

#thankGhana address to end the nationwide thank you tour
Social Justice & a Sustainable Economy by John Dramani Mahama
NDC 2020 Presidential Candidate & former President

Good evening, my brothers, my sisters, ladies and gentlemen.

As you have just heard, I am John Dramani Mahama. I was born in Damongo, grew up in Accra and Tamale spending my holidays in Damongo. I schooled in Achimota, Tamale, at the great GHANASCO, Legon and later in Russia. Along this journey, I have learnt useful lessons from the school of life – the theatre of rich, potent and abundant dreams.

We were created in the image and likeness of God and given power to overcome adversity and defeat, particularly when we work in unity and with a common purpose. This unity and common purpose are needed if we want to transform our great nation, Ghana, into a sustainable economy underpinned by social justice.

As social democrats, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) believes and has always subscribed to a compassionate political philosophy that seeks to create opportunities for all to develop to their fullest potential, not just a few.

The framers of our constitution and national laws espoused these principles and directed our governments to bolster social justice through equitable, prudent, and sustainable allocation of our national resources with the future generation in mind. Our governments must therefore lead the way in guaranteeing social justice. As citizens, we must not give up when our government shirks this responsibility. We must, in our own small way, keep hope alive by offering support to encourage each other.

When a Ghanaian is in need, we must support him or her to rise up and walk. This promotes and sustains our common humanity. For me, the ethnicity, partisan affiliation, religious background or gender of that Ghanaian in need does not matter and should not matter.

The “I am because you are” spirit is not alien to the Ghanaian. We live and experience life as a community and not as individuals. Each day, I become even more aware of our interconnectedness as a people, with common hopes of prosperity, safety and liberty for ourselves and future generations.

This fundamental lesson was evident in the contrasting lives in Achimota, Accra, and Tamale. As Member of Parliament for Bole-Bamboi, as Vice President and as President, this guiding principle has always influenced my decision-making.

Let me at this point thank you for joining me this evening as I give thanks to the almighty God and to you - all Ghanaians, and the rank and file of the NDC, for your prayers, support, encouragement, and perpetual guidance in my political career. I note that the audience here is drawn from a wide array of backgrounds, from high-flying professionals through to students and to those who look forward to employment after having completed their education.

This diversity notwithstanding, I believe we are all bound by a single strand woven around the desire to see our country prosper and develop in a manner that gives opportunities to all.

It has been barely a year since Ghanaians went to the polls to elect a President and two hundred and seventy-five Members of Parliament. Despite misgivings about the processes leading up to the election, we had reposed hope and confidence in what was a time-tested tradition of peaceful and fair elections since our democratic return in 1992. Our expectations proved to be misplaced as the worst-possible election in 29 years was delivered last year.

The umpire of our elections, the Electoral Commission, for some reason, chose to sacrifice the much-heralded good image it had carved over the years. Our difficulties with the elections have been well-documented and I would belabour the point if I recounted them here. Suffice it to say that the kind of violence that claimed the lives of eight of our citizens, the misuse of security agencies to influence the outcome of elections in some constituencies and the uneven playing field that marred the 2020 elections, should never be allowed to recur.

We in the NDC have duly learned useful, even if bitter lessons, from the entire episode. We are willing to engage the EC in constructive dialogue with a view to addressing the clear shortfalls of the present electoral process and fashion out one that meets the expectations of all if we are to avoid the unfortunate incidents of 2020. We have started this process by proposing a number of reforms to the electoral process and we continue to carry out consultations with stakeholders. We look forward to having an opportunity with the Electoral Commission to discuss these reforms and their possible implementation.

Despite the disappointment of the loss, I deemed it appropriate to extend my appreciation and gratitude to Ghanaians who found me worthy enough to vote for in their millions. The over 6.2 million people who, according to the officially declared results, spent time in long queues over a period of 12 hours to vote for me, deserve all the appreciation I can muster. Their show of support is a great source of encouragement for me and the great NDC, which I led into the election, that we have the trust of Ghanaians and that with the right approach, we will be victorious next time.

