

**STATEMENT IN HONOUR OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY (IWD) CELEBRATED ON THE 8<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2023 UNDER THE THEME EMBRACING EQUITY AND ON THE NEED FOR THE PASSAGE OF THE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION BILL BY HON. DR. ZANETOR AGYEMAN-RAWLINGS, HONOURABLE MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR KLOTTEY-KORLE CONSTITUENCY AND DEPUTY RANKING MEMBER ON THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON DEFENCE AND INTERIOR**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. Right Honourable Speaker, I rise to make a statement on the need for us as a country to hasten the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill on the authority of the permission you have gracefully granted me in commemoration of the celebration of International Women's Day (IWD).
2. Mr. Speaker, in celebrations of this year's, please permit me to congratulate all forty (40) dynamic female Members of this august House and indeed all women and gender equality activists.
3. Mr. Speaker, to mention but a few, Justice Georgina Theodora Wood and Justice Sophia Akuffo have served as first and second female Chief Justices of the Supreme Court respectively. In Parliament, Justice Joyce Adeline Bamford-Addo, first female Speaker of Parliament.
4. It is worthy to mention that the Ghana Armed Forces (GAF) has exceeded the United Nations quota for gender mainstreaming in male dominated professions. At the Ghana Armed Forces' Commemoration of International Women's Day on the theme: "Enhancing GAF's Innovative Gender Equity Strides for an Inclusive Force" Naval Captain Veronica Adzo Arhin, whose appointment also presents a milestone in the history of the Armed Forces, stressed that the Ghana Armed Forces presents not less than 15% of women in all UN Peace Support Operations which is above the mandatory 10% set out by the United Nations as far as contingent are concerned. The Ghana Armed Forces have currently also deployed 20% of females on UN Missions in Lebanon. This is the highest in the whole world.
5. Rt. Hon. Speaker, this year's celebration is under the theme, **#EmbraceEquity** and seeks to promote a gender equal world, that is, a world free of bias, stereotypes and discrimination rather fostering diversity, equity, and inclusivity. A world where difference is valued and celebrated by all. This year's celebration seeks to point out that embracing equity can help us create a world of equal opportunities for all.
6. Mr. Speaker, the irony of this year's commemorative celebrations lies in the failure of our dear country to pass the Affirmative Action Bill since the bill first received cabinet approval in 1997. Since 1998, Women Advocacy groups have fought resistance and contestations over affirmative action under several misconceptions including discrimination against men, promotion of nepotism, women are their own evil, women lack confidence to take public offices, quotas system is for lazy women, elitists agenda to cater for middle class women while rural women continue to suffer and many more, name them! Today, even without the Affirmative Action Bill, women have made giant strides and continue to leave huge footprints in every sector of life in Ghana.

**JUSTIFICATIONS FOR AFFIRMATIVE ACTION BILL**

7. Rt. Hon. Speaker, it is also important to emphasize that Affirmative Action is not just a policy tool geared towards the creation of equal opportunities for women. Several research conducted both home and abroad laid significant credence to the fact that an equal and equitable society promotes significant development.
8. A 2008 study of politics in the UK cited by UNIFEM (2008) found that since 1997 when women's representation in parliament doubled to 18.2%, issues of concern to women were being taken up in mainstream policy and political debates more often.
9. Another study in Norway found a direct connection between the percentage of women represented in the City Council and child care programmes. In West Bengal and Rajasthan where one third of all council seats were reserved for women-only competition in local government, a study found out that there were systematic differences between complaints made by men and women. Women, more than men, were likely to make requests and complaints about water resources. As well, while there were no differences in the patterns of

demands made of male and female led councils, there were striking differences in responses in that drinking water projects were 60% higher in female led councils than male led councils (UNIFEM, 2008).

10. Mr. Speaker, according to Ballington (2008), a survey by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) found that, over 90% of respondents were of the opinion that women gave priority to issues believed to be women's issues such as violence against women and children and women's property rights and their participation in decision making. These perhaps suggest that, many of our challenges including that of safe and portable drinking water, protection of water bodies, decongestion of our cities, improved healthcare delivery among others would receive a major boost if the Affirmative Action Bill was to be passed today and under implementation.
11. Affirmative action can be justified also on the basis that, an improved representation of social groups such as women has a beneficial impact on policies. Mr. Speaker, the general consensus with the UN system is that, a target of 30% in all decision-making bodies is necessary to ensure a critical mass which can make a difference. According to Tinker (2004), the UN ECOSOC has agreed to this target which has also become part of the Beijing Platform for Action.
12. Mr. Speaker, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in their latest "Women in Parliament" report point out that the global proportion of female parliamentarians has increased to 26.1%. This change is attributed to legislated quotas enshrined in the constitution and/or electoral laws, which are considered as one of the most crucial factors for success in increasing women's representation. However, quotas alone, may not entirely promote a larger representation of women. The report stresses that it is equally important to have clear, well-designed rules with enforcement and control mechanisms in place. The implementation of such a quota shows political will and serves as evidence that our leadership puts its money where its mouth is.
13. Rt. Hon. Speaker, the 1992 Constitution under Article 35 (6) is clear on Affirmative Action by demanding of the State to, "*take appropriate measures to achieve reasonable regional and gender balance in the recruitment and appointment to public offices*". Again, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU), United Nations (UN), the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) all have treaties and charters on promoting gender equality in governance to which the Government of Ghana have signed unto. Mr. Speaker, Uganda passed a law that mandates all Ministries, Departments and Agencies to satisfy criteria under gender mainstreaming and climate change in order to be approved by Parliament.

