1990 to 2007 Ghana had foregone royalties corresponding to \$ 388 million, if mining companies had paid 6% rather than 3%. And \$ 1.163 billion if mining companies had paid 12 % rather than 3 %, adding "This sum by far exceeds the remission of debt Ghana has been granted in the same period." It also quoted Steve Manteaw, Communications Director of ISODEC , and one of Ghana's leading experts on national mining operations, as having stated that studies had shown that these operations also have a negative effect on the environment that equals between four and ten percent of the country's GDP. "Thus, taking the mining operations' environmental consequences into perspective, the economic effect upon Ghana's GDP is in fact negative," the report says.

Among the reasons for the low economic impact of Ghana's massive mining industry is that, like in most African countries, mining corporations are offered significant tax advantages. "They are exempted from duties, for example on fuel and the import of machines, they pay a lower tax percentage, and they can reduce their tax base through special deductions," the report says, adding that "through aggressive tax planning, these corporations further diminish their tax payments."

African countries typically collect between 30 and 35% in corporate taxes from the mining industry. Ghana only collects 25% of the mining corporations' profits in corporate taxes. "However, many corporations manipulate their profits in Ghana so they appear lower than they really are, sometimes even making them so low that they are exempted from paying any corporation tax at all," the report says.

According to DanWatch and Concord Denmark, this can easily be done by the way multi-national companies are allowed to make their balances. "Corporations can move their profits to countries with low or even no taxation," the report says. "The most commonly used method for moving profits is transfer mispricing."

In Ghana, the alleged transfer mispricing and fixed low local revenues also influence royalties of the value of extracted minerals, the other source of revenue from mining companies. Ghana calculates the royalty rate to a minimum of three percent, which is raised accordingly with the company's profits up to a maximum of six percent.

Low profits on paper will thus also ensure lower royalty payments, the report holds. The loss in royalty revenues could amount to hundreds of millions of Euros during the last decade, mining analysts have calculated.

"The current international tax regulation framework makes it impossible to estimate whether the corporations are paying a fair amount of tax to the developing countries, because they are only obliged to produce an annual report which covers the entire corporation group."

The report also took issues with the European Union, accusing it of double standards in taxation. Many of the world's leading tax havens are on European soil and the EU, in protection of its multi-nationals, has done little to halt this development.

The report called for sanctions against tax havens in Europe and beyond. Further, Ghana and other developing countries should be assisted in capacity building to help them collect their rightful taxes.

In his preliminary response, Minister for Lands and Natural Resources, Collins Dauda, who had not yet seen the report, said his outfit would like to study the report and see what can be done to maximize revenues for Ghana.

“Every government would like to maximize revenue, so if there is a way of doing this, why not? We would like to study and do it well,” Hon. Dauda told the Financial Intelligence. He however added that revenue generation and its maximization is one thing while the utilization is another.

“We generate a lot of revenue in this country but how well we have used it is my main concern,” he stated.

LIBERIA

Country Gets U.S.\$15 Million Grant, Direct Delta Flight

The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Board of Directors, chaired by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, yesterday, approved an approximately \$15 million grant for Liberia to support the country's ongoing efforts to improve governance.

The grant, which is subject to a 15-day congressional notification period, will be awarded through the MCC's Threshold Program and focuses on land rights, girls' education and trade policy, an MCC dispatch said.

This announcement was made at a breakfast reception on Capitol Hill honoring Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf for her efforts to set a high standard for good governance, accountability, and sustainable development.

"When President Johnson Sirleaf visited the United States in 2008 she said Liberia was striving to meet MCC benchmarks in hopes of joining the MCC family. I am pleased to announce that MCC plans to partner with Liberia to help deliver stability and create the conditions for long-term economic growth," said Mr. Johannes.

"We are looking forward to working with our colleagues in Congress to discuss the grant program with Liberia and move toward an official signing ceremony."

Subject to congressional notification and consultation, the United States Agency for International Development, the U.S. government agency administering the program, and the Government of Liberia will sign an approximately \$15 million, three-year MCC

threshold program agreement investing in three areas: land rights and access, girls' education, and trade policy.

The program will help promote equitable access to land and increased land security through increased understanding of property rights issues and improved land administration and land registration capacity; improve girls' primary education enrollment and retention through a scholarship program for girls, grants to communities to improve the school environment, and supporting mentoring programs and awareness campaigns; and; support efforts to improve trade policy and practices, specifically in harmonizing tariffs, engaging regional and global bodies, and strengthening the regulatory environment.