That trust, was also reflected in the spectacular gains we made in the Parliamentary elections in which we moved from 106 seats to 137, marking an increase of 31. It is trite knowledge that but for the underhand manoeuvring and misuse of security agents to overturn the true outcome in several constituencies, we would be in the Majority in Parliament now.

I acknowledge the participation of those who chose to repose confidence in our opponents and voted for them. I extend thanks to them as well because their decision to exercise their franchise has left our democracy the richer for it.

To give expression to my eternal gratitude to Ghanaians, I have in the last few months toured the length and breadth of this country to personally convey my thanks for this massive support. I interacted with Ghanaians across the political and socioeconomic divide and experienced the challenges that they are going through, both in rural and urban areas.

Throughout these interactions, one thing has become resoundingly clear, and it is that our country is not on the right path. We are clearly headed for a major ditch if immediate action is not taken to reverse the trend. I also asked, after listening to many of the people who spoke in these interactions, what we can do collectively to address the excruciating hardship and suffering confronting many a Ghanaian.

The problems of our country are legion, and hydra headed. As I distilled from my interactions with the people of Ghana on this tour, the most pressing problem is the impact of the ailing economy on livelihoods, prospects and dreams.

The consequences of misguided priorities in economic management has led to unbearable hardships, high unemployment and the frustration and despair felt by millions of our youth. Other concerns include the bastardization and politicization of state institutions, mounting corruption, rising insecurity, abuse of power, lack of investment in critical infrastructure and abandonment of projects, and heavy-handed governance.

ECONOMY

The tragedy of our current national situation is that we have a government that appears completely unwilling to acknowledge the problems and even begin the process of addressing them. We are instead confronted with an administration that believes that these major problems can be wished away through PR, sloganeering, divisive rhetoric, populism, and plain political deception.

Take our present economic state for example. At a time when everyone is crying out over the excruciating hardships brought on by excessive taxation, ever increasing cost of living, weekly fuel price increases, this government chooses to recite a hackneyed mantra, that there are indicators that show that the economy is doing well.

Even if we were to overlook the mismatch between these claims and the very visceral suffering and pain people are going through in their daily lives; it beggars belief, that the same people saying this were only six years ago, dismissing any linkage between the welfare of Ghanaians and economic indices.

They said, then, that they had visited markets and were not experiencing single digit prices as the inflation rate then would dictate. They insisted then, that the best way to measure the strength or otherwise of the fundamentals of the economy was to look at the exchange rate, for its depreciation would expose the weakness therein. These days however, even as the exchange rate depreciates to very worrying levels, they say we have strong economic fundamentals.

Beyond these spirited linguistic acrobatics, the plain truth, which we all see and feel, is that the Ghanaian economy is in deep crisis. At the micro level, we feel the heavy impact of a troubled economy when we go to the market and find prices of basic items rising with alarming rapidity. We also feel it when we go to the fuel station and find that the already high price of fuel has been increased again.

We further feel it when our rents are increased or when we get onto the trotro and find that fares have gone up because of increases in fuel prices. Importers feel the pinch because duty at the ports have become almost impossible to pay due to the amount of taxes slapped on them.

The daily struggle of Ghanaians to make ends meet would be impossible to recount in one address. The question we ask, however, is how have things moved from bad to worse so quickly when we were promised a much better and more affordable standard of living?

I would say this is the direct result of the mismanagement of the Ghanaian economy by its current managers. The present economic decline is even more shocking when viewed against the backdrop that this has been the most fortunate government in the history of Ghana in terms of the quantum of resources received.

After inheriting an economy that had made remarkable recovery from the shocks of a protracted energy crisis, commodity price falls and much lower oil revenue, this government has brought this economy to its knees in ways that are totally unacceptable.

In pursuit of a just and fair society, the NDC administrations of Professor John Evans Atta Mills and my good self, between 2009 and 2017, achieved inclusive progress, in the face of intractable national challenges. The resultant effect of our work was a resilient economy that was projected to grow at 8% in 2017 and indeed the economy grew at 8% in 2017. We were focused on the management of the economy in its entirety, not mere economic metrics.

