

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC,
NANA ADDO DANKWA AKUFO-ADDO,
AT THE EXCHANGE OF NEW YEAR GREETINGS WITH MEMBERS OF
THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, ON TUESDAY, 28TH JANUARY, 2020, AT
THE PEDUASE LODGE, ABURI, EASTERN REGION.

Let me begin by wishing all of you a happy new year, and to say how delighted Rebecca and I are to see you here at Peduase, to exchange greetings and warm wishes, and to look ahead into 2020 with a renewed sense optimism for a brighter future for our respective countries and peoples. I hope you will permit me a certain moment of nostalgia in inviting you here, for my parents lived at Peduase when my father was the President of the 2nd Republic, between 1970 and 1972, so it holds a special place in my heart and memory.

I thank Her Excellency Mrs. Claudia Turbay Quintero, Ambassador of the Republic of Columbia and Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, for the positive words she has expressed about our country and myself on behalf of all Members of the Corps.

2019 was, indeed, an eventful year for Government and the Ghanaian people. We continued to make significant strides in all sectors of the economy; we deepened our democratic credentials and continued to reflect our status as a country governed in accordance with respect for individual liberties, human rights, the rule of law and the principles of democratic accountability; and we continued working to put Ghana on the path to progress and prosperity through the implementation of the initiatives and programmes contained in the Co-ordinated Programme for Economic and Social Development Policies (2017-2024).

The mandate given me by the good people of Ghana, to help create a modern, developed country, is one I cherish, which I will continue to execute, with all the vigour at my command, until the end of my mandate.

Your Excellencies, in the three years that we have been privileged to run the affairs of our country, everything we have done has been aimed at building a strong economy, the foundation for the accomplishment of the vision of a Ghana Beyond Aid.

A little over two months ago, the Minister for Finance, the hardworking, deeply patriotic Ghanaian, Ken Ofori-Atta, went to Parliament and gave us a candid view of the state of affairs of the economy. He presented a compelling picture, one of hope, because it is clear that, now, as a result of our policies, the fundamentals of our economy are in the right place. The foundation has been laid for the rapid growth and development we expect this year and succeeding years.

We have put Ghana on the path towards a prosperous future with the concrete steps we have taken to restore macro-economic stability and economic growth. After three years of disciplined and innovative economic management, the results have been remarkable. GDP growth rates have averaged 7% over the last three years, up from the 3.6% of 2016, the lowest in twenty-four (24) years. Inflation is at 7.9%, down from 15.4% in December 2016; our trade balance account, for the first time in more than a decade, recorded a surplus in 2017, maintained it in 2018, and we expect to maintain it again this year. We have brought the fiscal deficit down from 9.3% in 2016 to 4.5% currently. Interest rates have gone down from 28% in December 2016 to 15% now, and we are working on reducing them even more, to enable our businesses to be more competitive. Our macroeconomic indices are pointing in the right direction, and it comes as no surprise, therefore, that, today, Ghana is the leading recipient of foreign direct investment in West Africa.

We have cleared the GH¢1.2 billion debt we inherited on the National Health Insurance Scheme, and brought its operations back to life; and, earlier in the day, I commissioned three hundred (307) ambulances, i.e. 1-Ambulance-1-Constituency, for nationwide distribution to help promote an effective healthcare delivery system; and we have taken bold measures to sanitise the banking system and strengthen it, with deposits of 4.6 million Ghanaians safeguarded. We are also sanitising the energy sector, by trying to rid it of billions of recklessly incurred debts from the Mahama government that threaten to strangle our public finances. 'Dumsor' is a thing of the past, and the lights are on in Ghana. The results of our programme for "Planting for Food and Jobs", which is providing incentives and boosting incomes of one million farmers, have been spectacular. We have had two bumper years of produce, and, for the last two years, we did not import, unlike in previous

years, a single grain of maize. On the contrary, we are now a net exporter of food stuffs, and food prices are their lowest in decades.

Public sector employment has increased by three hundred and fifty thousand (350,000), and additional employment in the private formal and agricultural sectors amounted to nearly two million, with 1.6 million in the agricultural sector, and two hundred and sixty-eight thousand (268,000) in the formal sector. The Ghana Living Standards Survey tells us that unemployment has fallen from 11.9% in 2015 to 7.3% in 2019. We have embraced the application of digital technology in the delivery of public services, like the paperless clearance system at the ports, the mobile interoperability payment system, and the national digital property address system.

Free SHS, which was once described as an impossibility and a misplaced priority, has been successfully implemented. 1.2 million children, the highest enrolment of pupils in Senior High School in our history, are benefitting from the policy. We have superintended over the successful reorganisation of our regional governance structure, resulting in the creation of six (6) new regions, with strong popular support. We are vigorously carrying out our decision to make 2020 the 'Year of Roads', and the execution of the "One District, One Factory" initiative is progressing steadily.

