



STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

“Raising Ghana To The Next Level”

BY

H.E. JOHN EVANS ATTA MILLS
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2011.



H. E. Prof. John Evans Atta Mills
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Madam Speaker,

Vice President,

Honourable Members of the House,

I have the honour to appear before you this morning to discharge the constitutional mandate given to the President of the Republic of Ghana to annually present a State of the Nation report to Parliament.

Madam Speaker,

As with the Presidency, Parliament is also into its third year of its four-year term.

Working together over the past two years has been a rewarding experience and I urge members on both sides of the House to approach the work that lies ahead with a sense of common purpose.

Let our debates and discussions continue to be stimulating and constructive in the interest of a Better Ghana.

Madam Speaker,

Right behind us, work is progressing on Job 600 to provide offices for our Honourable Members of Parliament.

The on-going work is a statement that slowly but surely we are making progress.

State of the Nation Address — Thursday, 17th February 2011

And in this year of action, we will continue to fund the project for it to be completed so that our lawmakers can have functional offices to operate from.

Madam Speaker,

✓ Last year when Parliament reconvened on the 26th of January, you called on Honourable Members to be time conscious.

I hope the Honourable Members heeded to your call.

In this Action Year, our time consciousness must move notches higher because as the saying goes, "time is money".

Madam Speaker,

My first appearance before you was in February, 2009 barely two months upon assumption of office as President.

Even with limited knowledge of the national situation available at the time, I provided a far-sighted view of our nation's development agenda.

By the time I presented my second State of the Nation Address in February 2010, we had a clearer picture of the state of affairs bequeathed to us by the previous administration.

The challenges were indeed more daunting than we had imagined.

That address spelt out measures this Administration was going to take to deal with issues to restore the economy to good health, improve governance of the nation while consolidating and sustaining our democracy.

Madam Speaker,

I am happy to report that as a result of prudent policy measures and with understanding and support of Ghanaians, we were able to sustain macroeconomic stability in 2010 with year-on-year inflation declining further from about 16% in 2009 to a single-digit figure of below 9%, the lowest inflation figure in about two decades.

Why do we stress on this historic achievement?

Madam Speaker,

Inflation is the worst economic nightmare any country can go through. It breeds economic and financial instability and imposes hardship on the most vulnerable.

To be successful in tackling it is to create conditions for economic growth.

What we achieved for ourselves last year in confronting inflation was therefore notable. The challenge now is to remain on course.

Many Honourable Members of the House who participate in International conferences both within and outside can confirm the positive view the international community holds of Ghana's economic progress.

I know the question they often ask you is whether we have the courage and resolve to sustain the economy on this road to growth and prosperity.

My simple answer is yes; this Administration intends to stay the course because there are no short cuts.

Madam Speaker,

In addition to the successful efforts at curbing the rate of inflation, we also note with satisfaction that the global economic downturn notwithstanding, Ghana managed to maintain a respectable growth rate in 2010 and is poised to attain a higher level this year.

Indeed, much beyond our own expectations, the World Bank predicts that Ghana would post the highest GDP in the world for the year 2011.

Madam Speaker,

In compliance with Article 36 clause 5 of the Constitution, I presented to Parliament last December Government's Co-ordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies for 2010-2016.

As I note in the preface, the main thrust of this programme is to transform the economy for accelerated growth and job creation.

We aim to achieve this through accelerated human resource development, agricultural mechanization and value-added processing of our national resource endowments on the back of the new oil and gas resources.

One of the highlights of the document is the establishment of Special Development Zones which is an initiative to reduce spatial and income inequality.

The Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA) which is one of the NDC 2008 manifesto pledges has already commenced work.

Madam Speaker,

A donor's conference is in the offing to commit funds for SADA's operations.

The additional special zones we propose all of which will be under the Office of the President, will include;

- a. Western Corridor Development Authority which will subsume the Central Region Development Commission (CEDECOM);
- b. Eastern Corridor Development Authority which will have a mandate covering the Volta Region and Afram Plains;
- c. The Forest Belt Development Authority *comprising the forest zones* in the Eastern, Ashanti and Brong Ahafo Regions.

