

INAUGURAL ADDRESS BY H.E. JAMES VICTOR GBEHO AT THE OFFICIAL
LAUNCH OF THE CENTRE FOR DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS-GHANA - ACCRA,
14TH NOVEMBER, 2017.

Madam Chairperson

Honourable Former Ministers of State

Honourable Deputy Speaker of Parliament

Honourable Members of Parliament

Distinguished Diplomats

Distinguished Guarantors and Members of the Centre

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I must, first of all, proffer a debt of gratitude to my friends and colleagues behind the launching of the new Centre for Democratic Transitions for the honour of being chosen as the Guest Speaker on this important occasion. I am certain that political pundits, formulators and implementers of Ghana's foreign policy as well as other stakeholders in international relations would readily confirm that the process of handing-over governmental power from one administration to another, continues to pose serious challenges to countries in Africa, Ghana included. I am pleased, therefore, to share my views on the subject with you all this evening.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The recent history of our continent or, perhaps, the account of post-independence governance in African countries, is replete with instances of violence, civil wars and military takeovers, all of which have stunted social, economic and political development generally. With time, that era is now happily behind us as military and other forms of dictatorship have steadily become unpopular and have

almost petered out. Civil wars and governmental instability have also been replaced, as the democratic culture gained ground all around Africa, by the equally frequent breakdown in attempts at transferring democratic power from one administration to another.

Indeed, within the framework of democratic governance, such power has transferred from one constitutional government or from a military dictatorship to an elected government. It has also gone from one political party to another. But, we still have the nagging problems of disputed election results, unbridled ambition of politicians and sheer mismanagement to contend.

However, for our purposes in Africa, transitions need to be free, fair and legal as well as devoid of any form of violence to guarantee democratic transition. Above all, transitions must be sustainable to ensure relative and enduring peace. In that regard, it is a matter of great pride to every citizen of Ghana that our country is a shining example of the successful and democratic transfer of power. It has done so for the last 20 years.

It is because of the search for answers to the continuing failure in some African states that we focus our attention today on our chosen theme. I am pleased therefore, to be part of tonight's important discourse. After all, failure is a blow to democracy and a hindrance to development generally. It is also a built-in hindrance to the much sought after integration on the African continent hence the need to pay serious attention to its causes, nature and effect on transitions generally.

In my humble view, the breakdown of transitions have been mainly due to, but not exclusively caused by a number of factors that African countries, their peoples and governments, must recognize, accept and own up to as constituting impediments to democratic governance and its transitions. To leave this important process to chance is to continue to gamble with our future on the continent.

A careful study of instances of failure in the management of democratic transitions on the continent would reveal no doubt that they are more often than not

caused by the atavistic antagonisms between and among ethnic groups. Unfortunately, steps taken to mitigate their deleterious effects include post-independence constitutions that have not adequately addressed glaring manifestations of ethnocentrism. Indeed, when it comes to ethnic conflicts, no African state is spared embarrassment. The shame is at once historical and cultural; factors which democracy on the continent must grapple with in order to ensure constitutional governance.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I must be the first to also admit that ethnocentrism or tribalism is not peculiar to African countries alone. It exists in various forms globally. It is a phase in the development of human society which resorts to it for self-preservation and the countering of the domination of one tribe by another. The difference between Europeans and Africans where ethnic sentiments are concerned for example is that whereas Europeans would choose to be subtle with ethnicism and rather give more weight to political considerations, the African, if he is not politically mature, would be more likely to resort to the ethnic cudgel for protection and advantage. In the circumstance, the importance of appropriate education or orientation cannot be over-emphasized in the search for a solution.

In that respect, Ghanaians are lucky to have inherited the legacy of our first President, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, whose government, when threatened by ethnic, regional and religious divisions in nascent Ghana, stood firm against party politics that gratified ethnic and religious sentiments. Ghana is thus more united today than many other African countries because all rights and privileges are enjoyed by all Ghanaians no matter their tribe and faith.

Another potential hindrance to democratic transitions in Africa has been the unhelpful and arrogant rejection of conflict resolution until opponents would hopefully accept their tribal or clan superiority. As a result of the resolute stand by the C.P.P.

administration, we find that by the time Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's administration came to an unfortunate end in 1966, Ghana had already tasted and adopted nationalism.

