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SPEECH BY NANA ADDO DANKWA AKUFO-ADDO, 2016 NPP PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, ON “THE REAL STATE OF THE NATION – A NATION IN CRISIS”, ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2016, AT THE GHANA COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS.

I have been traveling around Ghana and meeting our people for much of my adult life. I have seen poverty, I have seen suffering, but, through it all, I have been encouraged and sustained by the willpower and determination of the Ghanaian people.

It might well be because of my determination to look out for the good and the positive in our situation that it has taken me a while to face up to the fact that our country is currently in a state of crisis. In all the years that I have been in public life, I have never seen the level of desperation and depth of despair that today have become the daily existence of the majority of people in our country.

This is Ghana, our Ghana, a nation where most people, in times of trouble, try and lift themselves up and do something to improve upon their circumstances.

Today, that spark which pushes us and gives us the determination to overcome is disappearing and a sense of gloom is enveloping our nation.

When the President of the Republic rose before Parliament, in fulfilment of his constitutional obligation, to deliver his Message on the State of the Nation, last Thursday, I watched on television in the hope that he would capture the mood and the difficulties that face our people daily. I waited to hear him admit that we are in a crisis and I willed him on to offer a glimmer of hope and ask all of us Ghanaians to help resolve the crisis in which we find ourselves. I wanted him to admit that ours was, indeed, a nation in crisis

Unfortunately, millions of Ghanaians, including my humble self, waited in vain. President Mahama painted a picture that bore very little resemblance to the reality that is today's Ghana. “We have made cocoa farming attractive”, that the

NHIS was flourishing, that he had overcome the energy crisis. Really? Mr President, are you living in the same Ghana as the rest of us?

I was forced to the conclusion that the President chose to tell us a tale of two Ghanas during his 3hr 40-minute speech. There is the Ghana inhabited by the President, his family, friends and a small select group.

Then there is the real Ghana inhabited by the remaining 27 million of us.

I felt, in the circumstances, that the public interest would be well-served by my undertaking of today, where I would attempt to place before the Ghanaian people, in this critical year of choice, the Real State of the Nation. It would be a solemn exercise, devoid of gimmickry.

Everywhere I go, every survey I read, every discussion I listen to, the one recurring theme is the problem of jobs and unemployment in our country. Millions of Ghanaians wake up each day to the soul-destroying reality of joblessness and they spend their energies looking for non-existent jobs. Young people finish school, acquire qualifications and end up frustrated with no prospects of a job or a career. Does the President have no evidence of the scale of graduate unemployment in this country? Has the President no evidence of the large number of teacher and nursing trainees who, 3 years and more after completion of their training, are virtually all sitting at home without being afforded the opportunity to offer the critical services for which they have been trained? The President came to Parliament and gave no indication whatsoever he was aware of the enormity of the unemployment problem that faces our country, especially its youth. Why ignore the clear evidence of this canker that characterises the true state of the economy? We heard nothing of the bold and radical measures that would encourage enterprises to expand, or that would help build new businesses in agriculture or industry to generate the hundreds of thousands of jobs that our youth need.

Instead the President mentioned the prospects of a few jobs here and there and went on to make an embarrassing display of a few vulnerable Ghanaians. It was a sad spectacle in propaganda, one that did a disservice to the image of our Parliament. It appears we have a President who is out of touch with the country he is governing.

My fellow Ghanaians, as I listened in disbelief to some of the things the President said, it soon became clear that he was taking liberties with the Ghanaian people that should not be accepted. Thanks to modern technology, the President was still

on his feet in Parliament when word started coming from around the country challenging the veracity of many of the claims he was making.

Far from the work progressing on the 60-bed district hospital in Salaga, as the President claimed, those who live in that community describe the site as “fenced, locked and abandoned”. The residents of Hohoe have said their town roads were done during the Kufuor administration. Ladies and gentlemen, it is disrespectful to the people of Ghana and to our republican institutions for the President to exhibit such a cavalier attitude to facts in a formal address to the nation.

For the past month, there have been regular stories about water shortages in different parts of our country, Nsawam-Adoagyiri and Winneba being the headline areas. Less than 24 hours after the President stood in Parliament displaying Madam Naomi Appiah Korang, a teacher and a known NDC activist from Kyebi, the Member of Parliament for Keta from his own party was in the House telling the country about the desperate water situation in his constituency. Again, on that Friday, his Minister for Water Resources, Works and Housing was in the House to give an account of the water situation in the country very much at variance with the complacent picture painted by the President. There had been no mention of water problems from the President in his address.

