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Eminent Personalities vs Professional Expertise in Conflict Resolution: A Critical Review of Ghana's Peace Council Act (ACT 818 of 2011)

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ABSTRACT

The interaction between eminent individuals and professional knowledge within Ghana's Peace Council, as stated in the Peace Council Act (Act 818 of 2011), is critically examined in this paper. It investigates the effects on the efficacy, legitimacy, and sustainability of peacebuilding initiatives in Ghana of relying more on well-known people than on experts in conflict resolution. The paper evaluates the benefits and drawbacks of giving celebrity status precedence over technical conflict management knowledge by thoroughly examining the legal framework and its real-world applications. The results emphasise the necessity for a well-rounded strategy that strengthens peace initiatives in Ghana by utilising both specialised skills and credible leadership.

INTRODUCTION

The complex processes of peacebuilding and conflict resolution require a careful balancing act between inclusivity, leadership, and competence. Act 818 of 2011 established the Ghana Peace Council with the goal of promoting national peace and stability in Ghana by enlisting well-known individuals in peace activities. Before the state finally formalized the Council through the Act, Agyemang asserted that the Ghanaian Peace Council had already been put to the test after five years of practice. The law, which emphasizes culturally appropriate conflict resolution and mandates that the NPC create a framework that takes into account indigenous alternatives, once again demonstrated Ghana's commitment to creating an institutional framework for peace.

The participation of well-known individuals can give peace initiatives legitimacy and publicity, but it also calls into question the function and significance of professional knowledge in resolving disputes. The conflict between the necessity of specialised knowledge and skills for successful peacebuilding and the dependence on notable individuals is critically examined in this research. The study investigates how the value of individuals over experts may affect the legitimacy, sustainability, and quality of Ghana's conflict resolution processes by examining the country's Peace Council Act.

Statement of the Problem

Possibly at the expense of professional experience in conflict resolution, the Ghana Peace Council Act (Act 818 of 2011) places a strong emphasis on the participation of notable individuals in peacebuilding initiatives. Professional experience required of those nominated to the Council is not specified in the Act. This dependence may jeopardise the use of specialised knowledge and

abilities required to handle complex conflicts, which raises questions about the efficacy, legitimacy, and sustainability of peace processes. Therefore, the challenge is to assess critically whether giving eminent individuals precedence over academically qualified professionals detracts from the calibre and effectiveness of Ghana's peacebuilding efforts.

Research Questions

1. What criteria does Act 818 use for appointing members of the Peace Council?
2. How does the inclusion of eminent personalities affect the Council's effectiveness in conflict prevention and resolution?
3. Is there a gap between status-based appointments and technical skills in conflict resolution?
4. What constitutes an ideal composition for the Ghana National Peace Council?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, related literature is discussed. The theoretical and conceptual issues underpinning the study are also discussed.

Concept of Eminence in Peace Architecture

People with historic authority, public recognition, or social standing—such as chiefs, religious leaders, or prominent politicians—are sometimes referred to as eminent (Aning & Danso, 2012). According to Christensen, these esteemed members used tactics that went beyond official legal and institutional frameworks to consciously prioritise incorporating moral authority and acknowledged cultural validity. Prominent people in the field of conflict resolution have shown success in settling challenging disagreements through conventional means.

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After conventional liberal peace channels failed, a state-backed Committee of Eminent Chiefs (CEC) successfully implemented hybrid dispute resolution procedures, demonstrating the need for empowering indigenous leaders. The inclusion of eminent leaders in the framework of sustainable peacebuilding systems within the African Union and ECOWAS is not surprising. Critics contend that eminence does not always equate to conflict resolution proficiency, even though these individuals might offer credibility and access to communities (Lederach, 1997). Prominent individuals might not have the technical expertise needed for mediation, negotiation, or early warning systems—all of which are essential in contemporary peace processes.

Critique of Status-Based Appointments

According to research, status-based appointments may reduce the efficacy of peace councils in situations involving violent or complex conflicts. Relying too much on prestige rather than ability, according to Aboagye and Bah (2004), might lead to inefficient, reactive, or sluggish dispute resolution. Furthermore, some notable individuals might not be impartial, particularly in disputes involving political, religious, or ethnic concerns (Osei-Tutu, 2020).

