

REPUBLIC OF GHANA

# SESSIONAL ADDRESS

BY

H.E. F.L. L. JESSEY JOHN RAWLINGS  
*(President of the Republic of Ghana)*

On the Occasion of the

STATE OPENING OF THE FIRST  
SESSION

of the

SECOND PARLIAMENT,  
ON THE FOURTH NOVEMBER

at the Parliament House, Accra  
on Tuesday, 2 January 1968.

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**SIONAL ADDRESS BY H.E. FLT LT. JERRY JOHN  
RAWLINGS, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA,  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE STATE OPENING OF THE  
FIRST SESSION OF THE 2ND PARLIAMENT OF THE  
4TH REPUBLIC AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE IN ACCRA  
ON TUESDAY, 21 JANUARY 1997**

Your Excellency the Vice President, Honourable Mr. Speaker, His Lordship the Chief Justice, Members of the out-going Council of State, Ministers of State, Service Commanders, Honourable Members of Parliament, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

We commence the business of the Second Parliament of the 4th Republic knowing that the eyes of the world are increasingly focused on Ghana. Our modest success in lifting ourselves from the depths of economic decline over the last decade and a half, our achievements in building participatory democracy within a stable political environment, the peaceful and mature conduct of our December 7th elections, and the positive signs of accommodation between government and the opposition following from it, the international recognition given to our wealth of human resources by the appointment of Mr. Kofi Annan, as the Secretary-General of the UN not forgetting the earlier appointment of another distinguished citizen, Dr. Thomas Mensah, then our High Commissioner to South Africa, as the first President of the newly established International Maritime Tribunal have turned the international spotlight on Ghana.

This is a time of great national pride for our country, but we must also be humbled by the knowledge of the responsibilities that we bear as a consequence.

This House will be one of the focal points of the international spotlight; your deliberations will receive attention as the world seeks to determine if indeed we are maturing as a nation. The world, particularly Africa, will be asking Ghanaians what we have made of the forty

years of our independence and what is the promise of the next ten years leading to our golden jubilee. I have every confidence that this House will project onto the international stage a positive image of Ghana as an important player in the global transformation.

May I say that my confidence in this House has been deepened by your unanimous re-election of Mr. Justice Daniel Francis Annan as Speaker. This is a man who has devoted himself to the service of this nation and has demonstrated his worth, his integrity and his fair-mindedness beyond all doubt.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Accept my sincere congratulations. We also commend your Deputies and all other officers elected at the inaugural sitting of this Parliament. We believe there is a good team whose joint efforts will enable this institution respond to the challenges I mentioned earlier.

Among the Honourable Members of this House, I see many familiar faces. I congratulate you on retaining the confidence of your constituents. I also sincerely welcome the new faces especially of the opposition parties to our common task of service to the people. It is my hope that even as you seek to project the views of the parties that you each belong to as well as the concerns of your specific constituencies, you will all acknowledge the overriding significance of the national interest and that enough common ground will be found among you in advancing the national interest.

**Mr. Speaker,**

In my Sessional Address last year, I indicated that the 5 year National Development Plan, a component of the document **Ghana Vision 2020**, which provides a framework for the attainment of middle-income level status for Ghana by the year 2020, should be ready for public debate by the end of 1996.

It has already been delayed, principally because instead of being the product, as previous development plans have been, of a small team of Accra-based experts deciding what is good for the rest of Ghana, it is based on input from every District in the country, each of which has

drawn up a 5-year plan. These have been co-ordinated at the Regional and Sectoral level to provide an integrated national plan originating from the grassroots.

This First Medium-Term Development Plan is now ready for publication. It sets the priorities for annual development budgets.

**Mr. Speaker,**

In pursuit of effective decentralization, of stimulating local-level development initiatives throughout the country, we have not only introduced decentralized planning but we have also operationalized the District Assemblies Common Fund. The passage of the new Local Government Act gives further expression to these commitments.

Unfortunately, our efforts to establish democratic structures below the District Assembly level were thwarted by two successive court injunctions. A priority activity for this term will be the establishment of these structures comprising the Sub-Metropolitan District Councils, the Urban, Zonal, Town and Area Councils as well as the unit Committees. It is our expectation that elections to these bodies will be conducted within the year.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The revenue-sharing arrangements between the Assemblies and the sub-district structures provided for in Legislative Instrument 1589 will enable these bodies function as effective expressions of the popular will.

Without doubt, the Common Fund has introduced a new stimulus into our development agenda. We should be increasing the percentage of the total national revenue that goes into the Common fund in the coming years. Increased resources will be made available to accompany the transfer of additional responsibilities for development management.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Through these programmes of decentralization, we shall further promote national mobilization, support community initiatives in development, build confidence and self-esteem in all Ghanaians wherever they

live; and enhance fair and balanced development of all localities in the entire country.

