



REPUBLIC OF GHANA

**SESSIONAL ADDRESS
BY THE PRESIDENT.
FLT.-LT. J.J. RAWLINGS
ON THE OCCASION OF
THE STATE OPENING
OF THE SECOND
MEETING OF PARLIAMENT**

THURSDAY 29TH APRIL, '93

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Mr. Speaker,

Vice-President,

Chief Justice,

Members of the Council of State,

Ministers of State,

Members of Parliament,

Distinguished Guests,

Countrymen and Women,

7th January, 1993 marked an important stage in our country's quest for a constitutional order enshrining freedom and justice. In my oath of office I pledged myself to the "service and well-being of the people of the Republic of Ghana and to do right to all manner of persons".

This morning as I stand before you who have been duly elected by the people of this country, I ask you to remember the responsibility that all of us in government have to serve the interests of our people, all of them, male or female, high or low, in the remotest part of the country or in the city, in their poor homes or in the luxurious residential areas, young or old, and whichever ethnic background they may come from.

We must constantly remember the words of the pledges of our respective offices and renew our dedication to work daily in accordance with those pledges.

Mr. Speaker,

We may take pride in successfully accomplishing the task of holding elections within the multi-party framework in a largely peaceful atmosphere and more or less within the time frame that we set ourselves.

Some persons amongst us did try to foment instability and turmoil to disrupt the peaceful evolution of the transition process. There were some who deliberately provoked violent

reactions from others so as to point fingers. Some even boasted and still do that they would bring about a situation of chaos similar to those of other neighbouring countries. But the good sense of our people has prevailed and we are here today in tribute to that good sense. With your support we should continue to provide the basic needs of our people. We should not forsake the trust reposed in us.

Mr. Speaker,

In my inaugural address of January 7th, I outlined some of the perspectives on the state of our nation. Today, I would like to provide further elaboration of those perspectives and seek your contribution in the task of moving our nation forward to an even higher level of performance.

The era of the Provisional National Defence Council, spanning a decade and more, will go down as an era of major achievements in nation-building, especially in the economic sphere.

During what was known as the "lost decade" for Africa, we in Ghana revived our economy and achieved steady growth: we built new roads, rehabilitated our ports and harbours, our telecommunications systems; we extended electricity to all regions of the country; we made productive activity on our farms, and in our mines and factories more rewarding. We undertook the reform of our educational system to make it more relevant. We encouraged and attracted foreign investment and sought to make our economy cope with the demands of a very competitive world.

Mr. Speaker,

As we look ahead, I believe we can all agree that the future prosperity of our country depends on us sustaining the economic reforms under the PNDC and accelerating the pace of economic growth. We will get nowhere if we substitute for realistic and logical policies some impractical and populist ideas.

The greatest challenge we face as a nation currently is, in my view, the challenge of summoning the will, and the moral courage to stay on course with the human and economic

recovery objectives we set ourselves in the past decade after years of national decline. There will be voices beckoning us to forget about sacrifice, voices that pretend that we can achieve progress without going through the difficulties. Let us not be deceived.

Fellow Ghanains, we are truly carrying an economic burden. We do not however consider it in our interest to adopt the attitude of those who say, "Live now, pay later". For us, the question is whether the burden is fairly shared. This is the concern that will continue to guide us in taking economic measures for the development of this country.

Mr. Speaker,

True historians can tell the younger generation of politicians the consequences of myopic and destructive policies in the past. Among other things, these policies resulted in hopelessly run-down social and productive infrastructure and continuously falling standards of living and declining public integrity.

The simple and plain truth of life, confirmed by our own history, and which applies to individuals and nations alike, is that one cannot live beyond one's means for any extended period of time. The truth is bound to catch up with us soon.

If your decisions as parliamentarians are taken with one eye fixed on immediate popularity and prospects in the next election, then you will be in danger of betraying the trust of the electorate by legislating only for the convenience of today at the expense of tomorrow.

