



STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

"STILL BUILDING A BETTER GHANA"

BY

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STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS

Madam Speaker,

I thank you for the opportunity to be here to perform my constitutional duty.

Article 67 of the Constitution requires the President at the beginning of each session of Parliament to deliver a message on the state of the nation.

I intend to do just that; to deliver a message on the state of the nation which I daresay is stable and in reasonably good health.

The economy is full of promise and in terms of development; we are making substantial progress **even though there is still a lot of work to be done.**

THE ECONOMY

The Global Economy

Madam Speaker,

Over the past three years that I have been President, much has been achieved in pursuance of our “Better Ghana” Agenda.

Even though we have experienced internal and external constraints, we have reason to be hopeful of Ghana’s future.

Madam Speaker,

A recent report by the World Bank has alerted developing countries of further economic shocks this year and the need for contingency planning.

We are therefore watching developments in the global economy with hope and apprehension.

Hope, because the easing of the global crisis is likely to give rise to economic stability and expansion that will impact on our economy; apprehension, because further weakening of the Highly Indebted Rich Countries (HIRCs) and of the global economy will have serious economic consequences not least on commodity prices.

Notwithstanding the global economic uncertainties, this administration has continued to make progress in the management of the national economy.

The Macro-Economy

Madam Speaker,

Under my watch, Ghana has recorded the highest ever growth rate in the annals of our nation's history with a provisional growth rate approaching 14%.

In my 2011 State of the Nation Address, I described inflation as the worst economic nightmare any country can go through because it breeds economic and financial difficulties and imposes hardships on the most vulnerable.

I stated then that our success in confronting inflation in the previous year was notable; the challenge was to remain on course.

I am happy to report that indeed we remained on course.

We recorded the most sustained single digit rates of inflation in decades, with the rate of inflation of 8.55% for 2011 being the lowest in 42 years since 1970.

As at the end of September, the budget deficit was 2% of GDP as compared to 14.5% of GDP in 2008.

With the exception of the level of the budget deficit which was higher than anticipated, we have managed to attain the macroeconomic projections contained in the 2008 NDC Manifesto for a Better Ghana.

The credit belongs to all Ghanaians and to the Government as the direct managers of the economy as well as Parliament as its monitors.

The positive economic indicators we have achieved have resulted in increased investor confidence in the economy.

A fortnight ago the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre released figures showing an increase in projects registered at the GIPC amounting to over \$7billion in foreign direct investment.

That said, I expect the recently established Inter Agency Task Force to ensure full compliance of provisions of the GIPC Act especially relating to Immigration and tax.

On the revenue side, let me recommend, CEPS, IRS, and VAT, for the good work being done.

There is still a lot of work to be done and I am confident that these Organisations will not let the nation down.

EDUCATION

Madam Speaker,

Our achievements in managing inflation, budget deficit and realizing high GDP growth rates have reflected in the progress made in many key areas of national development.

A snapshot of the education sector provides a good example of how far we have come within the short time span of 3 years.

Basic Education

In the city of Accra for example efforts have been made to bring an end to the school shift system which has been a drawback in the fight for quality education.

Several classroom structures have been constructed providing accommodation for hundreds of pupils who now benefit from a full day classroom teaching.

Contracts for the construction of over 1,700 classroom blocks for schools under trees have been awarded throughout the country.

On completion, the 4,320 schools under trees that existed in 2009 would be reduced by about 40%.

We are on course to eradicating the schools under trees phenomenon.

We have distributed over 3 million school uniforms to needy pupils nationwide.

This means that with a basic school population of about 5.2 million, we have supplied school uniforms to three out of every five children in basic school.

Under our free exercise books scheme, over 40 million exercise books have been supplied to all pupils in basic public schools.

On the average, 8 exercise books have been supplied to each pupil per year in both 2010 and 2011.

In respect of the school feeding programme, we have rationalized selection to target more needy communities.

In all, coverage has been expanded.

Second-Cycle Education

Madam Speaker,

As regards the second cycle level of the educational strata, about 672 emergency classroom blocks and dormitories are in various phases of completion nationwide.

Indeed, on my nationwide tour last year, I commissioned many of such completed projects.

In line with our social democratic principles, we aim at making secondary education accessible to every Ghanaian child of school going age by 2016.