This desired outcome sprung from sound and comprehensive policies, which included fiscal prudence, and building up financial reserves. Unfortunately, this government has succeeded in squandering all the unprecedented opportunities it had and has plunged us into dire financial straits. The situation has become so grave that only last week, almost every credible international financial institution, including the fitch rating agency, reported that Ghana had lost access to the international bond market.

Indeed, this government was forced to abandon the issuance of critically needed \$1 billion in green and social bonds due to very high and unsustainable public debt levels. This is the result of a total loss of confidence by the international market in the Ghanaian economy. They do not trust us to be able to meet our repayment obligations because our finances are in shambles.

At the last reckoning, in the second quarter of this year, our total public debt stood at GH¢334 billion, representing a debt to GDP ratio of over 80%. According to Fitch, this is set to rise in 2022 and reach 90% in 2023. This also means that the public debt has increased by GH¢214 billion from GH¢120 billion in January 2017. The debt to GDP ratio in January 2017 was 56%.

Available data shows that Ghana's Eurobond debt of \$13.2 billion is the third highest in Sub-Saharan Africa. Expressed as a percentage of GDP, we have the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa at a staggering 17.8%.

The consequence of this unbridled borrowing is that this year, we will spend over GH¢35.8 billion paying interest on our debt. Added to amortization [debt repayment] of over GH¢15.2 billion, we will pump GH¢92.7% of tax revenue amounting to GH¢51 billion, into debt servicing alone.

With total revenue (both tax and non-tax) for the year, projected to be GH¢72 billion, we will only have GH¢21 billion left to meet all other commitments. This won't be enough to meet the public wage bill for 2021 which stands at GH¢30.8 billion. To bridge the gap, government must borrow more, and this will swell the public debt even further.

International credit rating agencies have warned that if this situation doesn't improve, we could suffer further downgrade in our credit ratings, and we could go as low as triple C (CCC) for the first time in our history. Indications from government's own medium-term financial projections show that interest payments on our debt for next year will reach over GH¢40 billion which will worsen an already very precarious situation.

The debt overhang has been exacerbated by an unprecedented budget deficit of 15.6% and a primary deficit of 8% (including energy sector and financial sector payments) recorded in 2020. The primary deficit is the clearest indicator of fiscal indiscipline. This extraordinarily large deficit needs to be financed through further borrowing.

It was in a desperate effort to raise revenue to meet these obligations after squandering all the resources generated, that the government imposed a tall list of taxes in the 2021 budget, which have inflicted severe pain and suffering on Ghanaians. In effect, they punished Ghanaians after they had mishandled the economy. The pain and suffering that these taxes have brought, leading to the rampant increases in the prices of goods and services, stem directly from the gaping hole in our finances occasioned by reckless election-related expenditure.

This government has attempted to conceal its appalling incompetence and recklessness in the management of the economy with the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic posed a major challenge to the global economy including ours, it is quite clear in our case, that it was the desire to win elections at all costs that got this government to engage in unbudgeted consumption expenditure to create an artificial feel-good factor.

It is this overspending that led to the very large deficit that has undermined the economy and left it in parlous shape. Data from our neighbours and other comparators in Sub-Saharan Africa who were also ravaged by COVID-19 clearly shows that almost all of them kept their economies within manageable limits and have not been thrown into the economic crisis we find ourselves in.

Let me begin with Cote D'Ivoire, which was President Akufo-Addo favourite comparator to Ghana in the run up to the 2016 elections. COVID-19 did not affect us any more extraordinarily than it did Cote D'Ivoire, yet their budget deficit for 2020 was 5.9% and their debt to GDP ratio stands at 45.7%. Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Niger, among others, have deficits below 7% while their debt to GDPs are nowhere near the 80%, we recorded.

The undeniable effects of COVID-19 notwithstanding, it is evident from the above that the government placed the inordinate desire to win elections above prudent economic management. That is why Ghanaians are going through so much suffering now.

Long before COVID-19 struck, red flags had emerged signalling mismanagement of the economy. We drew attention to this, but no corrective actions were taken. Among these were the deliberate underreporting of the deficit through creative accounting under which some expenditure items, especially in the energy and financial sectors, were treated as amortisation items to artificially understate the deficit numbers.

