

HIS EXCELLENCY JOHN DRAMANI MAHAMA

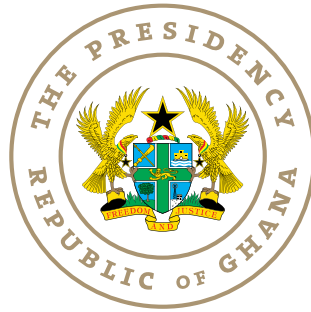
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA

**PAN-AFRICAN CONFERENCE ON INEQUALITIES IN THE
CONTEXT OF STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATION**

International Conference Centre

Accra, Ghana

28th April 2014



Madam Chair,

Distinguished Conference Delegates,

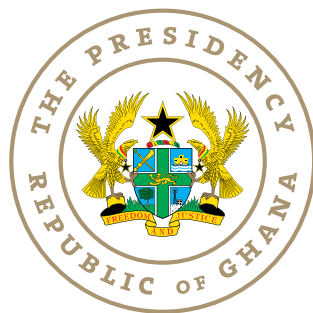
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me begin by thanking the organisers of this conference for adjusting the start time of this conference to accommodate me and allow me to participate in this very important event and let me thank all of you for your patience waiting one hour for me to join you.

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Ghana and to open this very important Pan-African conference on inequality. I would like to express my gratitude to all of you for making the time to come to Ghana for this historic gathering. It is surely one that will help Africa shape a post 2015 development agenda.

I am especially thrilled to welcome you to Ghana because of the historical resonance of this conference. On the 6th March 1957 when Ghana became an independent nation, our founding father, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah declared that “the independence of Ghana is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent.”

Since then, we have all come to realize that our independence, indeed, our total liberation is not found only in our political sovereignty. It is also found in our pride, in our dignity and in the equality of our citizens.



Your presence here demonstrates our commitment as a continent to making the fight against inequality a reality and not just a dream.

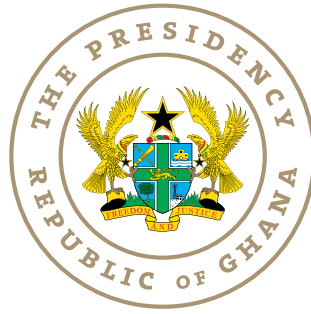
Madam Chair,

It would be fair to say that the issue of inequality—particularly that of wealth inequality, the gap between those who have and those who have not—has been a major topic of global concern since the beginning of time.

As early as 300 B.C., the Greek philosopher, Plato, said something interesting. Plato said and I quote, “There should exist among the citizens neither extreme poverty nor, again, excessive wealth, for both are productive of great evil.”

Throughout the course of history, wealth inequality has been the root cause of numerous conflicts, revolutions and social tension. Throughout the course of history, wealth inequality has been a major point of focus for most governments, an urgent problem that needed to be addressed, if not fixed.

To speak of inequality is to do more than speak of the difference between those who have and those who have not. To speak of inequality is to dare to question the reasons why that difference exists.



The word “inequality” has, in many ways, become stigmatized. It has become more associated with social values that evaluate performance than with the societal conditions that created and encouraged poverty.

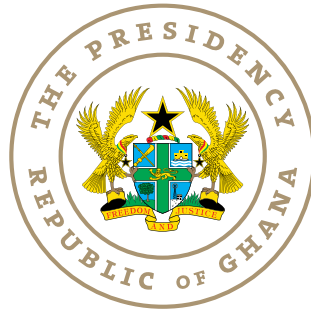
Wealth and good fortune are often attributed to hard work, tenacity, and resourcefulness. And by that same logic, poverty and misfortune are also attributed to laziness, or the absence of discipline and willpower.

This reasoning, of course, fails to acknowledge any of the factors that help to institutionalize poverty, and make it insidious and virtually inescapable.

Madam Chair,

It is my understanding that the goal of this gathering is to envision “The Africa We Want” and to create a vocabulary for that image, a vocabulary that will enable us to add our voices to the larger global discussion on “The World that We Want.”

If that is the case, then I would like to begin, this address, by using a language that is already embracing the ideal, a language that imagines the Africa We Want and, ultimately, the World We Want. Or, better put, the Africa We Need and, the World We Must Create.