Members of Parliament must help to rekindle the spirit of self-help in the country. You must participate directly in community programmes and not see these as the responsibility of local assemblymen from whom you can command reports of what is going on in the locality. You must be a part of what is going on.

I am confident that you will find a responsible balance between our people's present needs and the requirements of a

ourselves not as politicians who think of the next election but as statesmen who think of the next generation.

Mr. Speaker,

The programme which the National Democratic Congress and the progressive Alliance presented to our nation was not one of sweet promises, and easy victories; it was a programme of determined and just struggle to make our nation strong.

It is in that light that I will be asking you to undertake the review of the 1993 Budget statement which will be formally placed before you shortly. The question has been asked, why did the outgoing PNDC Government have to present a budget two days before the new Constitution?

The answer is quite simple: this is exactly what the new Constitution anticipated. It was clear that with a new Constitution in force, it would take some time to establish the new government in accordance with processes under the Constitution. The Government machinery could not raise revenues or authorise expenditures without an approved budget.

If we had delayed and waited till Parliament was ready to debate a budget, the salaries of public sector employees for instance could simply not have been paid. We do have in the Transitional Provisions a specific provision that "the financial estimates in operation for the financial year in being at the coming into force of this Constitution shall, until provision is otherwise made by Act of Parliament, continue and have full effect".

I have said many a time that the issue of the economy must be insulated from partisan considerations. We must not imagine that multi-party or Parliamentary democracy requires opposing views on the economy just for the sake of debate nor must we forget the danger to the very sovereignty of our nation if we do not keep our economic programme on course.

Mr. Speaker,

I would also like us all to remember during the forthcoming discussions on the Budget that we will not be able to finance the development projects we all wish to have for our constituents without raising the necessary revenues. We have

also got to realise that not all our hopes for development will be achieved in one year.

The phasing of projects will be an important part of the work of the National Development Planning Commission. We must all explain to our constituents what the costs of their expectations are so that they can understand this phased approach to our development objectives.

Let me, however, restate our commitment to the provision of water, electricity and good roads, especially to the rural areas, and to the completion of ongoing projects designed to improve living conditions of the rural communities.

Mr. Speaker,

Controls on public expenditure, economising wherever possible, avoiding waste in every possible way, are going to require a major effort from all organs of Government. There will be a determined effort to reduce cost wherever possible. Certain measures have already been put in place for achieving that objective.

The Ministry of Finance has issued directives to regulate and control recruitment in subvented organisations.

Many establishments continue to be over staffed. With the Government's wage bill rising to almost 50 percent of national revenue, every worker, be a manager, supervisor, technician or labourer will have to ensure the security of his employment through productive effort.

The Constitution requires that by 7th July, 1993, at the latest, some nine weeks from today, no less than nine Acts of Parliament must have been passed to establish certain institutions of State. These are:

- (a) the National Commission on Civic Education;
- (b) the Electoral Commission;
- (c) the District Assemblies Common Fund;
- (d) the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice;
- (e) the Minerals Commission;
- (f) the Forestry Commission;

- (g) the Fisheries Commission;
- (h) the National Council for Higher Education; and
- (i) the National Media Commission.

Draft Bills have already been prepared in all cases for submission by the relevant Ministers to Parliament. These Bills will have to be passed into law in time for the requisite appointments to be made.

Additionally, it is required that by 7th July, 1993, there would have been an Act passed to define the jurisdiction of the Regional Tribunals and to establish lower courts or tribunals.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members,

Our vision of justice at the grassroots level is one in which the people participate, where the quality of justice is self-evident and transparent, and where decisions advance the individual and collective well-being of the community or district.

Day in and day out we decry anti-social and irresponsible activities, we also decry the insanitary conditions of our

neighbours, the environmental hazards and damage caused by bush-fires, chain-saw operators and charcoal burners. We decry the filth dumped in our backyards and in the community drains by uncaring neighbours whose activities we are powerless to affect. We decry the choked drainage systems, the rubbish heaps and refuse dumps, the filthy streets and markets, as well as the unhealthy public places of convenience.

