



STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

**DELIVERED BY
H. E. JOHN DRAMANI MAHAMA
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA**

TO THE

6th PARLIAMENT OF THE 4TH REPUBLIC

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2013

Rt. Hon. Speaker of Parliament
Vice President Kwesi Bekoe Amissah-Arthur
Her Ladyship the Chief Justice
Honourable Members of Parliament

My presence here this morning is in fulfillment of Article 67 of Ghana's Constitution which requires the President of the Republic of Ghana to deliver to Parliament a message on the State of the Nation at the beginning of each session of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, permit me, to start by extending on behalf of Ghanaians, congratulations to all our Members of Parliament. In particular, I wish to acknowledge our newest Members of Parliament and extend to all of them a warm welcome of partnership in shaping the destiny of our beloved country. As the elected President of this dear country, I wish to express my personal gratitude to all Ghanaians for the trust and confidence entrusted in me. I am fully conscious of the expectations of our people and I pledge to work with a sense of urgency and remain sincere and truthful at all times.

As I stated on January 7 when I took the oath of office, I promised, that as president of this nation, "I will work hard to place us on the right path, and I will lead us over the hurdles and past the obstacles that might threaten to keep us from meeting our goals."

Mr Speaker, Ghana is a different place now from what it was when we began the journey towards democratic governance. We have come a long way since 1993 when the first President of the 4th Republic, Jerry John Rawlings, delivered the first State of the Nation Address under the 4th Republican Constitution. Ghana's democratic credentials were further consolidated with the election of John Agyekum Kufuor and later Professor John Evans Atta Mills of blessed memory.

Mr Speaker, our recent Presidential and Parliamentary elections have been adjudged by both domestic and international observers as by far the most credible, transparent, free and fair since 1992. This shows that each step of our democratic journey has been marked by improvements. As Ghanaians, we must be proud of this achievement.

Mr Speaker, the Electoral Commission must take much of the credit for this feat; since our return to constitutional rule in 1992 the EC has organized six successful elections. They have conferred victory where victory was due without fear or favour in the critical periods of 2000, 2008 and 2012. Our Electoral Commission has earned, in the process, an enviable reputation as arguably one of the best electoral institutions on the African continent.

Mr. Speaker, I entered public service out of a genuine desire to help make a difference in the lives of our people. My vision for this country is to create a conducive national environment in which our children grow happily into responsible adults; where workers are proud to work and defend our national values; where improved maternal health reduces the hazards of childbearing; where teachers use their influence to positively mould the next generation; a Ghana in which we all create and share in the benefits.

Mr Speaker, I believe that as a country we can achieve more by working together. Togetherness will enhance our capacity to meet our urgent needs; while promoting excellence and rewarding achievement. Ghana has witnessed impressive development in the last two decades. There have been improvements in roads and social infrastructure across the length and breadth of this country. Health facilities have been expanded and access improved, and so have educational

institutions with the private sector playing a pivotal role. In many respects, Ghana has witnessed many positive changes for which we must all be proud.

Real challenges however remain even as we have made these advances. As a developing middle-income country, there is still a lot more to be done to further reduce poverty, expand infrastructure and provide more social services for our people. These challenges are formidable, but they are insurmountable.

Mr. Speaker, this administration will pursue rapid economic development with a sense of urgency in order to create new jobs particularly for our youth. In partnership with the private sector, we will expand our infrastructure in a manner that will accelerate economic growth.

We will embark on an ambitious but realistic programme of building new roads and bridges; expand electricity generation to energize our economy; increase access to good drinking water and quality healthcare for our growing population; and improve sanitation and human security for all. We aim to transform our schools, colleges and universities to meet the demands of a new age with emphasis on technology and innovation.

Mr. Speaker, a well-designed and efficient public sector working in partnership with the private sector will be instrumental in our objective to deliver a prosperous nation.

Over the next four years, we will build an economy that rewards hard work and nurtures Ghanaian entrepreneurs and businesses whose prospects will not be tied to political cycles and patronage. As President, I am firmly focused on these goals, because these are the right things to do.

Mr. Speaker, In my first term as President, I will focus on delivering on the following, which constitute the vital pillars underpinning our national development programme.

1. Putting the People First
2. A Strong and Resilient Economy
3. Expanding Infrastructure
4. Transparent and Accountable Governance

PILLAR ONE: PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

Mr. Speaker, as a Social Democratic Party, we put people first. We believe that our people are our most treasured asset and this is what informs our social development agenda. The thrust of our social policy and human development programme revolves around education, healthcare, social security and protection for the vulnerable– women, children, the aged and people with disabilities. We will focus on and emphasize the productive and reproductive capabilities of these social groupings, while ensuring at the same time that the most vulnerable in our society are effectively protected.

Mr. Speaker, our people need decent and sustainable jobs to lead meaningful lives. Job creation and gainful employment therefore will be at the core of my priorities. I am determined to expand opportunities for all. Our policies and initiatives will be geared towards facilitating sustainable employment generation, which will then facilitate economic growth and enhanced incomes.

I have directed the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations to work with the Ghana Statistical Service to produce quarterly labour surveys to inform policy and planning. These surveys will create an accurate database of the unemployed among all categories of Ghanaian society and track these on a quarterly basis. It will also ensure that new jobs are accurately

recorded and tracked while making it possible to coordinate the various job-creation and employment initiatives.

QUALITY EDUCATION

Mr. Speaker, our quest to build an equitable society in which the productive capacities of our people are tapped for national development will come to naught if we do not give our children sound, meaningful and relevant education. This is even more imperative in today's knowledge-based economy. Any nation whose people do not have the required level of education will be left behind. Towards this end we will:

- Prioritize and expand access at all levels;
- Aggressively address quality enhancement and outcomes at all levels by putting in place measures to monitor quality of educational service delivery especially teaching and learning at all levels of our educational system;
- Reward outstanding educational service providers to boost morale in the sector; and
- Work to improve gender parity in education.
- Encourage community participation in management of schools
- Work towards standardization and affordability in fees.

Mr. Speaker, I extend a hand of partnership to our social partners- the religious bodies with long-standing roles in the provision of educational services and private sector operators of educational services- to engage in this national reconstruction exercise for expanding access and improving quality of education in Ghana.

Mr. Speaker, with specific reference to basic education, we will ensure that every child gets a head start by working to effectively and practically integrate kindergarten education into the existing system. To this end, District Assemblies will be required to incrementally build new structures in all existing public schools to serve the needs of kindergarten education. We shall expand training of kindergarten teachers to ensure that our children all over the country acquire basic numeracy and literacy skills before they start primary education.

