

- INDUCTION OF HIS EXCELLENCY MR. KOFI ANNAN AS CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA ON AUGUST 11, 2008 AT THE GREAT HALL.

Acceptance Speech By
His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, Chancellor

“Your Excellency, President Kufuor
Your Majesty, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Asantehene
Chairman and Members of Council
Vice-Chancellor
Pro-Vice-Chancellor
Distinguished Ministers
Members of the Diplomatic Corps
Members of Convocation
Alumni and Friends of the University
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honor for me to be here today to accept the position of Chancellor of the University of Ghana on this wonderful occasion: the 60th anniversary of its founding.

Back in 1943, the Elliot Commission was established by the British to investigate the possibility of establishing an institution of higher education in West Africa. At first, the British Government chose to establish a University College in Nigeria, only. But the people of the Gold Coast would not accept this decision.

Led by the scholar and politician, the late Dr. J.B. Danquah, they called for a University College to be founded here. The Ghanaian people did not give up, and on this very day, sixty years ago, this University was founded. In 1961, our national parliament endowed this institution with the power to award its own degrees, and our nation's founding father, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, was appointed as its first Chancellor.

We saw in the actions of those who fought for the establishment of this University a sign of our nation's determined character. A determination to seek the best opportunities for all our people, a determination to decide our own future, and to set an example for our continent.

This year, we also celebrate another 60th anniversary: that of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This declaration confirmed - for the first time in history - that human rights and fundamental freedoms are applicable to every person, in every country. It was a common statement of mutual aspirations a shared vision of a more equitable and just world.

Included among these basic and fundamental rights is the right to education, set out in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration. For it is only through education that people can find freedom and opportunity. It is only through education that citizens can set their countries on the path towards sustainable development and participation in the global economy. And it is only through education that we can understand the affinity and differences we have with our neighbours, and seek to find common solutions.

The founders of this institution understood this, and we should celebrate the fact that the University of Ghana has now provided world-class education and training to more than 50,000 graduates. And it has established links with other universities and educational institutions not only across the country, and Africa, but also across the globe. Through its teaching and scholarship it is undoubtedly at the heart of this nation's development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As I stand here, I cannot help but think back to 1957, the dawn of our nation's independence. The black star, the symbol of African emancipation and unity shone from our new flag, and we were a nation full of promise. In the decades that followed, the path wasn't always easy. But we can be proud of the progress we have made, particularly in recent decades.

Today, Ghana is one of the best performing economies in Africa. GDP has moved beyond 6.5 per cent. And this economic growth should make a real impact in lifting our people out of poverty.

And underpinning this economic progress has been Ghana's record of good governance. For good governance, which is rooted in respect for the rule of law, human rights and transparency, is the thread which binds the progress of all elements of a society.

When we look back at our nation's history since independence, we see that we have lived through six years of presidential one-party rule, several disrupted attempts at multi-party presidential rule and twenty one years of military rule, which included no less than five military coups d'état.

We learnt lessons during that turbulent period and in January 1993 the new Constitution of the Republic of Ghana came into effect. This has ushered in a new era, and guided our nation through fifteen years of governance under constitutionally elected Presidents.

At the end of this year, we will have the chance again to elect a new President and Parliament, and to further consolidate the democratic traditions of this nation. I have no doubt that the election will be

conducted smoothly, and that the people of this nation will again show that democracy can work effectively in Africa, as much as anywhere else in the world.

At this critical juncture, the political leaders and their parties have the grave responsibility to ensure that the elections are peaceful, free and fair. I urge them to accept a code of conduct and play by the rules. And the politicians must moderate their language. For as I have said before: words can heal, console, inspire and unite. But words can also provoke, harm, incite and inflame.

The Electoral Commission must insist on its independence and apply its rules fairly and consistently across the board, without fear or favor. This is particularly important this year, given the events in Kenya and Zimbabwe which have shaken confidence in the steady progress our continent is making as a whole towards good governance and democracy.

Zimbabwe is on all of our minds, and we call for a process of reconciliation upon which lasting peace and democracy can be built; for it is a fact that more countries than ever on our continent have moved towards multi-party elections. African-led initiatives, not least the African Peer Review Mechanism are supporting this progress. And we are seeing the emergence and consolidation of robust civil society and free press in many countries, both of which have a crucial role in holding their governments to account. But the freedom of the press must, of course, be exercised with judgment and responsibility.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a whole, our African continent is seeing progress. As a whole, the economic and political trends of our continent are going in the right direction. The rate of economic growth in Africa reached 6.6 per cent in 2007. This means the Millennium Development Goals proclaimed by the United Nations in 2000 are not necessarily attainable in all African countries. But it is indicative of enormous efforts being made throughout the continent.

In this transformation of our realities I am pleased to see that the role of Universities is duly recognized. Knowledge is the new frontier of growth and prosperity. Globalization can be turned into an opportunity if we master the value propositions that knowledge allows. It is not a coincidence that our country's growth surpasses other African countries, better endowed on economic resources. It is education and training that make the difference.

Universities are at the crossroads of value creation. They develop capacities and consolidate citizenry. They equip and enrich countries, allowing them to increase adaptability, innovation and productivity. It is therefore essential to protect their independence and

respect academic freedom, for this is the key for strong institutions and solid respectability. No country progresses today without recognizing the role of Universities. We Ghanaians need not to be reminded of this; but it is not enough to know it. We need to support it with deeds not just words.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since I stepped down as U.N Secretary-General almost a year and half ago, I have been touched to receive a number of honorary degrees and awards. But I have to say, that it is a particularly special feeling to be able to stand here with you today, in the country of my birth, and of which I am so proud, to become Chancellor of this University.

As I accept the invitation to become Chancellor, I think of the founders of this institution, and of our nation and I challenge us to work together, with the same determination, and with the guidance of our motto: 'Integri Procedamus', to take our country and Africa forward, and to realize the potential of every African citizen.

Thank you."