We see and know those who are responsible for such anti-social acts, and yet are too cowardly to reproach or report. So, we call on "Government" to do something, or demand that there should be laws, law enforcement agencies and judicial sanctions to stop such activities. To be honest, sometimes there is no urge to report breaches of the law because the authorities which must act are unwilling to take up the responsibility.

That is why in matters affecting our daily lives and the well-being of our communities, we must not evade our individual responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker,

Chiefs, community leaders, heads of families and social groups are capable of administering ordinary people's justice if only we acknowledge their right and power to exercise sanctions.

If we want to ensure that streets and drains are clean, that our forests survive, that refuse dumps are cleared, then justice must be decentralized. The Arbitration Committees of the CDR's made a positive contribution to the pursuit of justice in a simple and inexpensive manner. Can we evolve an arrangement which will build on this experience?

Mr. Speaker,

How to make each member of the community see himself as a participant and a beneficiary of the judicial process - that is the challenge posed by the Constitution's requirement that you pass a new Act to establish lower courts or tribunals. When you come to deliberate on the new Courts Bill, we expect you to be guided by these concerns and sentiments, by the ordinary man's sense of justice, by the community's well-being and orderly development.

Mr. Speaker,

The pressing assignments before this House means there will be two gruelling months ahead of you if we are to beat the Constitutional deadline in addition to your other duties in Parliament, in your constituencies, and, in some cases, in your Ministries.

The legislative programme for this year will also include a consideration of the Parliamentary Service Bill to regulate the Parliamentary Service and a new Local Government Bill to incorporate the new provisions of the Constitution on local government and decentralisation in time for the district level elections to be held later in the year.

Mr. Speaker,

In the short period since the inauguration of the Fourth Republic, we have already seen that adherence to the letter and spirit of the Constitution involves careful attention to procedural details both by Parliament and by the Executive.

You must also face the fact that a significant proportion of the electorate is apprehensive that Constitutional and Parliamentary procedures could impede the urgency with which we need to address national problems. It is up to you to prove that this need not be so. Many Ghanaians, whilst endorsing the principles of Parliamentary democracy, fear a return to the old ways, to "business as usual". It is in your hands to dispel such fears by demonstrating an appreciation of your solemn responsibilities.

Mr. Speaker,

I must draw attention to areas of the Constitution which require clarification or need to be reconciled with each other. For instance, Article 70 of the Constitution established a mode of appointing the District Assemblies Common Fund Administrator which conflicts with the provision in Article 252.

The provision that chiefs cannot take part in active politics which was introduced at a late stage in the Constitutional drafting process, also requires clarification in the light of other provisions allowing chiefs to be appointed to any public office,

for which they are otherwise qualified.

Again, we have experienced how the Constitutional requirements for laying instruments before Parliament for 21 sitting days delayed the election of regional representatives to the Council of State thus holding up appointments which require consultation with the Council. Consideration will have to be given to the efficacy of having Regional Ministers who are Members of Parliament.

There is also the need to broaden the composition of the National Media Commission to make it a truly democratic framework for regulating the activities of the media.

These are but a few examples where we may need to consider revisions to the Constitution in accordance with the Constitution itself. I am aware that amendments to a Constitution are not to be taken lightly and my Government will be sensitive to the need for fidelity to the fundamental principles of the Constitution.

Members of Parliament,

I would also like to express my intention to establish regular interaction between the legislature and executive beyond the formal requirements of the Constitution. Such interaction, which will also involve the Council of State, will foster the cooperative spirit which we require to make progress.

Those of us who have worked together over the past decade are aware of the value of consultation and consensus, as exemplified by, and rooted in, our traditional decision-making processes.