Early warning systems, stakeholder analysis, negotiating techniques, and knowledge of peacebuilding concepts are all necessary for effective conflict prevention (Miall, Ramsbotham & Woodhouse, 2011). Professional peacebuilders are trained to handle complex dynamics in situations where traditional leaders or distinguished individuals might not be sufficiently prepared, and they frequently employ evidence-based strategies. A person cannot effectively serve as a peacebuilder, mediator, peace advocate, or counsellor without these abilities.

Bridging the Gap

Lederach (1997) proposes a “middle-out approach” that combines the technical expertise of qualified peace specialists with the authority of established or illustrious figures. In places like Ghana, where formal and informal structures influence peace processes, this hybrid model may be helpful.

The National Peace Council Act (ACT 818)

The Ghana Peace Council was created as a legislative entity in 2011 by Act 818 of 2011, also referred to as the Ghana Peace Council Act, with the mission of fostering and preserving peace and stability in the nation. The Act specifies the Council’s membership, which consists of traditional leaders, prominent figures, and representatives from a range of industries.

Its duties include coordinating peacebuilding initiatives, advising the government on matters pertaining to peace, and settling disputes. The Act’s focus on well-known individuals raises concerns about how to strike a balance between influence and knowledge in dispute resolution processes, even while its goal is to promote national cohesion.

By creating national, regional, and district peace councils, Ghana’s Peace Council Act (Act 818 of 2011) formalised peacebuilding. According to the law, these councils must be made up of “eminent persons,” who are mainly chosen by traditional and religious leaders (Republic of Ghana, 2011). However, professional credentials and dispute resolution experience are not explicitly included as prerequisites in the Act (Boafo-Arthur, 2013). The question of whether these nominations are made for symbolic or political reasons rather than technical ones has been raised as a result.

The Role of the National Peace Council (NPC)

The NPC was created by an Act that outlined the individual and collective responsibilities of the Council. These roles are listed below:

1. Use networking and coordination to harmonise and coordinate the prevention, management, and settlement of conflicts and to create enduring peace: This entails planning and coordinating initiatives across various organisations and interested parties in order to avoid confrontations, manage ongoing disagreements, and successfully resolve issues. Peace practitioners contribute to the development of a unified strategy that advances lasting peace by encouraging cooperation and information exchange.

2. Increase the nation’s capacity for managing, preventing, and resolving conflicts and achieving lasting peace, including but not limited to community organisations, women, youth groups, and chiefs: This entails giving important community individuals and groups—such as women, youth, traditional leaders, and local organisations—training, resources, and assistance so they may better recognise possible problems early on, resolve disagreements amicably, and support long-term peace initiatives.

3. Raise awareness of the use of non-violent conflict prevention, management, and resolution techniques to create enduring peace in the nation: Increasing awareness entails teaching stakeholders and communities about peaceful techniques including mediation, negotiation, and dialogue. This encourages non-violent conflict resolution techniques and helps change attitudes towards them.

4. Promote the peaceful settlement of disputes through mediation and other procedures, such as indigenous peacebuilding and conflict resolution mechanisms: Peace practitioners assist disputing parties in coming to a peaceful agreement by mediating discussions and applying conventional or regional conflict resolution techniques. Indigenous practices that are effective in their context and culturally appropriate are acknowledged and incorporated.

5. Foster respect and appreciation for cultural, ethnic, and social differences as well as practices like dialogue and reconciliation that increase trust and ease tensions within communities. Encourage understanding of the values of diversity, trust, tolerance, confidence building, negotiation, mediation, dialogue, and reconciliation.

6. Coordinate and oversee the work of the District and Regional Peace Councils: This entails leading and overseeing local and regional peace councils to make sure their operations complement national peacebuilding plans and that they fulfil their responsibilities to their communities effectively.

7. Aid in the implementation of agreements and resolutions achieved between parties to a conflict: Peace practitioners assist in ensuring that all parties fulfil their obligations following the conclusion of a conflict or agreement, thus supporting implementation to maintain peace.

8. Offer suggestions to the government and other interested parties regarding measures to foster confidence and trust between and among groups. This entails counselling organisations and policymakers on practical measures and policies that can enhance cooperation, mutual understanding, and trust between various groups in the nation.

