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RESPONSE TO JOYNEWS DOCUMENTARY – “Militia in the heart of the Nation”

Government has taken due notice of a Joy News documentary titled “**Militia in the heart of the Nation**”, which was aired in the evening of Thursday, 7th March, 2019. In line with the President’s commitment to disbanding party vigilante groups, Government will continue to support any effort aimed at ending this worrying phenomenon.

Unfortunately, however, the Joy News documentary, the work of Manasseh Azure Awuni, carried a number of significant misrepresentations and misleading impressions, which we would like to bring to your attention:

1. Firstly, the promotion of the documentary, and the narrative of the documentary stated emphatically that a “militia” (**a military force that is raised from the civil population to supplement a regular army in an emergency**) had been uncovered training and operating at a “Security Zone”, with the complicity of the current administration, and identified them as belonging to the New Patriotic Party. Surprisingly, the 20-minute documentary does not show any evidence of such a militia or vigilante group training or operating at a “Security Zone”. Rather, it shows a group of young men and women, dressed up in white shirts and black suits, converging at the Castle, Osu, in the belief that jobs will be found for them.

From JOYNEWS' own documentary, it is clear that the company is involved in helping unemployed young men and women find jobs, and operates a website that openly states their objects. Again, in the documentary, officials of the company claim that they are in the business of helping people find jobs, and encourage the persons who sign up for their services to avoid engaging themselves in acts that breach the laws of our country.

Though in the advertisement, the producer – Manasseh Awuni suggested the undertaking of a fearsome training exercise by these young men and women, and backed it up with photos of masked men wielding assault rifles, the documentary itself failed to show any of such training exercises taking place, or the use of assault rifles by these young men and women. Government is of the view that this is most unprofessional and very misleading, and we can only urge the producer Mr Awuni and Joy News to avoid such misrepresentations in the future. The narrative put on the advertisement, to all intents and purposes, is not supported even by the footage aired.

2. Secondly, though the documentary rightly states that the National Security apparatus has made efforts to close down the office of the company at the Christianbourg Castle, it deliberately failed to highlight the fact that the office had been closed down by National Security since October 2018. Indeed, as has been rightly indicated, there is no militia or vigilante group operating from the Castle. This is an important fact which government believes had to be stated to viewers and listeners, but was deliberately omitted.

De-Eye Group, initially, succeeded in using the garden grounds of the Castle, Osu, for its activities because its promoter, one Nana Wireko Addo, had been assigned an office there to work with a taskforce to retrieve landed properties and vehicles in the possession of officials of the erstwhile Mahama administration. After the conclusion of the work of the taskforce in August 2018, he, subsequently, converted the office allocated to him into a private business office for the stated purposes of his company. Admittedly, this should not have been allowed to happen in the first place, but was quickly dealt with in October 2018, when he was evicted from the premises by a joint operation involving personnel of National Security and the Police.

We wish to reiterate that, contrary to your attempts, Nana Wireko Addo is currently not associated with President Akufo-Addo. Indeed, Nana Wireko Addo left the employ of President Akufo-Addo in 2010, at a time when he was not even presidential candidate of the New Patriotic Party. A simple check would have revealed this and ensured an avoidance of the attempt to link his organisation's activities to the President.

3. Thirdly, it is important to state for the record that the Castle, Osu, **IS NOT** a "Security Zone", neither is it an annex of the Presidency. Indeed, it is a facility operated by the Museums and Monuments Board, after President Akufo-Addo, on 5th March, 2017, tasked the Ministry for Tourism, Arts and Culture to spearhead its transformation into a museum. The general public may refer to news items of 5th March, 2017, the date on which President Akufo-Addo gave that directive. Indeed, the castle gardens are also open for use by members of the public. The narrative in Manasseh's promotion, in particular, that connotes the Castle, Osu, as a "Security Zone", which is being used to train militia and vigilantes is most worrying. Indeed, if this group was still operating from the Castle, wouldn't the Commission of Inquiry currently looking into the events at the Ayawaso West Wuogon election have noticed them by now?
4. Fourthly, the documentary also stated categorically that the young men and women seen in it had been used for security operations in and outside of Accra. One would have expected a list of such operations to be listed in the documentary. Curiously, that was not done. Again, the documentary stressed that members of the group provided security at an event held at the Accra International Conference Centre celebrating the life of Chief S.D. Dombo, an event which was attended by the President, Vice President, former President Kufuor, and key government functionaries. Unfortunately, there is no evidence in Manasseh's documentary to back this security providing assertion, beyond his mere say so in the documentary. In essence what the documentary has done with respect to this point is to create an impression without substantiating it with any evidence. In line with Joy News and Multimedia's own journalistic standards, they, as a media organization, would not accept this from any of their guests on any of their shows. We believe this is unfortunate, and falls short of their own best practices over the years.

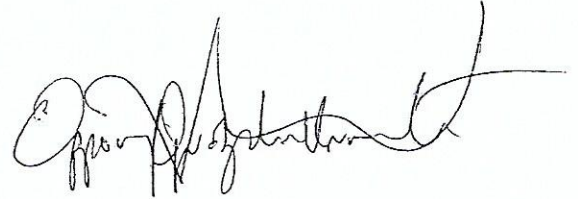
5. Lastly, the disingenuous and deliberate attempts to cast the President of the Republic in a negative light, vis-à-vis the fight against vigilantism, exposed what we now believe to be the real motive of this documentary. President Akufo-Addo made a passionate, sincere appeal to all political parties to disband their vigilante groups on 21st February, 2019, when he delivered to Parliament a Message on the State of the Nation. He reiterated this call on 6th March, 2019, at the 62nd Independence Day Celebration in Tamale. Mischievously, remarks by hosts of programmes on Joy News who sought to “promo” the documentary stated, without a shadow of doubt, that the President was preaching virtue and practicing vice, when, indeed, they knew that their documentary was based on activities captured in 2018 and which had nothing to do with Militias or Vigilantism. This is an unfortunate development, and we are at a loss as to why this highly respected media outlet will seek to create this unfounded impression.

Ladies and gentlemen, there have been many occasions where Joy News has produced documentaries based on fact, truth and accuracy. However, on this occasion, this so-called “undercover documentary” falls short of their own standards. It only puts together conjecture, malice, mischief, sensationalism, and unvalidated suspicions, and presented to the Ghanaian people as truth.

We welcome the willingness of all well-meaning Ghanaians, Civil Society Organisations, and the media to support the President’s fight against party vigilantism, and we urge that this is channelled towards supporting the efforts of the various political parties in finding mutually acceptable means to succeed. The President has demonstrated unprecedented leadership in tackling the menace of election-related violence in our body politic. His call to action is sincere, and must be supported by all.

We continue to hold Joy News in high esteem, and urge them not to compromise on their standards of validating information, avoiding conjecture and presenting the facts always.

I thank you for your attention.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kojo Opong Nkrumah', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kojo Opong Nkrumah (MP)
Minister

The General Manager
JOYNEWS
Multimedia Group
Accra