Mr. Speaker,

The realignments of Ministries and the establishment of new Ministries for Environment, Tourism and Science and Technology reflect changing national priorities. The new Ministry of Mines and Energy joins two sectors which require mutually reinforcing policies and programmes. The Ministry of Lands and Forestry will give full attention to land tenure and land use as well as the development and renewal of our forest resources.

The combination of the Trade and Industry ministerial portfolios is to ensure better harmonisation of the interrelated objectives in these important areas of activity. Our industrial policy aims at developing an efficient, internationally competitive manufacturing capacity that uses local resources as much as possible, and creates jobs for the people.

Our trade liberalization policy has sought to make available to the Ghanaian consumer goods and services of quality, at the lowest possible cost. Foreign inputs to the industrial sector are also expected to be procured from the most favourable sources so as to help the competitiveness of our industry.

Only close attention to developments in international trade environment will enable us provide the needed support to our local industrialists without penalising the Ghanaian consumer through unfair monopolies.

Mr. Speaker,

It is Government's belief that a dynamic private sector will be the engine for growth in the years ahead. In fact, democratization and the growth of the private sector have gone hand in hand. If in the past any impression was given that my Government was against the private sector, I would like to take this opportunity to dispel that notion as totally wrong and misconceived.

What we have been against have been the activities of a few people who insist on enjoying all the benefits of social infrastructure without paying taxes and honouring other obligations to the state, seeking all the time to exploit the system for personal advantage. The vast majority of our private sector entrepreneurs are honest law-abiding citizens who are as adversely affected by the dishonest activities of a minority amongst them as the rest of society.

In pursuance of our objectives, Government will be in constant consultation with the Private Sector Advisory Group to study problems confronting the Private Sector and come out

with solutions for them.

Mr. Speaker,

The Divestiture Programme has been an important element in our economic policy and is of especial importance in the 1993 Budget. We are not divesting of state enterprises to enrich a few private individuals at the expense of the nation. Our programme aims at providing resources for Government to undertake development programmes in the country and also infusing capital into these enterprises through selling Government shares either wholly or partially.

Through divestiture we are bringing interested new investors to revitalize several enterprises which were on the verge of collapse. The divestiture of some of the Government's participation in even successful enterprises is also an avenue for more private sector participation in line with the constitutional objective in the Directive Principles of State Policy of "ensuring that individuals and the private sector bear their fair share of social and national responsibilities to contribute to the overall development of the country".

Mr. Speaker,

It is obvious that our economic objectives cannot be achieved without a strong agricultural base. Despite some outstanding successes in agricultural production over the past few years, there is still the need for greater efforts to provide facilities for the efficient production, storage and marketing of food and agricultural raw materials. We must continue to increase food production to enable us to meet intermittent local shortages, and handle emergencies caused by natural or man-made disasters.

Our undoubted successes in increased crop production, tend to be undermined by post harvest losses as well as disruptions in marketing and storage.

Under-utilization of installed grain drying and storage facilities is being addressed by bringing District Assemblies into the operations of grain silos.

Some agricultural problems, such as complaints from cotton farmers that their greatly increased yields are not

promptly purchased, have their roots outside the agricultural sector. Many of the textile firms which are shareholders of the Ghana Cotton Company, and which claim to be operating profitably, have piled up huge debts for cotton supplied, and have therefore locked up the funds which should be going to purchase the cotton farmers crops.

The Government has therefore directed that the necessary steps be taken to enforce the collection of these debts, so that our hard working farmers are not discouraged from their efforts.

High priority has been accorded to the livestock sub-sector under the Medium Term Agricultural Development Plan while our fishermen will also be encouraged and assisted to increase fish production from marine and inland water sources. Fishing inputs are being provided to fishermen on reasonable repayment terms whilst reported malpractices involving premix fuel are being investigated with a view to rectifying the anomalies.