Madam Speaker,

Our development partners have continued to offer development assistance and in some instances indicated their readiness to increase levels of assistance.

We are grateful to them for recognizing the capacity, readiness and democratic integrity of this Administration to be reliable partners.

Madam Speaker,

This Government has achieved appreciable success in its effort to diversify the range of development assistance.

During my visits to Japan and China in September last year, we received pledges of substantial support especially towards infrastructural development.

A special team has been working to ensure urgent follow up actions because as the old saying goes – we must strike while the iron is hot.

Madam Speaker,

The quantum of funding for infrastructure development that should be available to the economy following our visits to the Far East, appears to have caused a stir among those who think the economy of Ghana is too small to absorb such substantial investments as if we are destined to remain a small economy.

Let us have confidence in ourselves.

Madam Speaker,

I have had occasion to state that too much has passed us by as a nation and we need to move as fast as we can; of course at calculated speed.

Past failures seem to have created a mentality that has restricted national ambition.

It is time for this country to think big and think positive.

Of course we should not raise unrealistic expectations or set our sights too high but there is nothing wrong in being ambitious and daring.

Madam Speaker,

On our visit to the Far East last September we carried with us our blueprint for the rehabilitation and expansion of rail network in Ghana.

We also had our blueprint for roads covering the Eastern Corridor spanning Ho all the way to Nkwanta, Kadjebi, Worawora, Yendi and beyond.

We had the blueprint for the Western corridor stretching from Elubo through Enchi, Juaboso and all the way to Wa in the Upper West Region and beyond.

These and other extensive road projects envisaged in the oil enclave namely Takoradi, Mpataba, Bonyere and elsewhere and economic roads in Tarkwa and Bogoso etc. are a statement of intent on where this Administration wants Ghana to be within the foreseeable future.

Madam Speaker,

Agreements covering these projects will be laid before the House shortly and I count on the ready support of Honourable Members so that we can get going because as the old adage goes: Time and Tide wait for no man.

MIDDLE-INCOME STATUS

Madam Speaker,

Following the rebasing of the economic indices of our nation, we are now at least in theory – a middle-income economy.

I use the phrase in theory advisedly because when we compare the levels of development in other middle-income countries it would seem we have a lot of catching-up to do.

The substantial investments we secure will take us closer to the levels achieved by other middle-income countries in road and rail

construction, in the oil and gas industry, education, health, provision of water, electricity and even waste management.

The provisional results of the 2010 Census put Ghana's population at a little over 24 million compared to the 2000 population figure of around 18 million.

While awaiting the final figures for the 2010 Census, it is clear that we have a lot of planning to do to raise living standards commensurate with our middle-income status.

Madam Speaker,

The year 2010 certainly ended on a high, with the pumping of our oil in commercial quantities.

As we join the ranks of oil-producing countries and thank the Almighty for the many gifts he has bestowed upon this nation, I assure Ghanaians that this Government will account for every pesewa of the oil revenue.

Madam Speaker,

I know that the majority of Ghanaians accept that the policies and priorities of this government are in the right direction.

I am also aware of the expectations for Government to act to lessen the economic burden especially following the increases in prices of some petroleum products.

A social democratic Government such as ours gains nothing politically by increasing petroleum prices.

It is our duty however to find a real and lasting solution to the TOR debt even as we watch with some trepidation, the rising crude oil prices on the world market.

I am not interested in interminable arguments over the issue of the TOR debt.

What I know is that the debt must be settled for the sake of a healthy, sustainable economy and for the sake of ensuring that we can adequately cater for our development needs.

Madam Speaker,

This Administration has been bold and courageous in taking steps toward the implementation of the single spine salary regime.

The new salary structure goes a long way in bringing equity and improvement in salaries especially in the public sector.

My appreciation goes to the leadership of organized labour and its rank and file for the patience and maturity they continue to show at various stages of implementation.

Negotiations on a new minimum wage have been completed and the result is likely to influence collective bargaining negotiations.

My appeal is for moderation in wage demands because large wage bills means less money for investment in needed infrastructure and provision of social amenities.