It is also the objective of this government, to eliminate the remaining schools under trees by the end of 2016. We intend to enforce compulsory basic school attendance and deepen pro-poor interventions like the distribution of free school uniforms, free exercise books and free computers. The school-feeding programme will be progressively expanded to all public basic schools in rural communities to satisfy the basic nutritional needs of the pupils. Mr. Speaker, we are committed to tackling the greatest challenges facing education at the secondary level in our country. Paramount among these is a lack of access occasioned by inadequate space and facilities for the large number of qualified Junior High School graduates.

To address the limitations imposed on access to secondary education we will, over the next four years, construct a total of two hundred new community day Senior High schools, giving priority to Districts, which currently lack such schools. **Mr. Speaker**, this level of aggressive expansion and improved access to secondary education also means the need for more qualified and well-motivated teachers, as well as administrative staff. In the next few months, government will:

- Roll out a special sandwich teacher educational training programme targeted at our unemployed graduates, in preparation for the full implementation of our access to secondary education programme.
- Lead a process to modernise and increase the number of colleges of education with special emphasis on deprived areas and communities.
- Design and implement a distance education programme for teachers with ten decentralized satellite campuses across the country, taking full advantage of

contemporary information and communication technology platforms that will allow electronically-shared access to instructional and curriculum resources by these students and staff in these colleges.

- In the area of Special Education, government will facilitate the completion of ongoing construction of Assessment Centres and equip our special education units with the necessary teaching and learning aids including devices for the hearing and visually impaired. In doing this we intend to emphasize inclusive education by ensuring that our children with special needs are fully integrated into our society through the educational arrangements.
Government will provide incentives for special educators and ensure our children-with-special-needs benefit from the advantages of modern technology.

Mr. Speaker, this year we will initiate a Bill for Parliamentary consideration towards the establishment of a new University in the Eastern Region, committed to Sustainable Environmental Development and Research. In addition we will begin the road map for converting our existing 10 public polytechnics into fully fledged technical universities.

HEALTH FOR ALL:

Mr. Speaker, the relevance of improved health services cannot be over emphasized. It augments investment in all sectors. A sick population cannot generate the productivity needed to maintain the acceleration of our economy.

Presently, our healthcare system still has personnel deficits and service deficiencies despite the facility expansion and human capacity development programmes we have been implementing. In the next four years, we will work towards improving access, service quality, increased personnel, enhanced working conditions across the various professions in the health sector.

In furtherance of our plan we will undertake the following:

1. Construction of an ultra-modern, new Teaching Hospital for the University of Ghana Medical School.
2. Start the processes for the establishment of Regional hospitals in the Eastern and Upper East Regions. We will continue work on the Regional hospital project in Wa in the Upper West Region.
3. Upgrade the Central and Volta regional hospitals into teaching hospitals to expand the scope for training medical doctors and other healthcare specialists.
4. Commence work on 12 new District Hospitals at Dodowa, Abetifi, Fomena, Garu, Kumawu, Sekondi, Salaga, Tepa, Wenchi, Madina. The refurbishment of the Takoradi European hospital will commence in earnest.
5. Commence work on a new hospital in Kumasi to decongest the KATH
6. Initiate work on phase one of the Specialist Emergency Centre at Korle-Bu Teaching hospital.
7. Establish an additional 1,600 CHIPS compounds across the country by the end of 2016. This will be consistent with our record over the last four years.

Mr. Speaker, in addition, we will initiate the necessary processes towards the construction of Polyclinics especially in the Districts as well as regions that currently lack such health facilities. In embarking on this journey of expanding access, we will also begin to explore new modalities of public-private-partnerships in Health investment, in a manner that brings new investment, expertise and technology into the health sector, providing citizens a variety of options of where they access their health services.

Mr. Speaker, there is an ongoing review of the operations of the NHIS. Our goal is to ensure a more efficient, expanded and sustainable delivery. We will work to reduce cost and eliminate fraud in the system. New improved claims processing centres will be set up, and improved IT systems put in place to enhance service and create a better platform for monitoring the scheme. Government has taken note of the last review workshop held and will present the recommendations especially in respect to sustainable financing of the scheme to cabinet for consideration. We will pursue the implementation of the Mental Health Act in order to mainstream psychiatric treatment and care for our population for our population.

Mr. Speaker, with regards to the deficit in health personnel, we will consolidate the gains made in the training of health care professionals through the establishment of the University of Allied and Health Sciences by;

- Transforming the Kintampo Rural Health Training Institute into a University College to support the training of Physician Assistants for our ambulance and emergency services as well as the training and deployment of clinical psychologists and environmental Health Inspectors.
- Scaling up the training of midwives and nurses and allied health workers to fill the gap created by ageing health professionals.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Speaker, Ghana has made significant progress towards achieving Universal Access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support services through the implementation of a National HIV & AIDS Strategic Plan. HIV prevalence has stabilized at 1.5 percent with over 25 percent decline in new infections among the youth. In 2011, Government committed GH¢150 Million to support the implementation of the new five (5) year strategic Plan. This was in addition to government's support for prevention & treatment services. With this plan we intend to achieve virtual elimination of mother to child transmission and cut the rate of new infections by half.

This year, our National Response to HIV will require GH¢180 Million to continue with effective implementation of the Strategic Plan. This funding will enable the Ghana AIDS Commission enrol over 220,000 Persons Living with HIV on the National Health Insurance Scheme Free of Charge. Some additional 15,000 will be initiated on Anti-Retroviral Therapy. Most importantly, over 625,000 expectant mothers will be tested for HIV.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Mr. Speaker, as we forge ahead in social development and economic transformation, it is important to be mindful of segments of our society who, for reasons of social, cultural or economic circumstances become vulnerable and marginalized. It is for this reason we have created the new Ministry for Gender, Children and Social Protection. The Ministry is to coordinate and implement the numerous Government social intervention programmes aimed at the poor and disadvantaged in society. Let me say again for emphasis, that the mandate of this ministry is not to promote gay rights as some segments of society have sought to portray.

We have also taken stock of all the existing social intervention programmes, and relocated them directly under the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection. This will enable us develop

a more efficient targeting mechanism and eliminate duplication and manipulation of the existing fragmented programmes.

The new Ministry will have oversight of the Disability Council and will take steps to integrate fully our challenged brothers and sisters in the mainstream of national life. We have shown a commitment to this by appointing Dr. Dana as a Minister of State. I have asked the Secretary to the Cabinet and the Chief of Staff to take note of any special needs he might have in order to allow him fully function in his role as Minister.

