



INSTITUTE FOR PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

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PRESS RELEASE

STOP FEAR MONGERING; STOP SUPPORTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Institute for Peace and Development (IPD) has sighted many Social Media stories reporting purported acts of violence that Violent Extremists have carried out in locations across Ghana. The videos, audios, and/or texts describe graphic scenes of Violent Extremists arriving in or carrying out acts of violence, including the beheading of their victims, in specified locations. The commentaries ran in English, Twi, Dagaare, and other local languages convey the impression that i) the terrorists have infiltrated Ghana already, ii) the reported killings or kidnappings have happened in specific locations within Ghana, especially in and around Tamale and other parts of northern Ghana, and iii) the report acts of violence have just happened or are happening as they report.

IPD is based in Tamale. Our staff and their families live in Tamale, with frequent travels through other parts of northern Ghana. Since June 2019, we have been monitoring reports of VE activities along Ghana's borders. We confirm that no such presence of acts of violent extremism as reported in the social media clips have happened in and/or around Tamale or any part of the north for that matter.

While IPD does not downplay the threat of penetration of Violent Extremists into Ghana from neighboring countries, we strongly condemn the circulation of make-believe stories that happened elsewhere a while back and have no connection whatsoever with Ghana. **We strongly caution the general public against sharing and/or believing such obviously edited stories designed to create maximum fear and panic in the population.** We particularly draw the attention of everyone to the fact that sharing such stories play into the hands of the Violent Extremists in many ways. This makes anyone who shares such stories an unwilling accomplice in the spreading of the violence.

Fear is the most powerful weapon of all terrorists or violent extremists. The whole purpose of their public and widely publicized acts of violence, including videoing and publishing of executions, are designed to trigger and sustain the maximum amount of fear in their target populations. Therefore, if you take part in sharing make-believe unfounded, and unverified stories about the presence and operations of violent extremists in Ghana, you are directly and willingly supporting the agenda of violent extremists to create fear and panic that diverts attention from their actual plans and movements, if Ghana is their target. Concretely, here is how the unfounded fear and panic you share work to the advantage and desires of the Violent Extremists:

- Fear diverts attention from the actual plans of the terrorists, enabling them to freely plan where to go and how to strike.
- Fear emboldens the adversary as it shows off our vulnerabilities.
- Fear breeds or increases suspicions of our neighbors, lowers trust, and hampers collective action for protecting against external aggression.
- Wild spread fear paralyzes a society, preventing it from engaging in watchful vigilance against violent extremists.
- Unfounded fear also restricts the movement of persons and goods, paralyzes social and economic lives, and increases psychological trauma. This adds social and economic hardships that compound the sense of vulnerability, helplessness, and hopelessness. It subjects society to manipulation by the aggressors.

- Unfounded alarms divert the attention and resources (human, material and logistical) of the security agencies to respond to nonexistent threats in alarm zones. It makes security agencies chase ghosts rather than look out for the extremists.
- Fear makes heroes or gods out of the enemy, thereby eroding any confidence to mobilize and confront the enemy.
- Beyond the immediate effect of breeding fear, repeated and multiple circulations of unfounded stories breed cynicism, distrust, indifference, repulsion, and disinterest among citizens in any form of engagement in genuine efforts to prevent or mitigate the incidence and impact of acts of violence, including those of violent extremists. This contributes to preparing the grounds for the infiltration and the strike of the deadly blows of the Violent Extremists on the blind side of the security agencies.

Recommended Counter Actions

Preventing Violent Extremism and all forms of violent acts, for that matter, is a collective responsibility for all citizens; it is not the exclusive duty of the Security agencies. Therefore, to be better prepared to pre-empt, prevent, and mitigate the effects of violent extremism, we must desist from spreading stories that detract us. For this reason, IPD recommends that:

- **Everyone** must be watchful. This includes not believing in and sharing unverified stories from social media that do not come from official sources such as the security agencies. Do not reshare such stories with friends or other platforms. To do so is to strengthen and extend the reach of the weapon of the Violent Extremists – the spread of fear. By that, you become an unwilling accomplice of the Violent Extremists, not a preventer of violent extremism.
- **All professional and citizen journalists, media houses, hosts of radio and television shows,** and all who have access to mass communication outlets should please ensure you thoroughly fact-check any piece of news before putting it out. When something comes to your attention from another media source, do due diligence; countercheck with the security agencies and verify the information. If false, provide any fact-based counter information to dispel the rumors as quickly as you can.
- **Religious leaders of all faiths:** We urge you all to use your platforms to educate your faithful on the dangers of spreading false information. Encourage them to be vigilant but not fretful about the activities of Violent Extremists. Urge them to join the **“See Something, Say Something Campaign** and report all credible information on suspicious activities to the **999** number that National Security has provided or to the nearest security service (Police, Military, Customs, Immigration, etc.) outpost or personnel.
- **Security Services:** Maintaining the peace involves curtailing the spread of false information and the creation of panic. It is important, therefore, that you act urgently to investigate, confirm, or dispel reported incidents of VE activities. This will reassure citizens of their safety and security, reinforce confidence in the security services, and encourage citizens to take actions that prevent or minimize the impact of any real threats that may come in their direction.
 - At the same time, we call on the Security Services to rapidly investigate, interrogate, and take quick, decisive, and deterrent action against any person or groups that they find to be peddling falsehoods about the activities of Violent Extremists.

We urge all to keep calm but vigilant. When you SEE and/or HEAR something worrying, Do say something. However, DO NOT SHARE stories that you cannot confirm are true. Remember that all who share unfounded stories of violent extremism either out of genuine concern for security or the joy of creating fear and panic must understand they are doing the bidding of the terrorists or violent extremists. Knowingly or unknowingly, they are accomplices in creating the conditions that make it easier for the VEs to penetrate and strike.

About Us: Based in Tamale, NR, Ghana, Institute for Peace, and Development has carried out research and evaluation work for key international development agencies in the areas of governance, peace, conflict resolution, citizens' engagement, and development across several continents. Our work in Ghana, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Deep South of Thailand, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Niger, Peru, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, among others over the last five years has focused on supporting our partners working in to promote sustainable peace and social cohesion building. For further information, see contact details below.