**NOVEMBER 18, 2019**

**PRESS CONFERENCE ADDRESSED BY THE GENERAL SECRETARY OF NPP, JOHN BOADU, ON THE DECEMBER 17 REFERENDUM TO ALLOW FOR A MULTI PARTISAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTION IN GHANA**

1. Friends of the media, Ladies and Gentlemen, we invited the press here today to, first, express our shock and outrage at the NDC’s sudden U-turn to now announce that they will be campaigning for a “No” vote on the upcoming referendum to amend Article 55(3) of the Constitution. The amendment is to allow political parties to also freely contest in the local government elections and administration and for voters to be able to hold political parties directly accountable for their stewardship at the local and not just the national level.
2. It will be recalled that on Tuesday, November 12, 2019, the National Democratic Congress urged Ghanaians to vote against the proposed amendment. **According to the party, a "YES" vote will further polarize the nation, particularly local communities along the lines of NPP/NDC, and will likely lead to the creation of “NDC Communal Labour day” and “NPP Communal Labour day”, as well as “NDC market” and “NPP market”.**
3. Unfortunately, this flies on the face of the informed wisdom that it is rather the winner-takes-all culture of the existing structure that is largely responsible for the tensions between the two main political parties and the gradual marginalization of minority parties in Ghana, which gets worse election after election.
4. The President of the Republic, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, in the supreme interest of Ghana, heeded to the growing calls of the people to trade in the power of the President to appoint all MMDCEs for them to be elected directly by the people through the amendment of Article 243(1) and related provisions.
5. Amending this provision requires the support of two-thirds (66.7%) of all Members of Parliament. With the ruling New Patriotic Party controlling 169 (61%) of the 275 seats in Parliament, and the opposition National Democratic Congress holding 106 (39%), President Akufo-Addo was absolutely clear from the word go that we could not achieve this without the support of the NDC. So, he made consensus building the basic ingredient for this important constitutional exercise.
6. Directly linked to this so as to make the devolution of power complete, the Government began the process of paving way for political parties to openly sponsor candidates for elections at the District Assembly level. This means that Article 55(3), which says that political parties are “free to participate in shaping the political will of the people… and sponsor candidates for election to any public office other than to District Assemblies or lower local government unit,” needs to be amended. Except, only through a national referendum as it is an entrenched provision. Amending it requires a referendum in which the voter turnout must be at least 40% and that at least 75% of votes cast must endorse the proposed amendment for it not to fall. Again, the President was under no illusions whatsoever about how this could be achieved and made consensus building the foundation for this exercise, as well.
7. This press conference, ladies and gentlemen, seeks to state the position of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) on the upcoming December 17 referendum and to, particularly, address, the unfortunate *volte face* (a complete U-Turn) by the National Democratic Congress.
8. This press conference will conclude by making a strong case for a ‘YES’ vote and call on the NDC to return to the consensus table, where we all started and were proceeding together purposefully towards December 17.
9. Indeed and in fact, until the announcement last Tuesday, November 12, 2019, the NDC had all this while been cooperating constructively with Government, in Parliament and elsewhere, with the NPP, the Electoral Commission, other political parties, faith-based organizations, traditional authorities, Civil Society Organizations and all other stakeholders for the success of the referendum in returning an emphatic YES verdict. This, they have done throughout the many engagements, conferences and symposiums that have been held on the referendum involving all the major political parties in the country.
10. That is why all the political parties, civil society groups, the media and the general public all appear surprised, confused and even hoodwinked by the NDC’s abrupt U-turn last Tuesday, barely five weeks to the referendum of December 17. What the NDC displayed last Tuesday was nothing else but an unpatriotic betrayal of the Ghanaian people. Such a naked show of dishonesty, deceit, indecision, lack of candour and integrity from the biggest opposition party in the country projects a perception that the NDC would sacrifice the national interest at the alter rather where cheap political points are scored.
11. There is a strong school of thought that the only thing that can explain the NDC’s unexpected U-turn is that they are fully aware of the difficult task of getting the amendment through without a consensus; knew all thus along, but pretended they were in favour until this last minute when huge state resources have been committed. By urging their supporters to vote ‘No’ , the NDC by this frivolous game hopes to register a curious propaganda “victory” as we enter election year in 2020.
12. Let this clear message go out to every household, ladies and gentlemen, that as far as the NPP is concerned, a ‘YES’ vote is not about NPP and certainly not about NDC. It is about what is good for Ghana; what is good for governance in our country, particularly where it matters most; at the grassroots level. Surely, the NDC are NOT saying that after 30 years, the current system of local government has delivered in terms of accountability, quality of service and its overall impact on the nation’s development.
13. It was never the intention of the NPP to make partisan political capital out of this. And, it will never be. There is no inherent advantage for any party but for the Ghanaian people and the quality of leadership and public services they get from their local government. That is why we begun on a platform of a consensus and it cannot be said that this entire Constitutional Reform exercise is to benefit one political party to the exclusion of others. Indeed, it is rather the current status quo which favours one political party or at best the two main political parties to the exclusion of all others.
14. If partisan advantage was the intention, Akufo-Addo and the NPP leadership would not have selflessly spent the last three years convincing our own rank and file across the country that letting go the powers of the president to nominate DCEs was the right thing to do. If it were for partisan reasons, the President and his party would not be leading this exercise to give up on his constitutional powers to nominate all Chief Executives of all Assemblies. It is rather the ‘winner-takes-all’ system that is at the bottom of much of the acrimony in our politics.