By all standards, we have a drought situation in this country; there has been no rain for about three months, the level of water in our dams is dangerously low, large tracts of farm lands and crops have been lost in bush fires. But the President was so determined only to find and tell good news that he omitted to say a word about the drought.

I crave your indulgence to appreciate that we have not called you here to a line by line, sector by sector rebuttal of the 3-hour 40-minute address. Our purpose is to illustrate that the real state of the nation is one of a nation in crisis, a reality the President chose to ignore.

The President sought to explain the theatrical show he staged in Parliament with the claim he was providing us with evidence for the claims he was making about the state of the nation. I am afraid it did not work and it turned out to be an embarrassing exercise in mediocrity, to borrow a form of words that is doubtlessly familiar to our President.

I join the President to celebrate with his sixteen “success” stories. Unfortunately, their stories do not constitute the reality that is present day Ghana. For every LEAP beneficiary that allegedly now has ten pigs, I can point to ten hardworking

individuals whose businesses have collapsed due to the unfavourable economic conditions.

In fact, the president also omitted an important group of beneficiaries of his government over the last 8 years. These include:

- Alfred Woyome and other beneficiaries of the 'create, loot and share' judgement debt brigade
- the beneficiaries of the looting of the SADA guinea fowl and tree planting schemes
- the beneficiaries of the looting of the GYEEDA schemes
- the beneficiaries of the looting of the Smartty's bus rebranding scheme

Why did the President fail to bring these people to Parliament? Further, for the sixteen who were bussed to Parliament, we can populate this room, indeed the nearby Ohene Djan Sports Stadium, with thousands and thousands of the young unemployed from Osu, La, Teshie and Nungua, the catchment areas of this auditorium, not to speak of the millions in the rest of the country.

Again, what about the teacher and nursing trainees whose allowances have been cancelled? What about teachers who have worked for 2 years and are only paid 3 months' salary arrears? What about the children of Kperisi primary in the Upper West region who have no desks or chairs, so lie on the floor for their lessons to the detriment of their health? What about people who cannot afford hospital fees because of the virtual return of the cash and carry system? What about our Black Queens who, after winning the gold medal at the All Africa Games, were treated so shabbily by this government which has refused to honour its promises to them? Is the President saying that he has no evidence of these? Why did he not bring them to Parliament?

Fellow Ghanaians, running a nation and reporting on its state is serious business. It should not be reduced to a public relations activity. It should be a comprehensive illustration to our people of what the big picture is.

1. ECONOMY

A universally accepted way of determining the state of a nation is by looking at its economy, and its impact on the lives of the people. So, if we want to look at the true State of the Nation, let us look at the true state of our economy. Let us look at what is happening to the big picture in agriculture, industry, services and the macroeconomic indicators, which show the health of our economy.

The people of Ghana have a right to expect a government to improve, at the very least, upon what it inherits from an outgoing one. Under the leadership of President Kufuor (2001- 2009), Ghana made significant strides. Without the benefit of oil revenues, economic growth increased from 3.7% in 2000 to 8.4% in 2008. In the process, the size of Ghana's economy increased from some \$5.1 billion to \$28.5 billion, a five-fold increase which led to more jobs, higher levels of income and improvement in standards of living. Even in the face of a global economic and financial crisis in 2007/8, with oil prices reaching a record high of \$147 per barrel, economic growth in 2008 rose to 8.4%. Ghana was transformed during the period of the NPP's tenure (2001-2009) from a low income HIPC economy to a lower middle income economy.

President Mahama, in his 2012 Manifesto, promised the people of Ghana that he would achieve an average GDP growth rate of 8% p.a, single digit inflation, an overall budget deficit of 5% of GDP and introduce economic policies that would put our average per capita income at 2,300 USD by 2017.

In reporting to the Ghanaian people on the state of the economy at the end of his term, therefore, we all expected the President to tell us how many of his promises on the economy had been achieved, and how much he had built on what he was left with.

Instead, the President paid scant attention to the economy. He told us about one private factory he had inaugurated in Accra and two institutions he hopes will bear fruit in the future. These are a yet-to-be-established EXIM Bank and a Ghana Infrastructure Fund that is yet to take off. He then talked about a specific microfinance company that has caused havoc in the Brong Ahafo, Ashanti and Northern regions through a pyramid scheme, and true to form, the President found someone else to blame, this time the Bank of Ghana.

