CLOSING REMARKS BY THE MAJORITY LEADER AND MINISTER FOR PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS, HON. OSEI KYEI-MENSAH-BONSU

Mr. Speaker, the Third Meeting of the Third Session of the Seventh Parliament which commenced on Tuesday, 22nd October, ends today, Monday, 23rd December, 2019. On the whole, we have had a productive discourse during this Meeting, albeit challenging and exhaustive. Nevertheless, our appreciation goes to the Almighty God for granting us the strength to carry out our duties and responsibilities during this Meeting. His love, grace and mercies cannot go unrecognised.

As we end this Meeting, permit me Mr. Speaker, to highlight some of the businesses transacted by the House. In all, the House held forty-two (42) Sittings.

Mr. Speaker, seven (7) Bills were presented to the House and referred to the appropriate Committees. They are:

i. Special Import Levy (Amendment) Bill, 2019.

Seven (7) Regulations in respect of various subject matters, thirteen (13) Annual Statements by Audit Committees of various institutions, six (6) Bilateral Agreements for the waiver of visa requirement for holders of Diplomatic and Service/Official Passports, about twenty-five
(25) Agreements (Loan Facility Agreements, Financing Agreements, Credit Facility Agreements), twenty-one (21) Request for Tax Waiver, among others were also laid before the House and referred to the appropriate Committees.

Mr. Speaker, the House debated and passed the under-listed nine (9) Bills during the Meeting:

b. Ghana Health Service and Teaching Hospital (Amendment) Bill, 2019.
g. Customs (Amendment) Bill, 2019.
i. Electronic Communications (Amendment) Bill, 2019.

A number of Committee Reports on Loan Facility Agreements, Financing Agreements, Credit Facility Agreements, among others were adopted by the House during this Meeting. Some Conventions were also ratified by the House during the period. The House adopted three (3) Committee Reports on the Annual Report and Accounts of the Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands for the years 2013, 2014 and 2015, and also gave approval to a number of requests for tax waivers, among others.

Mr. Speaker, twenty-five (25) Oral Questions were asked of and answered by various Ministers while forty-four (44) Statements admitted by you, were made by colleague Members on matters of national importance. These Statements were on policy, ceremonial or
personal in nature. About one hundred and six (106) Committee Sittings were also recorded during the Meeting.

Mr. Speaker, quite a number of referrals are pending before various Committees for consideration and report. I implore all Committees with outstanding referrals to expedite action on the referrals to enable the House deliberate on them during the First Meeting of the Fourth Session.

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Article 144 (1) and (2) of the 1992 Constitution, the President, acting in consultation with the Council of State and with the approval of Parliament, shall appoint a Chief Justice and other Supreme Court Justices. In fulfilment of this provision, the House, on the 13th of December, approved His Excellency the President’s nomination of three (3) Justices to the Supreme Court. They are:

- Justice Mariama Owusu.
- Justice Avril Lovelace-Johnson.
- Justice Gertrude Araba Esaba Torkornoo.

The three Justices were appointed upon retirement of the two Justices of the Supreme Court, Justice Vida Akoto-Bamfo and Justice Sophia Adinyira who retired this year, and the Chief Justice, Her Ladyship Sophia Akuffo who also retired on the 20th of December, 2019.

The House has also a few moments ago approved the nomination of Justice Annin-Yeboah by the President, for appointment to the high office of the Chief Justice of the Republic, today, 23rd December, 2019.

May I take this opportunity to appreciate the retired Justices for their immense contribution to the legal profession in Ghana. To the retired
Chief Justice, you will be remembered for your quest in ensuring that places of justice delivery, were in a dignified state.

Mr. Speaker, I applaud the Appointments Committee of the House for the good work done during the vetting of the four (4) nominees. Once again, let me use this occasion to congratulate the three (3) Justices appointed to the Supreme Court and Justice Annin-Yeboah on his appointment as Chief Justice. Given their enormous experience, I have no doubt that the Supreme Court would benefit tremendously from their leadership. I therefore urge them to discharge their duties without fear or favour, without let or hindrance. Let justice be done in the Republic even if, in the process, the heavens may fall.

