

PRESIDENT OBAMA'S VISIT TO GHANA – JULY 10-11, 2009

Ghana Will Deepen Democracy-President Mills

President John Evans Atta Mills on Saturday pledged the readiness of Ghana to deepen the democratic process for the benefit of the rest of Africa.

In a speech before Parliament, the President said Ghanaians are encouraged by the recognition of the United States of the modest strides being made in building and consolidating multiparty parliamentary democracy.

Parliament has to relocate to the Accra International Conference Centre to enable more members of the public to listen to President Barack Obama's policy speech on Africa.

"Your choice of our country encourages us to remain focused and to sustain the gains that we have derived from the democratic process and deepen them for the benefit of not only the people of Ghana but also for our brothers and sisters on the continent of Africa," President Mills said to enthusiastic applause of the over 2,000 people gathered at the Centre.

He said Ghana, like others on the continent, is faced with creating the environment of concrete opportunities to enable the people to achieve their dreams, especially in the areas of socio-economic development.

In this direction, he called on the rest of the world to appreciate the challenges facing the continent and come out with special packages that addresses the needs of the continent.

President Mills touched on the havoc that the global financial crisis is wrecking on the economies of African countries, including lower growth, unemployment, slow down in aid inflows and fall in remittances and uncertain commodity prices.

"Our world is becoming more and more vulnerable," he said, and added that trans-national crime, especially drug trafficking and money laundering, is also eroding the concept of sovereignty.

He said while globalisation has facilitated the easy movement of international criminals from one jurisdiction into another, the impunity with which organised crime is committed in our part of the world imposes another daunting task.

"We are impressed with the boldness and innovation with which you are addressing these crises," he said and called for US support and collaboration for the continent to deal with the impact of the crisis.

In welcoming President Mills and Obama to the house, Mrs. Justice Joyce Bamford Addo, the Speaker, described the visit of the US President to Parliament as "historic" and expressed the hope that his two-day official visit strengthened economic and democratic ties between the two countries.

She said it is the first time that an American President is addressing the Parliament of Ghana.

President Obama has said that the choice of Ghana as the first country for his visit to the continent was inspired by the positive contribution the country is making in its forward march to democracy.

Obama Lauds La Hospital

US President Barack Obama has lauded the La Hospital in Accra for its maternal health programme.

In brief remarks during his visit to the Hospital as part of his two-day visit to Ghana, the US President said: "Part of the reason this is so important is, throughout Africa the rates of both infant mortality but also maternal mortality is still far too high -- I mean, by a factor of -- a multiple of tens compared to many other parts of the world".

He said the kinds of programmes that provide sound prenatal and maternal care are extraordinarily important, adding this is a model of the kind of clinics where people are able to get these important services.

President Obama went on to Cape Coast Castle as part of his official engagements in Ghana.

Obama Tours Cape Coast Castle

Visiting US President Barack Obama toured the Cape Coast Castle in the Central Region with his family and described it as an "extraordinary" experience.

The private tour of the Castle also included his mother-in-law, Marian Robinson and the Godmother of his children, "Madam K".

In brief remarks after the tour, he described the slave trade as one of the evils committed against humanity, especially as there was a church just above the slave dungeon.

He said any group of people degrading others should be fought with all tools.

President Obama said the tour is an important landmark for his two children Malia and Sasha, especially Sasha, who is growing up to learn about their history.

He said the essence of the tour is to learn about the oppression that African-Americans went through and to interact with his ancestral lineage.

President Obama said to the African-American, the Castle can be considered in two way ways - a matter of profound sadness but also a place where the history of the African-American began.

He commended Ghana for preserving the Castle and commended those who abolished the slave trade.