

SENIOR CITIZENS DAY – JULY 1, 2016

ADDRESS BY GUEST SPEAKER MR KOJO YANKAH

YOUR EXCELLENCY PRESIDENT JOHN DRAMANI MAHAMA,

YOUR EXCELLENCIES FORMER PRESIDENTS,

FELLOW SENIOR CITIZENS,

I CONSIDER MYSELF VERY PRIVILEGED AND HIGHLY HONORED TO BE SELECTED TO DELIVER THE GUEST SPEAKER'S ADDRESS ON BEHALF OF ALL SENIOR CITIZENS ON THIS SPECIAL DAY.

TO BEGIN WITH, MR PRESIDENT, ALLOW ME ON BEHALF OF MY COLLEAGUES TO EXTEND CONDOLENCES TO YOU ON THE LOSS OF YOUR LOVING MOTHER. WE KNOW THAT AFFAIRS OF STATE HAVE NOT GIVEN YOU ENOUGH OPPORTUNITY TO MOURN HER, BUT BE ASSURED THAT YOU HAVE OUR SYMPATHIES.

IN THE SHORT TIME ALLOTTED ME, I PROPOSE TO SHARE A FEW THOUGHTS ON SOME CHALLENGES FACING OUR DEAR NATION, CONSIDER THE ROLE SOME OF US HAVE PLAYED, AND MAKE SOME RECOMMENDATIONS GOING FORWARD. (I WILL TRY NOT TO UPSET ANY APPETITES FOR LUNCH TODAY.)

YOUR EXCELLENCY MR PRESIDENT,

TODAY IN GHANA, IT IS UNFORTUNATE WE ARE TEARING OURSELVES APART, MAINLY ON PARTY LINES; AS IF MEMBERS OF SOME PARTIES COME FROM SOME OTHER PLANETS.

WE ARE CYNICAL ABOUT OUR OWN COUNTRY AND ABOUT OURSELVES BECAUSE WE CHOOSE TO DEFINE OURSELVES ONLY THROUGH THE LENSES OF OTHERS.

WE FAIL TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT NO PARTICULAR GROUP OF GHANAIS HAVE ANSWERS TO ALL OUR PROBLEMS.

OUR RADIO STATIONS ARE CROWDED WITH INTEMPERATE AND NOISY LANGUAGE, INSULTS AND INDECENT VERBAL ASSAULT ON OUR LEADERS PAST AND PRESENT, AND ON EACH OTHER.

OUR RICH CULTURAL VALUES ARE UNDER ATTACK, AND INDISCIPLINE HAS BECOME FASHIONABLE.

AT EVERY LEVEL OF SERVICE DELIVERY, OPEN REQUEST FOR A BRIBE IS BECOMING NORMAL, AND WE ARE BLAMING EVERYBODY EXCEPT OURSELVES.

IN SOME OFFICES, PUBLIC AND CIVIL SERVANTS HAVE TURNED THEMSELVES INTO PETTY GODS; THEY CANNOT DELEGATE FUNCTIONS, AND SO HAVE VERY LITTLE TIME FOR THE PUBLIC THEY SERVE. SOME DO NOT RESPOND TO EMAILS OR MESSAGES AT ALL, AND THEY SUCCEED FRUSTRATING INNOVATORS AND CREATIVE PEOPLE AND ORGANIZATIONS.

WE ARE SO PARTISAN THAT SOME OF US HAVE MADE UP OUR MINDS TO SHOOT DOWN ANY BRIGHT INITIATIVES THAT COME FROM OUR POLITICAL RIVALS. ALL OUR LENSES HAVE TURNED PARTISAN.

AS A NATION, SOME OF US ARE BENT ON DESTROYING WHAT OUR RIVALS HAVE DONE WHEN THEY WERE IN POWER.

SOME OF US ARE DETERMINED NOT TO CELEBRATE EACH OTHER'S ACHIEVEMENTS BECAUSE WE DID NOT INITIATE THEM. MEANWHILE WE SHOUT LOUDEST THAT WE ARE ALL GHANAIS.

THIS IS A SHAME TO OUR HERITAGE !!!!!

DEAR SENIOR CITIZENS, I WANT TO BELIEVE THAT WE ARE ALL SERIOUSLY CONCERNED ABOUT THESE ISSUES.