Another problem was the mortgaging of key statutory funds for borrowing which was not reported as part of the national debt. Funds which we created such as GETFund, the Road Fund, ELSA among others, have all been collateralized for borrowing.

This was meant to lull us into a false sense of security that our debt was lower than it was. A serious fallout is that the intended purpose for setting up these funds has been derailed. Coupled with the capping and realignment policies of this government, the sectors they are supposed to fund have been left completely hamstrung.

For instance, the District Assemblies Common Fund is in arrears of about four quarters, making it impossible for any meaningful development projects to be done in the districts. Education infrastructure and road construction have also been in very short supply because these funds have been so heavily encumbered.

Also, government's failure to settle arrears owed to contractors and suppliers, which have been grossly understated has added to the crisis. The 2021 budget reported arrears of GH¢8.2 billion out of which provision was made for only GH¢3.7 billion. We do know however, that total arrears accumulated at the Finance Ministry and other MDAs is about GH¢30 billion.

The rippling effects of this cash crunch has reverberated through many sectors of our national life. Take the education sector for instance where students of Colleges of Education have spent just three months in school out of the entire year because government has been unable to give the authorities money to run the schools.

At the second cycle level, this cash crunch has led to an erratic academic calendar and uncertainty, as students are sent home and recalled at irregular intervals. At the basic level, government has not been able to provide textbooks based on the new curricula for two straight years, forcing authorities to revert to the old curricula which was supposed to be outdated.

The present economic situation has fuelled talk among credible financial institutions and analysts, both local and foreign, of an IMF program to restore investor confidence in the economy. Who would have thought that the arch opponents of IMF programmes in the immediate past would now find themselves in a situation where an IMF programme would be recommended as a way out of the terrible economic mess they have superintended?

I had stated when we went to the IMF in 2014, with economic indicators and an environment that were better than we have today, that it was going to be our last such programme because we were confident that our homegrown program which won the confidence of investors, brought stability back to the economy and laid the foundation for the earlier gains under this administration, would be sustained and the mistakes of the past avoided.

The reality today is that despite all the gains we made, which we bequeathed to the current government, including two additional oil fields, and all the resources they have received totalling over GHS 400 billion in the last five years, our country has been virtually bankrupted.

Many have wondered what has become of all the claims of supposed competence and knowhow in economic management by those in charge of the economy now, after beating their chest only a few years ago.

There are indications that government prefers to impose more hardship and suffering on Ghanaians, by introducing very painful fiscal measures in the 2022 budget to be read next week as a way of avoiding an IMF programme. This government must realize that there is only so much that the already over-burdened Ghanaian people can bear and piling more taxes and levies on them will have devastating consequences on households. The very high cost of living will go through the roof leading to severe suffering for millions of people.

This is not the time for more taxes. The people are reeling under the heavy weight of existing taxes. This is the time for efficiency, and the modest use of the taxes collected. The ostentation and opulence that have characterized the spending of taxpayers' money contrasts sharply with the suffering of the people. The misuse of scarce resources on the avoidable creature comforts of the President and other leading officials must come to an end.

It is an unpardonable show of disrespect and insensitivity to the plight of the suffering masses for millions of Ghana cedis to be spent renting luxurious aircrafts for Presidential travels at a time when the state of Ghana has a fully fitted and airworthy Presidential aircraft that can ferry the President anywhere in this world. The staggering GH¢68 million spent on Presidential trips for the first nine months of 2019 alone constituted an unconscionable waste of very limited public resources at a time that the population was being asked to tighten their belts.

Leaders must be in tune with the sensibilities of the people. Resources entrusted into their care must be used judiciously for the public good, not for the excessive comfort of leaders. If this kind of waste was avoided, significant resources could be saved to address some of the more pressing concerns of the people.

The loss of confidence in the economy has triggered very worrying sell-off of our bonds and this is putting further pressure on our beleaguered cedi. Firm decisions need to be taken immediately to demonstrate to investors that we have what it takes to turn the situation around.

