

ASSESSING THE PERFORMANCE OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT: A TIME TO OWN THE PROCESS

STATEMENT BY HON. DR EMMANUEL MARFO

Right Honourable Speaker,

I thank you for the opportunity to highlight an issue that I believe is of public interest and indeed should be of great interest to honourable members of Parliament and the institution of parliament at large.

Mr Speaker, there is a growing interest in research works purporting to assess the performance of Members of Parliament; I can readily cite the periodic assessments published by Ghana Watch and the Institute of Economic Affairs. For my purpose today, I do not intend to go into the scientific merits of their conceptual and methodological approaches but to focus on some observations that we, as parliament, must take note and act upon them in our own interest. That notwithstanding, I must first of all, observe that the evaluative criteria for performance employed by some of these researchers in relation to the actual work done by MPs, lack internal validity. Many of such studies discount the enormous time used by MPs to follow up on projects, school admissions, job applications, committee meetings and other public interest assignments such as services on boards and so on and indeed the intellectual contributions deployed during these assignments.

Mr Speaker, I am bringing this matter up again because there seems to be a high public interest in the matter and in the absence of any other objective assessment material, the results of such studies provide the public and political actors a tool to 'judge' MPs and by extension Parliament as a whole.

Mr Speaker, in a recent research work by the Institute of Economic Affairs published in June 2016 under the title 'public perception of Members of Parliament - a survey report', a number of issues related to the public's perception of our roles and an assessment of our performance thereof were raised. Mr Speaker, the study raised the issue of minimum qualification for MPs and it indeed observed that at least 70% of respondents supported the need for defining a minimum qualification for MPs. This is an issue that has for long generated enormous debate, and for my purpose today do not want to go there except to remind us that it is still an issue that engages the minds of many.

First of all, Mr Speaker, the IEA study observed that majority of the respondents rated the performance of their MPs low to average. This is not a good observation that must characterize this house. Whether it is a reflection of the truth or not is left for debate but the fact remains

that the public's rating of our performance was not the best, according to the study. This observation is not surprising based on other results from the same study. For example, at least 75% of the respondents in the study perceived the role of MPs as assisting people or undertaking development projects. So Mr Speaker, *ab initio*, these respondents did not even have the right basis to make an assessment of MPs performance. Not surprisingly, the study revealed that almost 50% of respondents who contacted their MPs did so to discuss development issues and some 40% to seek various forms of assistance, including financial assistance. So, less than 10% actually contacted their MPs on questions of legislation or oversight functions. So clearly, how can one expect a high rating of MPs performance under circumstances where we know MPs do not have unlimited resources to meet the various financial requests from constituents and to meet the high cost of development needs in our constituencies. We continue to be confronted with requests to construct roads, bridges, drains and to renovate schools and so on. So, Mr Speaker, there seems to be some misconception here and the time to confront such mass ignorance is now; otherwise we will continue to be viewed in a negative way by the public.

Mr Speaker, I believe education will play a major role here and indeed an observation from the study reinforces this view already. In fact, the study concluded that the level of education of respondents had a positive relationship with their knowledge about the role of an MP. In other words, if we can dedicate adequate resources to our public relations outfit and even if the various regional caucuses could take it up as a project to launch a massive public education, we may be able to change this misconception. Mr Speaker, this is certainly important because we are 'elected' representatives and if the population who elect us do not understand our role, then we have a problem sustaining their mandate as we may not be able to meet their expectations. This may also account for the high attrition rate in this house.

Mr Speaker, another dimension of this misconception is that people also play politics with such research results. I have heard people who use the ratings of MPs as a campaign tool against sitting MPs, distributing photocopies of the published material to their delegates and tell them 'look at how your MP is performing? He or she is a grade 'E' or 'F' MP and if you are not lucky and you come from a constituency with many literates, then it might even affect your re-nomination or re-election.

Mr Speaker, going forward, I would like to say that we need to rise up and have a serious public engagement to align their perceptions and understanding to our constitutional mandate and function. We can no longer be on the defence; the time for MPs and Parliament for that matter to rise up to deal with this growing misconception is now. Mr Speaker, I must suggest that if it is the desire of the public to know the performance of MPs, we as an institution must develop an objective framework for performance assessment based on the actual work we do so that

those who want to do research will be appropriately guided. Mr Speaker, I should think that perhaps the Committee responsible for parliamentary affairs assisted by the research department of parliament and perhaps members with relevant research background could assist in this work. Mr Speaker, until we are able to design, in-house, a clear performance criteria and indicators framework based on a thorough assessment of the work we do, we will continue to encounter such outsider assessments. Mr Speaker, Parliament is a master of its own rules, and I will argue that, this is the time for us to be a master of our own performance assessment.

Most grateful Right Honourable Speaker