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*Chapter Eight; CITIZENS ROLES IN A DEMOCRACY*

INTRODUCTION

Sovereignty resides in and flows from the people in a democracy. They have a collective right to choose their governmental, political and electoral systems as part of self-determination. The authority of government likewise derives from the will of the people in their choice of these systems, and the people have a right to take part in their government, including through genuine elections to determine who will legitimately occupy government offices. These precepts are embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in modern constitutions the world all over.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

The term ‘citizen’ has an inherently political meaning that implies a certain type of relationship between the people and government. Citizens have a set of rights and responsibilities, including the right to participate in decisions that affect public welfare. In addition to the intrinsic democratic value, participation is an instrumental driver of democratic and socio-economic change, and a fundamental way to empower citizens.

CITIZENS’ RIGHTS

Individual’s rights and liberties are the groundwork of the state since it exists to enable men to live and develop fully. In order to let the citizen, have a share in the running of his/her government, a group of rights is very essential. These rights are not absolute since they are limited by the rights of other citizens in the state. A right may therefore be defined as a privilege or prerogative conferred by law upon a person or a group. When a privilege is expressed within the framework of the constitution of the state, it becomes a civil right.

DEMOCRACY

The concept of democracy, like many other political concepts first originated from Ancient Greece where in the city states, citizens were free to meet frequently in assemblies, citizens were free to discuss state affairs, take decisions and exercise their political rights. Every citizen was expected to participate in the running of government. This is what some scholars classified as a direct democracy, a system that enables people exercise authority themselves.

Since there is no single definition of democracy however, what can be deduce form the various definitions of democracy are the followings features:

1. The fundamental rights of the citizens are guaranteed
2. Independent and impartial judiciary
3. Existence of rule of law
4. Freedom of press
5. Periodic election that is free and fair

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CITIZENS IN A DEMOCRACY

While the state provides right and liberties, all citizens have duties to the state. Democratic citizens recognise that they not only have rights, they have responsibilities. They recognise that democracy requires an investment of time and hard work. A government of the people demands constant vigilance and support by the people. Democratic citizens know that they must bear the burden of responsibility for their society if they are to benefit from its protection of their rights.

There is a saying in free societies; you get the government you deserve. For democracy to succeed, citizens must be active, not passive, because they know that the success or failure of the government is their responsibility, and no one else’s. In turn, government officials understand that all citizens should be treated equally. Citizens are therefore expected to perform the following responsibilities in a democracy;

1. A citizen in a democracy should have the duty to vote. There is no point in democracy in which we do not participate. People, who are unhappy with their leaders are free to organise and peacefully make the case for change or try to vote hose leaders out of office at established times for elections
2. Ac citizen should be willing to pay taxes, since without taxes to fund a democratic government, there would be no democracy. A democracy must provide for all of its citizens and this can be better enabled when citizens pay taxes.
3. A good citizen must have a duty to obey the law. A democracy cannot exist in a lawless society, and without the willingness of citizens to obey the law, which is really a social contract, no government has the wherewithal to police a nation of lawbreakers, and anarchy results. Therefore, they must be ready to assist the law enforcement officers by reporting breaches of the law and by giving them any useful information they may have.
4. A good citizen must refrain from uttering destructive criticisms but must be prepared to offer constructive alternatives to government policies. He should not stir up racial or class division within the state which may lead to bloodshed or chaos.

CONCLUSION

Democracy is a system of government where the citizens directly elect the government by voting. It is also defined as the system of government by the people, of the people and for the people. It is considered as the best form of government in the modern era as it allows citizens to enjoy many rights and it gives them responsibilities at the same time. It is a plus for citizens if they are born in a democratic country and that is why citizens must do everything to save democracy at all costs.

Citizens play an important role in democracy. There would probably be no democracy without the co-operation and commitment of citizens. Citizens must be aware of their rights and responsibilities as without the awareness among the citizens, a government may turn into a tyranny. Citizens should also check how institutions like investigating agencies, law making agencies, and even civil servants, that are put in place for the well-being of the democracy, are working at the same time, while being critical, citizens must also not lose sight of the pursuit of public interest. A positive attitude should be maintained with development of the state being the priority.