

**STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS DELIVERED BY H. E. PRESIDENT J. A. KUFUOR AT
PARLIAMENT ON FEBRUARY 14TH, 2008.**

INTRODUCTION

MR. Speaker, for the 8th and final time, I have come before this august House, in accordance with the Constitution of the 4th Republic, to give Honourable Members an account of the State Of The Nation .

Today is National Chocolate Day. It is also Valentine Day, the day of love. Mr. Speaker, I should assure you that I did not choose the day for my address. Should I call it a manifestation of the love between the Executive and the Legislature? On my part, I will say fate brought me here because I want to leave this House with an effusion of love for both sides of the divide. So, in that spirit of love, let me wish each of you a Happy Valentine Day. Consult with the leadership of the House to ensure adequate supply of the food of love- our own chocolate.

Mr. Speaker, when I was preparing this address, my attention was drawn to some speculations on the comparative performances between this government and previous regimes. Such speculations, Mr. Speaker, are futile. To me, it is useless to pretend to be the inventor of the wheel. Rather, the mark of the successful leader is what to do with the wheel that one finds. My account will therefore be restricted to the State of the Nation as I found it on my assumption of office, and how it has influenced the decisions and policies that I have enunciated in my bid to better the nation. So, what I say today should not be thought of as an attempt at belittling what others did. Rather, it should be appreciated as a report of my government's performance over the past seven to eight years in office, to improve the conditions of our people. My abiding principle has always been to leave a place better than I found it.

Mr. Speaker, on balance, Ghana has been doing progressively well under my watch, and enjoying tremendous goodwill both from within and from the international community, as a result of the performance of the government over the past seven years.

Since the commencement of the Golden Jubilee celebrations last year, the pulse of the nation has become very vibrant and the people's outlook positive and upbeat. Increasingly, Ghanaians are displaying a strong yearning to be the best or with the best in Africa , as was manifested clearly during the just-ended soccer Tournament. Ghana did not lift the trophy as we had all wished, but the country should be proud of winning the bronze and, above all, for hosting an exciting and successful soccer fiesta adjudged by many of the continent's football officials and enthusiasts to be the best so far in the history of the Tournament.

Mr. Speaker, the House will be happy to learn that new FIFA rankings were released just yesterday, with Ghana ranked first in Africa and 14th in the world. This is the first time ever that Ghana has been ranked this high in the FIFA listings.

Let me therefore use this occasion to congratulate the Black Stars and the technical team for doing their best and for being good sportsmen, and the Local Organizing Committee for their contribution. I should also acknowledge the unalloyed support which Ghanaians gave to the Stars and the patriotism they displayed so passionately in the country.

Of course, I am not forgetting government's initiatives in bidding for the tournament and also the investment in the beautiful stadiums of which we are all so proud. But even as we pat ourselves on the back, let us not forget that maintaining structures and expanding the facilities to all regional capitals should be the responsibility of present and future governments and society.

THE MACRO-ECONOMY

Mr. Speaker with the budget already presented and all the details of national policy clearly articulated, I propose only to give an overview of the period since 2001, and what remains to be done. Let me begin with a focus on the macro-economy which has been one of the major preoccupations of government since it assumed office.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that in 2001, the nation was forced by difficult circumstances to make the most pragmatic but by no means popular choice of adopting the HIPC Initiative. The undeniable truth was that the country was broke. It could not sustain the servicing of its debts.

The economy was also entrapped by incredibly high levels of inflation of over 40% and interest rates of over 50%. The Cedi was in a dangerous free fall while TOR was smarting under crushing debts that had caused it to be black-listed and refused supplies by its regular suppliers.

Mr. Speaker, the progress recorded in the past 7 years has proved beyond doubt that the decision "to go HIPC" was a master stroke. Ghana is now solvent and the economy is strong and resilient. The greatest litmus tests of this are:

- The successful and spectacular issuance of a Euro-bond on the London Stock Exchange to raise USD750 million for infrastructural development. This bond was over-subscribed by over USD3billion, and this was Ghana's first attempt ever on the market.
- The ability to withstand the heavy shocks of the price of crude oil which has been skyrocketing since last year, from USD50 to USD100 per barrel.
- The prompt rallying to the aid of the numerous victims of the unprecedented flooding in the Northern and parts of the Western Region last year.
- The dramatic re-denomination of the Cedi without incident. You will all remember that the old Cedi exchanged 10,000 to one dollar. With this exercise now, the Cedi exchanges confidently for one dollar and some cents.

