



**ELECTORAL COMMISSION
GHANA**

**KEYNOTE SPEECH DELIVERED BY MRS. CHARLOTTE OSEI, CHAIRPERSON
OF THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION GHANA, AT THE 21ST GHANA
JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATION AWARDS NIGHT AT THE BANQUET HALL
OF THE STATE HOUSE ON AUGUST 27, 2016**

**Topic: "Media for Undisputed and Peaceful 2016 Election: the
Support of Civil Society"**

**Honourable Minister of Communications, Dr. Edward Omane
Boamah**

**Special Guest Honour, Osagyefo Oseadeyo Agyemang Badu II, the
Paramount Chief of the Dormaa Traditional Area**

The Chairman, National Media Commission,

President and National Executives of the GJA

Nananom, Nii Mei, Naa Mei

**Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and Members of the Diplomatic
Community**

**Distinguished Invited Guests and Ladies and Gentlemen of the
Media,**



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It is truly an honour to be here with you this evening to mark this phenomenal milestone in the history of your Association. I feel even more privileged and humbled to be the one sharing my thoughts with you tonight on how we can work together as strategic partners, to deliver peaceful and undisputed elections on December 7 to the people of Ghana. I wish to express my sincere thanks to you Mr. President of the GJA and your hardworking executives for considering me worthy of this honour and privilege.

Osagyefo our Chairman,

1. Since its maiden edition in 1985 under the Presidency of the late Edwin Tengey with support from his able executives, including the late Henry Addison, his Vice President; Ambassador Kabral Blay-Amihere, then General Secretary; the GJA awards ceremony has become one of the most anticipated events each year in our national calendar. It is organized to celebrate and honour outstanding works of journalism by members of the Association.
2. But getting there requires a certain level of unadulterated commitment to excellence and the cardinal principles on which your Association and profession heavily depends. These are high professional standards of integrity and accountability. Article Three of the GJA Constitution provides among other



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things that the Association should “promote professionalism and high journalistic standards and reward and honour outstanding members periodically”. It is clear that there is no shortcut to the achievement of this level of excellence. It is the product of meticulousness, and an unalloyed desire for accuracy, truth, balance, relevance, background, social impact, ethical standards and language presentation in your reporting. It is this kind of excellence that has produced media personalities such as our beloved and charismatic Komla Dumor of blessed memory.

3. And many other distinguished Ghanaian journalists such as the venerable Kweku Sakyi-Addo, formerly of the BBC, Ms. Elizabeth Ohene, formerly of the BBC, Ambassador Kabral Blay-Amihere, former Chairman of the National Media Commission, Mr. Kwaku Baako Jnr, Anas Aremeyaw Anas, Mabel Aku Banaseh, Manasseh Azure Awuni and Seth Kwame Boateng, among others. Together, their collective contributions to the betterment of our society through journalism are apparent. At this point, I would like to express my hearty congratulations to all the award winners tonight for your exemplary work. It is my prayer that your quest for professional excellence would not end tonight. It should rather be the beginning because you will be subjected to a higher degree of scrutiny than previously. So



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your award should spur you on to use your pens, keyboards and voices to change our society for the better.

4. Tonight, I speak not as an expert on the media. I speak as a mere consumer of media content. I speak as someone who works closely with the media. I speak as someone who believes the media is one of the most important institutions in ensuring free, fair and credible elections. And I speak as someone who is convinced that a responsible media and engaged civil society are the fundamental pillars for enhancing good governance, fighting corruption and injustice and making this nation one we can all be proud of.
5. There is no doubt that the Journalism Association has through various measures, demonstrated tremendous commitment to improving quality and promoting media accountability in this country. Indeed it is the reason why we have gathered here tonight to celebrate and honour the best in journalism practice.
6. Since our nation decided to use the ballot box instead of the gun to choose our leaders, the media has been one institution that has kept watch over all the other players in the electoral process. Your role in the electoral process has moved from being passive conveyers of certified results to that of an active force that polices every aspect of our electoral process.