9. Carry out any additional tasks related to its objectives: When necessary, peace practitioners can help peacebuilding efforts by engaging in extra activities relevant to their primary goals under this broad provision.

Skills and Competencies for Peacebuilders

United States Institute of Peace (USIP) after extensive research outlined skills and competencies any peacebuilder must possess to be very effective (USIP, 2011). Effective peacebuilders require both formal education and practical experience dealing with diverse communities, they said, highlighting key qualities including negotiation, mediation, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement.

In their book *Peacebuilding in Practice*, the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (UNPBSO) highlights the value of integrating academic training with real-world expertise in community engagement, mediation, and conflict resolution. They also emphasised the importance of developing skills such as dialogue facilitation and capacity building for peace practitioners (UNPBSO, 2018).

Cho and Landau (2023) argued that although the United Nations support unit in 2006 and 2012 gave a model of the United Nations Guidance for Effective Mediation that combined technical knowledge and skills, their operations are not neutral or value-free, and this limitation has not been addressed. Karner added to this discussion that although the mediation process effectively used professionalism as an added advantage to apply technical knowledge, which depoliticised conflict resolution methods.

Their neutrality and impartiality on issues have not made mediation processes obsolete. It frequently involves developing a group of mediation specialists with specific expertise in fields like gender, religion, and process design. Finally, Stedman (1997) highlighted professionalism in the conflict resolution framework as very significant but challenges a common ground for the integration of knowledge transfer and certification systems for traditional legal practitioners.

To effectively perform these roles of professionalism, individuals should possess a combination of relevant qualifications, skills, and experience, and the intentionality of traditional legal practitioners to adopt and accept the co-operate in the conflict resolution process. In the case of this study, here is an overview of the qualifications and expertise that, according to USIP and UNPBSO, align well with these responsibilities in the Ghanaian case. To effectively perform these roles, individuals should possess a combination of relevant qualifications, skills, and experience. Here is an overview of the qualifications and expertise that, according to USIP and UNPBSO, align well with these responsibilities:

Educational Qualifications

1. A bachelor's degree or higher in a related field, such as international relations, sociology, community development, law, human rights, peace and conflict studies, or a similar field.

2. For more senior or specialised positions, advanced degrees (Master's or Ph.D.) in international development, peacebuilding, conflict resolution, or related fields are beneficial.

Relevant Proficiencies and Abilities

1. Skills in Mediation and Conflict Resolution: the capacity to successfully arbitrate conflicts, create agreements, and promote communication.

2. Understanding of Indigenous and Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: Gaining an understanding of indigenous peacebuilding practices and local norms.

3. Communication Skills: Excellent oral and written communication, including training and awareness-raising abilities.

4. Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusiveness: Respect for diversity and experience working with different cultural, ethnic, or social groups.

5. Networking and Coordination: Ability to build partnerships, coordinate activities across multiple stakeholders, and manage collaborative projects.

6. Leadership and Facilitation Skills: Leading groups, supervising teams, and guiding community-based peace initiatives.

Practical Experience

1. Community Engagement: Demonstrated expertise in collaborating with youth, women, traditional leaders, community organisations, and marginalised groups.

2. Program Planning and Management: Creating, carrying out, and overseeing projects or programmes related to peacebuilding.

3. Capacity Building: Holding seminars and training sessions to improve participants' abilities to avoid and resolve conflicts.

4. Policy Advocacy: Experience counselling organisations or the government on initiatives to promote peace and trust.

5. Knowledge of Local Context: A thorough comprehension of the nation's or region's unique social, political, and cultural dynamics.

Additional Qualifications

1. Language Skills: Proficiency in local languages within the area of operation can enhance communication and effectiveness.
2. Knowledge of International Frameworks: Familiarity with international peacebuilding standards and human rights instruments.
3. Experience with Indigenous and Traditional Mechanisms: Practical experience in integrating local conflict resolution practices.

Personal Attributes

1. Empathy, patience, and strong interpersonal skills.
2. The capacity to operate in intricate, multi-stakeholder settings.
3. Adaptability and flexibility in a variety of contexts.
4. A dedication to advancing social cohesion, justice, and peace.