The critical decisions that must be taken to save the economy from imminent catastrophe must be guided solely by what is prudent and in the national interest, not what is politically expedient.

CREATING JOBS FOR THE YOUTH

Another problem that requires immediate resolution is the explosion in unemployment. The spectre of tens of thousands of frustrated and desperate young men and women, running and falling over themselves to apply for very limited positions in security agencies, as we have recently seen, is most heart breaking and deeply disturbing. Unemployment has truly become a national security crisis.

Here too, the government's approach has been one of nonchalance and the bundying about of dubious employment creation figures. This has been coupled with ad-hoc and unsustainable measures that have led to the throwing back onto the street of tens of thousands of NABCO recruits with virtually no hope of finding sustainable employment.

At the core of our message to the people of Ghana in 2020 was jobs, because the unemployment issue was staggering. And the youth bulge has surely become a major threat to our country. From all the pillars of our policy planks in the People's Manifesto – Infrastructure for Growth, Fixing the Economy, Tax cuts for jobs, developing a Digitally Functional Economy among others, our focus was on Jobs and Prosperity for all.

But for the actions of the Electoral Commission and the Supreme Court of Ghana, an NDC administration would have been in place today, and the implementation of our various people-centred policies would have provided you, and all of us, better conditions of living than we see today.

Unemployment continues to plague our country and it is clear this government has no sustainable plan to address it. The botched NABCO experiment has proven not to be the pathway and the means to an end. We need to come together and face youth unemployment head-on.

The NDC's one million (Edwumapa) Jobs Creation Plan, the free TVET and National Apprenticeship Programme as contained in our manifesto are still relevant and available for this government to draw on for implementation. If well implemented, we can create an average of 250,000 jobs every year for the youth of Ghana.

In our manifesto, we also provided plans to make Ghana a 24-hour economy – with three shifts of 8-hours each a day. Our plan was to aggressively diversify our economy, provide more public sector jobs, enhance productivity and add value to our products for export. This would answer Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) – Decent work and Economic Growth.

When I recently addressed the African Economic Congress, I urged Africa to engage and incentivise technology companies to focus on neglected areas and sectors that will impact the lives of our people such as agribusiness and health.

I further, encouraged Fintech companies to show more differentiation and diversification instead of the seeming over-concentration on creating payment platforms that are high yielding today. I believe, for example, that telemarketing and online internet shopping will continue to offer opportunities for our youth in the distribution value chain.

These are not things that I talk about in a vacuum. They are well thought through and structured solutions ready for implementation. On pages 41 and 42 of the abridged version of the 2020 People's Manifesto, we have laid out how a digitally functional economy will be developed to among others build on the infrastructure needed, train and create jobs, ensure expanded financial inclusion, introduce next generation agriculture, cyber security among others.

To further reduce the burden of unemployment, this government has a unique opportunity in the 2022 Budget Statement to lessen the tax burden on small and medium scale businesses. They must be allowed to grow to become more innovative and expand their employment generation capacity.

While I am aware of the tempting desire for the government to amass massive revenues for their un-tempered consumption-driven appetite, I need to caution that we must not kill the hen that lays the golden egg, in this process. It has become evident that the current approach in public financial management has failed and needs to be reconsidered. It has also become evident that the private sector needs support to help resolve the troubling levels of joblessness.

Ghanaian companies have proven that when they are given the needed push they will thrive, flourish and employ more. We tried it with the \$20 million injection in Entrance Pharmaceuticals (Tobinco), Ernest Chemists, Dannex, DanAdams and Kinapharma to expand production and provide jobs. It worked. Such a stimulus package to viable Ghanaian entities in targeted sectors can be adopted under the current circumstances to induce growth and enhance the employment generation capacity of the selected firms.

The Ghana EXIM Bank must re-direct its financing, more towards agriculture and agribusinesses. Farmers and agri-businesses in fishing, poultry and livestock, cashew, cocoa, sea, cotton, palm, and rubber etc. are in dire need of financial support to expand, take advantage of emerging local and international markets and contribute to employing more hands.