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7. According to Thomas Jefferson, the Founding Father of America and its Third President, “Where the press is free and every man is able to read, all is safe”. The media is vital: they protect the interests of the public, they are the voices of those who have no one to speak for them, they are the primary witnesses of our society's development and history. To paraphrase The Rt. Hon Lord Justice Leveson of the UK, The media, operating properly and in the public interest, is one of the true safeguards of society. Resulting from this great responsibility of being the pillar upon which our democracy revolves, we have moved a long way from our previous characterization as a country known for repression of the media.

8. The freedoms given to the media in Ghana, are to enable the media function freely, to protect not the interest of politicians, not the interests of the powerful nor those who pay the most, but the interest of the public. And in order to protect the interest of the public, the media must also act responsibly: respect the truth; act within the law; respect the rights and liberties of the individuals in society; respect the values of the society in which they operate.



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9. When the media chooses to exercise its rights without the accompanying responsibilities, we lose the value inherent in our democracy. We exchange tyranny of the dictators we fought so hard to be liberated from, for tyranny of the media. “The failure of monitoring institutions to perform according to democratic norms and in the true interest of society [erodes] their credibility and therefore, damages their ability to serve as legitimate watchdogs over state activity” (Tettey, WJ; 2006).

10. Let us be clear: the media in Ghana have made great and fantastic contributions to the development of our society and impacted the world around us. An examination of the work of the previous winners of the GJA awards is testimony to the positive and far-reaching contributions of the media to the democratic state we enjoy today. We owe the protection of our individual freedoms and liberty, the entrenchment of rule of law in our society, the development of multi-party democracy, the strengthening of the hands of the weak and vulnerable in our society and the overall growth and development of our society; largely to the tireless work of journalists.

11. We applaud the media, for helping us to resist oppressor's rule and defending, the cause of freedom and of right in line with our national anthem as composed by Mr. Michael Kwame



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Gbordzoe. Can we now focus a little bit on “cherishing fearless honesty?”

12. As media practitioners, you do know the role you are supposed to play in this year’s election. Ghana as a country, has had many elections over the almost six decades of our existence as a nation.

- 1960 referendum and presidential election
- 1964 referendum
- 1965 parliamentary election
- 1969 parliamentary election
- 1970 presidential election
- 1978 unigov referendum
- 1979 presidential election and run off,
- 1979 parliamentary elections
- 1992 referendum and presidential election
- 1996 presidential and parliamentary elections
- 2000 presidential and parliamentary elections plus presidential run off
- 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections
- 2008 presidential election and run -off and parliamentary
- 2012 presidential and parliamentary election



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13. That for 2012 ended in a landmark petition at the Supreme Court, though not the first one in our constitutional history. It also made our journalists and most of the electorate constitutional barristers and expert election administrators.

14. So surely, the media now knows how to report on elections in a responsible manner. There have been countless workshops and seminars on responsible reporting and media accountability, especially in relation to elections. Our media has now moved from just reporting election results, to actually setting the election agenda and carrying a large part of the responsibility of ensuring free, fair and transparent elections in our country. The media knows its duty of accountability to civil society and to ensure that the electorate is well informed to take important decisions that affect all of us on Election Day. The media is aware of its key role in ensuring that the electoral management body acts according to law and laid down policies; provides a level playing field for all political actors.

15. The media understands that civil society needs information from the media on actions by those seeking to govern them to enable them make choices on election day; that civil society counts on the media for accurate information on actions by the executive, the legislature and the judiciary; that civil society counts on the media to highlight its concerns,



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the issues that matter to civil society, the issues that are of concern to the voiceless and powerless in our society. For if our electorate are not properly informed, how can they make choices? And if those seeking to govern do not understand what matters to the governed, how can they govern us aright and lead us in the right direction?