"With vital support from Congress for MCC's budget and critical legislative fixes, we will continue to have the ability to partner with reform-minded countries committed to wisely investing American taxpayer resources in sustainable development that benefits us all in our interconnected global marketplace," said Mr. Johannes.

MCC's threshold program is designed to assist countries that are on the "threshold" of eligibility for MCC compact assistance. Threshold program assistance is used to help countries address the specific policy areas for improvement indicated by their scores on 17 policy indicators in three categories —Ruling Justly, Investing in People, and Encouraging Economic Freedom.

These policy indicators are central to the criteria and methodology for determining compact eligibility and are products of respected international institutions and national data. Each indicator is selected based on its utility in removing impediments to growth and poverty reduction, the number of countries it covers, its transparency and availability, and its analytical rigor.

Liberia was named eligible for MCC Threshold Program assistance on December 11, 2008. MCC is working with the Government of Liberia to develop a Threshold Program. The United States Agency for International Development will administer the Liberia threshold program and will be responsible for coordination, contracting, and financial management. MCC will maintain oversight of Liberia's threshold program.

Millennium Challenge Corporation, a U.S. Government agency designed to work with developing countries, is based on the principle that aid is most effective when it reinforces sound political, economic, and social policies that promote poverty reduction through economic growth.

Meanwhile, May 25, 2010 announced new service between Atlanta and Monrovia, Liberia, expanding the airline's position as the leading U.S. carrier operating flights to Africa.

The new service, which is scheduled to begin Sept. 4, will connect Delta's hub at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and Roberts International Airport in

Monrovia with a stop in Accra, Ghana. The flight will be operated on 215-seat Boeing 767-300ER aircraft, equipped with 34 Business Elite seats and 181 seats in Economy.

Delta has received approval from the Liberian Civil Aviation Authority, and preliminary approval from the U.S. government, to sell seats for the new flight for the planned launch in September. Final U.S. government approvals are expected before the flight begins.

"As the No. 1 U.S. carrier serving Africa, Delta remains committed to expanding our presence into fast-growing African markets," said Perry Cantarutti, Delta's senior vice president of Europe, Middle East and Africa. "Our new service between our Atlanta hub and Monrovia will provide convenient connections between Liberia and cities across the United States."

Delta had previously intended to begin service to Monrovia in June 2009, but was delayed while Roberts International Airport implemented measures to ensure its compliance with the standards of the International Civil Aviation Organization. Delta has worked closely with the United States and Liberian governments while the airport facilities in Monrovia were properly equipped and prepared for the new service.

"The government is enthusiastic about the prospect of Delta providing a direct flight between Monrovia and the United States, which would be the first such service in many years," said Liberia President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. "The government is working earnestly to ensure that all the necessary requirements are met so that the flights will commence as scheduled."

Added U.S. Rep. Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS), chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security: "I have been pleased to work with Delta and the Office of Global Strategies at the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to ensure that security continues to be a priority on all international aviation partnerships. As Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, I support TSA's international aviation security programs.

Facilitating commerce without compromising security remains a reasonable approach. Today, we are one step closer to offering direct service flights from the United States to Liberia – strengthening our partnership with Africa."

Delta, which has operated in Africa since 2006, has announced its intention to serve up to 10 African destinations from the United States, with aircraft ready to begin service pending U.S. and foreign government approvals.

Bob Johnson, founder and chairman of The RLJ Companies, which owns significant development projects in Liberia, said: "A few years ago while attending the Clinton Global Initiative and after hearing President Sirleaf appeal to the American private sector for support, I made a commitment to mobilize \$30 million for Liberia.

"In June 2009, we opened the RLJ Kendeja Resort & Villas, a 78-room villa style hotel. I applaud Delta Air Lines for making the commitment to provide direct air service to Liberia which will provide economic growth opportunities to Liberia from a variety of business sectors around the world."

Delta also is preparing to begin new year-round service between Atlanta and Accra. This service, announced in 2009, will begin on June 1 with three weekly flights, expanding to four weekly flights on June 14, and complement existing five-time weekly service between New York-JFK and Accra.

On June 2, Delta will also begin nonstop seasonal service between New York-JFK and Abjua, Nigeria, and in June and July will add two additional weekly nonstop flights between Atlanta and Johannesburg to support travel to and from the 2010 World Cup.

This summer, Delta will operate flights to seven African destinations. In addition to Monrovia, Delta will offer service to Accra, Ghana; Abuja, Nigeria; Cairo, Egypt; Dakar, Senegal; Johannesburg, South Africa; and Lagos, Nigeria. Delta also intends to serve Malabo, Equatorial Guinea; Nairobi, Kenya; and Luanda, Angola once government approvals are received.

