SUPPORTING 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 BY HON OSEI KYEI-MENSAH-BONSU, MP FOR SUAME - 22 FEBRUARY, 2017

Mr Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to make brief comments on the Statement relating to the Bimbilla situation as delivered by the Hon Minister for the Interior.

Mr Speaker, let me begin by commending the Hon Minister for the Statement; for briefing the House, and the entire country through us, about the situation in the Bimbilla area, relating to the chieftaincy institution and what tragic events have unfolded.

Mr Speaker, I must commend the Hon Minister for also acting timeously in the aftermath of that tragedy. One shudders to think about what events would have further played out if they had not visited with such speed.

Mr Speaker, chieftaincy is supposed to be the representation, and indeed, our chiefs are supposed to be the embodiments and custodians of the traditions and cultural practices of the communities where they superintend.

Mr Speaker, generally speaking, Ghanaians are peace-loving, well behaved, well-cultured and well-mannered. These are the traits that the chiefs are supposed to embody, and indeed, represent. It is sad to relate that most of the sparkles of conflicts that we witness every now and then in the country evolve around chieftaincy institutions. Usually, they would relate to succession or struggles over parcels of land. These are the two main reasons why chieftaincy, as an institution, is in recent times, sparking conflicts in the Ghanaian society.

Mr Speaker, the unhappy observation made by the Hon Minister is worth commenting on — 10 people dead, six of them women, one man and three children, and 21 houses burnt down. Of course, the effect would be insecurity— food security, education, and health. I would want to reflect on the absence of a Regional Minister and a District Chief Executive at the time.

Mr Speaker, the Constitution provides in article 256 (1), and with your permission, I beg to quote:

“1) The President shall, with the prior approval of Parliament, appoint for each region, a Minister of State who shall —

a) represent the President in the region; and

b) be responsible for the coordination and direction of the administrative machinery in the region.”

Mr Speaker, the Regional Minister is the Chairperson or Presiding Member of the Regional Security Council (REGSEC), just as the District Chief Executive is also in charge of the District Security Council (DISEC).
Mr Speaker, to what extent did the absence of these two personalities; the Regional Minister and the District Chief Executive for the district concerned, contribute to the tragedy that unfolded?

Mr Speaker, I just wanted to draw our attention, that in Parliament, unless an Hon Member is exiting, he or she does not turn his or her back to the Rt Hon Speaker. I believe these things should be part of the orientation that we provide to Hon Members of Parliament.

Mr Speaker, I would want to draw our attention to the absence of these two personalities at the time when the incident blew out.

Mr Speaker, I do not intend to go into the processes of adjudicating the matter before the court. My worry is the observation that, when the Hon Member for Bimbilla was nominated at that time for the position of Minister for Defence — we had chiefs from the two Gates following him.

I believe the assurance that he gave was that, to the extent that they had followed him to the vetting, to that same extent did he believe that from then, peace could be guaranteed in the Bimbilla enclave. Unfortunately, not more than two to three days after they went back, the conflict blew out again. That, in my view, is a tragedy.

Mr Speaker, as I said, I do not want to go into the issues involving chieftaincy at the place, even though as the Hon Minister himself has attested to, the antecedents of this conflict find expression in chieftaincy.

Mr Speaker, I do not want to go into it because I know what happened in this House when the Yendi crisis came up and the unfortunate statements that were made on the floor of this House exacerbated the conflicts. We should resist the temptation to travel that path in spite of ourselves.

Mr Speaker, it is not for nothing that matters relating to national security are not discussed in open plenary. We may have relevant information that we may want to share with the Hon Minister for the Interior or even the Hon Minister for National Security. But one does not ventilate it on the floor of the House, to the extent that, what one knows, truthful as it may be, may hurt some feelings and result in the inflamation of passions and further exacerbate the conflict. So, it is not all that we know that we give vent to, especially on the floor of this House.

Mr Speaker, that is why I would plead with Hon Colleagues — the Hon Minority Leader seems to be very passionate about what he knows. I would plead with him, that we do not ventilate everything on the floor of the House, especially when they relate to certain sensitive institutions.

Mr Speaker, I would urge the Hon Minister, with the roadmap that he has given; if anybody has any information that could help curb the situation and resolve the problem, that person may see the Hon Minister for the Interior and share it. I believe the Hon Minority Leader may be one of such persons. He appears to know so much about the antecedents. Let him go and see him, and perhaps, even the Hon Minister for National Security. But ventilating them in certain arenas could rather exacerbate the problem -
Mr Speaker, I would disregard the Hon Minority Leader; he is baiting me to go on the same path. I resist that bait.

Mr Speaker, as I said, all of us should encourage the Hon Minister responsible for the Interior and especially Hon Members hailing from contiguous places who may have some useful information to share, they are at liberty to pass on such information to the three Ministers; the Minister for Defence, the Minister for the Interior who is in charge and the Minister for National Security. This is because it is more or less a national security matter.

Thank you.