



PAID

STATE
of the
NATION
ADDRESS

FEBRUARY 25, 2016



Presented by

H. E. JOHN DRAMANI MAHAMA

President of the Republic of Ghana &
Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces

At the Fourth Session of the Sixth Parliament
of the 4th Republic on Thursday February 25, 2016.



Right Honourable Speaker
Your Excellency, the Vice President
Your Ladyship, the Chief Justice
Honourable Members of Parliament
Honourable Members of the Judiciary
Distinguished Leaders of Our Security Forces
Excellences, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;
Our revered Niimeɛ, Naameɛ, Chiefs, Traditional Rulers and Religious
Leaders
Fellow Ghanaians

Good Morning.

Mr. Speaker,

Over the years, I have often spoken about, and made reference to, the tremendous power that exists within every single Ghanaian - the power to create change and influence the course of events- the power to shape the future of this great nation of ours. We are Ghana's greatest wealth. The individual skills, talents, passion, personality, ideas and ingenuity we bring can make a world of difference.



When we lose someone, especially someone who is in the prime of his or her life, we mourn much more than what that person was to us, or meant to us. We also mourn the possibility of what that person might have been or could have accomplished.

Mr. Speaker,

Every year since the good people of Ghana elected me to serve as President, I have come to this august House in fulfilment of Article 67 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana to address the state of our nation.

In many ways, because I began as a Member of Parliament, this House is my political home and its honourable members are my brothers and sisters. We stood on different sides and held our positions. We argued points, and we pointed out what we felt was the error of the other side's ways. But, as I recall, at the end of the day, we were more than worthy opponents. We recognised ourselves as family, as a microcosm of the larger Ghanaian family.

Mr. Speaker,

It pains me today to see the vacant seat of our brother, my friend,



Honourable J.B. Danquah-Adu, MP for Abuakwa North. J.B., aged 50, when he was brutally murdered, was a gentleman who walked away from every conversation with a smile.

He genuinely loved Ghana and that devotion shone through in everything he did, especially in his constituency, where he was quite popular and well regarded. JB's absence in this House and in his constituency is both seen and felt. We have lost a member of our family. And Ghana has lost a true son, one who would no doubt have gone on to contribute greatly to the betterment of our nation.

I would like, on behalf of the good people of Ghana and of all those present today, to offer our deepest condolences to his wife and family; and to Mr. Frank Adu and Mr. George Twum-Barimah-Adu, brothers of Honourable JB Danquah-Adu, who are here in Parliament today.

I would also like to respectfully request that we take a full minute of silence to honour him. Let us also honour our compatriots who passed away during last week's Metro Mass Transit Bus accident.

May their souls rest in perfect peace.
Thank you.

Putting People First

Mr. Speaker,

My Government is committed to putting people first. I have said that again and again over the last several years, but what does that really mean? How is that declaration affecting the lives of people in Bawku, Aflao, or Axim?

We politicians are known for talking a lot, yet the irony of such a stereotype is that in actual fact, words often fail us. They fail to convey the numerous ways in which what we are doing is directly impacting the lives of those we are serving. And that is because we speak in ways that sometimes take the very subjects of our concerns and turn them into objects, or place them in demographics, or speak of them as statistics.

We detail projects and proposals, we cite budgets and data, figures and bottom lines that can feel very far removed from the flesh and blood realities of the people whose lives we seek to improve.

Mr. Speaker,

In this address on the state of the nation, I would like to show the direct line between policy and people. I would like to show how the seeds we have been planting for the last three years have taken root and grown. Some have now become trees bearing fruits that are ripe for picking. And many more are fast approaching maturity, preparing to display their gifts.



EDUCATION

Mr. Speaker,

I would like to show how we are changing lives. And what a better place to start than with education, which has been proven to be the single most effective way not only to change a single life, but other lives that surround it.

Education can break cycles of poverty and abuse. Education is the key that can unlock, for children, worlds into which their parents could not enter; worlds they never even knew existed.

During this term, my first term as President, we have consciously developed strategies and made interventions to raise the quality of education by emphasising its relevance, improving access, and working to eliminate gender discrimination and inequality. We have also worked to better train and equip our teachers.



I would especially like to take note of their indication that this intervention will help create 1,400 new direct jobs. Better still, that is 1,400 new direct jobs in Ghanaian businesses.

Mr. Speaker,

In our determination to improve quality education, we have also introduced two new programmes - the Teacher Professional Development Initiative and the Provision of Teaching and Learning Materials programme.

The Teacher Professional Development initiative aims to achieve a target of 95% trained teachers at the basic level by 2020 as set out in the Education Strategic Plan (ESP). The Provision of Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs) programme has seen to the distribution of teaching and learning materials to 10,924 basic schools.

In addition, 30,000 teachers were trained in ICT under the Basic School Computerisation Programme, bringing the total number of teachers trained under the programme to 50,000.

SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mr. Speaker,

Secondary education was plagued with a number of challenges, notably lack of access, leading to a poor transition rate from JHS to SHS. We are vigorously confronting these challenges. Under our programme to establish 200 Senior High Schools, I can report that 123 are currently being constructed. But permit me to place this project in a broader perspective.

The first secondary school was established in Ghana 140 years ago, in 1876. Between that date and 2012, the number of public secondary schools established was 526. The 123 schools that are being implemented right now will create more than 200,000 new places in the system, thus making the Community Day Schools Intervention the biggest ever expansion programme in the entire history of secondary education in Ghana.

It is because of this programme that 16-year-old Apim Shulamite is now the Assistant School Prefect of the Atta Mills Community Day School in Otuam. After completing JHS, Apim, who once dreamt of becoming a nurse, had to stay home for a year due to lack of access to a secondary school. Apim's parents are settlers from Somanya. Her father is a taxi driver and her mother sells second-hand clothing.

During the year that she stayed at home, Apim sold waakye and worked in a chop bar. Because of the Community Day Schools intervention, students like Apim are able to go from limited prospects to the fulfilment of personal dreams that ultimately benefit the entire nation.

Additionally, under the Secondary Education Improvement Programme (SEIP), 10,400 students benefitted from scholarships. 60% of the beneficiaries are young women, like Gertrude Ahya Yeboah, who is currently a student at St. Augustine's SHS in Bogoso in the Western Region.

TERTIARY EDUCATION

Mr. Speaker,

Enrolment in tertiary institutions increased by 6.3% for Universities and 8.9% for Polytechnics.

In November of last year, I inaugurated the main campus of the University for Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS) at Ho, which, in just three years of its establishment, has achieved many remarkable success stories. So far more than 2,300 students have been enrolled. Associated with the enrolment is also the creation of 816 direct jobs for teaching and non-teaching staff of UHAS. But those are just numbers.

Let me tell you about one of those 2,300 students: Dzidzor Kwamuar from Fodome-Helu. She lost her mum when she was 10 years old. When she counted herself along with her 13 siblings, those being her father's children, there didn't seem to be any hope of standing out. Thankfully, an uncle took care of her through JHS and SHS.

She was admitted to Aburi Girls and completed her studies there in 2014 only to find that despite being qualified, she could not attend medical school due to inadequate access.

Now, with the opening of the University for Health and Allied Sciences, Dzidzor is indeed standing out. This access has made a tremendous difference in her life, and it will also make a difference in the lives of Dzidzor's future patients.

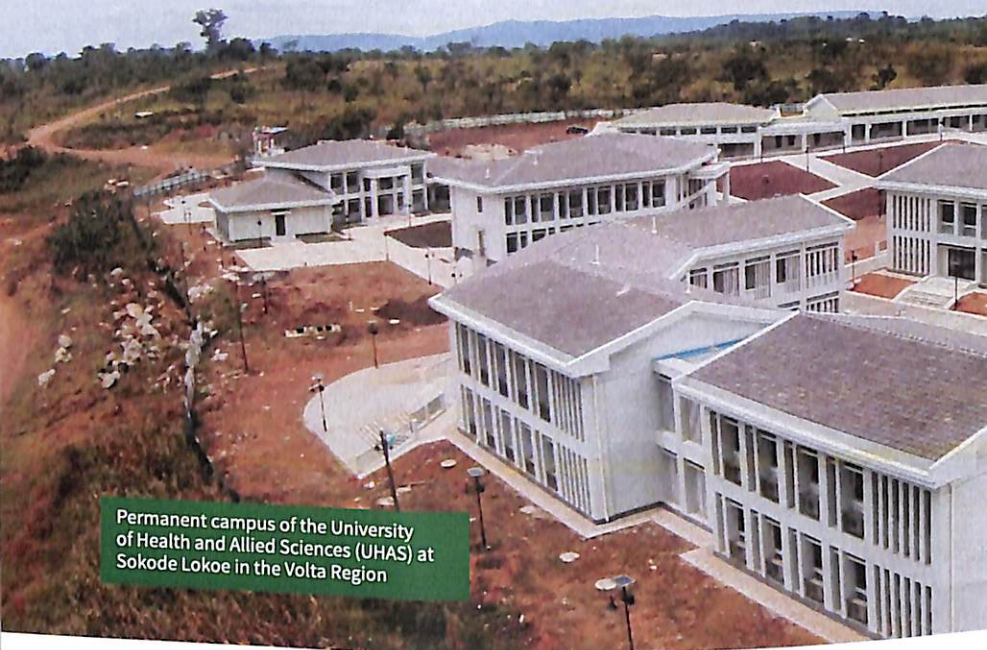
Mr. Speaker,

Progress has been made at the University of Energy and Natural Resources, which has so far admitted 2,685 students and created 315 teaching and non-teaching jobs.

