

A clear vision for Africa

By **HE JOHN AGYEKUM KUFUOR**

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JOHN AGYEKUM KUFUOR has been president of Ghana since January 2001, succeeding Jerry Rawlings. A founding member of the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP), he has had considerable experience of public service, spanning over thirty years, including a term as deputy minister of foreign affairs. He completed his third level education in the UK, attending Lincoln's Inn and the University of Oxford. In January this year, President Kufuor was elected as the Chairperson of the African Union for the 2007-08 AU session.

One of the foremost champions of African Unity was Ghana's first President, Dr Kwame Nkrumah who, taking inspiration from such renowned champions of the Pan African movement as Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois and George Padmore, believed that African political liberation and unity were necessary first steps to achieving economic development and in freeing Africa from poverty and humiliation. It is this conviction that explains why Africa occupies pride of place in Ghana's foreign policy.

50 years ago, Africa had a vision. It was a clear vision of independence in an environment of peace and prosperity. Pooling together and using the OAU as a medium, the continent succeeded in liberating itself fully from colonialism and apartheid.

As Africa approached 50 years of post colonialism it became obvious that liberation per se did not automatically mean the achievement of prosperity, peace and security for the people of the continent. In response to this challenge, the current crop of leaders has re-committed the continent to the pursuit of economic emancipation and integration of Africa.

This is evidenced by the transformation, since June 2002, of the erstwhile OAU into the African Union (AU), which is being empowered with laws and robust institutions to enable it to drive the continent's agenda

in overcoming the challenge. Another major step in this direction was the establishment of the Pan African Parliament in March, 2004. It is expected that ultimately, this continental parliament will provide a common platform for the people of Africa and their grassroots organisation, where they will discuss problems and challenges besetting Africa, and take decisions that will address them for the benefit of all her people.

Our continent, has been plagued in almost all its different regions by conflicts, wars, diseases, illiteracy and poverty, at one spot or the other. Happily, but for a few turbulent spots, the continent is now managing to rid itself of some of these drawbacks. In Burundi, there has been peaceful and democratic conclusion of the transitional process. Angola, Liberia, Mozambique and Sierra-Leone are no longer at war. For the first time in 40 years, democratic elections have been held in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The problems in the Darfur region of Sudan and Somalia persist in spite of the initiatives that the African Union has been making within its limited resources to help restore peace and normality. This unfortunate situation has exposed the limitations of the Unions' current condition.

As much as we all value the principle of sovereignty and integrity, Africa today should play the vanguard



President Kufuor and African leaders meet G8 leaders at the 8th meeting of the African Partnership Forum

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role in respecting and upholding human rights within the continent generally, and more so within the component states of the Union. The Constitutive Act of the Union, as well as the tenets of NEPAD, recognise these principles as necessary conditions for the up-lifting of the continent's image. We have to regret the situation within some sister nations where domestic policies are, or seem to be, at variance with these principles.

Economic prosperity has not always followed automatically in the wake of independence. Today, 35 of the 50 poorest countries in the world can be found in Africa. Further, as I have already intimated, poverty, illiteracy, hunger and disease are rife in parts of the continent. For many Africans, the independence vision of peace and prosperity still remains an illusion.

The importance of good governance for sustainable development cannot be over-emphasised. Hence, the Union's establishment of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as its flagship programme for implementing political and economic reforms. NEPAD in turn has fashioned the African Peer Review Mechanism to be subscribed voluntarily by member states.

This initiative is to give guidance and encouragement to member states to move towards the realisation of the objectives of NEPAD within their respective policies. Ghana, as a participant state, has great faith in the African Peer Review Mechanism for breaking the mould of the disorder and conflict that over the years has been the bane of much of Africa. We were indeed the first to submit to review. We are naturally proud of the accolades earned. We are also taking steps to remedy our shortcomings, such as have come to our attention through the review.

With the adoption of NEPAD, and as peace increasingly spreads within the continent, many governments are now enabled to focus on economic development. However, our economic performance is continually affected by institutional arrangements and policies which have a deleterious impact on African economies. Our economies are confronted with high tariffs, inequity in pricing, lack of access to markets and more seriously by the threat of global warming.

Africa would benefit rapidly from improved market access and an end to subsidised agriculture in the developed world. For millions of people on the continent, the Doha Development Agenda, which provides an unprecedented opportunity to establish rules based on an equitable international trading system, represents the hope of improving their living standards and freeing them from absolute poverty. So far, we do not feel that the World Trade Organisation represents Africa's best interest.

Despite these frustrations, today, most African

economies are better run; inflation is at a historic low in many countries, averaging 8 per cent per annum; while 27 African countries are projected to grow more than 5 per cent in terms of GDP this year. The past 5 years have also witnessed a more than 200 per cent increase in direct investment inflows. Exports are rising and significant advances are being recorded in debt relief. To sustain these developments, there must be continued peace as well as improvements in the law and order situation all over the continent.

Because of the positive trends in Africa, the G8 countries and many others are courting interactions with Africa. It has been my privilege to attend three of the conferences hosted by the G8 including the one held two years ago at Gleneagles.

I am honoured as Chairman, and Ghana is proud, to host the 9th session of the African Union Assembly and its Summit of African leaders in Accra. The composition of the commission of the Union will be discussed at the Summit. Formal election of members of the Commission will be concluded in Accra where a replacement will be found in Professor Alhar Konare who has declared his intention not to seek re-election.

Let me conclude by observing that despite the many challenges confronting us we can accomplish a great deal through our concerted efforts. With greater determination we will be able to resolve many of the seemingly intractable problems that stand in the way of our growth and prosperity. ■