The Ministry will establish a database of the poorest households or individuals in our society and fashion programmes to enhance their access to social services. This Ministry is at the heart of our being as social democrats. The fruits of economic growth shall be equitably shared for the benefit of our population. We cannot advance as a nation, half poor, and half rich. Our Minister assigned to GCSP is experienced and capable and I am sure that many will soon see the results of her expertise in that sector.

YOUTH AND SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Speaker, let me now turn my attention to an area that has often proven to be one of the greatest unifiers of our people, sports. A few weeks ago we had to endure the painful experience of missing out on our much-cherished dream of winning a fifth African Cup of Nations title.

Our Black Stars exited the just ended AFCON competition at the semi-final stage through the lottery of penalty. I recall how barely a year ago, our beloved late President Mills standing before this august house in his last sessional address, urged our football authorities to take seriously the issue of penalty taking by our teams as it has often been our nemesis in major competitions. What many appreciated as a humorous comment turned out to be prophetic as the same problem came to haunt us at the just ended AFCON competition.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that upon their return from South Africa, the handlers of our National Team have begun undertaking the necessary post mortem in order to ensure our qualification for the World Cup in Brazil next year. I request the FA and the management of the Stars to go back to the drawing board immediately and commence the building of a more formidable team that will not only qualify for the World cup but will surpass the achievements of their predecessors in previous World Cups. Another major tournament we need to prepare for is the Olympic games in 2016.

Mr. Speaker, we are mindful of the fact that poor planning and a lack of adequate preparation can derail our efforts to qualify for and participate effectively in these and other competitions. We will roll out a number of policies to unearth and develop sporting talents to feed our various National teams. These will include:

- Provision of incentives for MMDAs to establish at least one well-resourced sports and athletic infrastructure in districts.
- Re-invigoration of the traditional inter-school and colleges sports competition programs
- Reserve some admissions to Senior High Schools for talented sports and other creative students among other interventions
- Completions of the Cape Coast Stadium as promised by our late President John Evans Atta Mills
- Restructuring and re-orientation of the National Sports Authority to enhance its efficiency and effectiveness in the discharge of its mandate
- Development of the lesser known sporting disciplines among others.

Mr. Speaker, I stated in my address to the UN General Assembly last year that the youth are today's leaders and not future leaders. In order to enable our youth realise their full potential and contribute to National development, we have fashioned out comprehensive programmes including but not limited to:

- A GH¢10 million Youth Jobs and Enterprise Development Fund which will be launched to encourage and support young people to become successful entrepreneurs and create sustainable job opportunities
- Job and Enterprise Centres (JEC) will be established in all regions to help unemployed youth and those about to enter or prepare for the world of work.
- Develop Youth Centres in Districts to facilitate youth meetings, interactions, cultural programs, conferences and inputs into District Assemblies' deliberative mechanisms
- Continue with the National Youth Achievers Awards, which I introduced last year to institute and encourage Young Achievers.
- Revamp all the Youth Leadership Training Institutes and utilize them for year round training of youth in leadership, civics, patriotism and other nation building curricula

SADA & WESTERN CORRIDOR

Mr. Speaker, the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA) has agriculture as a key part of its agenda. In the spirit of Public-Private Partnership, SADA has facilitated partnerships to establish three agro processing factories- a sheanut processing factory at Buipe, a rice mill at Nyankpala near Tamale and a vegetable oil mill at Tamale. The Produce Buying Company is currently raising the capital to begin sheanut purchases to feed the factory.

Mr. Speaker, this will benefit tens of thousands of poor women in the savannah zone of this country. Outgrowers are being registered to meet the requirements of these factories. In 2011, SADA supported 6,000 farming families Last year SADA registered and supported another 16,000 farmers this year with farm inputs, including fertilizers, improved seeds and tractor services for land preparation services. SADA through its greening the Northern Savannah ecological zone agenda, has partnered with a private sector group to grow and nurture 5 million trees in the next 12 months. This is providing 5000 jobs across the North.

Mr. Speaker, based on the example of SADA, I directed a team in my office and the NDPC to work closely with the two Regional Coordinating Councils and relevant stakeholders towards establishing the Western Corridor Development Authority, comprising Western and Central regions. The implementation framework for the Authority is currently under development.

Mr. Speaker, the Social agenda outlined above informs our economic policy which I would like to touch upon at this juncture.

PILLAR TWO- A STRONG AND RESILIENT ECONOMY

Mr. Speaker, the economy of Ghana has over a period of more than two decades consistently witnessed a positive growth rate. This back-to-back growth registered from 1986 culminated in the attainment of lower middle-income status in the year 2010. This positive performance was taken to a whole new level in the year 2011 when our country registered what is believed to be probably the highest growth rate in the world- a whopping 14.4 percent growth in GDP. Since then our country has maintained its ranking among the 10 fastest growing economies in the world.

My vision in this first term of my presidency is to work to sustain economic growth rates at a minimum of eight percent in line with our goal of moving our country from a lower middle-income status to the full middle-income bracket. This we must do as we strive to achieve our set social objectives.

In the area of macro-economic stability, we have made significant progress. Inflation that for so long had been in double digits, has for the first time in our history remained within single digit for over thirty long months. Apart from the first half of 2012, when the cedi experienced serious pressures resulting from a huge balance of trade deficit, the currency has continued to enjoy relative stability.

This relative stability has been boosted by the relatively strong foreign reserves of the country that have increased significantly from about \$2billion at the beginning of 2009 to the current \$5.5billion. The banking sector that in 2009 experienced relatively high non-performing loan ratios has seen a marked improvement in its NPL ratio and has seen increased profitability and assets growth.

Mr. Speaker, these macro-economic improvements and the sustained strong economic growth rates we have recorded, have made Ghana a very attractive destination for portfolio and foreign direct investment- a factor which is critical in our quest to rapidly diversify and transform our economy and reduce our vulnerability to external shocks.

FISCAL CHALLENGES

Mr. Speaker, the challenge facing us now is a misalignment of the expenditure categories in the Budget namely, emoluments (i.e., wages, salaries and allowances), goods and services (including debt service), and investment or capital expenditure. This is attributable to the following critical factors. It is important to appreciate the fact that the personnel emoluments portion of the Budget has more than tripled in the last three years, from GH¢2.5 billion to about GH¢8 billion this year. This has been mainly due to the Single Spine Salary Scheme (SSSS). We now spend a staggering 60.9 percent of our entire national revenue to pay public sector salaries.

Mr. Speaker, this is almost double the globally accepted prudent level of between 30 to 35 percent. While we remain committed to boosting the morale of public sector workers of Ghana, whose incomes were low compared to their counterparts in the private sector. It is in that spirit that we undertook the salary rationalization with a view to enhancing fairness, productivity and motivation in the public sector. We now face the challenge of ensuring that the effect of the public sector pay reform does not constitute an unsustainable burden on public finances and on macro-economic stability.