- The flocking in of many reputable banks and the commencement of International Financial Services (Offshore Banking) in the country, in collaboration with Barclays Bank.
- The World Bank's rating of Ghana as the most attractive place to do business in the emerging markets.

Mr. Speaker, these achievements are the results of well-implemented policies and adherence to fiscal and monetary disciplines which are now the hallmark of the economy.

Further evidence of the consistent progress is that the GDP, even in the face of many difficulties, has moved beyond 6.5% currently, and is expected to pass the 8% mark within the next 3 years.

With this trend, the country should be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of reducing poverty by half ahead of schedule. A socially sensitive development framework is already in place. Mr. Speaker, we must build on it to promote widely shared growth which will come to reflect in the pockets of the people generally.

Oil Discovery

But, Mr. Speaker, the biggest blessing of the Jubilee year is the discovery of oil in commercial quantities estimated to be over 3 billion barrels, while prospecting continues. Proceeds from the find should impact the economy within the next two to three years.

In the mean time, I have set up a Ministerial committee to work towards the development of appropriate policies and measures, especially a regulatory framework which will make the sector profitable for the entire society. With proper management of the find, the country should be free from the inadequate liquidity which has been a major constraint to effective discharge of development programmes. Additionally, the country's dependency on external donor support would be reduced, thereby strengthening the self-confidence of the nation and people.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that in this very House, government announced a programme of five priorities, namely, the following;

- Vigorous infrastructural development
- Modernized agriculture centred on rural development
- Enhanced social services delivery, with special emphasis on education and health
- Good governance
- Private Sector development

For the past seven years government has worked hard to achieve these priorities.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Education

Mr. Speaker, Human Resource Development should be the natural starting point for the knowledge-based society to which this nation aspires in order to mainstream itself into globalization.

Mr. Speaker, on assumption of office, I found the country's education system in a parlous condition. From 2001, using resources from the HIPC Fund, Budget Allocation and the GETfund, government launched a programme to rehabilitate broken down educational institutions from basic through secondary to tertiary level. Other initiatives which have been implemented include the Capitation Grant, the School Feeding Programme and improved students' loan schemes, all of which have contributed to increase intake of pupils and students.

Mr. Speaker, on account of Ghana's School Feeding programme, I was invited to address the Council of the World Food Programme in Rome just about a week ago. Together with a group of pupils from Ghana, I told the Ghana story. So, Mr. Speaker, Ghana's School Feeding Programme has become a model for other developing nations around the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen, these policies that I have mentioned have all been captured within the new Educational Reform Programme, which started on schedule last September, with some novel features. The implementation of the constitutional provision of Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) has been launched with this programme, so that from the age of four to sixteen, all Ghanaian children must stay in school at the expense of the state. For those who do not continue to Senior High School, opportunity will be given for one year state sponsored apprenticeship programme to acquire an employable skill.

At the Senior High School, four main streams will run: academics, agriculture, technical and vocational. Special emphasis will be given to Science, Mathematics and Technology including ICT. But running through all levels will be ICT training without which one cannot be said to be fully literate these days.

Mr. Speaker, since the First Republic, various educational programmes have recognized the need for Science and Technology but have not sown the seed for inculcating the essential disciplines in our people. What this government seeks to do at all levels is to acculturate science in them, so that by the time they leave school, their mindset and outlook will reflect an appreciation of Science and Technology as a way of life.

Mr. Speaker, as part of the Reform, all the 38 Teacher Training Colleges are being upgraded into diploma awarding institutions, across the curricula of learning, from Science through Arts and ICT. Further, 15 of them have been designated science colleges to be steeped even deeper in these subjects to provide specialist education for Science, Mathematics and Technology teachers. Technical and Vocational Studies are also being highlighted in the Reform.

Government policy is to build Vocational and Technical institutes in every district, so the youth will learn to use not only their mind, but their hands as well.

A Distance Education programme has been laid on for the upgrading of teachers beyond the diploma level. Improved conditions of service are part of the incentives to motivate teachers to deliver quality service. This government is fully committed to the concept of quality teaching as the guarantee for molding our youth into being high achievers, with technical and scientific frame of mindset. Additional to refurbishing the Universities and Teacher Training Colleges , government policy is to attract and retain young qualified faculty through scholarships, better remuneration and conditions of service, sabbaticals and other incentives.