The completion of the emergency classroom blocks will make it possible to increase second cycle enrolment.

Between 2013 and 2015, we intend establishing additional community second cycle schools throughout the length and breadth of the country, particularly in under-served districts.

As far as this Administration is concerned, education is the key to giving the youth the skills they need to make the most of their lives.

Investing in the right education and addressing youth unemployment are two sides of the same coin.

Thus, besides emphasizing on formal classroom education, we are using the National Apprenticeship Programme, LESDEP, and other programmes for the teaching of employable skills.

So far, these programmes have made a great impact on youth employment in the informal sector of the economy.

It is expected that the shift of the NYEP focus from traditional paid modules to trade and vocation modules will encourage self-employment.

Madam Speaker, pursuance to a pledge made last year, the School of Fisheries at Anomabo, a satellite college of University of Cape Coast, is underway.

Also, a head office building for the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences is under construction.

Science, Communication Technology and Innovation

Madam Speaker,

Important changes have taken place in the communication industry in Ghana.

In July last year, Mobile Number Portability was introduced offering choice to mobile phone subscribers.

A lot of preparation on digital broadcasting migration has been going on and we are on course to switch over from analogue to digital in December 2014 ahead of the 2015 deadline set for all countries.

Related to this and in line with the imperatives of today's digital world is the importance of giving Ghanaian youth and students opportunities to gain skills in information and communication technology.

These are the tools for future employment and economic growth.

Under our Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) policy, provision is made for the distribution of free laptops to schools and students nationwide.

So far close to 60,000 laptops have been distributed and it is expected that by June this year, the number would have doubled.

This surely is good news for our students who hitherto had to write their Basic Education Certificate Examination ICT papers without having ever seen or touched the key pad of a computer.

Tertiary Education

Madam Speaker,

Before Parliament rose from its third and final meeting last year, the bills on the establishment of the University of Health and Allied Sciences in the Volta Region and the University of Energy and Natural Resources in the Brong Ahafo Region, were passed.

Work is seriously in progress as regards putting in place the needed infrastructure for staff and students.

Indeed, the Governing Councils of the two universities have been inaugurated and it is expected that admissions will begin when the new academic year begins sometime in September.

A lot has also been achieved in terms of improved infrastructural facilities for effective teaching and learning in the existing public tertiary institutions.

In the particular case of the University of Development Studies, we have made available funds for the expansion of infrastructural facilities and procurement of laboratory equipment and other projects.

Human Resource Training And Development

In the area of Human Resource Training and Development in foreign universities since 2009, the GETFUND has been providing funding in anticipation of employment in the following areas:

1. Emerging Oil & Gas Sector
2. The University of Health & Allied Sciences (Faculty)
3. The University of Energy and Renewable Natural Resources (Faculty)
4. Other Public Universities
5. The broader National Economy.

JOB CREATION

Madam Speaker,

This Administration has been concerned about job creation and its importance for the growth of the economy and the development of the nation.

Indeed, the second pillar of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) Manifesto addresses the building of a Strong and Resilient Economy as well as the Creation of Jobs.

It is on this account that as soon as this Government settled, we organized a special Cabinet Retreat to deal solely with this vital subject.

It would be recalled Ministers, as leaders of their sectors, were directed to work with the leadership of the private sector to find innovative ways of creating jobs outside the traditional employment avenues.

I can say with confidence that many jobs have since been created outside the non-traditional areas of employment.

Of course, many have also been employed via the traditional employment avenues.

With the expected heavy infrastructure expansion as well as the building of the allied petrochemical industries associated with our oil and gas find, I can safely project that many more jobs will be created by the time the tenure of this Government comes to an end.

AGRICULTURE

Crop Farming

Madam Speaker,

We have also made progress on the agricultural front.

True to our commitment to modernizing agriculture, the Government has increased the stock of Rice Combine Harvesters, maize harvesters; additional grain-cocoon storage facilities and bore holes for agricultural purposes where none existed.

Agricultural Mechanization Service Centers have also been established.

As a result of targeted interventions in the agricultural sector, we have recorded significant increases in rice, yam and maize production.

Cotton

Madam Speaker,

Our cotton farmers in the Northern Regions can attest to how far we have gone in reviving the cotton industry while Government intervention has resulted in a sizeable increase in cotton production.