A suitable candidate would typically have a relevant academic background, practical experience working with diverse community groups, strong mediation and facilitation skills, and a deep understanding of the local context and

indigenous conflict resolution practices. Combining these qualifications and expertise ensures they can effectively support peacebuilding and conflict prevention initiatives.

Appointment to the Ghana National Peace Council

The Council is composed of eminent individuals from Ghana’s registered groups stated in Act 818. Among their personal qualities that make them eligible to be nominated as members of the NPC Governing Body, the Regional Councils and District Councils are impeccable credibility, eminence, and integrity. They must also be seen by the public as impartial, unbiased, and capable of spearheading any national peace initiative (Act 818). They must also be seen by the public as impartial, unbiased, and capable of spearheading any national peace initiative. The Peace Council Act provides that 13 eminent members are to be selected from the groups mentioned in section 4 of Act 818. The majority of these 13 eminent members are directly drawn from religious institutions. Four are Christians, three are Muslims, and one is an adherent of African traditional religion. This is shown in the table below:

Table 1: The Composition of the National Peace Council

Christian Groups	Muslim Groups	Traditional Bodies	Governmental and Identifiable Groups
One person nominated by the Catholic Bishops Conference.	One person nominated by the Tijaaniya Muslim group	One person nominated by the Practitioners of African Traditional Religions.	Two persons nominated by the president of Ghana, one of whom must be a woman.
One person nominated by the Ghana Pentecostal Council	One person nominated by the Al Sunnah Muslims	One person by the National House of Chiefs.	Two other persons nominated by identifiable groups
One person nominated by the National Council for Christians and Charismatic Churches	One person nominated by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission		
One person nominated by the Christian Council			

Source: NPC Report (2024)

Theoretical Framework

According to the elite theory, a small, privileged minority known as the elite has considerable power and influence over societal decisions and governance. This idea holds that a select few powerful elites control society’s authority and decision-making. This elite class tends to control political and economic systems, influencing outcomes and policies to suit their interests. They may include commercial tycoons, military leaders, political leaders, and other powerful individuals.

According to elite theory, power is not shared equally by the populace but rather is concentrated in a small number of people who use a variety of strategies to hold onto their position, such as controlling institutions, resources, and knowledge. It emphasizes the enduring influence of elites in shaping contemporary societies and frequently stands in opposition to ideologies that support more

equality and participation in decision-making processes. A lack of different viewpoints, particularly from under-represented or conflict-affected areas, may arise from the appointment of elites. This may jeopardise inclusive peacebuilding initiatives that necessitate widespread involvement and confidence.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

To gather comprehensive and accurate information for this study, a combination of qualitative research methods was employed, specifically document analysis and interviews.

Document Analysis

This approach entails a methodical examination of existing materials, including council reports and Act 818. These resources offer important legal and contextual

information, as well as insights into frameworks, policies, and earlier activities pertaining to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Understanding the institutional frameworks, directives, and historical viewpoints that impact peace efforts in the region under study is made easier by analysing these writings.

Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussion

This approach includes conducting interviews with individuals who have specialized knowledge or direct experience, such as Peace Council staff and security experts. These interviews gather qualitative data on practical challenges, success factors, and insights that are not always captured in official documents. A focus group discussion was organized to solicit stakeholders' views on the subject. They provide a nuanced understanding of the operational realities, perceptions, and contextual factors influencing conflict prevention and resolution efforts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Eminent Persons (Eminence)

A key respondent, when commenting on the use of eminent members for peacebuilding activities, said:

The term "eminence" describes the standing, distinction, or notoriety of those engaged in the peacebuilding process. Council members, traditional chiefs, politicians, religious leaders, and other notable individuals who are acknowledged for their social status and power may fall under this category.

They frequently have public influence and moral authority due to their notoriety, which helps them rally support and resolve disputes. Reliance on such notable figures, meanwhile, can also create questions about how to strike a balance between expertise and influence, especially when it comes to the effectiveness of professional skills in resolving disputes.

Critiques of Elitism in Appointments

In a focus group discussion, participants cited Act 818 and suggested that prioritising elite or privileged individuals for key positions can hinder effective professional peacebuilding in several ways:

Lack of Expertise

It is possible that an eminent person appointed to the NPC lacks the fundamental abilities needed for the council to function effectively in the areas of conflict management, resolution, and prevention. As an illustration, a member of a Regional Board has never spoken or participated in council business, mostly because he or she is unable to communicate in English, which is the language of meetings.