The bill for the establishment of the University of Environment and Sustainable Development has been passed and I have appointed an implementation team to assist the Ministry of Education in realising this vision. In fulfilment of our pledge to ensure that each region in Ghana has at least one public university, we are on course to begin construction this year at Donkokrom in the Afram Plains and Somanya, all in the Eastern Region.

Mr. Speaker,

In furtherance of our policy to convert polytechnics to technical universities, six (6) have met the 16-point criteria and have been recommended for immediate conversion. They are the Kumasi, Accra, Koforidua, Ho, Sunyani, and Takoradi Polytechnics.



Permanent campus of the University of Health and Allied Sciences (UHAS) at Sokode Lokoe in the Volta Region

The remaining four polytechnics will be assisted by a special arrangement to support them with infrastructure, equipment and the strengthening of their governance structure to enable them meet the conversion criteria in the shortest possible time.

Mr. Speaker,

The abolition of the quota system for enrolment in colleges of education has increased admissions by 63 per cent.

This has created access for many students who otherwise would not have had the opportunity. To assist teacher trainees and finance their education, following the cancellation of the teacher trainee allowances, I have asked the Ministry of Education to direct the Student Loan Trust to register trainees on their campuses and disburse student loans to them.

This new system allows us to reinvest in the education of the next generation of teachers and students.

Mr. Speaker,

The double burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases raises an even more fundamental question about sustainable healthcare financing. This is precisely why I constituted a Technical Committee to make proposals that will lead to a fundamental redesign of the National Health Insurance Scheme.

2015 saw an active NHIS membership of 11.2 million (41% of the population). Outpatient Utilisation of the National Health Insurance Scheme rose to 29.6million in 2014 from 597,000 in 2005. For us, this undeniable pattern of increased utilisation of healthcare insurance bears ample testimony to the confidence that our population continues to have both in the Scheme and in the health system.

It is also the reason why questions about the adequacy of the funding mechanisms cannot be ignored. To this end, Government expects the team of technical experts to propose for Government's consideration, fundamental reforms that will touch on areas such as equity, premiums, and expansion of the revenue base, fraud, benefit packages and procurement of medications.

Mr. Speaker,

I want to make medication affordable for all Ghanaians. That is why I want our local Pharmaceutical Companies to produce as much medication as possible right here in Ghana. To that end, we have disbursed more than GH¢50million cedis to assist them in doing so.

Through this, we hope to achieve an uninterrupted supply of anti-retroviral drugs for HIV and AIDS patients. There are also innumerable other associated benefits to this strategy, not least of which is the creation of more jobs in Ghanaian companies.

We have here with us today, Samuel Amo Tobbin, the Executive Chairman of the Tobinco Group, which was one of the companies that benefitted from Government's support to the pharmaceutical industry.

The funds were disbursed through the Export Development and Agriculture Industrial Fund (EDAIF). With the support received, Tobinco has also increased its production portfolio by 150%. The company produces analgesics, antibiotics, antiretroviral and various



syrops for the local market and also for export to Niger, Gambia, Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Mr. Speaker,

One cannot speak of health without speaking of physical exercise. There is a need to return Physical Education or Sports to the school curriculum. The current situation where PE and Sports has been de-emphasised in the academic curriculum is, in the long run, extremely costly. It directly impacts the health outcomes of students in the area of obesity and other such illnesses that arise from a sedentary lifestyle.

It is very easy to see that the benefits far outweigh the costs. I have asked the Ministers of Education, Health and Sports to initiate stakeholder discussions to ensure the adequate reintegration of Sports back into the school system.

Mr. Speaker,

In October of last year, 12 people in the West Gonja District in the



617-bed University of Ghana Teaching Hospital, Accra

Northern Region were affected by Yellow Fever. In December of last year, there was an outbreak of Pneumococcal meningitis that started in the Brong Ahafo region. These remind us that public health emergencies are not to be taken lightly. They are an ever-present possibility.

Ghana has been commended numerous times by the international community for being on the frontlines during the Ebola crisis. As others were standing still or, worse, stepping back because of fear, we stepped forward and took control of the situation, helping to mobilise efforts that ultimately helped contain the virus.

The World Health Organisation has declared the Zika virus a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. Numerous cases of the virus have been reported in Brazil, the United States and other countries in the Americas, as well as in parts of Europe and Africa. The Ministry of Health, acting through its agencies has started coordinating public education programmes on the prevention of the Zika virus.

The Ministry is also keeping health facilities on alert with timely messages on transmission patterns, associated signs and symptoms, methods of prevention and emergency preparedness planning.

I assure the people of Ghana that Government is fully prepared and equipped to deal with this and any other public health issue that might arise.

HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE FOR BETTER HEALTHCARE

Mr. Speaker,

Our healthcare system has improved tremendously. We continue to invest heavily in the sector to ensure an even better system because as a social democratic Government, we believe that a healthy people make a wealthy nation.

It is for this core reason that over the past few years we have invested over US\$2billion in health infrastructure, equipment and human resource. We project to add 6,000 more beds to Ghana's existing stock by the end of 2018 when the programme is completed.

Presently, there are two Teaching Hospitals, three Institutional Hospitals, four Regional Hospitals, fourteen District Hospitals, dozens of Polyclinics and Health Centres, as well as hundreds of CHPS compound projects all at various stages of completion.

Mr. Speaker,

Construction of the University Hospital at Legon, upgrading and rehabilitation of the Ridge Hospital, and the second phase of the Tamale Teaching Hospital expansion project are progressing steadily.

The Wa Regional Hospital which commenced in October 2012 is presently 70% complete. It is part of the US\$339million, 8-hospitals project.

Work on the following hospitals is also progressing:

- 250-bed Regional Hospital in Kumasi-Sewua
- 60-bed District Hospital in Salaga
- 60-bed District Hospital in Tepa

- 60-bed District Hospital in Nsawkaw
- 60-bed District Hospital in Konongo-Odumasi
- 100-bed Municipal Hospital in Atomic-Accra.

Rehabilitation of the 295-bed Bolgatanga Hospital is progressing satisfactorily. Work on a new modern Emergency Department for the Korle-bu Teaching Hospital is 90% completed. A 12-bed intensive care unit (ICU) for the department of surgery has been refurbished and equipped.

Six district hospitals with integrated IT systems are currently being designed, constructed and equipped at an estimated cost of US\$175 million. The beneficiary communities are Sekondi-Takoradi, Abetifi District, Garu District, Kumawu District, Fomena District and Dodowa District.

Mr. Speaker,

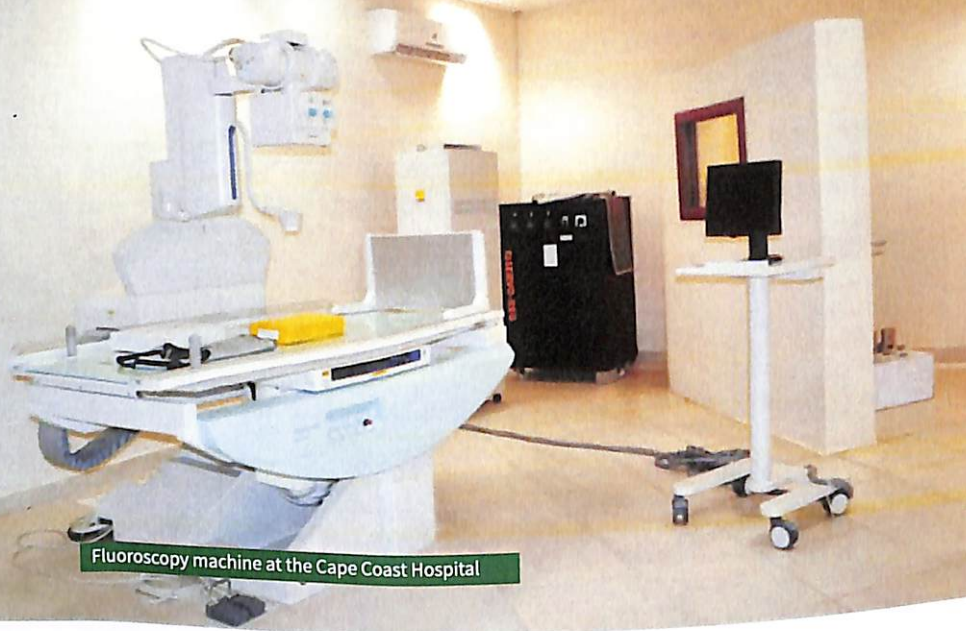
I have requested the Minister for Health to convert the Volta Regional Hospital into a modern Teaching Hospital befitting the status of a University hospital for use by the University of Health and Allied Sciences in the Volta Region.

