



2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2021

## PRESS STATEMENT ON THE WESLEY GIRLS HIGH SCHOOL MUSLIM STUDENT FASTING SAGA

### ATTENTION HONOURABLE DR. YAW OSEI ADUTWUM – MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

The recent impasse between Wesley Girls High School (WGHS) and a parent over not allowing his Form One daughter, a student of WGHS, to fast during this Ramadan period, has come to our attention. The subsequent comments by the Muslim caucus in Parliament and reported invitation by the Minister of Education to the Methodist Church hierarchy also refers.

Muslims and Christians in Ghana have coexisted peacefully by respecting each other's values and spaces and collaborating over issues whenever and wherever possible and we will definitely continue to do so.

At the moment, Christians who attend Muslim or Islamic Mission Schools anywhere in Ghana, are required to strictly follow Islamic regulations, including the wearing of the Hijab, learning Islamic recitals and prayers, etc. and they do so. Similarly, we expect that Muslims attending Christian Mission Schools will observe any school regulations that are required, once they decide by themselves to choose a Christian school instead of an Islamic one.

We are told that the girl in question and her parents, after speaking to the Headmistress, were appreciative of the explanation given by the Headmistress, that it is the tradition of the school that all religious groups in the school (Christians and non-Christians) are not allowed to fast, due to the academic pressures of school, and that there is a good Counselling facility to support the students. However, the students are encouraged to fast when they go home. This has yielded great academic success for students. This shows that the school is not against Muslim students, as is being suggested elsewhere. It is absolutely critical to note that this policy of the school is completely aligned with the constitution of Ghana, Article 14, (1) (e) which indicates that no person shall be deprived of their personal liberty/rights except: **“for the purpose of the education or welfare of a person who has not attained the age of eighteen years”**

The Ministry of Education and by that virtue the Minister for Education is responsible for all policies on education in Ghana. Similarly, the Ghana Education Service Act, 1995 (Act 506), Section 12 (3) indicates that for the Ghana Education service, the Director-General “shall be responsible for the direction of the work of the Service and for the day-to-day administration of the Service and shall ensure the implementation of the decisions of the Council”.

In light of recent developments in some SHSs with respect to the application of school rules and values, it is imperative that the Ministry of Education (MoE) led by its Minister and the Ghana Education Service (GES) under the leadership of the Director General, urgently convene a stakeholder meeting. This will enable us to exhaust the broader conversation on the future of mission schools, non-mission schools (from all religious groups) and their relationship with the MoE in terms of management, funding, autonomy of values, rules and code of ethics and to clarify our national policy on this issue. In addition, we call on the Government to provide a timeline for fulfilling its 2016 commitment to completely hand over mission schools to their founders. We say this because this issue is relevant to all other SHSs, not just WGHS or Achimota. Tomorrow it could be TI Ahmadhiyya at Potsin or Kumasi, and soon it will surely be St. Augustine's or Adisadel College.

Consequently, it is our considered view that the current directive from the MoE through the GES to WGHS to 'allow students to observe their Religious practices' flies in the face of the constitutional provision that allows the school to curtail this for educational purposes. The directive is divisive, deeply troubling and potentially counterproductive in-respect of the key reason for students being in school. This directive will open a Pandora's box and could destabilize discipline in schools. Soon parents could be requesting rights for their wards to perform various religious rituals and on what basis would a school decline such requests? The directive is also intrusive and may impose certain incidental burdens on school boards on the free exercise of discipline in our schools. The WGHS board policy that prevents ALL students from fasting is non-discriminatory and ought to be respected by all. Let us exercise caution, such that our efforts to promote the free exercise of religion does not compromise the time- tested principles that have made these schools successful. Let us avoid any interferences with school rules, regulations and principles that have the potential of undermining their continued success and achievements.

It is also noteworthy that Muslims have told us, that the Qur'an, in Sura Al Baqarah 2:185, indicates that fasting needs not be confined exclusively to Ramadan and that for those who are unable to fast during that month for legitimate reasons, Allah has kept the door of compensation open during other months of the year so that they need not be deprived of the opportunity to demonstrate their gratitude to Him for His bounty, in revealing the Qur'an. In addition, the Qur'an states that "Allah intends for you ease, and He does not want to make things difficult for you. (He wants that you) must complete the same number (of days), and that you must magnify Allah for having guided you so that you may be grateful to Him" (Qur'an, 2:185). By implication, Allah does not insist that the fast be done when there are complications. He understands and provides opportunities for it to be done later. This is what many Muslims who have chosen to go through Christian schools and signed to follow school rules have done in times past. This girl signed to follow school rules. So what has changed? This issue of fasting should therefore not have become an impediment according to the Qur'an. Please note that the Qur'an also underscores the importance of acquiring knowledge "My Lord! Enrich me with knowledge." (Quran, 20:114) and therefore Allah would clearly not punish the girl for choosing to go to an excellent school and defer fasting while acquiring knowledge. Interestingly thousands of pupils and students from different faith groups, including Muslims, have all quietly observed personal prayer and fasting in schools over the years, ensuring that they follow school rules, without any school being compelled to follow a national policy on fasting.

In spite of our position that this directive is unjustifiable and our concerns about what the real motives may be, and on the other hand, because we recognize the tensions this directive is creating amongst Christians, we want to make some suggestions. As a pragmatic solution to the current impasse, we recommend that, Muslim students in Christian schools can take advantage of the two track system and choose to spend the Ramadan period at home on vacation. Alternatively, Muslims who wish to live strict Islamic lives in school could also select Islamic Mission schools. This would ensure that our Christian schools do not set unsustainable precedents that affect the value systems and peaceful religious coexistence that have produced the excellence that make schools like WGHS stand out.

It is in this context that we (**Advocates for Christ Ghana**) call on the Minister of Education and the Director General of the Ghana Education Service to re-consider the current directive on promoting fasting in schools.

Considering the huge constituency that Christians represent, we further call on the Minister of Education to convene an urgent stakeholder meeting on this issue in accordance with Article 35 (6) (d) of the Constitution of Ghana, which states that: *The State shall take appropriate measures to:*

(d) **Make democracy a reality by** decentralizing the administrative and financial machinery of government to the regions and districts and by **affording all possible opportunities to the people to participate in decision-making at every level in national life and in government.**

We call on our Muslim brothers and sisters and their leadership to be fair, knowing fully well that Islamic schools do not give room for other non-islamic religious practices and bearing in mind that their own members state that the Ramadan fast can be deferred.

We call on all practitioners in the educational sector, to take stock of the current and future complications that this recent directive could engender.

We call on all Church members, Para Church Organizations, the Christian Caucus in Parliament, Christians home and abroad and the rank and file of Christian Youth groups across the length and breadth of Ghana who are getting agitated by these recent developments to please stay calm. God is in control. We shall overcome.

We look forward to the MoE and GES calling an urgent stakeholder engagement for Ghanaians to discuss these issues and to find long term solutions to these budding issues. We must support mission/non-mission schools to continue attaining very high standards and to thrive under their well-thought through school rules, regulations and principles.

God bless our homeland Ghana.

*KEsenanu*

**Mr. Edem Senanu**

Chairman, Advocates for Christ Ghana

[admin@advocatesforchristgh.com](mailto:admin@advocatesforchristgh.com)

0545477771