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KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE RT. HON. JUSTICE D.F. ANNAN,  
SPEAKER OF THE PARLIAMENT OF GHANA ON THE OCCASION  
OF A CONFERENCE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS FROM TOGO,  
BENIN, BURKINA FASO, COTE D'IVOIRE AND GHANA,  
6TH - 9TH JULY, 1996 AT GOLDEN TULIP HOTEL

SUBJECT

SHARING THE PARLIAMENTARY EXPERIENCES OF PARLIAMENTARIANS  
FROM TOGO, BENIN, BURKINA FASO COTE D'IVOIRE AND GHANA

May I first of all extend a warm welcome on behalf of the people and Government of Ghana, and on my own behalf, to all the honourable participants from sister African countries and observers from further afield. May your visit be both fruitful and enjoyable.

2. When I made my historic visit to the Republic of Togo last year, I intimated that I would help to encourage a closer interaction of Members of Parliaments from Ghana and Togo. To all intents and purposes, this statement was not limited to Togo alone but to all Parliaments in the sub-region and even the entire world.

3. I also consider it appropriate that Ghana should have been chosen to host the first sub-regional conference to share the parliamentary experiences of Members of our respective Legislatures. It is appropriate because one of the basic tenets in Ghana's foreign policy since its independence has been the fostering of the closest possible co-operation and collaboration

with neighbouring states with which Ghana shares ties of blood, history and culture, among others. Besides, like most of the countries assembled here Ghana is a country in transition to a period of full democratic governance. Sharing our common experiences and swapping ideas on the tenets of good parliamentary practice and procedures at the initial stages of our resurgent societies will, no doubt, considerably facilitate our march towards our ultimate goal of effective democratic governance.

4. Honourable Members would also recall that it was almost a century ago that mother Africa was subjected to partitioning by our former colonial masters in the heart of Europe. It is also significant to note that almost exactly a century later we are gathered here to witness if even partially, the beginnings of the process of re-unifying Africa through the coming together of Members of our sovereign Parliaments to share our parliamentary experiences - this time in an atmosphere of peace and democracy. It is equally significant to note that this re-unification of our countries in the sub-region is being actively promoted and financed by these same former colonial masters who are now our reliable partners in development. It should be our determination and bounden duty therefore to sustain the progress of our mutual co-operation and collaboration among the operatives in the basic institutions of our newly-found democracy in sub-Saharan Africa.

5. The programme for the Conference this week-end will, no doubt, provide you with briefs that will usher you into a period of interesting and fruitful discussions, cross-fertilisation and swapping of ideas that will be of immense benefit to honourable Members of our sovereign and democratically elected Parliaments. Among the briefs will be those based on the history and practice

of parliamentary democracy in Ghana, the present structure and set up of Parliament, the role of parliamentary committees, the constituency and the work of Parliament and finally an opportunity to visit the Parliament of Ghana in session. It is our fervent hope that the venue for such conferences which we hope to organise at regular intervals, will move from one country to the other in our sub-region. We also cherish the hope that more democratically elected Legislatures in our sub-region will join us sooner than later.

*Incun passage*

6. Permit me now, Honourable Members ~~of~~ Parliament to make a brief statement on the role of the Legislature in Ghana's democratic government. The 1992 Constitution of Ghana recognises the overriding necessity for the Legislature, the Executive and Judiciary to work together as the three main branches of government, inextricably linked by the common bonds of national interest and a shared responsibility to promote natural democracy and development. The powers entrusted to each of these branches are seen to operate as complementary processes, independently exercised at the institutional level but consciously directed to produce, in the final analysis a co-ordinated and harmonious totality that serves the supreme interest of the nation. In our progress towards the goal of democratisation there has therefore been a unifying spirit of nationalism exhibited over the past three and half years under this traditional diversity of powers.

7. No doubt, the performance of our Legislature in Ghana has not been much different from those in your countries with the exception of a few areas which will provide the bases for discussion during the week-end. Ghana's Parliament has so far performed its central democratic functions of securing full discussion and ventilation of views on all matters placed

before it mainly by the Executive. Parliament has thus ensured that Ministers have always been made liable to be required to explain and publicly justify their policies and their actions. This has made our Parliament the custodian of the liberties of the people. Parliament has also discharged its constitutional mandate of law-making in an inter-related framework of functions and responsibilities both within the parliamentary system and also with bodies such as the Executive, the Judiciary, the Council of State as well as political parties, professional, trade and business organisation, Bank of Ghana, various departments of state and the various commissions such as those on human rights, media, civic education, among others, which are prominent agents promoting the democratisation process. When Parliament makes laws therefore, it does so in the context of a much broader framework of responsibilities and a matrix of actions that practically affect all major areas of national importance and national interest.