As the first carrier serving Africa nonstop from the United States, Delta has grown from 22 weekly departures to and from Africa in July 2007 to nearly 80 planned for July 2010, saving customers a significant amount of time on flights.

Customers traveling between Atlanta and Johannesburg, for example, save an average of six hours each direction compared with connecting in Europe.

Delta Air Lines serves more than 160 million customers each year. With its unsurpassed global network, Delta and the Delta Connection carriers offer service to 367 destinations in 66 countries on six continents.

Delta employs more than 70,000 employees worldwide and operates a mainline fleet of nearly 800 aircraft. A founding member of the SkyTeam global alliance, Delta participates in the industry's leading trans-Atlantic joint venture with Air France KLM.

Including its worldwide alliance partners, Delta offers customers more than 16,000 daily flights, with hubs in Amsterdam, Atlanta, Cincinnati, Detroit, Memphis, Minneapolis-St. Paul, New York-JFK, Paris-Charles de Gaulle, Salt Lake City and Tokyo-Narita. Customers can check in for flights, print boarding passes, check bags and review flight status at delta.com.

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEE, IDPs

GHANA

Immigration Arrests Ghanaians Over e-passport

The Lagos State Command of the Nigeria Immigration Service on Tuesday paraded two Ghanaians, Miss Hassana Ishau and Mr. Gabriel Ajah, for attempting to secure a Nigerian e-passport under false pretences.

The Comptroller, NIS Lagos Command, Mr. Lasun Olaitan, while parading the suspects before journalists in Lagos, said that Ishau was apprehended during routine interrogation of applicants.

He added that the female suspect, who said she was from Akwa Ibom State, later confessed that she was from the eastern part of Ghana. She allegedly said that she was aided into securing the e-passport by Ajah and a Nigerian, who is currently at large.

Olaitan further said that it was wrong for a foreigner to attempt to secure a Nigerian passport illegally without fulfilling section 27 of the 1999 Constitution, which allows citizenship through naturalisation.

He said, "In the course of administering passport issuance in Lagos, we came across the malpractices being perpetrated by foreign elements. We have been vigilant in issuing passports and our mandate is to issue passports to Nigerians alone."

HEALTH

GHANA

KATH to get \$1,000,000 Eye Centre

The Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital (KATH) in Kumasi and the Himalayan Cataract Project (HCP) of the US has signed a Memorandum of Understanding to build a \$1,000,000 state-of-the-art Eye Centre at the hospital.

The project would be executed with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and involves the construction of a two-storey structure with basement, provision of ophthalmic equipment and training of eye specialists. A released signed by Mr. Kwame Frimpong, Public Relations Officer of the hospital, said Professor Ohene Adjei, Chief Executive of KATH and Mr. Job C. Heintz, Chief Executive Officer of the HCP, appended their signatures to the document at a short ceremony in Kumasi on Monday. The facility, which is expected to be ready within a year, would serve as a centre of excellence for the training of ophthalmic doctors and

professionals in the West African sub-region. Professor Ohene Adjei said he was delighted that all the key preparatory works towards the commencement of the project have been successfully completed.

KATH's present eye clinic is faced with serious problems of congestion due to lack of space and the large patients' attendance, he said. "The new eye centre of excellence, when completed in a year's time will provide the needed facilities and space for the hospital to provide world class training and services to our ophthalmic professionals and patients respectively," he said.

Professor Ohene Adjei conveyed appreciation to the HCP, USAID, Moran Eye Centre of the University of Utah, US, and the staff of the hospital for their diverse role towards making the project a reality. Mr. Heintz said he was satisfied with efforts the eye clinic of KATH was making towards bringing specialist eye care services to, especially underserved areas in the northern part of the country. He said the project would expand access to specialist eye care by those, who needed it the most. Mr. Heintz pledged continued support to the training of ophthalmic doctors of the hospital and West Africa in general, in sub specialties like cornea, cataract and retina operations

SIERRA LEONE

Bombali Tops Elephantiasis Cases

National programme manager of Onchocerciasis in the ministry of health and sanitation has revealed that Bombali district in the north currently has the highest number of elephantiasis cases.

Briefing journalists in Freetown on the campaign against 'lymphatic filariasis' that would be undertaken from June 3 to 7 across the country, Dr. Santigie Sesay said a study was made by his ministry in collaboration with the non-governmental organization, Hellen Keler International, to get result of the disease nationwide. He however expressed doubts as to how Bombali district has come to record the highest number of people infected with the elephantiasis disease.