Mr. Speaker, on the 13th of November, 2019, the Hon. Minister for Finance, Mr. Ken Ofori-Atta, in accordance with Article 179 of the 1992 Constitution, presented the Budget Statement and Economic Policy of Government for the 2020 Financial Year to the House. Certainly, this marked the climax of this Meeting.

Following the Budget presentation and under your auspices, Parliament organised a post-budget workshop where various experts were invited to speak on specific subject matters. Unlike most previous exercises, this year’s post-budget workshop was held in-house, with participation opened to all Members. The workshop sought to analyse and explain the various policy initiatives in the Budget Statement and their implications to the socio-economic development of our nation. This was to equip Members with the requisite knowledge not only to enhance the quality of debate on the Financial Policy and the Budget Estimates of Government on the Floor of the House, but also to interrogate the sectoral Budget Estimates at the Committee level, and assist the House and the various Committees in the exercise of the
financial control function of Parliament. It is unfortunate to recount that even though the resort to having an in-house post-budget workshop open to all Honourable Members was by popular request, less than 150 Members availed themselves of the opportunity. In other words, only 55% of Members participated in the exercise. That certainly cannot be good. Notwithstanding, Mr. Speaker, I commend Committees of the House for working assiduously within a limited time span to present their Reports on the sectoral Budget Estimates to Plenary for debate and approval.

Mr. Speaker, during this Meeting, Parliament continued its efforts geared towards bringing Parliament closer to the people. The “Visitors Programme” overseen by the Public Affairs Department had a total of one hundred and fourteen (114) first and second cycle institutions visiting the House, with a good number witnessing proceedings on the Floor. Thirteen (13) universities, five (5) churches and four (4) voluntary organisations also visited the House and observed proceedings.

The “Let’s Talk More Campaign”, which started during the previous Meeting, and which seeks to deepen Parliament’s engagement with the citizenry in order to reduce the general misconceptions and mistrust by a section of the public about Parliament, continued during this Meeting. The Chairperson of the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE), representatives of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and prominent media persons including the President of the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) have endorsed this Campaign.

During this Meeting, Parliament concentrated on rejuvenating the participation of the youth in our legislative process. The Public Affairs Department visited some second cycle institutions in the Greater Accra
and Central Regions to interact with the students. Parliamentary Youth Clubs which had ceased to be in existence in many schools were re-established in some of these schools. Some of the Clubs have subsequently visited Parliament and have been educated on how our Parliament functions. Workshops and knowledge exchange programmes for selected members of our Students Parliament in selected universities were also organized by the Public Affairs Department. There were also collaborations between our Parliament and the National Youth Authority as well as civil society to streamline the activities of the youth seeking to establish similar Youth Clubs. Parliament collaborated with the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs to have very educative workshops in many facets of our democratic governance.

Mr. Speaker, Parliament through the Public Affairs Department, has concluded its engagements with the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation on the need to improve live coverage of proceedings in the Chamber and at Committees. A fibre optic cable is being installed to facilitate the coverage of live programmes from Parliament. This will not only save cost but also improve the quality of programmes that would be televised from Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, on the 17th of December, 2019, the Electoral Commission organised the election of District Assembly and Unit Committee Members across the country. As usual, the District Assembly and Unit Committee election was characterised by low voter turnout despite the considerable publicity. Mr. Speaker, many have espoused various mechanisms that should be adopted by the Nation to deal with this situation. One of the ways to upscale the participation of voters in the District Level Elections whilst at the same time making sure we inject greater accountability and citizen ownership, is the proposal from
government to the House to amend Articles 55(3) and 243(1) and other relevant provisions. Unfortunately, as the President related to, the exercise had to be aborted because of lack of a broad national consensus. The Bills, rather unfortunately, had to be withdrawn. The President gave an indication to continue the exercise of securing a broad national consensus. Happily, Mr. Speaker, I am informed that the National Democratic Congress has written to the President declaring their intention to engage the President and indeed the New Patriotic Party in the enterprise of consensus building on the proposed constitutional amendments. That, to all intents and purposes, is positive news and I believe as a country, we could build on that in the hope that genuine trust and confidence would be built. Until we, as a nation, adopt a new approach in fulfilling this constitutional provision, the issue of low voter turnout during District Assembly elections may continue to linger.

