

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH
BY MRS MARY CHINERY-HESSE
ON THE OCCASION OF HER INVESTITURE
AS CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

Your Excellency the President of the Republic of Ghana, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo,

Chairman and Members of the University Council

Vice-Chancellor and other officials of the University

Former Chairmen and Members of the University Council

Former Vice-Chancellors and other officials of the University

Members of Convocation

Honourable Ministers and Members of Parliament

Former members of Government

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

Esteemed Traditional Rulers

Alumni, Staff and Students

Members of the Press Corps

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish my father, R. S. Blay of the Adahole Clan, and the Blay Family of Eikwe and Esiana, that proud first lawyer of Nzima, were here; and I also wish my mother, Aunty Lady of the Mould Family of Winneba and Jamestown, British Accra were alive to have witnessed this Ceremony. I am sure though that they both are looking down from Heaven with broad smiles of joy, pride and gratitude in their hearts.

This Event, celebrated with so much pomp and pageantry, showcasing elements steeped in Ghanaian Culture and Tradition, I am sure will be equally etched in the memory of all of you beautiful and kind people who have made time to honor me with your presence.

I am truly humbled by the dignified presence of such a galaxy of distinguished personalities filling this Great Hall, for the single purpose of witnessing this Special Day. I am referring to invited personalities who have gravitated to this Great Hall from far and near.

His Excellency the President of Ghana himself is here. Sir, I am deeply grateful to you; high officials in Government; the former President of the Republic from whose high office I served the nation, His Excellency J A. Kufuor; our esteemed Traditional Rulers; my own family, my dear, very supportive and understanding husband, my long suffering children and grandchildren, my twin sister Maud Blankson-Mills with whom I graduated on the same day, extended family relations, my school mates from the great School Wesley Girls' High School, and from Mfantshipim School, the beautiful Ladies of Volta Hall, my brilliant Colleagues from the Ghana Association of Retired International Civil Servants, etc, etc, etc. I recognize all of you.

For my part, I recall like yesterday that day in 1961 when I was in my final year at this same University of Ghana when President Kwame Nkrumah, at this same Great Hall was invested as the first Chancellor of this Institution, when the University obtained full and autonomous status. Never in my wildest moments did I dream that a day will come when I would be elected to sit on that Chair; truly coming full circle, from the status of *in statu pupillari* to Chancellor of my great Alma Mater. What an honour and what a pleasant beam of light to

brighten up my twilight years. I thank God. I am humbled. It is only right that I thank all those who have expressed confidence in me, that I could bring some positive additionality to the affairs of the University by supporting my Election to this high Office. I especially thank the University Council and the Academic Board. I promise I will not let you down.

I am filling the shoes of great ones. Beyond the Heads of State who occupied the Chair in ex officio status, Mr. Kofi Annan, my immediate predecessor opened doors for the University to critical funding sources. These have been important in the increasing recognition gained by the university's research centres, particularly in the area of agriculture; in improving access to international digital knowledge databases; and in the funding of Postgraduate scholarships.

Nana Wereko Ampem, the first Chancellor elected by the University community had been associated with the University for many years before he became Chancellor. He had given leadership to the University of Ghana Medical School Council as its first Chairman. Under his auspices as Chancellor, the University engaged in important processes to re-evaluate and re-energize itself. These involved, for the first time in many years, a consultative process for putting in place a strategic plan for the University and the appointment of a Visitation Panel.

And now, I have been deemed fit to sit on this Chair. I do not think that anybody can deny the historical nature of today's Ceremony. The University of Ghana invests its first Female Chancellor in the year it is celebrating its founding 70 years ago; its Platinum Anniversary.

That, I am sure will be the headline of many media sources. And why not? All my predecessors have been male. As my dear friend and Colleague of the African Union Panel of the Wise, Speciosa Kazibwe Wandira, the first Woman to be appointed Vice president on the

continent of Africa-this in Uganda - put it, today's event marks one more instance of a woman smashing the glass ceiling in our public space. Specioza, you are personally at this function, Your Excellency, leading a group of equally formidable African Women of timber and caliber to deliver a strong message that we ain't finished yet.

Even as I deem it appropriate that I dedicate my election to this high office to Ghanaian Womanhood, I have to commend your effort, Speciosa, with others to mobilize Wise Women under the rubric of FEMWISE to take their place at the mediation table in the fight to silence the guns on the African Continent. We have a responsibility to ensure that Women's voices no longer remain muted.

In logical terms though, one would have expected the appointment of a woman Vice Chancellor, then probably a female chair of Legon's Governing Council first. Hardly was I expecting a conservative premier university, to leap frog from female Pro-Vice Chancellors and Registrar, straight to Chancellor. I salute the University for this ground-breaking appointment, in the annals of University leadership.

The Chancellorship position just conferred on me is one I humbly accept, cherishing more the associated responsibilities than any inherent privileges.

The Chancellor should not be just a ceremonial face, but also an unseen lead advocate, I promise not to simply make myself available for ceremonial events and handshakes at graduation. Like my predecessors have done, I promise to put all the skills I have honed from the School of Life, and the extensive network I have developed in the process at the disposal of the University of Ghana.

It is a fact that the University of Ghana has made many strides in its gender composition since my time here as a student. However, this progress continues to be uneven. As a human institution, even as we

salute the University in this regard, we have to accept that some mistakes have been made in the past.