"This disease is caused by the anopheles mosquito, it has nothing to do with witchcraft," Dr. Sesay said. "It is characterized by the thickening of the skin and underlying tissues, especially in the legs and male genitals. In some cases the disease can cause certain body parts, such as the scrotum, to swell to the size of a softball or basketball."

Onchocerciasis is the world's second leading infectious cause of blindness. Rarely life-threatening, the disease causes chronic suffering and severe disability. In Africa, it constitutes a serious obstacle to socio-economic development.

Treatments for lymphatic filariasis differ depending on the geographic location of the endemic area. In sub-Saharan Africa, albendazole is being used with ivermectin to treat the disease, whereas elsewhere in the world, albendazole is used with diethylcarbamazine. Geo-targeting treatments are part of a larger strategy to eventually eliminate lymphatic filariasis by 2020.

The parasites responsible for elephantiasis have a population of symbiotic bacteria, Wolbachia, that live inside the worm. When the symbiotic bacteria are killed by the antibiotic, the worms themselves also die.

Elephantiasis caused by lymphatic filariasis is one of the most common causes of disability in the world. In endemic communities, approximately 10 percent of women can be affected with swollen limbs and 50 percent of men can suffer from mutilating genital disease.

Deputy Minister of information and communication, Haja Saidatta Sesay who chaired the briefing, voiced the urgent need for the disease to be put under control.

HUMAN RIGHTS/ GENDER/ SOCIAL ISSUES

GHANA

Ghanaians weep over killer tariffs

Ghanaians have vented their spleen of anger on the government of the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC), following the sharp increase in tariffs of water and electricity bills by the Public Utility Regulatory Commission (PURC).

A cross-section of traders, workers and small-scale operators interviewed by Today lashed out at the Mills administration, describing the increase in the utility bills as “abnormal” and a measure that will further deepen the already economic hardships that Ghanaians are saddled with.

According to them, by this policy the NDC as a party and a government has clearly demonstrated that they do not think of the ordinary masses of this country.

They were of the view that all that the government thinks of is to impoverish Ghanaians and nothing more. They intimated that the new increase in the water and electricity bills would not help at all, but will further lead to the collapse and winding up of many small-scale enterprises which find it very difficult to raise capital and break even.

The market women and petty traders complained bitterly that it will be very difficult to see Ghanaians patronizing their goods since their income would have to be expended on

the consumption of water and electricity.

“...We the market women are going to suffer now that it has been made public that Ghanaians will be paying more for electricity and water. It therefore stands to reason that there is going to be low patronage of our goods and services,” Madam Adwoa Adoabea, a trader at Kwame Nkrumah Circle told our team of reporters.

“The NDC by this action has demonstrated loud and clear that it is insensitive to the economic plights of Ghanaians,” David Boateng, a Tailor at Avenor near Kwame Nkrumah Circle asserted.

Mr Boateng went on to say that should people even decide to stop using electricity and rather use the services of generators they will still need to buy fuel, which according to him, will be very expensive Those interviewed by the paper could not reconcile the increase to the Better Ghana Agenda professed by the President Mills and his government.

“If this is the Better Ghana Agenda that Professor Mills then candidate of the NDC party in the 2008 general election preached and continues to preach then God help us all,” Daavi Ama, a beans seller at Darkuman in Accra lamented. Some of the respondents were displeased that in the wake of the increase in utility tariffs government has not dropped any hint of increasing the salaries of public and civil servants.

They wondered how this bracket of Ghanaians would cope under what they described as a “draconian measure” by the NDC government. Mr Emmanuel Amofa, a cleaner at a chemical supplier company at Kwame Nkrumah Circle, had this reaction: “My salary is GH¢80 cedis a month with a wife and three children. I live at Ashaiman, and always pay GH¢4 and use GH¢1. I believe you [referring to our reporters] have a clearer picture of my situation; very pathetic isn't it?”

Further Mr Amofa advised government to go round all companies and find out how much workers are paid before coming up with what he said was an “obnoxious policy”.

However, some Ghanaians were of the view that they will not have much problem if by this increment Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) and Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) are going to improve upon their services.

“I think we would all be happy if by this new policy both the ECG and GWCL would improve upon their services. This therefore should mean that we should not be having frequent power cuts. And if that should continue then I believe we should have cause to prosecute these two companies,” Mr Robert Quartey, a retailer who sells MTN, Vodafone and Tigo cards at Avenor, submitted.

