

Your Excellency, President Akufo-Addo
Vice-Chancellor, Prof Oduro Owusu
Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

Vice-Chancellor Prof Oduro Owusu, let me begin by offering you the expression of our gratitude for your generosity in hosting this event. Prof Akua Kuenyehia, thank you for accepting our invitation to convene this event, with your long history of involvement in and support of the Moot Competition. Let me recall, for everyone present, that the response we received from Prof Oduro Owusu and Prof Kuenyehia was immediate, encouraging and positive. What an honour you do us by offering us a platform from which to share with everyone here this evening, this good news story from Africa.

Mr President the story of the Moot begins in the summer of 1991, with two professors talking in a parking lot in the small German city of Heidelberg. Bemoaning the fact that there were no links to speak of between African Law Faculties, the one Professor suggested the idea of a moot competition that would bring together students and professors once a year, to envisage a new, better Africa through the lens of human rights.

The other Professor basically told him to forget it: considering that the main role players were traditionally cash-strapped African public universities, the mere logistics of such an endeavour meant it would never take off the ground. These were the days before email, when the fax machine was king – if you had a fax machine; it was the time before mobile phones, when you needed to call the national telephone exchange in order to be connected to your caller; and when we often had to ring people's neighbours down the street in order to speak to them; this was the time of the National Post Office, which took many weeks to deliver the letters and packages across this vast continent.

Well, the doubting professor was Johann van der Westhuizen, founding Director of the Centre for Human Rgths, and now retired Judge of the Constitutional Court of South Africa. The more daring Professor was Christof Heyns, who succeeded him as Director of the Centre, and who became the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions (or as we like to say, the UN Special Rapporteur on all kinds of Terrible Things) and who is now a member of the UN Human Rights Committee.

Since then 26 years have come and gone. In that time, the Moot has reached 150 universities, in 50 African countries, creating a network of people and institutions that is as impressive as it is unparalleled. The sheer size of the network makes the Moot the largest and most far-reaching human rights educational initiative in Africa.

Organising the Moot in a different African country in each year is a feat of endurance. We have been in 18 countries – from the Ethiopian Highlands to the Sahel in Senegal; from the Cape winelands into the dunes of the Northern Sahara. From its source in Uganda to its end in Egypt, the waters of the Great Nile River tell the story of young men and women speaking hope and promise to human rights in Africa, and creating an indigenous African human rights jurisprudence. Where ever the Moot goes, it brings a message, it generates awareness and it kindles debate and discussion. It leaves no one indifferent.

We have done this without the means that similarly large international events have to do this sort of thing. We keep at it because, for the average African student, it is a life-altering experience. By din of our history and circumstances we continue to remain rather isolated, even from each other. Keeping the show on the road, as it were, ensures that our 55 nations – one quarter of all the countries in the world – meet through their youngest and

brightest, and exchange robustly yet amicably, in a way that no other event allows, not even in the field of sport. Through the Moot, we show our young leaders Africa as it truly is – in all its glory and with all its challenges. It is truly a different young woman or young man that returns to their home country after an experience like that.

So, for one week in August 2018, Ghanaian students will meet people from every sub-region of Africa, many from countries they have only ever heard of – like Djibouti, South Sudan and Lesotho. They come with unique ideas and a perspective and a definition of human rights that is different from theirs. In exchanging these views and ideas, they will bridge the artificial colonial divide of language and legal tradition; they will reach across culture, religion, race and class to embrace a brother or a sister and create links that will last a lifetime. In the court rooms, they will be challenged by their opponents and humbled by the judges, but they will emerge a stronger, wiser, more tolerant person. Some professors will be invited as guest lectures and external examiners at other universities; there will be invitations to conferences and seminars; and interviews for postgraduate study. The Moot is only a peg on which we hang a rich and multi-faceted experience.

The 10,000 young men and women who have gone through this process play every part in the spectrum of human rights and development actors: the manager of an organisation for rural women in Niger, a senior police officer with the child protection unit in Benin, the Senate Majority Leader in Kenya, the Dean of Law in Malawi, Human Rights Protection officers with the UN Missions in Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Central African Republic and South Sudan, Legal Officers at the African Commission, in the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and at UNAIDS ... and the 1996 University of Ghana team, former Minister Mahama Ayariga and High Court Justice Charles Ekow Baiden. The list is endless.

The Moot bridges the gap between two things: on one hand the lack of qualified staff in national and continental human rights bodies and, on the other, the rich reserve of knowledge, skill, experience, passion and youth of our Moot alumni.

In both the UNESCO and African Union awards that we have received, the Moot was cited as a catalyst for realising human rights through education. This is what we wish to preserve and promote. When we started in 1992, virtually no African university taught human rights as a subject. Today nearly every one does.

Mr President, at this point, please let me tell you the story of Abdirahim Abdullahi. Mr Abdirahim Abdullahi studied law at the University of Nairobi, where the Moot Competition was held in 2014. Three quotes used to describe him are as follows: “a high-flying, grade A student”, “a brilliant and up-coming lawyer” and “a very bright and intelligent guy”. He graduated with honours in 2013 and started work immediately afterwards. The son of a chief, he had leadership qualities in addition to his academic brilliance; the world waited in hope of greater things. Less than 2 years ago, on 2 April 2015, he and 3 other men stormed Garissa University College in Kenya, and slaughtered 150 other young people.

Soon after he started work as a lawyer in Nairobi, his father reported that he had disappeared. It is now thought that he had become radicalised as they say, and received training from Al-Shabab, an Al-Qaeda offshoot, which claimed responsibility for the attack.