The continuation of the US\$264million National Medical Equipment Replacement Programme which has, so far, provided diagnostic and treatment equipment for over 150 hospitals nationwide will ensure adequate provision for the much-needed retooling of the Regional Hospital in the Volta Region.

Mr. Speaker,

We are training more health care professionals. We are improving on the conditions of their service so that we may retain them to work in Ghana. Umar Mahmoud Mogtar worked as a farm hand, but he had always dreamt of becoming a health professional. His opportunity came when a health-training institute was opened in Lawra in the Upper West Region and now he is on course to realise his dream.

We are providing and building a better health infrastructure and providing more modern equipment to meet the current and future needs of our population and people, like Mercy Poomaa, who gave birth at the Nkrankwanta Polyclinic in January of this year, because Mercy's previous pregnancy went through Caesarean section.



Fluoroscopy machine at the Cape Coast Hospital

Her condition with this pregnancy was delicate, one that could ordinarily only be undertaken by a higher-level healthcare facility.

Having access to a capable and well-equipped polyclinic nearby decreased the travel time necessary for Mercy to access medical attention throughout the pregnancy and, also, when it came to time to deliver, the establishment of a new polyclinic in Nkrankwanta ensured that she delivered safely.

Today she is a proud mother of a safe and sound baby because a modern polyclinic was built in her community.

Stories like this should be ordinary and expected, not exemplary, and we are working hard to make it so.

I firmly believe that Ghana's health system has been placed permanently on the right trajectory, and that it will be the healthcare system that other nations on the African continent will emulate and strive to duplicate.



To fulfil the policy of providing Colleges of Education in under-served areas and to expand access to teacher training, Government is absorbing into the public stream the following colleges -

- Saint Ambrose College of Education, Dormaa District
- Al-Farak College of Education, Wenchi District - this will become our first ever Islamic College of Education
- Gambaga College of Education, East Mamprusi District
- St. Vincent College of Education, Yendi Municipality
- Bia Lamplighter College of Education, Bia District.

Two other private colleges will be absorbed in the Brong Ahafo and Ashanti Regions to fulfil the initiative of providing a college of education in under-served areas. In addition, work will begin on three new Colleges in the Greater Accra, Central and Northern Regions.

Mr. Speaker,

Last year, we worked to improve the skills of in-service teachers. In 2016, we are going one step further by enhancing the education of pre-service teachers by giving them the skills and tools they need to excel in the classroom, and prepare our children for a bright and prosperous future.

We are doing this through the Transforming Teacher Education and Learning (T-TEL) Programme, which aims to impact 35,000 teachers over four years. Central to achieving this are the 38 Colleges of Education.

HEALTH

Mr. Speaker,

At Independence, life expectancy was 47 years. Today, life expectancy has increased by 14 years. This increase is due to advances in medicine, improvements in health infrastructure and increased numbers of health personnel. Not only are we living longer in our adult years, more infants are living to see those years.

According to the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey, there has been a drastic decrease in the rates of infant mortality and under-five mortality. Over the last decade, under-five mortality has decreased from 111 to 60 per 1,000 live births. Infant mortality dropped by almost 30% from 64 to 41 per 1,000 live births during the same period.

The mothers of these children are also surviving during pregnancy and after childbirth because antenatal and intra partum and postnatal care have improved.

EFFICIENT HEALTH FINANCING

Mr. Speaker,

We are poised to invest heavily in the coming years in education and preventive healthcare for the treatment of chronic diseases due to lifestyle choices- diseases such as Hypertension, Diabetes, High Blood Cholesterol, and Obesity. The investment in preventive health is even more prudent as our nutritional habits continue to change.



Operating theatre at the Paediatric Unit of the Korle-Bu Teaching Hospital

Mr. Speaker,

The Ghana AIDS Commission has successfully coordinated implementation of the National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan 2011-2015. Adult HIV prevalence has stabilised over the past 3 years. The current prevalence of 1.4% reflects declining new HIV infections and reduced morbidity and mortality among Persons Living with HIV.

Through targeted prevention strategies, new HIV infections have declined. We have seen a consistent reduction in new HIV infections from a baseline of 16,200 new infections to 11,356 in 2014. A 30% decline over the past 5 years.

We have been successful in reducing annual AIDS deaths by 43%. Through collaborative efforts to eliminate Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV with advocacy at the highest level, we have achieved over 50% reduction of transmission of HIV from mother-to-child. 81% of pregnant women receive PMTCT services. 66% of infected pregnant women receive treatment to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

The prevalence of HIV among exposed babies has reduced drastically to 8% at birth and 21% after breastfeeding; down from 32%.

The Ghana AIDS Commission and its stakeholders have agreed on priorities for the new National Strategic Plan 2016-2020 towards achieving the 90-90-90 fast-track targets for Ghana (90% of PLHIV know their status, 90% of PLHIV on Antiretroviral treatment and 90% achieve immune suppression).

These priorities include strengthening of strategic information and health systems, as well as community empowerment to scale up HIV testing, treatment and targeted behaviour change. We will strive to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV by 2017 and meet the needs of adolescents and youth.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Mr. Speaker,

We recognise that while carrying out structural reforms to achieve fiscal stability, many vulnerable families and households that are below the poverty line, could suffer further deterioration in their quality of life. For this reason, Government takes its social protection policies very seriously.

We have made remarkable gains in the Gender, Children and Social Protection sector by strengthening the legal and policy framework, effectively mainstreaming gender concerns, and increasing child rights protection.

Cabinet has approved five important policies to strengthen our Gender, Children and Social Protection programmes - the Child and Family Welfare Policy; the National Gender Policy; the Social Protection Policy; the Justice for Children Policy and the School Feeding Policy.

Other critical pieces of legislation designed to strengthen our social protection programmes, such as the Affirmative Action Bill, the Ageing Bill, the Domestic Violence Regulations, Adoption and Foster

Care Regulations, have all been finalised and validated. These Bills and the Regulations will be presented to this House this year, to be enacted into law.

In addition, we are also implementing programmes to protect the elderly. The new EBAN card introduced by the Ministry has gained acceptance in many institutions, and the elderly who present the cards at bus stations, banks, hospitals and other public places are given priority in order of service. So far, over 14,000 cards have been issued in 7 regions, with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection set to issue an additional 9,000 to conclude the first phase.

Mr. Speaker,

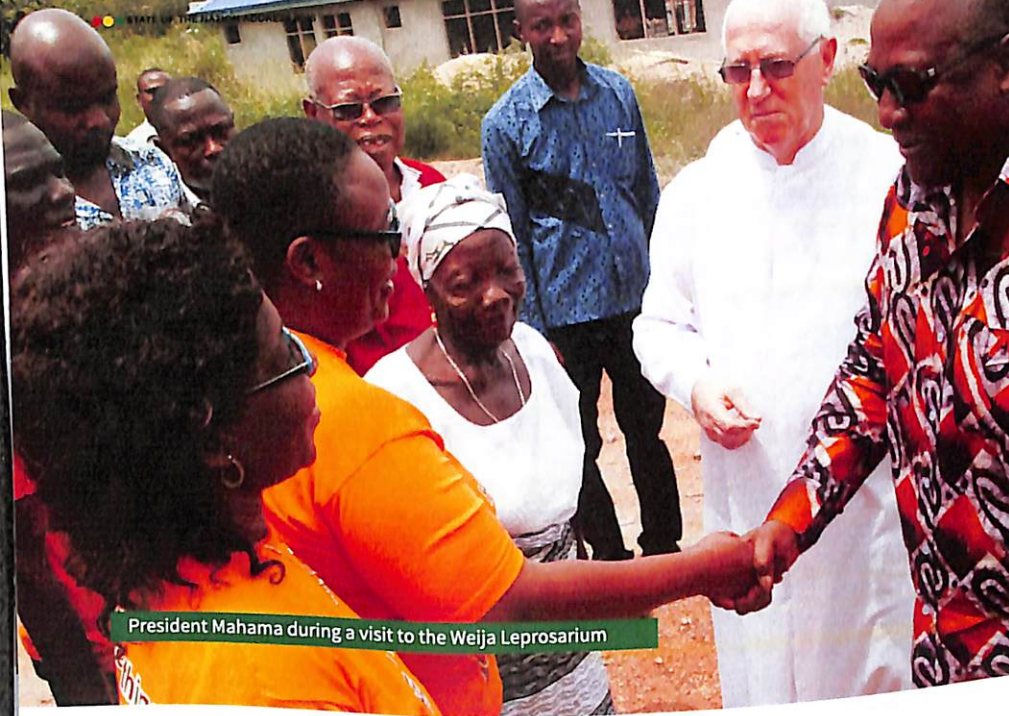
We also continue to work to improve the opportunities available to persons with disability. It has been proven over and over again that "disability is not inability." Our Minister for Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs, Dr. Seidu Danaa, is a living testimony of the veracity of this statement. He performs his duties just as effectively as the other members of my Cabinet.