**NDC’s POSITION ON THE REFERENDUM UNTIL NOW**

1. On April 18, 2017, President Akufo-Addo held a historic meeting with the three living former Presidents, namely, President Jerry John Rawlings, President John Agyekum Kufuor, and President John Dramani Mahama. Top on the agenda was the elections of DCEs and the introduction of multi-party democracy at the local government level. The positive responses from the three former leaders gave the nation, what we all saw to be a solid platform for consensus building.
2. The consensus process began in earnest. For example, on August 16, 2017, IDEG, which had been championing this constitutional reform for the past decade or so, organised a one day seminar on ***‘Establishing Multiparty Local Governance in Ghana.’*** The leader of the NDC delegation and former Minister for Local Government, **Samuel Ofosu-Ampofo**, gave a strong endorsement, on behalf of his party, to multiparty elections at the district level.
3. On all the various discussions that civil society groups have had consultations with political parties over the last few years, nowhere did the NDC give any hint of being fundamentally against electing people at the local government level on partisan basis. They hid it from Ghanaians We are curious to know why after making declarations at national and public fora and engagements, including at the Catholic Bishops Conference, several forums organised by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), particularly IDEG, the launch by Coalition of CSOs, the launch of Citizens’ Education And Awareness Campaign by the NCCE and the Information Service Department, among others, the NDC is now going back on their word and pledge.
4. In all these engagements we have referred to, some of which were held at the behest of the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) and the Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) to whip up political party and stakeholder support for the referendum, the NDC, just like the NPP and the other parties made their positions very clear to the effect that they were for the introduction of multiparty contest at the local government level and that they were willing and ready to get their supporters to campaign for a YES vote in the referendum.
5. The NDC maintained that they were convinced that amending Article 55(3) of the 1992 constitution to allow political parties sponsor candidates for election into the District Assemblies and lower local government units was the way to go if the nation really wanted to strengthen decentralization. The NDC had also participated in all the 10 regional and national consultations conducted by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development on the referendum in 2018, during which meetings, the party maintained its position that it was in support of the amendment of Article 55(3).
6. Ladies and gentlemen, please permit us to highlight a few examples of this, as this is a very important conversation on the destiny of Ghana’s governance structure and development. On **October 2, 2019**, IDEG organized a forum (on the theme: “Reforms, Benefits, Costs and Participation. MMDCEs Elections and the 17th December 2019 National Referendum), chaired by the Chairperson of NCCE, where the NDC boldly reiterated its support for a “Yes” vote. The General Secretary of the NDC, **Johnson Aseidu Nketia’s speech**, which was applauded by all, re-echoed their support: *“This is one of the topics [one of the few topics] that both the NDC and the NPP seem to be in agreement. So I will not want to [giggles] I would not want to talk too much about the advantages of having a multiparty election at the local assemblies,”* he said.
7. Aseidu Nketia’s speech continued, **“We are urging our members and we have asked all our members to also go out and vote for YES when the opportunity presents itself…** As for the assembly elections and involvement of political parties the Honorable Ameyaw Cheremeh has pointed it out clearly. It is true that even though these elections are not partisan, when you get to the grounds, [it is] the political parties, we are conducting primaries, we decide which individual will best represent the interests of the party and all of that.  I think that our democracy will become more meaningful if we take the devolution process properly to the grassroot level and ensure that we have a multi-party election and accountability can also be ensured. So the NDC is fully committed to the process, will encourage our members to vote a **YES** but once again in conclusion we are urging all of you as our social partners to join us in our efforts to ensure that the Electoral Commission in its conduct ensure that the right things are done so that we can have a free and fair election.” (A video of this speech, which was read on the General Secretary’s behalf by Eric Edem Agbana, the Deputy National Youth Organiser, can be made available to you).
8. It was this same Johnson Asiedu Nketia, who, on July 11, 2011, made a curious claim at Sunyani that the NDC won over 60% of the seats in the 2010 non-partisan district assembly elections. What this does, is make everyone aware that there is a fiction and all political parties hide behind the “non-partisan” election of District Assemblymen and -women which allows parties to evade accountability and for public service and development at the local level to suffer.
9. Again, another meeting was convened by IDEG on **25th October, 2019** between the two main parties. The Minority side was led by the 2nd Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Hon Alban Bagbin, Minority Leader, Hon. Haruna Iddrisu, Minority Chief Whip, Hon. Mohammed Muntaka and other Ranking Members. The Majority side was led by Majority Leader and Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Hon Osei Kyei-Mensah Bonsu. The Chief Whip, Hon Ameyaw Cheremeh and Chairmen of Committees and other members.
10. Again, there, the NDC leadership gave no hint that they were to soon make a U-turn. Instead, the two sides in Parliament reached a consensus on the critical issues on the referendum and the passage of Article 243(1), with the promise to brief leaders of their respective parties.
11. Ladies and gentlemen, broad-based consultations have followed this process all the way through. On **June 10, 2019**, a meeting was held at the Jubilee House for comprehensive deliberations on the referendum. There too, all parties were in agreement on voting “yes”. At that meeting, the NDC was represented by its General Secretary, Johnson Asiedu Nketia, whilst the People’s National Convention (PNC) was represented by its General Secretary, Bernard Monnah. Other key stakeholders were also represented. During the meeting, the NDC raised no dissent but rather fully consented to the amendment process and supported the campaign for a ‘YES’ vote.
12. Just last week, **Kofi Akpaloo,** founder of the Liberal Party of Ghana (LPG), who was present at the Jubilee House meeting, described the NDC’s ‘NO’ vote campaign as “a betrayal to a collective decision made by political parties to solicit for a ‘YES’ vote”.

