

**MESSAGE ON THE STATE OF THE NATION BY THE PRESIDENT OF  
THE REPUBLIC, NANA ADDO DANKWA AKUFO-ADDO, ON THE  
OCCASION OF THE STATE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT ON TUESDAY,  
FEBRUARY 21, 2017.**

Mr. Speaker,

It is good to be back here again in this Chamber, where I spent some 12 memorable years as a Member of Parliament. I recollect with nostalgia the vigorous debates of my days here as a Minority MP, and I have very fond memories of being on the Majority side also.

I can see some old faces from my first days here – like the 2<sup>nd</sup> Deputy Speaker, Hon. Alban Bagbin, whom I came to meet in the House in 1997, and who became a good friend of mine; and Hon Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu, the Majority Leader, with whom I entered Parliament on the same side, at the same time.

On December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016, the Ghanaian people went to the polls, and voted decisively for change. As a result, today, I am here again in this House, this time as President of the Republic, having secured an emphatic, electoral victory.

Mr. Speaker, we have to thank God for His Grace and Favour for a peaceful and smooth transfer of power, in which Ghanaians rose to the occasion, and made our nation the object of world admiration. The Ghanaian people are to be commended for their strong attachment to the principles of democratic accountability.

I would like to take this opportunity, Mr Speaker, to express my sincere appreciation to my predecessor, President John Mahama, for his leadership and his role in the transition. His conduct has been a credit to our nation.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to see the presence in this House of two other former Presidents of the Republic, their Excellencies Jerry John Rawlings and John Agyekum Kufuor. I am in the enviable position of being the first Ghanaian leader to be able to draw on the experiences of three living, former Presidents. This should, definitely, enrich my tenure of office.

Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your unanimous election to preside over the affairs of this House. It is a fitting acknowledgement of your distinguished service to our nation. I congratulate also your deputies on their appointments, the 1<sup>st</sup> Deputy Speaker, a respected member of the House, Hon. Joe Osei Wusu, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Deputy Speaker, the veteran legislator, Hon. Alban Bagbin. I commend also the Majority Leader, my contemporary in this House, who can

now put his extensive experience of Parliament to use as Leader of the House and Minister for Parliamentary Affairs. My compliments go, too, to the new Minority Leader, Hon. Haruna Iddrisu, who announced himself on the national stage when he came here in my last term in the House. It is clear that he has an important future in Ghanaian politics. I want to assure him and the leadership of the House, on both sides, that I will co-operate fully with Parliament to enhance the governance of our nation to be able to do the business of Ghana effectively.

Mr. Speaker, I use this occasion to commend the Electoral Commission and its Chairperson, Charlotte Osei, for the conduct of our recent elections, which has received domestic and international acclaim. In the coming years, I hope that our electoral processes will become even more robust, so that free and fair elections become automatic parts of our democratic culture.

Mr. Speaker, certain incidents occurred during the transition period that are matters of concern to me, and should be to every Ghanaian, as they marred an otherwise dignified and successful transition. Wrongdoing has no political colour, and I do not subscribe to the lawlessness of political party supporters simply because their party has been elected into office.

Mr. Speaker, when those incidents began, I instructed the then Inspector General of Police, John Kudalor, to apply the law, irrespective of political affiliation, to all lawbreakers. This instruction was also carried on to his successor, David Asante Appeatu. Both of them acted upon it, which helped to bring the situation under control.

It appears these events were predicated on some concept of equalisation, as they happened in 2009, and were repeated again in 2017. I condemn all such conduct, and I call on all political parties, especially the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress, to ensure that this is the last time such undignified acts occur during our periods of transition.

Mr. Speaker, I come before you, today, in fulfilment of the constitutional obligation that the President of the Republic gives a message to Parliament on the state of the nation at the beginning of Parliament's session.

Since my inauguration some six weeks ago as president of our country, I have set to work, putting into place the members of the team who will help me govern.

I have heard it said that I am behaving like a man in a hurry. Mr. Speaker, I am, indeed, in a hurry, I am in a great hurry. The times, in which we live, demand that we, all, be in a hurry to deal with the problems we face.

I am grateful, therefore, to the Honourable House for the expeditious manner in which my ministerial nominees have been vetted and approved, thus far. I look forward to the House dealing with the rest of the nominees I send, in an equally fast and efficient manner.