Our urban development strategy will continue to emphasize infra-structural development, urban upgrading and improved sanitation in the 100 urban population centres, four municipalities and thirty-four identified urban centres by the end of our second term.

Provision of rural social and economic infrastructure as well as the five identified basic rural needs of water, schools, health facilities, roads and electricity will continue to receive the special attention of the Government.

A new national sanitation policy as well as a national markets development policy will be outdoored during our second term of office.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Several areas of concern during the year ahead are obvious.

There are global economic trends that will pose challenges to our budget this year. The world market price of our major foreign exchange earner, gold, has been in decline over the last few months. The efforts of European countries to achieve their monetary targets has led them to be considering selling some of their gold reserves.

The sale of these reserves will no doubt put pressure on our export revenues. With these trends, I hope nobody needs any further convincing about the appropriateness of the strategies the Government has adopted in the past few years to derive more value from our major gold assets, in a similar vein to what even more powerful European economies are now doing.

Whilst gold prices are dropping, the price of oil has in the last six months consistently been reaching the highest levels since the Gulf War.

Tough choices will need to be made as a result of these adverse international economic circumstances.

I will urge all Honourable Members of this House to appreciate what the people of this country have been insisting on, that they be told the truth, not given promises we do not have the capacity to fulfil on a sustainable basis.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Over the last year we began to battle against inflation which had reached worrying levels in 1995. The efforts of fiscal and monetary discipline that were initiated have yielded results. The rate of inflation, as it stood in December 1995, had been more than halved by the close of last year--an election year. By maintaining the discipline that we initiated, we are aiming to bring inflation down to single digit levels within the next eighteen months and keep the lid on it thereafter.

As a nation we need to face up to some basic truths. Our import bill will increase unless we raise both production and productivity in our drive to export enough to buy these imports. This way we can minimize the pressure on our limited foreign exchange.

We should therefore, address the issue of how to progress from a nation of importers and traders to a nation of creative and efficient producers and exporters of goods and services.

Ultimately, this is what the value of the Cedi depends upon. We have no wish whatsoever to return to the days of artificial and unrealistic fixed exchange rates which distorted prices in the economy, killed our export trade, and made fortunes for the few who were lucky enough to have connections to those who granted licences.

We must recognize the fact that the real value of the Cedi relates to productivity, and not to governmental dictates.

But it is a fact that, in recent months, the rate of depreciation of the cedi has been lower than in recent years. We must however continue to pursue all avenues to reduce waste and inefficiency and increase productivity in both the private and governmental sectors, so as to stabilize the value of the Cedi. This way interest rates on bank borrowing can also be brought under control to reverse the currently difficult situation.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Efforts in this direction will necessitate measures to reduce the tendency to import consumer items even when local substitutes are avail-

able. Local manufacturers have a role to play in ensuring high quality products while keeping an eye on efficiency in production and packaging.

**Mr. Speaker,**

We shall strengthen our export development and diversification programme, and build upon the impressive gains made so far, especially in the area of non-traditional exports.

Our vision of Ghana as the Gateway to West Africa is fast becoming a practical reality. We are attracting investments into the Export Processing Zones to enable us penetrate external markets and thus stimulate the growth in the regional economy whilst providing more employment opportunities.

Twelve companies have been approved by the Free Zones Board as Export Processing Zone Operators. It is expected that before the end of this year at least 50 factories, including electronics and electrical component manufacturing units, will be in operation.

**Mr. Speaker,**

INDUTECH '97 will open in about five weeks' time. I hope that all Honorable Members of Parliament will take a keen interest in promoting enterprises located in your constituencies, as well as in encouraging the establishment of industrial estates by District Assemblies where viable.

Given that our objective is to harness the creativity of our entrepreneurs and create an open and competitive industrial and commercial system, major changes in attitude among the business community, the working population, the bureaucracy and indeed the entire population will be called for.

Investors, whether foreign or local, cannot do much with workers who have no regard for punctuality, or with managers who cannot set targets of performance, much less meet them.

The changes which have been set in motion demand a strong work ethic, a sense of urgency and a keen spirit of competition if we are to reap the benefits of increased investment and secure and maintain a strong place in the global market economy.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Our ambition to stimulate enterprise and investment in order to accelerate the growth of our economy requires a dynamic banking system. Unfortunately, many producers and entrepreneurs in the economy feel completely alienated from the banks and are unable to obtain help even when they have viable projects. On the other hand some of those who have had much easier access to large amounts have created non-performing assets for the banks. There are still too many people who keep their cash under mattresses or around their loins rather than put it into banks even if they could earn some interest overnight. Our bankers must ask themselves why this is so. They must be finding innovative ways to attract more people to save with them and by explaining the economic rationale for using the banking system.

