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Two former Majority leaders in Parliament have called for a bold measure to deal with issues of corruption which they say have become a stumbling block to the country's development.

Mr Alban Sumana Kingsford Bagbin, who served as the Minority and the Majority Leader in the Fourth and Fifth parliaments, respectively, said there was the need for a review of the aspect of the Criminal Code that defined corruption as a misdemeanor to make the law more biting.

His colleague former Majority Leader and Member of Parliament (MP) for Sekondi, Papa Owusu-Ankomah, was of the view that as a country "we need to move from rhetorics to action in the fight against corruption".

The two former leaders in Parliament were contributing to a statement made on the floor of Parliament to commemorate World Anti-Corruption Day which falls on December 9 every year.

The statement was made by the MP for Biakoye, Mr Emmanuel Kwasi Banduah, who is also the Vice-Chairman of the African Parliamentarians Network Against Corruption (APNAC).

Mr Bagbin's contribution

In his contribution, Mr Bagbin explained that the definition of corruption in the Criminal Code in its current form was not enough to ensure that a stiffer punishment was meted out to offenders in order to support efforts to curb corruption in the country.

"Corruption is a cancer that needs courage, fortitude and will power to exorcise, particularly in developing countries where systems are non-existent and institutions are so weak, which make the individual go to society with low ethics, principles and norms," he said.

He said many efforts had gone into the fight against corruption, adding, however, that some of those efforts were what he called "hush-hush", which had no sustainability.

Mr Bagbin, who is also a former Minister of Water Resources, Works and Housing, as well as Health, noted that debates during the Consultative Assembly that drafted the 1992 Constitution indicated that there had been a bold effort to put a structure in place to fight corruption.

He said in the Directive Principles of State Policy, every Ghanaian had been called on to combat corruption but, unfortunately, even the processes to get people into positions of trust "are all riddled with corruption".

"And so at the end of the day, the person is corrupted and he finds it difficult to come out of that situation," he added.

Mr Bagbin said Parliament had the responsibility to lead society in the fight against corruption but stated that the model of Parliament that the country opted for, which was even perceived as a department of the Executive, could not lead the combat against corruption.

He called on all to support the noise being made on corruption to conscientise Ghanaians and build their capacities to fight against the canker in the country.

Unfortunately, Mr Bagbin said, the laws of the country were different from the concept, adding that the law only talked about bribery and defined it as a misdemeanor, which meant a petty offence.

"And so with all the noise and investigations by the police, when you take the case to court a judge is compelled to apply the law, which is a misdemeanor," he said.

"We must change that law; we must amend the Criminal Offences Act to truly reflect the definition of the maker of the statement on the floor today. It is an abuse of public trust for private gain," he added.

He said the call on political parties to submit their accounts after general election should also be extended to individual candidates to know about their sources of money and justify their expenditure.

Mr Bagbin hinted that a National Anti-Corruption Action Plan would soon be laid before Parliament after some technical issues had been considered and expressed the hope that when the document was placed before the House, members would make an input to make it better.

Papa Owusu-Ankomah

For his part, Papa Owusu-Ankomah said Parliament must use its oversight responsibility over the ministries, departments and agencies as a tool to fight against corruption.

He stated, however, that Parliament had a long way to go in efforts at fighting against corruption and urged the various sector committees to continue to exercise their oversight responsibilities, even after budgets for the MDAs had been approved for appropriation.

He said although the country had so many laws against corruption, there was no will to implement them to uproot the canker from society.

He said it was unfortunate that public officers who did what was right were maligned by people who ought to know better.

Papa Owusu-Ankomah said petty corruption had become the order of the day, as people now believed that they could not get admission for their children and wards in schools or get employment without paying their way through.

He said some people even believed that they could gain admission to the universities and pay their way through to get first class honours, asking, "What society are we building? Let us, in everything we do, fight against corruption. It is Ghana that is suffering."

Papa Owusu-Ankomah lamented that public officers who did the right thing were described by their people as being wicked and urged those people not to be undaunted, since their efforts would be rewarded in future.

Mr Emmanuel Kwasi Banduah

In his statement, Mr Bandua had urged MPs to be alive to their responsibilities and rise up to the challenge in the exercise of their oversight responsibilities if they were to make a positive impact in the fight against corruption.

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