



# THE PRESIDENCY REPUBLIC OF GHANA

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## Speech Delivered By The President Of The Republic, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, On The Occasion Of The 60th Independence Anniversary Celebration

[MARCH 6, 2017](#)

We are met here, today, to celebrate the 60th anniversary of our nation's independence, to celebrate our freedom from the clutches of British imperialism, to celebrate the final achievement of the struggle of successive generations of Ghanaian patriots to establish a free, sovereign Ghana. We are grateful that, on such a happy day, leaders and representatives of our neighbouring countries and friendly nations have, in acts of warm solidarity, joined us in our celebration. Akwaaba, Your Excellencies, to each one of you.

I thank the children from across the country for their excellent march. I thank the cultural troupes from across the country on their magnificent display, which has showcased the best of Ghanaian culture.

I thank the officers and the men and women of the Ghana Armed forces, the police service and the other security services for their display of order, pomp and ceremony. And I thank them all for their willingness to put their lives on the line to secure the safety of our nation, the peace of our society, and the sanctity of our property.

I am happy to announce that, on my way to these grounds, Independence Square, I stopped to perform a very important duty. I have, this morning, cut the sod for the commencement of the building of a national cathedral of interdenominational worship in our capital, Accra. This project, I am glad to say, is supported by many of our leading figures of faith. It is meant to be a gesture of thanksgiving to the Almighty for the blessings he has showered and continues to shower on our nation.

Today is a celebration of our independence. Being independent means you have the freedom and ability to make informed decisions in life without having to ask other people for permission, help or money and you take full responsibility for seeing things through.

Our founders chose this day, March 6, as the date of our independence, in order to repudiate the Bond of 6th March 1844, which led to our land becoming a British colony.

Fifty-three years later, in 1897, a hundred and twenty years ago, a group of our forebears was moved to start a campaign against the terms of the colonial relationship between what was then the Gold Coast and the United Kingdom.

If the signing of the Bond of 1844 marks the formal start of the Gold Coast colony, then the formation of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society on 4th August, 1897, in Cape Coast, marks the start of the struggle for political independence. It is worth mentioning some of the names of the members of the Society because, unfortunately, we do not often acknowledge their role – John Mensah Sarbah, Joseph Casely Hayford, J.W. Sey, J.P Brown, and their colleagues, who organised the chiefs and people against the Crown Lands Bill, and forced the colonial authorities to retreat. Sarbah began the tradition of the Ghanaian lawyer as a nationalist.

This was probably one of the most dramatic interventions in the colonial history of our country. One hundred and twenty years after that event, its significance might be lost on us. But we would appreciate its importance if we consider that the very same objectives of the Crown Lands Bill were introduced at the same time, and became law, in countries like Kenya, Zimbabwe, Zambia and other British colonies around Africa and changed the course of their history. The lands of the indigenous peoples in those countries were seized by the British Crown under that law, an event from which, a century later, they have still not recovered.

In what was then the Gold Coast, we continued to possess our lands because of the bravery of the members of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society, and we must pay homage to these patriots every day, especially on this 60th anniversary. Even though we maintained, in 1897, the continuing and inalienable rights to our lands, we remained a colony and could not govern ourselves.

A decade or so later, the British West African National Congress, under the joint leadership of Joseph Casely-Hayford and Thomas Hatton-Mills, was formed to carry on with the agitation against colonial rule.

The next significant event in the struggle occurred on 4th August, 1947, exactly fifty years later to the day of the formation of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society, when a group of nationalists gathered in Saltpond for the launch of the United Gold Coast Convention, the UGCC, the first political party in our country.

The founders of the UGCC, then, met to demand independence from the British and 70 years after that event, one still marvels at the clarity of thought and the passion that they displayed. Some of the names of that momentous day have survived in our written history and folk memory.

Five of them are on our Ghanaian currency: Joseph Boakye Danquah; Emmanuel Obetsebi-Lamptey; William Ofori-Atta; Ebenezer Ako-Adjei; and Edward Akufo-Addo. Kwame Nkrumah, the sixth of the Big Six on the currency, was to join them later.

And there are others, equally important that we should not forget, and I pay homage to George Paa Grant, R.S. Blay, Cobbina Kessie, J.W. de Graft Johnson and Francis Awoonor Williams, amongst others.

The speech, the Ghanaian colossus, Danquah, made on that day, deserves to be quoted liberally on a day like this. He said: "Love of freedom from foreign control has always been in our blood. 870 years ago we struck against the attempt of the Arabs to impose a religious slavery upon us in Ghana. We left our homes in Ghana and came down here to build a new home. But there is one thing we brought with us from ancient Ghana. We brought with us our ancient freedom. Today the safety of that freedom is threatened. ... We must fight against the new domination. And we must fight with the weapons of today, constitutional, determined, persistent, unflinching, unceasing, until the goal of freedom is attained."