Fortunately, the financial sector reforms have restored the health of many banks, whilst divestiture by government of some of its shares in banks is bringing new infusions of capital as well as management expertise. There are also new banks being licensed. Altogether a more vibrant banking sector giving customers options in a competitive environment, is emerging. This should yield significant improvements in the responsiveness of the banks to customer needs, especially those customers who operate in the rural economy.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Agriculture is, and will continue to be, the backbone of our economy in its contribution to food security, employment, the provision of raw materials to many local industries and in export earnings.

Over the past four years, we have invested heavily in laying down the necessary support infrastructure in our rural areas, including feeder roads, water, electricity, market facilities, telecommunications and social services, and the promotion of small-scale processing facilities. All these provide an incentive for increased productivity and for improving the quality of life of the majority of our people.

Despite these infrastructural developments and some policy initiatives, there has been justifiable concern about the overall perfor-



mance in the agricultural sector. We will tackle with a greater sense of urgency the potential of agriculture in Ghana by removing the remaining obstacles which continue to hinder the growth and development of the sector.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Increased productivity and the acquisition and distribution of inputs, agro-processing and marketing will be the hallmark of our new agricultural growth strategy. The philosophy behind this strategy is the recognition of the need to identify, promote and support entrepreneurs who demonstrate the ability and willingness to undertake and manage large scale agricultural enterprises with agro-processing units into which small-scale producers will be linked both operationally and financially. We propose for instance that each region will have at least twenty nucleus farming enterprises to serve as centres for commercialisation and transfer of modern agricultural technology to small-scale outgrowers.

By and large, it is the determination of government to create a more agricultural friendly environment where access to land will be greatly improved. The Ministry of Food and Agriculture will soon make public a detailed outline of the accelerated agricultural growth strategy which will place emphasis on a new approach to land acquisition and financing both designed to make the sector more attractive to private entrepreneurs and our youth. Through the new approach we hope to develop better arrangements for the timely procurement of inputs, research services, irrigation facilities, agro-processing and efficient marketing services.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I wish to take this opportunity to make an urgent appeal to our traditional rulers and custodians of lands not to allow unnecessary land litigations to hold to ransom, our collective responsibility towards ensuring increased agricultural production and food security.

Last year, a draft national Land Policy statement was prepared within the context of Vision 2020, to modernize land administration whilst

retaining basic traditional and customary principles. It involves sustainable land use, access to land for investors, security of tenure, fair and adequate compensation, the strengthening of legislation, and many other delicate issues.

Very soon, this document will be submitted for public discussion to seek the consensus of all stakeholders, with a view to a revised code of land legislation which will provide a sound basis for social and economic development, and more particularly remove a major constraint to agricultural development.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Over the past four years, we have been overhauling the administration of the agricultural sector, establishing ten Regional Agricultural Coordinating Units and 110 District Agricultural Coordinating Units to further decentralize the Ministry's functions to the grassroots.

These coordinating units will now become an integral part of Regional and District Administrations.

Consequently, we have decided to abolish the post of Regional Deputy Ministers of Agriculture. At the time when this post was established by the PNDC, we needed to signal our political commitment to revive our shattered agriculture and through the Deputy Ministers mobilize our farmers to combat discouraging bottlenecks and demoralization. We must now place more emphasis on specific programmes of technical assistance to the farmer to increase productivity and facilitate the farmer's access to the market.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have served as PNDC Regional Deputy Secretaries and Regional Deputy Ministers of Agriculture for their work in reinvigorating this vital sector to a point where we can now move into a new phase of promotion and development.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The complex issues in the agricultural sector cannot be over-simplified by calls for the provision of subsidies to farmers. We know how

such subsidies have in the past led to the wholesale smuggling of cheap fertilizers, agro-chemicals and other inputs across our borders at great cost to the taxpayer and with no benefit to our agricultural production. We know how premium fuel, intended for fishermen, was also diverted, depriving both the fishermen and the State of much-needed resources.

However, where it is feasible to provide incentives targeted to specific areas of production and with little chance of abuse, we have not hesitated to do so. The special fuel now supplied to our fishermen is an example of this approach.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The cocoa industry continues to have its special place in our economy. Production has grown most encouragingly, as have revenue from processed cocoa products.

The Government stands by our commitment to continue increasing the producer price of cocoa to give the farmer a sustainable share in the export price.