Mr. Ivor Greenstreet, for many years General Secretary of the CPP, and now Presidential Candidate of the party, is also a testament to the fact that disability should not be allowed to be a bar to achievement.

It is estimated that persons with one form of disability or other constitute roughly 10% of our population, meaning that about 2.6 million of our compatriots fall into this category. I am of the opinion that marginalisation of such a huge segment of the population is not only unconscionable and impractical, but also unwise.

Many governmental and charity institutions are providing skills training for persons with disability to improve their opportunities in the world of work.

Under the Skills Development Fund (SDF), support has been provided to the Ghana Society for the Physically Disabled to procure a modern automated chalk moulding plant in order to enhance the production of chalk at their factory. This support will allow the organisation to meet the standard required by the Ghana Education Service.



President Mahama during a visit to the Weija Leprosarium

Training was also provided for the Lakeside Cross Disability Self-Help Group by the Animal Research Division of CSIR in animal husbandry, with the aim of enhancing their livelihoods. To create further opportunities for persons with disability, I have requested that the Administrator of the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) increase the disability grant from 2% to 3%; a 50% increase for the current fiscal year. This formula is soon to be presented to the members of this House for your approval.

The moratorium for disabled access to public buildings pursuant to the Persons with Disability Act of 2006 expires this year. The National Council on Persons with Disability (NCPD) has developed the Ghana Standards on Accessibility Designs for implementation. This will enable owners of public buildings to provide accessibility to buildings for disabled persons.

Mr. Speaker,

Last year, on July 23, I became the first sitting president to pay a formal visit to a Ghanaian prison. Joining the Prison Council, officers



and inmates of Nsawam for the launch of Project Efiase, opened my eyes to the deplorable conditions that exist in our prisons. As a follow-up to my visit, the Prisons Council is working on a new block at Nsawam specifically designed to decongest the prison, for which construction will begin this year.

Mr. Speaker,

In order to empower head porters - kayayei - and reduce their vulnerability, we have set up coordinated gender-based response centres at Mallam Atta and Agbogbloshie markets as a pilot to provide humanitarian support, counselling services, and psycho-social support to kayayei and market women. We have also registered a 1,000 of the kayayei free onto the NHIS in order to enable them access quality healthcare. In addition, a micro-finance credit programme for alternative livelihoods for market porters will also be launched.

Mr. Speaker,

Government progressively expanded the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme from 1,640 beneficiary households in 2008, to 71,000 in January 2013.

As at November 2015, LEAP had been expanded to 144,980 beneficiary households. The cash grants have also been increased this year. This has helped beneficiaries to not only address their critical needs, but also to invest in income-generating ventures that supplement family finances. I will share with you two such examples of this.

42-year old LEAP beneficiary Zenabu Sumaila, from Ninkogo in the Pusiga district of the Upper East region, has invested her grant into pig farming. Before that, she had no meaningful source of livelihood. Zenabu used to help her husband tend a small farm but when he died, it threw her and her two children into abject poverty.

She had to rely on the kindness of the people in her community for virtually everything. Even the Chief assisted her in feeding her household.

The lack of an income source also meant that her children could not attend school regularly and the family could not afford healthcare. After receiving her cash grants on a number of occasions, Zenabu started saving and she invested in animal rearing. She started with one piglet and she now has more than ten.

She has been able to supplement her cash grants with income generated from selling the piglets. She is now able to buy enough food for her household. Her children are attending school regularly and by virtue of being a LEAP beneficiary, Zenabu was also able to register on the National health Insurance Scheme free of charge.

Another LEAP beneficiary, Awenemi Apogyanga, from Sumbrungu Kulbia in the Bolgatanga Municipality, proved to be just as enterprising. A widow, Awenemi used to try to make ends meet by using the loom that she owned to weave kente. The money this brought in was not enough to sustain her household so her children would skip school to do part-time work to make enough money to buy material so she could sew and sell more kente.

With the assistance of the LEAP Programme, Awenemi procured a weaving machine and she is now able to afford the material in order to make kente, which she then sells to smock makers at Bolga. Her children no longer have to abandon school to help earn money for the household.

Mr. Speaker,
These are living testimonies of how people's lives are changed.

YOUTH

Mr. Speaker,
To ensure the smooth implementation of the National Youth Policy, in January 2015, I launched the National Youth Policy Implementation Plan. The Plan provides an accelerated framework with specific timelines for the adoption of programmes and activities in the policy document.

The country's Youth Leadership and Skills Training Institutes trained a total of 1,646 youth under a Vocational and Skills Training programme.

Mr. Speaker,
The Youth Employment Act 2015 has been passed to create a solid foundation upon which the Youth Employment Agency can be structured and run. Recruitment under the Youth Employment Agency (YEA) has also started, and it is targeted to recruit 100,000 young people over the next 12 months in 5 different modules.

The new Youth Employment Agency is implementing a purely cashless organisation where all financial transactions will be electronic or by cheque.

Mr. Speaker,
The Youth Enterprise Support (YES) initiative made significant progress in the year under review. A total of 2,048 applications were received in response to its first call, and 107 individuals were selected for financial and technical support. Out of the 107 beneficiaries, 81 were earmarked to receive financial support and 26 to receive technical support.

The progress of all beneficiaries is closely monitored by the YES business support team and the YES monitoring and evaluation desk through mandatory reporting and regular business site visits and audits

That first call under YES has created over 800 direct and indirect



Cape Coast stadium nearing completion

jobs for Ghanaian youths. The second call for applications was made in January this year and so far about 4,000 applications have been received. I urge our youth to take advantage of this initiative.

Mr. Speaker,

One growing area of opportunity for our youth is in ICT services and applications. In the last few years we have made significant progress in entrepreneurship support and the incubation of programmes. These serve as foundations for a strong digital ICT market. A number of interventions are being implemented, including mLabs, iHubs, Accra BPO Center, Kumasi Business Incubator, Regional Innovation Centers and the ICT Park in Tema to boost the innovation ecosystem and enhance digital opportunities and entrepreneurship.

SPORTS

Mr. Speaker,

In addition to the construction of the Cape Coast Sports Stadium, which has been completed and which I shall have the privilege of



Vice President Amissah-Arthur inspecting progress of work at the Cape Coast Stadium

commissioning soon, we have also completed the drawings and bills of quantities for the construction of the New Edubiase Sports Stadium.

Last September, Ghana participated in the 2015 All Africa Games held in Congo Brazzaville and won a total of 19 medals. Our women's football team must be particularly commended for winning the football trophy.

The Senior National Football Team, the Black Stars placed second in the African Nations Cup tournament held in Equatorial Guinea in January 2015, and the Black Satellites placed third in the Orange African U-20 Cup of Nations Tournament that was held in Senegal this year.

Mr. Speaker,

Government commits to the implementation of the findings and recommendations of the World Cup Commission even as we confront the legal hurdles ahead.

A new boxing gym and sports complex being built by SSNIT near the Korle Lagoon, will be commissioned this year. This will give opportunity to the young people in Bukom and other surrounding areas who have a talent for boxing to realise their dreams.

Building A Strong and Resilient Economy

Mr. Speaker,

When I took office as President our economy was faced with severe challenges from both domestic policy misalignment and external shocks. The resulting effect was a budget deficit of 11.5 % of GDP and a current account deficit of 11.7% of GDP. Expenditure pressures emanating largely from the compensation of public sector employees, budgetary overruns, shortfalls in corporate income tax and low Development Partners' inflow accounted for the high fiscal deficit.

On the other hand, developments in commodity prices and a tightening of financing for middle income countries jointly contributed to the high current account deficit.

At the time of our Independence, the Agriculture sector accounted for about 50% of GDP. It currently accounts for about 21.5% of GDP. The Services sector is, right now, the largest sector with slightly over 50% share of GDP. Following it is the industrial sector, which accounts for about 26.6% of GDP.