Irrigation

Madam Speaker,

Between 2009 and 2011, Government has rehabilitated several irrigation dams in the three northern regions, the Greater Accra, Volta, Ashanti, and Brong Ahafo regions.

With the completion of a master plan for irrigation development, the first phase of the Accra Plains Irrigation Project covering an area of about 11,000 hectares will begin this year.

Cocoa

Madam Speaker,

For the first time ever, Ghana produced over one million tonnes of cocoa in 2011.

Our output last year was over 50% the output in 2008 which was 680,000 tonnes.

In terms of the percentage of the world cocoa price that is paid to the farmer, we have out-performed every government in our history.

At an average world market price of US\$2,450.00 per tonne in January 2012, we are paying the cocoa farmer about 80% of the world market price.

Sheanut

Madam Speaker

A new shea nut factory has been established at Buipe in the Northern Region, to process sheanuts for export. The factory is expected to process close to 40,000 tons a year.

Government has already inaugurated the National Steering Committee to formulate programmes and strategies for growing and sustaining the industry.

The floor price for purchases at the farm gate has been fixed to ensure that the farmers are not shortchanged.

Madam Speaker,

Government through COCOBOD has launched a 6-year cocoa re-planting programme to rehabilitate old cocoa farms in Ghana.

The programme entails the production of elite cocoa hybrid seedlings for distribution to farmers free of charge to be used in replanting.

The main objective of the programmes is to create employment opportunities for our youth in cocoa growing communities throughout the period of the programme and assist them to acquire the relevant techniques and skills in cocoa production under the Youth in Agriculture Programme.

Another objective is to encourage under-producing farmers to expand their acreage and increase their yield.

Fisheries

Madam Speaker,

This administration has taken steps to enforce the Fisheries Regulations and protect fisheries resources. To this end some patrol vessels have been acquired and will soon be commissioned.

Implementation of a Fisheries and Aquaculture Development Plan will begin this year.

A turnkey fish processing plant at Elmina is expected to commence this year.

WATER

Madam Speaker,

We pledged in our Manifesto to focus on the production, distribution and supply of water taking into account the needs of the poor. We also pledged to build and expand a number of water plants nationwide.

Since 2009, we have constructed hundreds of boreholes fitted with hand pumps, hand dug wells with hand pumps and piped water systems throughout the country.

Several others have been rehabilitated.

I have directed that at least 20,000 boreholes be constructed nationwide over the next four years.

The Government has absorbed the 5% contribution by communities to the capital cost of construction of rural water systems in rural communities.

The Kpong Water Expansion Project is expected to add 40million gallons of water daily to the Accra-Tema Metropolis.

The many interventions we have made in the urban water sector are expected to bring about an increase in coverage from the present 62% to 80% by 2015.

ENERGY

The Power Sector

Madam Speaker,

This Government inherited a total electricity generation capacity of around 1,800 megawatts in 2009.

We have since installed an additional 376 megawatts to the generation capacity.

Additional capacity will be added this year through the expansion of the Takoradi International Company (TICO), the planned completion of the Bui project, the development of the Kpone Thermal Power Plant; and the completion of the Tema Osono Power Project.

By the end of 2013, power generation should reach about 3,300Mw, an over 80% increase in the generation capacity we came to meet.

Madam Speaker,

The national electricity transmission system that we inherited was saddled with over-aged and obsolete equipment, overloads, high losses, low voltage and evacuation constraints, among others.

We have, since assuming office, taken action to improve the situation.

These have included the completion of transmission networks and substation projects at Buipe in the Northern Region; Kpando, Ho and Asiekpe in the Volta Region; Sunyani and Techiman in the Brong Ahafo Region; Obuasi and Kumasi in the Ashanti Region; Tema and Accra in the Greater Accra Region; Winneba in the Central Region and Takoradi in the Western Region.

In all honesty, the phenomenon of “dumsor, dumsor” is not as bad as it used to be at the time we took over the management of the affairs of state and it is our determination to continue to work to make the situation much better than it is currently.

Rural Electrification

Madam Speaker,

From 2009 to date, under the various rural electrification projects, over 1,700 communities have been connected to the national grid.

We are aiming to extend electricity to a further 4,000 or more communities covering all the regions in the country.

