

STATEMENT BY HON. SAMUEL ATTA AKYEA, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR ABUAKWA SOUTH CONSTITUENCY ON THE OCCASION OF THE 54th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF DR. JOSEPH KWAME KYERETWIE BOAKYE DANQUAH AT NSAWAM PRISON.

RT. HON SPEAKER,

The 4th day of February, can never be wiped off the political calendar of our great nation, Ghana .It is the very tragic day in which Dr. Joseph Kwame Kyeretwie Boakye Danquah, the world class lawyer, philosopher, a pioneer of Ghana's independence, journalist, legislator, a historian and a prolific author was pronounced dead at 6 am in the Nsawam Medium Security Prisons in condemned cell No. 4 by the prison's medical doctor, Dr. R Negovetic.

Yesterday marked the 54th anniversary of that cruel and horrific death.

The circumstances of his incarceration, Mr. Speaker, are easy to assemble. Dr. J.B Danquah was the opposition leader when Ghana secured its political independence on the 6th day of March 1957 with Dr. Kwame Nwiah Nkrumah as its first Prime Minister.

The infant state having thrown off the shackles of colonialism, had within a year, a rather pernicious replacement, the Prevention Detention Act of 1958, passed by the Parliament of the day which conferred unfettered powers on President Nkrumah to imprison anybody in the realm under an Executive Instrument for whatever term, at his pleasure and without due process.

May I quote, with your kind permission, the text of Preventive Detention Act 1961 Executive Instrument 172, under which Dr. Danquah was placed in prison custody the 2nd time:

“Whereas the President is satisfied that this Order is necessary to prevent the persons described in the Schedule to this Order from acting in a manner prejudicial to the security of the State:

Now, Therefore, in exercise of the powers conferred on the President by section 2 of the Preventive Detention Act, 1958 (NO.17) and delegated to the Minister of the

Interior, this Order is made with the approval of Cabinet this Third day of October, 1961:"

1. The persons described in the Schedule to this Order shall be taken into custody and detained under section 2 of the Preventive Detention Act, 1958.
2. Subject to the power under section 3 of that Act to suspend, vary or revoke this Order, and subject to subsection (3) of section 5 of that Act, the period for which the persons described in the Schedule to this Order are to be detained shall be for a period of five years.

This Order shall take effect at one O'clock in the morning of the Third day of October, 1961.

The Preventive Detention Act, was simply "detention without trial" and it had the blessings of the then Parliament. The irony is that, the following parliamentarians were imprisoned by reason of that monstrous piece of legislation:

1. Joe Appiah, MP for Atwima Amansie Constituency
2. Victor Owusu, MP for Agona – Kwabre Constituency
3. P.K.K Quaidoo, MP for Amenfi Aowin Constituency
4. SG.D Anto, MP for Kpandu North Constituency

Outrageous as it were, all the four (4) Members of Parliament arrested and detained on the 3rd day of October, 1961, lost their seats in Parliament on the basis of the 21 days absence rule. Obviously, they would not be permitted to commute from Nsawam Prisons to indulge in Parliamentary deliberations in Accra.

The journey from the dark age of the Preventive Detention Act to the enlightenment of 1996 constitution, Mr. Speaker, I beg to submit, has a tortuous path paved with Dr. Danquah's innocent blood.

Enough of the infamous Preventive Detention Act. May I touch on Dr. Kwame Kyeretwie Boakye Danquah as a Legislator?

In 1946, Dr. Danquah became a member of the Legislative Council which was the colonial era Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, because of economy of time, let me highlight a few contributions of that pillar of freedom and well-endowed advocate.

Dr. Danquah's immense interest in education is reflected in the question time with the colonial secretary.

"Dr. Danquah puts the following questions to the Colonial Secretary:-

In view of the high cost of construction modern buildings for the training of teacher and education of the people and in view of the country's sense of urgency to provide senior primary education and secondary for all whose parents can afford to pay for the uniforms, the books and the fees , what plans are there to dispense with the present fashion of expensive building and equipment for the training of teachers and education of the people and to provide temporary emergency Education Rules for teachers' training colleges and schools to be opened and conducted in any type of building , structure or huts so long as they provide cover against sun and rain and are hygienic? (See Legislative Council Debates, session 1948, Issue No 1)"

His intellectual temperament, which is the soul of debate, is captured in the hansard as follows:

"You cannot ride roughshod over other people's opinions, if you are democratic."(Legislative Assembly Debates – Jun 12, 1950)

"Criticism is the salt of politics and we must not be afraid of it." (Legislative Assembly Debates – June 30, 1952)

The power of polytechnic education as a tool for economic development is stated strongly by him in the Legislative Assembly debates of March 28th, 1947:

"We are asking particularly that, in the field of engineering, it might be a good thing not to rely entirely upon Achimota because they have limited resources, and they also aim for what we call first grade Engineers- those with degrees. There is a lower grade: those of the polytechnic type, and we feel that these men will be a great help afterwards. We , therefore , respectfully ask Your Excellency to consider the establishment of a general polytechnic for the training of men of the standard 7 type to handle some of the requirements of Government in engineering which now confront us."

Relating to freedom which is primordial to our human existence, the doyen of Gold Coast politics pronounced himself thus:

“There is no school nor University for liberty or freedom. Neither liberty nor freedom is a degree or diploma to be acquired after years of tears and toil and sweat in a school or in a University. Freedom is a birthright and liberty its expression. We have a desire to be liberated because we know we are entitled to be free.” (Legislative Assembly Debates – March 12, 1952)

Of and concerning corruption, Dr. Danquah was very forthright in his position.

“If you are going to entrust public money to persons who are not going to be honest, and who are going to yield to bribery and corruption and who are going to allow themselves to be influenced, then you are not doing good to the country.” (Legislative Assembly Debates - March 27, 1953)

Regarding the principal duty of Parliament, he posited as follows:

“I think that the existence of Parliament or Assembly it to look after public money that is our first duty.” (Legislative Assembly Debates – February 12, 1953)

The consummate philosopher as he was, he reasoned the role of Chieftaincy in the following terms:

“The Chiefs represent the voice and power of the past and they signal the hope and strength of the future.” (Legislative Assembly Debates – March 21, 1953)

Mr. Speaker, even in his death, his jailor will not accord him the honour and dignity the departed deserves. The mortal remains of Dr. Danquah was hurriedly interned under 48hours. The final funeral rites are still outstanding 54 years down the line.

This august house in keeping with Akan customs and traditions and more importantly to hallow our “Ghanaianess”, If you like, should help organize his funeral rites.

The Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica rightly described your place in Ghana’s history as “the dean of Ghanaian nationalist politicians.”

You were martyred because of your love for freedom and Ghana’s democracy.

May truth triumph over lies and may good reign over evil.

Thank you Mr. Speaker for indulging me on this commemorative day