Public sector workers have proven over the years to be critical partners in national development. Perhaps this explains why it continues to attract job seekers. I disagree with the oft-repeated position that the public sector is full and has no room for more people.

The Human Resource Gap (HR Gap) study we conducted on the public sector last year, revealed gaping shortages in specific segments of the public sector. The Ghana Education Service and the Ghana Health Service have human resource gaps of almost 100,000 (98,650 actual) and more than 70,000 (76,795 actual) respectively. Similar gaps were also identified in the security services: Ghana Police Service - 35,020, Ghana National Fire Service - 30,136, Ghana Immigration Service - 3,522, and Ghana Prison Service - 7,925.

What is lacking are innovative strategies of financing these human resource gaps. The time has come for the government to bite the bullet and take the bull by the horn. Many of these sectors can be made self-financing to improve the capacity to employ, once they are allowed to use portions of their Internally Generated Funds instead of depending solely on the consolidated fund.

Similarly, the informal sector, which includes the creative arts industry and sports also deserve attention. Sports and creative arts are powerful life-changing endeavours. Azumah Nelson, 20-year old Samuel Takyi of Tokyo 2020 fame, Abedi Pele, Professor Francis Doodoo, Adjoa Bayor, the late Nana Kwame Ampadu, Amakye Dede, Kojo Antwi, modern day musicians, actors and actresses have transformed their lives and that of their families and communities through their talents.

Government must always keep in mind that their trade can only be enhanced if, and only if, the appropriate infrastructure and the enabling environment is created for them. After all, traders at our various food markets need good roads to cart farm produce from the farm-gate to the market to sell and make an income, while importers - like my friends at Abossey Okai - need a favourable exchange rate regime and a reduction in taxes at the port for their businesses to thrive.

Ladies and gentlemen; let me quote for you a paragraph from the NDC's 2020 People's Manifesto, and it reads: "Ghanaians need new opportunities for the development of their talents and skills. Transitioning from the current economic model to a knowledge-based economy will provide exactly that."

For me, if a government must commit future generations to a financial obligation, then a substantial portion of the funds should be used for projects that can generate income to pay back the debt. Or the funds must be directed towards public investment expenditure (CAPEX) that future generations can benefit from. The difference is very clear if you compare our record to the current trajectory.

We could also have opted for the short-term convenience of capping numerous statutory allocations but decided against it because of our focus on equitable and sustainable growth. I have heard various reports about attempts to access the Ghana Heritage Fund by this administration to support the annual budget. That cannot be. That should never be. I do hope that these are just speculations. If the government has decapitated over 90% of the petroleum revenue inflows, how can the meagre 8% help them?

The Stabilisation Fund and the Ghana Infrastructure Investment Fund (GIIF), both of which were established during my period as President can serve Ghana well. Let me recognise the contributions of my Senior Policy Adviser Dr. Valerie Sawyerr and the venerable Uncle Ato Ahwoi for their tireless efforts towards the setting up of especially the Infrastructure Fund.

Additional oil revenues, which came on stream from the Sankofa – ENI fields, the TEN fields and the Energy Sector Levy (ESLA) should have provided sufficient revenue to retire most of the legacy debts in the energy sector and strengthen the banking sector. We would have avoided the reckless and deliberate collapse of Ghanaian-owned banks, the massive job losses and the many adverse socio-economic impacts that were associated with this unfortunate endeavour.

My beloved brothers and sisters, the singular effect of this botched banking regulatory action on consumer and business confidence will impact this country for a long while. I am proud that as President and in conformity with our traditional ways of doing things as a true Ghanaian - consensus building - our administration strengthened the consensual approach to policy building. We reached across party lines and accepted criticism in good faith.

We did not hound journalists and civil society organisations for aggressively criticising us even if we disagreed with their approach or viewpoints. Most of you will remember the Senchi Forum that had an audience of prominent talents from opposing political groups.

Another key plank of our administration's strategy was transparency in our public financial management system and in our national discourse. The opacity within our current national discourse about economic indices undermines our collective progress. Debates about the true state of the nation, its debt levels, exchange rate trajectory or even growth numbers underpin the need for strong institutions that cannot be subverted by individual preferences.