I would like to begin by speaking not of inequality but, rather, of equality—an ideal that everyone seems to understand, a goal that seems to exist without stigma.

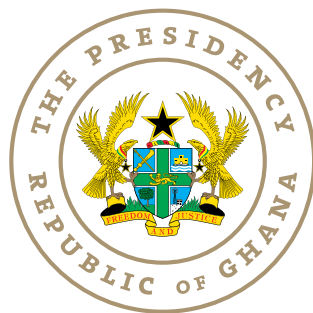
We know the definition of equality, or its other uses, equity. Somehow the stigma is automatically erased. We know equality to be a condition that either exists or does not exist. The reasons why or why not are beside the point.

Equality needs no explanation. Equality needs no justification.

Perhaps that is why the United Nations' declaration, it is placed prominently in Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and that act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." These days we can also say sisterhood.

This declaration was not drafted based on the world that existed. This declaration was based on the vision of an ideal world. In 1949 when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations, the majority of the African continent was still under colonial rule. And any notion of equality under colonial rule was nothing more than a farce.

In 1949, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations, slavery was still legal in many places throughout the world. It



wasn't until 1952 that slavery was abolished in Qatar, 1962 in Saudi Arabia and 1970 in Oman.

In 1949 women could not vote in many places throughout the world. Women eventually won the right to vote in Geneva in 1960, and in Portugal in 1974. In Saudi Arabia, next year, 2015, will be the first year that women will be allowed to vote; and they will also be granted the right to run for municipal elections.

Madam Chair,

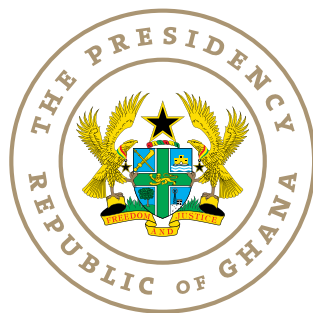
We know the definition of equality.

Even so, when we are tasked at conferences such as this one to redefine equality, we must do so by dreaming, by envisioning a world that does not yet exist. And we must outline a clear path to lead us from this reality to the reality we have determined that our future must hold.

Fourteen years ago, in 2000, the United Nations adopted the historic Millennium Declaration.

The declaration states that:

“We recognize that, in addition to our separate responsibilities to our individual societies, we have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level. As leaders we have a duty



therefore to all the world's people, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs.”

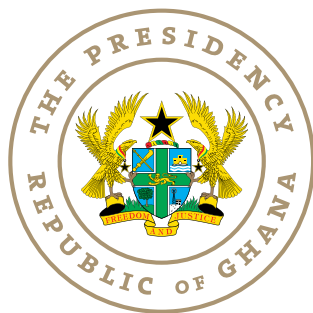
This, of course, was the dream, the vision in 2000 when the leaders met.

In 2001, that dream, the Millennium Declaration was translated into an outline, a map of our journey forward; it was translated into eight Millennium Development Goals with 18 targets and 48 indicators. While the first seven goals gave developing countries the responsibility of halving poverty by 2015 and removing a wide range of impediments to inclusive growth, the eighth goal represented a global partnership for mobilizing resources to finance the pursuit of the first seven goals.

Despite the ambitious scope of the MDGs and their associated measurements, in 2008 the United Nations revised the targets from 18 upwards to 21 and increased the indicators from 48 to 60. This was done to allow the refinement of certain concepts such as reproductive rights, which have a direct bearing on maternal and child health, and to include concepts like, “decent work,” which goes beyond mere employment to ensure suitable wages and working conditions as a sustainable pathway to a prosperous world.

Madam Chair,

Africa is, without a doubt, the perfect place for a discussion on inequality and a re-determination of the equality we seek to take place.



The African continent is, without a doubt, the one place in the world that has consistently been linked—whether right or wrong, whether accurately or inaccurately—with inequality.

Indeed, a good number of people in the Western world are constantly made aware of that inequality:

People were told to be grateful for what was on their plates and to eat all of their food because there were plenty of children starving in Africa.