Likewise, in tourism, 'The Year of Return', commemorating the 400th anniversary of the arrival, in the Commonwealth of Virginia, which was to become a part of the United States of America, of the first twenty (20) West African slaves, proved to be a joyful and learning experience all round for us and our kith and kin from the African diaspora, especially in affirming our determination that never again should the African peoples permit themselves to be subjected to such dehumanising conditions, sold into slavery, and have their freedoms curtailed, in order to build up forcibly countries other their own, and create wealth for the peoples of unknown lands to which they were sent, wealth from whose enjoyment they were largely excluded. The 'Year of Return' also provided a platform for us to re-establish, intensify and solidify our relations with our kith and kin of the diaspora. We granted Ghanaian citizenship to one hundred and twenty-six (126) of them who have lived with us for some time, and some two hundred thousand (200,000) more visitors took up the offer to visit Ghana during the year. The 'Year of Return' has been a remarkable success. The new initiative, 'Beyond the

Return', will help consolidate this development, and help realise the vision of a black world, on both sides of the Atlantic, which leverages hard work, enterprise, creativity and innovation to engage in mutually beneficial trade and investment co-operation that will guarantee the prosperity and dignity of black people the world over.

We have shown our commitment to the fight against corruption, over the last three years, not just in words, but, more importantly, in deeds. We have fulfilled the campaign promise to establish an independent Office of Special Prosecutor to focus on the prosecution of corruption-related offences; specific new laws have been enacted to this end; prosecutions are ongoing of persons allegedly involved in acts of corruption or financial loss to the state; and the protection of the public purse is being manifest. Government has systematically increased the funding for the accountability institutions of the State, such as Parliament, the Judiciary, the Office of the Attorney General, CHRAJ and the Auditor General. 2017 witnessed a 25% increase in allocations to these five institutions over those of 2016; 2018 witnessed a 34% increase over 2017; and the 2019 budgetary allocation was virtually at par with 2018.

In protecting the public purse, GH¢2.75 billion has been saved for the public exchequer from January 2017 to July 2019, as a result of the Public Procurement Authority (PPA) reviewing contracts brought before it for approval either under sole sourcing or restrictive tendering procedures. This is in sharp contrast to the performance of the PPA in the years before 2017, when approvals were given as a matter of course, and no savings achieved at all.

Again, every single alleged act of corruption levelled against any of my appointees is being or has been investigated by independent bodies, such as CHRAJ, the CID, and, in some cases, by Parliament itself. Indeed, two (2) appointees of the Executive are still facing investigations. It is refreshing to note that none of these agencies has ever indicated any pressure from the Executive over their investigations. Due process will be scrupulously maintained. Should you be notified of any evidence of corruption against any of my appointees, I insist that they be shared with my office to enable action be taken on the matter. That bodes better for our relations than unspecified, generalised pronouncements on corruption.

It is a matter of public record that twenty-one (21) officials of the previous administration are standing trial over their involvement in alleged acts of corruption or causing financial loss to the state, and prosecutions of the persons, i.e. regulators and individuals, allegedly responsible for the banking sector crisis have commenced. I would like to stress that, despite self-serving allegations based on deliberate mis-information, the actions government took to bring the PDS Concession Agreement, under the Millennium Corporation Compact, to an end was to prevent, rather than condone, wrongdoing. The war against corruption will not be won overnight, but, with political will, it will be won. I did not come into politics to enrich myself, but to serve the public interest. I am determined to help build in Ghana a model and culture of transparent, open and accountable governance that will be the equal of any on the face of the planet. And, in doing so, I am glad that, as you yourselves can testify, Ghana has a free press, and Ghanaians are at liberty to speak on any issue they wish.

Your Excellencies, last year I informed you of Ghana's desire to host the Secretariat of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). On 7th July 2019, at an Extraordinary Meeting of the Assembly of the African Union, in Niamey, capital of the Republic of Niger, Ghana was honoured by her peers with the opportunity to host, for the first time in her history, the office of a major pan-African organisation.

I thank, once again, Member States of the African Union and their leaders for this honour, and I assure them that Ghana will do whatever she can to bring about the smooth take-off of the Secretariat, and ensure that it turns out to be a world-class institution, which will become the pride and joy of all Africans. We, in Africa, are now members of the world's largest free trade area since the formation of the World Trade Organisation, and we have the onerous responsibility of making sure that the AfCFTA becomes an effective tool for the rapid development of Africa, and for the systematic empowerment of her long-suffering peoples.