Some of these Ghanaians are even threatening to beat up the distributors of the utility bills if they are not reduced. “If the government does not reduce the utilities bills, then the

distributors would have to suffer the consequences; we are going to fight them and make sure we beat them anytime they come to distribute bills,” they threatened.

Muslims want Sharia Law in Ghana

A number of Muslims in Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly have demonstrated against the activities of homosexuals in the area with a call on government to enact Sharia Law in Ghana.

The demonstrators, numbering over 1000, believe when the law is considered by the ongoing constitutional review exercise, and finally enshrined in the country’s statutory books, it would scare people from engaging in immoral conducts, like gay and lesbianism, which are gaining root in some parts of the country.

The Muslims, joined by many interested persons, including disabled persons, defied a heavy downpour Friday morning to cover over five kilometers and were expected to present their petition to the Western Regional Minister, Paul Evans Aidoo, at the offices of Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Assembly.

Joy FM’s Western Regional correspondent Kwaku Owusu Peprah, who followed the demonstrators, said the Minister is expected to forward the petition to Parliament for consideration and ratification.

The demonstrators feared if immediate steps are not taken to uproot the activities of homosexuals in the area and the country at large, the consequences on the society would be dire.

The demonstrators had heavy security protection as they chant Muslims songs.

The demonstration, Owusu Peprah said, became necessary after it was rumoured a fortnight ago that a secret gay wedding was held in the metropolis.

LIBERIA

Do Not Issue A Subpoena For Supermodel Naomi Campbell, Defense Lawyers Tell Judges; NPFL Fighters In Sierra Leone Were Not Sent By Charles Taylor, Witness Says

Defense lawyers for Charles Taylor this week asked Special Court for Sierra Leone judges to deny the request by prosecutors to issue a subpoena for Supermodel Naomi Campbell, who is alleged to have received rough diamonds from Mr. Taylor while on a visit to South Africa in 1997. A defense witness for Mr. Taylor also told judges this week that members of Mr. Taylor’s rebel group, who

assisted Sierra Leonean rebels during the country's civil conflict, did so voluntarily and were not sent by the former Liberian president.

On Monday, in response to a prosecution request to reopen the case against Mr. Taylor by calling three additional witnesses, including a subpoena for British supermodel Ms. Campbell, Mr. Taylor's defense lawyers asked the judges to turn down the prosecution requests.

After closing their case against Mr. Taylor in February 2009, prosecutors have asked that they be allowed to present three new witnesses, who will testify about a diamond gift allegedly given by Mr. Taylor to supermodel Naomi Campbell while they were both on a visit to South Africa in 1997. The three people whose evidence prosecutors seek to submit as new evidence are Ms. Campbell, Mia Farrow, and Ms. Campbell's former agent Carole White. Prosecutors say that Ms. Farrow will testify about being told by Ms. Campbell that Mr. Taylor had sent men to her hotel room after a 1997 dinner with former South African president Nelson Mandela and that the men had given her a diamond gift allegedly from Mr. Taylor. Ms. White, prosecutors say, will testify that she was present when Mr. Taylor said he was going to give the diamond gift to Ms. Campbell and that she was present when the men arrived and delivered the said diamonds to Ms. Campbell. As Ms. Campbell has been reluctant to testify about the incident, prosecutors have asked that the judges issue a subpoena to oblige the supermodel to testify about the incident before judges in The Hague. In their response on Monday, defense lawyers for Mr. Taylor called both motions unnecessary and urged the judges to deny both requests.

In the "Defense Response To Prosecution Motion To Call Three Additional Witnesses," which was signed by Mr. Taylor's lead defense counsel Courtenay Griffiths, defense lawyers stated that "The Defense strongly opposes this motion on the basis that no reasonable Court could find that the anticipated evidence is relevant to the charges against Mr. Taylor."

"Furthermore, the prosecution should not be allowed to trivialize the seriousness of the proceedings and charges against the Accused by adducing tangential and highly speculative testimony into evidence," the defense response states.

The response further states that "The issue of Mr. Taylor's interaction with the AFRC/RUF [Armed Forces Revolutionary Council/Revolutionary United Front] junta, the issue of diamonds and the issue of his credibility has been thoroughly explored and addressed as part of the Prosecution case-in-chief. Consequently, additional witnesses are not needed to elaborate on these same issues."

"Simply put, there must be finality to the proceedings. For the Prosecution to present such inferential evidence, as part of an obvious publicity stunt, would bring the administration of justice into serious disrepute," defense lawyers say.