Despite, this significant shift in the structure of the economy, the nature of our exports has virtually remained the same. We have a narrow base of export commodities and a high dependence on imports. This situation has subjected our economy to shocks in the face of global price volatilities.

In fact, we have witnessed a simultaneous fall in crude oil, cocoa and gold prices. The price of a barrel of crude oil has fallen by more than 70% since June 2014, and as it stands today, Brent crude oil is selling at around US\$33 per barrel from a high of US\$ 100 per barrel. This is

**Asuboi Road**

the route to Tamale. Before the completion of the Sawla-Fulfulso Road, Mohammed says he and other drivers spent between 8 and 9 hours traveling from Wa to Tamale. With the road completed now, an excited Mohammed says they now spend a maximum of 4-and-a-half hours doing the same journey and that now, travelling across the two regional capitals is much safer.

Ghana has the most extensive engineered roads in West Africa. I intend by the time I leave office in 2021 for Ghana to be among countries with the best road network in Africa.

Let me appeal to drivers to strictly observe road safety regulations to save lives and halt the carnage on our roads. It was heart wrenching to see the severe injuries sustained by the survivors of the bus accident, many of them children.

I wish to salute the doctors and staff especially of the Kintampo hospital and the other health facilities who helped to save the lives of the survivors.

Mr. Speaker,

Pedestrian and passenger-related fatalities account for nearly 63% of all road traffic related deaths. The National Road Safety Commission (NRSC) is strengthening the 'Speak Up' passenger campaign launched in 2015 and putting in place a new campaign on pedestrian safety. It is implementing a plan to construct and install 968-lollipop crossing stands at strategic locations to aid the use of the roads by children and vulnerable adults.

We will continue to support the Police MTTD with logistics such as speed radar guns and alcometers.

Mr. Speaker,

As part of its mandate of promoting good driving standards and the use of roadworthy vehicles on our roads, the Driver Vehicles License Authority (DVLA) automated 15 of its offices to improve the delivery of service to the public. The Authority is in the process of digitizing vehicle records to pave way for other stakeholders, such as the MTTD and insurance companies, to have real time access to vehicle records.

TRANSPORT

Mr. Speaker,

We have chalked major successes in our drive to aggressively modernise and expand our transportation system. Today Ghanaians and foreigners alike travelling through Kotoka International Airport's Terminal II transit through a refurbished arrival hall that meets all international standards. The new arrival hall gives travelers a most favourable impression of our country.

Work is currently ongoing on an ultra-modern International Terminal building to be known as Terminal 3. It is designed to accommodate 5 million passengers a year and process 1,250 passengers an hour. It will have six boarding bridges, a large retail area and three main business lounges, among others.

The Turkish construction company has taken possession of the site and has already started working feverishly. I will have the honour to be joined on the 1st of March 2016 by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to break ground for official commencement of work on this monumental project. This project will surely make Ghana the

preferred hub for transit passengers in West Africa.

I am pleased to note that this project is being financed by credit raised by the Ghana Airport Company Limited on its own balance sheet with no sovereign guarantee or charge to the public debt stock. This is in line with our new public debt management strategy that compels public companies to borrow using their own financial muscle.

To further enhance the operations of the airport and cater for the needs of importers and exporters, construction of a new state-of-the-art Import, Export and Transit Cargo Centre, Office Complex & Aircraft Ramp Handling Operation is almost complete.

The Centre will be equipped with the latest cargo handling equipment, including automated storage and retrieval systems accommodating 2,800 pallet positions, mini-shipment tower, cold stores, bullion stores, x-ray scanners and the highest level of security controls and CCTV monitoring for safety and security of goods and counter-narcotics purposes.

Mr. Speaker,

Work is progressing steadily on converting the Kumasi and Tamale Airports into international airports. Last year, work was completed on the first phase of the Kumasi International Airport. Work on the Tamale International Airport will also be completed soon. These will inject greater flexibility into air travel and become growth poles around which the economy of the middle and northern parts of our country will revolve.

Work will also be completed on the Aerodrome at Ho to give Ghanaians more air travel options. The procurement process for the temporary terminal to allow commercial flights to commence operations into Wa is underway.

Mr. Speaker,

In the Maritime sector, the expansion works on both Tema and Takoradi Harbours are moving steadily. The Phase I expansion works in Takoradi are expected to be completed in May this year. The expansion of these two ports will create approximately 10,000 new jobs for our people.



The following projects are also ongoing at the Tema Port:

- Bulk Cargo Handling Jetty project which will provide a jetty for the off-loading of bulk cargo- clinker, cement and related products to free the other berths for other commercial cargo vessel to reduce waiting time of vessels.
- The development of four (4) container terminals at the port including an access road from the port to the motor way and expansion of the motor way from four (4) to six (6) lanes.
- The reconstruction of the Net-Mending Wharf at the Tema Fishing Harbour to support the artisanal fishing industry and to enhance environmentally safe fish handling.

An even bigger expansion project aimed at increasing the size of the Tema Harbour to four times its current size, to respond to increasing container volumes will begin shortly. The US\$1.5 billion project will be the largest private sector investment in the transport sector in recent years and will result in the provision of a modern harbour with state



of the art equipment that is able to take on increasing trade, vital for economic development. This project is being undertaken by Meridian Port Services (MPS).

Mr. Speaker,

The Ghana Urban Transport Project, which is being implemented by the Ministry of Transport in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, is expected to provide scheduled passenger services along some designated routes within the Accra metropolis. Private sector transport operators will own and manage the buses for these routes. Government is assisting them to procure buses for the Bus Rapid Transit System to improve on its service delivery.

Dedicated bus lanes are being constructed. The first one from Amasaman to the Central Business District has been completed. This is a lane that will be used only by buses to ensure the provision of regular and efficient mass transit services for passengers and also to reduce congestion.



National Data Centre

ICT AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Speaker,

From the mid 1990's when we began the ICT revolution, Ghana has attained an enviable mobile and fixed telephony subscription record of 33,099,514 as at August 2015 as compared to 11million in 2008. Mobile and fixed Internet subscribers have also reached 17,159,383.

Last year, we established the National Emergency Response Number - 112 - which allows callers in distress to access any of the emergency services. It proved extremely useful during the period of the June 3rd Fire and Flood Disaster. We have also established the Government Online Portal - the eServices portal to provide Government services online.

This means we are almost at the point of conducting paperless Cabinet sessions. Indeed, at our last Cabinet sitting, I indicated that I would soon give a deadline when hard copy Cabinet files would no



longer be tolerated. Very soon, distinguished members of the House will also be conducting paperless Parliamentary sessions.

Mr. Speaker,

With expansion in mobile and fixed broadband including 4G LTE, the recently auctioned 800MHz spectrum, the establishment of the National Data Centre among others, Ghana's digital economy has been strategically positioned to blossom. We are witnessing more software being developed locally by the youth.

Cash is finding its way gradually into the electronic realm through mobile money and other initiatives. More and more digital jobs are being created with every click of the button. This is why we continue to train more girls in ICT to ensure digital inclusion.

