

Achievements of which to be proud

By PROF DR HORST KÖHLER

FEDERAL PRESIDENT OF GERMANY



For him it is self-evident that power in a democracy is bestowed for a limited period only

I would like to pay a special tribute to President John Kufuor of Ghana on the occasion of his winning the Chatham House Award 2008.

John Kufuor is a statesman who has rendered great services not only to democracy in Ghana but also to peace, stability and regional integration throughout Africa. A political leader who is admired and respected the world over – which is why he has also been invited to G8 Summits. John Kufuor belongs to a new generation of African leaders who, confident of their continent's future, are now exploring African paths to democracy and the rule of law and who at the same time are ardent advocates for international cooperation.

For all this, John Kufuor, deserves honour and respect. He has been the democratically elected President of Ghana since the year 2000. With him at the helm, democracy in his country has taken firm root. Approval ratings for democracy depend also on whether people can see their lives really getting better. He has made boosting economic growth through investment and good governance a top priority. This is very much in keeping with the tradition of his forefathers, who were great believers in a policy of balance. Last year in Ghana I was able to see for myself – on my visit to the Kingdom of the Ashanti, for example – how his nation is working to reconcile tradition and modernity. As the King himself commented at the Africa Forum in Eberbach in November 2007, “traditional systems of governance and the modern state must not be seen as mutually exclusive entities, but complementary to each other.”

Under John Kufuor's leadership, Ghana signed up to

the HIPC initiative for heavily indebted poor countries. This was a bold step, but one which has definitely paid off. The debt relief his country received has given it new leeway to invest in roads, schools and hospitals. In some areas school enrolment has doubled. For years the economy has been growing at around 5 per cent. Ghana now stands a good chance of halving the number of people living in poverty by 2015. These are achievements any Head of State would be proud of.

On repeated occasions he has rightly reminded the industrialised nations of their responsibility to aid and support Africa's own efforts. For if one's neighbour's house is on fire, as he said, everyone will dash to fetch water to quench the flames. Otherwise one's own house will catch fire, too. And that's why he has toiled so hard to resolve by peaceful means the conflicts besetting his region, in Cote d'Ivoire, in Togo and in Liberia. As President of the African Union he has worked hard with others to mediate in Kenya – and we all hope the arrangements now agreed will prove viable.

Another thing John Kufuor has been heavily involved with is the African Peer Review Mechanism. This is all about Africans learning from fellow Africans. Ghana was one of the first countries to undergo critical scrutiny, for it recognised the great benefits such an exercise can bring. As I see it NEPAD – the New Partnership for Africa's Development – is also Africa's offer to the international community, an offer of cooperation on a basis of partnership. I very much hope that industrialised and newly industrialised countries will appreciate this offer and take it up.

John Kufuor's, second presidential term finishes at the end of this year. Even before he was re-elected in 2004, he made clear that as a democrat and in line with the constitution, a second term was all he wished and hoped for. For him it is self-evident that power in a democracy is bestowed for a limited period only.

The new Africa is above all Africa's youth and that was something that was driven home to us both very clearly at the Africa Forum in Accra in early 2007. Our guests on this occasion were 50 young leaders from Germany and Africa. Before arriving in Accra, they had discussed among themselves – via the Internet and at a workshop at the Wittenberg Centre for Global Ethics – four key issues with implications for cooperation between Africa and Europe: environmental protection, violence and armed conflict, education for all and



German President Prof Dr Horst Köhler and John Kufuor (seated) during the Germany-Africa Summit in Accra, 13 January 2007

political participation. At the Forum in Accra these young leaders then presented the outcome of their discussions to other participants, including several heads of state. I was impressed by their seriousness of purpose and how well informed they were. In the shape of the so-called Accra Declaration we forwarded the young leaders' message to other heads of state in Africa and Europe. For me this document is vivid proof of what a tremendous role young people in Germany and Africa can play in building a bright future.


The network created by these young leaders in Accra is still going strong. Their discussions continue of course, but they have also established a much-used job and internship portal. And I'm delighted, too, that prior too the European and African Union Summit in Lisbon, a meeting was organised to bring young people from both continents together as well.

At one of the workshops in Accra when a young leader from Africa complained that no one would listen to what the young generation had to say John Kufuor asked whether he was a member of any political party or other organisation. He replied that he wasn't. Then came that thrilling moment when he launched his

powerful appeal for political participation and urged the importance of fighting for one's agenda by every means in democracy's book. What a pity we did not record him! His message would have been absolutely spot on for our young people in Germany, too.

There's another thing we both have in common: our vision of one world that is home to us all. Like John Kufuor, I firmly believe the only way we can solve the problems of this highly complex and interconnected world of the twenty-first century is to solve them together. That means we must listen to and learn from one another. The age of unilateralism, the pursuit of self-interest at others' expense is over. As John Kufuor said at the Africa Forum, what we need now is "a spirit which emphasises our interdependence and our common humanity within the global society rather than our differences."

This was the inspiration also for the Partnership with Africa initiative I launched together with the ZEIT Foundation.

I give tribute to John Kufuor, and look forward, as his legacy, to a bright future for Ghana and to the partnership between our two countries and nations. 

I give tribute to John Kufuor, and look forward, as his legacy, to a bright future for Ghana

FIRST

**PUBLISHING
EVENT MANAGEMENT
AWARD SCHEMES**

To order back issues or for any information please contact:
FIRST, 56 Haymarket, London SW1Y 4RN, UK

Tel: +44 20 7389 9650

Fax: +44 20 7389 9644

Email: publisher@firstmagazine.com

www.firstmagazine.com

