

University of Ghana

Aggrey-Fraser-Guggisberg Memorial Lecture and
Awarding of Honorary Degrees
2013-04-19

Golden Pillars

Remarks by
Sir John Daniel

Mr Speaker, Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Chairman of Council, Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am delighted to receive this honorary degree from the University of Ghana and deeply honoured to have been asked to make some remarks on behalf of my fellow honorary graduates. I confess that I have never before addressed an assembly on behalf of a former state president in his own country. Indeed, I have never previously addressed a university convocation on behalf of such a distinguished group of honorary graduates*.

I speak on behalf of another group as well. Six years ago, in April 2007, the Council invited an International Visitation Panel to Legon because the University perceived that its teaching and learning functions, and the quality of its operations generally, had deteriorated. The University invited the Panel to review its activities and recommend steps that would enhance its role as Ghana's premier university and research institution and enable it to become a leader in global higher education.

Your then Vice-Chancellor, Professor Clifford Tagoe, identified and invited the members of the Visitation Panel, and we received tremendous support from the then Registrar, Alfred Teddy Konu. The University is also honouring them at this ceremony, which gives me special pleasure.

It was my privilege to chair that International Visitation Panel with, as my vice-chair, Professor Aki Sawyerr, your distinguished former Vice-Chancellor who was then Secretary-General of the Association of African Universities. Our Panel was also enormously fortunate to have as one of its members Ms Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić, then Head of the Higher Education unit at UNESCO. As former UNESCO employees both Stamenka and I are greatly honoured to be in the presence of the Chancellor, his Excellency Mr Kofi Annan.

Stamenka arranged for UNESCO to conduct some research on behalf of the Panel and also worked closely with me on writing, editing and finalising the Panel's report, which I submitted to the University on a visit to Legon in December 2007. Throughout our work we had tremendous backing from our Panel Secretariat under the leadership of Mr Kofi Siabi-Mensah.

I am thrilled that Stamenka has been able to come with me to this ceremony today, and I would like to accept this honorary degree on her behalf as well - and, indeed, on behalf of all the distinguished members of the International Visitation Panel, who came from Ghana and six other countries.

I confess that in the years after we submitted our Report we rather lost touch with the University, as those university officers who had arranged our visits and hosted us so generously either retired or moved on.

However, our good friend, Joshua Mallet, my former colleague at the Commonwealth of Learning and now Director of your Centre for National Distance Learning and Open Schooling, CENDLOS, did tell me that the Report was having a significant effect on higher education in Ghana generally. But Joshua is a most generous person, who always likes to please, so we were unsure of the real impact of our work.

Just this week, however, the Registrar, Mr Joe Budu, kindly sent us two documents. The first was the final report to Council, made in 2011, of the Visitation Report Implementation Committee. The second is the draft of a case study that the Registrar is preparing with Professor Quashiga of the Faculty of Law for presentation to a seminar that UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning is holding in Nairobi next month. It is titled: *The role of steering policies and governance reforms in the management of higher education*. Stamenka and I read both documents with enormous interest and a great feeling of satisfaction.

Satisfaction first, because of the most impressive process that the University put in place to take forward the recommendations of our Visitation Panel and to strive to implement them one by one. We were particularly impressed that the Government of Ghana played its role in revising the University of Ghana Act. When we made our visitation back in 2007 we received great encouragement from the Government. But there has been a change of national administration since then and it is a great tribute to the maturity of Ghana's democracy that the process of revision continued and a new Act was promulgated in 2010 with new Statutes a year later.

Furthermore, it seems that this reflection on the legislative framework for higher education has influenced the country as a whole. It was a pleasure to read in the case study that, the recommendations of the Visitation Panel greatly influenced university structures and: "The University of Ghana Act has therefore become the standard for the formulation of legislation for all other universities".

We can also see that the process of reviewing and implementing the Panel's recommendations engaged many members of the University staff at all levels. Their commitment was most impressive and the degree to which the large majority of the recommendations have been almost fully implemented is amazing and rather humbling to those of us who formulated them.

We are satisfied secondly, and most importantly, because the implementation of the recommendations really does seem to be having an impact. The case study that is being prepared includes a survey of members of the university community to get their views on whether the reforms have made a difference.

I spent 17 years as a university vice-chancellor in Canada and the UK, so I know well that academics and students are rarely impressed by the reality of the reforms for which they campaign so vigorously. In my experience students are the most conservative in this respect: urging radical reform, but opposing it when it comes.