GOVERNANCE

Madam Speaker,

In the sphere of governance, the Constitution Review Commission has since its inauguration last year employed a consultations strategy which is geared towards ensuring that Ghanaians within

and outside the country get the opportunity to make inputs into the review process.

I am informed that it has targeted the 1st – 5th March for the National Constitutional Conference that will finalize the amendment proposal to the Constitution.

Our objective is therefore on course.

Madam Speaker,

It is the intention of Government to ensure that relevant completed and on-going policy reforms will be duly merged with the constitution review exercise to ensure a product that is holistic and reflective of our common heritage as Ghanaians.

These other initiatives include the new Decentralization Policy Framework; the proposals from the Presidential Committee on Emoluments; and the revised legislation on the Oil and Gas Sector. In that vein, I will urge Honourable Members to join in sustaining the review process by encouraging a “yes” vote at any referendum that may be required and by supporting the passage of any amendment bills that come before the House.

Madam Speaker,

The performance of the Electoral Commission in the District Level Elections has been a matter of public concern especially with the next Presidential and Parliamentary Elections around the corner.

I hope what happened in the District Level Elections was a one-time mishap and for the 2012 Elections the EC will live up to its acclaimed reputation as one of the best in the world.

Government will continue to support the EC and ensure that we come out of the 2012 Election with additional high flying democratic credentials.

WOMEN AND GOVERNANCE

Madam Speaker,

We indicated our general acceptance of the objectives of the 2004 “Women’s Manifesto for Ghana” which are based on the achievement of the gender equality and equity in national development in our own Manifesto of 2008.

This year, the Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs will work with the sponsors of the Women’s Manifesto and other stakeholders to incorporate its key demands in a revised “Affirmative Action for Women” which we hope to finalise by the end of the year.

ENERGY

Madam Speaker,

I have already made reference to the commissioning of Oil from the Jubilee Field.

It is important to conclude the passage of the Petroleum Commission Bill which is before Parliament in order to give legal backing to issues of local content and participation in the petroleum sector.

Madam Speaker,

This Government remains committed to providing adequate and reliable supply of energy to households and industry.

The supply of natural gas from Nigeria through the West Africa Gas Pipeline Project commenced in March last year.

This fuels two 100 megawatts gas turbines of the VRA as well as the Ho Asogli Thermal Plant.

Last year, the Aboadze to Volta transmission line was synchronized to the National Grid.

The construction of a 132 megawatts thermal power station in Takoradi also began last year and is scheduled for completion at the end of this year.

In the course of this year, we will be seeking Parliamentary approval for financing arrangements for the Takoradi International Company for the expansion of their capacity from 220 to 330 megawatts.

High capacity new power transformers have been installed in Kumasi, Ho, Anekpe, Techiman and Takoradi to increase transmission capacity and ensure reliable supply at these stations.

The ECG is also undertaking construction of primary substations in Accra, Tema and Kumasi. Over the past two years 705 towns have been connected to the national electricity grid.

As part of the continuous exercise of extending electricity to rural communities, in 2011, more communities especially in the, Western, Volta, Central, Northern, Upper East and Upper West Regions will be connected to the national electricity grid to close the regional distribution gap.

AGRICULTURE

Madam Speaker,

Modernization of agriculture, enhanced food security and creating job opportunities along the entire agricultural value chain are priorities of this Administration.

There have been notable increases of maize, rice, sorghum, plantain and yam production.

The goal of this Administration to make locally produced food more abundant and affordable is on course.

The implementation plan for the National Irrigation Policy will be completed and launched during 2011.

The first phase of the Accra Plains Irrigation Project, covering an area of about 5,000 hectares will be implemented to promote double and *where possible, triple* cropping of vegetables and cereals.

The Youth in Agriculture Programme has chalked some degree of success and its scope will be expanded this year.

The National Buffer Stock Company will this year improve its storage capacity of 34,000 metric tonnes to at least 60,000 metric tonnes.

The Company will also acquire a modern rice mill to enhance the processing of local paddy rice.

The Export Development Investment Fund (EDIF) will be converted to the Export Development and Agriculture Investment Fund (EDAIF).