I would like to mention that the programme to provide street lights to all regional capitals is proceeding according to plan and will in future be extended to cover all municipal and district capitals in the country.

Oil and Gas

Madam Speaker,

At the end of last year, Ghana had earned a total of US\$444,124,724 from the sale of the Ghana Group’s 41 liftingstotalling 3,930,189 barrels of crude oil.

We have made and will continue to make full public disclosure of all oil liftings and revenues accrued even as we hope for success in on-going oil and gas exploration in other areas.

The appointment and inauguration of the Public Interest Committee under the Chairmanship of an eminent Ghanaian is to demonstrate the Government's intention to enhance transparency and accountability.

Once again, this Government has demonstrated its commitment to a Ghana-first approach to the handling of national affairs wherever the national interest can better be served that way.

There have been some challenges in production at the Jubilee Oil Field. As a result, production estimates have been scaled down pending the completion of a remedial programme.

The Ministry of Energy and the newly established Petroleum Commission are positively keeping a close eye on the matter.

Madam Speaker,

The Ghana National Gas Company Limited (Ghana Gas) which is charged with responsibility to build, own and operate infrastructure required for gathering, processing, transporting and marketing of natural gas resources in the country has commenced business in earnest especially in the area of the development of gas infrastructure.

The completion of the project will stimulate diversification of the national economy.

THE SINGLE SPINE SALARY STRUCTURE

Madam Speaker,

In my State of the Nation Address last year, I informed this House of the bold and courageous steps we had taken to implement the new pay policy, popularly referred to as the Single Spine Pay Policy (SSPP).

As at that time, just about 11% of public service employees had been migrated onto the Single Spine Salary Structure (SSSS).

In the 2011 Action Year, over 80% of public service employees were migrated onto the SSSS and the process is expected to be completed within the year.

The implementation of the SSSS has not been without challenges.

We regret the hiccups and I wish to express Government's appreciation to Organised Labour and Associations for their continued support and collaboration as we work to successfully implement the Single Spine Pay Policy.

With the huge increase in the wage bill resulting from the implementation of the SSSS, Government expects that there will be commensurate increase in efficiency and productivity in the Public Services.

SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT AREAS

Madam Speaker,

In my first State of the Nation address in 2009, I indicated that SADA and CEDECOM will be used to address the peculiar poverty related problems in the three Northern regions and the Central region respectively.

In the intervening period, the law that formally establishes the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority has been passed and the Authority has been formally established.

CEDECOM is the shell around which the Western Corridor Development Authority will be created.

The creations of the other Development Authorities that I mentioned in my 2011 Address are receiving very active attention at the NDPC and will follow in the course of the year.

HEALTH

National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS)

Madam Speaker,

The National Health Insurance Scheme continues to grow with utilization rising from about 600,000 in 2005 to over 17.5million as at December 2011.

There is the urgent need for dialogue and consensus on financing of the NHIS to ensure sustainability.

Currently, measures are being implemented for cost containment through improved provider payment systems.

Meanwhile, for better customer orientation the scheme has planned to start a call centre to make it more user-friendly.

Health Infrastructure

Madam Speaker,

Our plan to improve access to quality healthcare is very much on course via a number of on-going projects nationwide.

Indeed, a number of new health facilities have been completed within the last three years and will soon be put to use, notable of which is the Winneba Municipal Hospital.

Significant progress has been made on the Tamale Teaching Hospital rehabilitation project.

Government is also strengthening the capacity of existing Regional, District Hospitals, and Polyclinics.

Five polyclinics will be completed by the end of June in Wechiau, Babilie, Ko, Lambussie and Hain, all in the upper west region.

Government's intervention in the deplorable state of the Korle-bu Teaching hospital has led to the procurement of life support equipment and new oxygen plants, the installation of which will soon commence.

Under the National Medical Equipment Replacement Project, Government is providing life support equipment, and medical imaging in selected District Hospitals nationwide as well as re-equipping radiology departments in the teaching and regional hospitals with state of the art Magnetic Resonance Imagers, and CT scanners.

These centers are also receiving mammography units to make breast cancer screening routine.

Equipment will be supplied and installed in district hospitals as well as health centers across the country.

As a matter of fact, state-of-the-art Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machines are currently being installed at the Komfo Anokye and Tamale Teaching Hospitals.