Regarding the request by prosecutors for a subpoena to be issued for supermodel Ms. Campbell to testify on the same issue, the defense response states that "The Trial

Chamber should refrain from exercising its discretion and issuing a subpoena for several reasons.”

These reasons, defense lawyers say include “Naomi Campbell’s evidence is of low probative value and is tangential to the real issues in the case.”

“Secondly, the evidence that Naomi Campbell could put before the court is obtainable elsewhere. Thirdly, the Prosecution must be aware that Naomi Campbell will likely be a hostile witness and should not be allowed to subpoena her as such. Finally, the Trial Chamber should be cautious about issuing an order that might not be enforceable.”

“The Defense contends that Naomi Campbell’s only utility would be to bring unwarranted media attention to the proceedings, it cannot be said that her testimony is necessary to try the case fairly,” defense lawyers say.

The response concludes that the prosecution request should be denied by the judges.

On Tuesday, Mr. Taylor’s 13th witness, a Sierra Leonean national and former executive member of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) – the rebel group that Mr. Taylor is accused to have provided support for – told the court that RUF leader Foday Sankoh personally gave him (the witness) an amount of \$30,000, which he took to a soldier in Liberia, who was an officer in the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) peacekeeping force in Liberia. The amount was for the supply of arms and ammunition to the RUF. This arrangement was facilitated by a Liberian national called Saye Boayue. Defense counsel for Mr. Taylor, Terry Munyard, sought to know how the witness and his RUF counterparts intended to transport the arms and ammunition from Liberia if they were supplied by the ECOMOG officer.

“I was supposed to receive the arms and ammunition from the ECOMOG man, he has to make sure that he leads me to the border of Sierra Leone and Liberia, then hand those arms and ammunition to a man called Michael Mike Lamin,” the witness explained.

Mr. Lamin himself was a senior Commander in the RUF.

Asked by Mr. Munyard whether he knew “how much, what quantity of arms and ammunition you were expecting to accompany to the border,” the witness said, “I didn’t know how much.”

The witness explained, however, that the arms deal with the ECOMOG office was futile because the officer had failed to deliver the arms and ammunition after receiving the money from him.

Prosecutors have argued that it was Mr. Taylor who supplied the RUF with arms and ammunition in return for blood diamonds mined by the rebels in Sierra Leone. Mr. Taylor has denied the allegations.

As the witness concluded his direct-examination on Tuesday, prosecution counsel Nicholas Koumjian commenced the cross-examination of the witness immediately. Mr. Koumjian sought to know about what happened to the diamonds mined by the RUF, especially in the late 1990s, to which the witness said that the only person who can answer that question would be Issa Hassan Sesay. Mr. Sesay, the former Interim Leader of the RUF, is now serving a sentence of 52 years imprisonment in a Rwandan jail after Special Court for Sierra Leone judges convicted him for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law in the territory of Sierra Leone from 1996 to 2002.

“Diamonds that were reserved by the RUF, these diamonds, the only one that can tell about the whereabouts of these diamonds is Issa Sesay himself,” the witness said.

He said that Mr. Sesay had kept some of the diamonds and told them he was doing so for RUF leader Mr. Sankoh, who at that time was incarcerated in Nigeria. The witness agreed with Mr. Koumjian that diamonds mined by the RUF in Sierra Leone had not been of any benefit to the people of the country.

“My Lord, I did not see any benefit, there was no benefit for the people of Sierra Leone,” the witness said.

Prosecutors allege that diamonds mined by the RUF in Sierra Leone were taken to Mr. Taylor in Liberia. Mr. Taylor has denied receiving any diamonds from the RUF.

On Wednesday, DCT-292 told the court that the NPFL fighters who went to Sierra Leone did so voluntarily and allegations that they were sent by Mr. Taylor were wrong. The witness mentioned that NPFL commanders Anthony Menkunagbe, Dupoe Menkazohn, Francis Menwon, and Nixon Gaye, among many others, volunteered to help the RUF in Sierra Leone. These Liberian fighters, prosecution witnesses have said, committed atrocities in Sierra Leone and were later forced to leave the country. The witness said that he cautioned RUF leader Foday Sankoh to seek advice from Mr. Taylor even though the men had indicated that they were in Sierra Leone to help the RUF voluntarily. Prosecution counsel Nicholas Koumjian had his doubts.

“Sir, when you said that he [Foday Sankoh] should go talk to Charles Taylor, that was because you knew that these Liberian soldiers who were creating the problems were under the command of Charles Taylor, correct?” Mr. Koumjian asked the witness.

