

2nd Kwame Nkrumah Pan-African Intellectual and Cultural Festival

Theme: Global Africa

2063:

Education for Reconstruction and Transformation

Opening Address

by Professor Kwesi Yankah Minister of  
State for Tertiary Education On Behalf of

Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo

President of Ghana

Great Hall, University of Ghana

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Salutations

Professor Ebenezer Oduro Owusu, Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana and Chairman for this opening ceremony,

Members of Government ,

Professor Akilagpa Sawyerr, Former Member of the Council of State,  
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Professor Hilary Beckles, Vice Chancellor of the University of the  
West Indies and Key note Speaker,

Pro Vice Chancellors, Deans and Provosts,  
Director of the Institute of African Studies,

Professor Horace Campbell, Current Occupant of the Kwame Nkrumah  
Chair in African Studies

Distinguished Participants

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Introduction

I make this presentation almost apologetically, since the message reached me only last Saturday, that the Sector Minister who was to represent the President, could not make it, and I should stand in.

In spite of the unusually short notice, I accepted it as a national imperative, but also because for me personally, any invitation back to Legon to be part of Kwame Nkrumah cultural and intellectual festival: is an invitation home. It is simply an invitation home to come and feast. If the venue is Legon it's all the better, better still if coming from the Institute of African Studies.

For the entire enterprise of an intellectual festival dedicated to Kwame Nkrumah, was nurtured and brewed in Ghana, and at the IAS, a centre of excellence in African Studies, where Nkrumah himself planted a cultural seed, upon which education and academia were to be founded. .

The concept of an Nkrumah festival is not new to me. I sat in office here, as Pro-Vice Chancellor Academic and Students Affairs in 2009, when the then Director of African Studies, presented a proposal for an Nkrumah Chair in African Studies, which was instantly accepted, applauded, and indeed thought to be long overdue. Appointed as the first Chair to the position was my good friend and brother Kofi Anyidoho, who in his vision for the position, dreamed of a Kwame Nkrumah intellectual festival reminiscent of what Tanzania had done for the celebrated Julius Nyerere. The festival would seek to celebrate the intellectual and cultural heritage and ideals of that great African, and update his vision to accommodate emerging trends in Africa's development.

### **Never Dies?**

It was also a Vision that throws more light on the concept of immortality associated with Nkrumah; NKRUMAH NEVER DIES, he forever lives, parroted in recitation by school kids in those days was not necessarily a sacrilegious statement, any more than the Akan proverb, *Tekrema mporo*, the tongue never rots, the tongue never decays. It simply bespeaks the power of the spoken word, and its capacity to immortalize its celebrated authors.

Overthrown while on a trip to Hanoi in 1966, exiled in Guinea, died in Romania, first at Nkroful his hometown, body exhumed and re-interred in Accra, where a fitting monument has been permanently erected in his memory: where his statue stands, pointing ahead into the future; another and a bigger monument of a giant tree, an unfinished business truncated in the middle, but spawning a never ending narration, the never ending debate: indeed, the saga of an endless epic that will be sung across centuries. I believe this conference is part of the on-going narrative on Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah.

## Close Encounters

I personally standing here, have been had the opportunity of access to several aspects on Nkrumah's heritage, both human and material. My chat with Dr Ako Adjei, Nkrumah's former associate, and a member of the Big Six that fought for Ghana's independence, at his Osu residence in 1992, years before he passed on. Dr Ako Adjei being the member of United Gold Coast Convention, who was sent to bring Nkrumah down from US, to be Secretary-General of the party, and who in the end fell out with Nkrumah. Incidentally, still nursing bitterness with his former pal, Dr Ako Adjei occasionally referred to

indigenous knowledge and the traditional foundations of Nkrumah's intellectual vision. My lifetime association with the great ethnomusicologist and living legend Professor J H. Nketia, who at a young age Nkrumah identified as a great ambassador for cultural nationalism. In establishing the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences,

in 1959 to pivot national development, Kwarne Nkrumah did not have in mind solely PhD holders, but also teachers, lawyers, scholars and exponents of indigenous arts like J. H. Kwabena Nketia, now 95 years old. And neither do I forget Elizabeth Asantewa then 43 years old, whom I met during the inauguration of the Kwame Nkrumah mausoleum in 1993. She was still incapacitated, and virtually hobbling on prosthesis from a bomb throw in 1963 when as a little school girl, she was presenting a bouquet to Kwame Nkrumah at the Accra Sports Stadium. The explosion disfigured one hand, and led to the amputation of one leg. She told me her story.

And can I ever forget the extensive research I did on the veranda boys, like Krobo Edusei and Kwame Kwakye, part of the proverbial veranda boys of Kwame Nkrumah, unlettered celebrities with little western education, but who wielded enormous social and political power in

Nkrumah's government, and were gladiators of Nkrumah's development agenda, as well as his links with the grassroots.

### **Indigenous Foundations of Learning**

I say all this to crystallize perspectives on Nkrumah's Vision of development, but also to advocate the need for African scholarship to cautiously navigate the rather perilous journey of globalization, where all knowledge have been subjugated, leaving behind the lone legacy of westernization, to which all other cultures are expected to subscribe if they should remain afloat.

Intellectuals in Africa have a moral obligation, then to construct an African consciousness that would guide Africa in conceiving of African solutions to African problems.