Mr. Speaker, the rate of growth of the wage bill has reached a point where they are squeezing out critical investments in the budgetary allocation of goods and services and capital expenditures. Unless we tackle this issue decisively, we may soon reach a point where not much will be left to provide the much-needed roads, bridges, ports, schools, clinics and water infrastructure we need to develop our economy.

This issue is even more significant because as we struggle to settle the wage bill, thousands of public workers continue to make demands for wage increases and threaten work stoppage if we do not meet these demands.

Mr. Speaker, the meat is now down to the bones, and it is time for serious rethinking about the level of wages in relation to our national competitiveness and the related productivity issues. It is said “to whom much is given, much is expected.” The people of Ghana demand better service from our public sector employees commensurate to the investment made in their remuneration.

Mr. Speaker, another factor that led to the large deficit was the significant shortfalls in corporate income taxes from the petroleum sector because of low volumes of crude oil exports. In addition, there were expenditure overruns arising from borrowing to pay off large arrears and major capital projects, notably the roads projects that we now categorize as the “gang of four” later adjusted to six. Happily many of these roads are in advance stage of completion.

CORRECTIVE MEASURES

Mr. Speaker, we are taking the difficult but necessary measures to address the serious problems of misalignment. The National Petroleum Authority recently announced adjustments in the prices of petroleum products to realign the distortions in the pricing of petroleum products. These distortions had resulted in a situation where Government had to shell out about GHC150 million to the Bulk Distribution Companies (BDCs) to compensate them for losses sustained in the supply of petroleum products. The net effect was also that because of the wide disparity in price between us and our neighbours, many unscrupulous people found a new occupation in smuggling the products across our borders for sale.

Our primary concern for the poor and vulnerable has necessitated a widening of mitigation measures, such as the introduction of solar lanterns, expansion of life-line threshold on energy for poor households and deepening social protection initiatives to cover a wider net of poor households to cushion them from the effects of these price increases.

On the other hand we are introducing measures to curtail Government’s expenditure on fuel. We would rationalize the use of government vehicles and fuel in the next few weeks. I have given the Chief of Staff appropriate directives on this matter. We will discuss with auto companies a scheme to enable Senior Public servants to buy on hire purchase their own vehicles and curtail the reliance on the use of State vehicles.

Mr. Speaker, we are also taking strict measures to curtail MDAs spending beyond their budgetary allocations and new mechanisms of strict monitoring will be announced by the Minister of Finance in the 2013 budget.

The Ghana Revenue Authority and other agencies have been tasked to help raise tax and non-tax revenues to levels that benefit our emerging Lower Middle-Income Country status. We will plug the leakages and raise Ghana’s ratio of revenue to GDP from the current meager 16% to above 20%. Comparative levels with other lower middle income countries are Kenya 24% and Senegal 22%.

Mr. Speaker, while we take these difficult measures, our engagement with Development Partners (DPs) through the Consultative Group (CG) process has focused on how to manage the transition to an upper middle-income status in an orderly manner to balance the need for growth with our obligations of reducing poverty and significantly meeting targets set in Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Mr. Speaker, partnership with the private sector has brought about accelerated growth and development of the economy. Ghana improved from the 92nd position in 2009 to the 63rd in 2012 on the World Bank’s “Ease of Doing Business Index”.

This progress has to be improved during the transition to Middle-Income status and we are in the process of transforming the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC) to meet the challenges of the 21st Century Investor.

Mr. Speaker, the government has taken a decisive step to locate private sector coordination under the Office of the President, and designated a Minister of State in the Presidency to coordinate and supervise Private-sector initiatives. In this effort, government will play a facilitative role for private sector development.

I have already inaugurated the Private Sector Advisory Council under my chairmanship, and decisive steps are underway to deepen the implementation of the *Private Sector Development Strategy (PSDS) II*, covering all major aspects of private sector development.

We will use Government's significant procurement power to benefit the Ghanaian Private Sector. As a policy, I am requesting public officials to give priority to the Ghanaian private sector in goods and services where they are competitive in value, quality and delivery.

ACCELERATING AGRICULTURAL MODERNIZATION FOR JOB-CREATION

Mr. Speaker, all of our accelerated development efforts have been geared towards giving special advantage to accelerated agricultural and aquaculture development through Modernization.

The process of modernization, involving the use of improved seed varieties, greater access to tractor services and training of peasant and small holder farmers on productivity enhancements, has resulted in dramatic increases in maize, rice and cassava production in the last four years.

These will be expanded with an additional 2,000 tractors, improved seed support and fertilizer subsidies, especially for the poorest farmers.

Total land under irrigation throughout the country will be substantially increased as a result of new initiatives on the Accra Plains and the Savannah zone, under a new World Bank facility on commercial agriculture development. This will allow for all year round farming and will enhance Ghana's food security.

Hydroelectric power and irrigation development will receive further boost in the Sissilli-Kulpawn project and the Pwalugu Multi-purpose dam in the Upper East region. These two projects are expected to bring some 80,000 hectares of land under irrigation in the Northern belt.

A more coherent focus on fisheries and aquaculture development has been initiated, with the designation of a new Ministry for Fisheries and Aquaculture Development and the imminent establishment of a college of Fisheries planned for Anomabo as a department of the University of Cape Coast.

COCOA

Mr. speaker, our focus is to work towards achieving sustainable production of the historic one million tonnes of cocoa. The key measures we have identified to accomplish this are the continued payment of at least 70% of the world market price of cocoa to farmers, the distribution of 20 million hybrid cocoa seedlings free of charge over the next several years. Additionally we will also pursue the continued application of the hi-tech system to increase yield per hectare. We are also reviewing the current distribution system of subsidized inputs to ensure that these reach the farmers directly.

MANUFACTURING

We will marshal the collective effort of all stakeholders to facilitate the emergence and growth of

a strong manufacturing sector:-

1. By reviewing the tax structure to reduce taxes paid by Ghanaian manufacturers to increase their competitiveness in the national and world market.
2. Facilitate the establishment of an industrial development fund to provide a ready resource envelope for ailing and struggling manufacturing industries in Ghana.
3. Provide service plots within dedicated industrial zones to be developed in Sekondi Takoradi, Tema, Kumasi and Tamale to support the local manufacturing companies to add value to local products for a strong and viable domestic manufacturing sector.

Mr. Speaker, work is ongoing on a \$1.2 billion ammonia-urea based fertilizer processing plant with an annual capacity of one million tons in Nyankrom in the Shama District of the Western Region. This is an initiative between the Ghana and Indian Governments with a potential for boosting trade, jobs creation, and increased agricultural productivity.

