

**“RUNNING FOR OFFICE IN AFRICA – CONVERSATION WITH DR. PAPA KWESI NDUOM” at the HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL, APRIL 8, 2009**

**Introduction**

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today at the Harvard Kennedy School. My purpose is to share with you what motivated me to run for office, the political environment in Ghana, the experience I went through as a candidate and why I still would like the opportunity to serve as President of the Republic of Ghana. I hope to share with you a short video that will give you a better feel for the campaign I experienced in 2008.

I got involved in politics for the same reasons as many others throughout the world. Public service is an honourable way to potentially affect in a positive way many more people than one can in the private sector. Politics has been said to be “... the art of the possible”. I want through politics to bring hope to the many in Ghana whose lives otherwise would be stuck in poverty, disease and despair. Two other candidates who ran for President in 2008 represented parties that had won national elections since 1992 – the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Some of the factors that contributed to our loss include the inability to raise the funds required to inspire the ordinary people to support my campaign; the inability of my party to field credible, resourceful Parliamentary Candidates to lead the campaign at the local level and the lack of a united front in my own political party.

But a very big challenge was an electorate, mostly poor, living in communities deprived of the basics – water, electricity, schools, housing, safe roads, good health facilities and faced with high unemployment and who were only willing to vote for the one they believe will give them what they want now. Unfortunately for me, they were material things I could not afford to give. I should also point out that my party was overthrown in a military coup in 1966 and banned from taking part in elections until a legal challenge led to its restoration in 1998. This had led to poor showing in the 2000 and 2004 elections and required something we could not deliver to prove to our members and supporters – the perception that we could win the elections.

Don't get me wrong. I am not much of a blame others person. I led a political party to a national election and lost. I love to compete so I acknowledge the fact that two competitors found a way to do much better than I did and I must learn from that experience.

### **Digression: Ghana and the United States of America**

Since the 1930s, Ghana and the United States of America have established a lasting relationship based on the experience of leaders who came from Ghana to the USA to study and work. The values of justice, freedom of speech, human rights, democracy, the equality of the races experienced in America with all the imperfections have influenced those who went back home to Ghana to engage in business or politics. Politics in Ghana has been influenced by the experience of those who migrated from Ghana to America to study, work and go back home to lead the struggle for independence and a better life for Ghanaians. This includes our first President, Kwame Nkrumah. It is interesting to note that four out of the eight candidates who contested the 2008 presidential elections studied at the undergraduate and/or the graduate level in the United States. So I find it quite appropriate that the Harvard Kennedy School would be interested in the experience of someone who ran for office in Ghana. It is also appropriate to point out that when President Kennedy started the Peace Corps, Ghana was one of the first countries to participate in the program.

### **The Unmet Expectation for a Better Life After Independence**

This year, Ghana celebrated 52 years of political independence that was won by a struggle against the colonial power, Great Britain. But Ghana has had the unfortunate circumstance of suffering through military coups and living under the dictatorship of leaders who were not voted for by the people. From 1957 until 1966 we were governed by the founder of my political party, the Convention People's Party (CPP), Kwame Nkrumah. He was overthrown by a combined military and police force in February, 1966.

That first military coup set the stage for the military to disrupt civilian governments and as a result interrupt Ghana's development efforts. After the 1966 coup, the military ruled until an elected government took office in 1969. That elected government was overthrown by the military in 1972. We lived under military rule from 1972 until 1979. The government that was elected in 1979 was also overthrown in 1981. The military rule this time was a very long one from December 1981 until January, 1993. Even then it was the man who led the 1981 coup who contested the 1992 and 1996 elections and became our President for eight years until January, 2001. Since 1993, we have had uninterrupted multi-party, constitution-based governance in Ghana. From time to time, there have been uncertainties about our ability to sustain multi-party democracy due to the visibility and reminders of our not so distant military participation in governance. This is the environment within which I chose to run for the Office of President of the Republic of Ghana.

I consider that the untimely end of the Nkrumah administration in 1966 set not only Ghana back in its quest for prosperity, it delayed Africa's march to unity and development that should have come with it by now. Today in Ghana, the challenge of meeting our Development Goal of crossing the per capita income of \$1000 (not a very significant goal by global standards) is an enormous one. Our task is to raise the public or private sector finance and investment required internally to fund the accelerated growth required to reduce poverty considerably.

At independence, there were very few secondary schools in Ghana (we did not have even one in the Northern part of the country) and one university. A lot had to be done to meet the expectations of a newly independent nation. It should also be considered that at independence, Ghana inherited a Civil Service dominated by expatriates from the United Kingdom. The major challenge, therefore, was the replacement of the expatriates with equally skilled nationals. The reform action initiated became known as the "Africanization" or localization program. At that time, only 14% of the senior positions in the Civil Service were held by Ghanaians, out of which not more than 3% held top positions.

