

Batidam abandons anti-corruption job, joins Mahama's administration



Renowned anti-corruption campaigner, and Executive Director of the African Parliamentarians' Network Against Corruption (APNAC), Daniel Batidam, has abandoned ship to join the Mahama administration as an advisor on governance; Public Agenda can confirm.

Batidam's appointment brings to 14, the number of presidential advisors and special aides at the behest of the president, and comes in the wake of recent public outcry over what is perceived as overloaded presidential staff list.

Revelations contained in an annual report on presidential office staff is that as many as 678 persons are employed in various capacities, including advisors to the President, presidential staffers, presidential aides and ministers of state to the presidency, provoked public outraged in February this year.

The list, released in fulfillment of Section 11 of the Presidential Act 1993 (Act 463), which demands that the President submits a list of staffers to the House annually, was said to be 17 more than the one inherited from the late President John Evans Atta Mills.

The list reportedly did not include the recent appointments at the Presidency, such as Ben Dotsei Mallor as the head of Communications and Spokesperson to the President and Kojo Adu-Asare, former Adenta MP who operates from the President's conference room at the Flagstaff House in-charge of yet-to-be-established youth fund, and other people who are known to be working at the press secretariat at the presidency.

There are five Ministers of State at the presidency namely, Major Dr. Mustapha Ahmed (rtd), Abdul Rashid

Pelpuo, Fiifi Kwetey, Alhassan Azong and Comfort Doyoe Cudjoe-Ghansah.

Other important personalities on the staff are the Chief of Staff, Prosper Bani; Deputy Chief of Staff, Dr. Valerie Sawyerr; Executive Secretary to the President, Dr. Raymond Atuguba; National Security Advisor, William Kwasi Aboah; Coordinator of Human Security Project, Brigadier-General Joseph Nunoo-Mensah and Secretary to Cabinet, Roger Angsomwine.

There are four senior presidential advisors who are, Paul Victor Obeng (May he rest in peace), Dr. Sulley Gariba, Alhaji Issifu Baba Braimah Kamara, former High Commissioner to Nigeria and Dr. Cadman Atta Mills.

Nine people were also mentioned in the report as presidential staffers and they are: Commodore Steve Obimpeh (rtd), Kwesi Baffoe-Bonnie, Emelia Arthur, former deputy Western Regional Minister; Dr Michael Kpessa Whyte of University of Ghana; Dr. Clement Abass Apaak of University of Ghana; James Agyenim-Boateng, former deputy minister of Information; Kweku Tsen, formerly of Daily Graphic Political Desk; Kwabena Owusu Akyeampong, former deputy Interior Minister and Kale Cezario, former Upper West Deputy Regional Minister.

The presidential aides are Stanislav Xoese Dogbe, Vincent Senam Kuagbenu former Director of the National Service Secretariat; Sandow Seidu Kpedu, attached to the First Lady, Lordina Mahama and Kofi Ofori.

Among the public and civil service staff at the office of the president are 316 household staff who work at the Flagstaff House, State House, Peduase Lodge and residences of the President and his Vice.

Twenty-one people, including a chief director, are working within the main administrative set-up while 15 people are working as executive and clerical officers.

Thirty-three people, mostly ladies, are on the secretariat staff while 12 people work with the procurement and supply unit.

Two hundred and sixty employees from the Ghana Health Service, Department of Parks and Gardens, Controller and Accountant-General's Department, Audit Service, Ghana National Fire Service, Public Works Department and the Ghana Postal Company, have also been attached to the presidency.

The news of Batidam's appointment comes as a surprise to many, not because of doubts about his competence, for he has a rich track record that speak about his worth, but the concern is that given the dire economic circumstances the country finds itself, and given the huge budget deficit that faces the economy, one would have expected the president to have shown some regard for the sensibilities of the citizenry and not continue to pile up costs with the appointments of new advisors and aides who will add to the already overburdened public purse.

The appointment of Mr Batidam again brings to 12, the number of civil society and NGO activists currently serving in the NDC government at levels of ministers, deputy ministers, advisors and special aides, but whose impacts are yet to be felt. Some political observers have noted that, good as these folks may be, they cannot change the political establishment. Many of these activists in government have already conformed to the status quo and in some instances, 'have become more catholic than the pope'. The concern being expressed among sections of the civil society fraternity is that as these outspoken civil society leaders join government the civil society front is weakened, and in the face of dwindling funding for citizens engagement with government the gains

made in holding governments to account would be inevitably reversed.

Batidam is a veteran anti-corruption campaigner. He was the founding Executive Secretary of the Ghana Integrity Initiative (GII), and until his appointment had a continent-wide responsibility for mobilising parliamentarians across Africa to fight against corruption in their respective countries. The African Parliamentarians Network Against Corruption, APNAC, as it is popularly known aims at coordinating, involving and strengthening the capacity of African Parliamentarians to fight corruption and promote good governance. It is one of the members of the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC). The network was formed in 1999 in Kampala, Uganda, with members of parliament drawn from 10 African countries i.e. Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Ghana, Uganda, South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Benin and Tanzania.

Batidam is said to have made immense contribution not only to the work of APNAC, but also in the raising of awareness on the destructive nature of corruption and the need to develop the right policy, legislative and institutional frameworks to counter it. Last year, when the Government announced a new bill it was developing to regulate the conduct of public officers Mr Batidam described it as a piecemeal approach to dealing with corruption in the country.

He said, "The new bill only scrapes the surface of a major national policy on corruption which has been abandoned by government in favour of a narrower policy". In his view, government should have rather provided legal backing to the National Anti Corruption Action Plan. "Why go for less when you can go more?" he questioned at the time.

It is not clear how Batidam intends to ensure that views he has expressed while outside government, are incorporated into government's policies, plans, and actions. Many indeed, doubt he will be able to make a change. The jury, however, is still out.

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