At the same time, we must be realistic enough to acknowledge the relatively poor world market price of cocoa, and the need for diversification to other exportable crops such as fruits and vegetables, nuts and spices, aquaculture, snails, plants and flowers, cassava chips, essential oils and a host of others.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Ghana's forests are another traditional export-earning resource. But our forests are not a limitless resource.

We have learned some lessons about deforestation, desertification, soil erosion, erratic climatic conditions, the loss of bio-diversity and several other ecologically damaging effects of over-exploitation.

Meanwhile, our booming real estate development industry and our furniture factories have to compete with export markets for locally produced and high quality lumber.

**Mr. Speaker,**

We **must**, if we are to answer to future generations, create a fully sustainable and responsible timber industry, even if some of the inefficient and exploitative operators fall by the wayside.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Careful studies over the last few years have established that the Annual Allowable Cut, that is the amount of timber which we can take from our forests each year and which will be replaced by natural growth, is being seriously abused, not only by legal and illegal timber operators, but also by encroachment on Forest Reserves, sometimes with the collusion of influential community leaders as well as the very officers who are mandated to protect our resources.

In the year ahead, we must make some significant moves to promote and encourage private timber plantations, in order to reduce pressure on our natural forests.

At the same time, law enforcement agencies and the courts must wake up to the importance of laws intended to protect our national forest and wildlife resources and our rich bio-diversity which we hold in trust for the entire global family, and apply these laws with all seriousness and responsibility.

Over the past four years, consultations have been going on with a view to restructuring the Forestry Department into a Forestry Service capable of paying its way through contracted services to district authorities and private entrepreneurs.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The minerals sector, over the past decade, has been an area of vigorous expansion. Gold mining, in particular, grew to the point of overtaking cocoa as our leading foreign exchange earner. Despite the current short-term price decline, it remains a very attractive area for investors.

As we look forward to gold prices recovering, Government will be able to generate resources from its holdings in many new projects that will be coming on-stream.

The increasing significance of the gold mining sector should not reduce our national commitment to ensure compliance with our environmental policies. The increase in surface mining activities make this the more urgent. The illegal mining activities of those in search of quick riches will not be allowed. As with illegal diamond, sand and stone winners, Government will take firm steps to bring an end to these unacceptable practices that cause such irreparable environmental damage.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The importance of maintaining the sustainability of the natural environment and preventing pollution and degradation must continue to be given due support by government. The Environmental Protection Agency's monitoring, compliance and enforcement activities have been vigorously pursued, and the public, industries and other investors are becoming increasingly aware of their rights and obligations. Despite some criticisms of the EPA's controls, we cannot afford to allow short-term economic expediency to damage the birthright of future generations.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Our aspirations to accelerate our economic growth have necessitated attention to the availability of energy nationwide. It is perhaps easy for urban dwellers to take electricity, for granted especially when they have not been paying the real cost of its supply. But what should be evident to any objective observer is that as electricity is extended throughout the length and breadth of the country, new industrial potentials are being unearthed. Indeed, known mineral wealth in some parts of the country can only be unlocked with the availability of energy.

At the same time as Government seeks to satisfy demand for electricity, attention is also being paid to ensuring increased supply. The projects being undertaken by the Volta River Authority and the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation to introduce thermal power to supplement hydro-electric power have reached advanced stages.

The efforts to produce our own indigenous gas resources which were of no interest to multinational companies in the past, as well as to build regional infrastructure for supplying natural gas resources which are abundant in the sub-region, particularly Nigeria, will continue to be supported by the Government.

The energy sector is one in which Ghana has pioneered regional cooperation. We will continue to work with our neighbours to bring about a regional power pool that better secures our access to long-term, reliable supplies of energy.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The remarkable growth of the tourist industry since 1992 will receive even higher tuning under our positive policy stressing our historical, cultural and natural heritage, with due precautions against possible negative social influences of the industry.

Last year, the new 15-year Master Plan for National Tourism Development was submitted for wide-ranging debate among identifiable stakeholders.

The exercise to examine the draft Regional Plans under the National Master Plan will be completed this year, so as to alert the private sector, as well as government agencies dealing with the provision of infrastructure necessary to the tourism industry, to identify opportunities and programme necessary development.

Despite the fact that tourism has already edged into third place as a major foreign exchange earner and has created about 300,000 jobs, we have hardly begun to tap the possibilities of this rapidly growing sector.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Employment generation and sound labour relations are matters of priority.

In the past year, we were able to sustain industrial peace through regular consultations with organized labour and private employers.

