

A very good morning to you all.

We thank the good Lord for His mercies that are new every morning and rejoice in the day that He has made.

As a Commission, we are mindful to acknowledge that we could not have come this far if the good Lord had not been on our side. For this we are truly grateful.

On behalf of the Electoral Commission of Ghana, I am pleased to welcome you all to this meeting of IPAC aimed at assessing the processes leading to the 2020 Election and the Election itself. As a Commission keen to learn and improve upon its work, processes, and successes, we place a high premium on this two (2) day workshop.

It has been four (4) months since we held the 2020 Presidential and Parliamentary elections. Over this period, we have reviewed the processes that preceded, characterized, and followed the Elections to ascertain the resilience of our electoral processes and our performance at the just ended elections, and I know you have too.

Much water has passed under the bridge, but it is important that at a point in time, we come together as actors and stakeholders in Ghana's electoral processes, to take stock of the processes, strategies and approaches we adopted in the 2020 Elections, highlight the areas that need to be strengthened, and build consensus on a reform agenda for the Commission for the coming years.

In this regard, we should collectively examine the challenges we faced in the electoral processes of 2020 and identify what did not work and why. This is important to gain insight and understanding of why certain targets were not achieved.

It is equally important that having successfully carried out General Elections amidst the unprecedented circumstances of a global pandemic, we pause to celebrate the successes we achieved as a nation in carrying out Elections under such circumstances, with a decorum and a level of efficiency that earned us the admiration of our neighbours across

the sub-region and the international community as a whole. Why should we gloss over our achievements while the international community applauds us?

As a nation, as a Commission and as stakeholders, it is important that we recognize the feats we achieved through the 2020 electoral processes for the purpose of documenting best practices and experience, and to ensure that the successful strategies we adopted do not fall through the cracks of inordinate fault-finding and critique. Constructive critique is a vital part of any institutional-building and learning process, but so is celebration of success!

Ladies and Gentlemen, as state institutions we tend to gloss over our achievements. Instead, as a country, our default mode is to cast assessments of public initiatives or exercises in the mould of fault-finding missions armed with a fine-tooth comb, seeking earnestly to find fault. Sadly, we are slow to recognise where we have put good processes and systems in place, much less document them. In a bid to improve upon our past performance, we rush to propose new recommendations when the old processes and structures are working very well. We need to be guided by the adage that *“if it aint broke, don't fix it”*.

I have no doubt that in advanced democracies, achievements are not glossed over, or taken as lightly as we do in our country. No wonder we find ourselves seeking to learn from advanced democracies when in fact we already have the experience and the know-how.

In any assessment, it is important that we understand why things did not work before we introduce reforms and new processes. We need to undertake sober reflection, introspection and discussion on why certain processes worked, and why others did not. I believe that it is only after we have done this, that we will identify reforms that are practical and workable.

For this reason, let us not rush to propose recommendations for processes that are already working well. We must remember that we all will have to live with the recommendations

that we make. But equally, let us not be slow to propose changes that address real challenges. Again, we must remember that we will have to live with the changes we failed to make.

Let us dissect our own recommendations with dispassion to ascertain their practicability and usefulness to the entire electoral process. As leaders in your own institutions, you do know that though some recommendations appear attractive on paper, they may not be practical in reality.

We must remember also that our recommendations should be based as much on our achievements as our challenges!

Ladies and gentlemen, let us celebrate our successes of the 2020 Elections and document them; for there is so much knowledge, good experiences and best practice residing in the Electoral Commission of Ghana.

Permit me, in this regard, to take you down the memory lane of the Election 2020 and to list some processes we need to draw lessons and recommendations from, and document.