Mr. Speaker, happily for our nation the burden that used to rest solely on the state for provision of tertiary education is being lessened by rapidly increasing private tertiary institutions, some of which are proving very competitive in terms of quality of programme delivery and student intake.

I must commend the founders of these institutions as well as the National Accreditation Board for their part in the process. My appeal is that the curricula of these private institutions should expand beyond religion, business and social sciences into Mathematics, Science and Technology, in line with government's new educational policy.

Health

Mr. Speaker, integral to Human Resource Development and the achievement of the UN's Millennium Development Goals is a robust health delivery programme. For this reason, government has seen to the rehabilitation of the Regional hospitals and district health posts; capacity building within the sector and improvement in the conditions of service of health workers.

Currently, the main driving force of health delivery is captured in the adage "prevention is better than cure." Accordingly, the focus is on disease prevention and promotion of healthy life-styles that include healthy eating, both at home and in schools; physical exercise, use of potable water and environmental cleanliness.

Water

Mr. Speaker, to provide safe water for good health, government policy has involved provision of bore-holes and hand-dug wells as well as major rehabilitation works on urban water supply systems. These are ongoing in all the regions. They include Accra-Weija-Kpong loop which is under construction and will be completed within this year to bring great relief, the Kwanyaku Water Supply Expansion Project, the Cape-Coast Water Supply Expansion Project (to draw water from Sekyere Heman) and the Tamale Water Expansion Project, the Kumasi Water Supply Project, and the Koforidua water supply project. Plans for Sunyani are almost completed. This is expected to radically tackle the water-borne diseases plaguing many parts of the country.

The National Health Insurance Scheme

Mr. Speaker, the National Health Insurance Scheme is a major contribution of this government to provide quality and affordable health care. At the moment over 9,000,000 individuals, representing 48% of the population, are full members of the scheme. At this rate, it is envisaged that in the five years, all Ghanaians should be covered. A special feature is that in three years all children below 18 will become automatic members of the scheme, not through their parents as it is now.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Speaker, the relentless fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS resulted in a modest reduction from 2.6% prevalence level in 2006 to 2.2% in 2007. The voluntary counseling and testing services which are operating in 138 districts should make help more readily available to people living with the disease. They should also help to contain the spread of the disease. At the moment, 48 anti-retroviral sites are operational in the country.

Mr. Speaker, there are other on-going programmes to minimize the incidence and impact of malaria and guinea worm infestation, on the society. With improvement in water delivery it is expected that incidence of guinea worm infestation will be reduced.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Speaker, a vigorous infrastructural development is being pursued to open up the whole country to facilitate the movement of persons, goods and services, while promoting socio-cultural interaction.

Roads

Mr. Speaker, the roads sector in particular is witnessing an incredible level of development unprecedented in the history of this country. Every region and district boasts of completed and on-going roads of all grades, especially those linking farm gates to market centres.

Mr. Speaker, the difference is that specifications of the major trunk and arterial roads are much improved, with an expected time span of 20 years.

The strategic importance of cocoa is acknowledged through the Cocoa Roads Improvement Project (CRIP). This year, USD100million has been released for a programme to tar or surface-dress some selected roads in 6 selected cocoa growing regions.

Mr. Speaker, all the arterial roads from Accra to the neighbouring countries of Togo , Cote D'Ivoire and Burkina Faso have undergone reconstruction. Work is on-going in various Metropolises, Municipalities, and district capitals to reduce traffic congestion, improve public transportation and support economic activities. Accra is a typical example of these – Nkrumah Circle –Ofankor, Tetteh Quarshie – Aburi, Malam – Kasoia and all over the country.

Mr. Speaker, since 2001,

- over 1,000 km of feeder roads have been surfaced nation-wide

- About 4,800 km have undergone rehabilitation.
- 10,000km have undergone spot improvement, while
- 2,300 have been re-graveled.
- 84 bridges have been built
- 500km of roadside drains have been constructed for all cities

Mr. Speaker, sadly, the accident rate on these improved roads, even though falling, is still unacceptable. I charge the Driver Vehicle Licensing Authority, the Road Safety Commission, and the Motor Traffic Unit to redouble their efforts to ensure that quality of driving on our roads improves.

