

STATEMENT BY
THE MINISTER FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE
REPUBLIC OF GHANA,
NANA AKUFO-ADDO, MP,
TO THE
HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT
OF THE FIRST SESSION
OF THE
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

MONDAY, 19TH JUNE 2006, GENEVA

Mr. President, may I begin by congratulating you and your Bureau on your election and for the able manner in which you conducted the wide-ranging consultations leading up to this First Session of the Human Rights Council. I salute also Foreign Minister Jan Eliasson who presided over negotiations at the United Nations General Assembly which resulted in the creation of the Human Rights Council. Without the professionalism, dedication and commitment exhibited by you and your Bureau, we may not have been here today. I daresay all of us owe a great debt of gratitude to our illustrious compatriot, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, for his tireless efforts in pursuing the agenda of reform of the United Nations to enable it meet more effectively the challenges of our new age, an agenda that has made possible the establishment of this Council. I extend my appreciation too to Madam High Commissioner and her staff for their dedication to the cause of human rights, particularly during this transitional period.

Mr. President, it is with great pleasure that the Ghanaian delegation has come here to this famous city of Geneva to participate in today's historic proceedings, which marks the beginning of a new human rights chapter in the book of the United Nations. I have the instruction of the President of the

Republic of Ghana, His Excellency John Agyekum Kufuor, to express on his behalf and on behalf of the government and the entire people of Ghana our heartfelt appreciation to Member States of the United Nations for the great honour done Ghana by her election to the Council with the greatest number of votes received by any country in any region of the world. We sincerely believe that the new Human Rights Council will provide a strong basis for the construction of a solid and durable edifice for the promotion and protection of human rights in the world, and we are determined to conduct ourselves in a manner that will justify this mark of exceptional confidence reposed in our country.

Our nation has in the last decade embarked resolutely on the path of democratic development, where the principles of democratic accountability, respect for human rights and the rule of law are now at the core of our body politic. It has become so because of the deep disillusionment of the broad masses of Ghanaians with long periods of authoritarian, military rule in the years after independence, which were characterised by widespread violations of the human rights of our citizenry, involving the senseless killings of innocent persons, unexplained disappearances, mass detentions, and the arbitrary seizures of private properties.

On 28th April, 1992, during the era of the last military government of the PNDC, in the Referendum of that day, the Ghanaian people rejected massively a continuation of military government, and chose the road of democratic empowerment under the liberal democratic Constitution of the Fourth Republic. Our involvement in the work of this Council will reflect that commitment.

The erstwhile Commission on Human Rights, despite its weaknesses, chalked significant achievements in the promotion and protection of human rights: it provided a forum for the analyses of the global situation on human rights and created a framework for international human rights protection.

Notwithstanding these notable achievements, it became necessary to create a new institution capable of dealing effectively with contemporary human rights challenges. In this regard, we, as members of the new Council, have a singular opportunity to bolster confidence in the work of the United Nations on the issue of human rights. The utterances we make at this and future sessions should blaze the trail for the pursuit of a global human rights agenda: we need to ensure that the mistakes committed in the past are not repeated. Towards this end, we must all endeavour to let the principles of universality, constructive international dialogue and co-operation be our watchwords. Let us be firm but fair.

Mr. President, I would like to say that, amongst the issues to be considered as part of the first year programme, the adoption of a Universal Periodic Review Mechanism (UPRM) is of particular interest to the Ghanaian delegation, because the UPRM has the potential to make a positive impact on the human rights situation worldwide. As required by resolution A/60/251, all members of the Council must undergo a review of their human rights record for their period of tenure on the Council. Meanwhile, one-third of the Council's membership is to end its term of office within a year: this ambitious target can only be achieved if priority is given to the development of the modalities of the Universal Peer Review Mechanism to enable the review to begin in good time and in earnest.

We know that a number of Universal Peer Review models are being considered for adoption by the Council. Without preempting the outcome of the search for an appropriate model, we should ensure that the model adopted is applied equally and fairly to all states without exception. That is the only way the Council's credibility and integrity can be guaranteed.

As you may be aware, Ghana was the first country to be reviewed by the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) under NEPAD. The Government and people of Ghana are currently implementing recommendations made by the review panel. Our confidence in the APRM was strengthened by the professionalism with which the panel executed its work and on the basis of that experience, we are convinced that the proposed Universal Periodic Review Mechanism will improve the human rights situation globally if its work is characterized by openness, dialogue and cooperation.

The Universal Periodic Review Mechanism should be allowed to function as a complement to the existing process rather than becoming a tool for thwarting the efforts of the Council. In this regard, we must consider the "capacity-building needs" of countries to be reviewed, as the lack of capacity can constitute a setback to the effective promotion and protection of human rights in those countries.

Mr. President, we need to determine the position of the Sub-Commission which has made invaluable contributions to the work of the erstwhile Human Rights Commission. In informal consultations on the Human Rights Council, a number of views have been expressed on the future of the

Sub-Commission. In our view, representation on the Council must be reflective of the different legal systems and regional balance, and there should be a limit on the term of office of members of any “think tank” set up under the Human Rights Council.

Mr. President, in Ghana’s bid for a seat on the Council, we voluntarily made a number of commitments which we intend to make reality. As a preliminary step, we are currently involved in the process of adopting all human rights instruments to which Ghana is not party.

Mr. President, during the 61st Session of the erstwhile Commission on Human Rights, we informed the Commission that the National Reconciliation Commission which was set up to look into cases of human rights abuses since Ghana’s independence had submitted its findings to Government. We are happy to report that Government has accepted the Commission’s findings and issued a White Paper on it, giving the necessary directives for their implementation. Indeed, the Attorney-General is currently being provided the financial means to meet the cases of compensation that the Commission identified.

Mr. President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, our membership of the Council imposes a heavy responsibility on us and we are committed and determined to make a meaningful contribution towards improving the global human rights situation. We believe that it is in a world devoid of violations of human rights that each individual can reach his or her full potential, and thereby enable human civilization to attain a new level where respect for individual liberty will live side by side with the collective solidarity that ensures social justice and prosperity for all the peoples of the world.

Thank you for your attention.