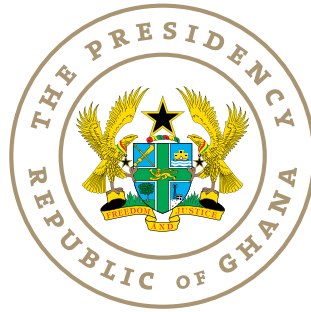
They were barraged with images of emaciated African children in villages with no electricity and no running water and asked to donate funds to help eradicate poverty.

Indeed, Africa was the place of wars, diseases, famine, substandard housing, substandard health care, and high illiteracy.

Indeed, Africa was the very embodiment of inequality.

So what better place than Africa to hold up to the entire world as an example of the way forward towards equality?

Africa is rising. Since 2005, poverty on the African continent has declined faster than it did between 1990 and 2005. Africa's economies are the second fastest growing in the world. The continent's GDP is predicted to grow by an average of 5.5% this year alone.



But what we are now realizing is that this growth will not be sustainable unless we properly address the issue of wealth inequality in our societies and ensure that this growth we are experiencing is inclusive.

What we are now realizing is that we cannot follow the same development paradigm of nations in the so-called developed world. We cannot use the same indexes to either influence or measure the growth of our societies. We cannot emulate the cultures of capitalism and consumption without somehow finding a way to infuse our individual, indigenous value systems into this.

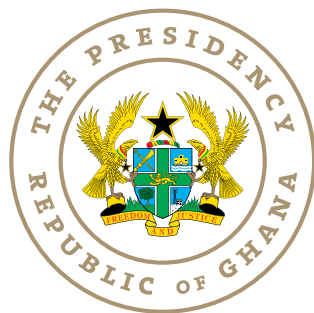
In moving forward, we in Africa have to ask ourselves “What kind of societies do we want to create?”

Madam Chair,

There was a time on the African continent, and that was not so long ago, that the worth of an individual was measured by his or her contribution to their village, clan or country.

These days, the worth of an individual is measured by his or her finances, and physical possessions, like homes, luxury vehicles and jewellery.

The fact is that already in the Western world, this type of consumption has proven itself to be a fatal disease of the individual spirit, a disease that can and will erode the very fabric of society by shattering the core values of community. And by following suit in this disposable culture of consumption, we in Africa run



the risk of disposing the very culture, values and principles that have sustained us and enabled us to survive as a people.

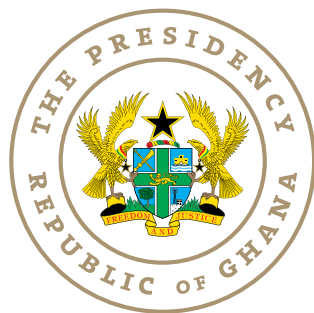
Already in Africa, the extended family system that guaranteed that each was his brother's keeper, that each children grew up in the family lavished with love by an army of grannies and aunts, that the elderly could live their twilight years in care, love and security without being committed to old people's homes is breaking down.

Pope Francis is quoted as saying: "The worldwide financial and economic crisis seems to highlight their distortions and above all the gravely deficient human perspective, which reduces man to one of his needs alone, namely, consumption. Worse yet, human beings themselves are nowadays considered as consumer goods, which can be used and thrown away."

Madam Chair,

Decentralization and the empowerment of local governments is a useful tool in the prevention of inequality.

In Ghana, The District Assembly concept which has ensured political participation at the grassroots level and the constitutional provision for a District Assemblies' Common Fund which ensures a direct appropriation of between 5% and 8% of gross national revenues to 216 Metropolitan, Municipal District Assemblies, has spared Ghana some of the worst forms of inequality. Also a progressive constitution that strongly upholds the rights of the citizen and enjoins government to be mindful of reasonable geographic consideration in the policy of national development has ensured a reasonable spread of



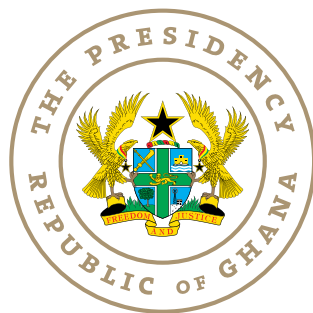
basic amenities in the country. Ghana has among the highest coverage of electricity in Africa, with about 75% coverage. Water coverage stands at about 65% of the population. Access to telecom services exceeds 100%. Percentage Access to healthcare and education are also high due to a National Health Insurance Scheme and a policy of universal basic education and Free, Compulsory, Universal, Basic Education. This is also supported by a school feeding Program in which over 1 million children receive one meal a day.

