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STATEMENT

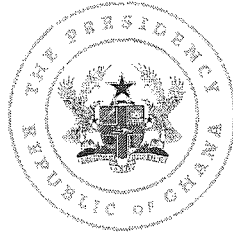
BY

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

ON THE OCCASION OF

**THE 71ST SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

NEW YORK, 21ST SEPTEMBER, 2016



**STATEMENT BY HE MR. JOHN DRAMANI MAHAMA,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA
AT THE 71ST SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
New York- Wednesday September 21, 2016**

**Thank you my brother and President of the 71st Session of the United Nations
General Assembly
Mr. Secretary General
Colleague Delegates to the Assembly**

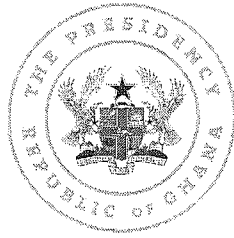
Allow me to first congratulate Ambassador Peter Thompson on your election as President of the General Assembly and to assure you of Ghana's support and cooperation during this 71st Session and throughout your tenure.

I congratulate also Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, for his selfless and dedicated service to our Organization over the past eight years and for the achievements during his tenure of office.

His time as Secretary-General witnessed some key defining moments for the United Nations in the maintenance of international peace and security, development and human rights, and I commend him for his leadership.

I am President of the Republic of Ghana. I was born one year after my country gained independence from colonial domination in 1957. I was born in the same year as Michael Jackson whose untimely tragic death shocked the whole world.

Michael also known as the King of Pop was one of the greatest artistes that ever lived. The words of his 1991 hit song "Heal the world" continue to echo to us from the grave.



Michael Jackson sang, "heal the world/make the world a better place for you and for me/and the entire human race".

His song released in 1991 came at a time of excitement for the world.

In the 58 years of my life, I have seen the world change more rapidly than in the millions of years of its existence. My life has spanned the excitement of the post war era, the heady days of our liberation from colonial rule in Africa, the Apollo moon landing, the cold war, the excitement at the fall of the Berlin wall, the era of globalization, the end of apartheid, the global progress of the MDGs, the Arab Spring, Brexit, China's slowdown, SDGs, ISIS, Cyber Attacks and on and on and on.

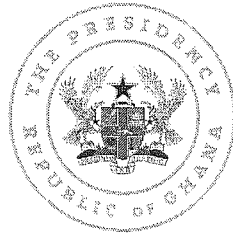
Mr. President,

Our world today is more complicated than it has ever been. And the question I ask is, what happened to the ideals that gave birth to this organization, the United Nations. What happened to that enthusiasm that captured the spirit of the post war world, that envisioned peace, safety and security for all mankind?

What happened to the excitement at the thawing of the cold war? And what happened to our joy at the collapse of apartheid?

The era of the cold war created a paradoxical safety and security. The bipolar world and the arms race assured mutual destruction from any nuclear war. The world was more predictable.

Those of us in developing countries hid behind our shield of the Non-Aligned Movement. We marched against nuclear armaments and envisioned the day the nuclear arms race would end so the trillions of dollars spent by the superpowers on nuclear weapons would yield a dividend that will create a life of prosperity for all people on earth.



President Reagan stood before the Brandenburg gate in 1987 and said “Mr. Gorbachev open this gate. Mr. Gorbachev tear down this wall.”

In President Reagan’s words, “walls cannot withstand faith, ...cannot withstand truth, ...cannot withstand freedom”.

The fall of the Berlin wall envisioned a new world. The era of globalization. An age where trade and interaction amongst people of the world would spread prosperity across the globe. It did somewhat!

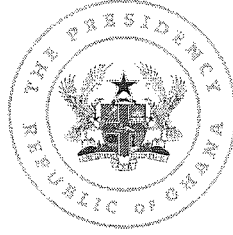
The rise of the Asian tigers, the emerging world, China, Brazil, South Africa, India, the turn of the millennium and the MDGs raised millions of people out of poverty.

A young man in West Africa drops out of school and takes to selling petty items along the streets of the city. Agreeing with four of his friends they decided to raise money and try to make it to the greener pastures of Europe.

They pay their way through Niger and arrive at Agadez, from where they brave the trek of death. A dangerous hike across the harshest desert on earth. They are attacked by bandits and robbed of all their money and provisions. They are rescued by some “good Samaritans.”

Two members of their group do not make it. After months of living under the threat of death from any of the armed groups including ISIS in Libya, they finally board an overloaded dinghy bound for Italy. Rescued from the sea after their dinghy capsized, only one of them remains, held in a refugee detention centre in Italy. He is the lucky one.

The only one of five friends to survive the perilous journey. How long he will remain in the centre, he does not know. This could be the story of any young African seeking a better life in Europe.