Mr. Speaker, in September 2018, His Excellency the President declared and formally launched the “Year of Return, Ghana 2019” in Washington D.C, United States of America at a programme organised to commemorate 400 years of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in Jamestown, Virginia in the United States. The “Year of Return, Ghana 2019” seeks to unite Africans in the diaspora with their brothers and sisters in Africa.

To this end, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture organised a number of programmes and activities which have attracted dignitaries from across the World to Ghana this year. Worthy of mention is the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Nancy Patricia Pelosi, members of the United States Congressional Black Caucus, the Prime Minister of Barbados, Rt. Hon. Mia Amor Mottley, an American
Comedian and Actor, Steve Harvey, an American Actor, Danny Glover, among others.

Mr. Speaker, it is worth noting that the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture is branding year 2020 and the years thereafter as “BEYOND THE RETURN” during which the Ministry will implement some planned programmes and activities. This is indeed laudable and given the fact the “Year or Return” has put a global spotlight on Ghana and positioned her as the preferred destination for our brothers and sisters in the diaspora, I urge the Ministry to stay focused on this agenda.

Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, when the House came to approve of the estimates of the Electoral Commission, the Minority walked out. The improvement in our electoral process that the Electoral Commission wants to introduce would undoubtedly, further deepen transparency, accountability as well as enhance the freeness and fairness of our elections. I want to believe that upon reflection, my colleagues would join ranks in order for us all as Ghanaians to clean up the processes together.

Mr. Speaker, I am compelled to touch on absenteeism and lateness to the Chamber by some Members, as this continues to be a great challenge to this House. We must confront this issue with all the seriousness it deserves. Forming a quorum to enable the House transact some businesses most often than not, became a challenge during this Meeting. We have been assigned a responsibility to ensure that Ghana’s parliamentary democracy becomes vibrant. Once again, I implore colleagues to endeavour to live up to this responsibility entrusted to us by the citizenry.

Notwithstanding, the above, I must acknowledge that we had a productive Session. The Speakership steered the proceedings and
business in the House in an able manner. There were times that tempers rose but agreeably, it is impossible to satisfy all of us, all the time. Permit me to applaud you and your Deputies.

My sincere appreciation also goes to Members who devoted themselves to the business of the House to ensure that we discharge our constitutional mandate effectively.

I am eternally grateful to the Speaker for his heart for consensus building. This has been consistently demonstrated, especially during our committee work. I have been privileged to have worked closely with you.

May I further commend the Acting Clerk and his staff for working tirelessly to ensure that work in the Chamber goes on uninterrupted.

I am equally grateful to the Parliamentary Press Corps for transmitting the business transacted on the Floor to the citizenry. I urge you to continue to play your role effectively, in furtherance of our democracy.

Mr. Speaker, in two days, Christians will be celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many of us will be driving to our constituencies for the festive season, and it is important that we guard against road accidents. Let us endeavour to wear our seat belts at all times, and obey all road signs and traffic signals. Permit Mr. Speaker, to urge all of us to take advantage of the season and reconcile with our maker and our fellow human beings.

To conclude, I urge us all to take some rest during the recess and get ourselves energized and composed for the business of the House in the First Meeting of the Fourth Session of the Fourth Republic. Mr. Speaker, on this note, I wish us all a safe journey back to our various destinations.

Merry Christmas and a productive New Year to us all.

I thank you Mr. Speaker for your indulgence.