The speed with which the Price Waterhouse Report on the rationiza-

tion of conditions of service within the public sector can be implemented will depend on the ongoing work of the committee of stakeholders which is examining the report. Even if it does not complete its task before the end-of-January deadline, affected workers may rest assured that the implementation of any salary increases will be back-dated to 1st January 1987.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Last year, a draft National Employment Policy was laid before Cabinet. This complex but crucial document is being carefully scrutinized, and issues arising from it will be debated during the year ahead.

The Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare also last year embarked on a thorough revision and consolidation of all existing Labour Laws, with a view to making them simple, easily understood, and effective in protecting the interests of workers and investors alike. This House will no doubt examine the results of this task during the year.

**Mr. Speaker,**

We need to make entrants into the labour market more employable.

Currently, only about 30% of JSS leavers gain admission into Senior Secondary Schools. Whilst some of the remaining 70% enter vocational or technical training institutions, many gain informal training on the job or are under-or un-employed.

Government is being assisted by the Overseas Development Agency of the United Kingdom to improve facilities at 23 Vocational Training Centres throughout all 10 regions of the country. These NVTI —registered institutions are being re-equipped and enabled to improve the quality of training as well as to increase their intake to cater for an additional 300,000 post-JSS trainees.

72,000 redeployees from the Public Service opted for retraining to establish their own enterprises. Of these, 63,500 have now been supplied with tools and equipment, and the remaining 8,500 will be catered for early this year.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Over the past few years there has been massive investment in new hospitals, health centres and other facilities as well as rehabilitation, upgrading and re-equipment of existing facilities.

Awareness of family planning, the importance of child-immunization and ante-natal care has grown substantially, and the battle against guinea worm, river blindness, polio and other diseases has been marked by some successes. We have also established Health Management Teams in all the Districts.

Infant mortality has dropped from 77 per 1000 live births in 1985 to 66 in recent years, whilst average life expectancy has increased from 50 to 55 years.

Nevertheless, about 30% of our people still have to travel more than 8 kilometres to reach a health facility, and the cost of health care is a burden to many families, despite government's costly subsidy on health services.

**Mr. Speaker,**

In the year ahead, access to health care will be improved by the construction of 16 new health centres and 2 polyclinics, the upgrading of 15 health centres to district hospital status, and the rehabilitation of 52 health centres, 8 polyclinics, 6 regional hospitals, 2 psychiatric hospitals and 2 teaching hospitals, as well as by more vigorous outreach programmes.

To address the cost of health care, the shortcomings in the implementation of the cash and carry system will be addressed systematically, and free services will be further extended to include the aged and pregnant women. We also propose to subsidize services for children under 5 years of age. In making this concession we must not be seen to be encouraging teenage pregnancy nor are we making random child birth a practice to be encouraged.

In the long term, Mr. Speaker, the National Health Insurance Scheme will contribute to resolving the cost of health care.



This year, a pilot insurance scheme will be implemented in the Eastern Region to test the work done so far. Its performance will be studied, as well as the performance of existing rural health insurance schemes already operating in the Nkoranza and West Gonja Districts, so that problems can be identified and eliminated before implementation begins on a national scale.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Other targets for 1997 in the health sector include further increases in the coverage of child immunization, the coverage of reproductive health care, and the elimination of polio, guinea worm, river blindness, yaws and iodine deficiency as significant public health problems.

The Ghana Health Service will be established; a regulatory body for Herbal Medicine will also be established while the Central and Regional Medical Stores will be restructured.

**Mr. Speaker,**

One of the major problems in the educational sector today is the plight of Senior Secondary School graduates hoping to enter university.

The 10-month strike by university teachers led to the loss of a whole academic year, and a backlog was created which has kept SSS-leavers idling at home whilst awaiting their turn to sit the University entrance examinations.

The gap has to be closed. We cannot allow the backlog to be passed on from year to year.

Closing the gap is going to be expensive, both financially and in terms of the effort which it will require from students and university staff alike, because it might mean pushing a double intake of students through university, with all the crowding and emergency measures which this effort will entail.

The Ministry of Education is working together with the University Vice-Chancellors on a programme to solve this problem. I take this opportunity to call on them to treat this matter with the utmost urgency.

and come out with details of a workable programme within the next few weeks to remove this obstacle from our children's education.

**Mr. Speaker**

An improved School Education Programme, which is the outcome of problems identified within the Educational Reform Programme by a Review Committee and subsequent public discussion of its report, is currently being implemented.

District Oversight Committees have been set up in all Districts to involve opinion leaders and other members of the public in assisting District Education authorities, especially the Inspectorate, to supervise schools and help to find solutions to their problems. In some Districts, these committees are proving their worth. In others, however, there is a need for greater commitment. Honourable Members may wish to monitor performance in their constituencies.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The quality of basic education depends not only on infrastructure and materials, but also on the competence, orientation and motivation of teachers.

