SUPPORTING STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT ON THE BRIBERY ALLEGATION AGAINST MINORITY MEMBERS OF THE APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE BY HONOURABLE DR NANA AYEW AFRIYE, MP FOR EFFIDUASE ASOKORE BY HON OSEI KYEI-MENSAH-BONSU, MAJORITY LEADER AND MP FOR SUAME - 31 JANUARY, 2017

Mr Speaker, the allegation that has saturated the entire Ghanaian atmosphere over the past four days is an earth-shaking allegation and must be handled with extreme care. Mr Speaker, I agree with the Hon Minority Leader that Parliament, as representatives of the people, should be concerned with establishing the truthfulness of any issue that comes before us. This particular instance which relates to certain named persons in this House — we must get to the bottom of this business.

Hon Joseph Osei-Owusu is the Hon First Deputy Speaker and the Hon Member of Parliament for Bekwai. In making this Statement before this House, represented by his own composure and demeanor, indeed, he is a person who has suffered some mortal wounds. So, the Statement is a dirge of lamentations and one could understand.

The second Statement, invited you, Mr Speaker, to refer the conduct of the Hon Mahama Ayariga to the Privileges Committee. Our Standing Orders provide that committees with defined remits should be assigned the responsibility of enquiring into any matter within their remit. However, in this particular case, as the Hon Minority Leader has alluded to, the primary person who has been cited, Hon Osei-Owusu, Chairman of the Appointments Committee, doubles up as the Chairman of the Privileges Committee.

In this particular instance, if the matter is referred to the Committee, he would be required to chair. In the alternative, he may recuse himself for the Vice-Chairman to be in the Chair. My worry is that, if it should go to the Privileges Committee, it may attract unnecessary partisanship. For that reason, I tend to agree with the application by the Hon Minority Leader that, the matter be sent to a special purpose committee charged with the responsibility of delving into this matter.

Mr Speaker, thereafter, upon establishing the truth or otherwise in the allegation, giving us their own observations and conclusions on the way forward for the conduct of business in this House in order not to waste much time on this proposal, I would first want to move for the establishment of the special committee, first as required by Standing Order 191 of our Standing Orders and I beg to quote:

“The House may at any time by Motion, appoint Special or Ad Hoc Committee to investigate any matter of public importance; to consider any Bill that does not come under the jurisdiction of any of the Standing or Select Committees.” Mr Speaker, in this case, it is the first leg of the Standing Order that matters to us. Mr Speaker, while we are at this, it may be part of the remit of the committee to define to us what the real intendment of Standing Order 20 and article 115 of the Constitution represent. Standing Order 20 provides, and I beg to quote: “There shall be freedom of speech, debate and proceedings in Parliament and that freedom shall not be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament.”
Mr Speaker, what this means is that, that freedom can be impeached or questioned in Parliament itself and that is the application submitted by the Hon Minority Leader. Mr Speaker, the other consideration is whether the phraseology “in Parliament” should be construed to mean “within the precincts of Parliament.” As I have said, it would be for the special purpose committee to define for us or to help us come to some determination in these matters.

Mr Speaker, I beg to move, that given the circumstances, this House appoints a special committee to investigate this matter of alleged bribery and submit recommendations to us about the way forward. Mr Speaker, I would want to further amend it that we constitute a five-member special committee to deal with this. When we have agreed, then we shall propose the names for the membership of the committee——

Mr Speaker, by our standing Orders, the establishment of the special or ad hoc committee requires a Motion to be moved, and that was what I did under Standing Order 191. There is no other way out. The Committees of this House are established by the Committee of Selection. It is only the special or ad hoc committee that is established on the spur of the moment on the phase of any development. Mr Speaker, if it has to be established, it must be established by a Motion moved on the floor, and that is what I did and it was duly seconded by the Hon Minority Leader, who initially was on some waters——

Mr Speaker, Leadership has had some consultations and we have agreed to have the following Hon Members to constitute the committee. They include:

1. Hon Joe Ghartey — Chairman
2. Hon Ben Abdallah Banda — Member
3. Hon Ama Pomaa Boateng — Member
4. Hon Magnus Kofi Amoatey — Member
5. Hon Benson Tongo Baba — Member

Mr Speaker, these are the five (5) Hon Members that we have agreed to serve on the committee. In respect of the time — Mr Speaker, for the time frame, Hon Members, including the members of the Committee, know the gravity of the issue and we do not want to stampede them. We want them to do a very thorough job, and at the end of the day, come with their own observations and recommendations, the way forward as a Parliament. Mr Speaker, respectfully, we want to leave the time frame to the members of the committee, that they should be conscious of the exigencies of these times and public interest in the matter. I believe they will not disappoint us. Mr Speaker, with the terms of reference, I guess one should approve —

Mr Speaker, I said that, we would leave the time frame to the members of the committee. They themselves should be conscious of the gravity of the issue at hand and also, the enormous public interest in the matter. But certainly, they would also know that, given the fact that the budget season is with us, they may have to finish with the discharge of this responsibility before the budget comes to this House. Mr Speaker, I guess that if we would have to press, I would suggest that we give them a period of not more than four (4) weeks——
Mr Speaker, as the Hon Minority Leader has indicated, specific allegations were made. So, it would be for the committee to determine the allegations and who made them. They have been attributed to some people. Mr Speaker, for all we know, they may appear before the committee and perhaps indicate that well, there has been some cut and paste, or maybe, their voices have been doctored, et cetera. Mr Speaker, it is for the committee to determine. So, it is the allegations as espoused or as set out by the Hon First Deputy Speaker, that they may have to investigate, and any other related matters.

Mr Osei-Owusu: Mr Speaker, I have heard what the Leaders have suggested. I will reluctantly agree to it, but the specific allegation that, I, Joseph Osei-Owusu took money from Hon Boakye Agyarko and gave it to the Hon Minority Chief Whip to be distributed to those members, I think, should be the first item on the terms of reference, and then any other matters. Mr Speaker, that is because, that is the basis of the action I sought leave to take. After that, any other related matters may be investigated.

Mr Speaker, just as I stated, I said the basis for the Statements — the attributions should be the basis for defining the terms of reference, and then we shall have any other connected matters put before the committee, relating in particular to determining the way forward for us as a House. Mr Speaker, so, I agree that, that should be the remit of the committee——