It is obvious that the President did not want to tell us the True State of the Ghanaian Economy. This is the good-news-story-telling President. Factual account stories do not interest him. If they did, he would have told us that economic growth for 2015 is projected by the budget at 4.1%, but by the IMF at 3.5% and that average GDP per capita income currently stands at \$1,342, far from the \$2,300 he promised four years ago. He would have told us that the rate of inflation stands today at 19.1%, and bank lending rates are as high as 33%. He could not tell those businesses that are relocating to Cote d'Ivoire that they should continue to engage in Ghana, if they were "smart", as he has policies in place that will enable their businesses to prosper here in Ghana.

Ghana is where it is today because reckless borrowing by an incompetent government has led to unsustainable debt levels, which have effectively closed the fiscal space for capital investments. Ghana is where it is today because the introduction of amateurish and panic measure financial policies have destroyed confidence in the economy. Ghana is where it is today because of the systematic plundering of the public purse by corrupt officials, which has turned our country into a devastated economic landscape.

Following the discovery of oil, Ghanaians rightly expected more. Indeed, this NDC government has had more in terms of resources than all other governments since Ghana's independence. In loans and taxes alone, the government had GH¢200 billion in the last seven years. This compares with GH¢20 billion for the NPP's eight years in office. Notwithstanding this monumental access to resources, the economy is clearly in crisis.

Ghana is now a country at a high risk of debt distress. Government has increased the debt stock from GH¢9.5 billion in 2008 to some GH¢99.0 billion currently. In dollar terms, this NDC government has, therefore, borrowed some US\$37 billion in 7 years! In contrast, President Kwame Nkrumah borrowed the equivalent of some \$2.5 billion between 1957 and 1966 and President Kufuor borrowed some \$5 billion between 2001 and 2008. This NDC government has therefore borrowed some five times the amount borrowed by Nkrumah and Kufuor put together. Reckless borrowing by the Mahama government has led us to a debt stock that is 73% of GDP, which is beyond the threshold of debt sustainability. Did the President not have any evidence of this when he presented the state of the nation address? Not surprisingly, we are now being charged interest rates that would keep generations of Ghanaians impoverished.

Last year, interest payments amounted to more than GH¢9.6 billion. That figure was more than the total debt stock of GH¢9.5 billion in 2008 at the end of President Kufuor's term. I recall in 2008, candidate Mahama lampooning the Kufuor government for excessive borrowing.

To put the interest payments on the debt in context, we should note that the entire allocations in the 2016 budget to critical ministries, such as the Ministries of Roads and Highways, Trade and Industry, Food and Agriculture, Water Resources, Works and Housing, Youth and Sports, and Transport, amounted to a total of GH¢2.1 billion. Interest payment in 2016 of GH¢10.5 billion would be five times what was allocated to these six key ministries combined. In 2015, the GH¢9.6 billion allocated to interest payment on the debt stock was about 3.4 times the entire allocations to the six key ministries listed above. The interest payments on

the debt stock in 2015 amounted to six times Ghana's oil revenue for the year. The oil discovery has basically been compromised over the last six years by the government's recklessness and incompetence.

Agriculture and industry, which should be the key drivers of the economy, are doing very badly. Last year, agriculture as a sector grew by only 0.04%. This was because crops generally recorded negative growth of -1.7% and cocoa declined in growth from 4.3% in 2014 to 3.0% in 2015. So much then for the claim by the President to have made cocoa farming attractive! Cocoa farmers will tell you that all the gains they made in the Kufuor years have been systematically eroded in the Mahama era.

Industry suffered one of the most heartbreaking setbacks in Ghana's history in 2015. Manufacturing, which has the potential to create lots of jobs, recorded a negative growth of -2%, while mining, which provides gold our 2nd highest foreign exchange earner, recorded a further negative growth of -3.8%. Mr. President, when you cite the example of a 7 million dollar gold refinery opening in Ghana as evidence that you are doing something about the economy, please be reminded that the true state of mining is that our mining industry is in crisis, and mining companies are closing down. The industry recorded a -3.8% growth.

In services, this government could not achieve its own projected target of 4.9% growth in 2015. Hotels and tourism, which provide jobs and incomes for tens of thousands of people, only managed -4.8% and -6.3% growth respectively. How, then, can the President claim our economy has become resilient?

