

**OPENING STATEMENT BY HON. SHIRLEY AYORKOR BOTCHWEY, MINISTER  
FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND REGIONAL INTEGRATION, AT THE 45<sup>TH</sup>  
ORDINARY SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL IN ACCRA, GHANA, ON  
18<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2024**

**Your Excellency Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the African Union Commission,**

**Your Excellency Dr. Mohamed Salem Ould Merzoug, Minister for Foreign Affairs and  
Cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and Chairperson of the Executive  
Council,**

**Distinguished Colleague Ministers of Foreign Affairs,**

**Your Excellency Mr. Claver Gatete, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic  
Commission for Africa,**

**Excellencies Permanent Representatives to the African Union,**

**Commissioners of the African Union,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a privilege to stand before you today at the 45<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the Executive Council being hosted here in Accra, and to accordingly extend a warm Ghanaian welcome to you. As we say here in Ghana, Akwaaba!

**Your Excellencies,**

2. We have some significant matters regarding our Union and issues confronting our continent to consider during our meeting over these couple of days. I trust that we will all constructively bring to bear our inputs to achieve the requisite synergies in our fraternal Pan-African quest.

I believe that this year's theme of our Union, "*Educate an African Fit for the 21st Century: Building Resilient Education Systems for Increased Access to Inclusive, Lifelong, Quality and Relevant Learning in Africa,*" is both timely and appropriate. The theme not only captures the essence of the challenges and opportunities we face in the education sector but also highlights the importance of resilient educational systems in addressing the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It establishes the need for a renewed commitment to building a future where every African has access to an education that prepares them to meet the demands of their time.

Therefore, our gathering here today as Ministers for Foreign Affairs, leaders and delegates of our respective countries reaffirms our commitment to prioritizing educational goals, which are central to the development and prosperity we seek for our people.

I am glad to note that under the transformative leadership of His Excellency President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, the introduction of the *Free Senior High School (SHS) Policy* has significantly improved education in Ghana and has enhanced the prospects of our youth to take on the exigencies of the 21st Century.

The introduction of the Free Senior High School Policy in 2017 has significantly increased access to quality education. Since its inception, Senior High School enrolment has risen from 308,799 in 2016 to 507,519 in 2024, which has also positively impacted gender parity at the high school level. Our government recently launched the Ghana Smart Schools Project, which focuses on providing tablets to learners in Senior High Schools and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions across the country.

In our efforts, we have not overlooked the importance of creative arts. Developing a strong creative arts sector fosters well-rounded citizens who are adept in creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking. We are working towards the construction of a Creative Arts High School to advance creative arts education.

**Your Excellencies,**

Several enduring lessons have emerged from our experiences with STEM education, which we hope to share for your kind consideration, given our commitment to education as the theme of the year. Firstly, in today's digital age, access to quality education should not be

constrained by geographical boundaries. We must invest in developing inclusive and accessible digital learning platforms that provide access to a wide range of educational resources.

Secondly, the quality of education is heavily dependent on the quality of teaching. We launched a comprehensive teacher training programme and reforms targeting both in-service teachers and those preparing to enter the profession. By investing in our educators, we have been able to improve their skills and knowledge, thereby enhancing their ability to build the capacity of the next generation of citizens.

Thirdly, the nature of educational curricula must be reviewed. An outdated curriculum cannot meet the needs of today's generation. It is essential to undertake thorough reviews and, where necessary, redesign educational curricula across all levels. Our goal should be to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration and creativity, as these are skills essential for thriving in the 21st century.

Inclusivity must be at the heart of our educational policies. Promoting STEM education among girls is crucial for achieving gender parity in our society. In Ghana, we have launched targeted programmes aimed at encouraging young girls to pursue studies and careers in STEM fields through scholarships, mentorship programs, affiliation programs, and awareness campaigns to ensure that girls excel in STEM.

By building such dynamic educational systems, we are laying a solid foundation for the achievement of the *UN Sustainable Development Goal No.4*, which calls for inclusive, and equitable education, and the promotion of lifelong opportunities for all. I wish to urge dear Member States to continue to provide access to quality education which is relevant to the needs of our teeming youth.

**Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We in Ghana pride ourselves in being part of the vanguard of the continent's progress. For this reason, we have honed our aspirations to ensure that our position on the continent reflects our constant determination to seek progress, prosperity and development, irrespective of the challenges confronting us.

In that vein, Ghana is delighted to host the *African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat*, a Flagship Project of the AU and a key milestone in the attainment of Africa's transformational development Agenda. I wish to use this opportunity to urge Member States to strengthen their commitment to the Secretariat as it has the potential to strongly shape the future of the continent, strengthen its position in the global market, uplift the lives of its peoples and accelerate the sustainable growth and development of the continent

Additionally, Ghana remains at the forefront of consolidating democracy and good governance within the sub-region. This year, we successfully hosted the *Second Edition of the Accra Reflection Forum* from 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> March, 2024, under the theme: “*Unconstitutional Changes of Government in Africa*”. The Forum has led to the adoption of a landmark declaration outlining Africa's collective vision and plans for addressing the scourge of unconstitutional changes of governments. The diversity and rich inputs generated by us, the Member States, on the subject, ultimately, culminated in the Accra Declaration on Unconstitutional Changes of Governments, which crystallised our joint position and orientation in the management of the challenge.

The President of the Republic of Ghana, H. E. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo as *Champion for the establishment of the African Union Financial Institutions* (being the African Central Bank (ACB), the African Monetary Fund (AMF), the African Investment Bank (AIB) and the Pan-African Stock Exchange (PASE) continues to advocate for the promotion of economic integration and development across the continent. The strengthening of these institutions will collectively enhance economic stability, promote sustainable development and facilitate greater economic integration among AU Member States.

Ghana will continue to assiduously work on all fronts towards advancing the implementation of the shared vision of the *Agenda 2063 of the African Union* and the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations*.

**Your Excellencies,**

As I conclude, I would like to emphasize the need to harness our collective strengths in utilising opportunities and finding solutions to the challenges presented to our continent, including in the education sector as per our commitment to this year's theme.

We owe a duty to ourselves in this present age, and as an obligation to future generations, to achieve this. In the words of the indefatigable Pan-African icon, Ghana's first President, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, "*We all want a united Africa, united not only in our concept of what unity connotes, but united in our common desire to move forward together in dealing with all the problems that can best be solved only on a continental basis*".

I wish to urge all delegations gathered here to reflect on our collective aspirations within our continent at large. Let us, on this occasion, remain resolute and committed to the shared vision of the Agenda 2063 of the African Union, our fifty-year development plan, in all its aspects, with determination, unity and dignity as Africans, and make this Mid-Year Meeting a success.

**I thank you for your kind attention.**