Mr. President,

All over the world, there are new walls coming up. Walls that imprison us against the rest of the world. The young African refugee in an Italian detention centre is facing one such new wall.

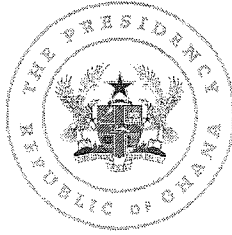
In many parts of the world, extremist forces have hijacked the dialogue and in the millennial generation, all available cutting edge technology is used to spread anxieties that evoke fear and arouse our basest emotions.

Hate speech is becoming common. People complain of being tired of being politically correct. In many places xenophobia has taken over rational thinking. In the vote on Brexit, the spectre of a flood of refugees was used as the instrument for propelling an exit from the EU.

It's a paradox of our world, that nearly 30 years after Reagan called for the Berlin Wall to be torn down, new walls are springing up everywhere.

And yet we have the resources in this world to guarantee each person a decent life. In the implementation of the MDGs, despite the minimal resources injected by the wealthy nations, we managed by prioritizing our spending to put more children in school than ever before in history. We managed to pull more than 40% of the worlds people out of extreme poverty.

In Valetta, the European Union put 1.8 billion Euros into an emergency fund to cooperate with Africa in curbing unregulated migration. And yet with a significant share of the world's arable lands, a youthful labour force, and a significant share of the world's natural resources, a reordering of economic relations could create boundless opportunities that would keep young Africans at home.



Removing subsidies to farmers of the advanced world, would create an even playing field for African farmers to compete. Removing revenue and non revenue barriers to African produce would give African agriculture a fighting chance.

Mr. President,

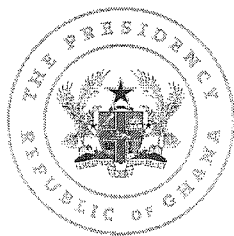
Some of the young Africans who hazard the desert and Mediterranean Sea to cross to Europe from my country are young poultry farmers or other entrepreneurs who sell their shops and undertake the journey because they can no longer compete with the tons of frozen chicken dumped on African markets annually, or the adverse business environment they have to face.

Africa does not need your sympathy or Overseas Development Assistance. Africa needs a fair chance to trade with the rest of the world and amongst ourselves. The progress towards the creation of a Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) is commendable and must be fast tracked.

Raising intra African trade alone from the paltry average of 15% will create better opportunities for Africa's youth.

We can achieve a lot in collaboration with the rest of the world and yet we must realize that a lot rests within our own capacity to achieve as Africans. Recently I took the decision to allow citizens of other African countries travelling to Ghana to obtain visas on arrival. This would stimulate trade and investment if it were replicated across the continent.

Structural reforms are required in many areas. Governance is also a critical area that requires reform in Africa. Democracy unleashes the creative juices of citizens. Africa has made remarkable progress. Elections are held regularly, civil society groups and think tanks have become more vocal, and the media is increasingly free.



And yet there is a lot more that can be done to allow Africans the space to express themselves. Democracy is not a one size fits all system. Different countries are at different stages of the democratic journey. Democracy evolves and cannot be forced. It doesn't help for bigger powers to go proselytizing democracy. It can have its negative consequences as we are experiencing in parts of North Africa and the Middle East. But still a properly functioning peer system can avoid some of the melt downs we are experiencing in some African countries due to the desire to remain in office interminably.

Mr. President,

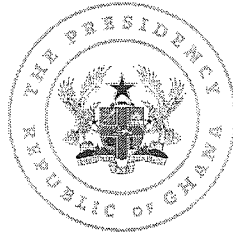
The mistake with Africa is that we are seen as a homogenous unit and treated as such, not taking cognizance that we are a whole continent with different aspirations, cultures, democracies and economic development.

Human progress is not a seamless movement forward. It encompasses periods of reversal, mistakes, fumbling and falling. All parts of the world have been through this, learnt from their mistakes, picked themselves up after a fall and continued moving.

Africa must be allowed the same latitude.

A few years ago the term Africa Rising painted a continent on the move. Recent headwinds experienced due to the China slowdown and the collapse of commodity prices have got some Africa sceptics gloating again over how nothing good can come from the continent.

Africa is a continent of 54 countries at different stages of progress and development. There must be room for us to make our mistakes and learn from them. Africa has the potential to be the next continent on the rise. There is a lot going for Africa.



There are many success stories on the continent. Africa has the fastest growing population, meaning a very youthful labour force. It has the fastest growing middle class with increasing disposable incomes. It has the fastest growing ICT networks in the world. Africa needs strengthened institutions and we are working to build them.

We must ingrain transparency and integrity, more and more, in our governance systems. President Obama said on his historic visit to Ghana that what Africa needs is strong institutions. We must strengthen our institutions of governance to eliminate the incidence of corruption that impoverishes our people.