YOUR EXCELLENCY,

ON BEHALF OF MY COLLEAGUES, BEFORE I GO ANY FURTHER, I WOULD LIKE TO SALUTE ALL THOSE WHO STRUGGLED AND SHED THEIR BLOOD AND SWEAT AND MADE PERSONAL SACRIFICES FOR GHANA TO GAIN INDEPENDENCE FROM BRITISH COLONIAL RULE. I SALUTE FURTHER ALL THOSE WHO FOLLOWED UP TO LEAD US TO OUR REPUBLICAN STATUS. AND I PAY TRIBUTE TO ALL THOSE WHO HAVE PLAYED VARIOUS HEROIC ROLES THROUGHOUT OUR LIFE AS A REPUBLIC.

MR PRESIDENT,

NOTING THAT GHANA ATTAINED REPUBLICAN STATUS IN 1960, 56 YEARS AGO, I SUGGEST IT IS FAIR TO CONCLUDE THAT THE GROUP WE REFER TO AS SENIOR CITIZENS, BOTH HERE AND IN ALL THE CORNERS OF THE COUNTRY BEING CELEBRATED TODAY, SHOULD ACCEPT PART OF THE COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY OF GETTING THIS NATION TO WHERE WE ARE TODAY.

MR PRESIDENT, COLLEAGUE SENIOR CITIZENS,

SOME OF US HAVE ENGAGED IN FRUITLESS AND GENERALLY UNPRODUCTIVE DEBATES COMPARING GHANA TO COUNTRIES WHICH GAINED INDEPENDENCE IN THE SAME YEAR AS GHANA DID. I CONSIDER THIS AS PART OF THE TRAGIC PROBLEMS FACING US AS A NATION. THE COMPARISONS WE MAKE ARE NOT REASONABLE, SIMPLY BECAUSE WE, LIKE ALL NATIONS, HAVE A

UNIQUE STORY WHICH SHOULD BE WELL TOLD AND PASSED DOWN TO OTHER GENERATIONS. WE WERE COLONIZED, OUR OWN PEOPLE STRUGGLED AS NATIONALISTS TO LEAD US INTO INDEPENDENCE AND LATER INTO REPUBLICANISM; WE OVERTHREW OUR ELECTED LEADERS (OTHER'S DIDN'T); WE HAVE EXPERIENCED ONE-PARTY, MILITARY, AND REVOLUTIONARY REGIMES AND WE HAVE SINCE 1993 BEEN RECOGNIZED AS A MULTI-PARTY DEMOCRACY. OUR GEO-POLITICS, ECONOMIC DIRECTIONS AND CULTURES HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT. THIS IS THE REALITY OF GHANA ON WHICH WE SHOULD DISCUSS OUR PROGRESS AS A PEOPLE. THE COUNTRIES WE COMPARE OURSELVES TO DID NOT GO THROUGH THE SAME TRAJECTORY.

MOST OF US HERE PLAYED SIGNIFICANT ROLES IN OUR JOURNEY TO TODAY AND I WILL MENTION ONLY A FEW :

WHEN WE OVERTHREW OUR FIRST PRESIDENT IN 1966, WE HALTED EVERY SINGLE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM THAT HAD BEEN PAINSTAKINGLY PLANNED : WE THREW AWAY A 7-YEAR DEVELOPMENT PLAN; WE ABANDONED A PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN PREPARED TO DEAL WITH ANTICIPATED URBANIZATION; AND WE DILUTED THE ACCELERATED EDUCATION PROGRAM WHICH HAD A CLEAR VISION TO PROVIDE FREE AND COMPULSORY EDUCATION FOR EVERY GHANAIAN. THE UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST WAS ORIGINALLY CALLED THE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF SCIENCE EDUCATION TO TRAIN TEACHERS FOR THE SCIENTIFIC ADVANCEMENT ANTICIPATED FOR GHANA; BUT WE CHANGED COURSE AND NOW THE UNIVERSITY OFFERS EVERY COURSE ON EARTH. THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND THE ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION WHICH WERE ESTABLISHED TO PROVIDE THE

SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGICAL GUIDE NECESSARY FOR OUR INDUSTRIAL TAKE-OFF CHANGED DIRECTION. AT THE KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, COURSES IN NUCLEAR PHYSICS AND APPLIED BIO-CHEMISTRY WHICH WERE OFFERED WERE ABANDONED AFTER THE OVERTHROW OF KWAME NKRUMAH.