TOURISM, CULTURE AND CREATIVE ARTS

Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to using Tourism as an instrument for the full realization of the economic potential of our culture and creative arts. In this respect:

- The newly aligned Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Creative Arts will facilitate the interface between government, implementing bodies in tourism, culture and the creative industries as well as international and civil society partners.
- The National Commission on Culture is being restructured as the government's lead implementing and advisory body on Culture and Creative Arts; and the Ghana Tourism Authority will be similarly transformed.
- Government will allocate funds to the sector and mainstream the creative arts industry as an integral part of the Ghanaian private sector.

PILLAR THREE: EXPANDING INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Speaker, all Ghanaians deserve to live in a country with improved infrastructure, which is inextricably linked to enhancing the quality of life.

The viability of private sector investments hinges on a robust and functional infrastructure of roads, rail, sufficient and efficient energy, stable water supply and a seamless communications and ICT infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, government will use information technology to support infrastructure development, urban renewal, land use management and environmental protection.

Mr. Speaker, Ghana was listed by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) as one of the top ten most dynamic performing countries in ICT-for-development in 2011. Indeed, telephone subscription in Ghana reached close to 26million as of December 2012, representing more than double the number as of December 2008.

Government will continue with the positive outlook and promote the rapid development of broadband infrastructure to reach all parts of the country to ensure that the improved connectivity provides better access to health care and health information, opportunities for

education and training, transportation, protection of environment and management of natural resources, and to support E-govt to create transparency in government.

In pursuit of this, the work on the Eastern Corridor Rural Fibre Optic backbone network project will be accelerated to add 584 kilometres of optic fibre stretching from **Ho** to **Bawku** and linking 70 towns enroute to improve the quality of communications services.

With the ICT sector expanding at such a rapid rate, attention will be focused on measures to protect the privacy of the individual and personal data. We will also develop strategies to counter the growing threats of cyber attacks and other online security concerns and accelerate preparations towards migration from Analogue to Digital Television Transmission. The Better Ghana ICT Project will be given a major boost this year. We shall commence the distribution of Four Hundred Thousand (400,000) laptop computers to schools and students.

ROADS

I have clear plans for the roads and transport sector, which we will start implementing this year. These include the introduction of public-private partnership models on commercially viable routes along the Western, Eastern and Central Corridor roads.

Work is soon commencing on the Northern segment of the Eastern Corridor road, stretching from Oti Damanko to Nakpanduri.

This year we expect to bring to a significant point of completion many of the ongoing road projects including the Kpando- Worawora- Dambai, Asankragwa- Enchi, Navrongo- Tumu and the Achimota- Ofankor, Madina- Pantang, Nsawam- Suhum-Apedwa, La- Teshie, Dansoman and the Apaaso- Kintampo roads.

Others are the Sefwi Bekwai- Eshiem- Asankragwa, Bomfa Junction- Asiwa- Bekwai, Tetteh Quarshie-Madina and the Berekum- Sampa roads.

We will embark on a regional roads improvement programme that will see significant upgrades in critical road infrastructure in the major agricultural regions and here I make special mention of the Western Region.

Our trunk roads development programmes are also progressing steadily across the country. COCOBOD is funding the reshaping, spot improvements and upgrading of gravel roads to bituminous surfaces in cocoa, coffee and sheanut producing areas.

In the course of this year, and under the policy on public private partnerships, feasibility studies will commence on the dualization of the Accra- Cape Coast- Takoradi road, and the rehabilitation and expansion of the Accra- Tema motorway. New interchanges are also planned for the Tema end of the motorway and the Kasoa-Bawjiase intersection.

Work will commence this year too on a new interchange at the Kwame Nkrumah Circle. It is also my hope that the project for the PPP in respect of the multi-carriage Accra-Kumasi Highway will be approved by Parliament for work to commence this year.

RAILWAY

Mr. Speaker, the Government's plan to revamp and modernize the railway sector is ongoing. There has been tremendous work in this sector and I recall my meeting with the railway workers at the 'Bottom Tree' in Sekondi. I can confidently say to them today, that as we continue with our railway sector development programme there will be significant signs of improvement within the next three years.

Government believes the private sector has a role to play in the on-going modernization of the rail sector, an example being the rehabilitation of the Accra-Tema, Kumasi-Ejisu, the Accra-Nsawam and Takoradi-Kojokrom rail networks.

Mr. Speaker, as they say in Oseikrom, the Kumasi airport is now busier than Kejetia lorrypark. That description is a reflection of the brisk business at our airports. Available data shows that passenger traffic through our International Airport has more than quadrupled in the last 3 years. Domestic passenger traffic on the other hand has increased ten-fold.

This remarkable progress is putting immense strain on our airport infrastructure, which we continue to expand. As a matter of priority Government has commissioned the immediate exploration of plans for the construction of a new international airport in Accra, and complementary expansion of the airports in Kumasi, Tamale, Sunyani and Takoradi. Feasibility studies for the construction of Aerodromes in Ho, Cape Coast, Koforidua, Bolgatanga, would be undertaken this year. We will commence a feasibility study on the establishment of a new national airline in collaboration with the private sector under a PPP arrangement.

Mr. Speaker, as we continue to expand the infrastructure at the Tema and Takoradi ports, we are also focused on the construction of a modern deep seaport in Takoradi. I have directed the Ministers of Transport and Finance to undertake an investigation of unauthorized fees and charges at our airport and ports which are putting which are putting unbearable hardship on our importers.

HOUSING AND URBAN RENEWAL

Mr. Speaker, one of the areas that I am passionate about is the concept of urban renewal. I believe that one of the most basic human rights we must guarantee every Ghanaian is the right to a safe, secure and accessible place of convenience. The pollution of our environment and especially our beachfronts is depressing.

Government will in the next three years work with all stakeholders to ensure that the National Housing Policy document is not only finalized and approved by both Cabinet and Parliament; but also, work feverishly to ensure that relevant legislation is put in place to provide the necessary foundation as well as legal framework for implementation.

Government will this year initiate a pilot scheme to combine social housing with improved sanitation and water supply. This will particularly concentrate on the dense urban slums where the phenomenon of safe sanitation and waste disposal are very weak.

We will be working to consolidate the various strategies being implemented to bridge the huge housing deficit. These strategies, which are in themselves opportunities for public-private partnership arrangements, will include the construction of low cost units for lower income groups, rural and social housing for the very poor and mortgage facilities for those who can afford.

