



**PRESENTATION BY MRS JEAN MENSA, CHAIRPERSON OF THE
ELECTORAL COMMISSION OF GHANA TO THE PARLIAMENT ON
TUESDAY 28TH FEBRUARY, 2023 AT 1PM
THEME: CONTINUOUS VOTERS REGISTRATION C.I**

Good afternoon Rt. Hon Speaker of Parliament, Hon. Majority Leader, Hon. Minority Leader, the Leadership of the House, Hon. Members of Parliament, friends of the media, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I thank the good Lord for making it possible for my team and I to be here this morning. To God be all the glory.

It is an honour to be here representing The Electoral Commission of Ghana. My team and I are pleased that we have been invited to share our views on the draft CI, which is the subject matter of our discussion today as well as to answer any questions that may ensue.

Rt. Hon Speaker as you may be aware, I was out of the jurisdiction at the invitation of ECONEC for a Peer Exchange and Election Observer Mission in Nigeria when your invitation to the Commission was received. Indeed your letter received on

Wednesday 22nd February 2023 requested for a meeting the following day Thursday 23rd February 2023. Infact had I been aware of the meeting, I would have rescheduled the mission.

In this vein, I would like to use this opportunity Mr. Speaker to correct the erroneous impression that I have failed to honour the invitation of Parliament. For the records, this is the 3rd time the Electoral Commission has been invited to a meeting of the whole house. The first was immediately preceding the 2020 elections and I led my team and presented a report on our readiness for the election. The second meeting was called last week at short notice when I was out of the jurisdiction. This meeting is the third time we have received an invitation to address the full house and I am here in my capacity as God's servant and the Chairperson to lead my team and to present our justifications for the draft CI which is the subject matter of our deliberations today.

Mr. Speaker, the CI before Parliament seeks to promote the Continuous registration of voters and advocates for an all year-round registration of eligible voters at the district offices of the EC. It is a clear departure from the previous system where voters registration was done for a limited period.

Like its name, under the Limited Voters Registration Exercise, the registration of new voters was conducted for a limited period only. It was not all year round like the Continuous Registration

we are proposing to implement. As such, persons who turned 18 years old after the registration period as well as persons who had not previously registered to vote, could not do so when the time set aside for Limited registration, usually 3-4 weeks elapsed.

Under our new proposal, anyone who is eligible to vote can simply walk into any of the District Offices of the Commission in the District where he/she intends to vote and register to vote.

As indicated, this is a far departure from the previous Limited Registration Exercise, where a person who could not register has to wait for the next round of the Limited Registration Exercise before he/she could register.

Hon. Members, permit me to restate that, the main advantage of the continuous registration is that potential voters can register at any time of their choosing once the exercise begins. Interested persons who have not previously registered and qualify to vote will be able to register at their leisure and with ease because it will be an all-year round activity. Additionally, applicants will not be confronted with long queues, frustrated crowds and conflict which has the potential to lead to violence.

We are equally confident that the continuous registration will minimize the bussing of prospective applicants to the registration centres and thereby lead to an orderly, conflict-free process.

I must add that, for the first time in our history, we are mainstreaming continuous registration as part of our regular

activities. As such, our officers in the field will be fully engaged all-year round.

Mr. Speaker, another significant feature of this draft Constitutional Instrument is the proposal to adopt the Ghana Card as the sole source of identification for any person who wishes to register as a voter. This implies that the guarantor system which hitherto allowed a registered voter to vouch for the citizenship and age of prospective applicants will no longer be relied upon as part of our registration process.

The reason is that, over the years the guarantor system has presented us with several challenges. Unfortunately, we were unable to discard it much earlier due to the absence of a national identification document such as the one issued by the NIA. The challenges with the guarantor system are two-fold: it opens the door for registered voters or guarantor contractors to guarantee/vouch for persons who were less than 18 years. Secondly, it allows the guarantors to vouch for foreigners. Such unqualified persons used the door of the guarantor system to try to get onto the register.

Mr. Speaker it is important to note that, to rid the register of minors and foreigners in 2020, the Electoral Commission established the District Registration Review Committees (DRRCs) which worked for several days and weeks in all the districts to expunge the names of minors and foreigners from the register. We challenged some 40,000 minors and foreigners and expunged some 15,000 persons from the Register during the Registration Exercises. **It has been argued that that number is**

not significant. We refute that argument and state that 1 person unqualified on our roll is one too many. In short, it is possible to have these illegal persons determine the future of our country. We must not allow this to happen. I must add that the work of the DRRC comes at a huge cost to the Electoral Commission. It is an unnecessary, wasteful and time consuming exercise. As a county we should not continue along this route.