It is expected that in the course of the year, MRI machines will be installed at the Volta and Central Regional Hospitals.

Basic Obstetric equipment have also been supplied and installed in selected district hospitals and health centers across the country as part of efforts at reducing maternal mortality.

The National Ambulance Service will take delivery of 160 ambulances this year to augment the existing fleet.

Apart from health structures and equipments, we have established new Health Assistant Training Schools, Nurses Training Schools, as well as Midwifery schools in various parts of the country to train more health personnel.

Madam Speaker, with the help of the Cuban Government, 250 Ghanaian students will benefit from medical training in Cuba.

200 of them will study for their first degree in medicine while 50 of them will benefit from specialist training.

Government has also succeeded in reaching an agreement with the Cuban Government to increase the yearly medical personnel quota to Ghana from 200 to 300.

Guinea Worm

Madam Speaker,

The last guinea worm case in Ghana was reported in May 2010 at Diare in the Northern Region. We have since not heard of any.

In 2012, we will intensify our disease surveillance to make sure that guinea worm is not re-introduced into Ghana and to also prepare Ghana for certification by the World Health Organization as a country free of guinea worm.

ROADS

Madam Speaker,

We continue to make strides in road infrastructural development. Permit me to highlight a few:

- As at January 2009, the Tetteh Quarshie-Madina road was about 30% complete. At the moment it is about 80% complete.
- As at January 2009, funds were still being mobilized for the Madina-Pantang road. This road is now about 45% complete.
- The Achimota-Ofankor road is now over 80% complete
- The Koforidua bypass has been completed and is in use so has the Kumasi-Techiman road

- The Nsawam bypass, the Nkawkaw bypass, the Oforikrom-Asokwa bypass, the first phase of the Sogakope-Adidome-Ho-Fume and the Bamboi-Tinga road are all nearing completion.
- Reconstruction of the Asikuma Junction-Hohoe road, the 147 kilometre Fulfulso-Sawla road, the 60-kilometre Assin Praso-Bekwai road, the Dodi Papaso-Nkwanta road and the Nkwanta-Oti Damanko road is on course.

Interestingly, on one of my working visits to a road construction project, one happy resident remarked “wompewei, nawope den”!

SECURITY, LAW AND ORDER

Madam Speaker,

Because 2012 is an election year, it goes without saying that our security institutions must be in a state of readiness to ensure peace and calm before, during, and after the elections.

The Police, Military and other institutions charged with law enforcement will have the fullest support of Government to act decisively and fairly.

Our commitment to ensure the safety of Ghanaians is as strong as ever.

Over the past years there has been a reduction in major crimes such as armed robbery, car snatching, highway robbery, narcotics and murder and the law enforcement agents are under strict instructions to sustain the arrest of narcotic traffickers and their collaborators.

The Police

Madam Speaker,

We have increased the strength of the Police Service by over 4,000 and at the same time taken steps to modernize its forensic facilities to assist in crime prevention and detection.

A large quantity of vehicles, communication gadgets, bulletproof vests have been provided to boost operational efficiency of the Police.

Immigration

Madam Speaker,

The Ghana Immigration Service is expected to complete installation of Digital Border Surveillance System at strategically selected Border control points.

This around-the-clock monitoring equipment seeks to enhance border security especially in the face of new sub-regional threats of religious and ethnic nature.

The Military

Madam Speaker,

The Ghana Armed Forces, in the last three years, is not in the near-moribund state it used to be before January 2009.

A lot of acquisition has been made in equipment and hardware for the Navy and the Air Force.

We will leave no stone unturned in our effort to develop a credible defence system capable of protecting our Oil and Gas Industry and our territorial integrity as a whole.

Last year, I made the point that the 48 Engineer Regiment will once again be mainstreamed into the area of road construction and I must say that I am very much impressed with the good job the Regiment is doing thus far.

Ayekoo to them!

Prisons Service

Madam Speaker,

This Administration last year commissioned a new medium security prison at Ankaful; the biggest in West Africa.

Under phase two, the Ankaful prison is expected to be a model prison which will compare with any worldwide.

The Service is also being provided with the needed logistics and manpower resources to make it more efficient.

Fire Service

Madam Speaker,

Last year alone, the Service took delivery of 152 new vehicles to enhance operations.