**Crash training programs** had to be developed, especially in the administrative field, to prepare enough nationals to replace the expatriates; others were needed to fill new positions that were being created.

The point I am trying to make to you is that while at independence, there were great expectations for a better life, jobs and social infrastructure, we had significant financial and human resource challenges to overcome. The government moved with great speed to implement a plan for rapid industrialization and social justice. Sometimes in the haste, mistakes were made. Military interventions compounded the problems of an underdeveloped country learning to deal with democracy, freedom of speech and the expectations of prosperity.

### **Why Did I Choose to Run for the Office of President?**

**I happen to agree with Thomas Carlyle, the Scottish-born English writer that “In the long-run, every government is the exact symbol of its people, with their wisdom and unwisdom”.**

I decided to enter the contest to become President of the Republic of Ghana because I believed that I had something positive to offer my country. I chose a positive path to the campaign with the wish that it would be a campaign of ideas our people could benefit from. I decided not to engage in negative campaigning and encouraged my supporters to stay positive. I chose not be part of a blame game believing that our people deserved better than that. I tried, but taking a “high road” was not enough and I lost in a very disappointing way, placing a distant 3<sup>rd</sup> out of 8 candidates.

## **Running for Office in Ghana – the Challenges and the Opportunities**

The challenges associated with running for national office in Ghana are many

1. Funding a Campaign: Our campaign had a web-site with a variety of options for making a contribution. We had a support group in the USA, Europe and elsewhere called Citizens for a Better Ghana that organized fund raising events in London, South Africa, Canada and many states in America. We established a publicly known account with a financial institution in Ghana for donations. The campaign held fund raising events in Ghana. We sent letters to many people. We raised a decent amount of money working hard and through small amount donations. Yet we were outspent in order of 20 to 25 to one by the two top candidates/parties. The evidence in giant billboards, radio, television advertising, t-shirts, bussing supporters to rallies, etc was there for all to see.
2. Getting the Message Across to the Voters: It is difficult to pay attention when you are hungry. This fact I learnt from the campaign. In America, neighbours get together sometimes to organize fund raising events where everyone brings something to snack on and drink. The candidate shows up, spends a few minutes, says a few words and receives the donations. In Ghana, I paid the transportation to bring people to my rallies. I paid for the t-shirts they wore and the banners they carried. I fed them. I paid for the music. I also paid for the transportation home. And where they were leaving, many would still point to their stomachs, asking for “...something small”. Serious messages had great difficulties penetrating poverty.

3. Staying Above Dirt: Our campaign worked hard to stay above dirt. My party wrote a very good campaign manifesto. We took jewels from it and came up with what I called the “Ten Point Agenda for Change You Can Feel In Your Pocket”. We prepared position papers on the environment, encouraging the private sector, reducing the size of government, public sector reform, emergency medical care, decentralization, etc. We did a weekly radio broadcast and accepted invitations to speak from students, farmers, business people, labour, teachers, etc. We prepared well for the two presidential debates and by all accounts I was judged the best candidate in the race. My opponents did not even attempt to travel the same course and quite often did not honour invitations to speak to the teachers, labour, students etc.

But they sent their people after us to twist and turn a lot of what we said and did into something negative in the field. They recruited many of my party’s people to do their dirty work aimed at discrediting our campaign and the candidates. Some of our best parliamentary candidates dropped out of the race. Business people who had promised significant donations went cold and gave nothing. This is not just pointing fingers at my competitors but at disloyal party members as well.

4. Transportation – Getting Across the Country: There are 230 constituencies in Ghana represented in Parliament. You can only fly to three cities on scheduled airline flights and that is not every day of the week, which means you drive. Most

of the roads only barely qualify to be called that. A distance of less than 300 kilometers in the northern part of the country takes over 6 hours to drive. So, it is rather difficult to spend time in every constituency.

5. The Media Ceiling: The media scene in Ghana has improved over the years. But the influence of government is still powerful. Money has a stronger influence on what goes out than ideas. The media decided early on that it was a two horse race so my party had a hard time fighting the third party battle. It affected the coverage we got. The major opposition party got through by attacking the party in power relentlessly by any means possible and the media gave them the vehicle to use in achieving the goal. The party in power used every means available to get free coverage and publicity paid for by government ministries, agencies and departments – including plastering the achievements of the party in government on billboards, public transportation (buses) and television advertisements.

But there was opportunity as well. At the end of the campaign I realized that a number of the candidates had adopted many of the change agenda items I had introduced early in the campaign. The items had to do with education, cleaning the environment, decentralization, strengthening parliament, separating the office of Attorney General from the Ministry of Justice and electing District/Municipal/Metropolitan Chief Executives. One candidate – the one who won adopted our party's change slogan and symbol. The campaign gave me the opportunity to learn humility that comes from the

knowledge that our people are poorer and many areas of the country more deprived of basic amenities of life than should be the case in a country like Ghana.