The restructured 3-year teacher education programme will help to address this, whilst the provision of teachers housing, which has already made available 2,200 headteachers' bungalows and 96 pairs of semi-detached teachers' quarters, will be continued, with deprived and difficult areas receiving priority attention.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Motor cycles and bicycles are to be supplied at cost to teachers who need them on easy repayment terms. This decision follows a pilot phase of this incentive scheme in the Afram Plains, which has recorded 100% recovery of the money invested within two years.

Girls from needy families in disadvantaged districts will continue to receive modest incentives to encourage them to complete basic education. The scheme will be improved and widened to cover more eligible pupils.

At the Senior Secondary level, we now have 453 public schools with a total population of almost 240,000. The temporary ban on the opening of new Senior Secondary Schools has been lifted and several applications are being considered for more community-based schools to be opened this years.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Improvements in the teaching of science and technology are expected to be reflected in this year's results. 36 of the 110 District Science Resources Centres are now in full operation, while the remaining 74 will be in operation within 18 months.

With effect from this year, instead of a single clinic attended by 300 selected girls, District Science Resource Centres will be used so that participation in the annual Science Technology and Mathematics Clinic for girls can be increased to more than 2,000.

The Distance Education Programme has started with its first course, which is a Bachelor of Education programme. This will enable serving teachers to work for a degree and improve their competence and status. Other courses will soon follow.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The funding of tertiary education has been widely discussed over the past year. Various fora and debates have agreed that government alone cannot adequately fund this level of education and that there must be some cost sharing among the beneficiaries, including those who will employ the graduates of our tertiary institutions.

Modalities for implementing cost sharing, including student contributions towards the maintenance of hall of residence and other facilities, will be announced during the year.

Another heavy burden on government is the interest payable on the Student Loan Scheme. These loans are heavily subsidized, with government taking about 85% of the real interest payable to SSNIT, the lender. The Ministries of Finance and Education have been charged to make proposals to make the Loan Scheme self-sustainable if the existing scheme will be a component of the new arrangement for financing tertiary education.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The opportunities created for private investment in the housing sector are bearing fruit throughout the country. Real estate projects totalling 15,000 housing units are planned for the Accra area alone within the life of this Parliament and these do not include the efforts of individuals, or new commercial projects yet to be initiated.

The Regional and District capitals as well as the rural areas also have ongoing programmes, both private and governmental, to improve housing delivery and rehabilitation. The Rural Housing Assistance Fund announced in my Sessional address last year will be operationalised this year.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Over the past few years, there has been massive investment in safe water supplies in settlements both large and small.

Whilst this has greatly improved access to safe water, 35% of our urban population and 55% of our rural people are still not assured of easy access to potable water. This therefore requires renewed efforts to accelerate the construction and development of appropriate water systems, as well as corresponding sanitation facilities. Here again the tremendous capacity within the private sector will be tapped under a well defined regulatory environment to complement governments efforts.

The previous Parliament passed the Water Resource Commission Bill, which must now be given practical effect in order to improve the regulation and management of all our national water resources.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Government will continue to support private road transport operators to acquire appropriate buses to improve passenger transport system in both the urban and rural areas. In this regard, the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU) and other viable transport operators will be encouraged and assisted to pursue their fleet modernization and acquisition programme for their members.

The Divestiture Implementation Committee is seeking strategic investors to participate in the operations and management of the three public bus companies.

The Government will introduce new policies to improve road safety standards and the management of traffic in city centres.

**Mr. Speaker,**

A law to establish a Maritime Regulatory Body will be introduced to improve upon maritime administration in the country. The Shippers' Council will solicit the appropriate private sector investment to establish a Dry Port in Kumasi in support of the country's Free Zones and Gateway Programmes.

Similarly, a Port Development Programme at Tema and Takoradi will be actively pursued. Existing berths will be dredged while deeper ones, including liquid and dry bulk berths and container terminals will be built to meet the requirements of third generation vessels. Furthermore, private sector participation in some of the port operations, such as cargo handling, will be encouraged to enhance competition and efficiency.

A second major fishing harbour will be built at Sekondi to improve the fishing industry along that part of the coastland.

The Volta Lake Transport Company will expand its capacity utilization with the improvement of the Tema-Akosombo and Buipe-Blogatanga roads while the plans for water-borne transportation of fuel to the North and beyond should enhance its earning potential.

Measures to improve the performance and long term viability of Ghana's railway system will involve the restructuring and development of the Ghana Railway Corporation.

A study of the Accra-Tema suburban railway system will be completed during the year for the development of a suburban mass transit rail system.