The macroeconomic indicators, which show the health of our economy, are troubling to say the least. Inflation is on a persistent upward trajectory and so are bank lending rates. The cedi has become a joke on the currency markets, which has destroyed the confidence of our traders. The attempt of the President to suggest that the economy is in the process of structural transformation was effectively undermined by his own admission that the export base of our economy remains what it has been for over a century, a narrow one based on the production and export of raw materials.

The story from big business, from small business, from the markets, from families, from students, from the desperate unemployed youth, from teachers, from nurses, from doctors, from cocoa farmers, from tro-tro and taxi drivers, from artisans, from pensioners, from nursing mothers, from all corners of our country all paint a dire picture. I believe the only conclusion to draw is that ours is a nation in crisis. Ghana is a nation in crisis.

We are in a state of crisis when investment and output in agriculture have decreased every year under this government, and we are now in negative figures. We are in a state of crisis when cocoa production has been going down because the government of Ghana changed the mass cocoa spraying regime they met, to an NDC cocoa farm spraying project. We are in a state of crisis when Ghana is reduced to importing cocoa from Cote d'Ivoire, as the Minister of Finance has informed us that we imported 15,000 tons last year. The stagnation in agriculture found expression in the importation of \$1.5 billion of food stuff into the country in 2014 against a food import bill of \$600 million in 2008. The import of fish, poultry, tomatoes, cooking oil, have all doubled between 2008 and 2015.

The production of basic food staples has been stagnating. The huge yearly vacillations in outputs and the rising imports of rice from 395,400 metric tons in 2008 to 543,465 metric tons in 2011 and over 600,000 tonnes in 2013, for which alone the nation spent \$374 million, testify to the escalating food insecurity in the country. We are in a state of crisis when the fishing industry and our coastal economies have collapsed as government officials play politics with pre-mix fuel. After asking the IMF for a bailout to restore the government's lost policy credibility, the President, in a further demonstration of how out of touch he is with the reality on the ground, apparently believes that the economy is turning around. All that has happened, thus far, is that the fiscal deficit has reduced marginally with some relative temporary stability of the currency. However, the type of fiscal consolidation that we are seeing is one that has allowed the government incredibly to continue on a massive borrowing spree. This has resulted in inflation not coming down, and interest rates staying high and increasing. The private sector has been crowded out and investment is declining along with growth. The government's response to this development has been to impose large tax increases on individuals and businesses to fill the gap. This is only going to aggravate further an unsustainable situation. The economy is on a reverse track.

It is clear that the Ghanaian economy is in crisis.

2. ENERGY

In last year's State of the Nation address, President Mahama blamed his predecessors for the crises in power delivery. He said they had not made the requisite investments and that it was their non-performance, which had led us to the crises. In other words the President declined responsibility. Today, when we are witnessing some positive development in power delivery the President makes a u-turn and claims he accepted full responsibility last year. That was, regrettably, a palpable untruth.

Let us remind ourselves of what the real facts are:

The NDC in 2012 promised to increase installed power generation capacity from 2,443 megawatts to 5,000 megawatts by 2016. The installed capacity was not to be predicated on emergency power plants. The current 800 megawatts, which the President speaks of, is today delivered by emergency power plants, which are costing the consumers a fortune. They are not a permanent solution to our power generation challenge.

Additionally, the government has suppressed demand to mines and bulk power demanders like Valco, creating the impression that they have boosted supply to meet demand.

The President recounts the story of Shirazu Issaku, the vulcanizer at the Fufulso junction, whose life has been transformed dramatically by the extension of electricity to his town. It is important to state, though, that the funding for this SHEP 3 project otherwise known as WELDY LEMONDS project, from which Fufulso benefitted, was secured by the previous NPP government.

Surely, the President cannot mean that such an example can make up for the thousands whose lives and livelihoods have been destroyed drastically by DUMSOR. The barbers, the hairdressers, the ice-cream vendors, the frozen food sellers, the tailors, the seamstresses, the hotel proprietors and restaurant operators, whose operations rely on electricity, were all brought to their knees as a result of four years of DUMSOR, induced by the mismanagement and incompetence of the government. Who or what can comfort those who lost loved ones as a result of DUMSOR? According to the reputable Institute for Social Statistical and Economic Research, DUMSOR cost the country financial losses of US\$680 million in 2014 alone, equivalent to 2% of GDP. Thus, the four years of DUMSOR have cumulatively led to financial losses of more than \$3 billion, and, in the process, thousands of Ghanaians have lost their jobs. Big firms such as Coca Cola, Mantrac Ghana, Cadbury, Novotel, Golden Tulip City Hotel, and several others have been forced by the high cost of DUMSOR to lay off workers. Juapong Textiles has been forced to lay off 1,400 workers, not to mention the number of families that have been affected by these considerable job losses.

