

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC,
NANA ADDO DANKWA AKUFO-ADDO,
AT THE 63RD INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION PARADE, AT
THE BABA YARA SPORTS STADIUM, KUMASI, ON FRIDAY, 6TH
MARCH, 2020.

It was sixty-three years ago, today, that our forefathers' dream of independence for our nation became a reality. Ghana became an independent nation, and gained her freedom from the colonial power, Britain.

The celebrated calypso singer of the time, Lord Kitchener, put it into what became a famous hit.

**This day will never be forgotten,
the 6th of March, 1957,
when the Gold Coast successfully
got their independence officially.
Ghana, Ghana is the name,
Ghana, we wish to proclaim.
We will be jolly, merry and gay,
The 6th of March Independence Day.**

Today, as we mark this sacred day on our calendar, it is worth noting that the great majority of our population were born after 6th March, 1957. They identify that day only through old black and white newsreels, and it might be difficult for them to imagine the sheer euphoria and magic of that day.

Last year, for the first time, we took the official celebrations out of the national capital city of Accra to Tamale, capital of the Northern Region, and a huge success it was.

This year, we are gathered here in Kumasi, capital of the Ashanti Region, as the focal point of the official celebrations. The happiness of the day is not meant to be limited to the place of the official celebrations; this is a day that should be celebrated by all around the country, and by all Ghanaians and friends of Ghana wherever they are.

On 6th March, 1957, indeed, the celebrations were not limited to the new country, Ghana, or to Ghanaians alone, the rest of the world joined to celebrate with us.

We were the trailblazers for the independence movement on the continent, we held out hope for restored dignity to the black race around the world.

African-Americans and the peoples of the Caribbean, especially, walked tall, and cheered us on. It was not accidental that the Trinidadian, Lord Kitchener, composed the defining song of the event. We are carrying on that relationship, born sixty-three (63) years ago, by having, as our esteemed guest of honour at these celebrations, the Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the Honourable Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, MP, one of the great figures of modern Caribbean politics, who has given us such a superb speech of commendation and encouragement.

Prime Minister and Mrs Sharon Rowley, and the members of the Trinidadian delegation, we wish you a warm Ghanaian welcome, a big akwaaba, and we know that you know you are at home and among your own. It is a matter of great joy to us that, last year, we had such enthusiastic support for the 'Year of Return' from the Caribbean and the Americas. The Prime Minister of Barbados, the admirable Honourable Mia Mottley QC, MP, was also with us last year, and was witness to the historic events in Yendi of the performance of the age-old Damba festival by a new Yaa-Na, to mark the end of decades of hostility in one of the ancient kingdoms of our land.

Prime Minister, we are here, in Kumasi, in the presence of the Asantehene, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II. There is one thing that any visitor here can be certain of – it is the cultural capital of our country. Kumasi welcomes people from all parts, and makes them feel like they belong. It was also the capital of one of the greatest kingdoms of pre-colonial Africa, Asante, whose lustre compared to that of the Kingdoms of Benin, Oyo, Mali, Songhai, Kongo, Mutapa and Zulu. So, we are, indeed, in historic premises.

Fellow Ghanaians, we remember today, as we should, those whose vision inspired the independence movement. We pay homage today, as we should, to those who dared to dream of this kaleidoscope nation, made up of different peoples; and we give praise, as we should, to those who made huge sacrifices to make possible March 6, 1957.

We refer to the members of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society, the members of the United Gold Coast Convention, the first political party in our country, the members of the Convention People's Party, our second political party, and all those who took the fight to the colonialists. We recall with pride, and salute the memories of Yaa Asantewaa, Jacob Sey, John Mensah Sarbah, Joseph Caseley Hayford, George Moore, R.S Wood, Thomas Hutton-Mills, Kobina Sekyi, James Kwegyir Aggrey, Nii Kwabena Bonnie III, Ephraim Amu, George Alfred Grant, Joseph Boakye Danquah, Francis Awoonor-Williams, R.S Blay, J.W de Graft Johnson, Emmanuel Obetsebi-Lamptey, Edward Akufo-Addo, William Ofori-Atta, Ebenezer Ako Adjei, Kwame Nkrumah, Cobbina Kessie, V.B Annan, Jimmy Quist-Therson, Komla Agbeli Gbedemah, Kojo Botsio, Kofi Baako, Krobo Edusei, Nancy Tsiboe, Mumuni Bawumia, S.D. Dombo, Kofi Abrefa Busia, Joe Appiah, Victor Owusu, R.R. Amponsah, Baffuor Osei Akoto, Modesto Apaloo, S.G Antor, Akua Shorshorshor, Dedei Ashikinshan and many others.