**THEIR POSITION IN PARLIAMENT ALL THIS WHILE**

1. This positive position for a “Yes” vote taken by the NDC was not only consistently articulated by the its national executives and other leading members but also by the party’s Members of Parliament on the floor of the august House. The NDC Minority in Parliament worked in close collaboration with their Majority counterparts to amend the relevant constitutional provisions to make MMDCEs positions ELECTIVE ahead of the referendum in order to further strengthen the case for an overwhelming YES vote at the referendum scheduled for December 17, 2019. The two sides were even planning to go out together to campaign.
2. For the records, we wish to, at this juncture, quote what some of their leading members said on the floor of Parliament during the second reading of the amendment bill and the broader issue of involving political parties in district assembly elections and administration, as captured by the Parliamentary Hansard of July 29, 2019:
3. The Minority Leader of NDC, **Hon Haruna Idrissu** said: *“So Mr. Speaker, two principles; amend the constitution, allow for popular elections of DCEs, but do it on the principle of partisanship. Without that, it may be difficult to support it.”*
4. **Mahama Ayariga** added: *“Mr. speaker let me reiterate the position of the Minority that we support the amendment to the Constitution to allow MMDCEs to be elected by universal adult suffrage. We do support that, but we also request that this should be doable with the sponsorship and support of political parties, given their strategic role in organizing our country”*.
5. Hon. **Haruna Idrissu** reiterated that: *“…the support of those of us on this side of the House is conditional to the fact that* ***DCEs should be elected, but they should be elected on partisan lines.*** *This is the principle we would support and walk with”*.
6. **Mahama Ayariga** amplified the party’s support for the partisanship election of MMDCEs by asserting that: “*If political parties are so important to be able to organize to determine who should be the number one person- the president, why should they not be involved in determining who should be the number one person in a district assembly? It is equally very important”.*
7. **Haruna Idrissu** eloquently highlighted hypocrisy in the matter by stating that: *“Mr. Speaker, the pretense must end. All of us here know that clandestinely, political parties support district assembly elections in Ghana. Let us resolve this issue as a country, whether or not political parties have a role in local elections. In countries such as Cote D’Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and South Africa, they walk on the basis of partisanship.* ***So, we support the principle, and that is a major policy shift for our political parties.”***
8. The **Minority Chief Whip**, Alhaji Mohammed-Mubarak Muntaka (MP FOR ASAWASI) asked the question: *“if the referendum on article 55(3) fails, then what happens?”.* He answered himself by stating that: *“It means that we would open ourselves to election without limit, just like the current arrangement, where we all pretend that the district assembly election is non-partisan, when in actual sense, all of us, in the sincerity of our minds know that people and parties are behind one candidate or the other.”*
9. **MR. MAHAMA AYARIGA** (MP FOR BAWKU CENTRAL): *“I think the consensus in this House is that we amend our Constitution to provide that District Chief Executives be elected into office. From the report of your Committee, it also appears that there is an arrangement that further steps be taken so that the election to District Chief Executive positions will or can be* ***on the basis of partisanship with political parties sponsoring candidates.*** *It does not appear to me that there is any dispute regarding the consensus on these two positions……. There is a political bargain here.* ***We in the Minority support the election of District Chief Executives, but we are asking for it along partisan basis****.”*

**CONCERN RAISED BY THE MINORITY AND HOW SAME WAS ADDRESSED**

1. The only concern the NDC MPs expressed was why all the consequential provisions were not consolidated together with Article 243(1) of the Constitution for amendment. But even with that, their fears were allayed by the Executive and MPs on the NPP side who gave them the strongest assurance that a bill would soon be presented to parliament to take care of all the consequential amendments in order to operationalize and smoothen the implementation of the Article 243(1) amendment. Also worthy of note is that the process for amending Article 243 (1) is almost complete, and so, any attempt to incorporate all the consequential amendments into the bill NOW would mean the bill has to be withdrawn from parliament entirely for the process to start afresh and would take us not less than 3 months.
2. The election of MMDCEs is not going to be held this year [2019] or in 2020 but in 2021, hence there is still ample time to amend all the consequential provisions in the 1992 constitution as well as to undertake a holistic review of the nation’s Local Government Law, the Local Government Act 2016 (Act 936) and other relevant pieces of legislation to conform with the new reality occasioned by the amendment Article 243(1) and 55(3). All these have been clearly outlined in the **ROADMAP TOWARDS ELECTION OF MMDCEs** launched by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development in July 2017 with the media in attendance.
3. The roadmap states clearly as part of the post referendum activities that, if the referendum results in a YES verdict, Parliament shall approve the Amendment Bill to Article 55(3) which shall then be followed with all the consequential amendments including Articles 248(3), Article 242, Article 248, The Local Government Act (Act 936), The District Assembly Elections Act (Act 473), The Security and Intelligence Act (Act 526), The Political Parties Act (Act 573) and finally a development of a Policy Framework and Guidelines pursuant to the new laws to guide the entire process.