Apart from the emergency plants which are costing the taxpayer a fortune, the government has failed to deliver on its promise. As a result of these questionable deals, electricity tariffs have been increased to exorbitant levels. Consumers are now faced with vanishing power credits and illegal charges for electricity. The

President wants us to give him credit for resolving DUMSOR, which was caused by economic and financial mismanagement of his government. So how can you expect credit for resolving a problem that you have caused which has inflicted such a high cost on the nation? What would be the case if the resolution turns out to be temporary? Would the President accept blame?

3. EDUCATION

The President claimed that he had made the biggest expansion to secondary education in this country. Ladies and gentlemen, when the then vice presidential candidate, John Mahama, dismissed the Free SHS the NPP proposed, he said it would not work because, according to him, the most important thing was first to increase access. When he got his Road to Damascus moment, he saw the wisdom in Free SHS, and said he would build 200 day secondary schools before introducing Free SHS. The President has commissioned FOUR of those promised 200 day secondary schools. If it has taken him four years to commission 4 schools, at this rate, it appears we would have wait a very long time for the 200 schools to materialise. And in the meantime, parents are having great difficulty in sending their children to secondary school because of their inability to pay the high fees involved. The original promise of Free SHS, which was the subject of a launch with great fanfare for secondary day schools, has also not materialised. As we speak, government is paying only GH¢114 out of the GH¢403 of children's school fees. Is this the free SHS he promised? Further, he had promised that the School Feeding programme would be expanded to cover all basic schools in the country. This promise has been abandoned. Capitation grant is in arrears, and even mere chalk in the classroom has become a scarce commodity in our public schools. The Polytechnics and Universities have been in constant uproar over the non-payment of various government financial obligations. Mr President, this is no way to run such a vital sector as Education.

4. HEALTH

We are in a state of crisis when the health sector of our country is in permanent uproar, and health workers lose confidence in the word of officials. We are in a state of crisis when our health facilities are short of trained personnel and our trained and qualified doctors and nurses are forced to sit at home for months, and, sometimes for years, without being employed, because the government has run our economy into the ground, and cannot pay their wages and salaries.

The latest case which brings this sad reality into focus was the gory Kintampo accident last week, which claimed over 60 lives. According to the Medical Superintendent of the Kintampo Government Hospital, where all the victims of the

accident were sent, Dr. Bismark Owusu Ofosu, who spoke to the BBC's Sammy Darko, said some victims of the accident who were brought in alive died because the Hospital lacked some vital logistics and medicine. "There is no supply of oxygen. Even Common Emergency Drugs are not available...", Dr. Owusu Ofosu said, while addressing the media on Thursday. Also, the Acting Administrator of the Ambulance Service in the Brong Ahafo Region, Samuel Karikari, confirmed to Citi News that at the time of the accident, the only Ambulance in Kintampo was out of commission.

The story of the School of Hygiene is worth mentioning here. For four years, young people have graduated from this all important public health institution. Virtually all of them are sitting at home and have not been able to offer the critical services for which they have been trained.

5. SOCIAL INTERVENTIONS

At the time the NPP left office, in addition to massive infrastructural development, major social interventions to protect the vulnerable in our society had been put in place. These included:

- National Youth Employment Programme –providing opportunities and jobs for the youth to get a start in the job market
- The School Feeding Programme to provide food to pupils in basic schools
- Capitation Grant to make education affordable and accessible
- The National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) to provide accessible healthcare to the population.
- Free maternal care for all pregnant women under the NHIS.
- Introduction of a Metro Mass Transit transport service to provide subsidised transport for commuters and a free bus ride for basic school pupils in Ghana.
- Introduction of the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) programme under which welfare grants were paid to the extreme poor.