Railways

Mr. Speaker, after years of neglect, the railway sector is at long last receiving attention. In the course of the year, rehabilitation of the network will commence, in partnership with the Private Sector. USD\$90 million of the proceeds from the Euro-bond is being used as leverage with a consortium so that the network which has not seen rehabilitation for the better part of the last century. The plan is to extend the network all the way to the northern part of the country, and is expected to generate thousands of jobs across the country and also revive some of the old railway towns.

Let me use this opportunity to appeal to the squatters along the railway line to make arrangements to relocate before construction commences.

Ports

Mr. Speaker, both the Tema and Takoradi ports are undergoing various forms of rehabilitation for modernization and expansion. Partly due to this, the volume of freight with the sister landlocked countries in the sahel region has increased immensely. Government's intention is to make the country's sea ports the preferred entreport in the ECOWAS sub-region.

Aviation

Mr. Speaker, thanks to the just-ended Soccer Tournament, three regional airports in Takoradi, Tamale and Kumasi have been upgraded to enable them cope with bigger aircraft and flights around the clock. Customs and immigration services are also available to support international flights. During Ghana 2008, Tamale and Kumasi received 8 and 10 direct international flights respectively, while Takoradi received 14 through Kotoka.

Telecommunication

Mr. Speaker, government is endeavouring to make information and communication technology available to large sections of the society. The National Communications Backbone Infrastructure network is being pursued vigorously to provide open access broadband connectivity. Through this, all Senior High Schools are being connected to the system to facilitate distance education programmes. Again, all sectors of our society including commerce, health, and government will access information speedily for decision-making.

Government is also promoting a competitive Telecom Market to ensure fair-play among the operators and higher quality and more affordable service delivery to the people. The importance of this is spreading information all over and introducing uniformity of standards and values.

ENERGY

Mr. Speaker, the energy sector has proved a challenge throughout the life of this administration because of the very high cost of crude oil and the occasional drying up of the Volta . Last year, after the energy crisis which led to a country-wide load-shedding exercise, government announced a short to medium and long-term energy policy to solve the problem once and for all. The new policy involves a mix of thermal and hydro energy for electricity generation. With the success of the short-term measures, the load-shedding exercise was discontinued. Implementation of the medium term policy is in progress, while the Bui Hydro Electric Project, which is a long-term measure, has started, completion is expected in 2012. Mr. Speaker, smaller dams are to be constructed on the Ankobra, Tano and Pra rivers, and negotiations are on-going with the contractors on the Bui project towards that end. I am confident that successful implementation of the policy will provide the country's energy requirement for Industrialization.

The West Africa Gas Pipeline

Mr. Speaker, one of the legacies of this government is the West Africa Gas pipeline which is now completed. The first free-flow of nitrogen has been done. This Project is expected to impact positively on energy generation in the country since gas is a relatively cheaper source of energy than crude oil.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Mr. Speaker, on assumption of office, I declared the ushering in of the Golden Age of Business, hence the critical focus on the Private Sector which inherently, generates more employment than the Public Sector. Various laws and measures have been put in place to facilitate the Sector's growth, including capacity building programmes, provision of government guarantees as well as different forms of credit like the Venture Capital Fund, Micro-credit and Small Loan Scheme.

Mr. Speaker, the Private Sector is doing very well. I must acknowledge the substantial investment which is now making its way into the economy, particularly from mining, services industry, commerce, tourism and hotel development. The financial sector, perhaps the most vibrant, continues to do well, with an influx of many new banks, both local and foreign. In a month, I should be launching the Central Bank's E-ZWICH system, which is modernizing the financial system towards greater efficiency and security. Also, Mr. Speaker, the vigorous and

almost miraculous developments in real estate which have become a feature country-wide are mostly private sector initiatives. Government has stepped in with a housing scheme to help workers. The project is ongoing in Accra , Kumasi , Koforidua, Tamale and Wa. I commend the private real estate developers highly for staying resolved in the face of high input costs. Mr. Speaker, there is the need to build greater entrepreneurial spirit to take advantage of the existing opportunities within the system. At the moment, a number of world class companies are vying to partner the country to invest in the bauxite industry for both upstream and downstream processing locally.