Under the Ghana Integrated Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS), we implemented best-practice control systems to improve accountability in public financial management. We plan to pick up from where we left off. We also promulgated the Public Financial Management Act to align our fiscal management practices with international standards.

Whiles strengthening the economy for sustainability our government further had our eyes firmly on growth and productivity. We did not believe we could recklessly borrow our way out of under-development.

A major hinderance to mobilizing sufficient resources to fund our development is corruption. We have in recent times witnessed acts of corruption, cronyism and decadence that lower the pedigree and reputation of the Office of the President – not forgetting the dubious and opaque Agyapa Gold Royalties deal, which this government is still hankering after with plans of executing and hosting in a tax haven.

I must at this point recognise the nationalistic truth and outpouring of the sentiments of many Ghanaians by the Catholic Bishops Conference on Monday. Until we are bold to reflect what we are all experiencing under this government, the situation will continue to worsen, and we are all going to be worse off from suffering.

Ladies and gentlemen, civil servants, doctors, nurses, teachers, businessmen and women, traders, farmers, drivers, and the teeming unemployed youth of Ghana, this government is our common national tragedy. We may yet have to endure these very difficult times for a while more due to a combination of factors.

But I come to you this evening with a simple message. Do not – out of avoidable hardships and difficulties – despair to the point of losing hope and giving up on Ghana. Do not lose hope! Instead, I urge you to hope and work hard for a better Ghana and a better future under a new NDC administration in 2025.

I am talking about a future where your name, your ethnicity, your tribe, your circumstances of birth will not determine how you are treated in your own country by your own government. I recall the words of the Most Reverend Japhet Yao Ledo during my thank you tour of the Volta Region, and I stand this evening to assure the people of the region and the nation at large that all successive NDC

administrations will continue to be national and people-centred ones, sharing the national cake, equally and beneficially to all regions and parts of the country.

A future where institutions will work for the good of all citizens and all citizens will reciprocate institutions with willing respect, not demanded obeisance out of fear of repercussions from the powers that be.

A future where the President will accord due respect to all citizens including Chiefs from all regions. So that a legitimate request by a Chief in Aflao to a minister to complete and operationalise a Community Day Senior High School started by my administration would not be treated shabbily by the President.

A future where state institutions will not astronomically increase admissions to the Ghana Law School in an election year; just because John Mahama and the NDC promised to expand access to professional legal education – only to turn around a year after the elections to deny access to many more students including those who are deemed to have passed the entrance examinations.

Ladies and Gentlemen, these are the issues the government wants you to ignore and forget. But how can you forget your living experience of hardships? No amount of digital propaganda, state-orchestrated and exaggerated actions and diversions will take away the excruciating hardship Ghanaians are enduring under this government.

In the middle of all these social and economic injustices, I urge all state institutions including independent constitutional bodies and the security apparatus, to be mindful of their mandate to the constitution and the people of Ghana. They should not yield to pressure to become agents of oppression and tools for propaganda. This country will be liberated, and they should seek to be on the favourable side of history.

The recent brouhaha about upweighting the use and application of enhanced computer systems in our workflows, practices and lifestyles is needless. Some have opted to term the drive a digitalisation drive. I am not the type to be taken in by words or huge catchy phrases as I focus on the substance of the programme in terms of its objectives, mode of delivery, outcomes, and impacts at cost effective levels.

It is quite amusing though, that even as the economy faces these severe challenges requiring urgent action, those who have been responsible for the mess, have attempted to make a fluid transition from failed, self-styled economic messiahs of the very recent past to overnight IT champions.

We are suddenly being told that the decades old incremental progress that has been made in the ICT sector due to sound and consistent policy making spanning several governments leading us to a point where they are being leveraged for convenient, efficient and innovative service delivery and transactions, is the brainchild of some people whose record and involvement is at best, very tenuous.

It bears stating that if the ICT sector has grown in leaps and bounds, then it is down to the hard work of several people who dedicated their lives and efforts towards bringing us thus far.