Indeed, when President Mahama was campaigning in 2008, he rubbished the introduction of LEAP and described it as evidence of the failure of NPP economic policies. Today, LEAP has become his flagship programme that he touts as evidence of economic success. The same can be said of the strong language he employed against plans for the establishment of the Northern Development Authority, renamed SADA, and the introduction of Free SHS. Unfortunately, all these policies, which he subsequently embraced, have been badly managed. I have to conclude that the NHIS is suffering a similar fate. The President announced some impressive numbers as those who now subscribe to the NHIS. The reality is that the service is in deep distress and we now have a two-tier health service,

where the NHIS users are the second tier and the dreaded cash and carry is in operation as the first tier at many health facilities. The other social interventions have suffered similar fates. The NYEP has been transformed of into a vehicle of corruption through GYEEDA. The Capitation Grant is in arrears. The School Feeding Programme is in arrears. Free Maternal Care under the NHIS is no more. The Metro Mass Transit, through rebranding, has become another avenue for corruption. The Social Democrats of the National Democratic Congress should tell us what social intervention programmes have they successfully launched after almost 8 years in office? The answer is a big zero. Like in other areas of national life, the social intervention programmes introduced by President Kufuor are in jeopardy.

6. INFRASTRUCTURE & ROADS

The President claimed that his government has brought about unprecedented levels of infrastructural development. So let's take a quick look at the story of infrastructure development in our country. The evidence shows that, notwithstanding the massive increase in the debt stock, capital expenditure as a percentage of GDP has actually been on the decline from 9.1% of GDP in 2008 to 4.1% by 2015. It is, in fact, a travesty that Ghana, before the discovery of oil, was spending a higher proportion of its income on infrastructure investment, than after the discovery of oil and the massive increase in the debt stock. What is sad is that the Mahama government has only spent about 20% of the \$37 billion it has borrowed for infrastructure projects. Ghanaians should, therefore, rightly expect at least 4 to 5 times more projects than what the government is touting.

The President spent over 40 minutes recounting his "achievements" in the roads sector. His story was, unfortunately, not corroborated by the facts on the ground. For instance, he mentioned works on the Drobo-Sampa road, as he did last year. At the time President Kufuor was leaving, the 40-kilometre stretch from Drobo to Suma had been done, leaving 7 kilometers from Suma through Sampa to the border. For over 7 years, the 7km stretch has not been completed. The Atebubu-Kwame Danso road, which the President said is on course, has long been abandoned by the contractor, G.N. Ghanem. The Tarkwa-Bogoso-Ayamfuri road that the President mentioned is part of the Takoradi-Kumasi road, for which President Kufuor had secured funding and works had been executed from Takoradi to Apemenyin. President Kufuor secured another \$73 million to do the road to Ayamfuri. This Apemenyim to Ayamfuri section has taken more than 7 years to complete.

Notwithstanding, it is an undisputable fact that the NPP investment between 2001-2009 far exceeds that of the NDC since 2009. The road network in President

Kufuor's time increased from 37,321 km to 67,291 km. The NDC has moved it from 67,291 to 71,063 km. This means that the NPP constructed 8 times more roads (km) than the NDC, even though the NDC had 10 times more money. The President, himself, admitted that his government's contribution to the road network is a mere 3,700 kilometres over the eight years of stewardship.

There is a very good reason why the NPP managed to construct a lot more roads with less money than the NDC has done in these last 7 years. It is about value for money. Under the 8 years of NPP, the average cost was \$480,000. In these two terms of this NDC government, the average cost of the same 1 kilometre asphaltic road is \$1.5 million. Yes, from \$480,000 under President Kufuor to \$1.5 million under President Mahama. This, fellow Ghanaians, is the real state of governance in Ghana today, where the Government throws so much money at fewer projects. The more inflated the cost of projects are, the less our country develops, and the less we are able to spend on the needy.

Indeed, most projects executed under this government have been over-priced, due mainly to the single source procurement method, which has become the procurement method of choice for this government. The examples are many, and have become bywords of the Mahama administration – SADA, GYEEDA, KARPOWER, SMARTYS, AMERI, ENI, ETC, ETC.

And Mr President you don't have to be an NPP political quantity surveyor to be alarmed by the overpricing of projects. The Crown Agents reviewed the contract for the Ridge Hospital upgrading and they decided we were being charged 142 million dollars more than similar jobs in other parts of the world.

Every project that has been undertaken by this government as a remedy for the four-year energy problem, has been done under a crisis procurement regimen. This means we have had to pay far more than we should normally, for it is a fact of life in the energy sector that every time procurement has to be done on an emergency basis means that you have failed to plan adequately. You have, then, to pay for your failure.

7. CORRUPTION

The President claims he has tackled corruption with determination and fortitude, and the paradox of exposure is creating the impression that corruption is prevalent in his government. Curiously, the President cannot point to one example where an exposure of corruption has come from his government. Each scandal, that has

been exposed, has been unearthed by the media, civil society or the Minority in Parliament.