Now that the processes for the composition of the Council of State have been completed, I shall inaugurate the Council this week, which will enable me to proceed rapidly with the appointments that need to be done in consultation with the Council. The full complement of appointments should be in place by the end of March.

Mr. Speaker, the conditions in our country demand that government machinery functions efficiently and at full force, and that nothing is left on autopilot. The conditions demand that all of us, each and every one of us, tackle every task before us with speed and dedication.

Mr Speaker, to give a fair account of the state of our nation, I have to give an account of the state of our economy, of our governance and of our national culture and attitudes. This account will highlight some of the fundamental elements of the situation, and will not pretend to be a detailed, sectoral analysis of our condition. I leave that to the budget statement, to be delivered in ten days time.

Mr. Speaker, I say nothing new or dramatic, when I tell this Honourable House that the economy of our country is in a bad way. After all, in the run-up to the recent elections, I said so, often and loudly. Some six weeks after taking over the reins of government, it gives me no pleasure to have to say that our worst fears have been confirmed, plus a few additional, unpleasant surprises as well.

Mr Speaker, many get quite lost when economists start rattling figures and statistics. I will try not to bore you with a lot of figures, but I hope you will bear with me as I have to put certain essential facts before our country.

You would recall that, notwithstanding the fact that the previous government had more than ten times the financial resources than any other government since independence, its management of our economy in the run up to the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections resulted in a quagmire that necessitated the urgent intervention of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2014. The IMF programme negotiated was ostensibly to restore fiscal discipline, debt sustainability and increase economic growth. The previous government promised Ghanaians that the reckless public expenditure that characterized the 2012 election year would not be repeated in 2016.

Mr. Speaker, the promises to the Ghanaian people were, however, not kept. In fact, virtually all the targets under the IMF programme, as at December 2016, have been missed. Fiscal indiscipline, once again, reared its head in the

2016 election year. Total projected expenditure for 2016 was GH¢43.9 billion (26% of GDP), but actual expenditure amounted to GH¢50.3 billion (30.2% of GDP). The full facts of the situation have not been put before the Ghanaian people. It appears, from what we are finding out, that some GH¢7 billion of arrears and outstanding payments circumvented the very public financial management system that was put in place to prevent such occurrences. These expenditures are being currently audited.

Mr. Speaker, at the same time, revenue performance for the year was poor. The total revenue target for our country was GH¢37.9 billion (22.7% of GDP), but the actual revenue came in at GH¢33.2 billion (19.9% of GDP).

Mr. Speaker, the combination of higher expenditures and lower revenues than projected resulted in a significant increase in the budget deficit for 2016. As compared to a target of 5.3% under the IMF programme, the fiscal deficit for 2016 was 9% of GDP on a cash basis and 10.2% of GDP on a commitment basis (that is on the basis of expenditures undertaken but not yet paid for). It should be recalled that, at the time Ghana entered into the IMF programme to restore fiscal discipline, the fiscal deficit was 10.2% of GDP. It is very clear, therefore, that the objectives set out in the programme have not been achieved.

Mr. Speaker, the increasing fiscal deficits were financed by increased borrowing. As at the beginning of 2009, Ghana's total debt stock was GH¢9.5 billion. By the end of 2016, the debt stock had ballooned to GH¢122 billion. Ghana's debt stock now stands at 74% of GDP, after all the previous denials to the contrary. More debt was accumulated by the previous government in the last eight years than all other governments put together since independence! In fact, 92% of Ghana's total debt stock was incurred in the last eight years under the previous government. The interest costs on this debt have also increased and will amount to an estimated GH¢14.1 billion in 2017.

Mr. Speaker, the reality of the state Ghana's public finances today are quite stark. Today, as a result of policy choices, we find ourselves in a situation where Ghana's total revenue is consumed by three main budgetary lines: wages and salaries, interest payments and amortization and statutory payments. These three items alone account for 99.6% of government revenue. This means that anything else that government has to do outside of these lines will have to be financed by borrowing or aid. After eight years of the previous government, there is practically no fiscal space left. The persistent resort to borrowing for any additional expenditures to meet the aspirations of our people is also not sustainable. We cannot continue this way with our public finances. I will not allow this economy to collapse under my watch. We will reduce significantly the fiscal deficit this year.