Mr. President,

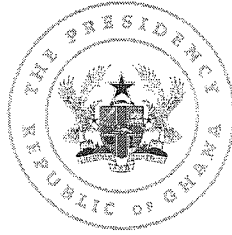
My country Ghana is a part of Africa's success story. I am proud of my country. We are variously called the "model of democracy" in Africa or the "beacon of democracy".

We have not looked back since the adoption of our 1992 constitution. Successive elections with power occasionally swinging between opposing political forces has established Ghana's democratic credentials in the world.

A strict two term limit for the President means that every eight years it is guaranteed that there would be a new person in charge.

Ghana has a fiercely independent media with hundreds of newspapers and radio stations. I say jokingly to my colleagues that in Ghana I have 27 million Presidents all of whom know my job better than me. Every morning on hundreds of political talk-shows across the country, my fellow citizens can be heard coaching me on how to do my job and what my responsibilities are as President.

Mr. President,



Bold measures in effecting structural reforms have yielded a more stable and resilient economy with deficit to GDP target of 4.9% this year, among other favourable targets. With a stable currency, business confidence is rising and Foreign Direct Investment remains strong. Ghana has been chugging along at a respectable average of about 6% GDP growth over the last decade. With the structural reforms we have undertaken in collaboration with the Development Partners and new developments in our offshore oil and gas prospects, Ghana is predicted to clip along from next year at a respectable 8% GDP growth per annum.

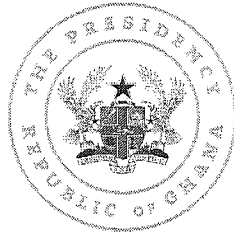
Over the last decade, we have invested heavily in expanding our socio economic infrastructure. Investments in healthcare, education, power, water, roads, and ports are yielding significant dividends for us and are creating more employment opportunities.

These investments are yielding dividends in improved healthcare, increased enrolment at all levels of the educational ladder, improved transportation system, the growth of the small and medium enterprises sector.

With the modest progress we are making, we are able to recapture the vision of the Founder of our Nation and it is a happy coincidence that on his birth anniversary today, I have the opportunity to address the world from the prestigious stage of the UN General Assembly.

Today the 21st of September marks the birthday of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah from whom many of our current generation of African leaders draw inspiration. President Kwame Nkrumah was a champion of African liberation and a staunch Pan Africanist. I wish all my country men and women a happy Founder's day.

Mr. President,



Two years ago, I stood on this stage and in my capacity as the Chair of ECOWAS called for urgent action to halt the spread of the Ebola Virus Disease, which was ravaging three of our West African neighbours and threatening to spread across the whole sub-region.

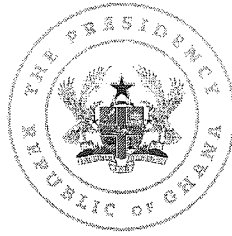
Today, I stand here to salute Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and the UN for the prompt response in setting up UNMEER which was based in Ghana. UNMEER will probably go down in the history of the UN as one of the most successful and effective missions ever deployed by this organization.

I salute also the international community for the effective response in form of logistics, personnel, medication and other stuff which helped to snuff out the disease in a relatively short time. My particular commendation goes to the volunteers, including forty-one (41) Ghanaians, who risked their lives by going into the infection zone to assist fight the disease.

Ghana remains proud of its contribution towards ending that crisis and the support to the UN System and the international community when we availed our country as a staging post for the international response and the UN Mission on the Ebola Emergency Response despite the threats.

Following the Ebola response, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Norwegian Prime Minister Erna Solberg and I wrote to the Secretary General calling for a high level panel to prepare a report that allows the world to respond better in times of such global health crisis. We are faced with such a situation already in respect of the exponential spread of the Zika virus. We must use the lessons learned to confront this new threat.

Mr. President,



Another threat we must confront together as a united world is the threat of terrorism. No part of the world is safe. In our sub-region the activities of Boko Haram in North Eastern Nigeria and the Chad basin has displaced millions of people and claimed thousands of casualties.

Attacks in Mali, Burkina Faso and Cote D'Ivoire show that all our countries are at risk. Terrorism is currently one of the gravest threats to world peace and security.

We cannot be under any illusions about the imminent threat to all of us even as we go about our daily activities. But the solution is not to shut our doors to foreigners who may have genuine cause for visiting— for tourism, for business, for sanctuary as refugees.

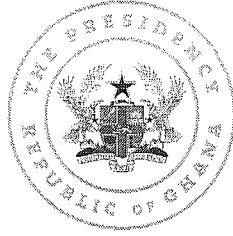
That is what the terrorists would want us to do – to instil fear and panic in order that we shut our doors on the rest of the world.