1. First of all, we need to acknowledge the fact that it took less than six (6) months to conduct a Presidential and Parliamentary elections that would usually take 2 years to undertake. We must applaud the hard work of EC staff across every region and district of this country, for the yeoman's job they did. From the introduction of the new Biometric Voter Management System, comprising new Biometric Verification and Registration devices and software through to the replacement of the entire Voters Register to the Election day. It took the Commission six months from the 30th of June to the 7th December to successfully implement all its processes. It is important, for our own work today, and for future leaders and staff of the EC, that we document how this was achieved.
2. We need to celebrate the fact that in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic and its uncertainties, as a country we were able to undertake all our electoral processes, from the preparation of brand-new Voters Register with over 17 million persons in

38 days, to the Exhibition of Register to the filing of Nominations to the Election Day activities without the spread of the COVID-19 virus and that no life was lost to COVID-19 as a result of our activities. We need to mark and document the fact that as a result of the stringent protocols put in place, the number of reported cases stood at zero by the end of the Registration Exercise, bearing in mind that the registration exercise was conducted at the height of the COVID-19 Pandemic. How this was achieved needs to be documented as best practice.

3. Despite the apprehensions around the COVID-19, the enthusiasm and participation of citizens in all our processes was high and beyond expectations. Indeed, despite the fears of a low turnout, we registered over 17 million eligible Ghanaians in 38 days and recorded a turnout of 79% on election day as compared to 67% in 2016.
4. Let us celebrate the absence of long queues at almost all Polling Stations nationwide at the time when advanced democracies such as the USA experienced long queues, for several days at their Polling Stations. It is important that we document policies and processes that led to the absence of long queues.
5. We need to celebrate the fact that for the first time in our history, the Government of Ghana financed the Elections in its totally and that there was no donor assistance and funding.
6. We need to celebrate the fact that as a country, we successfully employed and deployed high quality robust technology to enhance the credibility of our electoral processes. We successfully used biometric technology to ensure that only unique individuals were registered to vote, doing away with the phenomenon of double registration and multiple voting. It is important to document how this was done.
7. We need to recognise the fact that as a country, technology was deployed to enable a section of our citizenry to check their registration details over the telephone at minimal cost. In fact, for the first time in our history, registrants were able to check their registration details all through to the Election day.

8. We need to celebrate and highlight the fact that for the first time in our history, we managed to reduce the cost of election by some 41% compared to the 2016, in spite of inflation and hikes in prices. As a country, we reduced the cost of elections from thirteen Dollars (13USD) per person to seven dollars, seventy cent (7.70USD) per person. It is not often we hear of such news.
9. We need to highlight the fact that we succeeded in saving our dear nation a whopping sum of 90 million USD i.e. 522 million Ghana Cedi, a time when the cost of elections world-over keeps increasing.

And mind you, these savings were achieved in spite of additional costs associated with COVID-19 .i.e. PPE's and materials and the airlifting of our offshore items which came at huge costs and in spite of the fact that unlike 2016, we paid full taxes on all items. Again, we made these savings in spite of the fact that we increased polling stations by 10 thousand (10,000) and hired an additional 88 thousand,6 hundred and 22 temporary officers.

And so, there is a lot to celebrate. There is a lot to be thankful for. This is not to say that there is no room for improvement. For us at the Electoral Commission the sky is our horizon. We will not rest on our oars but will continue to collaborate with you and other stakeholders to discuss strategies and innovations that will lead to the strengthening of our systems.

I will now turn my attention to the challenges we experienced with the 2020 electoral process.

One issue that confronted us as a nation was the phenomenon of rejected ballots. To date, in spite of the advances made in the design of the ballot, we have continued to witness a disturbing trend of a high number of rejected ballots. The Commission spent considerable effort in designing a ballot paper to reduce the incidence of rejected ballots. We created a wide space between each candidate's box to prevent the mark of the thumb from seeping into the next box. And yet, we still recorded 3 hundred and 14 thousand, 9 hundred and one rejected ballots. Unfortunately, our laws do not allow us to take possession of the

ballots until after a year but we intend to undertake an audit to determine the root cause and find workable solutions to eliminate this problem.

Another challenge we are keen to address is the use of Manual Verification. As a Commission, we were hoping to reduce this significantly as we used both facial features and fingerprints to register applicants. My colleagues assure me that the 11,000 recorded instances of manual verification is relatively small, compared to the number of Voters on the Register and the number of Polling Stations **i.e. 38 thousand, 6 hundred and 22**. The 11,000 cases compared to the Polling Station and Voters Register amounts to 0.08% of the total Vote. This is very insignificant. In spite of the fact that the figures are small, our aim is to reduce this drastically in the near future.