**Mr. Speaker,**

In line with the objectives of the new telecommunication policy that seeks to achieve rapid expansion, variety and improved quality of telecom services throughout the country, a strategic investor for Ghana Telecom and a Second Network Operator have been selected. Under the regulation of the National Communications Authority, the two operators and other private sector participants are expected to rapidly

increase the supply of telephone lines by at least a further 300,000 by the year 2000.

The Ghana Postal Services Corporation will be restructured and strengthened to improve upon postal services delivery in the country. The programme for the provision of Post Offices at all the District capitals will be continued.

Road construction involves massive investment. However, as the major lifeline of production, marketing and industry, road construction and rehabilitation will be continued.

Several major projects are ongoing and many more are in various preparatory stages. It is hoped that toll road projects will soon supplement traditional sources of funding.

**Mr. Speaker,**

As in many areas, Ghana played a pioneering role in the development of sports in Africa. Today, the rest of Africa has caught up with us and we now face the challenge of having to propel ourselves further forward in order to recapture our leading role.

This is not just a matter of national pride. Sports have moved away from being a matter of entertainment and even of national morale. It is now very much a part of the process of national development and national cohesion. It is crucial for the health not of the youth but of all our people. It is vital cog around which vast segments of industry revolve and it holds the promise of becoming one of the most important sources of job creation.

In the light of these realities, we propose to begin upgrading sports as a major factor in our national development effort.

Our first task in this process is to address the question of infrastructure. We propose to take the first steps towards the construction of a national stadium complex providing the most modern facilities for all the major international sports in which we are engaged and which will make it possible for Ghana once again to host important international sporting events.

Side by side with this complex, we will initiate action on two fronts: first to upgrade the present network of stadia for the premier football league and secondly, to ensure that the District Assemblies initiate programmes for a network of community playing fields with adequate provision for track and field athletics, tennis, table tennis, hockey, boxing, swimming among others.

The Ministry responsible for industry, and the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre will be expected to encourage the establishment of industries for the production of sports equipment and materials, both to support the local sports development effort and for export. I have also requested the Ministries of Finance and Foreign Affairs to include sports in our bilateral and multilateral discussions with donor countries. It is my hope that we can draw on their expertise in coaching while we take steps to develop our own manpower resources.

While all this is going on, we expect the sports authorities to develop a more cohesive and purposeful programme for our national soccer teams and for the immediate introduction of a domestic programme for athletics, tennis, amateur boxing, table tennis and hockey.

**Mr. Speaker,**

One of the most remarkable features of our new democracy has been the emergence of a free and vibrant broadcast system. In two years, we have seen the transformation of our airwaves through a network of independent radio stations providing a mix of information, entertainment and education not only in the nation's capital but at a number of regional centres.

But even as we acknowledge the emergence of the new broadcasting industry which has in turn given great stimulus to the advertising industry, we cannot lose sight of the need for a well-defined regulatory framework.

Accordingly we will put before Parliament, comprehensive proposals for the regulation of the broadcasting industry as is done

world-wide. We shall also undertake the review of outmoded legislation including the Cinematograph Act.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Our constitution guarantees us all the freedoms any democratic society can enjoy. But our freedoms mean nothing unless we respect them and unless we recognise that we cannot pursue and protect our freedom by denying others theirs.

We are all anxious to enhance the freedom of the press as one of the pillars of our democracy. The framers of our constitution gave us an institution, the National Media Commission to take on the dual function of protecting the freedom of the press and protecting the people from infringement of their freedom arising from abuses of press freedom. Such a task requires a high sense of responsibility, sound grounding in the ethics of the media, an even-handed disposition and a commitment to justice and fairness.

The worst thing that can happen to such an institution is for those who are privileged to serve on it to see it as another vehicle in the pursuit of some grand political design, an instrument of political warfare, in combat with government and other interests, and some self-serving medium for the upliftment of individual egos.

**Mr. Speaker,**

There is the tendency to yield to the temptation to play to the gallery by creating the impression that we can best discharge our duties if we are seen to be in conflict with government. That tendency undermines our credibility and inevitably affects our capacity to perform our duties satisfactorily. It may have caused the commission to lose the opportunity to establish the moral authority that would have enabled both media practitioners and the public crave its adjudication and accept to be bound or influenced by them. As a result, people have preferred to resort to the established courts of law in the search for the protection of their reputations and freedoms.

It is my hope that the new Media Commission will take a cue from the past and establish a new moral authority that will enable it fulfil its



functions. It will have to show the courage to call for respect for truth and the highest professional ethics. This is the way to ensure that the expansion of the frontiers of press freedom will not mean the contraction of the liberty of the individual.