In his response, the witness said that “when they came they said they were not under the supervision, so I came to conclude that it was not Charles Taylor that sent these people.”

“I told Foday Sankoh to go back and tell Charles Taylor about it,” he added.

“Because you understood Charles Taylor was able to command those men, correct?” Mr. Koumjian asked again.

“He was their leader, yes, he can command them,” the witness responded.

Regarding the prosecution suggestion as to why he did not ask Mr. Sankoh to inform Amos Sawyer, who was the interim Liberian president at that time, the witness agreed with Mr. Koumjian that it was Mr. Taylor who had control over the Liberian fighters.

On Thursday, as he concluded his testimony, DCT-292 agreed with prosecutors that Mr. Taylor lied in his testimony that he did not ask RUF commander Issa Sesay to take his fellow RUF commander Sam Bockarie back to Sierra Leone. After falling out with the RUF leader Foday Sankoh in 1999, Mr. Bockarie relocated to Liberia with Mr. Taylor’s approval. When RUF leader Mr. Sankoh was arrested by the government of Sierra Leone in 2000, prosecutors say that Mr. Taylor asked interim leader of the RUF Mr. Sesay to allow Mr. Bockarie to rejoin the RUF and go back to Sierra Leone. Mr. Taylor in his testimony denied this account. On Thursday, Mr. Taylor’s own witness DCT-292 told the court that it was in his presence that Mr. Taylor asked Mr. Sesay to allow Mr. Bockarie to go back to Sierra Leone.

Prosecution counsel Nicholas Koumjian asked the witness whether Mr. Taylor had lied to the judges when he denied saying this. The witness agreed with Mr. Koumjian that that was the case.

“Mr. Taylor was asked by his counsel ‘Now, did you suggest that Mosquito [Sam Bockarie] be taken back,’ and Mr. Taylor said ‘No, I did not suggest that.’ Mr. Witness, Charles Taylor lied to these judges because you were present when he asked Issa Sesay to take Sam Bockarie back to Sierra Leone, correct?” Mr. Koumjian asked the witness.

“Yes, my lord,” the witness responded.

Also on Thursday, former Liberian Legislator and member of the NPFL, Mrs. Annie Yeney commenced her testimony as Mr. Taylor’s 14th witness.

In her testimony, Mrs. Yeney told the court that prosecution witness and former member of the NPFL, Joseph Zig Zag Marzah, lied when he told the court about how she had been engaged in cannibalism with Mr. Taylor. Mr. Marzah in his testimony told the court that on Mr. Taylor’s orders, when former Liberian politician Sam Dokie was killed in 1997, his liver was removed, cooked by one “Annie Yeney” (the current witness) and eaten together with Mr. Taylor. Mrs. Yeney denied ever engaging in such a practice.

“It is not true. That is what we call assassination of character, for a woman like me to cook a human being, it is not true. I am speaking to my God I serve, He knows my heart,” Mrs. Yeney told the court.

Mrs. Yeney took some moments to sob when speaking about Mr. Dokie’s death because according to her, Mr. Dokie’s wife was her sister who was also assassinated alongside the Liberian politician. She said she was informed that it was Mr. Marzah who had killed her sister and her brother-in-law.

Mrs. Yenedy explained that it was Mr. Marzah's practice to eat human beings and brag about it, telling people that he did not have a jail to keep his enemies.

"Zig Zag Marzah used to say these things in Gbarngba. He used to say he hasn't got a jail house, when he arrests any war criminals, he'll eat them," she said.

Describing Mr. Marzah, the witness told the court that "Zig Zag Marzah was not correct in his head, he was half mad, he used to naked himself and run in the streets," she said.

Mrs. Yenedy's description of Mr. Marzah corroborates what Mr. Taylor and his 11th witness Timan Edward Zammy told the court about the prosecution witness. Defense lawyers concluded Mrs. Yenedy's direct-examination within a couple of hours and prosecutors immediately commenced her cross-examination.

On Friday, prosecutors questioned Mrs. Yenedy about the death of Mr. Dokie, who prosecutors alleged was assassinated on the orders of Mr. Taylor because the former Liberian president believed that Mr. Dokie and other NPFL members wanted to form a rival faction to pose a threat to his (Taylor) bid for the Liberian presidency. Mr. Taylor has denied these allegations.

The witness, who told the court on Thursday that Mr. Dokie's wife was her sister, on Friday said that she could not tell whether members of the Dokie family were killed on the orders of Mr. Taylor. Alongside another popular Liberia politician, Jackson Doe, prosecutors allege that Mr. Dokie was assassinated because he was about to depart for neighbouring Guinea to meet another NPFL dissident Laveli Supuwood. Mr. Supuwood is now a part of Mr. Taylor's defense team. Asked whether these allegations were true, Mrs. Yenedy said she did not know.