The reaction of Dr. Nkrumah and his Convention Peoples Party did not end with legislation against ethnic, regional and religious parties, it was also accompanied by a vigorous political education of the electorate to accept the philosophy and rationale in establishing political parties the membership of which was universal.

Another hindrance to democratic transition on the continent has been the enactment of weak constitutions and other ineffectual laws to suit the whims of undemocratic leaders when it was quite clear that unambiguous and neutral laws and regulations were those required to reduce the probability of conflict. In that context, Ghana again has a few lessons for others.

On the eve of the return to constitutional rule in the country in 1992, after two decades of military rule, a new constitution was promulgated by Parliament in 1992, following exhaustive consultations and debate encapsulating a national consensus on the law of the land. Additionally, it contained a schedule of Transitional Provisions spelling out how the new constitution would usher in each branch of Government. Nothing was left to chance. Since then, and as a result of experience gained, further Acts have also become law spelling out, how to further strengthen subsequent transitions. It is important therefore, to lay emphasis on legal documentations that support and guide democratic transitions. Ghana's transitional efforts in 1992 are clearly exemplary and must be emulated.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The internecine civil war that ravaged Liberia in the mid-1980s was unduly prolonged and intensified by a serious lack of transitional laws governing how power must be transferred. Liberia was then in the throes of a chaotic civil war. Furthermore, inadequate consultations with and among the warring factions doomed the prospect of

a peaceful Liberia even after installing its new President, Charles Gankay Taylor in 1995.

As it happened, Charles Taylor was appointed President, as had been agreed earlier in talks held in Ghana but he failed to manage the transition properly thus sowing the seeds of tension and conflict.

Charles Taylor could not accept all other ethnic groups in his country as politically equal to his Americo-Liberian lineage. He showed in all his words and actions that the Krahn tribe from which Master Sargeant Doe, the leader of the coup d'état that launched the civil war in Liberia hailed, could not be trusted or forgiven by him and his NPFL faction. His short rule was therefore mostly in pursuit of members of that tribe, although they numbered not more than 3% of the population. War between the two groups became inevitable when Charles Taylor brought out his heavy guns on April 6, 1996 in a bid to defeat once and for all the Krahns under the leadership of Maj-General-Roosevelt Johnson. They fought one of the bloodiest wars in West Africa without a decisive victory for Charles Taylor and his NPFL followers. Thus eliminating the prospect of a democratic transition at that time.

Similarly, at the peace conference held in Addis Ababa in 1993 to mediate the conflict between General Mohammed Farrah Aideed of the Somalia National Alliance and all the other factions in Somalia, the host country was, at the meeting, openly partial to Aideed while claiming to be mediating their conflict. Indeed the host country deliberately accorded Aideed the status of Head of State while relegating all others. Little wonder that it all failed within weeks of the Addis Ababa conference. The transitional arrangements were defective ab initio, but Gen. Aideed continued with his reliance on fire-power to achieve his undemocratic ends. Sadly, he himself met his untimely death later.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The situation in Kenya today and its antecedents, going back to the Kenya General Elections of 2007, is also a prime example of how transitions can go awfully wrong unless there are changes in attitudes and respect for democracy.

In the first instance, the rivalry, characterized by political jousting between the two major ethnic groups in Kenya, has been so intense since the country's independence that it clearly needs the committed involvement of both groups to move away from the present entrenched tribal positions. Kenya needs to forge a national identity.

Furthermore, the alleged intention of either party to win elections at all cost rather than work out the democratic details of credible and democratic transitions has always invited conflict at General Elections. The necessary basis for a democratic transfer of power, regardless of who wins should be the building of trust and fairness among all Kenyans. This task, in my view, will not be achieved with only the current, perfunctory and last minute preparations but rather with the engagement of opponents in serious dialogue and a willingness to accept the verdict of voting. Perhaps, the regional organization, in that part of Africa, has a vital role to play in the medium to long-term to assist in restoring integrity while bodies like our new Centre for Democratic Transitions concentrate their efforts on giving purpose and direction to negotiations.

