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NPP ON THE MAHAMA FORD EXPEDITION SCANDAL

Ladies and gentlemen of the media, thank you for responding to our invitation in such impressive numbers. We called you here to address one matter: the alleged bribery of the President of the Republic, involving a foreign-based contractor friend of the President and what it means.

We have followed with very keen interest the discussions since the news broke last week and wish to state the New Patriotic Party's view on the matter. Our view is simple: this matter must be probed to its logical conclusion.

But, before that, we wish to begin by first congratulating Joy FM's investigative journalist, Mr. Manasseh Azure Awuni, for showing courage, diligence and patriotism in investigating this matter and resisting, as we have learnt, all attempts, including threats and offers of inducement, to kill the story. We are aware that, on other occasions, Mr. Azure has felt cause to turn his searchlight and critical pen on the NPP. We respect his independence and professionalism. We also wish to commend Joy FM for not only throwing its corporate weight behind the reporter and his work, but by continuing to probe deeper into this matter.

We have been scanning through the media landscape and have been equally encouraged by the enthusiasm with which other media houses have also carried on with the story. It is a testament of two things: that (1) this is no small matter of an innocuous gift involving the President of the Republic (2) the Ghanaian media, in spite of all the challenges, can still be trusted to play its role in the all-important fight against corruption so that Ghana's limited resources may be used for the welfare and wellbeing of the people, as it should be.

The latest scandal before our nation today, which has grabbed international attention as well, may be described simply as "The confession of a bribe giver". The journalist, in his own words, travelled to Ouagadougou on April 26, 2016 to "investigate allegations that Mr Djibril Kanazoe used undue influence to get contracts and paid bribes to some Ghanaian officials." He went, he probed, he found, and he has reported, with video and audio to boot.

What we know as a fact is that, Manasseh Azure came back from Burkina Faso with a confession extracted from Mr. Kanazoe, an international contractor based in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. It was he, the alleged bribe giver himself, who, after

being confronted by the evidence, dropped his denials and admitted to buying a brand new four wheel drive (SUV) as a gift to the President of the Republic of Ghana.

Ladies and gentlemen, these are neither the words of the NPP nor the journalist who did the investigation. But the very words of the alleged bribe giver, as captured on tape.

The Presidency in response has not been able to deny any of the basic facts in this monumental scandal:

(1) That, the Burkinabe contractor was first introduced to the then Vice President John Dramani Mahama, after failed attempts by his Burkinabe company, Messrs Oumarou Kanazoe Freres, to win a contract in Ghana through a competitive process.

(2) That, it was only after having been introduced to Mr. John Mahama by a go-between that Mr Kanazoe began winning contracts in Ghana.

(3) That, Mr Kanazoe's first contract was secured under the Ministry headed by Mrs Hanna Tetteh, a close colleague and friend to the then Vice President John Mahama.

(4) That, Mr Kanazoe's first contract cost Ghanaian taxpayers US\$656,248.48 for the construction of a wall—yes, a wall--around an empty, plot of land in an ambassadorial enclave belonging to the Embassy of Ghana in Ouagadougou.

(5) That, Mr John Mahama's contractor-friend won that first contract illegally, as it was without recourse to the clear provisions of the Public Procurement Act. Indeed, in his own words, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through our Ouagadougou Embassy, took the initiative to write to the company of Mr Kanazoe, a contractor the Embassy knew to be a friend of the then Vice President of Ghana, to request for price quotations for the wall.

(6) That, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs took the decision to award the contract to the company belonging to the Vice President's friend.

(7) That, the Public Procurement Authority has not been able to bring any evidence to challenge the fact that the contract was awarded unlawfully.

(8) That, in 2014, the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament described the amount spent on the wall, US\$656,248.48, as "outrageous."

(9) That, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has point blankly refused to shed light on the details of this "outrageous" contract.

(10) That, Mr Kanazoe in 2012 was given another contract to construct the 46.4km Dodo Pepeso-Nkwanta Road at a total financing cost of EUR 32.31 million (and not EUR 25.9 million as reported), a project which was praised by President Mahama on 19th April, saying, "I don't think that there is any road in Ghana that is more pleasing to the eye than this one."