Mr. Speaker,

An important lesson that we have learnt in four years of constitutional rule is that as a people, we must develop practices and conventions to give flesh to the bare bones of the Constitution.

Like all Constitutions, the 1992 constitution could not have anticipated all future events. Consequently, it contains omissions and in some cases contradictions. For example, the constitution is somewhat silent on the handling of transitional matters from one constitutional government to another, even though it has copious provisions on the first transition of 1993.

As with the experience the world over practice and convention will need to develop to fill in the gaps in the written word. Some constitutional amendments were passed by the previous Parliament. Consideration may need to be given to additional amendments to make the constitution a truly living document. My hope is that we can proceed on a non-partisan basis in identifying what needs to be done to strengthen our constitutional evolution. I wish to assure the nation that it has never been my desire to encourage any amendment to any part of the constitution simply to satisfy any parochial or personal interest.

Mr. Speaker,

Law and order is one area of deep concern to the government. Some individuals and groups confuse constitutional democracy with anarchy and lawlessness and created the impression that democracy means you can do anything you want without regard to the rights or feelings of others. This is wrong and the law enforcement agencies will be provided with the requisite support to ensure the maintenance of peace, law and order.

**Mr. Speaker, Fellow Countrymen & Women,**

True democracy is knowing the limits of your rights, respecting the institutions of the constitution and obeying the decisions of the courts. We will work to ensure that every Ghanaian has an appreciation of this viewpoint of democracy.

We have also committed ourselves in the NDC Manifesto to focusing our attention on social and criminal legislation during our second tenure. We expect the Law Reform Commission, which has been working on some of these subjects for sometime to bring their proposals before Cabinet and subsequently to Parliament, for consideration this year.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Ghana Armed Forces operates on a budget of less than 3% of the Gross National Product, one of the smallest defence budgets in the world.

Despite financial and logistic constraints, our service personnel have carried out their primary task of ensuring internal security and territorial integrity with commendable efficiency. They moved swiftly to contain chieftaincy disputes and civil disturbances, and also provided security to ensure peaceful elections.

Internationally, our Armed Forces continue to command respect and admiration for their professional competence especially in Liberia and Lebanon.

At home, they have been involved in civil engineering, air transport, medical services and environmental protection.

In successive sessional addresses, I have mentioned the need to rehabilitate and expand existing office and barracks accommodation for the military. These needs have not yet been adequately met, and I trust that this House will approve adequate resources to address them beginning from this year.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Last year, a Presidential Commission was established to look into matters affecting the Ghana Police Service. Its full Report is expected shortly and it is envisaged that its recommendations will assist gov-

ernment to adopt policies which will raise the motivation for Police personnel and contribute to improved efficiency of the Service.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Ghana's broad foreign policy objectives continue to be directed towards the promotion and protection of the interests of Ghana, the establishment of a just and equitable international economic, political and social order, the promotion of respect for international law and treaty obligations, the promotion of the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means, and adherence to the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, and other international organizations of which Ghana is a member.

With the imperatives of today's world and the evolving world order, Ghana will continue to forge a foreign policy that reflects our hopes and aspirations and aims at mobilizing and sustaining international goodwill and support for the realization of our national development objectives.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Constraints of time compel me to leave many things unsaid in this overview of the task ahead.

I would refer Honourable Members to the NDC Manifesto, to Ghana Vision 2020, and to the First Medium Term Development Plan for a more comprehensive indication of government's short and medium term plans which will engage the attention of this House during the next four years:

I would also recommend that newly-elected Members familiarize themselves as early as possible with the many ongoing programmes at both national and district levels. I must confess that I sometimes get lost among the many initials and acronyms which designate specific programmes, but we must all do our homework.

I am sure that we all look forward to a year of lively and constructive debate in this House. Admiring an elegant phrase or scoring a political point may add to the interest of the Parliamentary Press Corps and the general public, but let us all bear in mind that the basic objective shared by each and every Member of this august House is the advancement of our nation and the well-being of all Ghanaians.

Honourable Members of Parliament, you owe it to your constituents to work closely with the Executive to advance the national development agenda at the fastest possible pace. In all that we do we should manifest our commitment to the prosperity of Ghanaians. We are determined to create conditions for every Ghanaian to have a fair chance to succeed in his or her field of human endeavour.

Political differences should not be allowed to stand in the way of our people's yearning for improved standard of living. The way we treat each other, the way we relate to each other, the way we discuss issues in the House must portray a sincere commitment to building a stable and united country and to affirm that we are first and foremost Ghanaians.

I wish you God's guidance and strength in your service to our dear country.

Thank you.