16. Nevertheless, it will not hurt to remind you that your role in fighting for democracy in the 1980s is as important as the need to sustain that democracy in 2016. It will not hurt to remind you that your place in history will be defined not by your mere participation in the democratic process, but by your desire and willingness to see to it that right prevails against wrong and that deserving leaders will be selected at all levels of our democracy. It will not hurt to remind you that this election is not about political parties and the individuals seeking office, but is about the future of our country; and your special responsibility in helping to shape that future is non-negotiable. And it certainly will not hurt to remind you that you owe your freedom, and to a large extent, your livelihood, to the general peace and stability of this country. Yes, it will not hurt to remind you that your fortunes are intimately tied to the general wellbeing of this nation. Whatever undermines the peace of this country also has the potential to undermine your industry and the journalism profession. Working to sustain the peace and stability



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of this country, therefore, becomes both your spiritual, moral and national duty.

17. **Nana Chairman**, Our media landscape today is more vibrant than it ever was in any period of the history of this country. Current statistics from the National Communications Authority suggests that as at the first quarter of this year, we have 420 authorised FM stations, 339 in operation; 67 authorised TV stations with 33 on air; coupled with a plethora of newspapers, some only existing online and on whatsapp. Reporters Without Borders currently classifies Ghana as 26th out of 180 countries in their freedom rankings, and the second country in Africa with the freest media.
18. The fundamental reason why we the people have granted such rights and freedoms to the media are to enable our media speak truth to power and articulate the concerns and aspirations of the governed to those governing or seeking to govern. Courtesy a young Ghanaian lady, Ms. Lorraine Ocloo, I have put on the screen, the basic needs of the people of Ghana.
19. A free and independent media exists to serve the people and not the powerful. Our journalists should create news and not necessarily be the news. They should inform us, entertain us,



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educate us, force the political elite to focus on solving our many national problems; help shape the national agenda and improve our deteriorating political culture.

20. We must use the media to protect our most vulnerable: whether from greedy public servants who steal medical equipment meant to serve the needs of our population; or from abuse of power from any form of authority. Discussing trivialities from dawn to dusk on radio about political leaders and allegations without basis on the electoral process, and allowing invectives to be poured on public persons and institutions alike, are not the reasons why we made so many sacrifices to guarantee free speech and an independent press.

21. And so we live in a situation where complaints about media unfairness and excesses are rampant and worrying for a large majority of our citizenry. And here, I refer not only to wrong, inaccurate, defamatory, deliberately misleading articles and headlines about persons and institutions; but also untruths, errors, inaccuracies, unsubstantiated allegations which media organizations permit on their platforms by serial callers and political actors.

22. And I did check. The profession of 'serial callers' only exists in Ghana. I will quote from an article by a compatriot, Favour



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Nunoo, as part of his research work for a Masters Degree in Journalism:

“The study finds that in Ghana, the discovery of radio as a political voice became an incentive for the systematization of ‘serial calling’. With serial callers operating as “hired guns”, their entry into public debate was to announce a scandal or a repetition of a scandal, to take turf in the debate for the political party that has hired them. The study also found that ‘hijacking’ and ‘skewing’ constituted some of the modes, forms and strategies of interaction serial callers adopted to intervene in the dynamics of the debate and frame the agenda for public discussion. It found also that some media decision-makers in Ghana facilitated the entry of serial callers into the debate in order to attract greater participation of audience and to satisfy advertisers; in doing so, they neglected the professional ethical codes and standards. The study concludes by arguing that, the normative ideals of the public sphere in rational discussion do not apply on Ghanaian talk radio as the discourse is not rich in scope and depth, while also resulting in a politically polarized public sphere’.