Mr. Speaker, Ghana's economic growth has also declined dramatically. Notwithstanding the record amount of financial resources at the disposal of the previous government, Ghana's GDP growth in 2016 (including oil) is estimated at 3.6%. This is the lowest GDP growth in about 23 years.

Mr. Speaker, Ghana's banking sector has not escaped the economic decline and has become increasingly fragile. Bad loans in the banking sector have risen significantly. Economic and Financial data from the Central Bank show that non-performing loans have risen sharply from 11.2% in May 2015 to 17.3% in December 2016. The recent Asset Quality Review of Banks shows significant vulnerability of banks to current economic conditions, with many exhibiting significant weaknesses.

Mr. Speaker, low growth, rising rate of unemployment, high fiscal deficits, high and rising debt, and increased depreciation of the cedi, high cost of food, housing and utilities and high non-performing loans, amongst others, are symptoms of deeper structural problems that will require a range of reforms, beginning immediately and spanning the short, medium and long terms. We are going to have to implement some tough, prudent and innovative policies to get out of this financial cul-de sac and rescue this economy, restore fiscal discipline and debt sustainability as well as increase economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me no joy to tell the story of the economy as it is - as we inherited it. Too much time, energy and resources were spent in the past, in my view, without a deliberate, conscious assessment of their impact on jobs, and whether or not we were spending wisely to improve the lives of the people, communities and businesses. But, I was not elected by the overwhelming majority of the Ghanaian people to complain. I was elected to get things done. I was elected to fix what is broken and my government and I are determined to do just that. At the beginning of March, the Minister for Finance will come to this House to lay out in the national budget the details of our economic policy and the clear roadmap that we have laid out for taking the country out of its current predicament and onto a sustainable path of recovery, jobs creation and prosperity. I am absolute in my confidence that we have the programme, the competence, the commitment, and the goodwill of the people to turn things around. By the Grace of God, we will succeed and I believe this House knows it too.

In the immediate term, targeted legislative policy and institutional reforms will have to be undertaken to unleash the suppressed potential of the economy and allow Ghanaian entrepreneurship to rise and thrive, domestically and internationally.

For too many young people, unemployment is sadly the reality of the start to their adult life. For years, for generations, it was assumed and guaranteed in this country that the quality of life of every generation would be an improvement on that of their parents. We are now faced with the phenomenon of parents looking on in frustration as their grown-up children remain at home, without the means to strike an independent life by themselves.

This generation of Ghanaians dares not be the one to reverse this natural trend. We must create the atmosphere that generates jobs. We must boost the confidence of the private sector to invest in the economy.

We must have the courage to start building our future and take the hard decisions that need to be taken to grow our economy. We have no choice but to reduce the budget deficit and cut waste in all sectors of public life. We must complete the formalisation of the economy. The process for a comprehensive national identification system and a property titling system will be completed this year. That will boost confidence in our country and increase investment from nationals and foreigners. Then we will be able to generate jobs.

We must boost the confidence of the private sector to invest in the economy.

Mr. Speaker, I believe the starting point in turning round our fortunes must be with agriculture. Unfortunately, the state of agriculture in our country right now is not good. Farmers are left on their own. It is not surprising, therefore, that food prices are high and we are having to import almost everything we eat, including vegetables from our Sahelian neighbours. And yet, agriculture provides the best opportunity to use modern methods to change the lives of many, within the shortest possible time.

We have to irrigate our lands and equip farmers with the skills needed to make farming a well-paying business. We aim to popularize farming by encouraging many people to take it up as a full or part time activity. A National Campaign, **"PLANTING FOR FOOD AND JOBS"**, will be launched to stimulate this activity. An amount of 125 million Canadian dollars has been secured from Canada, a friend of our nation, to support the initiative.

This Campaign will be anchored on the pillars that will transform agriculture: the provision of improved seeds, the supply of fertilizers, the provision of dedicated extension services, a marketing strategy and the use of e-Agriculture.

To initiate the Campaign, the District Assemblies will be tasked to identify and register progressive farmers in each of the 216 districts.