Mr. Speaker,

The Government will continue to pay close attention to productivity in the cocoa sector. With the exceptionally low level of world market prices we must be particularly concerned about reducing the costs involved in purchasing and exporting cocoa. But the Government will maintain its policy of paying cocoa farmers appropriate prices for their toil. We are also committed to maintaining Ghana's distinctive position as the supplier of the finest cocoa of consistent quality.

Action is also proceeding on private participation in internal cocoa purchasing, and licences to operate have already been issued by the Ghana Cocoa Board to various companies.

In the mining sector our aim will continue to be the effective and efficient exploration and exploitation of the country's mineral resources in the interest of the national economy with the minimum harm to the environment.

Our objective is to expand the country's mineral production beyond traditional minerals such as gold, diamonds,

bauxite and manganese. The potential for the development of salt exports for instance has already been engaging serious attention.

Mr. Speaker,

Timber from our forests has traditionally ranked third as a foreign exchange earner, after cocoa and minerals. It is regrettable, however, that despite our efforts to strengthen the agencies charged with rational and sustainable management of our forest resources, this precious heritage continues to be eroded as a result of land clearing for farming, bush fires, the search for wood fuels for our too-rapidly increasing population and wasteful and poorly managed logging.

The Government will take urgent measures to optimize resource utilization, ensure future supplies of timber and conserve and manage our forest estate so as to maintain the ecological balance and diversity of the natural environment.

A new concessions allocation procedure is to be introduced to handle expired and confiscated concessions to

ensure that capable and properly equipped timber processors have access to an adequate resource base, whilst concession-holders without the capacity to utilize and manage the resource and who simply rent out our forests under the guise of extraction agreements will forfeit the right to continue this destructive and parasitic practice.

The encouragement of value-added processing and the banning of certain log exports are part of a programme to transform our timber exports by reducing gross volume and increasing net value.

A new national Forest Policy reflecting these concerns will soon be presented for approval by Parliament.

Mr. Speaker,

Tourism has of late shown the potential to become a major foreign exchange earner. Tourism has a number of substantial advantages. It is less subject to the fluctuations of distant commodity markets, but depends on our own efforts to provide, apart from the infrastructure, a peaceful, welcoming

and comfortable atmosphere for visitors.

Tourism, however, requires careful control to ensure that we avoid the negative social effects which indiscriminate mass tourism has brought to some developing countries, and the Government will ensure that such controls are effectively established.

Mr. Speaker,

The improvement and expansion of the country's telecommunications network is another dimension of our programme towards national development. The past ten years have witnessed structural changes and significant improvements in our telecommunication infrastructure. The basic objective of our policies on telecommunication are to bring about further expansion of the telecommunication facilities particularly into the rural and remote areas of the country where the average telephone density is at present very low.

To promote this, private sector participation in the provision of telecommunication infrastructure and services will

be given more encouragement.

It is desirable in this regard, to review the existing telecommunication and broadcasting framework including existing legislation with a view to creating the enabling environment for the accelerated provision of reliable and efficient services.

In order to ensure that private participation proceeds in a systematic and orderly manner, the Government has decided to set up a multi-disciplinary National Communication body responsible to Government for research, development and regulation of Telecommunication and Broadcasting as well as frequency management in the country.

Mr. Speaker,

Educational reforms were designed several times in the past, but were never implemented beyond a limited experimental stage until the PNDC implemented first the Junior Secondary School and then the Senior Secondary Schools systems.

Inevitably, in such a recent set of reforms, there will be problems and difficulties. Some are material and logistic, whilst others are perceptual. But as each year passes, the system is being fine-tuned as problems are identified and addressed.

With the JSS and SSS in place, our current emphasis will now be at the two ends of the scale --- Primary education will be upgraded and improved to provide a sound foundation, whilst the Tertiary Education reform programme goes ahead.

We stand committed to the Educational Reform Programme and will pursue it until children have access to relevant and high quality education to whatever stage their capabilities will allow.