**THE NDC’S U-TURN AND BREACH OF FAITH**

1. Having consistently spoken publicly in favour of the amendment of Article 55(3) and thus throwing their support for the referendum as we have demonstrated already, the NDC’s press conference of 12th November, 2019, was most curious. If it was calculated to confuse, then it has succeeded. But, surely, is this how an opposition party led by a former president eager to appeal to the electorate for another chance, behave?
2. There is a strong school of thought that the only thing that explains the NDCs U-turn is that, being fully aware of the difficult constitutional requirement that at least 40% of the electorate must show up and at least 75% of those who show up to vote must cast in favour before such an entrenched position can be successfully amended, the NDC wants to take undue, unpatriotic and selfish advantage of that. Thus, they are merely playing politics by hoping to register a curious electoral “victory” by actively mobilizing their supporters to vote ‘NO’. Indeed, our information is that, the NDC intends to use the referendum as a dress rehearsal for the 2020 general elections.
3. As far as the NPP is concerned, a ‘YES’ vote is not about NPP and certainly not about NDC but it is about what is good for governance in our country, particularly where it matters most; at the grassroots level. Surely, the NDC are NOT saying that after 30 years, the current system of local government has delivered in terms of accountability, quality of service and its overall impact on the nation’s development.
4. Nobody is begrudging the NDC for having a change of mind, but not by weaving a web of distortions and falsehoods and then on the basis of that suggest that it is rather the ruling party that had acted in bad faith.

**RESPONSES TO THEIR [NDC] CLAIMS**

1. **Government is deceiving the public that the referendum is about election of MMDCEs:** 
   1. It is never true that Government has sought to deceive Ghanaians into believing that the referendum is to elect MMDCEs. All stakeholders had been clear on the agenda that the President was giving away his appointing powers to allow the electorate to vote for their own MMDCEs and linked to that is the allow parties to also freely contest. The messages had been clear from all informed key stakeholders.
2. **Government was not transparent in the processes leading to the referendum:** 
   1. Throughout the process, government has made it very clear by way of public education that the burden to elect or not to elect MMDCEs has now been shifted from the Executive to Parliament by approving the current bill to amend 243(1) presently before Parliament which shall require at least 2/3rd majority of MPs voting in favour of the amendment. Citizens can do very little on that because the amendment is already before the august House which is seized with the competent jurisdiction to effect the amendments. However, the decision whether or not to elect MMDCEs on partisan basis requires the approval of citizens in a referendum, which is all that the December 17 referendum is seeking to achieve.
   2. President Akufo-Addo, who is at the forefront of this national exercise to strengthen local governance, has, on several occasions made a strong case for amending 243(1) and 55(3) in an atmosphere of sincerity and candour. Indeed, among other things, his statement on the State of the Nation in Parliament on 8th February, 2018, confirms this position and also demonstrates his unwavering commitment to the election of MMDCEs and the referendum on multi-party democracy in District level polls.
3. **The process was shrouded in secrecy** 