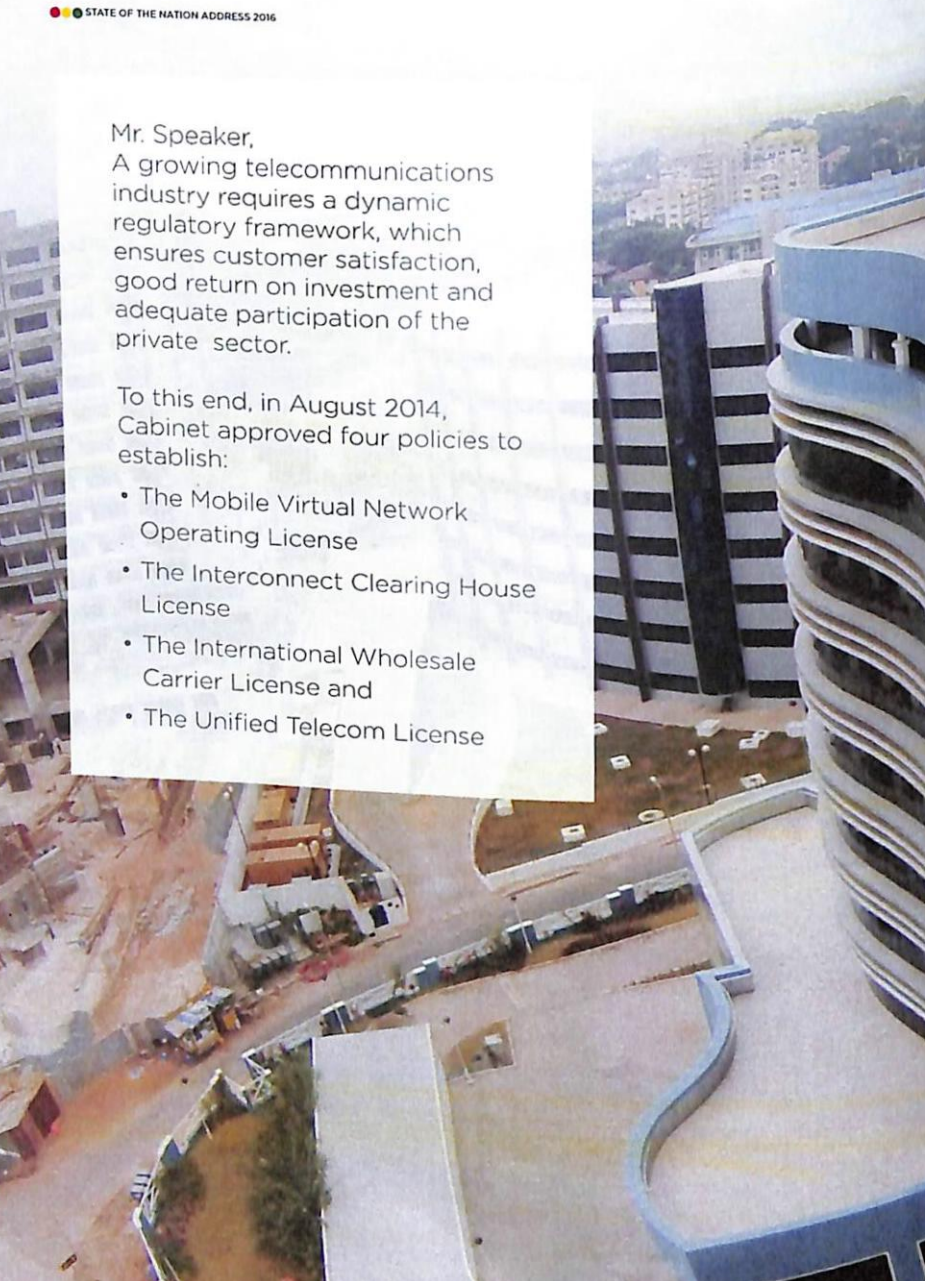
Last year, for the pilot programme we trained about 900 girls in the Volta Region in ICT. This year 1,000 more will be trained in other parts of the nation.

Mr. Speaker,

A growing telecommunications industry requires a dynamic regulatory framework, which ensures customer satisfaction, good return on investment and adequate participation of the private sector.

To this end, in August 2014, Cabinet approved four policies to establish:

- The Mobile Virtual Network Operating License
- The Interconnect Clearing House License
- The International Wholesale Carrier License and
- The Unified Telecom License





Transparent and Accountable Governance

Mr. Speaker,

The canker of corruption and its negative impact on development is well known. It continues to pose a big threat to every society, in both developed and developing nations. While the canker spares no country, its effects are felt more in developing and poor countries as it exacerbates poverty and hinder development. It eats into the moral fabric of society and undermines the foundations of democracy and good governance.

Corruption is a disease, which left unchecked can choke and kill a nation. It is an enemy of progress and development and a threat to peace and security. It is therefore an obligation on all of us to mobilise our efforts in the fight to eradicate corruption.

Mr. Speaker,

We have tackled corruption with determination and fortitude in an effort to stamp out systemic indiscipline in the fabric of public and social service. We have refused to bury our heads in the sand like the ostrich or to adopt a defensive posture. The indifference of the past has given way to a refreshing blast of sunlight, a proven potent and enduring disinfectant for the canker. This firm position and commitment has heightened public hope and confidence that the fight against corruption is winnable.

Mr. Speaker,

We decided in 2009 that a ten-year action plan that addresses corruption in a more strategic, scientific and sustainable manner is the right way to go and that the plan should be integrated into national development planning.

The nation was unanimous in support of the National Anti-Corruption Action Plan (NACAP). That is partly why the nation was united, through



Reconfigured chamber of Parliament

what the suitable accommodation for an MP should be - concentrated or scattered? Concentrated accommodation in, say, a Parliamentary village ensures better security. Scattered is more difficult to secure.

With respect to the security of the precincts of Parliament, I have authorised the release of the Western Gate Security Post of the State House to Parliament for use as a Police Station.

The facility has been refurbished with modern policing equipment and is ready for use.

We have also installed a Digital Surveillance System with over 400 CCTV cameras and it is currently being manned by a detachment from the Criminal Investigations Department of the Ghana Police Service.

I encourage the Leadership of Parliament to liaise with the Security Agencies to fashion out appropriate arrangements to ensure the safety of members of this august House.



The Law Courts Complex for the Judiciary

ENHANCING RULE OF LAW & JUSTICE

Mr. Speaker,

With the challenge to the constitutionality of the constitutional review procedure dismissed by the Supreme Court, we will work to ensure that the constitutional review process is brought to closure and that the Constitution Review Implementation Committee is able to proceed with its mandate.

With the commissioning of both Job 600 and the Courts Complex, we can all rest assured that all the three arms of Government have now been properly accommodated to carry out our work. But let us always remember that it is said that, "to whom much is given, much is expected". Our people expect much from us.

My understanding also is that, this year we will design and start construction of a new block to cater for the extra 23 members of Parliament who cannot be accommodated in the tower block complex.

our representatives in Parliament, in adopting the NACAP. Following its adoption, I have inaugurated the High Level Implementation Committee, as one of the structures to facilitate implementation of the plan.

The Committee is responsible for providing strategic policy direction and advice to implementing bodies, and assisting CHRAJ and the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) in monitoring and coordinating the implementation of NACAP.

The Committee consists of representatives from key state institutions, the private Sector and Civil Society Organisations.

Mr. Speaker,

The 'progress report' presented by the Acting Commissioner of CHRAJ reveals that significant progress has been made in the first year of the implementation of NACAP despite some challenges. Government is determined to play its role under NACAP and will sanction heads of institutions that do not comply with the directives on the implementation of NACAP.

Mr. Speaker,

The country is doing its best to combat money laundering and Terrorist financing after establishing the required legislative framework. Three (3) successful convictions involving money laundering have been secured following continuous analysis of intelligence of over 200 Suspicious Transaction Reports (STRs).

In the case involving ghost names on the payroll of the National Service Scheme (NSS), the Attorney General has commenced the prosecution of a number of persons. Thirty-five (35) officials including a former Executive Director and his Deputy have been arraigned before court and four have already been convicted. 130 others are being processed for court. 163 officers, some of whose careers in the Scheme span several Governments, and were neck deep in the fraudulent enterprise have been dismissed.

Following the passage of the Youth Employment Agency Act, Act 887 of 2015, we have taken measures to install strong systems to ensure probity, transparency and accountability. Steps are being taken to ensure that transactions take place on electronic payment

platforms. I have no doubt that these measures will strengthen the systems and procedures in the Agency to avoid a recurrence of the challenges its predecessor encountered. In the meantime, over fifty million Ghana Cedis has been recovered from the Agency's debtors.

Mr. Speaker,

I share the sentiments and, sometimes, the impatience of the public concerning the pace at which some of the investigations are proceeding, but our commitment to constitutional governance and the rights of persons, enjoin us to be patient with the judicial processes.

As I said last month, "we cannot be adherents of constitutional democracy, and be admirers of arbitrary justice". I wish to emphasise the commitment of my administration to expose and take action on allegations of corruption that are brought to our attention.

Mr. Speaker,

The new Board and Management of the Savanna Accelerated Development Authority (SADA) have comprehensively addressed the concerns raised in the 2013 audit report regarding the use of resources. The financial accounts of SADA from 2012 to date have been audited, and the 2014 accounts will be published as part of SADA's annual report.

A comprehensive report on the audit, including recommendations to address financial malpractices, is ready and will be published in due course. In addition, an external independent body has conducted a comprehensive institutional assessment of SADA and steps outlined to strengthen the institution's performance and accountability.

Last year, following concerns about the re-spraying and branding of 116 Metro Mass Transit buses, the Chief of Staff promptly asked the Attorney General to look into the matter. The Attorney-General concluded that if proper procedures had been followed the State would have saved about GH¢1.5 million.

The Chief of Staff subsequently directed the A-G to pursue the recovery of the excess amount. The contractor, following meetings with the A-G and without prejudice to their legal rights, agreed to refund the amount in three installments by the end of next month.

The first installment of GH¢300,000 has been paid to the A-G's Department.

Mr. Speaker,

As you would recall, ace investigative journalist, Anas Aremeyaw Anas, conducted some underground investigations and presented my office with a petition accusing some judges and other judicial officers of corruption. As required by the constitution, I referred the petition to the Chief Justice for investigation. On the recommendation of the inquiring panel, I approved the dismissal of 23 judges from the bench.

