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AS WRITTEN

ADDRESS BY H.E. FLT. LT. J.J. RAWLINGS  
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA

AT THE WORLD SUMMIT ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT  
IN COPENHAGEN, DENMARK SATURDAY 11 MARCH 1995

Mr. Chairman,  
Colleague Heads of State  
and Government Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

We could not have had a more appropriate venue for a Conference devoted to the social development of the peoples of the world than Denmark, a country that has come to symbolise resistance to oppression and the social well-being of all peoples. Denmark it was whose King, in defiance of the Hitlerite edict for all Jews to wear the Star of David as a virtual "death warrant", decided to be the first to wear that Star and dared the Nazis to identify him as the first Jew. The rest of the world stood beside the King of Denmark and defeated Nazism. That heroic stand of the King of Denmark must galvanise us into action as we meet in Copenhagen to take a stand against poverty and underdevelopment at this Summit

A large proportion of citizens in developing countries particularly those in Africa and the least developed countries live in poverty. Further, it is the rural environment that is typically host to the worst problems of poverty, disease, illiteracy, ignorance and deprivation.

Against this background, it is imperative that governments, particularly those in Africa and the least developed countries, adopt conscious and transparent humancentred development policies and strategies that will effectively achieve social development, accelerate economic growth and make all citizens both creators as well as beneficiaries of the national wealth.

The Government of Ghana is making substantial investment in human resource development, particularly for children and women, focusing on improving the health, nutritional status and longevity of our population as well as increasing access to all levels of education. Indeed, currently about 40 per cent of our total public expenditures are allocated to the education and health sectors alone. We are also implementing policies that will create and establish an enabling environment for human and social development.

A major element in our governance programme is the provision of the means for the empowerment of people through participatory development decision making at local levels. There has been a major reallocation of administrative and financial responsibilities to give greater control to the regional, district and sub-district levels of the system. Our aim is to allow people at the -- local level to determine their own development priorities, generate financial resources locally, and control the uses to which those resources are put

Our objective is to end once and for all the parasitic relationship that enables the urban elite not only to live off the sweat of the rural dweller, but to dictate to him the conditions of his existence.

Mr. Chairman, all these and similar policies and programme that we and other governments are implementing to promote social development are mainly the responsibility of national governments. However, there is need for international co-operation, assistance and joint action for the full and effective fruition of our objectives.

We are here in Copenhagen to deliver a message of hope and peace to the poor and deprived peoples of the world as we enter the 21st century. In pursuit of this objective, many developing countries have of late increasingly subscribed to the tenets of the free market economy and undertaken stringent structural adjustment programmes, but are not deriving the full benefits because the principles which the market and the programmes define for us are transparently manipulated through tariffs, quotas and low commodity prices, to our extreme disadvantage.

Improvement in the present world trade regime to minimise the trade losses of developing countries is therefore the first step that ought to be taken to reverse this unjust situation. Equitable prices ought to be paid for our primary commodities and markets must be opened to our processed and other value-added products. Cancellation or substantial reduction of the debts of developing countries is the other step that must be taken. The problem of the debt-burden is only an aspect of the broader issue of social and economic justice within the international community.

Mr. Chairman, I speak as the leader of a country which is acclaimed a success story in going through 12 years of structural adjustment, 5 years of transition from a revolutionary to a constitutional democracy, and 5 years of a far-reaching decentralisation programme.

Ghana is therefore one of the countries best placed to tell the story of those developing countries which are making strenuous efforts to provide opportunities and dignity for the disadvantaged within our societies but which are increasingly frustrated by the clearly unfair international terms of trade as well as the crippling debt burden. Essentially Ghana is calling for a menu of measures which would permit each indebted country to have the resources to boost growth whilst at the same time being able to service its

debt.

From our experience in Ghana, we now believe that structural adjustment, to be successful, must be reciprocal. The developed countries must also restructure their economies to reduce excessive consumerism, to pay appropriate prices for primary commodities, and to open up their markets to fair and effective competition. Of course, we have little right to complain unless we can demonstrate that the limited resources available to us are being used equitably and efficiently in the best interests of all our people. But if we are sincerely and effectively making these efforts, and yet it is clearly not enough to address the social injustices in our countries, then are we not justified in questioning the present world order?

That order includes the one in which we apply doublestandards in dealing with one another. The standards we apply in our countries are different from the standards we apply in dealing with countries of the developing world. When it suits us, we are ever ready to break from the most fundamental of our cherished norms to safeguard our national interest. But not so when we are dealing with other, especially developing countries.

Mr. Chairman, today, we have set aside all the rules relating to banking secrecy and confidentiality in order to deal with the problem of drug trafficking and its accompanying illicit wealth. But let us remember that those who take drugs choose to do so. The village dweller in the developing counts who drinks water from the disease infested pond has no such choice. Why can't we do the same to enable the peoples of the developing countries discover and trace the loot from their countries, stashed away in secure banks and tax havens which makes it impossible for them to have access to safe drinking water, primary schools and clinics?- ¢ -

Why can't we in fact enact enforceable legislation to prevent illicit and illegitimate wealth being taken out of our countries and kept in the banking and other financial institutions of the developed world? Why can't we disclose to the peoples of the developing world who we want to help, how much of their wealth we have in our vaults so that like the one time Israeli Prime Minister who had to resign his position on account of keeping a foreign bank account, our people can also call us to account? No! We would rather conduct referenda to protect the system that keeps our people in ignorance that makes it impossible to hold accountable people that we have put in positions of trust. We must not only talk about the unfairness of the international economic order, we must also talk about the immorality of the international finance order, because without morality, there is no justice, and without justice, there is no legality

Mr. Chairman, we therefore carry out our responsibilities towards our people with one anxious eye on those factors which operate at the international level which today is characterised by a steadily widening gap between rich and poor, both among and within nations.

If we do not want our world to enter the 21st Century on the brink of social breakdown, we must reduce this gap within our individual nations, and within the world community.- 8 -

We need that peace, in order to achieve full employment and social justice for all. We need that peace, in order to achieve social development of the peoples of the world. Above all, we need that peace if we are to make a peaceful entry into the 21st century.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your attention. A life of dignity and opportunity does not have to be a life of invidious affluence. Indeed, our planet earth could not support uniform affluence for all. But we must determine, at this timely forum, to commit ourselves to practical measures to provide for all peoples of the world the basic conditions within which social values, social justice and social coherence can exist.

We in Ghana make a solemn commitment to pursue our chosen path of empowering our people through decentralisation, popular participation in decision-making and people-centred development programmes.

We commit ourselves to the continued restructuring of our domestic economy and to join in the restructuring of our sub-regional and continental economies in the greater interest of our peoples and of the peoples of the world.

We commit ourselves to the pursuit of world peace and especially to peace in the West African sub-region and the African continent.

We invite the rest of the world to recognise the carnage, death and destruction taking place in West Africa and in Africa and to do all in its power to bring an end to those atrocities.

We need peace, in order to safeguard the well-being and security of people. We need that peace, in order to conserve resources for poverty alleviation.

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