

STATEMENT ON PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATIONS BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PARLIAMENTARY FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATIONS MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – HON. SARAH ADWOA SAFO

Parliamentary Friendship Associations have become synonymous with Parliamentary Diplomacy in recent times. While being among the many tools of Parliamentary Diplomacy, they have increasingly been heavily relied upon by Parliamentarians across the globe to deepen interactions with their counterparts in other legislatures. Parliamentary Friendship Associations have, thus, given fresh impetus to the people to people concept in traditional diplomacy as they create a unique platform for Parliamentarians from various legislatures to engage with one another in both bilateral and multilateral Parliamentary Diplomacy. Unfortunately, not much can be said of the concept in our Parliament for the reason that it has not been given sufficient administrative support to see it function effectively over the years. The establishment of the Management Committee along with the redefined structures and the passage of the rules and regulations governing their creation and functioning are indicative that we have decided to depart from the status quo to ensure that our Parliamentary Friendship Associations have a new lease of life and that they are set to be very useful tools in our quest to derive the maximum benefits from our efforts in Parliamentary Diplomacy.

In this statement therefore, I will outline the usefulness of Parliamentary Friendship Associations and proffer some suggestions regarding how we as a Parliament can derive the best from their effective functioning.

A Parliamentary Friendship Association is a cross-party association of legislators so established to promote dialogue with those of other legislatures. These associations, once established, enter into either bilateral or multilateral relations with those of other legislatures in pursuit of the purpose of their establishment. Ordinarily, a Parliamentary Friendship Association, by its name, is formed by individual members of Parliament who are drawn by a common purpose to interact with their counterparts in one or more other Legislatures in pursuit of a common set of goals. However, by reason of their importance evidenced by the



advantages that they engender for partner legislatures and the respective states of those legislatures, the Speakership of most legislatures have taken it upon themselves to ensure that Parliamentary Friendship Associations are well organised and have the right caliber of leadership to be able to project the image of the country and that of the legislature in the sight of the partner legislatures and their respective states. The reasons are not farfetched.

Parliamentary Friendship Associations offer a good platform for acquiring best practices to boost the practice and procedures of legislatures while facilitating the passage of key pieces of legislation which are ordinarily difficult to handle by virtue of their intricate nature and, especially, for the reason that there may not be precedence in the country concerned to guide their passage. Thus, the interactive role of Parliamentary Friendship Association offers members of the Associations the opportunity to become exposed to practices from each other's legislature which eventually influence their contribution to debates on the floor of their respective legislatures and therefore, the decisions that are taken in those legislatures. The general discussions that they hold with one another equally present a good opportunity for the cross-fertilization of ideas which go a long way to impacting on the decisions taken on the floors of the respective legislatures. This ultimately promotes good governance and helps to deepen democracy in partner countries.

Besides, members of Parliamentary Friendship Associations hold meetings generally with the political elites of their partner states on topical issues. This helps them to form consensus on a myriad of issues which in turn promotes cooperation and collaboration at other international fora. This also enables them to rally support for one another within the international community whenever the need arises.

In much the same vein, in trying to understand peculiar situations in partner states, Parliamentary Friendship Associations may gather useful information on one another and their respective states through various means. Seminars and lectures are also organised periodically at which experts are called upon to make presentations which present another opportunity to gather information about

partner legislatures and their states. Trade and cultural fora can also be organised to provide useful information on the economic and other potentials of partner states and these have the tendency to promote economic diplomacy between partner states while deepening the partner states appreciation for one another.

Parliamentary Friendship Associations promote the exchange of visitations at the level of the legislature and that enhances parliamentary diplomacy. In furtherance of their role in promoting dialogue, members of Parliamentary Friendship Associations embark on regular visitations to partner states at the level of the legislature while receiving guests, including those from non-parliamentary sources, from partner states for discussions on a broad range of issues. Being cross-party in membership their discussions are often frank and this often endears them to the political elite of partner countries. They therefore provide a reliable alternative to help in times of crises, especially, in times of conflict during which time they can be very instrumental in helping to douse the flames that ignite conflicts to obviate their escalation.

The foregoing and many such other factors make Parliamentary Friendship Associations most sought after by the Diplomatic Missions of partner states as they rely on members of the Associations to deepen their collaborations with the host states. Also, they have tremendous goodwill in partner countries and that easily enables them to forge linkages and networks that advance the course of diplomacy in general. It is for this reason that Heads of States and other political leaders of most states would always ensure that they have members of Parliamentary Friendship Associations on their delegations on all their state visits.

In the light of the foregoing and to ensure that our efforts to reorganize Parliamentary Friendship Associations stand the test of time, it is instructive to note that we, as a Parliament, have a great deal of responsibility to make the Associations work to bring in the needed results.

Members of Associations will be required to demonstrate real commitment to the goals of the Associations by availing ourselves of all activities of the Associations. We would have to show genuine interest in the affairs of our partner states in order to have real interactions with them. In this regard, we should be ready to

attend their national day events and related programmes at the invitation of their Diplomatic representations in Ghana. We should equally be ready to assist in hosting their political and business delegations as well as other dignitaries who will visit Ghana from time to time.

In the same vein, we should be prepared to share in their anguish in their most difficult times and be ready to offer them the needed support should they suffer any unfortunate situation. Such support may include visiting their installations to pay tributes at short notices, making statements on the floor of the House, filing questions to relevant Ministers of State, and supporting their cause at international fora, among many others.

Besides, we should take advantage of our close collaboration with them to learn from their experiences in pursuit of the search for best practices to help in times of need. We must strive to never have the occasion to reinvent the wheel if our partner legislatures/states have successfully traversed certain obstacles whenever we are confronted with similar circumstances.

Rt. Hon. Speaker, I will end by urging colleague Members of Parliament to avail themselves of training programmes and opportunities that may be organised periodically to equip members of Parliamentary Friendship Associations with the requisite knowledge and information to enhance their participation in the activities of the Associations. Such programmes should be taken very seriously given the sensitive terrain in which international relations and diplomacy are conducted and the rules that regulate the conduct of states and individual actors in international relations and diplomacy.

Thank you.