The claim of the fight against corruption is further undermined by the fact that the Independent Governance Institutions mandated to perform this function have been starved of funds. The Auditor General, for example, in 2013, complained bitterly about this.

The last time I said this, government spokespersons were clearly unhappy, but I will continue to say it until I am proven wrong with credible, verifiable information. Every time you see the Ridge Hospital, you should recall that, according to the Crown Agents, the contract for the project is inflated by 142 million dollars. Every kilometer of road constructed by this government, every school block built under this government has cost more money than can be reasonably justified.

It is clear from the actions taken on cases like judgement debts, the World Cup saga, GYEEDA, SADA, the DVLA saga, the Metro Mass branding, etc., that the fight against corruption is a sham. I say again, the so-called fight against corruption is a sham.

8. SECURITY

I cannot recall in recent times anything that has so agitated Ghanaians as the importation of the two Guantanamo ex-detainees into our country. And yet the President, in his State of the Nation Address, chose to dismiss the issue by claiming that his Foreign Minister had addressed the subject when she appeared before a closed-door session of Parliament, when, in fact, she did not shed any light on the matter. The President chose to ignore the widespread genuine anxiety amongst our people, in much the same way as he chose to ignore the laws of the land in negotiating the agreement with the US government. We insist that this belongs firmly in the realms of international affairs and its conduct ought to have been in consonance with the accepted principles of international law and diplomacy in a manner consistent with the national interest of Ghana as demanded by the Constitution of the Republic. In other words, our President should have taken the matter to Parliament, just as the US President took the matter to his Congress. The American President obviously did what he did in the best interest of his country, our President has only succeeded in spreading fear and panic amongst the population. The Ghanaian people are yet to be persuaded that this decision was taken in their interest.

9. POSTAL PACKETS AND TELECOMS BILL

There are serious concerns over, what has been termed, the “Spy Bill”, but the President chose to make no mention of it. Officially, the Interception of Postal Packets and Telecommunication Messages Bill, 2015, is intended to intercept postal packets, telephone and other electronic or cyber space communications for the purposes of protecting national security and fighting crime. Essentially, this Bill gives the State unfettered, discretionary access to the private correspondence of individuals. It poses potentially a major threat to individual freedom of expression and privacy. This law should not be passed, and the Minority has already signalled its opposition to the bill in Parliament. The irony is that the Right to Information Bill, which, on the other hand, will rather enhance individual freedoms and good governance, by providing further access to public information, all in the spirit of transparency and accountability, has rather been put on the back burner. Obviously, it is not one that excites the President because it provides sunshine on corrupt practices.

10. ELECTORAL COMMISSION

President Mahama assured the nation that the impending national election would be a free and fair election. We are grateful for this assurance. But, with just a few months to the 2016 polls, the core issue of a credible register is still not resolved. Compilation of a new register has been rejected. The Electoral Commission’s own solution of exhibition of the register has also been rejected by its own Panel of Experts as not a “viable option”. The Charles Crabbe report recommended a viable, cost-effective “middle way”, which is validation, requiring all citizens who want to remain on the voters’ register to report to their polling stations to be validated with photo and fingerprints checked. So far, the EC has been silent on this recommendation by its own Panel of Experts. Addressing the state of anxiety in the nation over the 2016 elections begins with a credible voters’ register and I respectfully call on the President to add his voice on the call on the Electoral Commissioner to deal with this issue with urgency.

11. THE ALTERNATIVE VISION AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

Fellow Ghanaians, it is time to build a new globally competitive economy with the NPP under my leadership. I am offering you a fresh package and a new direction. The immediate goal is to have in Ghana the most people friendly and most business friendly economy in Africa. Our emphasis will be stimulating production, expanding the productive capacity of the economy, and job creation.

We recognize that economic management must move side by side with an institutional framework of good governance. Some of the policies that will be critical in building this new economy are as follows:

