

The Ghana Union of Traders Association (GUTA) in collaboration with the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) organized a seminar themed “Citizens participation in peaceful 2016 elections”. The workshop sort to sensitize, educate and inform civil society organizations such as GUTA to appreciate and understand the need for them to actively participate in the up-coming 2016 general elections in a very peaceful manner. The seminar was organized in Nkoranza, Wenchi, Kintampo and Techiman in the Brong-Ahafo Region. A total of over 600 participants were drawn from various civil society groups, artisans, representatives from the Traditional Authority, the media, District Assembly officials, Assembly members and students.

Mr. Agyeman-Badu, former Chief Budget Analyst of the Techiman Municipal assembly presented “**The Role of Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) in Ensuring a Peaceful 2016 Elections**”; he said the overall development of areas of jurisdiction of assemblies lies with the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) and that these local authorities have the mandate to provide leadership to promote and ensure economic, administrative, democratic growth and development in their areas. He explained that these developments are measured by the quality of life of the people in terms of;

- Social accountability and transparency;
- Promotion of health and well-being of the citizens;
- Creation of favorable and enabling environment for stable and sustainable growth and development;
- Provision of efficient and effective public services etc.

He said all these development initiatives are possible when the areas are enjoying peace.

Mr. Haruna Kyeremeh an Accountant with the Interfaith Family Network and a tutor of the Akumfi-Ameyaw Senior High School made a presentation on the topic “**Ensuring a Peaceful 2016 Elections, the Role of Political Parties**” According to him the struggle of man for survival and self-preservation of the life of man brought about organized society, law and government to ensure the proper management and equitable distribution of resources and this process of organizing how we live together in society is what we call politics. He said that in a democracy every citizen can take part in this process by expressing their opinions on public affairs, formulating expectation, making proposals without fear of intimidation, voting in elections and standing as candidate etc. He said that parliament and government are the most important institutions in democratic politics and these rely on political parties.

Mr. Haruna Kyeremeh indicated that because political parties seek to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election, it is important for them to ensure that elections are conducted in a peaceful atmosphere. He added that peaceful elections can only occur if there is no violence or disturbances before, during and after the electioneer process.

Further, he said that all the political parties must play a role to ensure a successful 2016 general elections by observing the rules governing the elections as contained in CI-94 and recognize the EC as the only mandated body to organize the elections in the country. Additionally, political

parties must try to resolve all their grievances through IPAC or the courts rather than engaging in acts that could lead to violence. Others are;

- Parties should inform the police about the place, time and people who are to attend their rallies;
- Two parties should not hold rallies at the same place and time;
- Parties should seek police support to provide security at rallies;
- Parties must ensure that their supporters refrain from all acts of violence;
- Parties should preach peace and tolerance among members;
- Parties should avoid abusive and insulting language during campaign activities and dwell on issues;
- There should not be any campaigning 24 hours prior to elections by parties.

Mr. Haruna Kyeremeh reminded participants that in most countries post electoral violence is what had displaced millions of people and devastated previously cherished infrastructure and urged participants to exercise calm even in the face of provocation by their opponents.

According to Mr. Ameyaw Yeboah, Ghana is among the few African countries that have not experienced any form of large scale violence or civil war since independence in 1957 and this is why the country has often been described on both local and international levels as an oasis of peace and stability in a continent besieged with conflicts. He said Ghana is considered one of the most peaceful countries in West Africa especially having experienced the most peaceful political transitions since 1992 following the acceptance of democracy.

Speaking on the topic “**Ensuring Peaceful Election in 2016 –The Role of Civil Society Organizations (CSOS)**”, he indicated that the peaceful organization of general elections from the year 2000 to 2012 have made Ghana a beacon of hope for democracy, good governance, stability and peace in Africa. He further stated that for peaceful elections to take place it is important for all sections of the society to play their roles. Civil society organizations (CSOs) are essential part of the proper functioning of the state as they help to initiate, promote and strengthen comprehensive and objective dialogue between governments and their people. He said CSOs help to foster conflict resolution advances human rights and promotes better democratization process.

Mr. Ameyaw explained that a peaceful election is not dependent on just one group alone working to ensure peace but a multiplicity of bodies, structures and individuals working diligently to ensure a peaceful process before, during and after elections. Consequently, the CSOs will have to work together with several bodies and institutions including;

- Politicians
- The Electoral Commission(EC)
- The Media
- The Citizenry