LATELY, THE GHANA INDUSTRIAL HOLDING CORPORATION WHICH HAD 32 SUBSIDIARIES, AT LEAST WITH TWO FACTORIES IN EVERY REGION, CONSTITUTING THE BASE FOR INDUSTRIAL GROWTH, AND PROVIDING JOBS TO THOUSANDS OF GHANAIS AND WHICH CLEARLY WOULD HAVE PUT GHANA AHEAD OF MOST DEVELOPING NATIONS WAS DISMANTLED. WE SOLD AWAY THE GHANA TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY WITH ALL ITS SATELLITE SUBMARINE CABLES WHICH COULD HAVE OFFERED THE CHEAPEST BANDWIDTH TO GHANAIS FOR NATIONAL CONNECTIVITY . WE ARE STEADILY KILLING LOCAL AND INDIGENOUS INDUSTRIES IN THE NAME OF TRADE LIBERALIZATION. I COULD GO ON AND ON.....

WE DID NOT ONLY ABANDON THE MANY DEVELOPMENT PLANS WE SPENT TAXPAYERS' MONEY TO PREPARE OURSELVES, WE REVERSED SOME OF THE KEY STRATEGIC PROGRAMS THAT WOULD HAVE MADE GHANA A LEADER IN SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA.

THEREFORE, OUR SOCIO-ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE CHANGED SEVERAL TIMES, AND WE HAVE DRAWN UP DEVELOPMENT PLANS UPON PLANS, AND CHANGED THEM AT THE WHIMS OF INCOMING GOVERNMENTS - ALL THESE BY GHANAIS AND NO OTHER BREED OF PEOPLE. ONE PRAYS THAT OUR

CURRENT 40-YEAR PLAN, WITH FOUR YEAR CYCLES, WILL BE EMBRACED BY ALL GHANA TO STAND THE TEST OF TIME.

YOUR EXCELLENCY,

CLEARLY, ALL OF US HERE PLAYED DIFFERENT ROLES ALL THESE YEARS. I WILL BE BOLD TO CONCLUDE THAT WE HAVE ALL EXHIBITED WHAT THE LEGENDARY NATIONALIST EPHRAIM AMU REFERRED TO AS 'NIMDEE NTRASO, NKOTO KRANE, NE APESEMENKO ME NYA', TO WIT "THE KNOW-IT-ALL ATTITUDE, BRAGGING, GREED, AND SELFISHNESS'.

AS POLITICAL LEADERS, AS ADVISORS, AS PUBLIC AND CIVIL SERVANTS, AS PARLIAMENTARIANS, RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL LEADERS, THROUGH OUR ACTIONS AND INACTIONS, DEEDS AND MISDEEDS, THROUGH OUR ABUSE OF OFFICIAL POSITIONS, AS BUSINESSMEN, AS ACADEMICS, WE DISPLAYED THESE BEHAVIORS AND PASSED THEM ON TO THE YOUTH. 'OKOTO NWO ANOMA'(A CRAB DOES NOT BEGET A BIRD), OUR ANCESTORS ADMONISHED.

YOUR EXCELLENCY, MR PRESIDENT,

THE GREAT PATRIOT, EPHRAIM AMU, NOTED QUITE CLEARLY IN HIS EVERGREEN COMPOSITION "YEN ARA ASAASE NI":

'OMAN NO SE BE YE YIE

OMAN NO SE ERENYE YIE,

EYE SE NA HO SE

OMANFO BRA NA EKYERE'

"THE FUTURE OF THIS COUNTRY DEPENDS ON OUR INDIVIDUAL BEHAVIORS."

WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE WHICH DEMANDED RESPECT FOR OUR ELECTED LEADERS, ELDERS AND FOR EACH OTHER'S CULTURE ? WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR VALUES WHICH RECOGNIZED A GOOD NAME ABOVE RICHES ? WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR POTENT TRADITIONAL MEDICINES THAT COMPELLED OUR EARLY LEADERS TO ESTABLISH THE CENTRE FOR RESEARCH INTO PLANT MEDICINE ? WHAT HAPPENED TO THE POLICY THAT REQUIRED PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS TO MAKE FARMS TO FEED THEMSELVES ? WHY DID WE ABANDON THE POLICY OF KEEPING OUR ENVIRONMENTS CLEAN BEFORE THE 'TANKAS' OR HEALTH INSPECTOR ARRIVED ? WHY HAVE WE STOPPED GOING TO OUR VILLAGES TO CELEBRATE TRADITIONAL FESTIVALS WHICH TAUGHT US OUR RICH PRACTICES ? IS IT BECAUSE OF OUR NEW FOUND RELIGIOUS FAITHS WHICH SCORN OUR TRADITIONS ? WHY ARE OUR MEDIA HOUSES NOT GIVING MORE PROMINENCE TO SCIENTIFIC ISSUES AND THE MANY ACHIEVEMENTS OF GHANAIANS IN VARIOUS SECTORS ? WHY DO SECTIONS OF OUR MEDIA DELIBERATELY PROMOTE POLITICAL RIVALRY, TENSION AND DIVISION FOR ENTIRE FOUR YEARS WHEN OTHER MORE IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF OUR DEVELOPMENT DEMAND ATTENTION ? WHY ARE WE STARVING OUR COMMISSION OF CULTURE AND CENTRES OF NATIONAL CULTURE ? WHY ARE WE NEGLECTING OUR RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS ? WHY HAVE WE SOMETIMES DISRESPECTED RECOMMENDATIONS FROM AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORTS ? THE QUESTIONS ARE MANY.