Danquah captured the mood of the time and set our country on the path to independence. 4th August is truly a sacred and seminal day in the annals of the Ghanaian people.

The unfolding of the story is well known.

The UGCC leaders decided they needed a full time person to run the party's affairs; they sent for the dynamic Kwame Nkrumah, who was in the United Kingdom at the time, and he came to join them in December 1947. Soon thereafter, on 28th February, 1948, the notorious and senseless killings of three ex-servicemen, Sergeant Adjetey, Corporal Attipoe and Private Odartey Lamptey occurred, and sparked a nationwide revulsion against the colonial power, which, undoubtedly, quickened the pace of the independence movement. We celebrate the three as martyrs in the cause of Ghanaian freedom. The Watson Commission followed, which mapped out the steps towards our eventual attainment of independence.

In 1949, on 12th June, Kwame Nkrumah broke away from the UGCC and formed his own party, the Convention People's Party. Even as he broke away, Kwame Nkrumah remembered from whence he came and retained the word "convention" in the name of his new party, the CPP.

Eventually, after much agitation, independence came and Ghana, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, became the first sub-Saharan country to gain its freedom on March 6 1957. Danquah had done the research and convinced himself and others that the bulk of the people that inhabit these lands migrated from the ancient kingdom of Ghana.

On March 6, 1957, we lowered the British flag and we jettisoned the name Gold Coast that had been given to us and took on the name, Ghana, the name of our ancestral home. The name Ghana was meant to give us a fresh start and mark the break from colonialism; and it was also meant to serve as a link to our historical roots and the assurance that we have a history, culture and civilisation that preceded colonialism.

We must remember, on a day like this, some others who are not listed among the forefront fighters for political freedom, but who fought equally hard for our cultural integrity and the identification of who we are as Ghanaians.

I pay homage to Ephraim Amu, Tata Amu as he was fondly called. He was the composer of what easily passes as our unofficial National Anthem, *Yen Ara Asase Ne*. Is there a Ghanaian among us, today, who can sing or hear that song, in whichever language, without being moved?

Ephraim Amu stood alone, most of the time, against what he saw as cultural domination. You did not have to wear a European-cut suit to be a scholar, you could wear a fugu, kente and above all, a locally woven fabric, and still be an educated person, he argued. He insisted you did not have to eat foreign foods because you were a scholar, and he insisted our music was as interesting and sophisticated as any around the world. Those were radical ideas for the time.

I pay homage to Kwegyir Aggrey, he reminded us we were eagles that should soar, and not be timid, domesticated birds.

I pay homage to Philip Gbeho, the composer of our National Anthem, Theodosia Okoh, the designer of our national flag, and Amon Kotei, the designer of our coat of arms.

I pay homage to Kofi Antubam, the artist who first put Ghanaian art on the map. I pay homage to Saka Acquaye, the poet, writer, sculptor and musician, who wrote the first African folklore, *The Lost Fisherman*. I pay homage to J.A. Braimah, the Gonja scholar and statesman who wrote insightful publications about the Gonja people.

I pay homage to the poet Apaloo, who immortalised the philosophy and music of the Ewe language. I pay homage to E.T. Mensah, King Bruce, Jerry Hansen and the others who popularised highlife, which has become an enduring identity of Ghanaian music. I pay tribute to the great musicologist, J.H. Nketia, who is the unrivalled authority on African music.

I pay homage to Otumfuo Prempeh I, who waged a heroic, if unsuccessful, battle against the British, and retained his dignity even in exile. I pay homage to Yaa Asantewa, that woman of valour, who led the Ashanti resistance to British imperialism. I pay homage to Nana Ofori Atta I, who saw the wisdom in investing in the education of the young. I pay homage to Nii Kwabena Bonne III, Osu Alata Mantse, (Boycotthene), who organized the boycott of goods of the European traders and triggered the mass resistance that led to the 1948 riots.

I pay homage to Professor Alexander Adum Kwapong, the first Ghanaian Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana, who became an icon in the development of our educational system.

I pay homage to Dr Oku Ampofo, sculptor and physician, who encouraged confidence in our traditional arts and medicine. It is thanks to him that herbal medicine became a respectable subject of study and research in our country.

I pay homage to Akua Asabea, political activist; and I pay homage to Evelyn Amarteifio, social welfare pioneer. I pay homage to Esther Ocloo, pioneer industrialist and entrepreneur, whose food processing enterprises under the Nkulenu label changed our habits of food preparation forever.

I pay homage to Dede Ashikisham and Akua Shorshorshor, famous market queens, who helped finance Kwame Nkrumah and the nationalist movement from their successful businesses.

They and many others, like them, contributed to the fight for independence, and in moulding the Ghanaian that emerged on March 6, 1957.

We were independent and the world shared our excitement and wished us well.