Mr. Speaker,

In this fight against corruption, there is a need for us to combine law enforcement with an approach that also emphasises national integrity as an important component of NACAP. In connection with this, I take note of the role assigned to the Office of President to institute a National Integrity Awards Programme to motivate honest people in the country.

I am determined to have the awards programme established within the time frame prescribed by the NACAP. The criteria to be developed for this important programme will be transparent and participatory. I urge you all to take interest in it and at the appropriate time, submit proposals to assist us institute the scheme.

Mr. Speaker,

We are working tirelessly to encourage citizens to report corruption without fear of victimisation. Here again, the Anas' expose, and the debate surrounding it, suggests that though there is a favourable and enabling environment for investigative journalism to thrive, robust measures to further strengthen mechanisms for safe reporting of corruption and crime are needed.

Let me take this opportunity to inform you that 10 persons have been convicted in relation to Anas' expose on smuggling of cocoa, while two were acquitted by the court. The Attorney General and other relevant stakeholders are working together to bring the Witness Protection Bill to Parliament soon, for consideration. I also urge Parliament to expedite work on the Conduct of Public Officers Bill, which is currently in Parliament and also the Right to Information Bill, which is also still in Parliament.

Indeed, I think the Right to Information Bill by the time it is passed, will go down in the history of this country as the longest bill ever under Parliamentary consideration..

The Whistleblower (Amendment) Bill, which is already before Parliament, I am told, will be passed soon.

The anti-corruption and law enforcement agencies have meanwhile begun discussions on how to coordinate their activities in a manner that facilitates effective investigations and prosecution of corruption and crime.

I am happy to announce that the first in a series of Citizens Complain Centres has been set up here in the national capital. The Centre is located in Room 209 on the 2nd floor of the Public Services Commission Building in the Ministries Area. In addition to walk-ins, the Centre receives and processes voice complaints using hotlines and via its website, www.ghanacitizen.org.

The Citizens Complain Unit will collate data and will produce quarterly reports based on the type, nature and sources of complaints received. The report will also include recommended action, resolution of complaints as well as trend analysis. It is expected that reports by the Unit will help promote the fight against corruption as well as improve service delivery in the public sector.

If it proves successful, the Citizens Complain Unit will be replicated in all the regional capitals.

District Assemblies are also encouraged to establish their own Units in their district capitals.

Mr. Speaker,

The Sole Commissioner on Judgment Debts concluded his work and presented his report. Since then a White Paper has been published for implementation. The Sole Commissioner's report reveals the weaknesses in our systems and also shows how some persons in collusion with public officers deliberately fleeced Government of hundreds of billions of Ghana Cedis and in some cases US Dollars. Even before the presentation of the report, the Attorney-General upon my directive commenced a robust defence of several cases of judgment debts. This action has paid off with massive savings

recorded. In 2015 alone, as much as US\$900 million in claims against the state were successfully and effectively defended internationally. In domestic cases, last year alone, the Attorney General's Department successfully resisted claims of over US\$100 million.

Our greatest success in the fight against corruption must be based on preventing it. We must speed up the use of technology to remove much of human discretion in our public service transactions. We must move from a cash-based society into a cashless one where transactions are handled using electronic settlement platforms rather than lugging huge amounts of cash about. I have discussed with the Governor of the Bank of Ghana and asked for a road map to achieve this target by the year 2020.

There is a political risk any Government runs in facing up to corruption and fighting it - the paradox of exposure - where an open, transparent approach to fighting corruption leads to an erroneous impression that corruption is more pervasive and prevalent at a certain point than another. This is a risk my Government has accepted to take and a challenge we are willing to confront.

In this fight, concocted allegations and other salacious fabrications anonymously circulated on social media under the masthead of fake newspapers do not help. They rather hinder the fight, making it difficult to differentiate what is truth, and what is political propaganda.

Similarly, sweeping and generalised conclusions drawn on the basis of scanty and often misleading information ought to be guarded against. Corruption has serious implications for any society's advancement. For that reason the push against it cannot, and must not, be ceded to those whose only motivation is electoral advantage. I wish to strongly restate the political will of my Government, working with our internal and external partners, in the fight against corruption.

LEGISLATURE AND JUDICIARY

Mr. Speaker,

Good governance and the fight against corruption rest not only on the Executive and the general public, but also the Legislature and the Judiciary. In the course of their duties, the second and third arms of Government are called upon to perform tasks that will advance the frontiers of democratic practice in our nation.



Completed multi-purpose office complex (Job 600) for Parliament

However, as I observed earlier, the image of the Judiciary was brought to a near all-time low with the Anas exposures. As nerve-wracking as this incident was, it also presented a story of hope. Hope, in the fact that there were a significant number of judges who not only threw Anas out, but also threatened to call the Police on him. It shows that we have many judges on the bench who are upright and have great integrity.

We commend Her Ladyship the Chief Justice for her courage and determination in dealing with the matter as required by law. The Chief Justice and her team have worked hard to try to restore the image of the institution. We will work with her to ensure that we implement any other structural, institutional or human reforms required to make the Judiciary an institution Ghanaians can be proud of.

Mr. Speaker,

The provision of adequate security to Parliament and Honourable Members is of utmost priority to Government. The recent murder of our Honourable colleague raises again the discussion in respect of



Mr. Speaker,

The late President John Evans Atta Mills is our first and only President to have died in office. It is important that fitting memorials are established in his honour. The Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) has established the John Evans Atta Mills Centre for Law and Governance. This year, the John Evans Atta Mills Memorial Library of the University of Cape Coast will also become operational.

Government will support these two institutions to ensure that the vision and the ideals of this great academic and political leader are not lost.

Mr. Speaker,

This year is an election year and all of us must give the utmost support to the Electoral Commission to carry out its work. Our Electoral Commission has gained commendation all over the world for the good work that it has done over the years since the promulgation of the 1992 Constitution. We have held 6 successful elections and I

have absolutely no doubt that our electoral commission will rise to the occasion to deliver a 7th successful election come November this year.

It is important for all of us to support the Commission to be able to put in place the processes that will make this election successful. I call on all political parties to do exactly that.

Mr. Speaker,

I pledge as President to do everything in my power to work for a free, fair and transparent election. Every support that can be given to the Electoral Commission by Government, we will give to ensure that they are able to carry out their mandate. Let the election be clean and devoid of insults.

Mr. Speaker,

I want, on behalf of all Ghanaians, to salute the media for the good work they have been doing in communicating our voices to the electorate. I believe that as they have done in the last 6 elections, this year, again, they will be a useful conduit for sending the messages of political parties to the electorate.

I wish to ask the media to be circumspect in the use of language, and to avoid insults. Let us tell the Ghanaian people what we intend to do for them and let them make their choice.

DECENTRALISATION

Mr. Speaker,

Having decentralised our governance system to this point where functions, functionaries and funds have been deployed to the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs), Government and the citizenry expect the local authorities to reciprocate by being more responsive to the needs of their communities.

We expect the MMDAs to work towards financial independence through innovation and application of efficiency measures. We expect them to go beyond the naming of the streets, which they have done creditably well, to numbering the houses and developing a comprehensive database for policy planning and emergency response.



The street naming policy has largely been implemented; we need to speed up the next phase of numbering all houses and creating GIS maps of all our communities. District assemblies should be able to create a database of all this information for the purposes of effective revenue mobilisation and provision of social services.

Mr. Speaker,

This year will be the second year of implementation of a Five-Year Phase Two of the Decentralization Policy Framework and National Decentralization Action Plan (2015-2019). We remain committed to implementing the activities agreed upon.

Mr. Speaker,

Bills to decentralise the following Departments by devolution and converting them into Departments of District Assemblies have been finalised and will be placed before Parliament in the first quarter of 2016.

1. Registry of Births and Deaths
2. Ghana Library Board
3. National Youth Authority
4. National Sports Authority
5. Department of Cooperatives
6. Department of Town and Country Planning
7. Ghana Education Service
8. Ghana Health Service

The Consolidated Decentralised Local Governance Bill will also be laid before Parliament in the course of the year. A Local Government (Borrowing) Bill will also be laid before Parliament that will enable MMDAs to borrow for infrastructure projects and municipal services delivery without incurring liability for the Government.

SECURITY AGENCIES

Mr. Speaker,

Over the past few years we have embarked upon a progressive retooling of our security agencies. We have provided them with vehicles, accommodation, logistics and resources that enable them to fulfill their constitutional mandate.



Speed boats for Police Marine Unit

We will continue to place priority on their needs in order to place them in a favourable position to carry out their duty of confronting and defeating crime, including cross border crime, narcotics, arms trafficking and terrorism.