It made it more clear to me that the ordinary Ghanaian has expectations, feels cheated by the lack of progress in his or her life and is looking for leadership that will deliver a better life. One thing I know for sure is that Ghanaians however poor they may be cherish the opportunity to decide who their leaders should be through the ballot box.

### **What Did I Learn From the 2008 Campaign?**

1. Our party has to present a united front, work as a team and deal positively with the issue of can another party break through to challenge the two parties that have won elections since 1992. An important factor here is the ability to demonstrate that our party is different from the other two. It is also very necessary to recognize that we are a “Third Force” that needs to work harder to appeal to the youth, the poor and the workers who constitute the majority of the voters. Our message must communicate well with them.
2. Money, money and more money is very, very, very important to getting the attention of the majority of the voters who are poor, unemployed and are looking for attention. It would help greatly if Ghana adopted more transparent campaign finance laws that also required strict reporting and accounting of contributions. Some sort of performance-based state funding could make a difference.
3. It is important to get into the race at least two years to the election to provide the opportunity to travel to all 230 constituencies so that the voters can become familiar with the candidate.

4. Popular, well-resourced parliamentary candidates are needed to take care of the local supporters of the party and ensure the ability to get people out to vote for him/her and the presidential candidate.

### **Will I Run for Office Again in 2012 or Beyond?**

The simplest answer is YES! But the next time around, I will work harder to find a TEAM of good people who believe in social justice as I do and are prepared to make a sacrifice to work on a national campaign. I need a team, loyal and trustworthy that will unite around our message and work hard on our common cause to win power. The campaign team would field an effective fund-raising machine to provide the money to give us the opportunity to be heard and voted for. These are not simple, easy tasks to accomplish as a member of an opposition party that needs to reinvent itself to appeal to the youth, the ordinary Ghanaian and still have credibility with business and professional class.

My participation in the 2008 elections has given me positive visibility and the recognition that I have something to offer. My team will spend more time speaking on behalf of the ordinary Ghanaian well ahead of the campaign. Our party must become a champion of the ordinary people in a more aggressive yet socially acceptable way particularly around the principle of social justice.

Above all, I continue to believe that I have something positive to offer to my country and its people. I have been in the private sector and have helped improve the lives of over

1,000 people and their families. I want the opportunity to lead the country to bring a better life, a higher standard of living and future filled with hope to the more than 22 million people who call Ghana home.

### **What We Need – Leadership That Works For the People**

We have known all along what needs to be done in Ghana. Even before independence, we knew what was needed to develop the country and make its people prosperous. I have done some research on this subject. I have served as Chairman of the National Development Planning Commission which gave me the opportunity to review all the development plans prepared for implementation in Ghana since independence. All the development plans share the same general ideas and goals. Interestingly, they have a lot in common with the Manifesto Kwame Nkrumah took to the pre-independence elections in February 1951. I have picked out a few key elements of that Manifesto to help me make my point as follows:

- “...if our police are more efficient, well trained and well paid, and working under decent conditions with opportunities for promotion, then, we can be sure of a new era of peace and happiness”.
- “The Volta Hydro-Electric Scheme...will provide the necessary fuel and power for the development of industries, the building of factories, the operation of electric railways, public utilities and domestic appliances.”
- “...the Railway System will be modernized and extended to the Northern Territories and Trans-Volta. Various branch lines, and a coastal line, extending from Half-Assini to Aflao will be built.
- “A country-wide system of silos for grain storage will be established to ensure regular distribution of corn, rice, groundnuts and other agricultural products.”  
“Mechanization of agriculture will be embarked upon to improve the productivity of our farmers.”

- “It is under industrialization ... that a higher standard of living for the people of this country can be guaranteed.”
- “New and modern towns and villages will be planned and built with water and sewerage systems.”

In the Manifesto, the need to build schools, pay teachers well and encourage all Ghanaian children to get formal education was stressed among other social needs.

It is appropriate that we recognise that we Africans have been made poor by bad leadership across the continent and not because we have not known what needs to be done. Africa has no good reason to be the poorest of the continents in this world. We have the human and other natural resources required to create conditions for prosperity. However, we have had leadership from pre-colonial to colonial and post colonial times that have not managed the resources we have to benefit the local population. We still have leaders on the continent who are more concerned about self preservation and well-being through winning elections, than the security and prosperity of their people. I want to change our experience in Ghana by providing leadership that will work with a sense of urgency and selflessness to improve the standard of living for the ordinary person.

Thank you for your attention.