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Ghana: Death registration, death certificates and burial permits

Introduction

The following note describes the administrative procedures related to death registration and the related issuance of death certificates and burial permits. The note also touches upon the credibility of civil status documents in Ghana.

The note is primarily based on interviews conducted in Accra, Ghana, in December 2021. The interviewed sources are the head office of the Births and Deaths Registry Accra, a local births and deaths registry office at the Ridge Hospital in Accra and five western diplomatic representations.

Administrative structure and legislation related to death registration

Ghana is divided into 16 administrative regions.¹ At the local level, Ghana is divided into 261 metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies.²

The Births and Deaths Registry is composed of the head office in Accra, 16 regional offices, and numerous local offices and is collectively responsible for the establishment of legal identity in Ghana.³

Death registration in Ghana dates back to 1888 while birth registration began in 1912. In 1965, the Births and Deaths (Registration) Act made death registration compulsory within 24 hours from the time of death. After this timespan, a fee is required and after one year, it is no longer possible to register a death. This act is still in force.⁴

In 2020, the new Births and Deaths Registration Act was passed in parliament, making the registration more decentralised.⁵ As of December 2021, the Births and Deaths Registry is in the process of setting up offices at district level but it is unknown if the act is actually in force yet.⁶

¹ CIA World Factbook, 18 January 2022.

² Accra Metropolitan Assembly, 2021.

³ Births and Deaths Registry, Head Office, Accra, December 2021; Act No. 301, 29 September 1965.

⁴ Births and Deaths Registry, Head Office, Accra, December 2021; Act No. 301, 29 September 1965.

⁵ Births and Deaths Registry, Head Office, Accra, December 2021; Ghana Today, 28 August 2020.

⁶ Births and Deaths Registry, Head Office, Accra, December 2021.

Death registration in Ghana

Death registration in Ghana is performed at the local births and deaths registry having jurisdiction over the area where the death occurred. Death registration takes point of departure in the death registration form B (hereinafter Form B), which is filled in by hand. The information in Form B is based on one of two documents:

- If the deceased died in a hospital, the informant must provide a 'medical cause of death certificate', which is completed by a doctor based on a medical examination. This certificate is officially issued by the Ministry of Health, which should also be evident from the certificate.⁷
- If the deceased did not die in a hospital, a police report is needed in order to complete Form B.⁸

When Form B is completed, the local registrar use Form B to register the death in the 'register of death' book.⁹

If the deceased is below 15 years of age, an additional part of Form B is filled in concerning name, age, passport number of the mother and father.

According to the head office of the Births and Deaths Registry, when a register book is completed at a district office, they have 28 days to bring the book from the local registry to the head office for archiving. The district registrar brings the book to the head of the regional office who will take it to head office. Death registrations are digitalised at the head office and not at the local/district offices.¹⁰

⁷ Local Births and Deaths Registry, Accra, December 2021.

⁸ Local Births and Deaths Registry, Accra, December 2021.

⁹ Local Births and Deaths Registry, Accra, December 2021.

¹⁰ Births and Deaths Registry, Head Office, Accra, December 2021.

Burial permits

Based on a death registration, a burial permit is issued at the local births and deaths registry e.g. at the hospital to the informant/relative if the deceased is to be buried in that office's area of jurisdiction. If you have a burial permit issued, you do not get a death certificate. For most people, this is the last step of death registration. See Image 1 for a specimen of a burial permit.¹¹

FORM I

H BP/19 0329665

REPUBLIC OF GHANA

BURIAL PERMIT

(Section 20, (2) Act 301)
(Regulations 17 & 18)

Not to be Accepted for
any Legal/Financial
Transaction

This is to certify that the death of.....
late of.....who died on the.....day of.....20.....
has been duly registered in the Register of Deaths at.....
and permission is hereby given for the burial of the body
Witness my hand this..... day of.....20.....

Registrar

OWNER, MANAGER OR SEXTON'S ENDORSEMENT OF PRESCRIBED PARTICULARS

Registrar of Deaths

.....

The above body was buried on the.....day of..... — ..20.....
in Grave No.....in.....
Burial Ground at.....

Sexton

Date.....20.....

Note—Owner, Manager or Sexton shall return this form to the Registrar of the area in which the Burial Ground is situated

BDR Form No. 9

Image 1: Burial permit. (NIDC reference material)

¹¹ Local Births and Deaths Registry, Accra, December 2021.