(11) Even though the 46.4km road is an EU-funded project (with the design and supervision by the US-based construction management firm, Louis Berger), the contracting authority was the Ghana Highway Authority.

(12) That, per the Laissez-Passer written by the Embassy of Ghana on October 29, 2012, the vehicle was brought in after John Mahama had been succeeded to the office of President following the passing of President John Atta Mills.

(13) That, prior to that, the late President John Atta Mills had instituted a quiet enquiry into the conduct of his Vice President over the controversial Embraer Jet deal from Brazil. And, that went nowhere.

(14) That, per the Auditor General's Report, the amount of US\$656,248.48 covering payment of the wall was released not long before the Ford Expedition vehicle was offered as a gift.

1. Though the Ford Expedition belonging to Ghana's President was new, the gift owner, whether directly or through his assigns, allegedly declared and caused the vehicle to be valued at the Tema Port as a second hand vehicle and, as a result, paid about 50% less, a significantly lower amount of duty on it.

(15) That, DVLA still has in their system all details covering the vehicle apart from the registration details which should tell you who owns the vehicle.

(16) That, no physical or documentary evidence has been supplied by the Presidency to support the new claim of the President's spokespersons that the Ford Expedition was, upon receipt, added to the official fleet of vehicles at the Presidency.

ETHICAL VALUES

While the Government of Ghana does not dispute the chronology of events, it has sought, in its reaction to the story, to lower significantly the standard of integrity required of our leaders. The President's stance, as evidenced in the arrogant attitude of his Ministers and staffers on this issue, is demoralizing to the many honest men and women in public life who are doing their best under difficult circumstances to uphold ethical values.

This conduct of the highest public officer of the Republic sets a very disturbing example for many others in public office, especially coming on the heels of the Anas judicial corruption scandal in which judges have been rightfully sacked and disciplined for betraying the public trust and bringing their high offices into disrepute. If the President and his men and women can defend this behaviour, who is to tell the Policeman not to take "gifts" from motorists? Are we now being told that, when it comes to matters of corruption and integrity, there must be one law for President Mahama and another law for everybody else?

PLEASE SPEAK!

The President who is personally and directly involved in this bribery allegation has thus far refused to speak on matter, choosing, instead, to let his paid spokespersons. My message to His Excellency the President is this: Mr. President, please speak on your own behalf and in your own defense! The giver, your friend, has confessed

that he has given his friend in government who has since helped him to secure government contracts a gift of a sports utility vehicle.

On a matter as this, the President must come out personally to answer the allegations, not delegate it to his underlings, as if to imply that this is some petty or unimportant matter. This is no small matter, and the President must not seek to trivialize it by evading it. We cannot allow the culture to be entrenched and legitimized in Ghana, where public works contracts go only to the highest gift-giver or to those with close connections in high places.

The NPP has taken notice of the unanimous opinion of the anti-corruption community (GII, former CHRAJ Commissioner and Deputy, and the President's own Advisor on Integrity) that the President's conduct violates even his own Code of Conduct.

Article 284 of the 1992 constitution states as follows; "A public officer shall not put himself in a position where his personal interest conflicts or is likely to conflict with the performance of the functions of his office."

How does the President reconcile this with accepting a gift of substantial value from a businessman and friend who has a material interest in public works contracts awarded by the Government of Ghana? The President's primary duty is to put the interest of Ghana above all else in all of his dealings and to not allow even an appearance to emerge that he has compromised that paramount duty in favor a third party who is involved in certain transactions with the Government of Ghana.

We cannot simply disregard the seemingly coincidental timing of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructing The Bank of Ghana to make payment for the Ouagadougou wall and the procurement and transportation of the Ford SUV vehicle to the President as its beneficiary owner.

The notion that the so-called gift was passed on to the state is a pitiful defense and clearly an afterthought. The presidential fleet is not stocked through donations from private foreign contractors doing business with the Government. We would be risking the personal security of our Presidents and the staff of the Presidency if such were the practice. Moreover, why pay duty on a 'gift' if ownership of it was meant or intended to be passed on to the State?

Repeatedly, we see evidence of the President saying one thing and being defended by his party people for doing just the opposite, as if he is above the law.

