

GHANA



PERMANENT MISSION OF GHANA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS
19 EAST 47TH STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017
TEL. 212-832-1300 • FAX 212-751-6743

PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**ADDRESS BY
THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA,
NANA ADDO DANKWA AKUFO-ADDO**

**AT THE
74TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**ON THE THEME
“GALVANIZING MULTILATERAL EFFORTS FOR
POVERTY ERADICATION, QUALITY EDUCATION,
CLIMATE ACTION AND INCLUSION”**

**ON
WEDNESDAY, 25TH SEPTEMBER, 2019, NEW YORK**

Mr President, Secretary-General, Your Excellencies,

Ghana presents her compliments to you Mr President, worthy representative of our great neighbour, the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and extends hearty congratulations on your election to preside over this 74th General Assembly. We extend our appreciation to the President of the 73rd Session for her work, and commend the brave theme that has been selected for our consideration during this meeting.

I note that there is a United Nations' accepted definition of poverty, which, like everything undertaken by our institution, tries to find a form of words that is acceptable to all of us.

But, Mr President, it is probably right to say that those of us, who live in countries generally referred to as developing countries, get somewhat bemused by arguments and complicated definitions of poverty. For us, poverty is a daily reality that we live with and feel, for far too many of our people are burdened with it, and it robs us of the dignity that should be the inherent right of every human being. We know that our performance as governments will be judged by how successful we are in reducing and eventually eradicating poverty in our countries.

The responsibility is ours as individual sovereign countries not only to aim at reducing poverty, but, actually, to create prosperity for all our citizens. We, in Ghana, certainly are engaged in fighting to eradicate poverty from our country.

If the world wants to marshal all its undoubted energies to support this fight, there cannot be a better start than an acknowledgement and a consensus among the nations of the world that, indeed, poverty anywhere degrades us all, whether in the developed or developing world.

Luckily for us, technological advances are short circuiting the path that leads us out of poverty, and it is no longer the long and tortuous road it used to be.

A mere twenty years ago, mobile phones were a rarity that some feared would become a developed world status symbol, and another sign of the technology gap between the rich and the poor. Today, the poorest person in the most inaccessible place in the poorest country has a mobile phone, often a smartphone.

In many ways, it has transformed our lives. In the year two thousand (2000), in Ghana, there were ninety-thousand (90,000) mobile phone subscribers, today there are more than forty-one million subscriptions. This has led to a remarkable difference in communications within our country and with the outside world. A sizeable and growing number of the population has been, and is being brought into the formal banking sector by the mobile phone.

Mr President, the application of technology can be the tool to set us on the road to prosperity. The modernisation of agriculture through the application of technology could well turn out to be the fastest way to make the turnaround that we seek.

The young people of the world, especially the youth of Ghana and Africa, have demonstrated their ingenuity and innovative prowess, and we need to enlist them fully in the fight. It will be an easier battle, of course, if trade practices were seen to be more equitable and fairer. The question always remains whether the rich nations are prepared for an equitable and fair-trading order. It appears that they are not, and we have, thus, to continue to fight for a fairer world economic order.

It should not be lost on anyone that the minerals, on which the world depends to move industry and manufacturing, are mostly available in Africa, and yet, we, who own these fundamental resources by birth right, have remained poor, whilst our minerals have brought vast wealth to nations and peoples outside our continent.

It is worth pointing out also that not only do we not get a fair share of the wealth once extracted, our lands, our environment, our oceans, are often left devastated by the process, and the competition to gain control over these minerals has also often led to insecurity in our countries.

I do not seek to blame outsiders for our problems, but, since we are being urged to find multilateral solutions, I believe it is worth pointing out that unfairness in the economic order undermines the fight against poverty. Indeed, the flight of capital is continuing the foreign exploitation of Africa, represented by colonialism and imperialism. The report of the panel chaired by the highly respected former South African President, Thabo Mbeki, on the illicit flow of funds from Africa, has raised the lid on what many had always suspected, but did not have the figures to support. According to that report, Africa is losing, annually, more than \$50 billion through illicit financial outflows. Collaboration, is certainly, needed amongst the nations of the world to stop this rape of Africa.

The African Continental Free Trade Area, which recently came into effect, and whose Secretariat Ghana has the honour of hosting, is a major, collective effort by Africa to get to grips with mastery of her own development. It will be the world's largest free trade area since the formation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and will provide the vehicle for us to trade better more among ourselves; offer an opportunity to exploit our abundant wealth and resources for the benefit of our peoples; and give us protection in how to deal with other trading blocks.

Mr President, the fight to eradicate poverty is intrinsically linked to quality education, the second part of the problems identified for special attention during this General Assembly meeting.

Wherever quality education is available, there is usually prosperity. Throughout the ages, education has been the most equitable source of providing opportunities and has provided the fastest and most reliable route out of poverty.

We, in Ghana, acknowledge that we need an educated and skilled population to be able to compete effectively in the world economy. We are, therefore, taking the courageous step of spending on education a substantial part of our national revenue, indeed a third of our nation's budget.

Mr President, in this area also, we can and should employ technology to accelerate the provision of quality education to as many people as possible.

Very soon, we might not have to enter classrooms nor even go to the hallowed grounds of the famous universities to gain access to the knowledge that used to be exclusively available in those institutions.

It is possible now for our young people to listen to lectures and watch experiments by famous scientists and scholars on their smartphones and laptops, without setting eyes on, or physically ever entering an Ivy League university.

But, to be able to benefit from these opportunities made possible by technology, we need to raise our infrastructure to a basic, minimum level. We need to provide reliable electricity and internet services to the people in our towns and villages, and, then, they can truly join in the benefits of the technology that bring quality education to all. We can then have a realistic expectation of a prosperous future.

Mr President, the General Assembly of the United Nations is usually held at the time of year when the extremes of nature are on display around the world. Maybe we are being urged to take notice, and hopefully take practical and proactive steps to curb the human activities that are endangering our planet.

Our world is enriched by the diversity of cultures and religions and beliefs – they add spice to our lives. But there are scientific and mathematical truths that do not change with space or time, and these truths we all do well to uphold.

Now that the scientists have spoken on the realities of climate change, I believe it is time to direct our energies to what we can and should do to counteract the danger, and stop unnecessary arguments.

Nature has been brutal this year in demonstrating to us that our climate is changing, and we are probably pushing our world to destruction. The devastation wreaked by Cyclone Idai, Hurricane Dorian, the extreme summer temperatures across Europe, surely provide the evidence, if some were still needed, that it is time to take action to bring back our world from the precipice.

This year is the 50th anniversary of the historic landing on the moon, which was a seminal event that celebrated scientific achievement and humanity's triumph. The image that has stayed with me, since I was 25 years old, and which still brings me true awe and wonder, is that picture of the earth, taken from the vantage point the astronauts had, which showed clearly the truth of the one world that we inhabit.

We could try to delineate our borders more clearly, we could make clearer distinctions on the basis of colour, race, language and creed; that picture tells us the natural path is to be inclusive.

This, in no way, is meant to paper over the many difficulties we have in our part of the world that we have to work to overcome, or to suggest that, because some parts of the world are developed and prosperous, we can pretend all is well with us as well.

In my part of the world, we do not argue over what constitutes poverty. We know it, we live with it, feel it and it is a daily reality.

As the old saying goes, birds sing not because they have answers but because they have songs.

There might not be any one answer to the theme of this 74th General Assembly, but the hope is that the discussions point us to the possibility of a new world, in which collaboration between the nations and peoples is on such a scale that we can dream of and achieve a sustainably prosperous world.

I thank you for your attention.