1. We will put in place an environmental policy that will lead to the effective management of our forest reserves, the recovery of millions of acres of land devastated by open-cast and alluvial mining, and the protection of our water bodies. Protecting our environment is a necessity, not an option.
2. As our manifesto stated in 2012, we will introduce and improve upon existing skills training programmes to give our young people, including those failed by the education system, the practical skills they need to get a job as well as to drive a new industrialised economy. In partnership with the private sector, we will facilitate and support rapid development of skills, including apprenticeship training for graduates from vocational and technical schools.
3. We must put in place an effective legal framework to anchor fiscal discipline. The passage and enforcement of a Fiscal Responsibility Act that has bite will be important in this regard. It will require governments to declare and commit to a fiscal policy that can be monitored. It will include fiscal rules, including rules governing election year spending, provisions for transparency and sanctions, including sanctions on the Executive.
4. To enhance transparency, the long overdue, world class Right to Information Bill will be passed into law.
5. The time has come to bring accountability to local government through competitive politics. The election of DCEs at the local level can no longer be delayed.
6. An Independent Special Prosecutor with a legislative mandate to deal with corruption will be appointed and empowered to tackle corruption in a non-partisan manner.
7. Formalization of the Ghanaian economy will be pursued as a matter of economic strategy to expand the tax net. The elements of this formalization process that will be completed as a matter of priority are:

- i. National ID cards which this government has been unable to issue in 7 years after starving the National Identification Authority of funds will be issued in the first year.
- ii. Financial inclusion – Goal is to have 70% of the bankable population having bank accounts.
- iii. The movement from a cash based economy to an electronic payments based economy.
- iv. Complete the street address and post code system.

These processes would enhance the collection of more revenue even with lower tax rates.

- My approach will be different from the tax, borrow and spend approach of the Mahama administration. My priority will be to reduce the cost of doing business to help small and medium-scale enterprises grow, and to make the Ghanaian economy become globally competitive. We will provide tax incentives for increasing productivity. We are opposed to NDC measures that cripple businesses and cause unemployment. My intention is to reduce corporate tax rate, abolish VAT on Financial Services, remove duties on the importation of raw materials and manufacturing equipment, amongst other fiscal incentives, to stimulate growth of the private sector.
8. An enhanced employment Tax Credit Scheme to provide incentives for companies employing fresh graduates will be instituted.
 9. We will restore the teacher and nursing training allowances and we are still committed to our program of free senior high school education for all students at that level.
 10. We will deepen financial sector reforms with the objective to establishing Ghana as a leading financial hub in Africa. Unfortunately, this Government has taken us backwards in the area of financial sector reform.
 11. Government continues to be in arrears on its obligations to statutory funds such as the NHIS, DACF, GETFUND, Payments to the Disabled, etc. even though government has collected the taxes that are meant for these funds. We would implement a policy of automaticity in the transfer of revenues collected for these funds so that arrears to these funds do not arise in the future.

12. Give priority focus to agriculture and value addition in agriculture – A quick win with direct benefits to the majority of the population in terms of incomes, lower food prices and jobs.
13. A concerted effort will be made to deepen the process of women’s involvement in the country’s politics and economy. We will continue with the initiatives that led President Kufuor to establish the first Ministry of Women’s Affairs. Gender equity is a cardinal concern of our times.
14. We will establish a Zongo Development Fund as part of a broader Inner City Development Strategy to support development activity in the Zongo and inner city communities.
15. All round sports development has become a social necessity, and the requisite attention of government is going to be paid to it.
16. We will establish a Fund to support the creative arts and entertainment industry to grow local talent and create jobs.

These are some of the policies that we will institute to inspire the rapid development and transformation of our economy and society.

Fellow Ghanaians, I say it often and I know it to be true: we were not placed on this well-endowed land to be poor; it is bad leadership and poor policies that are the source of our woes.

The people of Ghana have been known to rise up to the occasion during times of difficulty and pull together, but that happens when there is trust between the people and the leadership of the country. That happens when the people see that the leadership can understand and feel their pain. That happens when the people can see that they are not the only ones being asked to tighten their belts to the elastic limit. That happens when the people can see that public funds are not being dissipated with abandon. And that happens when the leadership paints a realistic picture of the situation in the country.

Then the people will work through their pain and help to build Ghana. Our history is replete with examples of Ghanaians rising to the occasion when the need arises. Even at this late stage of the eight-year NDC administration, the President could

have been honest with the nation, painted a realistic picture and then count on the support of the people to join in the effort to bring back hope to Ghana.

The Ghanaian people have a rich and compelling history. We led the African peoples in their struggle for liberation from imperialism and colonialism. After initial decades of predictable turbulence in the post-independence era, the determined struggles of our people for democracy are today leading us to build the most admired system of peaceful, democratic governance on the African continent. Our name is synonymous with many of the highlights of Africa's history. And so it shall continue.

Fellow Ghanaians, join me and my team to get Ghana back to work. Ghana has no place among the ranks of struggling nations. Join us to put Ghana in its rightful place. The change is coming, be part of that change and arise for change.

God bless Ghana, Mother Africa and us all.