Mrs. Yenedy denied that her loyalty to Mr. Taylor had motivated her to travel to The Hague to testify for the former Liberian president. She said that she decided to testify because she wanted to refute claims by prosecution witness Mr. Marzah that she cooked Mr. Dokie's liver as a meal and served Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Taylor is on trial for allegedly providing support to RUF rebels during Sierra Leone's 11 years civil conflict. The former president has denied the charges against him.

COTE D'IVOIRE

Zero Tolerance of FGM/C

Progress on a "Zero Tolerance" national campaign in Côte d'Ivoire to eliminate female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C) by the end of 2010, has been slowed down by health and education infrastructure, aid groups said.

Since the campaign began, 180 villages in Marandallah prefecture, in the north-central Worodougou region, no longer practise FGM/C and the aim is to double this by the end of the year.

The Ministry for Family, Women and Social Affairs is at the forefront of the campaign, which is backed by the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UN Population Fund (UNFPA), according to Ministry head Euphrasie Yao.

FGM/C rates have declined since the civil conflict ended in 2007, but not quickly enough. "FGM is decreasing, but one in three women in this country is still mutilated, and that is too high," Leticia Bazzi, child protection officer for UNICEF in Côte d'Ivoire, told IRIN.

In 1998 some 49 percent of women and girls aged 10 to 45 were subjected to FGM/C, but by 2006 the number had dropped to around 36 percent.

Deteriorating health and education services fuel persistently high rates, said Bazzi. Schools were the best places to make girls aware of the dangers of FGM/C, and medical personnel were in the best position to tell them about the health dangers of the practice, but both sectors were facing severe staff shortages and inadequate resources.

According to government statistics, FGM/C is most prevalent in the north and west of the country, controlled by Forces Nouvelles, where health and education services have deteriorated most quickly since the conflict, due to lack of resources and the flight of skilled staff to the capital, Abidjan.

In the mainly Islamic north, almost 90 percent of women undergo the procedure, and once girls have passed this initiation they are seen as being ready to prepare for marriage and are usually not expected to return to school.

In the village of Tieni in western Côte d'Ivoire, Chief Maho Gamni still allows FGM/C. "It is difficult for the girls to find husbands unless they have the operation - it's our custom." He had not heard of Operation Zero Tolerance, but he told IRIN that "People in Abidjan want to outlaw our customs".

FGM/C poses numerous physical and mental health risks, including birth complications, maternal death, infertility, urinary incontinence and tetanus.

Practitioners of FGM/C can be imprisoned in terms of a law enacted in 1998, but the 17 other African states that have banned FGM/C - including Burkina Faso, Togo and Senegal - have found that they are rarely brought to book.

Chris Baryomunsi, a member of parliament from Kanungu in western Uganda, where the practice was banned in late 2009, told IRIN that a ban must go hand-in-hand with awareness-raising at every opportunity, including in schools, at health clinics, on the radio and through community structures.

Punishment without education would not work, Bazzi told IRIN. "If practitioners are just punished, then the practice is likely to become more clandestine, which would actually endanger the lives of women and girls."

SIERRA LEONE

Judge Re-Elected Head of UN-Backed War Crimes Tribunal

Justice Jon Kamanda of Sierra Leone has been re-elected to serve as President of the United Nations-backed war crimes tribunal set up to deal with the worst acts committed during the long and brutal civil war in the West African nation.

This will be his second term as the Presiding Judge of the appeals chamber, a post which automatically makes him the President of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL).

Justice Emmanuel Ayoola of Nigeria, who previously served as the court's President, also been re-elected as Vice-President, according to a press release issued today by the court from Freetown, the capital.

The SCSL's judges wrapped up their 14th plenary on Friday in The Hague, voicing "sincere appreciation and gratitude" to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for the use of its courtroom and other support for the trial of former Liberian president Charles Taylor, who is under indictment for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The Special Court is an independent tribunal established jointly by Sierra Leone's Government and the UN in 2002. It is mandated to try those who bear the greatest responsibility for atrocities committed in Sierra Leone after 30 November 1996.

Last September, the eight prisoners convicted and held by the SCSL were transferred to Rwanda to serve their sentences since no prison in Sierra Leone meets the required international standards. The remaining trial, involving Mr. Taylor, is continuing at The Hague, where it was moved for security reasons.