The scourge of fire outbreaks and resultant loss of lives and property remain a source of grave concern and we are determined to reduce it to the barest minimum.

As a way of building capacity, a number of officers and men last year received training in the, United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Belgium.

It goes without saying however that there is a need to enforce safety regulations and standards and I expect the Fire Service to be fearless in that respect.

GOVERNANCE

Foreign Policy

Madam Speaker,

Continued protection of the nation's land and maritime resources and ensuring good neighbourliness between Ghana and her neighbours is of priority to this Administration.

Ghana is a country with an impressive track record on fostering international peace and we will stay on that path.

This administration will conduct our foreign relations on the basis of national respect and good neighbourliness.

We believe in using the tools of diplomacy and existing bilateral and multilateral structures in resolving questions of boundary disputes.

To this end, I have tasked the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources to coordinate the activities of the Ghana Boundary Commission in pursuit of delineating the outer limits of the continental shelf of Ghana beyond 200 nautical miles (M) which is currently at the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS).

I have also instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to intensify its activities in ensuring the security and welfare of our many countrymen/women and youth all over the world.

We have consular and moral responsibility for them all.

Youth and Sports

Madam Speaker,

On the youth front; through the Better Ghana Caravan Project we are focusing on activities in the priority areas of employable skills, Youth Health and Sexuality education, drug use and substance abuse education, conflict prevention, management and resolution.

In sports, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) which had suspended the Ghana Olympic Committee (GOC) lifted the ban last August paving the way for Ghana's participation in the upcoming London 2012 Olympic Games.

Ghana is to play host to the second ECOWAS Games in June this year.

At the 10th All Africa Games held in Maputo, Mozambique in September last year, Team Ghana put up the best performance ever by winning 19 medals.

The National U-23 male football team and their U-20 female counterparts won gold and silver respectively at the Games.

On behalf of the people of Ghana, I once again congratulate our gallant sportsmen and women on their fine achievements

In the course of last year, the Senior National Football team, the Black Stars was rated 14th in the FIFA world ranking and 1st in Africa.

That has so far been Ghana's best ranking in world football.

The Black Stars did not lift the African Cup as anticipated; better luck to all of us next time.

Parliament

Madam Speaker,

I am assured that the Job 600 project will surely be completed this year and ready for your occupation next year.

I am confident that I will be the first President to address you at a time when you will be working from the comfort of your new offices.

This year, I hope to work with Honourable members to review three initiatives that I announced will be instituted in the course of my Presidency.

These are the assignment of National Service personnel as Research Assistants to MPs; the construction of constituency duty offices for Honourable members; and the establishment of an MPs' Constituency Development Fund separate and apart from the District Assemblies Common Fund.

Together, we will work to find solutions to the challenges that have impacted negatively on the agenda of the Executive and the Legislature to work in tandem to broaden the frontiers of our democratic dispensation.

Constitutional Review Commission

Madam Speaker,

Last year, I noted in my address that the work of the Constitutional Review Commission was on schedule.

I also noted that all governance reforms must ultimately take their ethos from the Constitution Review Process.

I still stand by this Resolve!

I am happy to report that the Commission has since presented its Report to me ahead of schedule and I have identified a Technical Implementation Committee to assist Cabinet develop the white paper and begin with the implementation of the recommendations without delay.

Madam Speaker, I hope that this House will join me in thanking the Chairman and members of Commission for a job well done.

Corruption

Madam Speaker,

Let me state here and now that I remain undaunted by attempts to thwart the fight against corruption by legal and technical means.

I do not care whose ox is gored when it comes to the fight against corruption and neither will I be off-tracked by all the sideline comments that are being made to befuddle the hardcore issues.

The "Cocaine" Commission

Madam Speaker,

The fate of the abortive Ghana@50 Commission prosecutions stayed my hand in going the route of appointing a Presidential Commission to re-open

investigations into the disappearance of cocaine from the Police vault as well as the 77 parcels of cocaine that got mysteriously missing from the MV Benjamin that I announced in my Address last year.

We have since identified what went wrong with the Ghana@50 Commission and we will address it and definitely begin the cocaine investigations this year.

Indeed, as I speak, the National Security has in its custody a very key player in the case of the 77 parcels of supposedly missing cocaine.

I have also received a report from the BNI on the results of the investigations into the cocaine which got missing from police vaults.

