

**A PRESS STATEMENT ON THE OCCASION OF INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DEMOCRACY; ISSUED BY THE CSO
PLATFORM ON GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NORTHERN REGION**

Since 2008, the United Nation has observed 15th September as International Day of Democracy to provide an opportunity to review the state of democracy in the world. This year's theme is: ***"In defense of democracy: The 20th anniversary of Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU's) Universal Declaration on Democracy"***. The day is being celebrated across the world to highlight the Inter-Parliamentary Union's Universal Declaration on Democracy as an international standard to guide governments, parliaments and citizens through today's many challenges to democracy around the world.

Ghana joins the global community today in observing the day with a theme **"Consolidating and Deepening Democratic Governance in Ghana: The Constitutional Review Process – the way forward"**. The CSO Platform on Good Governance in the Northern region-a civil society platform critical of good governance and deepening the democratic values of the country associates with the theme and urges public interest in marking the day. The progressive growth of Ghana's democracy is so rapid and has been considered by the UN as one of the enhanced democratic nations in the world. Even though the country has achieved this milestone, a lot more is needed to sustain the gains and promote key democratic values like freedom of all citizens, respect for human rights, participation, transparency, accountability and of course the principle of holding periodic and genuine elections. Over the past two decades, the country has been successful in holding free and fair elections. This is a significant accomplishment, especially in the context of Africa. Ghana rates highly on most of the basic measures of democracy, including protection of fundamental civil liberties and human rights, but has been less successful when it comes to the nature and scope of the participation of most social groups in the country's governance processes and institutions beyond elections.

The Platform has observed with great concern the limited participation of most social groups in the country's governance processes in both local and national levels and request for redirection of efforts to mitigate it. Majority of citizens limit democracy to election of leaders at local and national levels. If this is understood as democracy, then citizens could best be described as kingmakers with lack of capacity to question activities of kings they make. On the occasion of International Democracy Day, the CSO Platform on Good Governance challenges all citizens to show interest and understand the basic tenets of democracy as it will make them active citizens and true owners of our growing democracy.

Whiles commending governments for protecting and defending the constitution of the republic of Ghana, the platform believes that over two decades of strict adherence, compliance and implementation should be enough for us to document weaknesses and review it to meet the realities of our time. There are national debates on excessive powers of the executive, Winner-takes-all politics, article 71 officer holders remuneration amongst many others. Fortunately, the Constitutional Review Process had considered number of articles of our constitution which must be reviewed. It is a fact that the current government raised number of concerns in the process as opposition party at the time. We advise the government to work towards building consensus especially if the 2018 proposed referendum is to be realized to enable a less politicized review and implementation process.

The role of the three arms of government and the 4th unofficial arm being the media is crucial in growing our democracy. A day like this should serve as a reflection on major weaknesses of these institutions, point them

out and demand urgent actions for enhanced performance. We observed threats to our democracy when judicial corruption was brought to the public but got consoled when established systems were used to address them. Similarly, Parliament has been hit with number of corruption allegations with most citizens expressing dissatisfaction on the handling of such cases. The media contributed greatly in informing the public of these threats to our democracy but the alleged demands of financial benefits by some journalist to cover up wrongs which are threats to our democracy are equally worrying and must be addressed.

The platform therefore concludes by asking citizens to get embolden and become active participants of the democratic growing process. Disempowered citizens and their groups weakens the basic principle of democracy and must be avoided.

The government must also reflect on the importance of this day and improve commitment to true decentralization and devolution of power. The decentralization of Ghana crumbling down with procurement of major services being shifted to national level, town hall meetings supposed to be organized by district assemblies are not done, sub-district structures are none existence or exist in limited numbers. The government must act with urgency and empower district assemblies instead of using weak capacity as an excuse to justify centralization.

Long live Ghana's democracy.

Signed:

Date: 15th September, 2017

Alhassan Mohammed Awal

Coordinator of the CSO Platform

Executive Director - NORSAAC