Nana Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,



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23. According to proponents of the agenda setting theory of the media, the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are successful in telling us what to think about. Unfortunately, however, the media seem to have ceded the power to set the national agenda to the politicians and their paid serial callers. While it may not be entirely wrong to hand the microphones and newspaper columns to persons with useful contributions to make, it is dangerous to open the media space to vicious attackers of dissenting views and people who are skilled in insulting and undermining public persons and institutions. Such actions contribute in no way to strengthening our political culture or our democracy.
24. The power you have, as journalists cannot be underestimated. As the African-American civil rights activist, Malcom X once said and I quote: **“the media is the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses.”** How you exercise this power, can make or break this nation. Indeed, it has already broken many decent, patriotic Ghanaians who ventured into politics or chose to serve this nation to the best of their ability in public service. In our more recent history, we have allowed serial callers and political actors to insult all and



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sundry, including foreign diplomats, religious leaders and traditional rulers.

25. As a nation, we seem to have sacrificed our national values, our cultural attributes, and our respect for others, on the altar of multi party politics. In my view, we have just one item left to sacrifice, our collective peace and national stability. The media has contributed greatly in getting us to where we are. Can the media please help us, retrace our steps as a nation, and take ourselves back from the brink?

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

26. Oscar Wilde the great Irish playwright and novelist once said, "By giving us the opinions of the uneducated, journalism keeps us in touch with the ignorance of the community."
27. A society like ours, which desperately needs development, certainly does not need to be kept in touch with ignorance. We need enlightenment. And as we approach another crucial election, it will be seriously detrimental for the media to continue to hand the microphones to just anyone who has something to say without scrutinizing the content of the message. Journalists are more powerful than passive conveyer belts, passing on any message at all to the listeners, viewers or readers. We cannot afford a passive media. This is



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not what we fought for as a nation for decades. Many committed and dedicated journalists and citizens of this country made huge personal sacrifices, of their lives and their personal liberties for the freedoms the media enjoys today. This is the time to appreciate and reward those sacrifices by the show of a more responsible and patriotic media fraternity.

28. The publication of one untrue, unchecked story about the Electoral Commission and its staff, a political party, a presidential or parliamentary candidate, may not only damage the individual or institution concerned, but may cause untold and unanticipated damage to this country.

29. It is worth stating again, that when it comes to elections, we have an Electoral Commission and an electoral system that deserve more of our commendation than our contempt. We should be stating our national story with pride.

30. In the 25 years before we embarked on the journey of the fourth republic, we had four successful coup d'etats and only God knows how many unsuccessful plots. In the 23 years since we endorsed the 1992 constitution, we have had six successful elections with two alternations of power by the same Electoral Commission we consistently vilify. Only one parliamentary result has been overturned by a court after declaration by the



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Commission. With the collective efforts of political parties and civil society, we have created an electoral process that protects fully, the vote of the voter and makes it impossible for the Electoral Commission or the Chairperson of the Electoral Commission to subvert the will of the people.

31. And while we were building our democratic structures brick by brick, just in the ECOWAS sub region alone, there have been 14 coups, three civil wars, over 12 regional insurgencies, foreign interventions and UN operations. We have countries almost brought to their knees by the activities of religious radicals and ethnic groups fighting for control over natural resources. All around us, we see the devastating consequences on nations when personal ambitions and sectional interests are placed above national interest. We do not need to go there. We need to protect our democracy together and fiercely. It is time to collectively start fighting for our national peace and stability, in the same way we fight for political power.

Nana Chairman,

32. Democracy is not only about free and fair elections. A free and fair election is the road on which the vehicle of democracy travels to meet the participants of the democratic process. That vehicle carries human rights, free media, education, good health, infrastructure and the things that give



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meaning to our existence as a people. A free election without the democratic goods is like constructing an expensive motorway which does not bring any benefit to the supposed road users. We cannot take pride in our democracy when all we can boast of are peaceful elections and a vibrant media. In any case, elections are meant to be peaceful. If America goes to the polls, nobody reports that their elections are peaceful. So that should not be our main achievement when it is the natural thing that should happen if we elect our leaders. If we reduce our democracy to elections, we risk losing the very essence of the elections and that can prove detrimental to our collective interest as a people.