On our part as a government, we upgraded the metro fibre link between the Ministries in Accra and built a backbone fibre optic cable of over one thousand kilometres in length, including the Eastern corridor from Ho to Bawku with a link from Yendi to Tamale. Our choice of the eastern corridor, which is an underserved area, was instructive as it engrained our commitment to social justice and equity.

We also deployed 4G LTE technology with one hundred and twenty base stations across the country and built a tier-three national data centre with a 600-Rackspace Data Centre in Accra and a 45-Rackspace back-up in Kumasi.

It is important to appreciate that all digital software require an underlying infrastructure to allow for connectivity, storage, security, and analytics. In simple terms without the underlying infrastructure, systems and applications cannot talk to each other to support decision-making. We also initiated various projects under the e-government project to digitalise documents and procedures in parliament and the judiciary among others.

I keep wondering, rather curiously, why this government will not implement our policy of disallowing state institutions from investing in building separate data centres while we have space in the national data centre.

The history of port automation in Ghana, perhaps gives the most vivid illustration of how illusory the desire to appropriate gains in technology uptake for partisan gain is.

That process begun under the Rawlings administration in the late nineties with the policy of the Ghana National Single Window programme, which culminated in the roll out of the GCNet system under President Kufour in 2002 as the first phase. In 2015 the second phase commenced with a number of notable achievements.

A fully automated Pre-Arrival Assessment Reporting System (PAARS) in 2015, which reduced the time for import classification from two weeks to 48 hours and in some cases 2 hours.

A fully electronic payment system for the import Declaration Form (IDF), which meant that importers could purchase this via credit card, mobile money or bank draft, was launched. Ghana's first CashXpress Card for payments of Customs Duty on the Ghana's Trading Hub Portal was introduced.

Other digital applications like the Trade Information Portal, Export Tariff Classification Tool, Duty Calculation Tool, Price Valuation Tool and a fully functional Help Desk. Following these interventions, a roadmap for full paperless goods clearance was developed and launched in June 2016 which among others, would ensure that between 2017 and 2020:

- Automation of internal workflow for each government agency
- Automation of the Customs Long Room
- Introduction of paperless exchange control forms
- Introduction of paperless manifests and BAPLIEs among others.

My administration and the ones before us invested heavily in this drive.

CONCLUSION

My very distinguished audience, both in here and those joining us on radio, television, Facebook and on YouTube, I am profoundly grateful to you for your attention and support. I have shared with you a few thoughts, which should drive our nation forward on the path of progress and prosperity.

I have also advocated the need for a sustainable economy that creates jobs and opportunities for all, not just a few. That is Social Justice!

I had always thought the POSTERITY that was to judge me was far away, but it came too soon under this government's watch. I do not seek vindication. How can I seek vindication when the impact of this government's mismanagement of the economy has been so grave on the people of Ghana who I hold dear?

My task is to continue to give you hope and results, help the NDC to REORGANISE, put proper and enduring systems in place, work together in unity to win election 2024 at the polling stations, in a manner that no man or woman can interfere with.

My task is also to continue to serve our continent and the world. I am currently working together with an Independent Global Health Panel, through which I have advocated for the establishment of a Global Public Health Convention to ensure adequate Pandemic Preparedness and Response. Another pandemic will be a disaster particularly if it catches us unprepared.

In a few weeks I will be in the Gambia, together with other regional bodies to observe the December 04 presidential elections of that country. My contribution to consolidating democracy in our country is known and enshrined.

For the younger generation coming up, full of ideas, creativity, energy, altruism and who believe in a fair, just and inclusive Ghana that offers you the opportunities and platform to drive the change you seek – you currently outnumber us, and the future is for you.

I am asking you to keep believing and showing an active interest in the fortunes and direction of this country. Considering your numbers, the current and future direction of this country rests on your oars.

Let me at this point celebrate my running mate, Professor Naana Jane Opoku Agyemang. She has been a worthy partner, and indeed, she was an efficient Vice Chancellor and Minister for Education. In the NDC, we do have the women, and you have seen them on display this evening. Let us work for social justice. I urge you all to stay safe, for COVID-19 is still here.

Thank you for your attention.

God bless us all.