This will enable the Agency to support entrepreneurs and investors with needed credit in the agricultural sector as well.

FISHERIES COLLEGE

In fulfillment of a promise in our manifesto, the Ministry of Agriculture will collaborate with the University of Cape Coast to establish a Fisheries College at Anomabu in the Central Region.

The Satellite Campus is expected to train professional technicians who will help to modernize Ghana's Fishing Industry.

HEALTH

Madam Speaker,

In order to achieve the health related MDGs by 2015, Government will continue to concentrate on improving health outcomes by targeting resources towards the health of women and children, and prevention and control of communicable and non-communicable diseases.

The National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) will continue to provide financial risk protection against the cost of basic quality health care for all citizens in Ghana.

Madam Speaker,

Even though there are geographical hotspots in the country, we have continued to reduce our national HIV/AIDS prevalence rate which currently stands at 1.9% and we aim to achieve virtual elimination of mother to child HIV transmission within the next 5 years.

Ghanaians will be happy to note that we are on the verge of once again eradicating the guinea worm disease in Ghana.

Since May 2010, when the last case was reported, we have not seen any case of guinea worm in Ghana.

Madam Speaker,

In the area of health infrastructure, the construction works on District Hospitals will continue.

Regional Hospitals and staff housing at Wa, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi and Tema will commence.

Other projects include the ongoing refurbishment of the Tamale Teaching Hospital and the expansion of Radiotherapy and Nuclear Medicine Centres at the Korle-Bu and Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospitals.

Madam Speaker,

Following the passage of the Mental Health Act, Government will adopt a community mental health care strategy to facilitate the implementation of the Act.

The required Legislative Instrument to operationalize other aspects of the Act will also be laid before Parliament.

EDUCATION

Madam Speaker,

This year, we will further intensify our commitment to free exercise books, free school uniforms and turn more schools under trees into brick and mortar classroom blocks.

We will also expand the Capitation Grant as well as the School Feeding Programme Support.

The latter program has been restructured in such a way that the development partners which earlier pulled out on account of poor financial and procurement audit reports are considering resuming their financial support for the programme.

Government will continue to provide incentives and motivation packages for teachers, especially those in deprived areas.

Madam Speaker,

In the co-ordinated programme of economic and social development policies I referred to earlier, we have noted the rate at which the computerized placement mechanism is blocking access to Second Cycle Education by pupils from Basic Schools in the catchment areas.

It has therefore been decided that from the 2011–12 academic year, the policy of selecting 30% of first year students from within 10-mile radius of where schools are situated will be restored.

Madam Speaker,

The Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology has already begun distributing computer notebooks to brilliant but needy science students.

In line with Government's vision to expand ICT infrastructure development, this Administration has also put in place a Tertiary Institutions Internal Access Programme (TIIAP) of institutions to benefit from a discounted laptop scheme.

The first batch of beneficiaries of the Mathematics, Science and Technology Scholarship Scheme as promised in our manifesto will be awarded scholarships before the end of March.

The scheme covers needy but brilliant science biased students in Second Cycle and Tertiary Level Institutions.

Madam Speaker,

Government will continue to support the expansion of especially Tertiary Education including those in the Private Sector but will not allow a mushrooming of institutions without the appropriate accreditation.

As you are aware I have already cut the sod for work to begin on the promised two additional Public Universities in the Volta and Brong Ahafo Regions.

Madam Speaker,

The sod-cutting for the commencement of works on the construction of the University of Health and Allied Sciences in the Volta Region, as well as the University of Energy and Natural Resources in the Brong Ahafo Region, is ample testimony to our commitment to breathe life into our manifesto pledges.

ROADS SECTOR

Madam Speaker,

I can confidently say that our roads sector expansion project is very much on course.



Ongoing or completed projects include Tetteh Quarshie-Madina, Asankragwa-Enchi, Achimota-Ofankor, Kumasi-Techiman (Phase 2).

The Eastern Corridor Road which links Accra through the Volta Region to the Northern Region will begin in earnest once this August House approves the financing arrangements.

A number of feeder road projects were completed in 2010 and more are to follow this year.