MR PRESIDENT,

THIS IS SENIOR CITIZENS DAY, IN AN ELECTION YEAR. THIS SHOULD BE A TIME FOR SOUL SEARCHING AND SELF-CONFESSION, ESPECIALLY FOR SENIOR CITIZENS, BUT GENERALLY FOR THE ENTIRE POPULACE. WE ARE ALL GHANAIS. BY ALL MEANS LET US DISAGREE ON PRINCIPLES, BUT I PROPOSE WE SERIOUSLY THINK OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF OUR PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENTS AND ACTIONS. I WANT TO BELIEVE THAT WE ALL LOVE GHANA.

MAY I PLEASE END WITH A FEW RECOMMENDATIONS :

FIRST, IN ADDITION TO HOSTING SENIOR CITIZENS, THE STATE SHOULD ORGANISE SENIOR CITIZENS FORUMS IN ALL DISTRICT CAPITALS TO ENABLE SENIOR CITIZENS SUGGEST SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS THEY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO CREATING.

SECONDLY, DISTRICT ASSEMBLIES AND TRADITIONAL LEADERS SHOULD FACILITATE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SENIOR CITIZENS CENTRES OR BUREAUS FROM WHERE SKILLS OF SENIOR CITIZENS CAN BE ACCESSED TO HELP IN DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT.

THIRDLY, THIS NATION NEEDS A NATIONAL THINK TANK COMPOSED OF MEN AND WOMEN OF ACHIEVEMENT, GENIUSES, INVENTORS AND CREATIVE MINDS, DEVOID OF PARTISANSHIP, AND READY TO SHARE THEIR IDEAS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT. AND WE HAVE MANY OF THESE AT HOME AND IN THE DIASPORA.

FOURTHLY, MR PRESIDENT, YOUR DIRECTIVE TO NAME OUR ROADS AND STREETS IS A HIGHLY COMMENDABLE ONE. BUT I RECOMMEND TO OUR CITY AND TOWN AUTHORITIES TO NAME OUR MAJOR STREETS AND MONUMENTS AFTER CREATIVE MINDS, INVENTORS, INNOVATORS, AWARD-WINNING FARMERS, TEACHERS, SCIENTISTS, AND MEN AND WOMEN OF ACHIEVEMENT TO REPLACE

SOME OF THE NAMES THAT HAVE NO RELEVANCE TO OUR COMMUNITIES.

FIFTHLY, GHANA WILL BE MUCH BETTER OFF WITH A NATIONAL HERITAGE MUSEUM; LET'S ESTABLISH ONE. OUR CHILDREN HAVE NO REFERENCE POINTS, NO HEROES, NO ROLE MODELS. ALL WE SEE ON SOCIAL MEDIA ARE CUTS AND PASTE OF FOREIGN IDEAS.

FINALLY, WITH YOUR PERMISSION MR PRESIDENT, I WISH TO APPEAL TO ALL SENIOR CITIZENS TO COMPILE THEIR MEMOIRS, IF THEY HAVE NOT ALREADY DONE SO, FOR PUBLICATION. THIS COUNTRY WILL BE RICHER IN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND LITERATURE; THE YOUTH WILL DRAW A LOT OF INSPIRATION FROM THEM, AND WE WILL HAVE A BANK AND DATABASE ON OUR HERITAGE THAT WE CAN ALL RELATE TO.

YOUR EXCELLENCY, MR PRESIDENT, COLLEAGUE SENIOR CITIZENS, THIS IS OUR MOTHERLAND, THE LAND OF OUR BIRTH.

LET US AIM TO STRENGTHEN THE PILLARS AND INSTITUTIONS OF OUR HARD WON DEMOCRACY IN A REPUBLIC.

LET US RALLY TOGETHER, UPROOT THE KNOW-IT-ALL ATTITUDE, GREED, BRAGGING, ARROGANCE AND SELFISHNESS FROM OUR BODY POLITIC, AND CONTINUALLY ASK GOD TO BLESS OUR HOMELAND GHANA.

THANK YOU.