Our first President, Kwame Nkrumah, delivered his famous speech that midnight of March 5, 1957, a few hundred yards from here, at the Old Polo grounds. He said we were free forever, and there cannot be a sweeter or more reassuring sound or set of words than those to a people emerging from oppression. He said our independence would prove that the black man or woman was capable of managing his or her own affairs.

And then he said what has probably been the most quoted part of that speech. He said “the independence of Ghana was meaningless unless it was linked with the total liberation of the whole continent of Africa”. In those words, Kwame Nkrumah sealed the fate of Ghana to the continent. He bequeathed to us Ghana’s pan African vocation and its commitment to the unity and integration of Africa.

We are grateful for his leadership, and that of his principal colleagues, Komla Agbeli Gbedema, the organisational genius of the Convention People’s Party, Kojo Botsio, its theoretician and strategist, and the others who occupy prides of place in the history of the nationalist movement.

We are equally grateful for those in the Opposition at independence, who, at great personal cost and in defiance of the infamous Preventive Detention Act of 1958, were determined to hold aloft the banner of freedom, and who insisted that the multiparty democratic state was the best form of governance for our nation.

I refer to Joseph Boakye Danquah, Emmanuel Obetsebi-Lamptey (Liberty Lamptey), William Ofori-Atta, Simon Diedong Dombo, Kofi Abrefa Busia, Baffuor Osei Akoto, Victor Owusu, R.R Amponsah, Joe Appiah, S.G. Antor, Modesto Apaloo, Ashie Nikoi, Attoh Okine and others. Our generation of Ghanaians have vindicated their stance. And we reaffirmed that belief on 7th December, 2016, when the Ghanaian people exercised their sovereign franchise, in a dignified and serene manner, to remove an incumbent and elect a new

government. Once again, we demonstrated our deep attachment to democratic values and governance.

The difficult times our country went through after independence were to be replicated across the continent: dalliances with a one-party state, military interventions, political theory experimentations and instability; and, the collapse of economies and with it, lives.

I must pay homage to Professor Albert Adu Boahen, the eminent historian, academic and statesman. He found his voice, spoke out, and ended the culture of silence. His courage was the inspiration that sparked the agitation for the restoration of democratic rule.

Finally, in Ghana, a consensus emerged with the coming into being of the Fourth Republic. We have agreed on a multi-party constitutional democracy and a guarantee of individual freedoms under the rule of law. These past 24 years have been the longest period of political stability our country has enjoyed since independence, and the effects are gradually showing.

The pace of our development has quickened and our self-confidence, which had been severely strained, has returned. At independence, the popular slogan was to seek first the political kingdom and all other things would be added. We assumed and, indeed, we expected that rapid economic development would follow the political freedom that we had won.

Sadly, the economic dividend that was meant to accompany our freedom has still not materialised. Sixty years after those heady days, the mass of our people are still poor.

After sixty years, we have run out of excuses, and it is time to set Ghana to rights and get our country to where it should be. The challenge before us is to build our economy and generate a prosperous, progressive and dignified life for the mass of our people. Hard work, enterprise, creativity, discipline and a consistent and effective fight against corruption in public life would bring the transformation we seek.

We will achieve these goals when we move and act as a united people. We must take pride in our diversity by all means, but the Ghanaian must always rise above the ethnic or sectional interest. We have a bright future, and we must mobilise all our resources and all our strengths, here and in the Ghanaian Diaspora, to get to that promised land of prosperity faster.

It is turning out to be a constant refrain, I know, but, on a day like this, we cannot ignore the state of our environment. We are endangering the very survival of the beautiful and blessed land that our forebears bequeathed to us. The dense forests that were home to varied trees, plants and fauna have been largely wiped out. Today, we import timber for our use, and the description of our land as a tropical forest no longer fits the reality. Our rivers and lakes are disappearing, and those that still exist are all polluted.

It bears repeating that we do not own the land, but hold it in trust for generations yet unborn. We have a right to exploit the bounties of the earth and extract the minerals and

even redirect the path of the rivers, but we do not have the right to denude the land of the plants and fauna nor poison the rivers and lakes.

There is nothing we can do better to pay homage to those who fought to free us from bondage than to dedicate this 60th independence anniversary to protecting our environment, and regenerating the lands and water bodies.

I am confident that we can achieve the dreams of our forebears. I am hopeful that we will be worthy inheritors of this land. I urge that we wear the accolade of being a Ghanaian with pride.

Let us mobilise for the happy and prosperous Ghana of tomorrow, in which all of us, including our youth, our women and the vulnerable in our society, will have equal opportunities to realise our potential, and build lives of dignity. Then, our independence will be meaningful. Then, we will have a Ghana beyond aid.

Two months ago at my inauguration on these grounds, I demanded that we renew the sacred compact that comes with being able to call yourself a Ghanaian citizen. I am proud that I am able to say without equivocation today: I am a Ghanaian citizen.

I wish you all a happy Diamond Jubilee anniversary and God's blessings.

May the Almighty bless our homeland Ghana and make her great and strong.