I intend to get to the bottom of the matter, and I will!!!

Under my watch, Ghana will continue to be an unattractive destination for the illicit drug trade and I feel no pain for those who are no longer benefiting from the trade.

Justice

Madam Speaker,

In many of these matters that reflect negatively on governance, the Judiciary as the institution of state with the mandate to dispense justice, and the Executive with the mandate to implement the law, must act as partners engaged in a collective effort to rid the country of corruption, drugs and other harmful activities.

Any perception that the Judiciary is on the side of wrongdoers undermines democracy and the institutions of democracy.

Whilst urging our Honourable Justices to live up to their noble calling of independent arbiters, I would also like to remind them that they are an arm of government and that they have as much responsibility as the other arms of government in ridding the society of criminal elements, thereby ensuring justice for the citizenry and other persons.

The 2012 Elections

Madam Speaker,

There are four critical matters that should engage our attention in this Election Year.

The first is the Judiciary's role in the settlement of election disputes.

The ability of the judiciary to settle election disputes expeditiously will be a big plus for the forward march of our democracy.

The second matter is the role of the media in the elections.

Polarized or not; aligned or not; biased or not; the Ghanaian media has a responsibility to work to preserve Ghana's democracy.

Speaking for myself, I have confidence in the ability of my brothers and sisters in the media to rise to the occasion.

On the perception of polarization, alignment and bias, however, the media has to speak for itself through its deeds.

The third matter has to do with the state of industrial relations in an election year.

It is often the case that in election years, labour demands escalate to such an extent that they do not only create industrial tension but also ultimately prove economically very costly to the nation.

My appeal to the tripartite partners in labour negotiations this year is for them to have an eye on the national interest and to ensure that they create the kind of labour environment that will engender peaceful elections and post-election stability in the country.

The fourth is in relation to chieftaincy disputes and ethnic conflict.

We have had our fair share of these problems in parts of the country. In some instances they have resulted in loss of lives and destruction to property.

The Security Services have been tasked to be proactive in dealing with those who for reasons of political expediency may want to escalate chieftaincy or ethnic tensions.

Madam Speaker,

Whatever be the case, we expect this year's elections to be free and fair, free from fear, transparent and with the results acceptable to and accepted by all.

We as Government will do all in our power to support the Electoral Commission to ensure these.

And whatever the security challenges we will not be found wanting.

The sovereign will of the people will reign supreme!

Conclusion

Madam Speaker,

I have always preached peace and I am happy the leadership of political parties are responding to the clarion call I have sounded over the years.

I am also glad that those who did not see the need to pray for peace are now praying for peace.

I hope however that we show proof of genuine commitment to peace by our utterances and actions.

Let us all remember that the stability we enjoy as a country can turn instantly to brittleness if we fail to be circumspect and if we fail to hold in check those who may want to hold the country to ransom.

Madam Speaker,

This Government is intent on continuing with the pace of development right until the election period.

It is true that we will have to campaign at some point in time but I promise you this will not be at the expense of pushing the Better Ghana Agenda.

We will also not sacrifice the gains we have made on the economic front on the altar of election year politics.

Ghana must grow; and Ghana will only grow if we take bold and courageous decisions!

Madam Speaker,

Our common yearning to see Ghana moving forward binds us as one people.

Even as we seek to promote our respective political ideologies, we must be willing to synthesize the best ideas from both sides of the House for the advancement of the country.

We must all be willing to put aside unnecessary partisanship and keep in mind the big picture of how to sustain together our middle-income status through sustainable economic development.

That will be the multi-party democracy dividend for which we all continue to toil in the name of Mother Ghana.

Madam Speaker,

Many Honourable Members of the House have been through a hectic period of campaigning towards Constituency primaries.

Whether you won or lost, you remain MPs and I will treasure your input at all times.

Do not forget there is still a lot of work to be done here in the House.

I wish Members on both sides a fruitful session and may all that we do help in building a Better Ghana.

Let us always bear in mind that as a people, we have much more common ground than we make it seem.

Therefore let us build on the things that unite us.

Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity granted me, and look forward with a lot of optimism to being back here in this august house next year to deliver the State of the Nation Address.

God bless our homeland Ghana and make our nation great and strong.

I thank you for your kind attention.