Mr. Speaker, I am deeply concerned about how the challenges in the housing sector, have led to exorbitant rents that do not only violate our rent law but also suffocate the average Ghanaian. I will work hard to address this challenge.

Mr. Speaker, water supply is currently precarious in some communities including significant parts of Accra. This is in spite of the several efforts we have been making to improve the supply of good drinking water, especially to Ghanaians.

It is worth noting however that these efforts are beginning to yield some results. The situation however requires massive investment in new water delivery infrastructure and timely maintenance like the ongoing works at the Kpong headworks. In the medium to long term, we will seek to devolve authority from centralized urban water management systems to a more decentralized management for efficiency and cost effective delivery.

Mr. Speaker, a multi-agency sanitation task force was set-up to coordinate a nation-wide clean-up exercise from September to December 2012. This sanitation management effort has helped to address part of the waste disposal problem.

The Task Force experience is now being reviewed in order to engage all the stakeholders, including the District Assemblies, in a more sustained and concerted effort to rid our country of the unsightly rubbish heaps that are threatening the health of our communities.

Mr. Speaker, my focus is on waste and sanitation management systems not just waste collection and disposal. The emphasis will also be on waste recovery and recycling as well as providing incentives to increase private sector participation in the hygiene, sanitation and pollution control sector.

The start of the CONTI project in Accra financed by the US EXIM will see significant improvement in flood control and solid and liquid waste management in the capital city.

MINING

Mr. Speaker, our mining sector needs substantial reform to ensure that we move towards economically and socially sustainable mining. The Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources has been tasked to ensure that mining in Ghana is undertaken responsibly and meets community needs and expectations.

Mr. Speaker, mining must create employment that matches its type, provides fair economic returns to the community and protects the environment.

As I recently announced, Government will rigidly enforce the laws of Ghana by addressing the illegal invasion of foreigners in our small-scale mining sector. This problem has been fully investigated and we have concluded that there is an unacceptable collusion between some Ghanaians and these foreigners to circumvent our laws.

Mr. Speaker, a series of decisive measures are underway to purge the system and better regulate small-scale mining, in order to create and sustain employment, for Ghanaians, primarily.

ENERGY AND PETROLEUM

Mr. Speaker, millions of Ghanaians and businesses are today experiencing very erratic and frustrating electricity supply. It is a situation that I am deeply concerned about, and to which I have devoted considerable energy to solving. This is especially because compounding the

problem of unstable power supply is an equally worrying issue of unreliable water supply to some communities.

The current developments do not reflect the investments and progress we have been making in the area of electricity generation. What should be our successes and rather augment available generation capacity has unfortunately been undermined by a number of unforeseen developments.

We had made good progress in fixing the damage done to the West African Gas Pipeline Company (WAPCO) only to experience a drawback, when nearly 600 kilometres of the pipeline was inundated with seawater.

Mr. Speaker, in a frantic effort to pump the seawater out, two of our most experienced engineers lost their lives tragically in an underwater explosion. Permit me to use this occasion to send my deepest condolences to the bereaved families.

The repercussions of the incapacitated gas pipeline has brought near total darkness to our neighbours in Togo and Benin, and led to the loss of over 250 MW of electricity supply to Ghana.

Mr. Speaker, work on the WAGPI is now planned for completion in April 2013.

As President I am adequately aware of the challenges and the extreme discomfort that this is causing to the generality of our people and businesses. This situation causes me sleepless nights. We have had to work round the clock to bring many plants into operation earlier than scheduled while we await the restoration of the plants affected by the absence of gas from the WAPCO.

We are expecting the addition of over 500 MW of installed generation capacity this year. This includes:

132 MW from the Takoradi 3 Thermal Plant by end of February

130 MW from the Bui Hydroelectric Power Project by end of April and increased to 400MW by end of September

2 MW from a Solar Park at Navrongo by end of February

With the addition of Takoradi 3 this month, and the first power from Bui in April, our current deficit of about 200 MW at peak, should be sufficiently ameliorated. While this will give us comfort from the current unpleasant load shedding, the system will still be fragile with a slim margin of redundancy. Restoration of the WAGPI and Asogli coming back on stream will give us a better margin of comfort.

Work has also started on a 161 kV Tumu-Han-Wa transmission line in the Upper West Region. Other projects are the Kpando-Kadjebi Transmission Project, a new 330KV transmission line from Boadze–Prestea-Kumasi- Tamale- Bolgatanga among others.

Mr. Speaker, Government's overall objective for the energy sector is to ensure reliable, stable and progressively cheap power for economic development in the country and the wider West African region.

Ultimately developing and bringing on stream our own gas potential will guarantee affordable power to support the acceleration in growth of our economy. Gas from our Western field provides us with enough flexibilities and cost-efficient ways of additional power generation. This project will receive my personal attention. Work is progressing steadily on the Gas Infrastructure

Project at Atuabo in the Elemabelle district of the Western Region. When completed by the end of this year, it will put us on track to achieve the planned expansion of 5,000 MW capacity of power generation by 2016.

Government will continue during the year, to support the utility companies to carry out distribution system improvement projects and increase electricity access to all parts of the country under the 'Energy for All' programme to ensure universal access by 2016.

Mr. Speaker, we are progressing steadily in the area of renewable energy, by installing Solar systems for remote Public Institutions and Community Lighting in off-grid communities. In addition, Government will implement pilot mini-grid electrification for lakeside and island communities.

The private sector has shown considerable interest in investing in the renewable energy sector. Government will ensure that the feed-in-tariff is published to encourage these private investors

Mr. Speaker, we will commence the distribution of over twenty thousand solar lanterns to replace kerosene lanterns and reduce indoor air pollution in remote rural homes. This intervention forms part of government's efforts to protect the vulnerable in our society and to ensure that they have alternative and affordable sources of energy.

Mr. Speaker, the GNPC through joint ventures continue to explore the hydrocarbon potential of our sedimentary basins.

As part of measures to promote local content and participation in the petroleum industry, an Enterprise Development Centre (EDC) with support from the Jubilee Partners will be fully operational this year.

The centre will be located in the Western Region to facilitate the training of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to be properly positioned to take advantage of the oil and gas industry.

We will proceed with local content legislation to ensure Ghanaian participation in this blessing of nature God has bestowed on us. We will implement local content in a manner that is a win-win for Ghana and our foreign partners in Ghana's growing oil and gas industry.

Mr. Speaker, this year we will start a restructuring of TOR to restore it to its former glory as the most efficient refinery on the west coast of Africa. We will carry this out with strategic partners who are willing to invest in a PPP with the Government of Ghana.

The Bulk Oil Storage Company (BOST) will be reorganized to play its role in strategic storage and distribution of petroleum products.