Over the next four years, approximately 2000 deprived Primary Schools which have been compelled to hold classes under trees and in sub-standard structures will be provided not only with improved accommodation but with houses for headteachers in order to improve their supervisory role. Under this programme, communities will be increasingly involved in

the management, supervision and improvement of Primary School facilities.

Mr. Speaker,

Population growth continues, and there is relatively little change in the fertility rate in the country. Family Planning coverage is still low despite some encouraging responses. The Ministry of Health has therefore formulated plans for accelerating Maternity and Child Health Services, including Family Planning, in the short and medium term.

The Government will continue to stress Primary Health Care and the ability of preventive measures in our communities through better nutrition, sanitation, immunization programmes and other steps to reduce and even eliminate preventable diseases.

We will continue with the steps being taken to streamline procurement procedures for medical supplies and the standardization of essential equipment to reduce waste in the

The Ministry of Health will implement a programme designed to improve the national capacity for research into the efficacy of herbal medicines, and to strengthen the Ministry's own unit for herbal and traditional medicine.

The Government will also introduce a National Health Insurance Scheme, and concrete proposals will be presented to Parliament.

Mr. Speaker,

The fine achievements of our sportsmen notably in the fields of boxing and soccer have boosted our national pride and enhanced our prestige internationally.

It is the aim of the Government to give greater encouragement to our sportsmen and women to win more laurels for the country. To achieve this requires long term strategic planning and investments in the provision of modern stadia and other facilities commensurate with our international prestige in sports.

To this end, Government will encourage partnership between private business, voluntary organizations and schools within the respective communities in the provision of sports and recreational facilities. I must say that the Government recognises the importance of physical recreation for the health and welfare of our people.

Mr. Speaker,

We will continue to stress participatory democracy to ensure the responsiveness and accountability of Government to the governed. The District Assemblies which were established as the centres of local political authority have since their inception been initiating, co-ordinating, managing and executing policies in all matters affecting their localities.

The effectiveness of the District Assemblies depends largely on the successful translation into reality of the decentralisation of the machinery of Government. However, the physical presence of the 22 decentralised departments is yet to be fully achieved and financial decentralisation has not been effectively implemented.

A revised Local Government Bill reflecting these concerns will soon be presented to Parliament. A programme for the acceleration of decentralisation has been finalised.

The Interim National Electoral Commission is being requested to initiate processes for holding district level elections before the end of this year.

Mr. Speaker,

Whilst constitutional requirements and practical reality will not permit the registers to be replaced before the district level elections, we are concerned that steps are taken to replace the registers immediately thereafter.

I will accordingly request the substantive Electoral Commission, as soon as it is constituted, to take steps to compile a new Voters Register in time for the 1996 Presidential and Parliamentary elections. We hope friends of Ghana who are genuinely interested in her democratic future will assist us in mobilizing the very substantial funding which will be needed not only for the registration exercise but also for a National

Identification Card System.

Mr. Speaker,

The problem of unemployment is a matter of grave concern to all of us, and it is the task of this administration to ensure that more employment is generated, not through costly and artificial job creation, but through genuine economic growth offering opportunities for real and productive jobs to those with initiative and the will to work.

We expect to do this largely through the energised private sector as well as the informal self-employment sector which stand to reap the real benefits of our economic policies. At the same time, Government has formulated a 3-year phased programme in selected districts in each region to support a number of simple and feasible Community Initiative Projects. In the first year, an amount of ₦6 billion has been voted to complete over 400 partly completed community projects, including Primary and Junior Secondary School classrooms and teachers quarters, health posts, health centres and nutrition centres.

It is projected that over 11,000 skilled jobs will be created in the first year of this project, with additional jobs being created in the subsequent years.

Mr. Speaker,

The problem of unemployment and under-employment is, in many respects, illustrated by the youth who line some roads in our cities selling dog chains and other items. A number of these young men in their quest for means of livelihood have fallen victim to unscrupulous drug dealers who are using them in their underworld network of drug trafficking. These activities have been under the close surveillance of the security agencies in recent months and we will act decisively to stem this corrupting influence on our youth.

