

GHANA



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STATEMENT

BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY
MR. JOHN DRAMANI MAHAMA
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA**

ON THE OCCASION OF

**THE 68TH SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

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**Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is with a heavy heart that I address you today.

Before I left Ghana to attend this assembly, I learned of the terrorist attack that took place in Nairobi, Kenya. I was shocked and deeply saddened to hear of the many lives that were lost to those senseless and cowardly acts of violence.

As the death toll increased, so too did my grief, knowing that each additional number symbolized one more human life.

Those numbers symbolized individuals who may have been strangers to you or to me but were of prime significance in the lives of the people who loved them: parents, children, husbands, wives, friends, colleagues.

Soon enough, I got word that one of the people massacred was a person who held significance in my life and in the lives of so many other Ghanaians. Kofi Awoonor, a 78-year-old gentleman who had served his country loyally, as a distinguished poet and professor, a former ambassador to Brazil and Cuba, and past Chairman of the Council of State, a presidential advisory board.

Professor Awoonor had once even been our country's envoy to the United Nations.

On this fateful day, however, Professor Awoonor was in Nairobi to perform his poetry at a writers' conference. He had travelled there with his son, and they had decided before the day's scheduled events to do what should have been one of the most ordinary and uneventful of activities—make a stop at the shopping mall.

Unfortunately, what happened that day at the Westgate Premier Shopping Mall was anything but ordinary. Professor Awoonor's life was taken away from him and those who loved him, just as the lives of dozens of others were taken away from them and their communities; each person with a unique story, and with accomplishments or aspirations for which they will be remembered.

Professor Awoonor's son, though injured, was among the many who were lucky enough to escape the attack. It is a day they will never forget; they will carry the scars, physical and emotional, with them. And we, who watched from a distance, should never allow ourselves to forget because we have also been irrevocably marked by this tragedy.

Mr. President,

When independence was upon us and our possibilities felt endless, the world saw how brightly Africa could shine. Then, for decades that light was dimmed.

There was a time when killing seemed almost commonplace in Africa. Indeed, there are plenty of graves that remain unmarked. There was a time when the ruthlessness of dictators seemed to be the order of the day. For decades the corruption, greed and depravity of a few caused the suffering of an entire continent.

We so easily could have succumbed to the wars, the poverty, the diseases; but we did not. We staggered our way through, year after year, but eventually we made it. We survived.

Mr. President,

Last year when I addressed this assembly, I began with the assurance that I had come with good news from Ghana, and stories of success from the African continent.

This year, it gives me great pleasure to do the same—even on the heels of this terrorist attack—because I know that today's Africa will not be divided or deterred by the heinous crimes of those who wish to disrupt our progress. I know that our borders will no longer be used to undermine the brotherhood and sisterhood of our citizens.

The days of massacres must remain in our past. Our rivers will no longer flow red. Our children must be students now; we will no longer allow their childhoods to be stolen by those who wish to turn them into soldiers.

Africa is standing tall, walking confidently toward political stability, walking confidently toward economic prosperity, walking proudly toward ethnic and religious harmony and co-existence.

There is no place in today's Africa for hatred and intolerance and the murder of innocent people. Not anymore. Not ever again.

So we will mourn our dead. We will console ourselves, and each other, through the grief. But we cannot allow terror to defeat us. This must strengthen our resolve. Our stride will not be broken.

Mr. President,

Last year, on this stage, I also declared Ghana's resolve to be a beacon of peace in the West African sub-region. On behalf of the citizens whom I serve, I promised the world that Ghana would not allow its territory to be used in any manner whatsoever to destabilize other nations.

Ghana has been steadfast in our cooperation with regional neighbours to maintain the security of those nations that are enjoying stability and to restore security to those, such as Cote d'Ivoire and Mali, that have recently emerged from turmoil.

Currently, Cote d'Ivoire is in a stage of rebuilding. The recent overtures toward reconciliation made by President Ouattara are a major step towards bridging the country's political divide. After its own bout with terror, Mali made a solid return to democracy by conducting an election that all observers, even the sceptics and the cynics, hailed as being free, fair and peaceful.

West Africa has seen enough war and strife. We want peace and security to persist in our sub-region. Ghana will continue to play its role in strengthening the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to make sure it is able to meet this goal.

Mr. President,

With all that I have mentioned in this address, I am sure it would not come as a surprise to anyone that Ghana enthusiastically threw its support behind the Arms Trade Treaty just adopted by the UN General Assembly. International trade in conventional arms and ammunition must be regulated.

We like to make mention of how the world has become a global village, especially when speaking of technology, culture, and travel. The facility of that global village exists for warmongers and terrorist groups as well. They are using it to recruit new members, expand their cells, create intercontinental networks, obtain weapons, and conceal their identities as well as locations.

If we are to fight back, we must also work cooperatively. Nations in the developed world must align themselves with nations in the developing world. We must form partnerships and work together.

Ghana is prepared to do this. We have signed the Arms Trade Treaty and we intend to do everything possible to see that it is ratified in a timely manner.

Mr. President,

Fledgling democracies tend to be fragile. Their limits are still being tested; their characteristics are still being defined. Democracy is not a one-size-fits-all venture. Nor is it a one-time event. It is a system that takes decades to build, a process that pushes you toward a perfection you will never reach, but must try nonetheless.