I hope that all the views I have just shared with you, my distinguished audience, point indisputably to the dire need for an adequate, timely, fair and committed preparations as well as skillful guidance for success.

The first step in dealing with difficult situations we have identified is, in my view, to reach a viable and dependable national consensus on the need to unite to reduce ethnic and political divisiveness.

But we all know that this order is easier said than done. For over 300 years the nations of modern Europe for example, were embroiled in wars with destructive

regularity and yet multilateralism has in the end persuaded the same nations to become members of the United Nations or united humanity, because they have accepted the tools of peace and consensus in giving one another a democratic chance instead of war. We can say therefore that there is hope for our continent, if only it can get its act together.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In sum, democratic transitions should rely heavily on dialogue among different groups, engage in an unceasing search for compromise as well as an unending emphasis on national unity. There must always be drafters of constitutions, laws and regulations on hand to put into legal form for adoption verbal agreements reached. An inter-party body to help guide the successful implementation of consensus reached earlier would no doubt be a definite asset to transitions in that country.

It is thus in the scrupulous understanding and facilitation of these guidelines that the Centre for Democratic Transitions will be useful as a think-tank, an advisory body and individual or collective facilitators in this country and others in Africa.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is in consideration of the need for regional and national efforts to fill the gap in our transfer of democratic administrations from one political party or entity to another that the relatively new Centre is being officially launched today. Its purposes will include the ability to think deeply through, formulate necessary guidelines for successful transitions on the continent and also to advise governments and other stakeholders on how they may arrange the handing over of democratic government from one administration to another. The Centre's services should also include advice on how to sustain peace and justice in the period following the actual transfer of power.

It is a daunting task and I know that all governors of the Centre are experienced professionals who have quietly been in the field in all parts of our continent for the better part of two decades. They are eminent lawyers, academicians, politicians, public

servants and diplomats who have played important roles unobtrusively in bringing about accepted change on the continent generally. They are suitably equipped to discharge these difficult duties.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It could be recalled that at the beginning of this address, I praised Ghana's proud history of peaceful transitions in the last 20 years. Whereas this record is incontrovertible and enviable, we need to remind ourselves that efforts need to be deployed by our new Centre and perhaps all of us to preserve that lead we have achieved in Africa. The Centre will also provide the platform for the free discussions at all times of how Ghana and other African countries can achieve and preserve democratic transitions.

More importantly, the Centre should be equipped to place its professional services at the disposal of African governments on how to prepare for and negotiate agreements in their respective domestic situations as well as the management of the actual transition.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is also important to note that Ghana and other African countries with similar records in managing transitions successfully may suddenly require assistance themselves, especially when that assistance is least expected. After all, it takes only half-a-day to throw a country's constitution through the window during a military coup d'états. In that way, therefore all states practicing democracy in Africa are also vulnerable. The antidote to this vulnerability is to further strengthen democracy through public education and other activities of our Centre for Democratic Transitions.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I conclude my address, I wish to crave your indulgence to make one other important observation about the scale of the task at hand.

All studies have confirmed that the future will bring serious challenges for democracy, particularly on our continent. With the current situation of our economies not being able to create enough jobs for the youth, the rapid exponential growth of the population of Africa, estimated to hit 1.4 billion people in only a decade and a half from now, the irreversible move of the youth into urban centres, the movement of the several thousands into the middle income bracket, and so on, there are bound to be serious challenges to the democratic agenda in Africa. We need to deepen democracy to survive.

We have already started to see in Ghana and in other countries the resort to political thuggery, euphemistically dubbed vigilantism, and the increasing challenges of the powers of electoral commissions. Vigilantism must of course be condemned and done away with, especially as the fact remains that if judges and public servants can be chased out of their courts and offices by hoodlums then it is only a matter of time before they disrupt democratic transitions.

In my humble view, therefore, the work of the new Centre for Democratic Transition, and other bodies involved in the establishment of democracy in Africa, is already cut out for them. The panacea for threats to democracy is, more democracy, not political thuggery.

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Stemming from my close knowledge and association with individuals involved in the work of the Centre, I have no doubt that the Centre will continue to meet the expectations of the international community and Ghanaians generally. We wish them well in this noble endeavour.

I thank you for your attention.