Ghana was celebrated with 14 other countries for achieving the MDG target on reduction of hunger and malnutrition well in advance of target date of 2015.

Social protection has also been identified as being most effective in reducing poverty and narrowing the inequality gap. It ensures more equitable distribution of resources.

The Government of Ghana has been employing social protection interventions to tackle poverty. Since 2007 we have adopted a coordinated approach in implementing our National Social Protection Strategy. In 2013, we created the Ministry of Gender children and Social protection.

Our major social protection flagship cash transfer is the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty programme. It is administered by the Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection. It provides support to the extreme poor and most vulnerable groups including the elderly aged 65 and above, persons with disability and orphans and vulnerable persons. In 2013, LEAP was being administered to 74,000 families in 100 out of 213 districts in all ten regions of



Ghana. We are set to increase the number of beneficiary households to 150,000 by close of 2014.

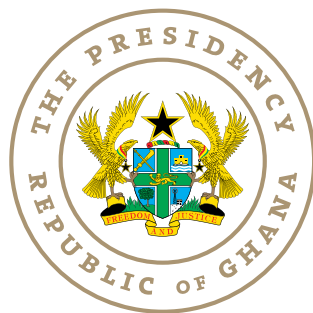
LEAP has had a positive impact on local economic growth. Beneficiaries spend about 80 percent of their income on the local economy. Every GH1 transferred to a beneficiary has the potential of increasing the local economy by GH2.50. It has enabled the poorest families better meet their basic needs, prioritise their health, enroll their children in school, improve school attendance, increase savings and work to pull themselves out of poverty. In addition to cash transfers LEAP families are entitled to free health insurance under Government's national health Insurance Scheme.

Through growth and social intervention schemes such as the PRSP, extreme poverty was been slashed by more than half between 1991 and 2006. I am happy to learn that other African countries are demonstrating commitment to reducing vulnerability and exclusion by adopting and implementing social protection policies.

Madam Chair,

We recognize that strong though our social protection policies may be, they are only a beginning. We recognize that we are, right now, primarily making right what is wrong.

That is why we in Ghana are especially interested in the outcome of this conference. In Lower-Middle income and middle-income nations such as ours



inequality is more visible as a result of an increasing middle class with growing disposable income and visible consumption

We must ensure that the fruits of our success are shared and enjoyed by as many of our citizens as possible.

For far too long on the African continent, only a minority of people benefitted from the resources of our land.

For far too long, our people have been were placated with promises of a better future. It's time to make good on those promises.

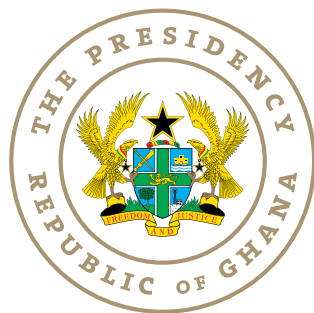
If Africa's fortunes are indeed changing, then that prosperity must be reflected in all of its citizens, not just the wealthy and the privileged.

Nelson Mandela, who waged a lifelong struggle for the equality of African people, once said, "Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice."

As with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Millennium Declaration, the vision and the vocabulary that is captured during these three days of discussion will chart a new course for the African continent. It will challenge us, its citizens to rise up to our fullest potential in order to realize the vision.

I would like to thank you, in advance, for the admirable work that you will do during these three days. Conferences such as this allow us to share best practices and exchange ideas.

I would like to thank you for daring to dream and to ask the difficult questions in order to make the important determinations.



In conclusion let me thank the organisers and sponsors of this conference and to say how proud we are, as a country to host all of you.

It is an honour for me to once again extend a warm welcome to all of you, and to thank you for your kind attention and to officially declare this conference opened. Thank very much.