Indeed, his own Code of Conduct indicts him. The man appointed as the anti-corruption Czar at the Office of the President, Mr. Daniel Batidam, when presented with facts identical to the facts of this matter, is on record as saying, authoritatively, that acceptance of a gift of that nature by "any leader, any president, not even a

president, a minister, a responsible public servant” from a contractor to the government as “not only conflict of interest but potentially being corrupted.”

Mr. Batidam has also since lost his voice.

BBC FUMBLE

Recently, our President, after fumbling to a BBC television question on bribery, gathered himself to say that he had never taken bribe, either as a human being or President. “Any human being would have encountered corruption in one way or the other. What you need to do is to put yourself in a position to (resist it)”, the President said.

Yet, a year earlier, in another example of preaching virtue but practising vice, this same President had, on 12th May 2015, directed his Minister of Finance to give a multi-million dollar contract, without any competitive tender, to a company belonging to another friend of his, a female friend.

CODE OF CONDUCT

President Mahama does not like to practice what he frequently preaches. Examples are plenty in the pages of the President’s own Code of Conduct for his appointees and all public officials. For example, it reads under Clause 1.4.4 (e) as follows: “To avoid the creation or appearance of an obligation, gifts in cash or kind are not to be solicited or accepted from commercial enterprise or any other organisation. An exception to this would be the acceptance of a presentation made during a visit to an institution.”

How can these be the express letters of your own crafted code of conduct and yet you unleash your Ministers and their subordinates to defend your decision to receive an expensive gift from a commercial enterprise with multi-million dollars worth of dealings with Government and insult all who question this conduct? What is the use of having a code of conduct when you yourself are not prepared to be measured by its principles?

MICHAEL AIDOO

According to Mr Kanazoe, despite all his best efforts, with a top NDC man and contractor, Michael Aidoo, who got him to bid for contracts in Ghana, he was not getting any. In Mr Kanazoe’s words, ”When we made the tender, we didn’t win.” He continued, “One day he [Michael Aidoo] told me he knew the Vice President [John Mahama] so let’s go to salute him. We went to salute him... And we became friends.” It was only then that things started happening; the dollars began to flow from Ghana coffers. This looks like a clear case of conflict of interest, at least. It

may interest Ghanaians to know that Kanazoe's contractor friend, Michael Aidoo, also known as 'Big Aidoo', is in fact the Western Regional Chairman of the NDC.

If the intentions of the giver of the gift were sincere he would not have denied it until he was confronted with the document that allowed the vehicle safe passage to Ghana.

We cannot also accept the claim that the Laissez-Passer serves as proof that the President meant to be transparent about it. The use of the Laissez-Passer was administratively necessary to get the vehicle into Ghana lawfully.

Why wasn't the vehicle disclosed in the President's Asset Declaration Form? Why would anyone cause the registration papers to go missing from the DVLA?

It does not matter whether after accepting the gift the President gave it to charity or to the state. What is clear is that before the gift and after the gift Government took steps to award at least two separate contracts to Mr Kanazoe in blatant breach of the Public Procurement Act. This is typical of the more than 80% of contracts that have been awarded either by sole sourcing or complete disregard of the laws of the land.

Our own investigations point to the fact that, in the extreme case, the cost of the wall ought not to have cost the state more than \$100,000 even if marble tiles were used and stainless steel railings applied. This suggests that the cost of the Ford Expedition was, in all probability, factored into the "outrageously" inflated cost of constructing the wall.

It is this culture of wanton inflation of projects that is denying the economy the opportunities to create jobs, fueling inflation, high interest rates and untold hardships. The Ghanaian economy will not be able to create the kind of jobs the people need and the management of the economy will not be stable enough to allow businesses to grow and expand to create jobs if the leadership of the country is too compromised to lead the fight against graft.

MINORITY LEADER

Recently, Minority Leader, Osei Kyei Mensah-Bonsu charged, "Let the President deal with how the cost of road construction under his administration, in dollar value, has more than tripled." The question is, how can the President deal with it if he himself is not straight?

Corruption in contracting is the primary reason for the extraordinary high cost of road construction in Ghana. Contractors are not charities and will seek to recoup, through inflation of the contract price, every money or in-kind gift or bribe they pay to a public official. In the end, it is the overtaxed Ghanaian taxpayer who suffers.