Lack of Representation

A lack of different viewpoints, particularly from underrepresented or conflict-affected areas, may arise from the appointment of elites. Because the council must

have prominent representation, important stakeholders are marginalized under the current NPC Act. Although they might not have many notable members, women's and youth organizations could make significant contributions to peacebuilding. This may jeopardize inclusive peacebuilding initiatives that require widespread involvement and confidence.

Reduced Legitimacy and Trust

Local residents may view the NPC's work as biased or unfair when appointments favour elites, which can undermine the legitimacy of peace initiatives and erode community trust. Some Ghanaians now believe that pastors and other religious leaders make up the majority of the NPC. This impression has developed as a result of the way council members are chosen.

Nepotism and Patronage

The Peace Council's exclusive appointment of distinguished members could encourage favouritism and nepotism, which could lead to corruption and inefficiencies. Such actions have the potential to damage public trust and institutional integrity, both of which are essential for lasting peace. The efficiency of the council may also be further jeopardized if powerful members use their influence to secure reappointment prospects over less powerful but more qualified candidates.

Limited Local Knowledge and Context Awareness

An eminent member might not have a thorough awareness of regional problems and cultural nuances, which could result in strategies that are unworkable or detached from the realities on the ground. Peacebuilding efforts may be hampered in certain situations since they might not even speak the language of the community they are supposed to serve.

Potential for Power Consolidation

Such selections could impede long-term peace and stability by strengthening current power structures, making it more difficult to oppose vested interests or advance genuine reform.

Elitism in appointments under Act 818 can undermine the inclusivity, legitimacy, and effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts, ultimately hindering sustainable peace and development.

The Need for Professional Conflict Resolution Competencies

The Focus Group Averred That

Professional conflict resolution skills are necessary to guarantee successful and long-lasting peacebuilding initiatives. Respected individuals and powerful leaders can be extremely helpful in starting conversations and building trust, but they might not have the specific abilities needed to handle difficult situations and deal with the underlying causes of conflicts.

Negotiation, mediation, active listening, empathy, and knowledge of conflict dynamics are examples of professional conflict resolution competencies that help practitioners manage tensions, promote productive communication, and create solutions that all parties can agree to. By tackling the root causes of problems rather than just managing surface-level disputes, these abilities aid in defusing tensions, averting violence, and establishing lasting peace.

In an Interview with a Regional Chairman of the National Peace Council, He Said

The legitimacy and efficacy of the NPC are compromised by the absence of post-appointment training for its members. Thus, the council's ability to reach just, long-lasting, and complex solutions is strengthened by the inclusion of qualified conflict resolution specialists. For peacebuilding projects to be legitimate and successful, these competencies must be given top priority.

In an Interview with a Regional Executive Secretary (RES) of the National Peace Council, He Said

Section 19(a) stipulates that the Regional Executive Secretary (RES), in accordance with Act 818, is mandated to provide technical advice to the Council on matters related to conflict prevention, management, resolution, and the promotion of sustainable peace within the region. This role is strictly advisory and does not entail any binding authority over the Council's decisions. Moreover, during Council discussions, the RES has no voting powers. According to Section 19(b), the RESs are the Council's secretaries and are in charge of providing procedural and administrative support.

Gap Between Status-Based Appointments and Technical Skills

In the focus group discussion, members commented on the gap between status-based appointments and technical skills in conflict resolution. Their views can be summarised as follows:

1. Status-based appointments typically favour individuals based on their position, influence, or political connections rather than their expertise in conflict management or mediation. This can lead to appointments of persons who may lack the necessary technical skills or specialized training in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

2. Communication, mediation, negotiation, conflict analysis, and an awareness of social dynamics are technical skills in conflict resolution. All members should be required to possess these abilities as they are crucial for handling and resolving disputes effectively.

3. There is a chance that dispute resolution initiatives may be ineffective or illegitimate because of a lack of technical expertise when appointments are made solely based on status. In resolving conflicts, members may commit unforgivable errors that could harm the council. If mediators or peacebuilders are thought to

be incompetent, this may erode confidence among stakeholders.