Mr Abdullahi was top a law student with leadership qualities – the typical profile of our young Moot participants and alumni. Had he actually participated in the Moot Competition, might we be telling a different story now? The Moot Competition has never been more relevant in demonstrating to those who Nelson Mandela called “the leaders, teachers and

judges of tomorrow” how the law can be used as a means to resolve disputes and advance human development. Today this Moot is more relevant than ever, as a means to reach the young, those who feel disaffected and who are easily impressionable.

Your Excellency Mr President, I listened to your recent State of the Nation address with the same attention and admiration as I have listened to nearly all your public addresses since you came to office. Your mastery of the issues, your commitment to your Nation, and (I must add) your legendary public speaking abilities make my task tonight very very difficult indeed. It feels like I am aspiring to that pantheon of gods who are working for a new and a better Africa; one that is based on human dignity, true equality and the freedom from fear and want, as well as freedom to dream, to achieve and to change our continent.

In your State of the Nation address you spoke of safety and security; in your most recent press conference ~~only yesterday~~ a fiery journalist asked you tough questions about Ghana’s safety in the context of unemployed and disaffected youth being recruited into terrorist groups. I watched you reassure the people of Ghana of your government’s commitment to youth empowerment, and of course the efforts and preparedness of the forces of law and order. In that moment I wished that you could have told the journalists taking you to task the story of Mr Abdullahi, and said that in August, Ghana will host an event that is contributing to safety and security through the education of its best and brightest young lawyers, not only in Ghana but across our continent.

For me, ladies and gentlemen, it is a personal story too. I was a starry-eyed student in 1995 when I participated in the Moot. I remember meeting the team from Rwanda and realising, quite incredibly, that the 2 students were 1 Hutu and 1 Tutsi: one year before then, their mutual suspicion, fear and hatred had led to a genocide that has for ever blighted our collective conscience as Africans. The following year, I was a volunteer at the Moot in Morocco. Then I was invited to join the Centre, I did the Master’s degree in Human Rights, and I simply never left. I have been involved in the Moot for 24 years now. Like me, there is a long list of men and women who we meet in our work all across the continent, who preface their story with the simple but profound words: ‘it all started with the Moot.’

This is year 24 and I’m still here. It is my 20th year of formal employment and I am still in my first job. Let me assure you: people like Asamoah Gyan, Shatawale and even you Mr President, you have nothing on me – I am very passionate about what I do, and implacable in my conviction that we are changing our continent one young lawyer at a time. Together we are moving Africa, in the words of the Moot slogan ‘from human wrongs to human rights’.

The Moot runs on soft money, funds that we raise every year from donors and well-wishers. Small and large amounts, it all goes into one pot to help challenge a new generation of young people to envisage a new and a better Africa: one where our collective strength and wisdom is greater than our individual challenges as nations, groups and peoples. Together with our closest university partners, we have presented it for 26 uninterrupted years, in every part of our continent, including places where it seemed most unlikely, and where people said we were mad to go. We have been able to do so for three reasons: one, because we choose our partners, the host university, very carefully; two, because we have a very small and very efficient team at the Centre for Human Rights; and three, most importantly, because of the financial support we have received.

The University of Ghana is only the third African university to have hosted the Moot Competition twice. The Moot was held here, on this beautiful campus, at the turn of the

Millennium in 2000. Prof Quenyehia **was Dean at the time**, Prof Quashigah was Chief Organiser, and Dr Appiagyei-Atua had just completed his doctorate in Canada. 17 years later, the Moot is back home. Prof Kuenyehia is retired from the University, but is our Convenor; Prof Quashigah is Dean of the Faculty of Law; and Dr Appiagyei-Atua is the Chief Organiser. The circle is complete, we could not hope for a better team.

The Moot is usually the harbinger, through which we have forged our closest friendships and biggest collaborative endeavours with Faculties of Law all over Africa. The largest of these is the Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratisation in Africa.

Established in that same year, 2000, and presented as a regional cooperation initiative by 14 leading African universities, over 600 people apply to this one-year programme, which only admits 30 top graduates from around 20 countries each year. Students spend six months in Pretoria and a further six months at one of the other partner universities. Alumni constitute a cadre of highly trained experts in every sphere of human rights activity. With a 100% employment rate, these graduates are extremely sought-after. Individually and collectively, they have morphed into an incredible force for change. 22 of them come from Ghana. This is more than twice the number of alumni Ghana should have if one divides 510 alumni by 55 African countries. It is a testimony of the high calibre of lawyers who graduate from this Faculty of Law and university graduates from Ghana in general. They are a microcosm of the wider alumni group, including Leda Limann with the UN Mission in South Sudan, High Court Judge George Buadi and former Minister Nana-Oye Lithur.

The 2017 Moot Competition gives us the opportunity to strengthen our ties with the Faculty of Law at the University of Ghana, a founding partner of the Master's programme and a centre for human rights excellence in its own right. The Moot is really only the tip of the iceberg of what is possible in terms of collaborative endeavours between African universities. The one thing we have learned over the years is the inestimable value of working together as institutions in the creation of a network of excellence in human rights education.

Ladies and gentlemen, although much remains to be done here like elsewhere, Ghana has much to show in human rights protection and democratic credentials. It is therefore with great pride that we will bring the rest of Africa here in October. With this level of support and commitment from the University of Ghana and indeed the Nation, and paraphrasing Winston Churchill, this will be the Moot to end all moots.

The bottom line of this endless rhyme is that a continental event such as this one is impossible to run without the generous support of financial donors.

And so – as the Faculty of Law at the University of Ghana, and the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria – we stand before you today, armed with a simple but profound idea: an idea that has created a momentum for change on our continent; an idea that has shattered every myth and become the stuff of legend; an idea that has raised the bar on human rights education; and an idea that has shown what good we can do if we are prepared to dream big, and endure small sacrifices.

We stand before you this evening, with the same idea that we have offered for 26 years, and we ask you for your support.

Thank you.