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Press Release

NATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS AUTHORITY (NCA) MUST IMMEDIATELY WITHDRAW DRACONIAN PUNITIVE MEASURES ON SIM CARD RE-REGISTRATION AND CEASE BEING A RUBBER STAMP REGULATOR.

Monday, 5th September, 2022

The National Communications Authority (NCA) must immediately withdraw its recently announced draconian punitive measures on SIM card re-registrations, and cease being a rubber stamp regulator in the communications industry.

Quite clearly, the inability of the NCA to assert its mandate is partly to blame for the current mess with the SIM card re-registration exercise. If the NCA really wants to achieve its aim of becoming a world-class regulator, then it must first wean itself off political control and the egos of the sector minister, and effectively regulate the communication industry using evidence-based research. As a former chief manager at the NCA, I know that this is an authority staffed by professionals who would only act in ways that promote the larger interest of Ghanaians. This is not the NCA that we know. The standards have fallen.

The National Communications Authority Act, 2008 (Act 769) which establishes the NCA makes it the central body to license and regulate communications activities and services in the country. Therefore, as an industry regulator, the NCA ought to always provide well-researched technical advice to the Minister of Communications and Digitalization. Of course, the government through the ministry can issue policy directives that have to be implemented through the NCA as the regulator. However, the NCA must not be a rubber stamp regulator. Because evidence over the past few years abound that the NCA is being used as a poodle by the minister to implement the draconian policies of government in the communication sector. The usurpation of the NCA's powers by the minister has become so bad that today, even the [Ghana Chamber of Telecommunication is urging Ghanaians](#) who have concerns about the SIM card registration to petition the minister and not necessarily the NCA. It's an affront to the mandate of the NCA to allow itself to become a rubber stamp regulator.

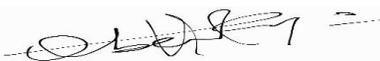
The NCA is very much aware of the challenges associated with the acquisition of the Ghana card. In fact, the NCA is well aware that millions of Ghanaians despite frantic efforts have not had their Ghana cards due to the inability of the National Identification Authority (NIA) to issue same. Yet the NCA went ahead to issue punitive measures at the instance of the sector minister, who is hell-bent on satisfying her ego rather than serving Ghanaians. Isn't the NCA supposed to prioritize the interest of Ghanaians over that of the minister?

Why the absence of queues doesn't mean all is well

It will be recalled that on 1st October, 2021, the ministry through the NCA commenced a nationwide SIM card re-registration exercise amidst protests from various sections of the country. Particularly the Minority in Parliament raised many concerns about the process and made recommendations with the aim to help guide the process smoothly. But the sector minister blatantly rejected good advice and proceeded on a tangent that was designed to frustrate Ghanaians, as we are witnessing today.

The Telecom Chamber in a recent statement noted that human traffic at the various registration centers had drastically reduced immediately after the deadline for registration was extended to 30th September. Soon after, the NCA announced punitive measures against unregistered SIM Cards bearers. The question the NCA should be asking is; why have Ghanaians who have acquired the Ghana card and were joining long queues for days to register their SIM cards at various registration centers suddenly abandoned the centers? This simply meant that people who had continuously absented themselves from work and abandoned their businesses to go and join long queues to register, only had a relief or breathing space. That should emphasize the point that the process of re-registration was very cumbersome and poorly implemented, thereby, giving people limited options. It was a needless process in the first place. So, it is out of place for the NCA to feed on that statement from the Telecom Chamber and start issuing punitive measures to consumers, without regard to the real challenge which is difficulty in acquiring Ghana cards. This is capricious.

Going forward, I will recommend for the NCA to include the passport and voter's ID as means of identification to enable Ghanaians who do not have the Ghana card yet to register their SIM Cards. Those who use the passport or voter's ID will then be mandated to update their records upon acquiring the card. Also, the introduction of the GH SIM Card Registration App is a commendable effort. However, the cost of using the App is quite exorbitant and exploitative and should be reduced. Having introduced the self-service registration App, the NCA should have had the patience to wait and observe the initial implementation challenges that may occur using the App, before rolling out any punitive measures.



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