Mr. Speaker,

Ghana's Armed Forces continue to distinguish themselves in peace keeping duties in many parts of the world. They have also participated fully in national affairs by providing numerous social services including medical care and air transport as well as road and bridge construction. All this is in addition to their

principal duty of readiness to defend our territorial integrity.

That Ghana is a nation of peace and stability in the sub-region of turmoil is testimony to their professional competence even in the face of occasional provocations.

Whilst a few people here in Ghana make uninformed remarks about excessive military expenditure, it is an established fact that Ghana is one developing country which spends the least resources on the military.

We shall however need to ensure that our military and security personnel, including the Police, have the means to renovate run-down barracks and provide the basic equipment and material for the effective discharge of their duties.

This is in accordance with Article 210 of the Constitution which provides that the Armed Forces should be equipped and maintained to perform their role of the defence of Ghana.

Mr. Speaker,

The focus of our foreign policy will continue to be the maintenance of friendly relations with our immediate neighbours and indeed all the sister countries of Africa. As a country we have our fundamental interests which we must pursue in a principled manner. We will also play our part in ensuring that justice and adherence to democratic principles find greater expression in the world, especially in South Africa and the Middle East.

We shall continue our support for the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to promote better economic relations in the sub-region.

The encouraging initiatives ECOWAS has pursued in Liberia should set the stage for achieving regional security within the framework of the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Speaker,

We have had to grapple with the problem of refugees from neighbouring Togo as a result of the unstable political

situation. As usual, our traditions of hospitality and good neighbourliness have made us respond generously to the plight of others even when we ourselves have limited resources. The Government of Ghana respects the principle of non-inteference in the affairs of other sovereign nations, Togo included. We believe, however, that it is only progress in the establishment of a democratic order that will bring about peace and stability.

The Government will continue to support the UN, and contribute to the search for democratization and restructuring of the world body and in particular the Security Council to reflect present day international realities.

The Government is convinced of the relevance of the Non-Aligned Movement as an instrument for protecting Third world interests, encouraging South-South co-operation, and working towards a new and just World Economic Order.

We shall, on our part, continue to strive to develop further economic co-operation with all nations at the bilateral and multilateral level. Our main objective in this respect will be

to attract more foreign investments, especially in the private sector, to broaden our industrial base.

Mr. Speaker,

The problems ahead of our nation are enormous but not unsurmountable if we approach them with determination, unity of purpose and a spirit of commitment in the supreme interest of our country. We need the contribution of each and every citizen no matter his or her status for the achievement of our national goals of economic development and social justice.

It is for this reason that this Government throws a challenge to all citizens, irrespective of their political alignment or affiliation to make their contribution to our national goals.

Democracy thrives in an environment of free exchange of views in the spirit of tolerance, understanding and mutual respect. I wish to emphasize here that we do not equate unity with uniformity.

But whilst we concede to others their right to hold opinions different from ours, we will caution against any attempts to express that dissent with acts of violence and threats to the peace and security of innocent citizens.

The proper forum for political debate under Constitutional rule is this House. But to enable the opposition parties to make relevant inputs I call on the national executives of the parties within the Progressive Alliance to make the necessary accommodation if these parties wish to engage in serious and objective discussions in place of the usual rabble-rousing.

Mr. Speaker,

On 7th January, all of us made the solemn pledge to observe and defend the provisions of the Constitution of the Fourth Republic.

Upholding the Constitution is also the responsibility of the entire people of this country who through the referendum of April last year fully endorsed it. Let us therefore together strive

to make the Constitution an instrument for ensuring the peace, progress and prosperity of our country.

Mr. Speaker, Members of Parliament,

I thank you for this opportunity of addressing you. May God bless you and guide your deliberations.

Thank you.