Throughout the years, since we gained our independence, we have had difficulties, and stumbled in the search to reach our potential, but Ghana has never lost her position as the inspirational leading light on the African continent.

At sixty-three (63), we know that we have squandered many opportunities that, properly utilised, would have brought us to the economic breakthrough to which we aspire. We lament, and rightly so, the infrastructure deficits that plague all sectors of our lives, and the considerable number of our people who still live in poverty. But, if truth be told, we have solid reason to rejoice and be grateful to the Almighty, for this is a blessed nation.

It is a good thing that we are usually so very hard on ourselves, and the critical voices drown out everything else. For as long as we have not achieved our economic goals, we cannot, and we should not, relax and be complacent. However, we should learn to count our many blessings, and not talk ourselves down unnecessarily.

It surely must count for something that our nation has been spared the ravages of civil war that have racked our neighbours and other nations on the continent. It must count for something that we have been spared the epidemics that have brought havoc to other nations in our neighbourhood.

It certainly must count for something that we have managed to keep out terrorist activities from our country, and we are able to take for granted the peace that defines Ghana.

Our politics might not always be the most edifying, but they are rigorous and loud, and all citizens cherish the right to freedom of expression. We are into the 28th year of this Fourth Republic, the longest, uninterrupted period of stable, constitutional governance in our history. We have had regular, hard fought elections and changes of administrations, and managed to avoid any third-term manoeuvres. That is something for which we should applaud ourselves.

We should never forget that development through the democratic process, the path we have chosen in this Fourth Republic, is not exactly the easiest governance option. Some of the countries that have made miraculous economic transformations did so, more often than not, through authoritarian regimes. In earlier times, several of the developed economies built their successes on the back of slavery and work practices that would not be tolerated in any democracy today.

Some may admire the results of razing down whole villages and new structures appearing in weeks, but we have to ask ourselves how much regimentation needed for such things would be tolerated by the Ghanaian psyche. Or dare I ask, where we would fit in our weekend funerals to be able to put in seven-day weeks?

We should be proud of the liberal democratic path we are treading, and unite to make it work. We could, and should be able to bring our people out of poverty and into prosperity faster. But, let us acknowledge that good things are happening in our country, and we are making progress.

Nineteen percent (19%) of our people do not have access to potable water, but eighty-one percent (81%) of people in Ghana, presently, have access to safe water. We are making progress. The supply of electricity has reached eighty-five percent (85%) of the country. We are making progress.

No child has died from measles in the past seventeen (17) years in Ghana. Fellow Ghanaians, in our country, measles used to be the leading killer of children aged under five (5). We are making progress.

No longer do mothers have to sell off their most treasured fabrics and jewellery, and fathers go to money lenders, to be able to see their children through senior high school. Today, senior high school education is free for every child. We are making progress.

There are more children in secondary school now, especially young girls, than we have ever had. We are changing the curricula and focus in education to meet the needs of the modern economy, and prepare our young people to compete on the global scale. We are making progress.

More and more people are embracing the need to preserve the beauty of our environment and the purity of our waters and oceans. We are making progress.

Some twenty-five (25) years ago, only a few wealthy people carried mobile phones; it was a status symbol and it gave them access to opportunities that few could dream of. In the year 2000, there were ninety-thousand (90,000) mobile phone subscribers, today there are forty-one million subscriptions. Today, mobile subscriber penetration is greater than the population. We are making progress.

The digital revolution is changing the face of our society and our country, and, soon, we will take a deserved place as a modern economy. We are making progress.