Mr Speaker, for too long our farmers have been left to cope by themselves, without the necessary support from government. For too long, our farmers have been left to the mercy of the vagaries of the weather.

We have decided to embark upon a programme to provide water to enable all-year farming. We are calling it the one-village, one-dam policy. It is a programme that I expect will rapidly get the support of the population, and should help to transform food insecurity in our country.

The three northern regions, in particular, will benefit from the availability of water to enable all-year farming, so that the enforced yearly migration can be minimized and food production become more predictable.

I look forward to an increase in public investment in agriculture, starting from the first budget of my government. We must reverse the unfortunate trend of the past eight years, which saw a regular decrease in public investment in the sector that provides a living for the majority of our people.

Mr Speaker, food processing has been the first step towards industrialization in virtually every country, and it is time for us to take it seriously. Not only will it serve to cut down on the wastage of crops during the high season, it will provide more jobs and expand farming business. Food processing will also save time in the preparation and cooking of our local foods, and there will be better control on the hygiene in the process. Mr. Speaker, I look forward to an exciting time in the agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, if I were to ask each one of you in this Chamber, today, to tell me what the number one problem was in your constituency, I suspect there would be a uniform answer: JOBS.

The most critical challenge, inherited by this NPP government, is the very high, unprecedented level of unemployment, particularly among the youth. It is a debilitating and confidence-sapping problem that affects every home. We can argue on what the official rate of unemployment is, but we can all see the desperation of our young people. They want to work, but there are no jobs and some of them are being driven to unacceptable behaviour. We have a veritable time bomb on our hands.

To address this challenge, the government is embarking on one of the most comprehensive programmes for industrial transformation ever to be introduced in our country.

The key elements of this programme are:

1. restoration and maintenance of a stable macro-economy

2. monetary and fiscal measures which will lead to a reduction in interest rates and a reduction in the tax burden on enterprises
3. provision of reliable, affordable power to enterprises and homes
4. setting up of a stimulus package to support existing Ghanaian industries and improve their competitiveness
5. implementation of the initiative, through public-private partnerships, to establish at least one industrial enterprise in each of the 216 Districts in the "One District, One Factory" policy
6. development of strategic anchor initiatives as new pillars of growth for the Ghanaian economy, including the establishment of petrochemical industries; an iron and steel industry; an integrated aluminum industry; the expansion of the domestic production of pharmaceuticals; the establishment of a vehicle assembly and automotive industry; the production of industrial salt; the establishment of garment and textiles enterprises; and the manufacture of machinery, equipment and component parts
7. establishment of a multi-purpose industrial park in each of the ten regions
8. implementation of a comprehensive programme for SME development
9. establishment of an industrial sub-contracting exchange to link large scale companies with SMEs
10. implementation of an aggressive programme for export development, targeting, primarily, regional and continental markets
11. enhancement of domestic retail market infrastructure and the active promotion of the marketing and distribution of domestically produced goods
12. improvement of the business environment through regulatory and other reforms, and
13. establishment of a permanent consultative forum for public-private sector dialogue.

We are confident that, through these interventions, significant job opportunities will be opened to Ghanaians across the country.

Mr. Speaker, the Takoradi to Paga railway, connecting the Eastern and Western corridors, will be initiated this year to open up our country and provide access to our landlocked neighbours. It will also provide a lot of jobs.



Mr Speaker, probably the most difficult problem, that has dogged this nation in the past five years, has been in the energy sector. This has caused havoc in small, medium and large enterprises. It has disrupted families and businesses and brought many organizations to their knees.

The most obvious manifestation of the energy problem has earned us notoriety in the world, with the entry into Wikipedia and other dictionaries of the word DUMSOR. It is a phenomenon that has blighted our lives, destroyed appliances and collapsed many companies. The attempts by the previous government to resolve the crisis have led to a gargantuan debt overhang in the sector.

We have inherited a heavily indebted energy sector, with the net debt reaching 2.4 billion US dollars as at December 2016. I have to point out the alarming fact that 800 million US dollars of this debt is owed to local banks, which threatens their stability and that of the whole financial sector. Indeed, the huge indebtedness of the energy sector constitutes the single major hurdle to Ghanaians enjoying reliable and affordable electricity supply.