The sustainability and success of peace initiatives may suffer if the appointed individuals are not equipped with the appropriate skills.

Summary of Findings

The analysis arrived at the following findings:

1. The criteria outlined in Act 818 for the appointment of members to the Peace Council do not explicitly specify the requisite expertise or professional qualifications necessary for effective participation.

2. Act 818 mandates that the Peace Council should include eminent persons; however, it does not define the specific attributes or competencies that constitute "eminence" within the context of peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

3. The appointment of eminent members lacking relevant expertise in conflict prevention, management, and resolution may undermine the operational effectiveness of the National Peace Council, thereby impeding its capacity to address complex conflict dynamics effectively.

4. There exists a notable disconnect between appointments based on social or status considerations and the essential technical skills required for proficient conflict analysis, negotiation, and mediation.

5. To enhance its efficacy, the membership of the current Peace Council should be diversified to encompass a broader range of perspectives, including technical experts, community representatives, and stakeholders with specialized knowledge in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

CONCLUSION

Act 818 has come under fire for putting prestige above ability, even while it acknowledges the value of moral authority and traditional leadership in peacebuilding. The effectiveness of conflict prevention and resolution in Ghana might be improved by a more balanced strategy that combines status and skills.

Eminence often refers to the status, rank, or societal influence of people, such as well-known leaders, traditional chiefs, or esteemed persons, whose power is frequently predicated on their position, reputation, or social standing. Their notoriety does not always translate into proficiency in preventing and resolving conflicts, even while it might aid in gaining public support and promoting discussion.

Real conflict prevention and resolution abilities, on the other hand, require specific training, expertise, and experience in dispute mediation, identifying underlying problems, and using practical methods to settle disagreements amicably. These abilities, which are essential for successfully handling complicated conflicts, include communication, empathy, negotiation, and an awareness of conflict dynamics.

Therefore, eminence is not a replacement for expert conflict management abilities, even though it might

inspire stakeholders and increase the legitimacy of peace initiatives. Effective peacebuilding ideally blends the technical know-how of certified mediators and conflict resolution practitioners with the clout of notable individuals.

Recommendation

I. The NPC should create transparent appointment procedures that emphasise professional abilities, experience, and pertinent certifications to increase its effectiveness. This includes establishing explicit criteria that prioritise technical expertise in addition to prestige. This lessens reliance on social or political standing alone and guarantees that people with the right experience are chosen. Nominees could also be required to fulfil a minimum qualification requirement.

II. Encouraging merit-based appointments to guarantee that skilled professionals oversee conflict resolution initiatives: Merit-based selection procedures may be used to promote the appointment of highly skilled and qualified individuals, increasing the efficacy and legitimacy of conflict resolution programmes. Three (3) candidates may be nominated by the appointing institutions; the NPC secretariat will interview them and select the candidate who best fits the job requirements.

III. Prioritising training and capacity-building for appointed officials: By offering opportunities for continuous education and skill-building, NPC members can gain the technical know-how in mediation, conflict resolution, and related fields, ensuring they are prepared to carry out their responsibilities efficiently.

IV. Creating formal procedures and criteria for the removal or replacement of members who exhibit incompetence or misconduct guarantees the NPC's integrity and operation, upholding organisational efficacy and public confidence.

V. Diversifying the Council: The 13 members of the Council must be maintained; however, the Council must be diversified in terms of membership. This approach aims to foster inclusive and representative governance within the Council. It is recommended that the current NPC Act (Act 818) be amended to ensure broader representation by including members from the following groups:

- i. A representative from Christian organizations
- ii. A representative from Muslim organizations

iii. A representative from practitioners of African Traditional Religion

iv. A representative from the National House of Chiefs

v. A representative from a registered women's group or Queen Mothers' Association

vi. A representative from a registered youth organization, such as GRASAG, NUGS, etc.

vii. A representative from the National Media Commission

viii. A representative from the Ghana Bar Association

ix. A representative from a Civil Society Organization involved in peacebuilding or related activities

x. A representative from the Trade Union Congress

xi. A representative from security agencies, with priority given to the police

xii. Two government appointees

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