



SOCIALIST MOVEMENT OF GHANA (SMG)

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MEDIA STATEMENT

SECURING DEMOCRACY IN WEST AFRICA

Yesterday, the 15-member Peace and Security Council of the African Union (AU) voted to suspend Burkina Faso's participation "in all AU activities until the effective restoration of constitutional order in the country. "The AU's move came only three days after the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) also suspended Burkina Faso from its ranks and warned of possible sanctions pending the outcome of meetings with leaders of a coup who have announced the suspension of the constitutional order.

The Socialist Movement of Ghana (SMG) sees these measures announced by ECOWAS and the AU as symptomatic of the frenzy which has gripped neo-colonial leaders across the continent following the spate of coups in the West African sub-region and elsewhere. Over a period of 18 months, there have been four coups in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Chad. There are very strong indications that the coups in West African countries have received popular support from the masses, portraying the leadership of ECOWAS and the AU as being completely out of touch with the aspirations of the people.

The situation in the West African sub-region is characterized by insecurity, illegal constitutional changes, insurgencies, economic deterioration, high unemployment, high cost of living, labour unrest and the debt overhang due to the neo-liberal market model imposed by the neo-colonial regimes in the sub-region. It is obvious that the so-called democratic model which is being practised in Africa is nothing more than a blind copy of Western institutions which have failed to address the concrete problems of poverty, lack of access to social services including health, housing, and education. The growing indebtedness of African countries coupled with insecurity brought about by the spread of religious insurgency has become a dangerous cocktail for destabilization.

The coup in Guinea followed mass protests by the people against the illegal constitutional changes which enabled President Alpha Conde to run for a third term. These peaceful mass protests had been brutally repressed with scores of Guineans thrown into detention without trial and hundreds of others reportedly tortured and harassed.

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In Mali, the deteriorating security situation and the abandonment of the army which did not have sufficient arms and logistics to prosecute the wars against the Islamic insurgents and the Tuareg secessionists led to the military takeover from an ineffective civilian regime, following a popular clamour for change by the mass of the population. The complete reliance on an ineffective colonial army from France and the expeditionary forces from the EU and ECOWAS which virtually did no fighting except to guard the foreign owned extractive industries like the gold mine in Mali and the routes to the French controlled Uranium mines in Niger worsened the situation. These foreign forces also had the additional duty to protect the corrupt regime of the civilian government of Mali from a dissatisfied population.

In Burkina Faso, the latest country to fall under military rule the security situation seems to have deteriorated badly with the insurgents taking large parts of the country as Burkinabe soldiers were abandoned to be massacred by the Islamic insurgents due to the lack of logistics, arms and ammunitions. This coup in Burkina Faso was against a background of a popular uprising of demonstrations against French troops and an attack on the Presidential Palace and the ruling Party's headquarters which was burnt to ashes.

All these security lapses were against the background of the imposition by external forces of the neo-liberal economic model and a constitutional bourgeois democratic order which does not address the socio-economic needs of the population but rather deepens the exploitation of the people by a small elite and engenders widespread poverty and perpetuates underdevelopment and a low standard of living of the mass of the people. This model has institutionalized resource theft and economic control by foreign multi-nationals of the natural resources of the sub-region like oil, gold, bauxite, uranium, etc. Finally, increased financial control by financial institutions of the West such as the Bretton Woods institutions. Lack of economic investment, export of local jobs, and a liberal trade regime have also led to food insecurity, unemployment, crime, closure of national industries etc.

The West, principally led by France and the USA have now resorted to the setting up of military bases and signing dubious defence agreements primarily to defend their multinational corporations involved in resource theft under the guise of fighting against the Al Qaeda inspired Islamic insurgencies in the sub-region. The presence of these foreign troops is a huge destabilizing factor in the governance of the state as it provides a false sense of security to the neo-colonial regimes and undermines national sovereignty.



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The bourgeois constitutional rule of elections, parliaments, army, police, and the courts which are far removed from the people and are used by an elite to protect their misrule, guard their privileges and abuse power cannot be sustained.

The Socialist Movement of Ghana (SMG) accepts the principle that only the people of a given country can determine its system of government and therefore is uncomfortable with the decisions and actions of ECOWAS and the AU apparently aimed ending the spate of coups in the sub-region. The imposition of draconian sanctions and sermonizing cannot under any circumstances lead to the construction of democratic societies in West Africa.

The people of West Africa are the only true guarantors of democracy. Like people everywhere, they will only participate in the democratic experiment if it leads to improving their conditions of work and life. Right now, the burdensome privilege of the ruling elite, widespread corruption, growing inequality and poverty has failed to convince the masses that democracy foisted under the banner of neo-liberalism is the answer to the problems.

The Socialist Movement of Ghana calls on all progressive mass movements, including the trade unions, youth and students' movements and women's organizations to come together to develop a platform for mass mobilization. This West African Peoples Organization must be anchored on the principles of collective self-reliance, Pan-Africanism, and socialism.

We believe that true democracy can only be constructed by the organized masses, acting together to destroy all vestiges of colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism.

There is victory for us!

Justice Akuffo-Henaku

Secretary, International Relations.

Contact Persons:

Justice Akuffo-Henaku +233 24 437 3622

Nana Yaw Appiah Kubi +233 54 024 7815

Blaise Tulo Jnr +233 54 934 2342

www.smghana.org

P.O. Box NT 272, Accra – Newtown Accra