Truth be told, the guarantor system was not the best under any circumstances. However we did not have other options since a significant number of persons did not possess the Ghana Card at the time of the Registration Exercise in 2020. Even then, we had 10 million Ghanaians using the Ghana Card to back their citizenship at the time of Registration. Today, with some 16 million Ghanaians in possession of the Ghana Card, and with NIA's assurance that it will print and distribute the remaining cards to registrants in a matter of weeks, we do not believe that we will disenfranchise persons by enforcing the policy requirement of using the Ghana Card to prove one's eligibility. Moreover as I mentioned earlier, the registrations is continuous. It is an all year round exercise, so voters have until October 2024, roughly 20 months to register. That is a very long time.

Mr. Speaker, the use of the Ghana Card as the sole means of identification will prevent foreigners and minors from getting onto our Voters Register. This is because the Ghana Card bears the record of one's age and citizenship. More especially it will prevent unqualified persons from influencing our elections and having a say as to who should govern our country. This is an issue that borders on the sovereignty of our Nation. Simply put, only

eligible Ghanaians must be entitled to vote. We call on our Honourable Members to support our efforts to prevent foreigners and minors from getting on our electoral roll.

Honourable Members, again, by using the Ghana Card as the main source document for the Continuous Registration, the Electoral Commission will be conforming to the Legislative Instrument passed by Parliament namely National Identity Register Regulations 2012, Legislative Instrument 2111. Regulation 7 (1) states that, a national identity card issued to an individual shall be used for a number of transactions where identification is required. **One of the mandatory transactions stated in Regulation 7 (1) j is the registration of voters.** As such, Parliament by its own assent legitimized the Ghana Card as the sole document to prove a person's citizenship and per the case of registration, a person's age.

As mentioned earlier, although the Ghana Card was not the only required document to prove a person's eligibility in 2020, at the end of exercise, over 60% or about 10 million of registered voters used the Ghana Card as the main source of identification. This means that two years ago, some 10 million Ghanaians registered with the Ghana Card.

We are reliably informed that over 17 million Ghanaians have registered for the card and that about 16 million Ghana cards have been issued. On the strength of these numbers, we are convinced that the 1.5 million applicants we are expecting to register by the end of 2023, are likely to already possess the Ghana Card.

Relying on the 2021 census report and, per our estimates, we are likely to register between 450,000 and 550,000 Ghanaians every year. We believe that of the 17 million people the NIA has registered, it is likely the 450,000 to 550,000 people we intend to register annually have the card, as we speak.

Mr Speaker, with the NIA's assurance that it will commence its card issuance in a matter of weeks, we encourage those who do not have the card to begin the process of acquiring the card to enable them register as voters. The NIA has its registration centers across the districts and the regional capitals. Therefore, accessing their facilities will not be a challenge.

Additionally, since the card is acquired at the age of 15, we encourage any Ghanaian who will turn 18 in 2023 or 2024 and who is interested in voting in the country's elections to visit the nearest NIA registration center and register for the Ghana card to enable him/her also register as a voter when he/she becomes eligible.

It is important to note that all those who registered in 2020 are not part of this registration exercise because all their details including their biometrics (finger prints and facial features) are intact. This registration is for those who did not take part in the 2020 voters registration exercise and those who have turned 18 years since the last voters registration exercise in 2020.

As an institution, the Electoral Commission remains committed to reforms aimed at strengthening the integrity of its processes.

We believe that the elimination of the guarantor system from our registration process will be a catalyst for a further deepening of the integrity and credibility of our register and ultimately our elections as a whole.

Reforms instituted by the Electoral Commission over the years have aimed at strengthening and tightening our electoral process and ensuring its credibility and integrity. In 2012, for example, we replaced our manual Voters Register with a Biometric Register. This engendered confidence and trust in our Register. Ahead of Elections 2020, we introduced the facial recognition function, in addition to the fingerprint verification. This ensured that over 99.9% of voters were electronically verified.

