



Republic of Ghana

STATEMENT BY  
HONOURABLE AMBROSE DERY  
MINISTER OF STATE  
AT THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE  
OF  
THE  
REPUBLIC OF GHANA

AT THE

HIGH LEVEL SEGMENT  
7<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

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Mr. President,

Madam High Commissioner,

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Permit me to state how honoured I feel to address this august gathering on behalf of the Government and People of the Republic of Ghana.

I wish to commend you, Mr. President, for ably steering this Council in its pursuit of improving global human rights standards.

I would like to congratulate the members of this body for striving to uphold the principles which combine to make this world a congenial place for human kind at all levels; a world where the dignity of any human being is not trampled upon, but raised to the level where it rightly belongs.

Mr. President,

60 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is gratifying to note that the Human Rights Council is at the forefront of the global effort to promote human rights and to eliminate the injustices which have plagued the international community for so long.

In this regard, my delegation congratulates the Council on the completion of its Institution Building Text, which provides it with a

practical modus operandi to address human rights situations of concern, and attend to other substantive matters on its agenda.

Mr. President,

The Government of Ghana has been following with keen interest the important work of the Council. Of particular interest to the Government of Ghana, is the work which remains in the domain of the Working Groups on the drafting of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Cultural, Economic and Social Rights, the Durban Review and Programme of Action, People of African Descent and Minorities, the Right to Development, and the Ad Hoc Committee on the elaboration of Complementary Standards.

The outcome of deliberations within these groups will go a long way in addressing many of the normative gaps in the human rights protection and promotion framework. Some of these gaps are responsible, we believe, for the discrimination which is sometimes visited on people of African descent and various minorities, around the world almost on a daily basis. We can only effect a change in the lives of such people when we put in place mechanisms to concretely address the negative experiences they continue to endure due to, inter alia, their colour, creed and gender.

In our view, and by virtue of our continued adherence to the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, those laudable principles which reiterate the inalienability, indivisibility and universality of human rights, we must also envisage a new international order where economic, social and cultural rights are ultimately placed at par with civil and political rights. Accordingly, it is regrettable that 60 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, economic, cultural and social rights have not found justiciability in the normative framework of some Member States of the United Nations.

Mr. President,

The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana guarantees respect for the economic, cultural and social rights of its citizens. However, the recognition of and commitment to these basic rights by a developing state *per se* cannot guarantee the enjoyment of these basic rights if she is not adequately equipped to make good that commitment. The issue of technical cooperation and assistance is therefore paramount to developing countries, and thus the need to persistently urge the international community to honour its commitments and pledges of assistance. We cannot, on the one hand criticize countries for non performance as a result of inadequate capacity, and on the other turn a blind eye to the appeal for support which can complement their efforts to raise the living standards of their people.

Mr. President,

51 years ago, the people of Ghana decided to take our destiny into our own hands, embracing the principles of self government and nation building. Indeed, we, as many others on the African continent, have had our fair share of the difficulties associated with nation building. I am however happy to say that the practice of good governance and the implementation of sound economic policies have yielded positive results and improved the lives of the citizenry in Ghana. I am therefore proud to say that today, as aptly stated in the words of our President, His Excellency Mr. John Agyekum Kuffuor, "It is a good time to be a Ghanaian."

The Government of Ghana is committed to the promotion and protection of human rights. In consonance with that commitment, Ghana has made an open ended provision in the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana in Article 33(5) of Chapter 5 on fundamental human rights and freedoms as follows:

*The rights, duties, declarations and guarantees relating to the fundamental human rights and freedoms specifically mentioned in this chapter shall not be regarded as excluding others not specifically mentioned which are considered to be inherent in a democracy and intended to secure the freedom and dignity of man.*

Currently, steps are underway to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.

In line with our commitment to promote the rights of women and children, a Ministry of Women and Children with cabinet status has been created with the sole aim of ensuring that issues which affect women and children are given the full attention of policy makers. Also of importance is the new Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Police Service, whose activities have brought into scrutiny, some pertinent issues in both the domestic setting and the workplace. To provide the requisite legal framework for the activities of DOVVSU, a Domestic Violence Bill has been passed into law. (i.e., Domestic Violence Act 2007, Act 732.)

Furthermore, in pursuit of the realization of the Right to education, the Government has introduced the capitation grant to schools, which ensures free, compulsory and universal basic education to all children of school going age, namely, pre school, primary and junior high school. Government has also started on a pilot basis, the school feeding programme which ensures one warm meal a day per child at the basic level, an initiative which has been acclaimed by the World Food Programme in Rome, (February 2008) as a best practice worthy of emulation.

Mr. President,

Allow me to turn to the work of this Session. As we can all bear witness, all the items on the agenda merit the attention of the Council. Apart from the consideration of reports on the thematic issues, we also note that the fine tuning of the institution - building process will continue. It is our hope that in the context of the review, rationalization and improvement of mandates, progress can be made in endorsing acceptable criteria for this process. We also note with interest the very high standard of qualification and technical expertise of the several candidates vying for membership of the Advisory Committee. The pedigree of the candidates is not in doubt, but the task is to ensure the selection of the best in an equitable manner. Ghana has absolute confidence in this Council, under the able leadership of Mr. President. We cannot fail.

On the Universal Periodic Review, we look forward to a fruitful process: one devoid of polemics; one which promotes understanding and cooperation with the aim of guaranteeing an overall improvement of the human rights situation of the State under review. I also wish to stress the importance of expediting the process of establishing the Voluntary Trust Fund, to facilitate the effective participation of the least developed countries in the said process.

It is worth noting, that under a similar arrangement of peer review, Ghana was the first to volunteer for the African Peer Review Mechanism. The exercise was beneficial, as it highlighted the gaps in our system as well as our achievements. It is our fervent hope that the Universal Periodic Review will achieve the ultimate aim of providing a co-operative forum for the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide.

Ghana comes up for review in May, 2008 during the second session of the UPR Working Group, and we hope the review will provide us with another opportunity to share our challenges as well as our successes with the Council and other relevant stakeholders.

May I, with your permission, Mr. President, highly commend the High Commissioner and her Secretariat for their excellent work and

support. Without their support, this Council would not be where it finds itself today.

I now on behalf of the Government and people of Ghana convey our sincere gratitude to all members of this Council and other stakeholders for being great partners in our quest to make the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a reality and the world a better place for mankind.

Mr. President, Madam High Commissioner, Distinguished Delegates,

I thank you.