

PRESS STATEMENT ON BAWKU CONFLICT TO BE DELIVERED BY THE UPPER EAST REGIONAL HOUSE OF CHIEFS

INTRODUCTION

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Press

Let me on behalf of the Vice-President and members of the Upper East Regional House of Chiefs welcome you to this press briefing. This ceremony has been organized to enable the House to update the media and members of the public on the recent developments in the Bawku township with regards to the communal conflict there and to let Ghanaians know the position of the House on these developments.

UPDATES

In the last quarter of 2021, there was renewed escalation of the regrettably enduring conflict in Bawku. These skirmishes in the township aggravated in the run up to the Samampiid and the purported plans by the Mamprusis to observe the final funeral rites of the late Tampuri Alhaji Adam Zangbeogo, who is still recognized as the last Bawku Naba by the Mamprusis and subsequently celebrate the Damba. This has led to the loss of abled and productive lives and valuable property, stalled economic activities, and deprived several school children of an opportunity to pursue their future dreams. As a bustling economic hub of the east and Ghana, it has further worsened the woes of a country emerging from the ravaging effects of COVID-19 and its consequences on the national economy. It is from this background that the Chiefs of the Region wish to condemn in no uncertain terms these senseless and morally depraved criminal acts. It is saddening to note that since these clashes in Bawku in 1983, 1984, and 1985 all has not been well with the inhabitants of this growing township. The clashes

have transformed, over the years into a war of attrition rather than an action to settle a chieftaincy dispute.

HISTORY

The Bawku conflict has a long history, perhaps rivaling Ghana's struggle for independence and its political history. For more than 65 years, this conflict has been intertwined in issues of politics, ethnicity, land, and chieftaincy. It is no surprise that various political groupings have fed from the blood of its victims since the inception of the conflict.

From its onset, legal processes have been initiated, government commissions, traditional authorities and civil society organisations have all attempted to settle the matter. It is important to recall that the Supreme Court Ruling of April 2003 still remains the most remarkable attempt to bring finality to this ailing conflict.

Despite the political meddling in the conflict, it is worth noting that successive governments have equally played significant roles in ending the debilitating conflict through their unequivocal declarations on the matter in reference to the Supreme Court Decision. The most recent attempt initiated by His Excellency Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo, by inviting the Nayiri and the Bawku Naba for discussions is highly commendable.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is rather disappointing that these high-level interventions have yielded little results in resolving this devastating conflict. This has led us to reason that what we are experiencing in the area is organized crime orchestrated by people with doubtful integrity for their selfish interests. Crime is intolerable in any society and thus must be stamped out.

What is of particular concern to us in this Region is the attempt by some persons to associate the recent acts of lawlessness in Bawku with the desire of Nayiri, Overlord of Mamprugu, to maintain a hold in the Kusaug Traditional Area through violence and intimidation. It is our

considered view that no ruler, whether traditional or secular, can thrive in power by means of violence and high handedness. That is why it is difficult for us to accept reports circulating in Bawku and elsewhere that those organizing and executing these acts of violence have the support and blessing of the Nayiri. The Nayiri is respected and we wish to call on those peddling these claims to desist from doing damage to His Royal name.

WAY FORWARD

Ladies and Gentlemen of the press and all present, it is from this informed background that I and my fellow eminent chiefs of the region wish to put forward the following proposals for mitigating this cancer eating away our livelihoods and robbing the future of our children.

- I. The situation in Bawku has reached crisis level, with many families and individuals having lost their source of livelihood and currently struggling to survive. We call on government to set up a relief fund and to appeal for various kinds of donations to alleviate the humanitarian crisis currently unfolding in the area. For the long term, we encourage government to consider setting up major state establishments and providing special investment packages to provide employment for the teaming youth and give them a sense of meaning in life. There may be need to add that the highest state institution and investment in Kusaug is a Senior High School. This cries foul of the enormous contribution that the land has rendered to the state.
- II. Bawku is the capital of the Kusaug Traditional Area, which is home to a number of settler communities including Yanga, Hausa, Bimoba, Bisa, Moshie, and Dagomba besides the Mamprusis and a host of other tribal groups from across the country. These are people belonging to one country called Ghana,

Information available to the House indicates that some identified youth are said to have been on the wanted list of the security services in connection with several criminal incidents in Bawku. If these reports are true, then we urge the police to expedite their investigations and bring whoever is guilty of breaches of the law to speedy prosecution. The conflict in Bawku in our view needs to be dealt with seriously and with utmost expediency devoid of political interferences. We cannot continue to allow persons with criminal intentions to hold us to ransom in perpetuity. We also call on the security services to execute their mandate in an impartial and professional manner to win the trust of the parties involved and foster peace.

desire to live in peace, tranquility and to go about their legitimate businesses like everyone in this country. We therefore urge them to make a joint statement about the situation in Bawku and call the feuding factions to embrace peace.