Mr. Speaker, security for oil and gas continues to be a major priority. The Navy, Airforce and Army have been retooled to establish a safe and secure corridor for our oil and gas installations. We will continue to provide security for both onshore and offshore oil and gas infrastructure against disruptive threats and theft while putting in place anti-piracy infrastructure. The completion of the Vessel Tracking and Monitoring System being installed by the Ghana Maritime Authority will allow us to use radar to identify unauthorized vessels that enter our territorial waters.

We will place emphasis on integrating community groups into protection arrangements thereby supporting employment growth even as we undertake a comprehensive assessment of risks to our maritime assets including downstream and onshore facilities such as pipelines.

PILLAR FOUR: TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE

Mr. Speaker, Ghana continues to exhibit strong leadership in democratic governance, which makes us the envy of many nations. As noted earlier, we have just come out of an historic election which witnessed progressive reforms including the use of a biometric voters register and biometric verification for voting which has been acclaimed by both domestic and international observers as free, fair and transparent.

Government will continue to support the Electoral Commission by providing it with the needed resources to carry out its programmes and reforms.

The independence of the judiciary would be upheld and we would work to improve conditions of work of the judiciary. We will work with the Judicial Council to continue the process of providing new and more modern court rooms and provide the instruments and equipment to facilitate the work of the judges.

Mr. Speaker, Government will continue to partner with community-based organisations and civil society especially in the areas of public service reform and delivery.

In pursuing this objective, the Government of Ghana will develop mechanisms for promoting citizen-based monitoring and evaluation of public policies and programs, as well as providing feedback and suggestions on ways of improving the targeting of social and economic development programmes. Civil society will continue to have limitless space to participate in our governance system. It is healthy and allows growth of democratic governance.

Mr. Speaker, We will guarantee freedom of worship as enshrined in our constitution and continue to promote peaceful coexistence of all religions in our country. It is expected that the umbrella religious organizations will in turn implement self-regulation to curb the excesses of some of their members who give the clergy a bad name.

Mr. Speaker, the role of traditional institutions, will be strengthened to promote accountable governance. Working with the National House of Chiefs, the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs has been re-aligned to provide more vigorous interface between chieftaincy and tradition. We will progressively improve the allowances given to Paramount chiefs and Queenmothers to facilitate the execution of their traditional duties.

Mr. Speaker, a strong parliament is a strong democracy. Strengthening Parliament is also a crucial element in managing a successful transition to middle-income status. This includes ensuring that Parliament has the capacity to play its oversight role effectively.

Mr. Speaker, the 'Job 600' project, which will ensure that Members of Parliament can operate from descent offices, is almost complete. MPs can expect to be furnished with laptops with full

Internet connectivity to facilitate communication between their offices and constituents as promised in the NDC manifesto.

In my first term, we will seek to strengthen Parliament by:

- Establishing the Democracy Fund proposed by the Constitution Review Commission (CRC) to provide sustainable funding for Parliament, Independent Governance Institutions and other pro-democracy governance bodies.
- Strengthening the Committees of Parliament by ensuring that the Chairpersons and Ranking Members of Parliament are accorded recognition consistent with their status and responsibilities as recommended by the CRC.
- Commence a feasibility study for the construction of a new Parliamentary Chamber block on the premises of the state house.
- We will also explore appropriate housing for MPs in order to guarantee their safety and security.

DECENTRALIZATION AND LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Mr. Speaker, effective decentralization in governance and decision-making starts with the Presidency. I have therefore instructed the Cabinet office to ensure that Cabinet meetings rotate between Accra and the Regional capitals. By this, millions of our citizens outside Accra will have the opportunity each month to witness and participate in the process of decision-making directly.

Mr. Speaker, during my first term as President, every effort will be made to ensure that some of the far-reaching proposals emanating from the CRC's report on decentralization such as the election of Chief Executives at the local level is given the needed impetus. We will mainstream the concept of Local Economic Development (LED) to facilitate, develop and implement employment creation programmes based on the natural resource endowments and the comparative advantages of every district.

We will continue to strengthen our decentralized local governance system by implementing the programme to establish the remaining seven decentralized Departments of the District Assemblies and identifying new Departments for decentralization whose capacities are needed by the District Assemblies such as the Departments of Women and of Children and the Statistical Service.

We will also commence a phased programme for the provision of administrative, economic and social infrastructure for the 106 new districts created in 2003, 2007 and 2012 and extend the composite budget system to cover the 46 new District Assemblies established in 2012.

THE MEDIA

Mr. Speaker, the Broadcasting Bill has been on the drawing board for a long time. We must hasten to pass the Bill so that national standards for the electronic media can be established.

The newly established Media Development Fund aimed at improving capacity within the media will be operationalized this year.

We shall also support the National Media Commission to enact the needed Regulations that will establish an organizational framework and standards to ensure balance, fairness, access, opportunity and objectivity in the media.

Access to the establishment of Community radio will be improved to allow millions more to benefit from the unique attributes of this medium.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS, JUSTICE AND THE RULE OF LAW

Mr. Speaker, a major governance issue for the year will be the implementation of the recommendations of the Constitutional Review Commission. For this purpose, an Implementation Committee has been established to be responsible for all aspects of the programme leading to the enactment of constitutional amendments. Subsequent to the constitutional amendments, which the CRC Implementation Committee is currently working on, we will proceed to transform the Legal Aid Board into an independent constitutional body, implement the recommendation for CHRAJ's decisions to be made directly enforceable, and introduce the recommended weekend and small claims courts.

COMBATING CORRUPTION

Mr. Speaker, we are proposing to revise the Criminal Offences Act to redefine corruption to include the more expansive definition covered in the UN Convention Against Corruption and the AU Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption. We will give impetus to the fight against corruption by strengthening the anti-corruption agencies and sanctioning culpable persons to serve as a deterrent to others. The work of the Sole Commissioner into judgement debts will help us bring to order an unacceptable phenomenon that has become a huge charge on the public debt. We would push for critical reforms in the AGs department. I will implement the Freedom of Information Act as soon as it is passed by Parliament.

Our commitment to the fight against corruption remains unshakeable. We would streamline and root out the rot that has become associated with the alienation of public lands.

FIGHTING NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING AND CONSUMPTION

Mr. Speaker, I am firmly committed in ensuring that Ghana is absolutely insulated from the illicit drug trade.

To this end; we will pursue the programme for the legislative conversion of the Narcotics Control Board (NACOB) into an autonomous Commission.

We will also continue to strengthen the inter-agency coordination mechanism involving NACOB, the Customs Division of the Ghana Revenue Authority, the Police, BNI, the Food and Drugs Board, Aviation Security and the Immigration Service and ensure increased international cooperation especially for surveillance.

