

**A TOAST IN HONOUR OF  
EMERITUS PROFESSOR J. H. KWABENA NKETIA**

**AT HIS 90<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY LUNCHEON AT THE GREAT HALL, UNIVERSITY  
OF GHANA, LEGON, ACCRA.**

**PROPOSED BY PROFESSOR ALEXANDER KWAPONG**

Chairman and Members of the University Council, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellors, Members of the Academic Board, Senior and Junior Members of the University, Akosua and Naana and other members of the Nketia Family, Distinguished Friends and Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me first say how delighted and grateful I am for the invitation to say a few words and propose a toast in honour of our dear Professor J. H. Kwabena Nketia on this historic and memorable occasion. 90 years is an exceptional and rare landmark that comes the way of ordinary mortals. Many who manage to attain this rare distinction are afflicted with the many biblical aches and pains that accompany most octogenerians, let alone the ninety-year-olds, but not Kwabena Nketia. He is the exception: since the 58 years that I have known him as a colleague, I have not seen him brought down with any of the serious illnesses endemic in our tropical environment to which we ordinary octogenarian survivors are prone. Not only is he as hale and hearty as ever before, as we can all see today; but he has continued to maintain his intellectual acumen, his creative, artistic and musical genius that has made him our University icon and our National Treasure.

Despite the grievous losses he suffered in the untimely deaths of his beloved wife, Lily and his sons, Kwabena and Kwame, Kwabena Nketia has continued to soldier on, undaunted and has earned our respect and admiration.

Under his sustained, long and able leadership as the second Director of the Institute of African Studies who succeeded Thomas Hodgkin, the newly created Institute of African Studies grew into a great African centre of academic, cultural and musical excellence. Generations of Ghanaian,

African and visiting foreign students, researchers and scholars who passed through the walls of the Institute will testify to the enduring quality of his many sided-talents. His fruitful collaboration with his friend the late Professor Mawere Opoku in the School of Music and Dance and with Efuia Sutherland and others has enriched the cultural lives of many of his fellow-countrymen and other Africans, while his own musical compositions continue to enhance and add to the musical heritage left by his mentor and friend, Ephraim Amu of blessed memory We will need no reminder of our debt to his musical genius as we sing the University of Ghana Anthem at the end of this luncheon.

Academically, Kwabena Nketia stands very tall in his chosen field of ethnomusicology, here and internationally while he has deepened African Studies through his own individual scholarship, he has also broadened the boundaries of these studies and made of them a coherent, disciplinary whole. Now thanks to Professor J.H. Kwabena Nketia and his many Ghanaian and international academic friends and peers who have worked with him during these many past decades, the average Ghanaian, I daresay, does appreciate the real significance of the so-called '*dondology*' of our Institute of African Studies.

When I joined the University College of the Gold Coast as a young Lecturer in the Department of Classics in October, 1953, there were only a few of us Africans (or Ghanaians as, we later became four years later) in a sea of expatriates who constituted ,the senior members of the University College. Emeritus Professor Kwabena Nketia was then a Research Fellow in the Department of Sociology headed by Dr. Kofi Abrefa Busia, our first Ghanaian Professor. The University College with David Balme as its founding Principal was then only five years old. The band of the tiny Ghanaian minority pioneer academic and administrative senior members of staff numbered just about a dozen people altogether. Kwabena Nketia was obviously present at the creation, as the saying goes, of this University to which he has remained totally dedicated and devoted during these past six decades.

Out of all the Ghanaian pioneers at the Western Compound of Achimota in 1953, only two of us, Professor Kwabena Nketia and I, are alive today, some fifty-eight years later. We dare also, coincidentally, the only two surviving foundation Fellows of the, Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences which

was founded by President Kwame Nkrumah in 1959. You can, therefore, appreciate, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, why I feel so very highly honoured and so grateful to you, Professor Ernest Aryeetey, and members of the University and to Akosua and Naana, the wonderful daughters of our beloved Kwabena Nketia, for the invitation to join in this special luncheon in honour of Emeritus Professor Kwabena Nketia's ninetieth birthday in this august Great Hall of the University of Ghana and to propose this toast for the occasion.

So, distinguished ladies and Gentlemen, let us all be upstanding and with fully charged glasses, drink a hearty toast to Emeritus Professor J. H. Kwabena Nketia on his 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday. May God Bless you, Kwabena, and grant you more years of continuing Good Health, Happiness and Peace!

Text of Remarks delivered at the Great Hall, University of Ghana, Legon.  
Wednesday, 22 June, 2011.