

**POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF THE YOUTH, THE LACK THEREOF AND  
A THREAT TO PEACE AND SECURITY OF GHANA.**

**BY ERNEST HENRY NORGBEY MEMBER OF PALIAMENT OF ASHAIMAN  
CONSTITUENCY.**

Mr. Speaker, anyone with good intentions for Ghana's future will always look to securing the next generation and their role in political discourse and functional productivity. Ghana has a youthful population, majority of all citizens are below the age of 35. According to the Ghana 2010 census 46.5 % of the Ghanaian population are below the age of 24, this is to say there is a great mandate to our society to wake up to the awareness of the numerous young people available and threat young people can be to any society if they are idle. One of the basic forms of functional involvement is in political involvement.

Mr. Speaker, the political environment has been classified by society into groups such as youth, elites, children, aristocrats; etc. with clear defined roles expected of each group. Any work about political participation is also related to democracy, (Parry et al.1992) Hence in any democracy the extent to which a person participates is based on their elitist consensus.

According to the African Youth Charter, youth is expressed as individuals between the ages of 15 and 35 years. The political society is increasingly becoming an environment specifically ruled and dominated only by elders as well as few young people. It is discovered that the secret message communicated to most young people today by the society is that they are not wanted in political discourse. Predominantly, this type of political system is far back captured when the ancient Greeks were the first to believe the idea of gerontocracy as famously stated by Plato in 380 BC, that, "It is for the elderly man to rule and for the younger ones to submit and that the youth are seen as disrespectful". However, these beliefs are also evident in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and over the years, leadership roles have been reserved for a few with respect to age. Many young people are led to understand political participation as predominantly the province of adults.

Mr. Speaker, the problem is that the youth is not fully involved in political participation and even if they are, they are seen to be given insignificant temporal roles to play especially youth are seen as political tools of violence and this is what we seek to correct.

Mr. Speaker, the increasing violence is as a result of the idle involvement in the political process. It is significant to note that the electoral process in Ghana is mostly clad with violence and mayhem and there is little opportunity for proper expression of their political right. The manipulation of these youth makes security before and during elections a major challenge. High unemployment digs Ghana further into the trenches of manipulation for violence. Any token however insignificant will definitely influence quite a number of people.

The situation is not peculiar to any constituency, similar occurrences all over Ghana in seemingly cultural assonance. Indeed the event of political manipulation is the grounds for vigilantism and the violence of Delta forces, Invisible forces, Bolga Bull Dogs, The Hawks just to mention a few. These groups have a periodic importance during elections and right after are cast to the background, their struggle for relevance is what we see daily. The youth has been classified as one radical and vigorous group when political leaders are struggling for power and any other status in the society, but to be fair, that's sometimes their only means of being heard.

Mr. Speaker, the problem of limited participation of the youth in politics and the reasons for such an occurrence are really far reaching. Some are constitutional specifications like 21 years for parliament and 40 years to be president. When people are limited by a constitutional demarcation it soon begins to sound as normal and acceptable and gains legitimacy in the political rhetoric.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the issue of cultural prescription of leadership. One challenge in Ghana is that almost all social groupings in Ghana tend to reserve leadership role for the elderly. The big explanation today is "that's how we have always done it". Once again history and repeated action does not make an action right, just popular. Politicians often assume that, the young people are not qualified to engage in decision making because of their "cognitive deficiency". There are over 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24 in the world (UNFPA, 2014), with 90% of them in developing countries. Sidney, an American political scientist formulated the traditional model of political participation in 1995. He stated that "political participation affords citizens in a democracy an opportunity to communicate information to government officials about their concerns and preferences and to put pressure on them to respond". This stipulates that, in any democratic state, citizens have the right to express their grievances in a way that catches the attention of government officials. There are a number of activities that are seen as participation in the political sphere. Examples include; voting, contesting for position, attending protest or demonstration, contributing electoral campaigns etc., (Weber, 1994). Participation in politics is essential for democracy. It is through this behavior that the choices of "who gets what, when and how" are made.

Mr. Speaker, Aristotle stipulates in 350 BC "Man is rational in nature" and therefore can make choices in ways that can even benefit him. If an individual is old enough to vote and decide on what is the political culture then the person is old enough to determine to hold that similar portfolio. Moreso, if an individual of 21 is old enough to make laws then he should be old enough to implement these laws. Why should an immature person make laws for the mature one to obey and implement? Individuals especially the youth are motivated by considerations of self-interest when they get involved in politics. Meaning, if a rational human being has attained the voting age to know who is fit to be in power as stipulated in the constitution, then he (the youth) must as well be rational enough to contest for a position or involve in high level politics.

Mr. Speaker, there is real precedence of these exceptional youth noteworthy is His Excellency former president Rawlings at 28, The minority leader Hon. Haruna Iddrisu, Dominic Nitiwul who became a legislator at the age of 24 and did creditably well, our own A.S.K Bagbin in parliament and Emmanuel Macron of France etc demonstrate clearly how young people can embrace and excel at politics leadership and holistic functionality when given the room to operate. Political participation is a dual thing that features voting or being voted for. Any attempt to separate this opportunity from the youth means there's a proof of distinction between the rationality that qualifies one to become the elector and hence the rationality to become an elect or stand for elections.

Mr. Speaker, Ghana is a fallow period, meaning we as a people are at a crossroad ,our destiny lies before us .Ghana can become like Malaysia and China that exploit their youth for holistic development or we can become like Libya or Syria whose conflicts are worn as medals on the bosom of young men and women .We decide what happens to the nation by our simple legislative power .As members of this house and staunch believers in Ghana's future, no matter our party colours it's time for us to act to take action to review our laws ,offer better employment opportunities ,mobilize for Ghana's future through infrastructure and service delivery .Mr. Speaker, I challenge you and all members of the house to allow the youth to participate fully .This is no longer a question on rationality or readiness but simply a removal of constitutional disenfranchisement .

I thank you Mr. Speaker for the opportunity.

Aselma Wilson