

Spoken word counts.

Welcoming address of the President of the Senate of the States General, Mrs. Yvonne E.M.A. Timmerman-Buck, on the occasion of the visit of His Excellency the President of Ghana,
Mr. John Kofi Agyekum Kufuor
on Tuesday, 21 October 2008

Your Excellency,
Dear President Kufuor,

It is with great pleasure that I warmly welcome you today in the plenary hall of the Senate. I would like to extend my welcome also on behalf of Mrs. Verbeet, President of the House of Representatives. We are honoured that you have found the opportunity to meet with members of both Houses of the Dutch Parliament during your official visit to the Netherlands. Our two countries nowadays maintain good relations from a cultural, political, economic and even environmental point of view. Ghana and the Netherlands share that their origins as nation-states go back to the sixteenth century. The first contacts between our peoples go back to that era. They unfortunately also have brought tragedy to many local inhabitants. But fortunately there were - at that time as nowadays - other dimensions to our relationship. Quite a number of fellow countryman and woman are living and working here, while many Dutch missionaries and volunteers found their way to a number of health and educational institutes in the past century. Our economic ties are impressive in many respects and our development cooperation is characterized by real partnership. The recent mutual contacts about multiparty democracy are innovative and inspiring for the region and for our own reflections on the quality of our democracy. The way in which your electoral processes have been conducted are exemplary for most of the rest of your continent. And it has been your personal interest and engagement, Mr. President, which has facilitated enormously our

cooperation for clean water in a number of your cities in the framework of the ORET-programme.

Mr. President, your impressive career of almost forty years in national and international politics, shows not only your commitment to the development of Ghana, but also to the African continent. You have transformed your country into the African model for stability, democracy and peace. After so many years of serving your Ghanaian citizens, we do hope that your knowledge and experience will not be lost for the African continent.

Your personal commitment to international challenges, for example your concerns with global warming, the new scarcities on food and fuel, the functioning of international organizations and military peace-keeping operations, is only to be applauded. Your contribution at the UN Summit last month, was a prime example of your ability to look beyond borders.

Your analysis of the challenges facing our world, in combination with the opportunities provided by our "era of knowledge", resulting in the call to people and countries to work together to jointly benefit, has made a profound impact. Like you said, it is time to realize we are all in the same boat and we should either learn how to sail together or we will all sink. In the current times of economic and financial crisis, you could not have said it any better.

I am aware that Ghana is also affected by the international crisis. Not only because your country trades in US dollars, but especially because of the rising prices of many commodities. This has far reaching consequences for the important agricultural production of your country, negative ones, but for the future potentially also positive ones. Therefore, it is of great importance that development aid of the international community is improved, faster delivered, more flexible and better coordinated. I believe important steps were taken to this extent for the whole of the developing world during the international conference

on the effectiveness of development aid in your capital nearly two months ago. I would like to congratulate you on that success and hope the implementation of the agreements will be just as successful.

As regards the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, your country is on the right track. Your national ambitions, stated in the national Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategies, go even further than the MDG's. So if Ghana meets those targets in 2015, it will be one of the few countries in Africa - if not, the only one - that made more progress than the levels set by the United Nations. In the ongoing debate about the effects of development cooperation your example is stimulating.

Of course, like in every country, there is room for improvement. I know that you are very active in many areas. I wish you all the best in dealing with the challenges of child health and mortality, maternal mortality, gender equality, income-levelling and the increased flux of young children to the cities. The already adopted measures of free of charge child deliveries and a national health insurance system are an important step in the right direction.

Your country also made great progress in improving the business climate. Last year, the World Bank stated in her report "doing business" that Ghana was in the international top ten of reforming countries. You have introduced just one office counter for entrepreneurs, where they can deal with all the necessary formalities. A very forward-thinking initiative, with which Ghana advanced the Netherlands.

Dear President, there are many more topics I could touch upon, but as you will appreciate, we would be especially interested to hear from you. Therefore, it is my honour to give you the floor.

Thank you.