

**STATEMENT HIGHLIGHTING THE RIGHT OF ABODE AS PROVIDED
UNDER THE IMMIGRATION ACT, 2000 (ACT 573) FOR PERSONS OF
AFRICAN DESCENT IN THE DIASPORA BY SAMUEL OKUDZETO
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May I express my profound appreciation to you, the Right Honourable Prof. Aaron Michael Oquaye for the opportunity to make this all important statement.

Mr. Speaker, this statement seeks to draw attention to the **“Right of Abode”** as stipulated by the Immigration Act, 2000 (Act 573)

Mr. Speaker, Section 17 (1) of the Act in issue provides: **“Subject to this section, the Minister may on an application and with the approval of the President grant the status of right of abode to any of the following persons:**

- a) a Ghanaian by birth, adoption, registration or naturalization, within the meaning of the Citizenship Act who by reason of his acquisition of a foreign nationality has lost his Ghanaian citizenship; and
- b) a person of African descent in the Diaspora.

Mr. Speaker, the objective of this particular statement is to focus attention on Section 17 (1) b) thus: **“A person of African descent in the Diaspora.”** By so doing; I hope to generate the much needed awareness and hopefully trigger action from relevant authorities.

Mr. Speaker, subsection (3) of Section 17 further provides: **“A person of African descent in the Diaspora qualifies to be considered for the status of a right of abode if he satisfies the Minister that he:**

- a) is of good character as attested to by two Ghanaians who are notaries public, lawyers, senior public officers or other class of persons approved of by the Minister;
- b) has not been convicted of any criminal offence and been sentenced to imprisonment for a term of twelve months or more;
- c) is of independent means;
- d) is in the opinion of the Minister capable of making a substantial contribution to the development of Ghana; and
- e) has attained the age of eighteen years.

Section 18 then provides under subsection (1): **“A person with indefinite residence status or a person with right of abode status is -**

- a) entitled to remain indefinitely in Ghana;

- b) entitled to enter Ghana without a visa;
- c) entitled to work in Ghana either as self employed or as an employee without a work permit; and
- d) subject to the laws of Ghana.

Mr. Speaker, the Right of Abode provisions of the Immigration Act, 2000 (Act 573) can be contextualized as a piece of legislation that recognizes the African history and reality. It is a stark reminder of the three centuries of unconscionable separation and horrendous assault on African civilisation since the 16th century transatlantic slave trade all the way to the 1884 scramble for Africa in Berlin.

The Right of Abode provisions can therefore be seen as a bold and commendable Pan African approach towards reuniting Africa beyond a rather narrow continental unity.

Mr. Speaker, it is therefore my contention that the Right of Abode provisions contained in our Immigration Act, 2000 (Act573) over the last near two decades have rather sadly not been given the needed oxygen and impetus.

The beauty of the Right of Abode provision is that it was passed by the Parliament of no other country but Ghana – a country celebrated for its sterling historical Pan African credentials. This is the country famed for hosting that iconic American till his passing at age 96 in 1963; that undaunted life-long fighter for the emancipation of colonial and oppressed people, that man who helped establish the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, that Secretary of the first and second Pan African Congresses held in 1900 and 1919 in London and Paris respectively before chairing the 1945 edition in Manchester which provided the spark for African liberation from the shackles of colonialism – I speak of Dr. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois – the man George Padmore described as the greatest scholar the black race has ever produced. And of course, we cannot forget that great West Indian himself– George Padmore; who Kwame Nkrumah described as the Missionary and one of the greatest architects of the African Liberation Movement who was his ever-present compass. Beyond immortalizing these two with the George Padmore Library and the Du Bois Centre here in Accra – Ghana has many years thereafter played host to an army of African Liberation Fighters and courageous Pan Africanists of the purest kind. It is this tradition I believe the Right of Abode provisions demand of us to continue by keeping the African revolutionary torch aflame. The challenges confronting the present generation of Africans may be unique in their own rights, however, it cannot be in doubt that a concerted effort of the kind that delivered victories over slavery, oppression, subjugation and colonialism is needed today in equal measure to defeat contemporary forces such as neo-colonialism, racism, exploitation, unfair trade and poverty which are militating against our progress.

Mr. Speaker, quite obviously the threat to the full realization of the Right of Abode provisions is lack of awareness and lack of a conscious deliberate effort to utilize this tool to

reconnect with Africans in the Diaspora whose roots remain in Africa. It is time to adopt an aggressive international publicity of this provision in our laws. All our Diplomatic Missions abroad should be tasked to lead the charge. Back home, the Ministers of the Interior, Foreign Affairs and Tourism Arts and Culture ought to be requested by the President to draw up concrete programmes towards the full realization of this objective and Parliament should be apprised regularly of how many persons of African descent in the Diaspora have been granted the Right of Abode Status. Mr. Speaker, I believe that at a time our President is projecting a Ghana Beyond Aid – a campaign that strongly promotes Ghana's Right of Abode legislation will be most timely in attracting many successful persons of African descent in the Diaspora to look to Ghana as their true home where they can invest, exchange ideas and create successful partnerships. This will then be taking the hitherto useful PANAFEST effort to the next level.

Mr. Speaker, I could not be making this statement in a more opportune era – as I speak; A Pan African Movie – Black Panther, which passed the \$1 billion mark just 26 days after its release – by all standards a fantastic movie which breaks away from the stereotype and portrays Africa in deserving light. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, Ghana and Ashanti receive special acknowledgment in this movie. I can imagine that it would be very fascinating news which I believe would be hailed and well-received among people of African descent all over the world if our Government is minded to announce Ghana's willingness to offer Right of Abode Status to the Black Panther cast and crew who are of African descent in recognition of the honour done Ghana and the African people. The inestimable benefits to our nation will be unimaginable even as it affords us the opportunity to leverage on this outstanding movie production to market our Right of Abode and allow for the black star of Africa to take its rightful place in the hearts of Africans everywhere.

Finally Mr. Speaker, I do hope that as politicians, this statement will change our outlook towards the Diaspora. There is more to the Diaspora than ROPAA. In other words - there is more to the Diaspora than adding to our votes tally. There is a lot more we can achieve for the collective good of the African people across continents. It is my prayer that the Diaspora Policy which is currently being formulated will reflect this truism and it is my wish that soon and very soon Ghana will return to the accounts of its glorious past of that amazing ancient Empire of Ghana as first told by the 11th Century Arab geographer, Al-Bakri.

I remain exceedingly grateful, Mr. Speaker.