Agriculture

Mr. Speaker, agriculture forms the biggest part of the private sector and employs the larger population in the rural area. It is also the obvious sector to lead industrialization. Government has sought to modernize the sector through mechanization and irrigation to change the rural economy, create more wealth and help attain the Millennium Development Goals. So far, more than 3,000 tractors have been sold to farmers at highly subsidized rates. Small scale irrigation projects are also being promoted, especially in the northern parts of the country. Despite this, much remains to be done to transform the sector, mainly because of outlook and also financial constraints. However, through various interventions including the supply of improved planting materials, extension services and micro-credits to farmers, significant results have been recorded. Food has been available around the year at affordable prices.

Commercial Farmers

Mr. Speaker, the agricultural sector is attracting some large scale commercial farmers like Golden Exotics Company Limited, which is the local subsidiary of the internationally renowned French company, “Compagnie Fruitiere,” the Another company is the Blue Skies. These in turn are attracting a number of satellite farms.

Cocoa

The cocoa sector in particular registered the highest ever production level of over 740,000 tonnes during the 2005/2006 crop year. The target is to attain a million tons in the next couple of years.

Currently, government’s policy is towards value-addition and is therefore welcoming both local and foreign investors into the sector. At the moment over 30% of cocoa beans are processed locally by such world class companies as Barry Callebaut and Cargyll. Our own cocoa processing company is also doing very well.

Millennium Challenge Account

Mr. Speaker, under the Millennium Challenge Account, Ghana is the highest recipient of an amount of USD547 million. It may prove to be the long-awaited opportunity to transform and modernize the rural economy through mechanization.

Under the programme, farmers in twenty-three districts in five regions the country are being assisted to undertake commercial agriculture, mainly in the cultivation of horticultural

produce. The project is to serve as a model to other farmers and to promote best practices from farms to the ports for export. Many ancillary jobs are expected to be created not only in the participating districts, but also throughout the country.

National Youth Employment Programme

Mr. Speaker, unemployment has bedeviled the nation's economic efforts. The search for economic growth is to expand opportunities for employment generation and job creation for the youth. Projections are that with the improving GDP the employment opportunities will expand. Mr. Speaker, in 2007, a total of 200,000 jobs were created. This was a major improvement over the 120,000 created in 2006.

Mr. Speaker, the stagnation in the economy caused a huge backlog of unemployment which the recovery of the economy is gradually resolving. In the formal sector, there is a steady growth in employment generation. In 2006, 120,000 jobs were created, while 200,000 jobs were created in 2007. Some youth take up jobs in the informal sector which go unrecorded because of lack of appropriate data. Mr. Speaker, on this score, I am happy to say that the national identification programme is about to take off. The equipment is in; the offices are almost ready; training of personnel is about to start. By the end of this year, all residents of 16 years and above will have photo identification cards. By middle of next year, both Ghanaians and legally resident foreigners will have their photo identification cards.

Mr. Speaker, the Youth Employment Programme is one key strategic intervention to engage the otherwise unemployed youth to prepare for more permanent job positions. Since the inauguration of the programme, in October 2006, it has provided placements for over 108,000 young people. Given the transient nature of the placement and funding arrangement for them, the programme tends to suffer delayed payment of wages.

I have directed the Ministers for Finance, and Manpower, Youth and Employment to ensure that funding for this programme is streamlined and sustained, to ensure regular and timely payment of allowances.

I am happy to note however that the programme has attracted attention of sister African countries, the international development community as well as Ghana's private sector, which is proving to be a reliable partner in supporting the youth.

The PUBLIC SECTOR

Mr. Speaker, in the past, the public sector tended to stand aloof from the private sector. Government is reforming it to be very professional and very supportive of the private sector. The new concept for development is public/private partnership. Government has initiated the establishment of the citizens' charter on all institutions to enhance responsiveness to the private sector and to lock into place the partnership between the two. The first phase of the charter involves the land and revenue sectors.

Public Sector Pay Reform

Mr. Speaker, as part of the reform government is developing a comprehensive objective job evaluation as the basis for establishing equity in public sector wage administration.

Fair Wages and Salaries Commission

In the same way, the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission has been constituted to ensure that public sector pay is administered with equity, fairness, and transparency, so as to minimize labour disputes over pay administration.

NATIONAL LABOUR COMMISSION

In the face of the growth in the economy, the National Labour Commission should be even more up and coming in settling labour and industrial disputes using negotiation, mediation, and arbitration, as against confrontation.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend government's main social partners – organized labour and employers, for displaying good faith in our relationship over the past seven years.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Mr. Speaker, Ghana prides herself as a beacon of good governance. But as self assessment is ever so suspect, we should be happy with the African Peer Review Mechanism which provides external monitoring. Ghana was first to sign up to the APRM.

