STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT ON THE BIMBILLA SITUATION IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF GHANA BY HONOURABLE AMBROSE DERY, MINISTER FOR THE INTERIOR AND MP FOR NANDOM - 22 FEBRUARY, 2017

Mr Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to make a Statement on the very important matter of the Bimbilla situation in the Northern Region of Ghana.

Background

Mr Speaker, I believe it would facilitate an appreciation of the Bimbilla situation to put it in the context of some relevant antecedents.

The late Bimbilla Naa, Naa Abarika died in 2001. Since the performance of the funeral of the late Naa Abarika in 2003, the Bimbilla skin has been in crisis, which has festered and resulted in a number of clashes, violence and the loss of lives over the period.

The Bimbilla skin, a paramount skin has two (2) Gate skins which ascend on a rotational basis, to the Bimbilla skin; the Gbimayili gate and the Bangyili gate. The late Naa Abarika was of the Bangyili gate and thus on his death, it was the turn of Gbimayili gate to ascend the skin.

Regrettably, an intra-gate misunderstanding ensued in the Gbimayili gate in the pursuit of getting a successor to the Bimbilla skin between the late Naa Andani Dasana and the late Naa Salifu Dawuni (Nakpa Naa). The misunderstanding was exacerbated by the support of majority of the people of the Bangyili gate, that is, the Vonaa, for the Nakpa Naa family.

The resultant cause of action has gone from the Judicial Committee of the Northern Regional House of Chiefs, through the Judicial Committee of the National House of Chiefs and as I speak, now pending in the Supreme Court of Ghana.

Meanwhile, the two protagonists, namely, the late Naa Salifu Dawuni and the late Naa Andani Dasana have both passed on respectively. Nakpa Naa Salifu Dawuni passed on naturally on 5th March 2014, but has not yet been buried due to controversy over the status of burial and related matters. The late Naa Andani Dasana, however, died as a victim of an attack on his palace, with three (3) elders on June 19, 2014.

A curfew was imposed on Bimbilla and its environs immediately after the death of Naa Andani Dasana, precisely on 7th March, 2014 to contain the resultant tension after the death of the late Naa Salifu Dawuni and has since been in place, albeit renewed and reviewed from time to time.

Mr Speaker, Bimbilla has suffered eruptions of violence notwithstanding. Some of these violent eruptions have caused loss of lives as the death of the late Naa Andani Dasana and three (3) elders on 19th June, 2014 and the death of thirteen (13) persons on 9th June, 2015 in a misunderstanding involving butchers in purported matter of obligations to the regent.

The latest spate of violence
Mr Speaker, regrettably, on Wednesday, 8th February, 2017, REGSEC in Tamale received intelligence information that a planned enskinment of one Mumuni Haruna as Bimbilla Kumabi by the Regent of Bimbilla had the potential of adversely affecting the peace of Bimbilla and its environs.

The deliberation on the said intelligence information by REGSEC, Tamale, culminated in a directive to the DISEC of the Nanumba North to persuade the Regent of Bimbilla to delay/postpone the enskinment, notice of which had been given to DISEC per a letter dated 2nd February, 2017, and fixed for 9th February 2017, to enable REGSEC put in place necessary security reinforcement to contain any possible security threats.

REGSEC in its request to DISEC noted that the date for the enskinment on 9th February 2017, which was just the next day, was too close to discuss the issues arising thoroughly and to deploy the needed security reinforcement for the proposed enskinment in view of the report that had been received. REGSEC further requested that a transitional period be by way of postponement for deployment of more security personnel.

The Nanumba North DISEC met, appreciated the threat and agreed to engage the Regent to defer the planned enskinment.

The discussion between DISEC and the Regent was intense and drawn out as late as 3.00 a.m. on 9th February, 2017. The REGSEC, through the Regional Police Commander, had, in fact, corroborated the position of DISEC but failed to dissuade the Regent to defer the planned enskinment. Later, on the morning of 9th February, 2017 while the security agencies were in a precautionary move to send reinforcement from Yendi to Bimbilla, the Nanumba North DISEC reported that the Regent had, in fact, performed the enskinment ahead of the scheduled 3.00 p.m. and tension was getting out of hand. DISEC then requested that the curfew be extended. The curfew at that time was from 8.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m. So, it had to pass through to REGSEC.

REGSEC duly considered the request for extension of the curfew and recommended same to the Ministry of the Interior. However, before, REGSEC communicated its recommendation to the Ministry of the Interior, it received reports of sporadic firing of gun shots and the discovering of two (2) bodies. As a result, they communicated and the curfew was extended, this time, from 4.00 p.m. to 6.00am imposed immediately by the Minister for the Interior to stem the escalation of violence and loss of lives.

Mr Speaker, 10th February, 2017, when REGSEC met to review the situation in Bimbilla, it was reported that seven (7) more bodies were found. The death of an injured person sent from Bimbilla to the Tamale Teaching Hospital raised the death toll to ten (10), namely six (6) women, one (1) man and three (3) children, all aged 4 years.

Mr Speaker, eleven (11) persons were reported injured, and seventeen (17) persons were arrested, twenty-one (21) houses were burnt and damaged.