- III. Information available to the House indicates that some identified youth are said to have been on the wanted list of the security services in connection with several criminal incidents in Bawku. If these reports are true, then we urge the police to expedite their investigations and bring whoever is guilty of breaches of the law to speedy prosecution. The conflict in Bawku in our view needs to be dealt with seriously and with utmost expediency devoid of political interferences. We cannot continue to allow persons with criminal intentions to hold us to ransom in perpetuity. We also call on the security services to execute their mandate in an impartial and professional manner to win the trust of the parties involved and foster peace.
- IV. In the same vein, we would like to advise the politicians to stay clear of the Bawku conflict because in our opinion, they are the midwives that have conducted the labour for the delivery of this monstrous child, They are advised to stop parading in political regalia causing havoc wherever they pass with great impunity. We wish to caution that there is no way that perpetuating illegality can become a conduit to remedying a situation or settling grievances.
- V. Fellow respected chiefs, the chieftaincy institution has been the main contention of the Bawku conflict and many especially the political elite have on various occasions laid blame at our door for the sustenance of the unfortunate situation.

The Bawku-Naba, Zugraan Abugrago Azoka II has been on the skin for thirty-eight years now and a lot of goodwill and support has existed between the skin and the people of Kusaug. It is trite knowledge that the Bawku Chieftaincy Dispute has been settled through due process/ legal process. For the avoidance of doubt. We know that in 1957 the colonial Governor, Lord Listowell setup a committee of enquiry to ascertain the conflicting claims between the Kusasis and Mamprusis. The committee found that Bawku is a Kusasi land and that the present Bawku Naba's family are the right descendants and rulers of the Bawku Skin.

This committee finding in favour of the Kusasi was upheld and confirmed by the Court of Appeal (the Highest Court of the land at that time) in 1958.

Despite the military intervention in the Bawku skin affairs in 1966 (NLCD 122) and in 1981 (by PNDC Law 75), the Supreme Court in 2003 affirmed the legitimacy of Naba Asigri Abugrago Azoka II.

Ladies and Gentlemen, In this regard, and with the support of my fellow esteemed chiefs of the House we wish to respectfully and kindly invite the Nayiri, our elder brother and father, some of the noble chiefs of this House and the Bawku Naba, also our elder brother and member of this distinguished House, to a round table meeting to be mediated by a selected group of eminent chiefs in order to dialogue and fashion out home-grown solutions to this monstrous conflict. Our people say that "for a witch to catch you, there must be one in your House", therefore, let us come together to hunt down and banish this witch forever.

- VI. Naba Azoka II is a ruler of the Kusaug Traditional Area, If the Mamprusis in Bawku want to be involved in chieftaincy matters, they are advised to select from amongst themselves a suitable candidate for consideration by the Naba Azoka II for enskinment as a Mamprusi community chief in Bawku. As a Regional House of chiefs, we hereby wish to appeal to the Nayiri to advise his kinsmen to embrace this alternative for us to ensure a lasting and sustainable peace in the area.

My Vice President, eminent chiefs of this House, the Press, ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, we need peace in Bawku as any insecurity in the area affects the whole of the Upper East Region and the country in General.

Bawku being a border town with Togo and Burkina Faso is vulnerable to foreign terrorists, Jihadists and other criminals, hence our worry.

If our language is a bit hard, we beg everybody's pardon for it is just that our sensibilities have been hurt.

I thank you all for your presence and support and for coming.

UPPER EAST REGIONAL HOUSE OF CHIEFS

BOLGATANGA

UPPER EAST REGION

CC:

- President of the Republic of Ghana
- President of the National House of Chiefs
- Minister for Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs

- Minister for National Security
- Minister for Interior
- Inspector General of Police
- The National Director NIB
- National Peace Council
- Upper East Regional Minister
- Upper East Regional Police Commander
- Upper East Army Commander
- Upper East Regional Peace Council
- Upper East Regional NIB Director
- Upper East Region Security Council