

COMMENTARY ON THE DECISION BY THE NDC TO BOYCOTT ALL IEA PROGRAMMES BY DR RANSFORD GYAMPO, SENIOR LECTURER, POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT, UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON.

It is unfortunate that the ruling National Democratic Congress has decided to boycott all IEA activities leading up to this year's election. The point must be made that this is not the first time the NDC is taking such a drastic decision. In 2012, the NDC took a similar decision not to participate in the IEA debate ahead of the election.

But in a dramatic U-turn following the unfortunate death of Prof. Mills, the NDC rescinded the earlier decision and participated fully in the evening encounters and the debates for both presidential candidates and their running mates.

It is significant to note that, which U-turn came at an extra cost to the Institute. It is not exactly clear the basis of allegations of bias against the institute. This is because outside election periods, the NDC likewise all other parties with representation in parliament fully cooperate with the IEA under the auspices of Ghana Political Parties Programme.

It is also worthy to note that, in opposition, the NDC attended every IEA workshop and event. It appears that the party has so soon forgotten the huge financial investment and contributions the institute makes on them almost every monthly. Here, one can talk of the monthly stipends paid to party officials, funding of workshops and capacity building programmes, as well as donation of computers and other office equipment.

It is a matter of fact that the NDC, as a political party, has every right to stay away from the IEA platform. However, there is no doubt that the IEA platform is credible. It offers candidates the opportunity to appeal to election kin-makers, the undecided and floating voters.

These are the real people who determine who wins an election. The votes of party foot soldiers and core supporters alone cannot be enough to win elections. It cannot be denied that it was based on this assumption that, Mr. John Mahama decided to take part in the 2012 debates, when he became the NDC flagbearer with barely four months to the election.

It is yet to be disputed that his participation in the debates contributed to his electoral victory. As things stand now, it appears the party is embarking on a political suicide mission by alienating and not endearing itself to the election kin makers. People have suggested that debates do not contribute to winning elections.

It is surprising that some may want to look at debates only in relation to electoral fortunes of political parties. Those who hold this view are oblivious of the voting attitude of the five to 10 percent floating voters who are the election king makers. There is no doubt that partisan de-alignment is not a popular phenomenon in this part of the world.

And in this regard, the core supporters of political parties would not be moved by debates. But, the undecided voters make their choice based on events such as presidential debates and how presidential hopefuls fare at such fora. Debates promote issues-based electioneering. They present and enhance the

exercise of people's democratic right of choice, calm down political tension and are useful accountability mechanisms as they promote healthy dialogue between Presidential Hopefuls and the citizenry. In fact, those who seek to govern must be prepared to subject themselves to probing questions from the citizenry to ensure that they understand the concerns of the masses and have the capacity to address them.

Allegations of bias against IEA cannot be sustained. The General Secretary of the NDC chairs the IEA's Ghana Political Parties Programme. How can such an anti-government body tolerate this arrangement? Just because the findings of the IEA's Socio-Economic and Governance Survey hit the government hard does not make the IEA anti-government. One wonders what would have happened if the Institute had released the 2015 report. IEA is holding on to the report because it feels the timing is inappropriate.

This is a demonstration that the Institute bends over just to cater for the interest of the party because it does not want to be seen to be embarrassing its partners. Let politicians who have command over the issues and challenges confronting Ghanaians be bold and face the IEA debate. Let them not find excuses to run away.