Madam Speaker

We cannot fail to notice that traffic lights in major urban centres some of which ceased functioning for about 10 years have been replaced with modern ones designed to work even when there are power outages.

Our busy intersections have therefore become less hazardous for motorists.

Of course, there is still a lot of work to be done and we are not relenting in our effort in this regard.

HOUSING

Madam Speaker,

The sod has just been cut for work to commence on the construction of an initial 30,000 housing units out of a total of 200,000 units to be completed in 5 years.

The first phase of the 30,000 units is targeted at the security agencies in all the 10 Regions in order to provide decent and acceptable accommodation for our men and women in uniform.

Subsequently, all other categories of workers will also benefit from the increase in our housing stock.

WATER

Madam Speaker,

Some progress is being made in the existing water supply situation. Through rationing, many parts of Accra now have access to water.

The rehabilitation of water treatment plant and pipelines at Kpong which is expected to start this year as well as the ongoing ATMA Rural Water Supply Project will go a long way in further improving water supply.

The Kwanyako-Kasoa Water Interconnection Project has brought relief to the people of Kasoa, Awutu, Senya Beraku, Gomoa Fetteh and its environs.

The expansion of Kumasi Barekese Water Treatment Plant has also been completed.

The water treatment plants at Konongo, Kumawu and Kwahu and other projects covering Damongo, Essakyer, Bolgatanga, Navrongo, Bongo as well as several other District capitals and towns throughout the country are concrete evidence of our determination to meet the Millennium Development Goals of water for all by 2015.

EMPLOYMENT

Madam Speaker,

Our massive infrastructure expansion plans in the areas of housing, roads and railways, will open up lots of job opportunities for many categories of our labour force.

The National Youth Employment Programme (NYEP) continues to expand its operations and is giving employment to lots of our youth. Our Youth in Agriculture Programme is also going to create more jobs especially after the Accra Plains irrigation project takes off.

Madam Speaker,

Our security agencies have already started recruitment exercises which will see a number of our youth in uniform once they complete their training programmes.

It is also anticipated that once our financial institutions respond appropriately and reduce the cost of credit, the ability to access loans will stimulate industry growth which will in turn create opportunities for job creation.

YOUTH AND SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

Madam Speaker,

My Christmas card for last year featured a picture of the gallant Black Stars who did the nation proud in the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

I meant it as a signal that our country's heroes will always be remembered and that Ghana is worth dying for.

Once again, on behalf of all the people of Ghana I congratulate them for doing the nation proud.

We must strive to maintain the high standards Ghana has set in world football.

In this regard, the Youth and Sports Ministry is being tasked to collaborate with the GFA and private stakeholders to rebuild colts football as a base for the growth of Ghana's football.

Other sporting disciplines will also be used as rallying points to harness the potential of the youth.

Madam Speaker,

We are going to make an effort to reorient the psyche of our youth towards what we consider to be Ghanaian values – especially on the issue of moral consciousness.

The Ministry of Education will be working in conjunction with the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Culture as well as the relevant state and private entities to reinforce Arts and Culture Festivals in second cycle institutions.

Also, Choral Festivals will be organized from the district to the national level.

The idea is to have a National Festival of Arts, Culture and Choral Music championed by the youth to reignite their sense of belonging.

CORRUPTION

Madam Speaker,

One governance issue that will forever remain close to my heart, is the fight against corruption.

As a way of strengthening institutions of state for the fight against corruption and provide the needed teeth to bite, the Serious Fraud

Office (SFO) has been reengineered and named the Economic and Organised Crime Office (EOCO) with prosecutorial powers.

About a fortnight ago, Ghanaians watched a shocking expose of corrupt activities and practices involving revenue collection at the Tema Port.

Last year, there was a similar expose on cocoa smuggling along the country's borders.

I expect the Ghana Revenue Authority to relentlessly pursue people who fail to, or, under-declare incomes simply to avoid paying taxes because the principle of equity demands that the burden of tax should be shared among all citizens.

I also expect the management of the Ghana Revenue Authority and Customs Excise and Preventive Services (CEPS) for that matter to act without delay to restore public confidence in the organization.