   1. Again, contrary to the NDC’s claims, the processes leading to the referendum have NOT been shrouded in secrecy. First of all, the process began with the development and launch of a **COMPREHENSIVE ROADMAP** by the Ministry of Local of Local Government and Rural Development which was done in the full glare of the media. The Ministry also conducted public awareness and sensitization meetings with relevant stakeholders in all regions of the country and at the national level where meetings were held with all identifiable stakeholders, including political parties, the National House of Chiefs, the Christian Council of Ghana, Catholic Bishops Conference, Federation of Muslim Council, CSOs, professional groups, relevant committees of Parliament, etc.
   2. Also, through the help of the Attorney General, the Local Government Ministry ensured that all the constitutional requirements for amending entrenched provisions pursuant to Article 290, including a 6-month gazette notification and the laying of the bill before Parliament were all strictly complied with. How more transparent does the NDC want the process to be?
   3. Through the Local Government Ministry, Government has provided funding to the NCCE to educate the public on the referendum.
4. **Multi-party democracy is divisive and will destroy local government** 
   1. The NDC’s message to the whole world that suggests that multi-party democracy is divisive, alien and unsuitable for this country, especially at the local Government level, is also surprising. It gives an uneasy impression that Ghana’s main opposition party is not really committed to the liberal democratic journey, even though, so far, they are the biggest beneficiaries after 16 years in office. .
   2. The last 27 years of multiparty democracy has recorded the best performance in most fields since the First Republic. But, it is also true that the development has been very slow at the district level, especially where local initiatives are concerned. The current reforms should rather diffuse the NPP-NDC duopoly and acrimony as people from different parties are compelled by the electoral system to work together in their various communities.
   3. When these reforms are carried through, the smaller political parties should have greater opportunity to organize themselves at the most basic level of governance and be able to grow from the local level to avoid the country heading towards a two-party state.
5. Well, since we are in a constitutional democracy, it is within their right to campaign for NO, but the NDC should not be disingenuous and deceptive in their campaign. There is no doubt that as we speak, some of their party constituency officers and polling station (ward) executives as well as those of the NPP and political parties are holding positions as Assembly and Unit Committee Members. Per their logic, do we have NDC market days and NPP market days? Do we have NDC communal labour and NPP communal labour?
6. **President Akufo-Addo is trying to destroy the ‘non-partisan local government legacy’ of President Rawlings**
   1. If multiparty democracy works in democratic states across the globe, what is so special about Ghana for it not to work? Ghana cannot be left out. Not when we are touted as the bastion of democracy on the continent of Africa and beyond.
   2. It is instructive to note that the need to select Metropolitan Municipal and District Chief Executives (MMDCES) in a multi-party democracy has been a popular call since 2000 and, more institutionally, the work of the Constitution Review Commission in 2011 when their Report confirmed that the good people of Ghana had expressed the desire to have their MMDCEs directly elected on multi-party basis. President Akufo-Addo is seeking to implement the wishes of the Ghanaian people, as expressed consistently in various surveys.
   3. The deficiencies and findings and surveys, including the comprehensive Afro barometer survey of 2017 by CDD, which states that over seventy percent of those surveyed want election of MMDCEs on partisan basis, have convinced us that there is the need to embark on a comprehensive review of political participation at the local government level.

