

REMARKS BY DR. KWABENA DUFFUOR, CHAIRMAN, MILLENIUM EXCELLENCE AWARDS

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE, ACCRA

AUGUST 19, 2005

Mr. Chairman,	His Lordship Cardinal Appiah Turkson
Your Majesty, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II	Asantehene and the life Patron of the Excellence Awards Foundation
Your Excellency, Mr. J.A Kufuor	President of the Republic of Ghana
Your Excellency, Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo	President of the Republic of Nigeria and Chairman of the AU
Your Excellency, Mamadou Tandja	President of the Republic of Niger and Chairman of ECOWAS
Your Excellency, Mr. Abdoulaye Wade	President of the Republic of Senegal
Your Excellency, Mr. Mathieu Kerekou	President of the Republic of Benin
Your Excellency, Mr. Yahya Jammeh	President of the Republic of The Gambia
Your Excellency, Mr. Faure Gnassingbe	President of the Republic of Togo
Your Excellency, Alhaji Aliu Mahama	Vice President of the Republic of Ghana
Your Excellency, Dr. Busumuru Kofi Annan	UN Secretary General
Your Excellencies	Representatives of Invited Heads of State
Members of the Diplomatic Corps	
Nii Mei	
Nana nom	
Award Recipients and Nominees	
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen	

It is a great pleasure for me to be part of this august ceremony – the Millennium Excellence Awards, which has been organized under the Royal patronage of His Majesty, Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Asantehene.

We salute His Majesty, for his unflinching support during the planning and execution of this historic activity. Your Majesty, you are a source of innovation and ideas for ways you can actually make things happen. You have transformed what used to be a local event to, indeed, an international activity.

We salute our President H.E.J.A. Kufuor and H.E. The Vice President Alhaji Aliu Mahama for honoring our invitation. To see several African Heads of State at this historic celebration is something you do not often see in a lifetime and I wish on behalf of the Foundation to express our sincere gratitude to our leaders for joining us in celebrating the excellent achievement of these individual and corporate bodies.

Our special thanks go to H.E. Dr. Busumuru Kofi Annan, recipient of the highest and most prestigious award. Your Excellency, you are indeed a great global leader of our time and your presence here today is a deeply humbling experience.

To our distinguished award winners, we salute you all. Through your selfless devotion to work, courage, determination and achievements, you have become our role models.

I wish to express my deep gratitude to my colleague Governors on the Board for their dedication and commitment in directing this event. To Mr. Ashim Morton, the Founder, we salute you for this grand initiative. My sincere thanks also go to the Trustees as well as our numerous sponsors for their generous support in cash and in kind, without which we could not have come this far.

Mr. Chairman, this occasion is a memorable one. Memorable in many senses, but primarily, because we have gathered here this morning and have honoured, recognized and appreciated our heroes and heroines.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, we have celebrated the achievements of men and women who in our best of judgment and estimation, have excelled in their respective fields, disciplines and endeavours. Indeed, we have celebrated merit and its accompanying achievements.

In their superior wisdom, the Founding Fathers of our present constitutional dispensation enshrined the provision of equality of opportunity as a cornerstone of our democratic enterprise. However, in order to assure equality of opportunity one has to create and sustain equality of opportunity in the areas of education, training as well as access to the factors of production.

It is in this light that Government Policy to ensure the establishment of a well-endowed second cycle school in every district of the country should be commended. We believe that this policy will assure equality of opportunity in the areas of education and training which are essential ingredients for building a merit-based society.

This is the vision of the founding fathers. This is also the way to create and sustain a merit-based society in which hard work, dedication, commitment and perseverance that leads to excellence, is rewarded.

Mr. Chairman, the vision of creating a merit-based society will become a permanent mirage unless we develop a culture of building upon past achievements and recognizing and accepting the legacies of our predecessors. It is not possible to achieve excellence when at any point in

time one erases previous works and achievements and endeavour to re-invent the wheel. The past, whatever its imperfections, offers the basic building block for moving forward and making progress, which leads to excellence. The above admonition was vividly captured by Dr. Ephraim Amu, the Great Musician in his famous song "Tete Wo Bi Ka, Tete Wo Bi Kyere" [literally translated as: " The past (history) has lessons to teach the present".]

Mr. Chairman, excellence is achieved with patience and continuity. It is not in doubt that the Great Wall of China took 75 years to construct. The construction period, therefore, spanned the lives of nearly three generations of Chinese. Each succeeding generation did not demolish the inherited wall and re-start all over again. On the contrary, succeeding generations continued from where their predecessors left off. This is the key to excellence.

Mr. Chairman, as we recognize and celebrate merit and achievement, I would implore the good people of this country to extol merit as a virtue and strive to work towards the attainment of a merit-based society. This ideal is a very effective cure for the abuse of ethnic and tribal affiliation as a means

of facilitating their access through the maze of patronage and cronyism. The beauty of a merit-based society is that such tendencies are less pronounced.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let history not say about our generation that we were those who in the midst of plenty, made no progress in our lives because we failed to recognize and appreciate each other. Let History say that "We who were strong in love" as Wordsworth put it, were the ones who really achieved excellence in our lives because we built on legacies and past achievements.

Thank you very much and May God richly bless you