The creative arts are thriving, and there are exciting things to interest a wide range of people. The fashion scene is vibrant, and unearths new talent every day. Take a look around this stadium today, and feast your eyes on the riot of colours and the wide variety of styles that our kente weavers can conjure. Every day, this ancient, royal, eye-catching, beautiful fabric is reinvented to win over new generations. The kente, of course, has crossed over our borders, and is no longer exclusively Ghanaian, but the symbol of identity for peoples of African descent everywhere.

Our designers, tailors and dressmakers keep Ghanaian-made clothes in the top range of attractive clothes. Art galleries are alive with established and new painters and sculptors, and there are signs of their innovative works all around us. We have always been known for musical talent, and this generation is keeping up the tradition.

Fellow Ghanaians, there is renewed confidence in our foods, and a strong belief in the things that define us as Ghanaians. We have always been known for arguments and debates, and, in an election year, it is predictable that the decibel level would go up. That is what we are currently experiencing, but, as the saying goes, even as the arguments get louder, we keep a keen look out for each other's eyes.

There is an Akan proverb that says: "Omanni ko, yeke a, yekeka nwi so; yenntutu aseε." When we fight as members of a community or family, we bite off hair; we do not uproot it." In other words, in our gravest moments of fury, we strive to avoid bloodshed.

The consensus is holding for all of us to work towards the prosperous and happy Ghana we want. We all recognise that the responsibility we carry as the first sub-Saharan country to gain independence is not simply to build a successful country. We owe it to the rest of the continent and the black race to demonstrate that, indeed, we can build and run a successful, prosperous and happy country. This is a task we do not shirk, and which all Ghanaians accept.

Our pan-African vocation remains on course, as we continue to be in the frontline of the effort to forge a united Africa, and our peers have honoured and conferred on us the duty to host the Secretariat of the Continental Free Trade Area. We are making progress.

During the course of the Year of Return, which we marked last year, we were glad to welcome hundreds of thousands of visitors from the African Diaspora, and we are hoping that the renewed relationship between Ghanaians and our kith and kin from the Caribbean and the Americas will grow from strength to strength. The initiative of 'Beyond the Return' is a vision of a black world, on both sides of the Atlantic, which leverages hard work, enterprise, creativity and innovation to engage in mutually beneficial trade and investment co-operation that will guarantee the prosperity and dignity of black people the world over.

Fellow Ghanaians, we have been treated to a marvellous performance by schoolchildren and men and women from the military and the services. It took hours and weeks of practice to be able to put up such a flawless display, and I wish to congratulate them all. The lessons will not be lost on us.

To you, the men and women of the military and the services, who put your lives on the line to keep us and the country safe, I say Ghana is deeply grateful. To you, the children who have been part of the captivating ceremony, I say very well done, and prepare yourselves to carry the torch into a greater and brighter future.

Before I conclude, I must say something about the subject that currently concerns the whole world, and that is the novel Coronavirus outbreak. It is a medical crisis that is bringing in its wake death and economic difficulties, and is spreading fear and panic around the world.

Government has put in place a high-powered team to handle the crisis, which is monitoring developments on a daily basis. Strict checks at our entry points are being conducted, with rigorous screening procedures. Isolation centres have been designated for potential cases, and a quarantine centre has been set up. In the interim, non-essential travel into Ghana is not being allowed from high risk countries, namely, China, Iran, Italy, Japan and South Korea. We are counting on the experts to do their part to protect us, but we all have a responsibility to take measures to protect ourselves and each other. The recommendations are for each one of us to practice basic, personal hygiene, and be extra careful with sanitation. For the time being, as the Ministry of Health has advised, we have to revisit our custom of shaking hands and avoid doing so.

We should pray, of course, that the Almighty continues to protect us, but it is also the time to pay attention to the health experts, and reject all fraudulent claims for cures that will only threaten public health and safety. Please listen to, and take seriously, the public education messages being put out by the authorities, and I urge the churches, mosques, traditional authorities, civil society organisations and opinion leaders all to join in helping keep Ghana safe. Government, on its part, is determined to do whatever is necessary, including providing additional resources, to protect the population.

I wish all Ghanaians and friends of Ghana across the globe a joyous 63rd Independence Anniversary, and, once again, Prime Minister Rowley, thank you, your wife and your delegation for coming from Trinidad to join us to share our special day.

May God bless us all, and our homeland Ghana, and make her great and strong.

I thank you for your attention.