Madam Speaker,

In respect of the Ghana Standards Board and Food and Drugs Board, I expect them to collaborate to stop the dumping of sub-standard goods on the Ghanaian market.

Madam Speaker,

I am also concerned about reports from the Auditor-General of lack of co-operation by some government departments.

Accordingly, I have directed the Auditor-General to invoke the letter and spirit of Act 584 on the withholding of salaries and other emoluments and privileges to persons who fail to heed queries from the Auditor General's Department.

Madam Speaker,

We will continue to cooperate with civil society and anti-corruption agencies to continue to wage a concerted war against corruption.

SECURITY AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Madam Speaker,

We are not taking lightly the potential threats to the security of the oil and gas industry.

The government has taken steps to enable the Ghana Navy maintain a strong maritime presence.

The Ghana Air Force is also being re-equipped with transport aircrafts, surveillance planes and helicopters.

These will enhance the capacity of the Ghana Armed Forces to ensure the country's territorial integrity and provide safe sea passage to all legitimate traffic while combating illegal activities including, bunkering, drug trafficking, poaching and pair trawling.

Madam Speaker,

Without doubt, the Ghana Police Service with the help of other security agencies have clamped down heavily on crime—especially armed robbery.

I am not saying that there are no cases of robbery; what I am saying is that the armed robbers are no longer operating with impunity.

This year, with the recruitment of an additional 3,200 personnel to beef-up the Police Service, crime will be fought with extra zeal.

I am concerned with cases of unsolved murders and I expect the Police Administration to seek external help and collaboration where necessary.

Late last year, I ordered the re-opening of investigations into serial killing of women which occurred in the period 1998-2000.

That sad chapter in our history will not be closed until we get to the bottom of those serial killings.

Still on security, **Madam Speaker**, fire outbreaks continue to cause havoc throughout the country especially in the markets.

In this action year, I expect District, Municipal and Metropolitan Chief Executives to mount a serious check on violations of regulations and Bye-Laws and remove unauthorized structures which obstruct access to markets, drains and fire hydrants.

Public institutions are also expected to follow up on fire audit reports and improve safety.

This year, the Fire Service is expected to take delivery of a fairly large number of fire-fighting engines and gear for its personnel.

Madam Speaker,

As Commander-in-Chief of the Ghana Armed Forces, and having sworn to protect the integrity of Mother Ghana, I have put the security agencies on red alert and they are under strict instructions to deal decisively within the ambit of the law with anybody or group of persons who will attempt to disturb the peace and stability of this dear nation of ours.

We will not sit idly by and allow some persons to throw this country into a state of chaos just to satisfy their self-centered and inordinate political desires.

WAR ON DRUGS

Madam Speaker,

When I stood before this House in my first year as President, I pledged to wage a concerted and relentless war against the drug menace.

Two years down the line, I can confidently say to the people of Ghana that we have acquitted ourselves very well in this regard.

I have no regrets subjecting myself to a body check at the Kotoka International Airport.

It is the surest way to lead by example as well as energize the NACOB officials not to allow any official or persons purporting to be so to bully them.

Madam Speaker,

In the wake of recent startling revelations about the unacceptable extent to which Ghana was used as a major link in the drug trade, I have decided that a full scale investigation into the disappearance of cocaine from the Police vault as well as the 77 parcels of cocaine which entered Ghana's territorial waters aboard the MV Benjamin vessel and mysteriously got missing should be re-opened.

I do this in the knowledge that administrative enquiries were conducted into both cases.

The twist however is that the missing cocaine was not found and the culprits were not identified.

With a Presidential Commission of Enquiry, we hope to be able to do both.

We will not relent in our fight against the narcotics trade and I believe that the majority of Ghanaians are happy not to be waking up to daily stories of cocaine here, cocaine there and cocaine everywhere.

We will continue to make Ghana an unattractive destination for the narcotics trade and will collaborate fully with cross-border and other foreign operatives to flush out the drug barons and their couriers.

DISCIPLINE

Madam Speaker,

It is a fact that when it comes to discipline on our roads, we cannot produce a script that we can be proud of.