APRM

When any country has been reviewed, the APRM requires periodic reports to focus on action plans to remedy defects brought to light by the review. Accordingly, the latest report made to the Eighth Summit of the APR Forum on January 30, 2008 at Addis Ababa , highlighted action plans for better governance, including the following:

- Stemming conflict arising from land disputes
- Strengthening the oversight role of Parliament
- Establishment of trade desks in MDAs and capacity building for analyzing multilateral trade issues
- Strengthening of tax administration

The report was well received by the APR forum.

Mr Speaker, we remain persuaded that the Africa Peer Review Mechanism provides us with a mirror to undertake a reality check on good governance and on our collective well-being. Implementation of the action plans reported to APR Forum has already commenced.

Law and Order:

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to report that the fight against corruption, which is an affront to good governance, has found a new ally in Parliament. Last year saw the public hearings of the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament for the first time. Some of the revelations were mind-boggling. I congratulate Parliament on the excellent job done. The Committee's proactive stance demonstrates appreciation that concerns about corruption are more helpful when they go beyond mere complaints. The Attorney-General's Department has set up an Anti-Corruption Unit to study the recommendations, to prosecute cases that need to be prosecuted.

Law Enforcement:

Mr. Speaker, law and order also require enforcers in the right numbers proportional to the population. In 2001, the Police Service stood at 15,983. It has since gained by an additional 10,132. But compared to the UN ratio of Police to citizen at 1:500, Ghana currently reports a ratio of 1:994. While beefing up the numbers is receiving attention, resources lately provided to the police include vehicles, communication equipments, ammunition and uniforms.

Mr Speaker, in the past, communities could form volunteer units for community protection. It is an idea worth revisiting. This, however, is no recommendation for instant justice which must be condemned in no uncertain terms.

Gender:

Mr Speaker, Ghana is making great strides towards a more inclusive society. Last year, government appointed the first female Chief Justice in the nation's history. We should be proud that the male stranglehold on the headship of the Judiciary has at long last been broken. In all units of the Public Service, both genders are represented at the top. There is representation also in all branches of the security services. Both Parliament and the Executive also have their share of gender mix, though balance is yet to be achieved.

Mr Speaker, it is for paying prompt attention to such under-representation that the Ministry of Women and Children has been established. The Ministry is doing a good job already.

Foreign Relations

Mr. Speaker, if I may now turn briefly to foreign relations, respect for our country shows in the number of international conferences attracted here in recent times. In the next few days, we expect to host the President of the US , Mr. George Bush.

Mr. Speaker, Ghana was in the Chair in July last year when the AU engaged in the Great Debate on Africa 's future. Subject to details still being worked out, the consensus was for a Continental African Union Government in the foreseeable future. Sadly, there are still conflicts and tensions that do not make anybody happy. But no effort is being spared by the AU to provide remedies.

Relations with our immediate neighbours were never better. It is a matter of national pride that in the last seven years, Ghana was elected twice as chair of the sub-regional body of ECOWAS.

Late last year when the European Union and Africa engaged each other to devise strategies for mutual survival in the global market, Ghana as chair of A.U. was co-chair with Portugal as chair of the E.U.

Mr. Speaker, I have been personally privileged to travel extensively representing Ghana , Ecowas or the AU as chair. It has been a good experience for me, and I dare say it has earned good public relations around the globe for the country, for which we should all be proud.

Parliament:

Mr. Speaker, the Legislature plays no small part in the drive for good governance. How well equipped is the House for its critical role must be of concern to all of us. It is, indeed, a shame that our MPs do not have adequate office room or staff to assist their work. I recall that in my very first Sessional Address, I made a promise that the House would be provided adequate resources for its work.

Mr. Speaker, I was aware at the time of a loan facility of USD 25 million waiting to be utilized. It was only later that I learnt that the loan had been diverted to an apparently more urgent purpose by those who secured it. But I am happy to report that fresh resources are in hand for the refurbishment of Job 600 for use by MPs. The Speaker is aware of what the Executive is doing for the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, in future, the House might consider preparing a comprehensive budget of its needs for funding in the same way as the Judiciary does. In offering this advice to the House, I am tempted to say it is because “I care for you”. The reason should be obvious, because I was twice elected to the House. Indeed, Parliament is where I cut my political teeth some forty years ago.