### **Nkrumah's Vision**

Nkrumah foresaw the danger of globalization and sought to forestall it at various intellectual forums. He firmly asserted this at the first congress of Africanist held in Accra, where Nkrumah took care to link the congress to its indigenous traditions (Davidson 1994:87).

He stated at the conference that "While some of us are engaged in the political unification of Africa, Africanists everywhere must also help in building the spiritual and cultural foundations of the unity of our continent" (Davidson op.cit).

It was at this congress that the idea of an Encyclopedia African Centre emerged, an elaborate research institution tasked to study all aspects of Africa (Oquaye 1994:37).

The need for Africa to rely on African answers to African problems is also echoed by Chancellor Williams in his 1961 book, *The Birth of African Civilization*. Here he states after he visited Africa:

*We had arrived (in Africa) with the idea that what Africa needs very likely would call for westernization; we left with the conviction that, nothing could be worse than complete westernization. (Williams 1961:15)*

It was however in October 1963, when inaugurating the Institute of African Studies that the foundations of Nkrumah's intellectual agenda were amplified. He stressed that the Institute should be divorced from trends in African Centers of Learning in the west, where they have been largely influenced by colonial ideology.

The new approach, he said, 'should be rooted in our traditional statecraft, our highly developed code of morals, our hospitality and our purposeful energy,' He added,

But you should not stop here. Your work must also include a study of the origins and culture of African Descent in the Americas and the Caribbean, and you should seek to maintain close relations with their scholars so that there may be cross fertilization between Africa and those who have their roots in the African past".

The Institute, he urged, should not be purely academic and divorced from the African situation.

In a brief chat some time ago with Professor Nketia, the first African Director of the Institute, he told me Nkrumah had aimed at a major archives of African oral traditions at the institute, which was to be a depository for the preservation of recordings of folktales, proverbs, traditional songs, and several other oral genres reflecting the moral and philosophical foundations of the African personality. These collections were to be called "African Classics.

Had we heeded these calls for African scholars to unabashedly construct scholarship on strong indigenous foundations, we would have attained unassailable levels of intellectual achievement where we look first within, for African solutions, and where AU's agenda for 2063, would prioritize self-reliance in the reconstruction and transformation of education.

### **Negative Trends**

We would have avoided some of the following trends in marginalizing African Scholarship:

- The instinctive denigration of other African scholars in local research,
- A deliberate prioritization of western scholarship in citation trends by African scholars, and the conspicuous marginalization of pioneering scholarship by Africans,
- The prioritization of western journals in the scheme of author citation for purposes of promotion within African universities

There is also an a priori denunciation as un-academic any knowledge produced in an African language. There are several scholars today who almost by default would rule out any respectable thesis or dissertation in Ewe, or Yoruba, or Akan. It cannot be scholarship, simply on the basis of the meta language used. Our psychological attitudes to language make possible the immediate denunciation as un-academic any discourse not articulated in a Euro-American language. Translate the same discourse into a Euro-American language, and the cross linguistic rendition almost magically propels it into the realm of academia.

Academic discourse then is sometimes defined not as much by substance as it is by medium. This perspective gives an added dimension to the theory of linguistic determinism: here the language you speak determines your scholarly status. Or rather the scholarly authority you wield is

predetermined by the language community into which you were born. If you were born into a 'dominant' culture of scholarship, your chances of becoming an accepted mainstream academic are of course greater. Such trends, under which the current academic order operates, bog down the African academy and can never lead to reconstruction and transformation in education, envisioned in the theme for this conference.

### **New Agenda**

A new agenda should be that of reordering our priorities as African Scholars, and just as Akuffo Addo Government has sought to do, not as first resort, go everywhere with cap in hand, only because we have trampled on, and carelessly dissipated God-given riches underneath our feet, including the cultivation of indigenous perspectives.

### **Conclusion**

To this end, this Government fully endorses Agenda 2063 as outlined by the African Union, with a commitment to "A shared strategic framework for inclusive growth and a global strategy to optimize the use of Africa's resources for the benefit of all Africans."

Significantly, at the first African Higher Education Summit held in Dakar in 2015, which I attended, an action plan was agreed to revitalize higher education for Africa's future, in furtherance of AU's Vision 2063. One priority area in the action plan, to which I wish to draw the attention of this Conference is Priority Area 9, which recommends that Africa should:

*Mobilize the Diaspora to be engaged in transforming  
Africa's higher education agenda.*

The specific action plan is to develop a 10/10 program that sponsors 1000 scholars in the African diaspora to collaborate with African universities across all disciplines every year for 10 years. They would collaborate with their counterparts on the African continent in research, curriculum development, and graduate student teaching and mentoring.

This monumental agenda if even half achieved, would be in furtherance of Nkrumah's Vision as outlined above, while simultaneously transforming the fortunes of higher education in Africa.

Colleagues, there is work to do as we sit here, and there is work to do at every forum provided to discuss the transformation of Africa's fortunes.

In the next three days, please do not lose your focus, but solely think Africa Africa Africa, in our search for transformation in Education.

Let me finally wish you all very fruitful deliberations over the next three days in your spirited inquiry into the transformation of Africa's future along the trajectory of education.

Those visiting Ghana for the first time, please enjoy your stay in this beautiful University, and enjoy the warm hospitality Ghana provides 365 days in a year.

Thank you.