

STATEMENT ON ENDING THE 37 YEARS TROPHY DROUGHT OF THE BLACK STARS: THE ROLE OF THE NATION

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Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for granting me such an enviable opportunity to make a statement to this august house on the topic '*Ending the 37 years trophy drought of the Black Stars of Ghana: the role of the nation.*'

Mr. Speaker, one of the sporting activities in Ghana that the citizens are very passionate about is football. Not only does football bring honour and prestige to the nation, it also fosters national unity and cohesion as well as enhancing the nation's international reputation. It is for these reasons that government continuously invest heavily on our National Football Teams with the ultimate aim of making the nation proud.

Mr. Speaker, Egypt will be hosting 23 African Countries between 21st June and 19th July for 32nd Edition of the Africa Cup of Nations. Being one of the participating nations, Ghana will be making her 22nd appearance in Group F which comprises of Benin, Cameroon and Guinea Bissau on 25th, 29th June and 2nd July respectively. I will therefore implore the house to garner all the supports that we can give them so that they will bring the trophy. With one accord we wish them well and our prayers are with you.

Mr. Speaker, it is an undeniable fact that the Ghana Black Stars is one of the decorated teams in Africa. Since the inception of Africa Cup of Nations in 1957, Ghana has made 22 appearances and has tasted 9 finals with 4 wins and 5 as runners up. In the annals of African football, Ghana was the first nation to win the most coveted continental trophy for 4 times (1963, 1965, 1978 and 1982).

As a result of this the Black Stars of Ghana was adjudged the undisputed champions of African football at the end of the 20th Century. However, since the beginning of the 21st Century, due to series of disappointments, Ghana has lost this sweet accolade to the Pharaohs of Egypt for their dominance between 2006 and 2010.

Mr. Speaker, it is worthy to note that after the triumphant victory over Libya in 1982, Ghana is yet to taste another continental glory although the search for the most coveted continental trophy continued unabated. For 37 years, Ghana had made a record appearance of 8 Semi- Finals and 3 finals appearances of which all have ended in disappointments.

Mr. Speaker, never in our football history have we experienced series of heartbreaks than the period between 2008 and 2017. Historically, Ghana was the first nation to make 4 consecutive semi-finals appearances in the Africa Cup of Nations. This feat was recorded between 1963 and 1970. With this, we broke-even by winning two (1963 and 1965) and losing the other two (1967 and 1970). However, between 2008 and 2017, the Black Stars have made an unprecedented 6 consecutive semi-finals appearances with two finals without any victory.

Mr. Speaker, the lost to the Indomitable Lions of Cameroon in the semi-finals at Kumasi in 2008, the painful defeat to the Pharaohs of Egypt and the Elephants of Ivory Coast in the finals at Angola 2010 and Equatorial Guinea 2015, the preventable defeat in the semi-finals in 2012, 2013 and 2017 have not been forgotten. We remember them with grief and sorrow.

Mr. Speaker, due to these series of disappointments, most Ghanaians have lost interest and hope in our Black Stars to the extent that some of us are questioning the level of patriotism and loyalty of the players to the nation. It is evidently clear that the patronage of Ghana's football is dwindling vis-à-vis the dominance of the European football. Although there are other factors, the

underwhelming performances of the Black Stars cannot be discounted as a major contributing factor. In spite of this, I will take this opportunity to caution the nation that if the Black Stars are going to make any meaningful impact in Egypt, it will immensely depend on the support we will give them. I have no reservation that with our prayers and teeming support as a nation, they are going to win the trophy. The following are the reasons underscoring my conviction that the Black Stars are going to bring the trophy to Ghana.

Mr. Speaker, undoubtedly, 2019 has been a year of surprises to the football fraternity. In the year 2019, the miracle at Anfield is so fresh on our minds. The fairytale of Ajax when they beat Real Madrid, Juventus and Tottenham Hotspurs at their own backyard are still widely discussed. Jurgen Klopp's first UCL title after 3 successive attempts has become news. Mauricio Sarri winning his first ever title in his 28 years coaching career underpins the fact that nothing is impossible to be achieved in 2019. It is worthy to note that the fate of the Black Stars is not different from Jurgen Klopp and Mauricio Sarri. If these two renowned football managers have been able to win the UCL and UEL titles in 2019, what makes it impossible for the Black Stars end their 37 years trophy? With hope and determination, it is possible for our boys to make us proud.

Mr. Speaker, it is an established fact that North African countries have been favorite places for winning trophies. Out of the four continental trophies to our name, two were won on our home soil (1963 and 1978), the other two were won on the soil of Tunisia (1965) and Libya (1982). We have not forgotten the indelible impact that we made in the FIFA U-20 Youth Championship hosted by Egypt in 2009. It is exactly a decade ago when we became the first African country to win the U-20 title after Black Satellites beat Brazil on penalties. Thankfully, we still have some of the players that played in that tournament in our team. We are hoping that the good omen that followed us anytime we travel to any of the North African countries will lead the Black Stars in this year too.

Mr. Speaker, it should be on record that all our successes in football in recent times have occurred in years ending with nine (9), hence 2019 has a special package for us. To recollect, 1999 provided us with the African Youth Championship title which was hosted by Ghana. We can still recollect the immense contribution of Sammy Adjei, Owusu Afriyie, Aziz Ansah among others and the popular song for that tournament, 'Aben Wo Ha'. Similarly, the 2009 delivered us with African Youth Championship and the World Youth Championship in Rwanda and Egypt respectively. The impact of Dominic Adiyah, Ransford Osei, Agyeman Badu, Andre Dede Ayew among others are so fresh on our memories. With these staggering past records, I believe strongly that the luck that we had in those years will lead us this year tournament too.

Mr. Speaker, to conclude, my advice to the players is that they should be very discipline on the field of play and they should stay away from social media when they are off the field. This will help to avoid any unwarranted comments that will incur the wrath of Ghanaians. We do not want a repeat of the Brazil Saga and the social media outburst. To the coach, my advice is that he should be bold when taking decisions. To the media, I will plead that you will employ a little bit of circumspection in your reportage about the happenings in the camp of the Black Stars. Finally, to the nation and the teeming supporters of the Black Stars, I ask that we should manage our expectations. We should not put excessive pressure on them since there are no minnows and walkovers in the game any longer. We wish them all the best, may you bring the cup to Ghana.

Thank you.