

**ADDRESS BY THE AMBASSADOR OF GHANA, H.E. MRS. N. B. KUMI ON THE
OCCASION OF HER FIRST MEETING WITH THE GHANAIAN COMMUNITY IN
BELGIUM – ANTWERP, 2 SEPTEMBER 2006**

DISTINGUISHED PRESIDENT OF THE UMBRELLA ASSOCIATION, "GHANABA"

DISTINGUISHED LEADERS OF THE VARIOUS GROUPS WITHIN "GHANABA"

HIGHLY RESPECTED TRADITIONAL AND SPIRITUAL LEADERS OF GHANAIS

IN BELGIUM

FELLOW COMPATRIOTS

FRIENDS OF GHANA

I am happy to be here tonight. I am happy because as I look around this room, I see happy people, I see kind and hospitable compatriots who have come from far and near to welcome and honour me with their presence.

I am familiar with life in these parts of the world and I know the sacrifice you have made to come here tonight. I want to thank you most sincerely for that gesture, which I hope to reciprocate anytime you beckon me to join you for other events.

I also want to use this opportunity to inform you that although I am formally meeting you the larger community, three months after my arrival in Brussels, I have in fact been in touch with the President of GHANABA,

the umbrella Association of Ghanaians in Belgium and the other regional, religious and traditional leaders since my very first seconds in this country. They were at the airport to welcome me when I set foot on Belgian soil; they were in my house to offer me drinks and food and above all to pray for a good tour of duty for me; they came in their numbers to congratulate me and share my happy moment with staff and family when I presented my Letters of Credence to King Albert of Belgium; and even before I could meet you in person, they arranged for me to speak to you on radio. Their welcome and attention for me have been overwhelming. They have more than acquitted themselves as your able representatives. I am most grateful for the honour and affection they continue to bestow on me. And I want you to join me in saying a big thank you to them by giving them a loud applause.

Mr. Chairman, I have observed a lot since my arrival and one such observation made is the good rapport between the Ghanaian Community and the Embassy in Brussels. For that I want to thank you all for your cooperation and patience. I also want to put on record my gratitude to my predecessor, Ambassador Kobina WUDU, and the Deputy Head of Mission Mr. C. N. A. KOTEY who ably held the fort for one year, as well as the Minister Counselor in charge of Consular Affairs at the Embassy, Mr. Joseph ANNIM, who for the past four years, has been dealing with the

Ghanaian Community practically on a daily basis. I see him running around all the time and yet he manages to keep a permanent smile. I don't know how he does it. To the other members of staff at the Embassy who contribute in several ways to ensure your welfare here and to promote the good image of our country Ghana, I say well done. They have all made my work easier.

Mr. President of GHANABA, in the presence of this large Ghanaian crowd, let me declare my intention to further strengthen this cooperation and enhance the Embassy's Welfare activities for Ghanaians in Belgium.

Mr. Chairman, I realise that it is late in the evening and a lot of merry making has been going on for sometime. It may therefore not be an appropriate time to enter into discussions of substantive matters. That realization notwithstanding, this occasion calls for the mention of a few issues, namely what the government, under the distinguished leadership of His Excellency President John Agyekum KUFUOR, is doing to place Ghana on the right path to political stability and economic development .. *(Twoo boi, Twoo boi..)*

Fellow Ghanaians, let us thank the Lord for Ghana is blessed. Blessed with Good leadership with a vision of progress. Our past leaders have paved the way for a great Ghana. We were first in attaining Independence in

sub-Saharan Africa and we rightly played the role of assisting other sister African countries to achieve similar freedom. We did what was expected of us to help end apartheid on African soil and we continue to fight for the protection of African dignity.

In recent times the dignity of Africans has been sorely tested when we consider the inhuman situation our brothers have to go through in their quest for better economic opportunities outside our borders. This is a problem that concerns Africans in the Diaspora including all of you here in this room and to underline the importance the government attaches to the welfare of our brothers abroad, Ghana has recently secured membership of the International Organisation for Migration, the organization that deals with migration issues. We hope to make a difference through our participation in the discussions of and programs of the organization. Likewise, we have reason to congratulate ourselves for securing a seat within the UN Security Council. Many of you might have seen from your TV screens Ghana chairing the Security Council meetings throughout the month of August 2006. It is the intention of the government of Ghana to use our tenure for the remaining 16 months to promote the good causes including world peace and security so cherished by the United Nations Organisation.

At the domestic front, it is right to note that Ghana has come a long way. Those of you who have been home of late would agree with me on the improved political and economic atmosphere and the maturity with which matters of national concern as well as diversionary issues are handled. The nurturing of our democratic institutions continues because we have a responsive government – a quality which has been proven beyond doubt by being the first African country to appear for scrutiny under the African Peer Review Mechanism within the NEPAD framework and the qualitative improvement in government that has marked the seriousness with which the KUFUOR administration attaches to criticisms and suggestions of the Ghanaian citizenry. With regard to socio-economic development, the government continues to make significant strides towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals especially in the health, education and transportation sectors. Time will not permit me to go into details. That will be done later when I meet you in your various towns or communes in smaller numbers. Suffice it to state at this stage that our regional hospitals are better equipped and more accessible to many and although the *National Health Insurance Scheme* is in its infant stages, there is every reason to hope that the eventual benefits will be worth the current teething problems.

In the education sector, prospects for school children are better, thanks to the Capitation Grant Scheme launched earlier this year which allows for free tuition and textbooks supplied by government to all school children free of charge. As a result, enrolment in basic public schools across the country has increased eightfold. In the urban areas, the children enjoy free bus ride on the Metro Mass Transit buses and some are even benefiting from the “*one meal a day*” pilot project launched in some selected schools in all the regions in the country. Doubtless, the opportunity being offered our leaders of tomorrow, combined with other poverty reduction strategies will go a long way to facilitate government efforts at poverty reduction since it will enhance the economic chances of those children when they grow up.

In addition, the government has stayed focused in its fiscal management. Thus good governance has become the hallmark of the KUFUOR administration. A fact that has been acknowledged by an overwhelming number of countries and the rewards have been many - very positive image abroad, significant debt forgiveness running into billions of dollars; multi-donor budgetary support, access to the Millennium Challenge Account which will enable government implement a comprehensive national programme of improving our rural economy through radical agricultural transformation, extensive electrification, improved road

infrastructure as well as the provision of more educational, water and sanitary facilities. Hopefully in good time, our economy will improve and with better economic prospects, we will all strive towards achieving the goal of making Ghana a middle income economy by 2015. That is the pressing issue and if we keep the pace and continue to be blessed with the kind of leadership we are now enjoying, we shall certainly get there.

Fellow citizens, the quality of leadership in our country depends on you and me. We vote to give power to our leaders and in recognition of the significant contributions being made by our brothers abroad to national development, a law passed in Parliament has been consented to by the President to make it possible for all of you to vote during elections provided you get your papers in order. I am certain many of you would want clarifications on this. The Embassy will happily oblige.

I have every intention of touring Belgium and Luxembourg to explain government initiatives to our compatriots in smaller numbers so as to allow for an interchange of ideas. An interchange that will ensure that we bring government to your doorstep just as we carry your ideas to government with a view to positively influencing national direction. This, we hope will enable us all feel truly Ghanaian even as we reside outside our country of birth.

Let me also assure you of my availability 24 hours a day and seven days a week, rain or shine to see to your welfare and other needs. YES! You can put it to the test!

I thank you for coming in your numbers to welcome me so warmly.

GOD BLESS YOU AND GOD BLESS OUR COUNTRY.

LONG LIVE GHANA!!!!