Lately the Police Service has earned the admiration of the nation for the dexterity with which they tracked down and arrested Arthur Simpson Kent who fled from Britain to Ghana after allegedly committing murder. The speed with which the suspect in the J.B. Danquah Adu murder was nabbed has also earned the Service plaudits. We hope the Police will deepen this investigation to unravel all the unanswered questions surrounding this case. In the mean time I will urge the public to desist from making wild, unsubstantiated allegations.

Mr. Speaker,

Ghana continues to participate in peacekeeping efforts in the West Africa sub-region and on the African continent as well as other parts of the world, as her contribution to ensuring peaceful resolution of

We must also, as a leading nation on the West Coast of our continent, live up to our principles and our ideals that have informed our Foreign Policy since our independence and continue to do so, because those ideals are as relevant today as they were at our independence. Our First President charged that Africa should unite because in unity lies strength, we are far from that but there are steps we can take as a country that can bring Africa closer to us, and create economic opportunities as we do so for our citizens.

✂ Earlier this year at the Executive Council Meeting of the African Union it was decided that AU Member States should review their internal and external security situations with a view to putting in place the mechanisms that would allow for the issuance of visa's on arrival for citizens of AU member states, with the option to stay in the country for up to 30 days.

Mr. Speaker,

We believe creating opportunity for the mobility of people on our continent is key to unlocking our economic potential. Today within some of our regional organisations, in our case the ECOWAS, and in a number of countries such as Kenya, Seychelles, Mauritius, Rwanda it is possible to travel without having to obtain a visa before visiting another member state.

But by and large, traveling across our continent is a hassle. Indeed for those African businessmen and women trying to do business on our continent, it's actually easier for them to operate within the Schengen Area of the European Union than it is to travel around our continent. Africa has a growing and dynamic middle class that is both entrepreneurial, forward looking and has purchasing power and we intend to make it easier for them to enter our country.

Mr. Speaker,

With effect from July this year, we will be allowing citizens of AU member states to enter into our country and obtain visas on arrival with the option to stay for up to thirty days and experience what our country has to offer. This measure, with time should stimulate air travel, trade, investment and tourism.

We have managed movement within and out of our country with citizens of the ECOWAS member states so we have the capacity to



L - R: President Obama, President Mahama, Mrs. Lordina Mahama and Mrs. Michelle Obama.

manage this new regime. We also know that there may be persons from our continent who we may not want to admit into our country, and hence the provision for obtaining visas on arrival and not visa-free entry.

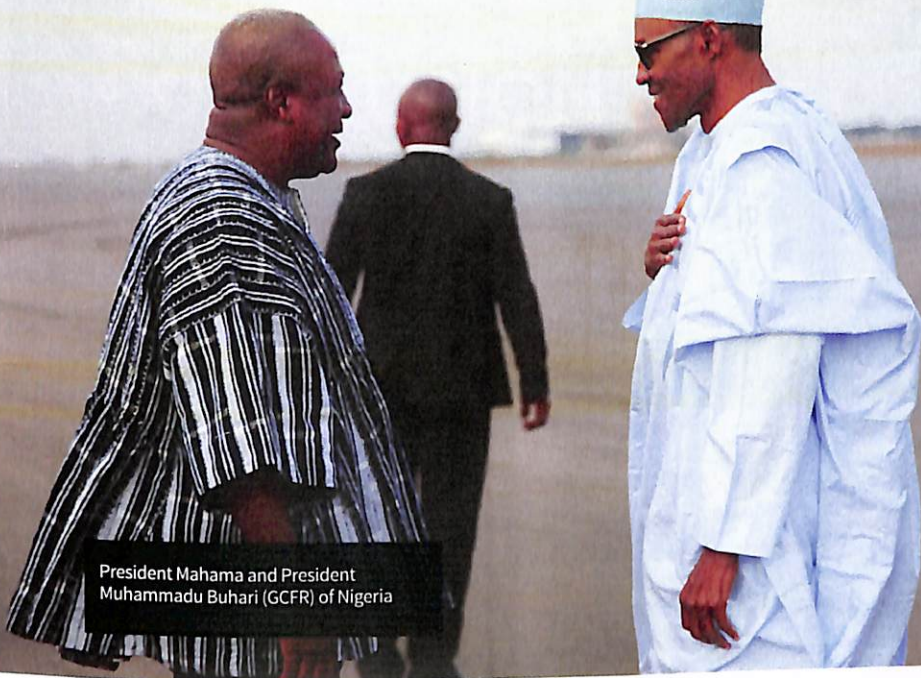
This will enable the Ghana Immigration Service to make a determination as to whether to allow them entry or not into our country.

Mr. Speaker,

In doing this, we are taking up the needed leadership of our Founder's dream of bringing the citizens of the African continent closer together.

Mr. Speaker,

This year, we will also commence negotiations for the creation of a Continental Free Trade Area by 2017, and we will be actively participating in the negotiations with a view to creating the economic basis for a more united and integrated continent. The target we set ourselves as a continent here in Accra in November 2011, during the African Trade Ministers meeting, is an ambitious one, but is certainly



President Mahama and President Muhammadu Buhari (GCFR) of Nigeria

not beyond our capability and we will continue to play a leading role towards realising our goal of promoting an integration of the states and people of this great continent. Last year, just before the UN General Assembly, the world saw the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The goals set an ambitious agenda for the development of all the countries of the world so that for the next fifteen years we will collectively work together to create the world that we want to see.

We also, at the COP 21 summit in Paris, came to a historic agreement on reducing carbon emissions and fighting Climate Change.

Mr. Speaker,

The two are not mutually exclusive and we look forward to incorporating the elements of these two important multilateral and global policy initiatives into our national planning and programme implementation.

Mr. Speaker,

I was honoured to be appointed the Co-Chair of the UN Secretary General's SDG Advocates Group. This is not just an honour for me; it is an honour to our country in recognition of our leadership in peacekeeping, in managing crisis such as the Ebola outbreak that hit our region two years ago, our leadership on our continent in promoting democracy and good governance, and our leadership in positively transforming the lives of our people over the period of implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

It is important that we draw our continent's attention to the need to incorporate the SDG's into our National Development Plans as we think and plan for the future we want to create for the next generation.

I will be working with other members of the advocacy group and roping in other advocates from our continent with an emphasis on bringing on board young people and women so that the SDG's become part of our discourse and engage our collective attention as we plan towards the development of the continent.

Mr. Speaker,

We will begin the implementation of our linguistic pact with La Francophonie, and through this process encourage our citizens at all levels to become bi-lingual in French and English.

When we consider that with our immediate neighbours our combined populations create a market of 74 million people, and we already engage in trade and social interactions with each other both formally and informally, it is time for us to make an extra effort to be able to engage them and the other francophone states within our ECOWAS region more effectively to promote trade in goods and services, tourism and investments within our region.

Mr. Speaker,

This year, we will continue to play an active role within our ECOWAS region, on the continent, within the Commonwealth under the leadership of our new Secretary General - Patricia Scotland - and within the United Nations and its various agencies, especially the Human Rights Council and UNESCO, where we are members of the Executive Board. We will play an active leadership role in creating the world we want.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Speaker,

I began this address with an admission that politicians talk a lot - as I have, no doubt, proven here today - but that our words sometimes fail us because they do not always accurately reveal the human faces that inform our ideas and benefit from the programmes and policies we enact.

When I was elected President, I stated that my mission during my term in office would be to transform Ghana. It is certainly an admirable goal, but even to my own ears it sounded like a huge and lofty undertaking. I suppose if one looks at it as a single undertaking, it does seem intimidating, perhaps even impossible.

But transformation is, by its very nature, an elusive process. It's a process by which change takes place in graduation, in small and almost imperceptible movements and occurrences. Sometimes all that is noticeable is the before and the after, but not the process in between.

Mr. Speaker,

We are always in motion, even when we believe ourselves to be standing still. The Earth is always spinning on its axis. I like to think of our Transformation Agenda in that same way. Change is happening. It is taking place. Ghana is being transformed.

I realise that saying so does not make it so. But I know, too, that seeing is always believing. So look around in this gallery. I would like to ask my invited guests to please stand: Mercy Poma; Regina Haku; Umar Mahmud Mogtar; Naomi Appiah Korang; Mohammed Hissan; Gertrude Ahya Yeboah; David Aminayire; Mohammed Awabu;



Dzidzor Kwamuar; Apim Shulamite; Samuel Amo Tobbin; Zenabu Sumaila; James Appiah-Berko; Emmanuel Aboagye; Shiraz Issaku; Awenini Apogyanga.

Mr. Speaker,

This is Ghana. This is every tribe and ethnicity. It is every religious affiliation. It is every political persuasion. It is the young and old. It is various income levels. This is the process of transformation. We are changing lives, one individual at a time. We are heeding the words of our founding father, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, and looking neither East nor West but forward into the future that we want for our beloved country.

I thank you for your kind attention.

May God bless this august House.

And may God continue to bless our homeland Ghana.