There have been certain aspects of Legon's history which the University has happily put behind, and may have amply atoned for. Mr. President, I crave your indulgence to refer to just one example.

Untypical of Legon, the entire university looked on in silence, while one prominent part of its space, indeed the Senior Common Room of one Hall of Residence, was pronounced Out of Bounds to Women, and this legibly inscribed. Apparently, Management of that Hall of Residence never forgave women as a whole when on one occasion an ugly fracas developed between two women guests in that senior common room; you can guess what triggered the incident. I am sure some other decision would have been made if it were two men caught in a similar situation.

The ban on women visiting that space was wisely lifted in the 1990s, when the Hall in any case, became a mixed gender hall, accommodating men and women students, and appointing men and women hall fellows.

Today, the University of Ghana can be proud of its revised basic laws and statutes; it can be proud of gender ratios in its current enrollment and admission patterns. Legon can be proud of the successful launch of sexual harassment policies; and it can express pride in having established a Center for Gender Studies and Advocacy that coordinates gender-related issues and advises the University.

While the proportion of undergraduate students who are female has grown appreciably, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, the sciences and post-graduate studies still need to make progress in this regard.

The situation with faculty has improved much more slowly and University management continues to be largely male dominated.

We need to continue to improve these numbers, and also create favourable conditions and conducive environment for female students and faculty to thrive at the University of Ghana.

The University has to work hard to reach a point where 'firsts' will be a thing of the past and women's leadership at the University becomes routinized and taken as given. We will work at it.

In accepting to become Chancellor of University of Ghana, I am aware of the fact that I am joining the Institution at a crucial time in the history of global higher education, including in Ghana, calling for critical reappraisal, to confront the need to redefine their mission in the light of the many changes taking place in our world that affect their current modus operandi. For example, the nature of faculty/student engagement is fast changing. The young generation has access to technology which gives them the possibility to acquire knowledge much beyond what a lecturer might offer them. This calls into question the traditional role of teachers as repository of all that a student needs to pass examinations. A good lecturer now is rated highly if he has the knack to empower his students to reach out for knowledge wherever it can be found. The Internet with its many search engines has given the death knell of lecturers as gurus.

Issues of the relevance of academic programmes have attracted a lot of attention. The global commentary on the future of higher education increasingly stresses the importance of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) to the development and progress of nations. In Ghana, this conversation has correctly championed the promotion of STEM. The sciences are critical for invention, innovation and technological advancement.

This does not, of course, imply the neglect of the humanities and the social sciences in the curriculum and in research support, since there are significant complementarities between the social sciences and the humanities and the physical sciences.

Our Countrymen have complained about the apparent disconnect between the curricula of our Universities and the World of work, such that there now is a very vocal Association of Graduate Unemployed. This would be a contradiction in terms at the time I graduated in 1962. Jobs relevant to our training were waiting. In fact, we were spoilt for choice; in certain instances, we felt like a kid in a candy shop. May Ghana in the very near future recapture this glorious state of affairs.

Your Government, Mr. President, I know is seized with this same agenda, and you are assiduously introducing relevant educational policy reforms towards its attainment. I salute, Sir, for your foresight.

Of course it is easier said than done. There is the vexed question of university funding. Employers continue to complain about African university graduates not having the necessary skills required for the job market. Certainly the dialogue between Town and Gown must improve. A veritable conduit must be created for this, and my ILO experience should come in useful. African nations must needs prepare their institutions of higher learning to provide the knowledge required for the essential and desired knowledge economies which will drive our development agenda.

Fortuitously, the University of Ghana has already taken several important steps to tackle some of the growing challenges. I refer specifically to the adoption of a Strategic Plan for the period 2014-2024 aimed at overcoming many of the challenges, and making the University of Ghana shine even brighter. That is why it is gratifying

that it is at this time that the University is enjoying academic eminence, favorable ratings in global university rankings, and at a time Legon is basking in the glory of very productive research centers. We are indeed proud to host pace-setting African Centers of Excellence, funded by the government of Ghana with a loan from the World Bank, of which this university has two.

But if this is a time this university glows in academic splendor, it is also a time this great University nurses a pain within.

In recent times, this University has endured rather unflattering media publicity, and has spent a good deal of time fending off assaults on her public image. It is not necessary to list at this time the projects which have blown us such ill wind.

Let me salute efforts made by you, Mr President, Your Excellency Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo and your Government, for the initiatives and interventions you have made towards the resolution of the problems. I as well salute the University Governing Council and management past and present, including past Vice-Chancellors for various attempts made in bringing the crises to near resolution.

I promise to bring to bear as well, as the Chancellor, the formidable skills I have garnered in my many international interventions to throw oil on troubled waters to stem conflict, and even death. We do not have the habit of sweeping dirt under the carpet. We will confront any difficulties and all will be amicably resolved.

My vision for the University is for an Institution:

- Rooted in Ghanaian and African realities.
- Authoritative in its research on Ghana and Africa at the highest levels of quality by any international measure.

- A home to and welcoming to scholars of international standing from all over the world, and to students from a rich variety of cultures and backgrounds.

My luck is that Legon already has what it takes to attain this Vision.

Mr. President, Your Excellences, Distinguished Guests, Dear Friends, as I conclude, and as I accept formally the position of Chancellor of this great Institution, the University of Ghana, I would like once again to pledge to give of my best in making Legon soar like the eagle, and remain the brightest jewel in Ghana's Tertiary Education Crown.

Thank you for your attention, and God bless us all!

1st August, 2018