We are constantly waking up to gory stories about the carnage on our roads, and this cannot continue.

We cannot continue to sit and watch the wanton loss of precious lives.

I have given strict instructions to the Ghana Police and other law enforcement agencies to rigidly apply the appropriate sanctions in dealing with all who fall foul of traffic laws.

I have also instructed the Driver Vehicle Licensing Authority (DVLA) to conduct an immediate review of internal processes for the acquisition of licenses.

This is to ensure that we do not issue licenses to people who are not qualified to have them.

The Attorney-General's office is to review and strengthen legislation to ensure drivers and owners of broken down vehicles that stay on the roads and cause accidents and deaths pay the price for it.

LAW AND ORDER AND THE MEDIA

Madam Speaker,

All of us subscribe to the rule of law and free speech.

It is however not enough to believe or proclaim, but rather to practice one's belief in an acceptable and peaceful manner.

Political stability is the gift of political discipline by all actors.

Those of us in leadership positions bear the heaviest burden in ensuring that our actions and utterances do not incite lawlessness and damage our sense of community.

The media has a huge responsibility in the effort we must all make to encourage rational exchanges among reasonable people with different views.

Let us all keep one thing in mind; Just because you have the right to say something does not mean you should. Exercising good judgment is important.

We must not always find fault with each other; sometimes it also helps to tell stories about Ghanaians rising to the occasion.

Madam Speaker,

The draft Broadcasting Bill has been too long on the drawing board. It is time to consider seriously its enactment to help control the excesses that sometimes characterize exchanges in the electronic media.

My expectation is that when the time comes, the debate on its provisions will not fall into predictable patterns of partisan discourse.

FOREIGN POLICY

Finally, **Madam Speaker**, a word on our foreign policy.

I believe we have abundant experience and expertise in this country in the art of diplomacy and peacekeeping.

We will draw on this expertise in our common desire to help our brothers and sisters in Cote d'Ivoire find a lasting solution to the political impasse there.

This is not the moment for anyone with the interest of Ghana at heart to start beating war drums.

I will always respect and support calm and thoughtful resolution of disputes.

Ghana will continue to participate and support peace-keeping initiatives across the world to the extent that our resources and capacity will permit.

We are keeping an eye on events in North Africa and hope that things will simmer down quickly.

Soon, Africa will welcome Southern Sudan as a new country following the conclusive results of the referendum held recently.

The Government of Sudan deserves commendation for the co-operative spirit with which it has handled the process.

CONCLUSION

Madam Speaker,

I am confident that the challenges notwithstanding, the policy choices and concrete development programme of this Administration will raise Ghana to the next level with its promise of a better future in a Better Ghana.

In the two years of this Administration, our pre-occupation has been to restore the economy to good health, improve living conditions, rehabilitate and expand infrastructure, as well as strengthen democratic institutions and practice.

My pledge is to build a Better Ghana and I remain anchored to that pledge.

Today, in addition to cocoa, gold and other natural resources we also have oil.

God forbid that we let this moment slip through our hands.

That is why as President, I will remain focused and continue to serve this country with a clear conscience as we begin the 3rd year of this Administration.

It is my firm conviction that if we spend a little bit more of our time looking up, instead of spending all the time looking down, we will accept that we are a blessed people living in a blessed nation.

Madam Speaker,

We have no other place called home; that is why we must allow the things that unite us to override the things that divide us.

Whether from the, East, West, North, or South, we are all Ghanaians.

No one group is superior to the others; we are one people with a common destiny so we must forge ahead with a united sense of purpose of building a nation that this generation and future generations will be proud of.

And let no one think that inciting or priming others for violence is the way to determine the outcome of elections.

This country has come too far to travel down that road again.

The foundation we have laid for peace, stability, and for the building of a Better Ghana will endure.

Madam Speaker,

Ghana will not die; Ghana will live to proclaim the glory of God.

Madam Speaker,

We have built a solid foundation; we will build a solid structure; and we will build a Better Ghana.

May God continue to bless our homeland Ghana and make us great and strong.

I thank you for the opportunity, and I thank you for your kind attention