Ghana stands in solidarity with all countries that have experienced terrorism recently- Bangladesh, Belgium, France, Germany, Indonesia, Lebanon, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Turkey and the United States of America.

No! We must not give in to them. The terrorists must not win and they will not win!

Mr. President,

I wish to commend the United States and Cuba for the progress made in thawing the relations between the two neighbours. We have all been watching with excitement the removal of some of the last vestiges of the cold war with the reopening of embassies, the historic visit of President Obama and the resumption of flights between the two countries.



It is time to take the remaining steps to completely lift the blockade on Cuba and it is my hope that this can be achieved before President Obama's administration leaves office.

Mr. President,

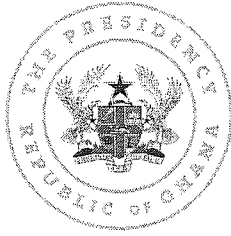
Ghana once again wishes to reiterate its support for a two state solution to the Israeli- Palestinian conflict. There is no military solution to this conflict and Israel's security can only be guaranteed by a peaceful and stable Palestinian state coexisting side by side. Unfortunately, the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands continues to make such a solution more and more difficult to attain.

Mr. President

Last September, we convened in this very hall and made a commitment to implement the agenda for sustainable development. It is an ambitious and yet achievable Agenda, whose goals and targets go far beyond the imperatives of economic growth into tackling the root causes of poverty and deprivation and to delivering on the social and environmental dimensions of development.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development marks not only the beginning of a new and even more promising phase in our trajectory as a global body, but also challenges us to develop new and innovative partnerships that I believe will guarantee progress evenly across regions and for all people.

The seventeen (17) goals and one hundred and sixty-nine (169) targets underscore the underlying values of the United Nations as enshrined in its Charter and provide renewed impetus to its activities in sustaining peace, preserving our planet, and ensuring socio-economic justice as well as safeguarding the dignity of mankind.



Mr. President,

The Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development together with the Sustainable Development Goals represent four important mutually reinforcing landmark agreements that opens a new chapter in global development towards ensuring prosperity for our people, and preserving our planet.

I am impressed by the level of commitment that the US and China, two of the major emitters of Greenhouse gases, have shown by agreeing to ratify the Paris Agreement. I hope that this will be the catalyst that brings the agreement into force and unequivocally state our commitment as a generation towards bequeathing a better world to future generations.

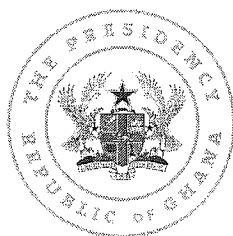
Mr. President, we must not fail to do this.

It is also our responsibility, as leaders, to move beyond norm setting to delivering on our commitments at the national, regional and global levels. Even if we do not achieve all at the same time, it must not be for want of effort.

Mr. President,

I am particularly honoured to have the opportunity to co-Chair the Secretary-General's Advocacy Group in support of the SDGs. While we acknowledge that national leadership and ownership are critical, there is a need for global partnerships for financial resources, policy advice and technical assistance.

I am happy to inform you, Mr. President, that Ghana has begun work in earnest to implement the SDGs and we have put into place the necessary national structures



to ensure that the policies and measures taken in that regard fall in line with our 40-year development plan, currently being formulated.

I have also signed the ratification instrument of the Paris Agreement and would be part of the event today to deposit Ghana's instrument with the UN.

Mr. President,

The United Nations Security Council remains an important source of legitimacy for international action on peace and security. While Africa accounts for close to one-third of the UN membership and nearly two-thirds of the work of the Council, it remains woefully under-represented in the permanent and non-permanent category.

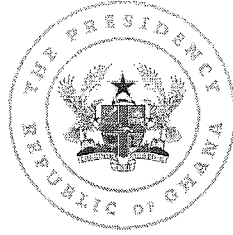
Eleven long years after the AU adopted the Ezelwini consensus, we are nowhere near achieving a more equitable reform of the UN Security Council. This will continue to remain a scar on the conscience of this world body if not remedied.

Mr. President,

Ghana is a leading democracy in Africa. I stand before the world to declare that just as we have done in the past, my country will go to the polls this December and the processes before, during and after will mark a further consolidation of Ghana's credentials as a leading world democracy.

In conclusion, let me once again express my sincere appreciation to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his extraordinary leadership during his tenure as Secretary General of the United Nations.

The people of Ghana, my wife and I, wish you and Mrs. Ban Soon-taek well in your future endeavours.



It is my wish that history will record our time here in this hall as one that gave reality to Michael Jackson's song, "heal the world/make the world a better place for you and for me/and for the entire human race".

Mr. President, I thank you for the opportunity to address this Assembly.