8. While speaking on the Legislature in our sub-region permit me honourable Members to once again invite your attention to the crucial role played by the Committee System in our democratic process in the hope that the subject would be accorded special attention during the impending discussions and debate. In its investigative functions, the Legislature exercises constitutional authority and duty through its Standing and Select Committees to investigate and inquire into the activities and administration of Ministries and departments. It is the Committee System that enables Parliament to examine and assess legislative proposals in detail and this is indeed a crucial aspect of Parliament's work in the process of democratisation and due attention should be given during the conference as to how best to streamline its operations in furtherance of our on-going

democratisation process. This is also an area where all true proponents of democratic governance should provide sustained financial and logistical assistance.

9. Honourable Members ~~of~~ Parliament will also agree with me that Parliament remains the central arena for any effective international relations. This is expressed in a manner whereby parliamentary approval is sought for and obtained for international agreements of whatever shape. The coming together of Members of Parliament from our neighbouring countries will afford Members opportunities to exchange ideas on a variety of issues and build up mutual trusts and confidences among themselves and their countrymen. <sup>S</sup>since a journey of a thousand miles begins with a step, it is believed that the initial coming together will be the first and preliminary stage where the modest beginnings of "building bridges" among Parliamentarians from Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire can start. The Beijing conference, the North - South detente, and a whole lot of national and international changes point to the need for consultative meetings or forums for Parliaments in this sub-region. ~~It is for these reasons therefore that the week-end conference has been organised to examine the possibility of making such a meeting a regular affair.~~

10. Currently the order of the day is the promotion of parliamentary democracy, inter-parliamentary interaction, regional and sub-regional groupings. In the West African sub-region there are countries with Parliaments. Togo and Cote d'Ivoire have had Parliaments since their independence. Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, to name just a few, have had parliaments at one time or the other. Other countries in the sub-region without parliaments are getting ready to have them and those who have are determined to maintain theirs; and sooner than later the sub-region

can boast of a democratically elected Parliament in each country. In spite of the fact that not all countries in the sub-region have parliaments, by sheer expression of solidarity and good neighbourliness, the region has a group-ECOWAS which has been in existence for over two decades. Out of this a sub-regional group has emerged namely, ECOMOG, which is doing a yeoman's work in the Liberian factional conflict.

11. Already Parliaments in countries within the sub-region belong to Parliamentary groupings such as the C.P.A., I.P.U. U.A.P. and others. Annually, they pay sums of moneys to attend meetings of such organisations. Whilst there, they attempt to interact with each other and even lobby themselves for some of the positions in these groups or voting patterns on issues discussed at these forums. Meanwhile, they hardly meet or interact while they are in the sub-region or when they return from such conferences. This obviously cannot go on indefinitely. Besides, there has been the desire either implied or expressed that there must be some sort of forum for interaction of the parliamentarians in the countries in the sub-region. Their only interaction so far has been the occasional meetings of these MP's in foreign countries. On most occasions it has been realised that a preliminary interaction within the local context would have given enough time and realisation for a better analysis of issues than how they approach them in the forums of these other wider groupings. In a bid to lay a foundation for an effective homework before Members of Parliament attend such international meetings it is obvious that there should be a machinery at home for interactions. It is often said, quite rightly, that across the borders of West African countries are our own kith and kin who have the same problems and aspirations which

Legislatures in these countries strive to satisfy. In doing so they may have developed very interesting rules, practices and procedures that effectively help to achieve these goals.

12. It is for these reasons that the week-end meeting of Members of Parliament from Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire has been organised to enable their Members of Parliament to meet their colleagues in Ghana for a few days' exchange of ideas. The main purpose for such a meeting will be to examine the possibility of making it a permanent and regular feature of the relationship among Members of Parliaments and other institutions that promote democracy in our sub-region.

13. Finally, I have the responsibility as Speaker of a Parliament to call upon all honourable Members of Parliament here assembled to recognise and explain to their countrymen that Parliament is a premier publicly acceptable institution open to all our peoples, wherever located, to come forward to participate in its work by listening to debates, liaising with its Members and submitting petitions to them for consideration. For all the peoples in the sub-region, in future, therefore Parliaments should protect the socio-economic infrastructure for the achievement of socio-economic development of all our peoples.

14. And on this note I wish all honourable participants the best in your deliberations during the week-end and a safe return to your respective countries.

Thank you.

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