During the Panel's visits the overseas members learned a new word, 'perching'. We were aghast at the state of some of the halls and residences and recommended an immediate end to perching. We are pleased that this has been done, but not surprised that some students resisted this policy of giving them more civilized living conditions.

However, we are particularly pleased that there seems to be general satisfaction with the considerable changes that have been made to the curriculum, with the introduction of core courses. When we wrote in our report that "the core obligation of the University of Ghana is the production of graduates who have developed critical thinking capacities, oral and written communications skills, an appreciation for the arts and the humanities, and a commitment to lifelong learning", I suspect some of the panel feared that this might simply be a pious nod to tradition, but your new programme structures really do aim to inculcate these habits of thought in your students.

Equally, it is encouraging to see the new priority being put on postgraduate programming, with a concomitant emphasis on the qualifications of the academic staff and the fostering of research. None of these moves are easy but they are essential to "enhance the institution's role as Ghana's premier university and research institution and enable it to become a leader in global higher education" to quote again from the brief you gave to the International Visitation Committee.

The third reason for our feeling of satisfaction is the success of the process itself. Bringing in an International Visitation Panel could have been a waste of money, but it wasn't – why?

The Case Study gives several reasons. First, there was an overwhelming desire for change within the University.

Second, the University ensured that the membership of the Visitation Panel was a judicious mix of international experts and Ghanaian and African authorities.

Third, we relied on internal wisdom at every step of the work – holding a mirror up to the University so that it could see itself more clearly. This helped to make the recommendations appropriate, meaningful and therefore largely acceptable.

Fourth, as I noted already, the University followed up on the Report in an exemplary and transparent manner, publishing it in full and setting up a high-powered Implementation Committee with the obligation to report to the Council every quarter.

Finally, of course, this all took place in a supportive environment. Without the active support of the Government and external stakeholders the reforms would not have achieved the success that they did.

All this is to say that this ceremony and the developments at the University in the six years since we were last here give Stamenka and I great joy. We shall share our joy with the other members of the Panel in the days ahead, knowing that they will be as pleased as we are by what you have achieved.

As we are gathered here together in this Great Hall, let me end by quoting the opening paragraph of our report:

"In the Great Hall of the University of Ghana at Legon huge gold pillars rising to a soaring ceiling provide a vivid metaphor for the tremendous national aspirations that

accompanied the transformation of the University College of the Gold Coast into the University of Ghana in 1961. Since then the University has survived and developed through periods of economic and political turbulence that would have challenged even the world's most established centres of learning".

Today Ghana is a stable democracy with tremendous economic potential. We hope that the impact of the International Visitation Panel, whose work we recall today, will be to rekindle that metaphor of the Great Hall and allow the people of Ghana to reinvest in the University those national aspirations for eminence in Africa and the world of half a century ago. The University now has the elements in place to pursue with energy not only the process of catching up described with such eloquence by Professor Thandika Mkandawire in his inspiring lecture, but also his invitation for the University of Ghana to lead the universities of Africa in putting down the intellectual foundations for a new era of African empowerment.

*Honorary Graduates:

For Distinguished Scholarship

- John Pobee *Emeritus Professor, Department of Religion; Anglican Priest*
- Ama Ata Aidoo *Novelist and writer*
- Emmanuel Victor Doku *Professor of Crop Science, Former Dean of Agriculture*

Contribution to Tertiary Education

- Frank Adu Jnr. *Managing Director, CAL Bank*
- Vartan Gregorian (*in absentia*) *President, Carnegie Corporation*
- John Daniel *Chair, International Visitation Panel*
- Alfred Teddy Konu *Former Registrar*
- Grace Marquis *Professor in the Department of Nutrition and Food Science*

Distinguished Contribution to Public Service

- John Agyekum Kufuor *Former President of Ghana*
- Samuel Nunoo Woode *Chair, Public Service Commission*

Alumni of whom the University is especially proud

- Rachel Philips *One of the first two women to enrol in the University in 1948*
- James Aggrey-Orleans *Former diplomat and High Commissioner to the Court of St. James*

Contribution to Industry

- Anthony Oteng-Gyasi *Former Chair of Council (at the time of the Visitation)*
- Cecelia A. Kwofie *Managing Director, Domod Aluminium*

Former Vice-Chancellors

- Kwadwo Asenso-Okyere
- Clifford Nii-Boi Tagoe

Aggrey-Fraser-Guggisberg Memorial Lecturer

- Thandika Mkandawire *Chair of African Development, London School of Economics*