Your Excellencies, in pursuit of Ghana's foreign policy of good neighbourliness, we continued to improve our co-operation and solidarity with all countries in West Africa and Africa. We continued to demonstrate our commitment to both ECOWAS and the African Union, and participated in all meetings, including Summits and conferences, organised by these bodies.

Additionally, Ghana hosted the Annual International Conference of the ECOWAS Court of Justice in October 2019, which had, as its objective, to appraise the legal aspects of the economic integration agenda of ECOWAS, and the role of the ECOWAS Court of Justice in the integration process. Following the conference, and as a demonstration of our continued commitment to the integration of ECOWAS, I have designated the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice as the competent national authority to enforce judgements of the ECOWAS Court in Ghana, in compliance with the relevant protocol.

As ECOWAS Member States, our shared vision of regional integration can only be realised if all Member States continue to demonstrate commitment and political will to mainstream relevant ECOWAS Protocols in our respective domestic laws, including, particularly, the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons, Goods and Services, and the protocol on the ECOWAS Trade Liberalization Scheme (ETLS). That is why Ghana is working tirelessly with the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to resolve the apparent conflict between the Ghana Union of Traders Association (GUTA) and Nigerian traders operating in Ghana. We have done it successfully before, and so I have full confidence in our ability and capacity to address all the related issues and concerns, just as I am re-assured, after detailed discussions, on the sidelines of the recent UK-Africa Investment Summit in London, with His Excellency Muhammadu Buhari, President of the great Federal Republic of Nigeria, that the issue of the border closure between Nigeria and Benin, which has an impact on Ghanaian trade with Nigeria, will soon be satisfactorily resolved.

We continued to reinforce bilateral ties with several countries outside of the African continent with whom we have enjoyed years of mutually beneficial co-operation, whilst forging new alliances and friendships. During the year, I visited Austria, Barbados, Canada, Cuba, France, Guyana, Jamaica, Japan, Malta, the Russian Federation, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Switzerland, Trinidad and Tobago, United Arab Emirates, and the United States of America. The Vice President, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration and other high-level government officials also visited other countries, including Belgium, China, India, Slovenia, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

Ghana was honoured by presidential and ministerial visits from South Africa, Norway, Barbados, Italy, China, Singapore, Republic of Korea, Mexico and Suriname. We hosted the President of the 73rd United Nations General Assembly, H.E María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, as part of her three-nation African tour, to bring the UN closer to the people and to fortify multilateralism.

We took the decision to withdraw our recognition of the independence of Kosovo. Our earlier decision turned out to be “premature”, as it contravened the Helsinki Final Act, and, more fundamentally, UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999). Nonetheless, we have taken account of the ongoing dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo aimed at resolving the impasse, and we support the process to bring finality to the matter, and will act in accordance with its outcome.

We will continue to strive with others for a world free of nuclear weapons, and for a world in which great power competition for world hegemony is muted in the interest of our common humanity. The emerging trade agreements between the People’s Republic of China and the United States of America, which are intended to end the trade war between the two biggest economies in the world, are welcome pointers to this end.

On this occasion, I reaffirm Ghana’s commitment to the principles of multilateralism, which has been demonstrated over the years through Ghana’s active participation in UN peacekeeping operations since the early days of our independence, in the early 1960s, as an indication of the value the country attaches to its membership of the United Nations.

Your Excellencies, Ghana, as she has done periodically, since 1992, is going to conduct, on 7th December, a general election, so that our people can choose the person and persons they want to manage the affairs of the nation on their behalf. This will be the eighth (8th) general election of our history in the 4th Republic. Government, together with all stakeholders, will ensure that it is peaceful and orderly, so that our people can make their choice in freedom and serenity. I am highly optimistic that that will be the case, and that the reputation of our nation as a beacon of democracy will be further enhanced. I am certain that the strict application, which I have instructed, by the security agencies of the law against vigilantism, which I have caused

to be enacted, will enable us realise that objective. Ghana will continue to be a shining example of democratic engagement, and we are eager for your support for our democratic journey.

In conclusion, Your Excellencies, I reiterate Ghana's commitment to the values of democracy, respect for individual liberties, human rights and the rule of law, which will continue to shape our foreign policy. Again, I renew Ghana's commitment to continued collaboration with your respective countries and international organisations in this and in the many years ahead, in order to advance our common pursuit of greater co-operation in the interest of world peace, and to deepen our ties of friendship.

I wish you and your families well, and, above all, success in your duties as accredited representatives of your countries and international organisations to the Republic of Ghana.

By the grace of God, and with the generosity of the Ghanaian people, I am hopeful that we shall meet again next year.

Happy New Year, Afehyiapa, and may God bless us all.

I thank you for your attention.