**COMMITMENT OF PRESIDENT AKUFO-ADDO**

President Akufo-Addo has, without doubt, selflessly demonstrated and continues to demonstrate, both in words and in action, an unwavering commitment to giving real meaning to the concept of decentralization and bringing good local governance to the Ghanaian people in a free and fair atmosphere. In devolving his appointive power back to the people in respect of MMDCEs, President Akufo-Addo, has, thus far, demonstrated that he puts Ghana first. This is an example we expect the NDC leadership to emulate.

**THE CONSENSUS CASE FOR YES**

1. The New Patriotic Party will, nonetheless, still stretch a hand of friendship and appeal to the NDC, the second largest party in Ghana, to come back to the consensus table and let us, together, do what we know to be right for Ghana. We will appeal to the NDC to put the national interest first. The NPP is fully behind the President’s programme and the people’s desire to democratize local governance and enhance accountability at that level.
2. We are also happy to hear that Government intends to continue engaging the NDC and other stakeholders to get this important exercise of strengthening governance at the grassroots fully back on track.
3. We also call on all patriotic citizens, including followers of NDC and other parties, to do what we all know to be right and support the “Yes” campaign.
4. We call on all other institutional stakeholders to also reach out to the NDC presidential candidate and his party leadership to come back and support the “Yes” vote.
5. To reinforce that this is not just an NPP agenda but a national agenda, in making the case for a ‘YES’ vote, we would like to quote from civil society:

H Kwasi Prempeh of the Ghana Centre for Democratic Development stated at the weekend in relation to a governing party having its opposition winning some MMDCE elections: “*…both parties have work to do governing the country and can be judged and held accountable on their performance, not just nationally but also locally. Why isn’t it better to move away from our winner-takes-all politics and let local communities have the opportunity to have their preferred party participate directly in government at the local level…this… build[s] bridges of cooperation between parties, because for local development to proceed, the local and the centre must work together, regardless of which party controls government at which level.*… *Our winner-take-all arrangement, where the winning party gets everything and the loser gets nothing to do but oppose, is a part of why our politics is the way it is”*

IDEG supports the participation of political parties in Ghana’s Local Governance because, *“…it would promote inclusiveness and reduce the winner-takes-all system and polarization. It will also enable the minority political parties to control some MMDAs and therefore give them a share in executive power at the local level even as the ruling party controls power at the national level.”*

*They argue further that, “The quality of MMDCEs and Assembly members would improve because the political parties with their own internal vetting and competitive processes will scrutinize and bring out their best candidates for election as they compete amongst themselves.”*

1. We began this journey believing there was consensus, and we are still hopeful that all is not lost. The discussions will continue this week with stakeholders and we will do our best to put Ghana first.
2. Thank you.