33. This is where your role is crucial. You can help in this regard by scrutinizing the promises that are made to the electorate while tracking progress made on previous promises. And I must knowledge here the recent research work by Imani Ghana in this regard. And you must know that if this nation prospers, you will also prosper. If our country is built and the needed investment is put in the media industry, journalists will be paid well. I commend the Ministry of Communications for the recently launched analogue to digital project, which would allow media organisations to monetize content, increase their revenue earning capacity and pay their staff better. You can then earn decent livelihood without relying on payments which



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people with negative agendas have to offer in exchange for your conscience.

34. Moreso, media owners and journalists must not allow themselves to be used as mercenaries to drag others and institutions in the mud. Doing so will hinder the growth of the media and turn the admiration people ought to have for the media into disdain and contempt. A Journalist who allows himself or herself to be used as an agent of destruction is not different from the proverbial goat, which aims at destroying the wall but ends up losing its fur. It will amount to what the Nigerian writer, Chinua Achebe once said and I quote: "He who will hold another down in the mud must stay in the mud to keep him down."

35. Let's get out of the mud and march forth together and build the nation we can call our own with pride.

Nana Chairman,

36. Everywhere in the world, elections are the most hotly contested activities in a nation's political life. This is because the stakes are very high for every political party participating in the election. In Ghana, where we have closely fought elections that are decided on very thin margins, the stakes becomes even higher. There is a higher burden on the Electoral



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Commission to ensure accuracy in vote counting, collation and declaration of results. The demands on our staff and election officials are higher. And this is why we are implementing over 25 reforms agreed with the political parties in this year's elections. The reforms ensure a more transparent and a more inclusive electoral process and that we attain 100% accuracy in the counting, collation and declaration of results.

37. Election reporting by the media goes beyond Election Day. It starts with speculations and rumors about the process and the Electoral Management Body. This year, we have been subjected to all sorts of allegations, impossible and without basis. Our plea to the media is that sad as it is, we can accept political actors who do not understand the electoral process. But we cannot afford a media that is not familiar with the laws and the processes. So much airtime and many newspaper columns are devoted to politics: it would serve our national interests better if we report facts, use the opportunity to engage and educate our electorate on the process rather than reporting speculations and untruths about the persons managing the process. Please ensure that you check and verify everything you report on the electoral exercise. Do not base your election-related reports on mere speculations and rumour. We at the Commission have left our doors wide open to you as our key partners in the process. If you are in any



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doubt, or you have any questions about the process, please come to us for explanation, clarification or education. Your failure to do so may create the condition for a disputed electoral outcome without basis, which we do not need as a nation.

38. So here, I am pleading for a return to first principles: the principles and ethical values that make journalism a profession worthy of our respect and the protections, which our constitution provides to journalists.

Nana Chairman,

39. For the media to support democratic growth and stability, it is also important that the members of the fourth estate of the realm give serious consideration to self-regulation.

40. When government, whether the executive, the legislature or the judiciary, feels the need to regulate the practice of journalism, to protect the public from defamatory comments, journalism that jeopardizes national security and stability, we also risk a clamp on free speech, and free media. No democratic society has thrived with a repressed media.

41. You the ladies and gentlemen of the media must recognize the need to go beyond codes of conduct and



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guidelines. As helpful as these are, they have clearly not been effective in responding to the concerns of media consumers about the tyranny of the media. Complaints by the public have been largely ignored, where available, retractions are buried within the text of subsequent editions; apologies are painfully drawn out like pulling out an infected tooth. Where the comments are made by a third party on a media platform, the media organization feels little or no sense of obligation for carrying the invective, the falsehood or publishing the defamatory and usually unconfirmed tale.

42. A self-regulated media would better serve the interests of the journalism profession and the interests of the people of Ghana. Let members of the inky fraternity have the courage to name and shame their own. Your fraternity must show concern for the welfare of young journalists, set minimum wage rates for members of the profession; set standards for the practice of journalism, and save young journalists from abuse stemming from the large proliferation of media houses.

