

**STATEMENT BY SAMUEL OKUDZETO ABLAKWA – MP FOR NORTH TONGU AND RANKING MEMBER ON THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT TO COMMEMORATE THE HISTORIC DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN LIBERIA AND THE COMMENDABLE ROLE OF GHANA IN THE ATTAINMENT OF THIS FEAT**

May I express my debt of gratitude to you Right Honourable Speaker for the opportunity to make this statement in honour of the historic democratic transition in Liberia and the highly commendable role of Ghana in supporting Liberia all the way in what has been an arduous, tortuous and eventful journey.

Mr. Speaker, barely 72 hours ago, Liberia – the country established by freed American slaves in 1847 experienced its first democratic transition since 1944 when Africa's first female President and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of the Unity Party (UP) handed over to the only African to win Fifa's World Player of the year in 1995 and former Senator, His Excellency George Tawlon Manneh Opong Ousman Weah of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC).

Mr. Speaker, the special invitations extended to Ghana's current President, H.E Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo and Ghana's former Presidents- H.E Jerry John Rawlings and H.E John Dramani Mahama to the auspicious inauguration ceremony is ample testimony of the very high regard and deep sense of appreciation that Liberia has for Ghana.

As it is well known, during the two brutal civil wars in Liberia – described as Africa's bloodiest conflict, Ghana did not opt to play the role of a disinterested bystander. Our gallant Ghanaian troops led by General Arnold Quainoo as part of an ECOWAS Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) mission comprising some 4,000 troops which also had support from Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Gambia and Guinea did their very best to save lives and restore normalcy when the first civil war between 1989 and 1997 raged on tragically claiming some 200,000 lives which included an estimated 14,000 Ghanaians living in Liberia at the time and displacing more than a million Liberians. Charles Taylor of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) battled against Prince Johnson's Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) over the control of the capital – Monrovia with Prince Johnson eventually savagely torturing, dismembering and executing President Samuel Doe in September 1990 under full video coverage. As we do know, this development further exacerbated the conflict leading to infuriated loyalists of President Samuel Doe and the Armed Forces of Liberia in June 1991 forming the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO) led by Raleigh Seekie.

ULIMO was later to split under two militias by 1994 - ULIMO-J, an ethnic Krahn faction led by General Roosevelt Johnson and ULIMO-K, a Mandingo-based faction led by Alhaji G.V. Kromah.

Mr. speaker, by 1994, humanitarian conditions had fast deteriorated with an estimated 1.8 million Liberians left in dire need of humanitarian assistance in difficult to reach territories in Liberia, the unconscionable spectre of child soldiers had begun to emerge, large deposits of diamond had been dissipated in funding the purchase of weapons of war, mass rape, maiming and torture was occurring on a daily basis and even more worrying was the spread of the conflict to Sierra Leone and Guinea threatening to destabilize the entire sub-region.

After several failed peace agreements, Ghana did not give up as we are fondly remembered for the September 1994 Akosombo Agreement - a supplement to the Cotonou agreement signed by factional leaders which was to be followed by the Accra Agreement in December that same year.

Mr. Speaker, in August 1995, President Jerry John Rawlings famously brokered an agreement signed by the warring factions and at a conference sponsored by ECOWAS, the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and the Organization of African Unity - as it was known at the time, Charles Taylor agreed to a cease-fire and a timetable to demobilize and disarm his troops. The Rawlings brokered agreement contributed greatly to the eventual ceasefire and the conduct of the July 1997 elections which was won by Charles Taylor.

Mr. Speaker, unfortunately the newly found peace, albeit fragile, was rather short-lived and in just two years Liberia returned to civil war. The Liberian second civil war claimed another 50,000 lives lasting four agonizing years from 1999 to 2003.

Mr. Speaker, here again Ghana did not show exasperation, neither did we abandon our good friends. President John Agyekum Kufuor rose to the occasion and negotiated what became known as the historic Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The Kufuor agreement was signed by the warring parties on August 18, 2003 marking the political end of the conflict and beginning Liberia's transition to democracy under the National Transitional Government of Liberia which was led by interim President Gyude Bryant until the refreshing Liberian general election of 2005 which was won by Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

Mr. Speaker, apart from the wise counsel, solidarity and tenacious leadership of Ghanaian Presidents, the brave and legendary sacrifices of Ghanaian troops, it is worth highlighting that the Ghanaian people once again showcased that rare attribute of what

has become known as the quintessential Ghanaian hospitality when we welcomed and warmly embraced Liberian refugees into our ranks. Ghana agreed for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to establish the Buduburam Refugee Camp where some 12,000 Liberians were hosted. Indeed a good number of Liberians including the current President H.E. George Weah have since made Ghana their second home.

Mr. Speaker, we have not stood by Liberia only in times of war. We have been there for them when calamity struck even in times of peace. As the deadly Ebola virus epidemic ravaged through Africa in 2014, with Liberia being the most susceptible – at least 4,809 Liberians reportedly lost their lives with another 10,675 contracting the virus; Ghana again came to the rescue. Under the dynamic and compassionate leadership of H.E. John Dramani Mahama, Ghana offered to serve as the hub for the United Nations relief effort to assist affected countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Nigeria, Mali, Senegal and DR Congo at a time most countries refused to take the risk. After an impassionate UN General Assembly address calling for global support, President Mahama exhibited hands-on inspiring leadership by personally visiting affected countries including Liberia sending relief items, medical supplies and cash from the good people of Ghana. He also deployed experts and medical practitioners to help eradicate the disease in Liberia which in 2014 when the disease broke out had only 50 doctors serving a population of 4.3 million with a very weak health system.

Mr. Speaker, I am not unaware of several Ghanaian educational institutions that have assisted in building capacity of Liberian leaders and professionals across the board. Same can be said of other Ghanaian institutions including this august house of Parliament and civil society groups for their worthy contributions in helping rebuild that nation. We do also know the role our Electoral Commission played in strengthening Liberia's electoral capacity over the years not forgetting the latest support from celebrated former Ghanaian Electoral Commissioner Dr. Kwadwo Afari-Gyan following the Liberian Supreme Court's directive on the need for that country's electoral commission to improve its capacity ahead of the second-round election. As an icing on the cake, it was heartwarming to see former President John Mahama and former Foreign Minister Hanna Tetteh dedicate their time and energy in observing the Liberian polls and helping alongside others to get things done right and credibly.

Mr. Speaker, on this occasion of Liberia's historic democratic transition; and for a country that has been through so much; and for a country that has seen and experienced the true character of Ghana; we can only at this juncture congratulate them and extend our very best wishes to both former President Sirleaf and President Weah.

President Weah has demonstrated exemplary love for his country and we know he means well. It is our prayer that he will excel with statecraft just as he excelled on the football pitch. May his prodigious story inspire many African youth to dream, to believe in themselves, never to give up and to have hope in the abundant possibilities in our continent.

Mr. Speaker, often we are hard on ourselves as a country refusing to see the many areas we have served as a beacon of hope to others and the inspiration we have offered other nations. Yes, we remain a country with many challenges like many other nations even of the developed status, however, in times like this; let us be proud of our collective achievements as a people in making our continent and humanity a better place and let this spur us on to carry out greater and nobler works at home and abroad.

God bless our Republic.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.