Mr Speaker, there has been some improvement in the power supply since November last year, but the challenges facing Ghana's power sector are far from over. The key problem is cost. We produce power from Akosombo at three US cents per kilowatt hour. The marginal price charged for businesses is an effective 42 cents, more than ten times the average tariff in West Africa.

This makes it very difficult to start or run a business here and be competitive. The cost of energy destroys businesses large and small. It is the bane of the vulcanizer, the tailor, the dressmaker and the hairdresser, the carpenter and the wayside fitting mechanic. It destroys jobs. It compounds poverty. The current state of the energy situation in our country is unsatisfactory.

The problems are enormous, but we must, and we will, confront them.

I am proposing a number of policy interventions. We will improve on transparency in tariff setting, and introduce a new tariff policy that will reclassify consumer categories in order to protect lifeline and strategic industrial consumers. We will also reduce significantly some of the levies and taxes on the tariffs.

As at the end of 2016, the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) had signed 43 Power Purchase Agreements (PPA), whilst a further 23 were under discussion. Government is conducting a review of all the Power Agreements entered into by the previous government in order to prioritise, renegotiate, defer or cancel outright, if necessary, in the national interest.

Overall, we have begun to develop a national electricity masterplan, which will also explore the benefits of listing VRA and GRIDCO on the Stock Exchange.

Mr. Speaker, my government will enforce the procurement law. We will insist on open and competitive bidding for power capacity procurement. This will not only reduce the cost of power projects and ensure value for money, but will also address the problem of unplanned procurement.

Government will encourage increased private sector investment in utility scale solar and wind energy projects, as well as accelerate the development of mini-grid solutions in off-grid and island communities for lighting, irrigation and other economic activities.

We will, consequently, review the Renewable Energy Act to provide further incentives to attract the private sector to invest.

Mr Speaker, the Ghana Compact II programme has officially come into force. Both parties to the Compact, the Governments of Ghana and United States of America, are committed to complying with their obligations. However, the implementation of Ghana's commitments has faced some challenges due to disagreements between stakeholders, particularly between labour, ECG and the Millennium Development Authority (MiDA).

We need further dialogue on the key issues that have generated these disagreements. We are aware that these discussions should be concluded urgently in order to arrive at the decisions that will allow for its implementation. We expect that all stakeholders will discuss these issues dispassionately and transparently, to ensure that all concerns are adequately addressed.

Mr. Speaker, the success of all our plans and all our aspirations depends on our ability to educate our young people, and provide the opportunity for lifelong education to the adult population. Mr. Speaker, it is not an original statement, but it is a true statement: education is the key; education holds the key to the rapid development of our country; it holds the key to a better understanding and accommodation with our environment; it equips us with the skills required to deal with the world; education holds the key to the prosperous and happy Ghana we all want and deserve.

Luckily, there is consensus amongst us on the need to provide quality education to all of Ghana's children. If I am in a hurry, I am in a hurry to ensure that every child born in this country attends school from Kindergarten to Senior High School; in other words, that is the basic education that each

child is required to receive. We intend to reform the basic school curricula with emphasis on literacy, numeracy and creative skills.

And just in case there is anyone left in this country who has not heard yet, Free SHS starts with the 2017/2018 entrants into the public SHS.

We shall embark upon a vigorous expansion and re-equipping of Technical, Vocational and Agricultural schools and align all TVAET under the Ministry of Education to ensure standardization.

The teaching of mathematics and science will take pride of place in all schools, as we aim to make understanding of the scientific basis of life a central plank in our schools. We will, thus, make the use of ICT a central feature of our national life.

My government shall place teachers at the centre of quality education, and encourage professionalism among them. There will have to be some legislative reforms to ease some of the bottlenecks at the district level of supervision.

By the way, teacher trainee allowances will be restored when the Minister of Finance comes to read the budget. We keep our promises, just as we shall ensure that our sports development is hinged on the revival of school sports.

Mr. Speaker, there has been far too much tension in the education sector. It is in everyone's interest that the school experience is a happy one for children, teachers and parents alike. The happy and skilled population that will drive the path to development starts at school. We aim to provide the key to prosperity in our schools.