Nana Chairman,

43. Permit me to end my address by recounting an event that happened last year and devastated our entire nation. On a rainy night on the 3rd of June 2015, about 154 Ghanaians who sought shelter at a GOIL filling station at the Kwame Nkrumah



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circle in Accra sadly lost their lives. An additional 154 Ghanaians sustained various degrees of injuries. Five houses, including the Goil filling station suffered various degrees of damages. Property worth over GH¢1,658,847.00 was lost. Seventeen motor vehicles, including a fuel tanker were burnt beyond repairs; a mini mart, a pharmacy and a restaurant located within the filling station were completely destroyed. We have not quantified the number of jobs lost and livelihoods affected, the number of children who have dropped out of schools because their parents' sources of employment were affected by the fire.

44. The Committee tasked to look into the disaster did find that the fire was caused by a negligent but unintentional act of one Ghanaian citizen. Clearly, the citizen who accidentally started the fire did not intend to kill and maim so many of his fellow citizens or destroy their livelihoods and property.
45. The Committee, as it should be, did not tell us how many NDC, NPP, CPP, PPP, APC members lost their lives or were injured by the fire. The Committee also did not tell us how much NDP, GCPP, or PNC members lost in the properties that were destroyed. We did not even get an ethnic breakdown of the victims. That may have helped us draw our usual partisan conclusions on the matter.



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46. What was clear was that, fire was started accidentally through the careless actions of one man; damage and consequences were exacerbated by other pre-existing conditions such as our penchant as a nation to use gutters as garbage cans, and poor maintenance culture and poor insurance culture.
47. The rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless in society were all affected because we could not predict when the rain would start or that our families and loved ones would seek shelter at the filling station on that sad night. The fire affected all of us, regardless of party affiliation, ethnic group and whether we were journalists or doctors or farmers.
48. **Nana Chairman**, one careless comment by a journalist on a radio or TV station; one unsubstantiated untruth that is not checked and clarified by a serial caller or a youth activist of a political party; one careless joke by a party leader, can have the significance of the careless action that started the GOIL fire. One careless comment thrown into our already very inflammatory political environment, with strong ethnic rumblings that we all choose collectively to ignore, strengthened by the anonymity of social media and the hard work of expert serial



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callers; can start a fire in this country that we may not be able to put out. We should never allow this to happen.

49. **Nana Chairman,** I thank the President of the GJA and his able executives for the opportunity to share some thoughts with you all tonight. The Electoral Commission of Ghana is poised to deliver a world-class election on December 7, 2016. But we cannot do it alone. We need a professional and responsible media. We need an informed civil society. We need the media to dedicate some time to studying the electoral laws and processes. We cannot have a credible electoral process if the media, standing between the EC, the electorate and the politicians, themselves, do not understand the processes. It permits abuse of the process. It does not empower the media to hold all the actors accountable. This country needs a strong media, fearless and bold, standing on the side of truth, to save our democracy, to set our political culture on a clean path, to restore power to the voter. Then and only then, can we have credible elections. When the contents of the ballot boxes reflect the true aspirations and desires of an informed electorate for this nation. The Electoral Commission, by itself and even with the support of political parties and the media cannot guarantee peaceful and undisputed elections, without the participation and involvement of civil society. But we can get the support of civil society, only if, the media returns to first



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principles, reclaims its power from politicians and serial callers, and uses that power **only** in the public interest. By putting the dreams, aspirations, fears, concerns of the people of this country, the future of this country, above self, tribe, tongue and party.

50. I encourage you tonight, to pledge anew to Ghana, “our gifts of mind and strength of arm; steadfast to build together, a nation, strong in unity. I thank you all for the time and the attention you have given me tonight.

May God bless you all. May God bless the Ghana Journalists Association. Long may they serve Ghana. And God bless our homeland Ghana, and make our nation, greater and stronger.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much.