

**STATEMENT BY H.E. JOHN DRAMANI MAHAMA
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA
TO COMMEMORATE HIS APPOINTMENT AS
CO-CHAIR OF THE GROUP OF EMINENT ADVOCATES
FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)**

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE, ACCRA
12 FEBRUARY 2016

Your Excellency Ms. Christine Evans-Klock, UN Resident Coordinator

Your Excellency Hege Hertzberg, Ambassador of Norway,
representing the Prime Minister of Norway

Heads of the various United Nations Organisations in Ghana

Honourable Ministers of State here present

Honourable Members of Parliament

Our distinguished traditional rulers

Ladies and gentlemen,

This week we had the honour of joining the first ladies of Africa at the 7th African Conference on Sexual Health and Rights at the Kempinski Hotel. Included in this conference were the continental launch of a campaign that does advocacy on adolescent health, and also, significantly, the launch of Ghana's campaign on ending what I consider the most obnoxious practice of the 21st century, that is child marriage.

I believe that today's event, coming after the very busy conference on sexual health and rights organized by Curious Minds in conjunction with the First Ladies, is a good climax to the week, and I want to congratulate all the organisers, including the UN system, and all those who made that conference possible, for the hard work they put in.

Late January, I attended the inauguration of the SDGs Eminent Advocates Group, having been appointed the Co-Chair by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Secretary-General in his statement at the inauguration expressed his appreciation to me for the leadership role I had played on the continent in several issues dealing with peace and security and other matters.

But above all, he highly praised my country Ghana for our efforts in achieving many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and he also praised Ghana for our role in the consolidation of democracy in Africa, respect for human rights and the rule of law.

I, therefore, have absolutely no doubt in my mind that my appointment is attributable to the image of respect that our country Ghana has carved for itself on the international stage. And so I want to dedicate this honour done me to all the people of Ghana, because it is all of us who have earned this honour.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) come on the heels of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the UN's signature global development agenda which ushered in the new millennium in 2000 and was implemented with vigour over the next 15 years. The United Nations has described the MDGs as the "most successful anti-poverty movement in history" and we in Ghana are proud of our contribution towards the global efforts in implementing them.

The most recent annual progress report on the MDGs showed that the number of people living in extreme poverty as well as the proportion of undernourished people in developing regions declined by more than half during the implementation of the MDGs, compared to the levels in 1990. The maternal mortality ratio also declined by 45 percent worldwide, and the proportion of the world's population using an improved drinking water source rose substantially over the same period. Across the world, school enrolment levels increased but quality was generally thought to have suffered.

While substantial progress was made towards gender parity in primary education and the participation of women in political activities, progress towards improving gender equality in the labour force remained slow. It was estimated that more than 880 million people lived in slums by the end of 2015, compared to 689 million in 1990. This phenomenal growth was the result of accelerated urbanisation coupled with inadequate land use and housing policies.

While the MDGs helped focus world attention on poverty and other forms of deprivation and did in fact succeed in improving living standards worldwide, there was a global consensus that much still remained to be done.

In September 2015, as the world drew down the curtain on the MDGs at the United Nations' General Assembly in New York, it ushered in a post-2015 global development agenda, the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (or the Sustainable Development Goals) to take on the unfinished business of the MDGs.

The new framework is not only more ambitious - made up of 17 goals, compared to the 8 goals of the MDGs - but it also seeks to address some of the qualitative issues of development that were missing in the MDGs. Hence, the importance of universal school enrolment, for example, is expanded to include “quality education” as well as “life-long” learning opportunities for all.

The SDGs also pay more attention to issues of economic growth, the natural environment, as well as the importance of institutions in meeting the world's developmental ambitions.

I am happy to note that Ghana played a very active role in the preparation of the Sustainable Development Goals, starting with the Africa Regional Consultations, which began in Accra. Ghana was also one of the original 20 nations selected for national consultations on the theme, “*The World We Want*”, for the post-2015 development agenda. Later, Ghana and Denmark jointly coordinated global consultations on inequality, including a seminal meeting in Copenhagen that was jointly chaired by chairman of the National

Development Planning Commission of Ghana and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This collaboration culminated in the Pan-African Conference on Inequalities in Accra, where I was ably represented by my economic advisor (now the Director-General of the National Development Planning Commission).

At the global level, Ghana was chosen as one of the 70 countries that formed the Open Working Group that eventually developed the SDGs which were eventually adopted in New York in September 2015.

Let me take the opportunity at this time to thank the National Technical Committee and the High-level Inter-Ministerial Group, under the chairmanship of Professor Kwesi Botchwey, Chairman of the National Development Planning Commission, for their tireless efforts in the preparation of the SDGs, which earned the admiration of their colleagues in the UN.

I have no doubt that my appointment is partly a reflection of the hard work of this Committee and Group, and I wish to express my deepest appreciation to them for their hard work. I expect to draw on their technical expertise as I co-chair the Group.

I am happy, therefore, to announce that I have constituted a High-Level Committee on the Implementation of the SDGs in Ghana, under my leadership, with technical support from the National Development

Planning Commission as well as relevant ministries, departments and agencies.

With this committee in place, Ghana will be able to incorporate the SDGs into its national development agenda, over the short, medium and long term, while sharing its experiences and learning from others around the globe. I look forward to fulfilling and exciting times with my colleague advocates.

In the matter of advocacy, I expect that we will work with civil society organisations, including faith-based organisations, philanthropic organisations, research institutes and think tanks, to facilitate the work of the Group of Eminent Advocates. To this end, strong political commitment at the global, national and local levels will be very important for creating favourable conditions to help mobilise all development actors to work in harmony for the successful implementation of the SDGs.

Ladies and gentlemen, with this brief statement, I now have the honour to formally launch the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Ghana. I call on you to join hands with the government of Ghana and UN agencies in Ghana to ensure the full success of this historic global endeavour.

Thank you for your attention.