Further re-inforcement — very important lives of people
Further reinforcement was sent by the Police and the Military on 10th February, 2017. By 14th February, 2017, two hundred and ten (210) police personnel, sixty-nine (69) military personnel and thirteen (13) investigators were deployed to keep the peace and also to investigate for the perpetrators to be brought to book.

**Position of the Government of Ghana**

Mr Speaker, it is clear, at this juncture, to make a note of the position of Government on this matter. There are two (2) strands/aspects of the Bimbilla situation, namely: matters affecting chieftaincy and matters of peace, security and safety.

Mr Speaker, to the extent that it is a chieftaincy matter, Government is not going to interfere. However, we leave that to the remit of the traditional authorities, the Judicial Committee of the Regional House of Chiefs, the Judicial Committee of the National Houses of Chiefs and the Supreme Court of Ghana.

The Bimbilla Chieftaincy matter has gone from the Judicial Committee of the Northern Regional House of Chiefs, through the Judicial Committee of the National House of Chiefs and is now before the Supreme Court. Period!

Government, however, would not shirk its responsibility to ensure peace, security and safety of all persons in Ghana. Government, in consonance with the said responsibility, is committed to achieving peace in Bimbilla and its environs. Furthermore, Government is also committed to the security and safety of each person in Bimbilla and its environs.

In pursuit of peace in Bimbilla and its environs, Government has deployed police and military personnel. The team of investigators and operatives are on the ground working to find the perpetrators of the recent violence, the resultant loss of lives and damage to property. As at today, three (3) suspects have been identified and are in the custody of the Police to assist further investigations.

In respect of security and safety of each person in the Bimbilla area, the security personnel on the ground have been tasked to protect each person and also the homes of key stakeholders on both sides of the chieftaincy divide. Accordingly, the homes of key stakeholders such as the Regent, Nakpana, Vonaa and Kpatihinaa are each protected by a combined team of police and the military.

**Challenges**

To achieve the peace, security and safety of Bimbilla and its inhabitants, some challenges must be confronted. Some of these are impunity, inter institutional collaboration/coordination, logistical demands and outstanding security issues.

Impunity stems from the fact that not a single person has been held responsible nor sanctioned for the series of attacks and the resultant loss of lives from previous eruptions.
We must hold the culprits responsible and duly sanction to serve as a deterrent to future recurrence.

REGSEC and DISEC have been instructed to work more proactively together. Bimbilla has no resident magistrate and so the District Court is dormant with consequences for the smooth enforcement of peace, security and safety. A resident magistrate could also facilitate ongoing investigations.

Resources are required to support the effort to achieve peace, security and safety in Bimbilla. Hon Dominic Bingab Aduna Nitiwul, Member of Parliament for Bimbilla has been very supportive. The Government has also been very supportive in this regard.

The Northern Regional Peace Council is working hard to achieve peace. The fact that the corpse of the late Naa Salifu Dawuni is not yet buried, is an outstanding issue.

Visit of Government delegation to Bimbilla 14th February, 2017 On 14th February, 2017, I was privileged to lead a powerful delegation to Bimbilla with a message from the President, H.E. Nana Addo Dankwa AkufoAddo and to assess at first hand the situation on the ground.

The Government delegation was composed as follows:

a. Minister for the Interior, Ambrose Dery
b. Minister of Defence, Hon Dominic Nitiwul
c. Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection, Hon Otiko Afisah Djaba

The Inspector-General of Police, Chief of Army Staff, other top Police and Military Officers from Headquarters and the Northern Regional Commands, as well as officials of the stakeholder Ministries

The District Police and other Security Commands in Bimbilla as well as officials from the Regional and District security councils.

The highlights of the Message of H.E. the President Nana Addo Dankwa AkufoAddo are stated below:

To the extent that it is a matter of chieftaincy, the Government would not interfere. Thus, the process should go through the established chieftaincy institutions at the various judicial committees of the Regional and National Houses of Chiefs and the Supreme Court.

However, the Government would not shirk its basic responsibility of ensuring the safety of life and property in the area.

Indeed, the Government would ensure that appropriate measures are implemented to promote social and economic activities of the people of Bimbilla and its environs in a safe and secure environment.
Government views the killings as senseless/criminal and would do everything in its power to bring the perpetrators to book. The President extends his condolences to the bereaved families.

The Government is neutral in all these matters as it does not support any faction in this dispute.

The only interest of Government is to ensure peace and security in the area.

The regrettable death of the ten (10) persons should be the last and Government would not want a repeat of the same in subsequent years.

The delegation visited the homes of key stakeholders, found them protected as instructed and discussed with them the President’s Message. The homes of the Regent, Nakpa Naa, Vonaa and Kpatihi Naa were visited among others.

The delegation was satisfied that the situation had improved. Subsequently, the curfew has been duly reviewed from 6.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m.

**The way forward**

The National Peace Council must lead the negotiation through alternative dispute resolution methods to ensure lasting peace.

Mr Speaker, I wish to assure you that the Government shall continue to monitor the situation and ensure that the situation does not deteriorate and affect others in the vicinity.

Security is a collective responsibility and I call on all persons/stakeholders to work with Government to achieve peace, security and safety for the benefit of all in Bimbilla.

Thank you.