Yet another challenge that has been on the front burner of our discussions at the Commission is the perpetuation of the illegality of encouraging minors and foreigners to register as voters. During the 2020 Exhibition Exercise, we collaborated with opinion leaders and civil society at the grass root level to expunge the names of minors and foreigners from our register. Very often fingers are pointed in our direction as if to say that the Commission registered the minors and foreigners but we need to take the time to identify the root cause of this phenomenon. We must ask ourselves, "*na who cause am?*". It is certainly not the Electoral Commission and its officials who cart illegal persons to the registration centres. We need to re-look at our Laws and provide stringent sanctions to perpetrators of this illegality.

An exceedingly disturbing challenge was the violence in 4 centres, which led to the death of 7 citizens of our dear country. Though the violence was not widespread, one life lost is a life too many and we say never again. Here also there is the tendency for fingers to be pointed at the Electoral Commission when security is not the core mandate of the Electoral Commission.

I use this occasion to clarify that the Electoral Commission is not responsible for Election security. The entire electoral process and its success rests on our shoulders but our

mandate as entrenched in the Constitution does not include security. We collaborate and partner with our security agencies in their quest to carry out their responsibility of ensuring peace, law, and order at all centres throughout the country.

We need to define clearly without a shadow of doubt whose responsibility it is to guarantee security on Election day and to place that responsibility on their shoulders. Additionally, we need to provide laws to ensure that the perpetrators of the violence are dealt with decisively.

I take this opportunity to call upon the Police Service and the National Elections Task Force to speed up their investigations and bring the culprits to book. The families of the victims, the citizens of Ghana, and the international community, are waiting for justice to be done.

Proposals

Over the next two days, I hope that together we can propose measures to address these challenges. Some proposals, which we will put forward for discussion are as follows.

1. We propose closing the polls at 3pm rather than 5pm. In 2019, we announced our decision to close the polls at 3pm rather than 5pm, in the 2020 Elections. Nonetheless, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and the stringent, and necessarily time-consuming safety protocols we instituted at our polling stations, we were compelled to put this proposal on hold. Over the past months, however, this proposal has re-surfaced from various sections of the public, and indeed, our own experience from the 2020 Elections has revealed that it is a workable proposal, as by 1pm, most polling stations were empty, suggesting that this is a workable proposal. Therefore, this is a reform we intend to put forward.
2. Again, we propose to do away with the system of periodic nationwide registration exercises, and institute an all-round system where citizens who turn 18, or persons who have not previously registered, may visit any district office with their Ghana

Card or passport and register as voters. This will help us do away with nationwide registration exercises and go a long way to reducing cost of elections.

3. We further propose a year-round exhibition system that will enable citizens check their registration details on their smart phones and other mobile devices. Citizens would not need to wait for an exhibition exercise to check their details. They will be able to do so, all year round.

4. We propose to build further efficiency into our collation process by focusing on data entry only at the Constituency Collation Centre. The entry point for data capturing into the system will be at the Constituency Collation Centre. The data i.e. Constituency Collation Results will be made available to all stakeholders at the Regional and National levels. Flowing from the data captured at the Constituency Collation Centre, the system will generate regional and national reports without further data entry at any of those levels. By adopting this system, the problem of minor inaccuracies with the collation process and unnecessary delays will be reduced significantly.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, we have much to discuss in the two days ahead of us. However, it is discussions such as these that led to the successes I have enlisted above. And so, I entreat that we enter the discussions with candidness, objectivity, and open-mindedness.

Indeed, if we could reduce the cost of our Elections while around us costs of elections are rising; if we could carry out our elections entirely with our own funds as a nation; if we could register an entire electorate in the space of 38 days, and if we could carry out our polls without lengthy queues and without a rise in Covid-19 cases, then there is little we cannot do, once we put our minds to it.

Yes, the task ahead is huge, but with unity of purpose, and with the good Lord firmly on our side, we will rise up to the challenge, and we will see the Electoral Commission, our

electoral processes, and our next voting day, give us new cause to celebrate our own, homegrown electoral best practice.

May God bless our homeland Ghana and make our nation great and strong.

Let Peace Reign.