We shall maintain a zero tolerance for drug trafficking and I request all officials engaged in tackling this menace to maintain a high sense of integrity in order to win this battle.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Speaker, the security and safety of all citizens will be a priority. We have been making modest gains as crime statistics show that the incidence of crime is on the decline. This notwithstanding, we will continue to resource and adequately equip the security services to ensure that no Ghanaian feels unsafe in their lawful pursuits.

A worrying trend in our crime indices is increasing cases of rape and defilement. In many cases families, religious leaders, traditional rulers and sometimes public officials intervene to cover up and resolve these cases at home. I wish to emphasise that rape and defilement are criminal and must be handled by the criminal justice system. We must bring to book paedophiles and rapist who prey on our women and rob them of their dignity. I am instructing the IGP, DOVVSU, GCSP to work together to ensure that all of such cases are brought to justice.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to provide critical support capable of augmenting the developmental service mix of our armed forces while providing adequate security for our citizens. This strategy involves:

1. Enhancing the health and logistical infrastructure that enables the security agencies to lead rescue and support missions, step in when we have major disruptions in basic services – water, health, sanitation, floods and natural disasters and also perform their traditional world-acclaimed peacekeeping and development role in post-conflict situations.
2. Undertake a comprehensive Security Services Health Sector Initiative that will improve basic, primary and referral health facilities within the security services and also make those facilities available for use by the general public. In this regard we will build a second military hospital in Kumasi and upgrade the medical stations in the various barracks.
3. Address the critical office and residential accommodation problems facing the military and the Police, Prisons, Fire and Immigration Services as well as NADMO.

Mr. Speaker, in collaboration with the National Peace Council, the UNDP, The Otumfuor Committee and other stakeholders, I intend to begin a new round of bringing to closure some of the protracted chieftaincy conflicts in the north. I call for the cooperation of all my compatriots in these areas to give peace a chance. We can only succeed in turning around the fortunes of the 3 Northern regions if we have an atmosphere of peace and security.

FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. Speaker, Ghana's foreign policy of positive neutrality will remain our focus with emphasis on economic diplomacy hinged on our national interest. Ultimately, our foreign policy will deliver good neighbourliness, peace at home and abroad and economic wellbeing by strategic partnerships.

Mr. Speaker, our commitment to peace and security in the West African Region is paramount in our foreign policy considerations. We have recently joined with ECOWAS in seeking a permanent peaceful resolution of the conflict in Mali, by contributing a modest detachment of our armed forces to participate in the African-led force operating in Mali, AFISMA.

As the actual armed conflict is abating, Ghana stands ready to use our rich mediation experience, to assist Mali return to stable, representative democracy, just as we have done in time past in helping bring peace to Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire.

As a commitment to peace and stability in the region, I have pledged at the Africa Union and the United Nations, that Ghana will not serve as a haven to destabilize any of our neighbors. I wish once again to assure any refugees on our territory that they are welcome guests as long as they do not use Ghana as a base to destabilize the Governments in their home countries.

Under my Presidency, Ghanaians and the international community can trust that Ghana will uphold all its commitments to the UN, the AU, the Commonwealth, ECOWAS and other international organisations to which we belong.

Ghana will continue to take all necessary measures, in cooperation with relevant international agencies, to fight against international terrorism, money laundering, narcotics and human trafficking.

Mr. Speaker, the financial framework within which the programs and policies discussed in this address will be executed will be outlined when the Minister of Finance in the coming weeks, presents the Budget and Financial Statement of Government to this house.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Speaker, fifty years ago our nation's founder and the first President of the Republic Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah urged Ghanaians to remember that the eyes of the world are upon us in whatever we do. These profound words have as much meaning today as they were five decades ago. It is a challenge to us to work together to bring honour to our country and its people.

I reaffirm my commitment to uniting Ghanaians as one people. We are a nation of diverse cultures and religious beliefs; there is a tremendous amount of beauty in our diversity. While we celebrate our diversity, let us explore what unites us instead of focusing on the things that divide us.

Let us build trust -- remembering always that civility, humility and discipline are signs of a strong national character. Real change is when everyone pulls together, works together, when we all exercise our responsibilities to country, our local communities and our families.

Let me state to this august House

1. That I shall work to ensure that every household in this country will soon enjoy uninterrupted water and power supply;
2. That our young minds desirous of opportunities for basic and secondary education shall have the space in our schools and shall have quality, affordable education that will improve their career and life expectations;
3. That our mothers shall live longer and healthier as they perform the God-given function of child-birth;
4. That our inner cities shall witness significant renewal in sanitation and housing
5. That the economic opportunities of this country will be open to all our citizens irrespective of gender, ethnicity, religion or political affiliation.
6. That our governance systems shall deliver the services and opportunities we promise to the citizens of Ghana; and
7. That our citizens will assume their right to demand accountability for these services and rights and that our roads infrastructure is not only expanded but also made safer for our people.

Mr. Speaker, we are determined to deliver on the development goals, which I have outlined. We have objectives to meet and the expectations of our people to fulfill; our people expect to see results, whether it is in the delivery of water, electricity, healthcare or sanitation services. We

must not overlook the little things that matter to our people even as we stress on responsible citizenship as an important factor in nation-building.

Political office holders including Ministers of State, Metropolitan, Municipal and District Chief Executives, CEOs of public institutions and middle and lower management personnel will be required to exhibit a high sense of responsibility and diligently execute their mandate to meet the needs of the ordinary Ghanaian. It must not be business-as-usual.

Mr. Speaker, we may be confronted with many challenges as a nation but our collective resolve is far greater than those challenges.

Mr. Speaker, as I said on that eventful day of my inauguration, “change does not happen overnight and sometimes, despite whatever progress has been placed in motion, it will appear to be darkest before the dawn of the new day makes that progress visible. In such times I will be counting on you to maintain the faith and the trust that you have placed in me as President. I will not let you down.”

Our momentary difficulties must only serve in strengthening this collective resolve towards a future of limitless possibilities.

Despair is not an option and we shall not make excuses.

I know I lead a nation of great people who have it within us to establish that fair and just society of opportunities for all to which I dedicate my entire efforts.

Mr. Speaker, the future is here; the future is ours; the youth, women and men, and especially the children of our motherland, Ghana, expect noticeable improvement in their lives.

In all this we acknowledge our abundant faith in God and his bountiful mercies on our nation. God’s divine favour is on Ghana. We have no cause to fear. With God in our boat we smile at the storm.

I know we will not fail our country and I know the Good Lord will not fail us either.

God bless Ghana.

Thank you.