Death certificates

Death certificates are issued at the local births and deaths registry to informants of deceased people if the deceased is to be buried in another jurisdiction than the jurisdiction of the issuing registry. The informant must then get a burial permit at the births and deaths registry, which has jurisdiction over the area of the burial site.¹² See Image 2 for a specimen of a death certificate.

FORM H

FDC/19 0376413

REPUBLIC OF GHANA

DEATH CERTIFICATE
(Section 20, Act 301)
(Regulation 17)

This is to certify that the death of.....
of..... who died on the.....
day of..... Date at.....
has been duly registered on the..... day of Date.....
in the Register of Deaths for.....
in the Registration District

The lateaged.....
was a national of

Witness my hand thisday ofDate.....

.....
Registrar

BDR Form No, 8

Image 2: Death certificate. (NIDC reference material)

A certified copy of the death registration can be produced after the issuance of the burial permit but it requires a letter from the court. An extraction will then be made of the original death registration; hence, the certified copy will include the same information as the burial permit and Form B.¹³ This type of certified copy is not to be confused with the document called *the certified copy of entry to register of death*.

¹² Local Births and Deaths Registry, Accra, December 2021.

¹³ Local Births and Deaths Registry, Accra, December 2021.

Certified copy of entry in register of deaths

The certified copy of entry in register of deaths (Image 3) is needed for any legal claims/inheritance.¹⁴ A relative can apply for the document at regional level and at the local/district registry. The document is printed at the head office in Accra and at the main offices in Ashanti and Greater Accra. However, documents printed in Ashanti and Greater Accra must be brought to the head office of the Births and Deaths Registry in Accra for signatures and stamps.¹⁵ The applicant must present a death certificate or certified copy of the death registration to get the certified copy of entry in register of deaths issued.¹⁶

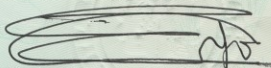
E20/ 1002709		No: 020114-11999-2009	
Republic of Ghana			
CERTIFIED COPY OF ENTRY IN REGISTER OF DEATHS			
Entry No.	11999	Registry: KORLE BU	
Name in full. First name first and surname last.	SAMPLE SAMPLE		Sex: FEMALE
Age	1	Nationality	
Place and address of deceased. (Write number of house, name of street, name of ward or part of town.)	SAMPLE RESIDENCE SAMPLE TOWN SAMPLE DISTRICT		
Occupation			
Place of Death			
Date of Death	1ST JANUARY 1900		
Cause of Death	SAMPLE CAUSE OF DEATH		
Full Name and Qualification of qualified Medical Practitioner certifying Cause of Death	SAMPLE DOCTOR SAMPLE QUALIFICATION		
Date of Registration	24TH AUGUST 2009		
Signature in full or Name in full and mark duly witnessed of Informant	KWAKU BAAH	Informant's relationship to the deceased BROTHER	
Place of Burial (Write name of cemetery and town.)	SAMPLE CEMETERY SAMPLE TOWN		
Signature of Registrar	SAMPLE REGISTRAR		
Margin			
I, EDWARD NORTEYE, Registrar of Births and Deaths for Ghana do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true copy of the entry No. 11999 in the Register of Deaths for KORLE BU in the ACCRA METROPOLITAN ASSEMBLY.			
Given under my hand and Seal in Accra in Ghana this 10TH day of DECEMBER 2021			
 Registrar of Births and Deaths L. S.			

Image 3: Certified copy of entry in register of death. (NIDC reference material)

¹⁴ Local Births and Deaths Registry, Accra, December 2021.

¹⁵ Births and Deaths Registry, Head Office, Accra, December 2021.

¹⁶ Births and Deaths Registry, Head Office, Accra, December 2021.

Late registration of the certified copy of entry in register of deaths

According to a 2006 report from the Danish Immigration Service, late registration of death requires a statutory declaration with an explanation of why the death has not been timely registered together with a sworn declaration attesting to the death. On this basis, the registrar completes Form B and issues a certified copy of entry in register of deaths (Image 3). Hence, it is possible to have a certified copy of entry in register of deaths issued without providing any proof of the death. The registrar does not issue the death certificate (Image 2).¹⁷

¹⁷ Danish Immigration Service, 11 July 2006, p. 9.

References

Oral sources

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