It was not for nothing that between 2005 and 2008 alone, the NPP administration spent \$1.2 billion to add 4,400 kilometres of road to what had already been done. Let us compare that to the NDC government, which has spent \$1.9 billion between 2009 and 2014 to construct only 740 kilometres of road. This means the NDC has in five years and with \$700 million more in cash constructed six times less the length of roads done by the NPP and in three years with less cash.

In a tweet on 19th April, the President described the 46-km Dodo Pepeso-Nkwanta Road as a “symbol of the friendship between the EU and Ghana.” What that tweet did not disclose was the friendship between the President and the contractor. We cannot develop Ghana if the aim is to award contracts to our friends who come bearing gifts.

Ghana deserves a leader who is trustworthy and displays unshakeable integrity, action-oriented, resilient in the face of setbacks while treating people with respect, not as mere objects for lies and propaganda, who can be neglected and when it comes to elections “bought” with the icing on the cakes procured from reckless and corrupt spending.

We have seen leaders resign or prosecuted for being involved in lesser cases of bribery. Ex-president Molina of Guatemala is on trial for conduct not too different from what we are seeing here in Ghana. Just two years ago, the leader of Australia's most populous state had to resign after failing to declare a gift of A\$3,000 (\$2,800, GHS11,051) wine. The New South Wales Premier Barry O'Farrell lied to a corruption inquiry that he never received the wine and could not remember calling the businessman who sent him the gift in 2011. He had to resign after investigators unveiled a handwritten thank you note from him.

The stance of the Mahama Administration in refusing to acknowledge wrongdoing and show contrition in this matter is an example of the arrogant display and abuse of power that has become characteristic of this government.

President must show leadership and humility by admitting wrongdoing and not hide behind Government communicators to further insult the intelligence of Ghanaians and all who are rightfully disappointed by this gratuitous damage to the dignity of his office and the country.

How does he explain the reversal of the GH¢82 (\$20.78m) potentially unlawful road contract that was all but concluded with Mr Kanazoe to construct a 28km road at the cost of GH¢82million? Why reverse it if it was proper?

The cost of building that Ouagadougou wall must be probed. The issues surrounding the Ford Expedition must be probed. All other contracts awarded to Mr Kanazoe, the President's friend, must also be probed.

Symptomatic of the stench of corruption and incompetence that has overwhelmed the Mahama administration, the President has in this case displayed extraordinary poor judgment and indiscretion unbecoming of the elevated office he occupies.

Furthermore, President Mahama has clearly caused his subordinates, ranging from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Roads, former ambassador to Burkina Faso to all those who facilitated the delivery of the car to him, to become possible accessories to an alleged crime themselves, further reinforcing the culture of corruption.

PARLIAMENTARY PROBE

We are therefore calling for a parliament probe; for the House to exercise its vested investigatory power or to act, pursuant to Article 2789(c), to cause a bi-partisan public enquiry to be appointed to probe into this serious matter. The President of the Republic stands accused of bribery, abuse of office and conflict of interest. The circumstantial evidence linking the President to the contractor, and the contracts to the gift, and clear efforts not to be transparent with the transaction, provide enough grounds for Ghanaians to get a full public enquiry into this matter. Other than the Constitution, our procurement laws and potentially other laws may have been broken. Parliament owes it a duty to the people of Ghana to institute an open inquiry into this matter.

Ghana's many good contractors deserve a level playing field in the competition for contracts. They do not deserve to be subjected to a system where contract awards are driven by cronyism and gift-giving. If it's bad for judges to receive so-called gifts from persons with matters before the courts, how does it become OK for the President or VP to accept a so-called gift from a private foreign contractors, who has a material interest in government contracts? What is wrongful when done by our judges cannot be right and acceptable when done by the President. To the contrary, as the No. 1 public officer of this land it behooves the President to set the highest ethical standard possible so that to uphold the moral authority to dismiss and sanction subordinate public officers who engage in acts of corruption.

The sleaze and corruption that Mahama continues to preside over is a disgrace to the Office of the President. Like gangrene, it has affected all parts of his administration. Ghana, under President Mahama, is bleeding. We must stop the bleeding. Our country is in danger. The future of our young people is uncertain, and when hopelessness is allowed to engulf and deplete the aspirations of the young, our peace, our security, our very democracy are all threatened.

Thank you.