Similarly, the adoption of the transparent ballot boxes instead of the opaque ballot boxes, the issuance of photo identity cards instead of thumb printed ID Cards and the removal of the names of those who enrolled in our Register using the National Health Insurance card are all part of the reforms which have tightened and strengthened our processes and ensured the credibility of our elections. Today Ghana can boast of transparent and credible elections because of the incremental reforms that have been implemented.

Indeed, our electoral process is at par with that of the most advanced democracies in the world.

Honourable Members, it is in this vein that we urge you to support the decision of the EC to rely on the Ghana Card as the

main source of identification for those who wish to register as voters. Our country has evolved, and it is important that our electoral processes also evolve to meet the exigencies of the times. Let me state again that in 1992 when we had no ID card we adopted the guarantor system. Today, 30 years on we cannot continue to use a system that is fraught with challenges. More so when we now have a credible system National Identification Card in place.

Before I end, I wish to emphasize that this CI and its provisions are not aimed at disenfranchising eligible Ghanaians. The Continuous Registration Process on the contrary will be inclusive as it will make it possible to capture all those who would otherwise have been excluded in a Limited Registration Process.

The Continuous Registration Exercise unlike the previous Limited Registration Exercise, and like its name will be continuous. As such anyone who has a Ghana Card can simply visit any of our offices and get registered. The exercise is not a periodic or limited one that could lead to disenfranchising persons who do not possess the Ghana Card. This is an all year-round activity. As such a person who does not have the Ghana Card today can acquire it tomorrow and simply walk into a district office where he or she intends to vote and register. Let me state that once the exercise commences, voters will have up till October 2024 to register to vote.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to rehash that the use of the Ghana Card as the sole means of identification will ensure and

guarantee the credibility and integrity of our Register, and our elections as a whole. It will:

- prevent the enrolment of minors on the Register
- prevent foreigners from being registered to vote and
- eliminate the guarantor system which is prone to abuse and which promotes conflict and violence. Additionally, it will avoid costly, time-consuming, tedious follow-up processes such as the DRRC.

Finally, by using the Ghana Card as the main source of identification, the EC will be conforming to Regulation 7 (1) of the Legal Instrument (LI) passed by Parliament i.e. the National Identity Register Regulations LI 2111, which states that the National Identity Card SHALL be used for a number of transactions where identification is required - including the Voters Register.

More importantly, the NIA has assured us that, as of today, it has only a little over 500,000 Cards pending printing. Additionally, they have 3.5 million blank Cards are here in Ghana in a bonded warehouse. We are also reliably informed that monies have been released and that more funds are in the process of being released. With this assurance, coupled with the fact that, like the EC, the NIA has offices in all the districts and regions, we are confident that our Continuous Registration Exercise will be inclusive, participatory and robust. We are confident that

anyone who qualifies to register will have the opportunity to do so, if they so wish.

On our part as the institution mandated by the 1992 Republican Constitution to compile the register of voters and revise it at such intervals as may be determined by law, we will do everything in our power to register all qualified applicants who wish to register as voters. Our goal is to ensure that no one is left behind.

As you know, the EC has a proven track record in this regard. In 2020 despite the concerns raised by the sections of the society that the Registration Exercise will not be successful, the EC registered over 17 million people in 38 days during the COVID-19 pandemic and during the rainy season. It was a seamless and inclusive process and no one was left out. The number of persons on our register, represents 55% of our population of 31 million, the highest in West Africa with the exception of Cape Verde which has a population of 600,000.

To enhance the transparency of the registration process, the political parties may have their agents at the registration centers. Additionally, the Commission will regularly update the political parties on the number of registrants at each District Office.

Mr Speaker, I wish to emphasize that the Ghana Card will not be used to vote in 2024. The Ghana Card is only a requirement to qualify a person to register as a voter. Once you present your Ghana Card and successfully register as a voter, you will be issued a Voter's Identification Card which bears the code of your

region, district, electoral area, and polling station. The Ghana card does not have these features. It will not be used to vote in the 2024 General Elections.

In conclusion we wish to state that, in the exercise of our mandate, we are mindful of Article 42 which enjoins us to register Ghanaians who are 18 years or above and who are of sound mind. We do not intend to disenfranchise persons who qualify to vote. It is in our interest to register them. It will be an antithesis to deny any Ghanaian the right to register. However, we equally have the responsibility to ensure that only qualified Ghanaians are found in the voters register. We owe this responsibility to Ghanaians and we will work to uphold that. Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, we are grateful for your time and attention.

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

Thank you.