Mr. Speaker, we have to be healthy if we are to make a success of the plans and aspirations we have. The National Health Insurance Scheme remains the best option we have devised to ensure that as many people as possible have access to health care in our clinics and hospitals. The scheme is not in a good state, and there are too many providers that are owed money. They are threatening to opt out and stop offering their services to the most vulnerable in our society. We shall restore the National Health Insurance Scheme to good health.

And yes, the Minister for Finance will restore the allowances to trainee nurses in the budget.

Mr. Speaker, government will work with Parliament to pass the Affirmative Action Bill to increase women's involvement in decision making at all levels, and enable us achieve our current objective of 30 per cent participation of women in public appointments.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come to enforce the Disability Act and ensure its compliance, which will begin with access to public buildings for the physically challenged. The Minister for Local Government will also see to the implementation of the District Integrated Social Services programme for children, families and vulnerable adults.

Mr. Speaker, our people can only prosper and flourish in an atmosphere of peace and security. Safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the nation is critical for our progress.

We will improve the state of combat readiness of our armed forces by improving the logistical infrastructure, and improve the welfare of service men and women and also of veterans. Our armed forces remain one of the best-organized and most professional in Africa.

Mr. Speaker, I bring you greetings from The Gambia, where I was a guest last weekend at the inauguration ceremony of President Adama Barrow. Ghana should always take its membership of ECOWAS seriously, as its viability advances our national interest.

One of the first issues that came to my attention, as soon as I assumed office, was the request from ECOWAS to send a military contingent from Ghana, as part of the ECOWAS Mission in The Gambia (ECOMIG) to resolve the post-electoral impasse in that country. Senegal was to provide 3,150; Nigeria 509; and Ghana 210 troops. I assented to the request as it involved large issues of regional stability, and the preservation of democracy and rule of law in a member state. Ghana sent 208 troops. The Mission succeeded in creating the necessary environment for the rule of law to be maintained, and for the rightful transfer of authority to the newly elected President. I saw with my own eyes how popular that event has been in the Gambia; and how popular is the ECOWAS mission.

Consequently, ECOWAS has now put forward a new mandate which involves reducing the force to one of 500 soldiers, intended to be a stabilisation force. As from yesterday, February 20, Senegal will provide 250, Nigeria 200 and Ghana 50 troops in the force.

Presently about 3,000 Ghanaian soldiers are involved in peace keeping operations around the globe. We need to do more to keep their morale high and empower them. We have decided that they should be paid their allowances at post, and not on their return. I am glad to say that this new regime of payment has been applied to the case of The Gambian deployment.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to be able to inform the House that the outstanding arrears of 13 million US dollars for all peacekeeping personnel have been cleared by my government, and the contingents in the Gambia have been paid all their allowances in full.

I have asked the Minister for Defence to come shortly before Parliament and make a statement on the Gambian deployment.

There are serious difficulties facing our armed forces that are not unlike those facing other parts of our public sector. Overcrowded and inappropriate accommodation for personnel, inability to pay food and utility bills, and threats from providers to cut supplies; these are the everyday stories in all departments and our armed forces face the same problems. It is a regrettable state of affairs that will not continue under my administration.

Mr. Speaker, the police are the first line of security and protection for citizens. We must have an efficient police service that has the confidence and support of the people. I am determined to give whatever support is required from government to ensure that we have the service that the people of Ghana deserve. We must get a more professional police service, where recruitment and training practices are of acceptable international standards. We shall continue recruitment into the police service, with the aim of meeting the U.N ratio of 1 police officer to 500 civilians, and also ensuring gender equity.

All of us are agreed on the Ghana we want; a prosperous, united and peaceful country. Some countries have made progress in the economic field and achieved some of the results we desire. I have listened with incredulity, as some amongst us have advocated the harsh methods that appear to have helped some countries achieve rapid progress.

Some, amongst us, seem to be flirting with the concept of authoritarianism and romanticising it, as an acceptable price to pay to achieve rapid development.

Mr. Speaker, I have an unshakable and undying belief in freedom and the democratic process, and in their capacity to inspire rapid development. Development in freedom should remain our moral anchor. That is the Ghanaian way and that is the Akufo-Addo way.

