

Leadership, vision and courage

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President Kufuor's leadership has vindicated the Commonwealth principle: that accelerated national development can go hand in hand with good governance and democracy

I offer my warm congratulations to HE President John Agyekum Kufuor of the Republic of Ghana, on being conferred the 2008 Chatham House Prize for his significant contribution to the improvement of international relations.

Ghana is a valuable member of the Commonwealth, and under President Kufuor's leadership, it has played a strong role in advancing the values and principles of the association. If at independence on 6th March 1957 Ghana was a beacon for African independence and unity; now it has become a beacon for African stability and progress.

In many ways, Ghana and the Commonwealth are inter-twined. They have grown together over the years, and come a long way.

Ghana's belief and vision in independence for all African people mirrors the Commonwealth's role, as one of the most ardent champions of the process of decolonisation, which Ghana set in train on the African continent. Great Ghanaian advocates of independence like President Nkrumah and Alex Quaison-Sackey, the first African head of the UN General Assembly, found strong allies in their Commonwealth counterparts from five continents.

President Nkrumah was one of the pioneers of non-alignment, in a world polarised by super-power rivalry. Most significantly for the Commonwealth, in 1965 it was Ghana that spearheaded the movement to establish an impartial and neutral Commonwealth Secretariat.

In 2007, when President Kufuor was elevated to the role of President of the African Union, the Commonwealth found in him an outstanding leader who could work alongside the African Union and the EU in programmes to strengthen governance all across the continent.

Ghana's democratic record – despite the incidence of coups – is strong. The significance of 1992, when Ghana became one of the first African countries to make the transition from one-party authoritarianism to a multi-party state, has never been lost. Ten other Commonwealth African countries have followed suit over the last 15 years.

In 2000, Ghana became one of the first African countries in which an opposing party came to power through the ballot box, a position that was secured in peaceful elections in 2004.

The Commonwealth and Ghana under President

Kufuor continue to work together, not just in consolidating democracy and development at home, but in advancing it and sharing it with others.

There have been many eminent Ghanaians who have helped further the Commonwealth's work. Among them are Dr Kwadwo Afari-Gyan, head of the Ghanaian Electoral Commission, who has helped to prepare and observe elections in Guyana, Malawi and Kenya. Justice Emile Short, head of the Ghanaian Human Rights Commission, has helped to establish similar bodies across West Africa. Professor E.V.O. Dankwah assisted in preparing a Constitution for Swaziland; while Professor V.C.R.A.C. Crabbe, an inspiration at over 80, heads the Commonwealth programme on drafting and introducing new national legislation in Africa.

Thus Ghana is exporting the strength of its democratic institutions, while its exceptional teachers are to be found all over Africa, and its peacekeepers have been the mainstay of UN forces from Lebanon to the DRC, from Sierra Leone to Somalia. And of course, Ghana and the Commonwealth can take pride in having provided the United Nations its first Secretary-General from a Commonwealth country in Kofi Annan.

Again, it is no coincidence that Ghana was the first country to offer itself up for the African Peer Review Mechanism within NEPAD. The APRM report showed that democracy is on course in Ghana, and offered suggestions as to how to make a good situation even better. Ghana and the Commonwealth can be proud that of the 29 African countries which are part of the APRM, 14 are from the Commonwealth.

Ghana's impressive development within the last eight years under President Kufuor's leadership has vindicated the Commonwealth principle that accelerated national development can go hand in hand with good governance and democracy. The forthcoming Presidential and Parliamentary elections, due in December 2008, are an opportunity to consolidate further the trend of multi-party democracy, and to serve as an example to other Commonwealth countries.

On behalf of the Commonwealth, I applaud President Kufuor for his outstanding leadership, vision, courage, personal modesty and spirit of dedication, which has made Ghana a model of democracy and stability for Africa and for the Commonwealth. **F**