National Heritage:

Mr. Speaker, it is an open secret that as President of the nation that attained independence 50 years ago ahead of the pack in Black Africa, I commute to work from my own self-built home. Of course, my home is not going to be available to the next President. On the other hand, the Castle, a former slave post, is so unsuitable for residence that it should surprise no one that none of our Prime Ministers and Presidents of the past chose to live there full time. So, where will my successor live, if he has no suitable accommodation of his own?

Mr Speaker, Flagstaff House is being rebuilt to accommodate the next President in dignity. Additionally, Peduase, Akomsombo and Akuse which were built in the First republic as Presidential retreats have all been refurbished. Not for the vanity of the Presidency, these are

national assets that deserve better than the neglect to which they have been consigned in the past.

Mr Speaker, not from the budget, and certainly not at the expense of anyone's pet project, the money for Flagstaff House has been sourced from soft loans repayable over a 25-year period, with a 5-year moratorium. Good things do not come better than that. Parliament should be proud that at long last there is going to be an official residence for the President of our Republic.

Similarly, Mr. Speaker, in the wake of Ghana 2008, the country now has four state of the art stadiums in four regions. It should be possible over time for each region to have one of its own. Human resource development is better for such facilities which can also be exploited to economic advantage. We must make use of them while enjoying ourselves. The point is that, Mr. Speaker, we do not have to solve all personal problems before we give ourselves the occasional treat.

Election 2008

Finally, Mr Speaker, under the Constitution of the Fourth Republic , it is to be noted that no office, appointive or elective, may be encumbered forever by any one person. Ever so often, as regulated by law, holders of elective office, as President or Member of Parliament, must seek fresh mandate by submitting to election.

Mr Speaker, in canvassing for any elective office, political parties have the machinery for marketing their favorite candidates for a choice to be made by the electorate. But it is increasingly becoming evident that some prefer the marketing strategy of presenting their opponents in the worst possible light. I dare say they might do better, if they focused more on what they would do different, if they received the people's mandate. Still, within the limits of the law, political parties may run their campaign in any manner that they choose.

Mr Speaker, the electoral arrangements currently in place have been put to test four times already since 1992, with outcomes that have been endorsed as reflecting the true wishes of the people. Each election has thrown light on areas that need attention. Thus, we have progressed from opaque to transparent ballot boxes; and from Voter ID Cards with no pictures to ones that have pictures. Polling Agents have acquired experience from each round of elections, and with training could get better still. On-going work on National ID Cards has so progressed that issuance of the Cards should be possible this year.

Mr Speaker, the independent Electoral Commissioner appointed since 1993 remains at post. Staff at the Commission include some who have also been at post since 1993. The Commission has received international commendation over the years for its neutrality and professionalism. Indeed, It is much sought after in other countries to provide technical assistance. The Commission can perform better still, with constructive criticism.

Above all, Mr Speaker, there is the judiciary, another independent entity, whose intervention can be petitioned by any one who feels aggrieved. When there is so much going for our electoral process, there is no reason to contemplate extra measures for resolving imaginary scenarios in the coming elections. Far from being at war, we are only going into elections, and not the first time, Mr Speaker.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Speaker, in coming to the end of this address, I should remind the House that there is still a long list of unfinished business. But I do not want to begin a culture where a long catalogue of things yet to be done becomes the basis for an extended term.

In the period since 2001, government has focused on providing the platform for accelerated growth. I believe that this has been largely achieved through macro-economic stability. The next phase of development should take us into industrialization, with attendant employment opportunities and value addition to our raw materials, especially agricultural produce.

Acquisition of Valco is also going to be especially critical to the industrialization phase of our development. World class prospective investors give us hope that an integrated bauxite/alumina to aluminium industry is possible, after all. This was the dream which inspired Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the nation's first President to source money to build the Akosombo dam. That dream is within reach, Mr Speaker.

Through this august House, Mr Speaker, I want to thank all our compatriots for the opportunity given me to serve as the country's President for two terms. I want to thank especially my favourite political party, the New Patriotic Party, on whose ticket I stood, whose vision has been the source of my inspiration. I have no doubt that the party's motto, "Development in Freedom", remains relevant. I dare say that because they know a good thing when they see it, the people of this great nation will return the NPP to power.

Mr Speaker, I thank you and the House for receiving me.
May God Bless you.