This past year, the limits of Ghana's democracy were tested and I am proud to report that we passed with flying colours.

The results of our recent elections were contested. Since our return to constitutional rule, Ghana has conducted six successive elections. These were the first results to be formally challenged and heard by the Supreme Court. What made this situation noteworthy was the reliance, by all parties involved, on the rule of law. The proceedings were televised for the sake of transparency. The verdicts were readily accepted, and there was not a single reported incident of violence.

Ghana's victory is not an aberration. Other countries, like Kenya, have shared similar experiences. This indicates that democratic institutions in Africa are growing stronger. It indicates that the balance of power in African countries is shifting from the authority of a sole individual to the more equitable process of a properly designed system. Strong institutions are the hallmark of a nation's stability. They are crucial tools in the fight for human rights.

Mr. President,

It is our intention to bring an end to youth unemployment. What we have done in Ghana to address this issue is create the Youth Jobs and Enterprise Development Fund, a program that will provide young people with entrepreneurial skills and access to the funds needed to establish businesses or expand existing ones, thereby creating new employment opportunities.

Six of the ten fastest growing economies in the world are on the African continent. However, this growth has not yet translated into sustainable employment opportunities. Over the course of the last decade, African economies created over 37 million wage-paying jobs, yet 63 percent of workers remain trapped in low paying subsistence or self-employment endeavours. With these realities come the very real possibilities of income instability, exclusion from the benefits of economic growth and social security benefits tied to formal sector employment.

Africa has a fast growing population, more than 50 percent of which is below the age of 35. That means we must create more jobs for our growing numbers of youth. They must have opportunities available to them. We cannot do this unless we transform the economies of Africa. It all comes down to value. We must value our resources, including our human resource. We must value our people.

We cannot continue to be exporters of raw material and primary produce. We need to add value to our exports. We cannot continue to export raw cocoa beans in Ghana. What we need to do instead is process more of those beans into value-added products. We cannot continue to export unrefined gold. We need to add value to our gold exports. We cannot continue to export oil and gas. We need to integrate that industry into our economy. We need to process petroleum products and produce power with the gas. We cannot continue to export bauxite and then in return import alumina to feed our local aluminium smelter. We need to work toward creating an integrated bauxite and aluminium industry in Ghana.

In this way, by keeping the concept of value at the forefront of our economies, we can create new jobs for our young people. We can do this with local and foreign investors who share our vision. Often the Western world wrongly assumes that we in Africa do not know our worth. We do. It's not sympathy we want; it's partnership, the ability to stand on our own feet. It's not handouts we're in search of; it's opportunities. We have already shown that with time and the right opportunity, Africa can make it.

Mr. President,

Ghana achieved the Millennium Development Goal target for reducing poverty and hunger far ahead of the scheduled date of 2015. We are on track to achieving MDGs 2, 3, and 6 as well. School enrolment, gender parity and reduction of HIV/AIDS have all seen dramatic progress and statistical shifts as a result of the work that has been done to reach our targets.

While we are lagging in MDGs 4, 5, and 7—infant and maternal mortality as well as water and sanitation—the figures show that there has been a vast improvement. Since 2000, the number of maternal deaths for every 100,000 births has decreased by more than half, from 740 to 320.

We recognize that when you're talking about human lives, even a 50 percent decrease is too little. That is why in 2010 we launched the MDG Accelerated Framework and Action Plan.

Women account for more than 50 percent of Ghana's population. We believe that empowering them through education and encouraging them to take full control of their reproductive rights will not only help us realize our MDG goals faster, it will help us build a better nation.

It's not enough to put girls in school and allow them just enough education to be deemed literate. We must keep them in school. Removing teen girls from school for any reason, let alone to marry them off, is an unacceptable practice that must end. African women have always been the backbone of our societies. Imagine the change they could effect in our countries if only we'd help them reach their full potential.

As a President and a father, I owe it to my children—my sons and my daughter—and all the children of Ghana to create for them a country where they walk with their dignity intact and their heads held high and stand shoulder to shoulder with the children of Europe, South America, Asia, North America and the rest of the world.

Mr. President,

Ghana is encouraged by the new initiative to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian issue. We are still firm in our belief that an independent Palestinian state existing side-by-side with a

peaceful and secure Israeli state is a desirable outcome we must all support and work towards.

In working towards this, we must realize that the continuous construction of settlements in Palestinian territory increasingly shuts the door on a two-state solution.

Ghana calls, once again, for the embargo against Cuba to be lifted. It is a relic of the Cold War era and has no place in our current global dispensation.

We have come a long way since the end of the last global war, yet the makeup of the U.N. Security Council is not a reflection of that development. Ghana, therefore, supports a reform of the U.N. Security Council.

Ghana will continue to pursue the principle of constructive engagement in our relations with other countries in the world. We are fully committed to promoting honest global partnership that is informed by mutual respect and reciprocity.

In closing, I would like once again, to pay my respects to those who have lost their lives in Kenya, in Syria, in Palestine, in Egypt, in Libya, in Pakistan, in Iraq, in Nigeria, in Mali, in Somalia, in Turkey, in India, in the United States and all the other places where terrorists have attacked in this year alone.

The reason we are all gathered here today is to find the ways and the means to create a better, more peaceful and prosperous world.

Thank you, Mr. President.