The rule of law should remain our guiding and unbending principle. Those of us in public service should acknowledge that corruption is one of the biggest concerns to the people of Ghana. It is the one subject on which a surprising number of people are willing to tolerate a waiver of due process. This is

because, unfortunately, public officials are in danger of losing the confidence of the people in the fight against corruption. There is a perception that all public officials are part of a great scam to defraud the public and that they protect each other. It is in everybody's interest that the fight against corruption is transparent and has the support of the public.

Mr Speaker, the office of the Special Prosecutor has been shown to work in other places, and I shall be bringing legislation before the House for its rapid establishment. I am satisfied that the Office will be established in a manner consistent with the Constitution. In like manner, I shall propose for legislation amendments to the current asset declaration regime to make it more effective.

Mr Speaker, the people of Ghana have voted for change. All the various arms of government should recognize this strong desire on the part of the people for change. We continue along the path of business as usual at our own risk.

Mr Speaker, my personal belief in and adherence to the concept of the separation of powers is well-known, and I do not intend to interfere in any way in the affairs of Parliament or the Judiciary. But I would be failing in my duty if I failed to say what needs to be said.

Mr Speaker, all three arms of government, the Executive, the Judiciary and the Legislature need to take cognisance of the clear desire of the people of Ghana for change. All three branches must change the way we do things. I ask this Honourable House to take a candid look at itself and consider changing the way it conducts its business, if needs be.

Mr Speaker, there are some areas of our lives in which we can all demonstrate the change for which the people of Ghana have voted: punctuality, sanitation and the care of the environment. Over the years, it has become acceptable practice that official functions invariably start and close late. We invite people to functions for 9am and start at 10am. I have heard some offer the preposterous excuse that there is something cultural about not paying attention to time. Mr Speaker, let us show that we acknowledge that change has, indeed, come by being punctual to functions. I intend to set a personal example.

The other area of our lives in which we can and should start making a change is the care of the environment.. We are in danger of destroying our blessed country. Ours is a beautiful country. If we claim to love our country, we must take care of the lands, the trees, the water bodies and the animals. They are part of what makes Ghana.

The change we have voted for demands that we adopt better and sustainable sanitation habits, and learn to protect and preserve our environment.

Mr. Speaker, there is one subject on my mind that I wish to put before the House for consideration. I believe, in this 60<sup>th</sup> year of our nation, that the time is ripe for us to establish consensus on some national issues. It is important for us to have a conversation on how we name things that are of national importance to us all. I speak of the seat of the Presidency and Founder's Day.

In my view, it is not right that, 60 years after independence, these matters are still at large. It does not inure to the dignity of the Ghanaian Republic that such matters have become subject to political football.

I believe we have to settle these matters once and for all, and in due course, I propose we have a national conversation and dialogue to this effect which, hopefully, will end in legislation that will reflect the national consensus.

Mr. Speaker, in a few days' time, we shall mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the independence of our country. Ebenezer, thus far has the Lord brought us.

Mr. Speaker, we all know where we want Ghana to be, and we are aware we are not where we want to be or ought to be. We also know of the big dreams of our forefathers to build a self-reliant and self-sustaining nation that would take pride of place amongst the comity of nations.

This anniversary provides us with the opportunity to reflect on our past and plan for the future. This is the Ghana we see – a new Ghana.

We will put in place policies that will deliver sustainable growth and cut out corruption.

We will set upon the path to build a Ghana that is not dependent on charity; a Ghana that is able to look after its people through intelligent management of the resources with which it has been endowed.

This is our path, and this path offers a new Ghana.

This Ghana will be defined by integrity, sovereignty, a common ethos, discipline, and shared values. It is one where we aim to be masters of our own destiny, where we mobilise our own resources for the future, breaking the shackles of the "Guggisberg" colonial economy and a mind-set of dependency, bailouts and extraction. It is an economy where we look past commodities to position ourselves in a global marketplace. It is a country where we focus on trade, not aid, a hand-up, not a hand-out. It is a country with a strong private sector. It is a country that recognises the connectedness of its people and economy to those of its neighbours.

This requires a forward-looking vision for our country, enabling us to confront our challenges and embrace our opportunities, not one fastened in the rear-view mirror.

It is a Ghana beyond aid.

Mr. Speaker, thank you, and may God bless our homeland Ghana and make her great and strong.