## **AFRICAN SUCCESS STORIES OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION**

14. Mr. Speaker, African women have increasingly taken up leadership positions in governance, breaking down barriers and challenging traditional stereotypes that have excluded women from positions of power. This trend has been observed in various African countries, and several women leaders have made notable contributions toward improving the lives of their communities. Subsequently, I will highlight some of the African success stories of female representation in governance and leadership.
15. Mrs. Agyeman-Rawlings, former First Lady of the Republic of Ghana and the late Justice Annie Jiagge were instrumental in the realisation of the Intestate Succession Act, 1985 (PNDC Law 111), under Former President Flt. Lt. J.J. Rawlings. In absence of a valid will, this Act protects the surviving spouse's property rights in intestate succession and promotes the fair treatment of widowers and widows. Mr. Speaker, I must mention that Justice Annie Jiagge was not only a Ghanaian human rights activist and the first female lawyer called to the Bar in Ghana in 1950 but she was the first woman in Ghana and the Commonwealth of Nations to become a judge.
16. Another notable example of female leaders in Africa is Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who served as the President of Liberia from 2006 to 2018. Sirleaf was the first woman to be elected as a head of state in Africa. During her tenure as president, she implemented policies that aimed to improve the health, education, and economic well-being of Liberians, particularly women and girls.
17. Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, who served as the President of Mauritius from 2015 to 2018 is another success story. Gurib-Fakim was the first woman to hold the position of president in Mauritius and the fifth woman to

become a head of state in Africa. She was also a renowned scientist and biodiversity expert, who advocated for environmental protection and sustainable development during her presidency.

18. In Rwanda, women have made significant strides in political leadership, with women holding over 60% of the seats in parliament. This is largely attributed to the country's quota system, which requires that at least 30% of parliamentary seats be reserved for women. One of the notable women leaders in Rwanda is Pauline Mujawamariya, who served as the Minister of Gender and Family Promotion from 2008 to 2011. Mujawamariya was instrumental in advancing policies and programs aimed at empowering women and promoting gender equality in Rwanda.
19. In South Africa, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma served as the Chairperson of the African Union Commission from 2012 to 2017, becoming the first woman to hold the position. Dlamini-Zuma is a seasoned politician and anti-apartheid activist, who played a key role in the fight against apartheid in South Africa. As Chairperson of the AU Commission, she worked towards advancing the socioeconomic development of Africa and promoting peace and security on the continent.
20. Last but not the least, we have Amina J. Mohammed, who served as the Minister of Environment of Nigeria from 2015 to 2016 and is currently the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations. Amina is a respected diplomat and development expert, who has worked extensively on issues related to sustainable development, gender equality, and poverty reduction. As Deputy Secretary-General, she has been at the forefront of efforts to promote the empowerment of women and girls and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.
21. Mr. Speaker, African women have made significant strides in political leadership, challenging stereotypes and breaking barriers in a traditionally male-dominated field. The success stories highlighted above demonstrate the important contributions that women leaders are making toward promoting gender equality, advancing sustainable development, and improving the lives of their communities.

## CHALLENGES

22. Rt. Hon. Speaker, the Affirmative Action Bill in Ghana seeks to provide a framework for addressing issues of gender inequality and promoting equal opportunities for all citizens in various sectors of the country's economy. However, there are several challenges facing the implementation of this bill, including:
  23. **Limited political will:** Despite the government's efforts to pass the Affirmative Action Bill into law, there is a lack of political will to fully implement it. This is partly due to the belief that affirmative action measures are not necessary for Ghana and that the country already has laws that promote gender equality.
  24. **Limited resources:** The implementation of the Affirmative Action Bill requires resources, including funding and personnel, to ensure its success. However, Ghana's limited resources and competing demands for funding make it difficult to allocate the necessary resources for implementing the bill.
  25. **Lack of awareness and education:** There is a lack of awareness and education among the general public about the importance and benefits of affirmative action measures. This has resulted in resistance and opposition to the bill, as some people do not fully understand its purpose and objectives.
  26. **Cultural and traditional norms:** Ghanaian society is deeply rooted in cultural and traditional norms that favor men over women in many aspects of life, including education and employment. These norms make it difficult to fully implement affirmative action measures that seek to address gender inequality.
  27. **Implementation challenges:** Even if the Affirmative Action Bill is passed, there may be challenges with implementing it at the grassroots level. For example, some institutions may resist the implementation of the bill, while others may lack the capacity to implement it effectively.

Rt. Hon. Speaker, the implementation of the Affirmative Action Bill in Ghana, if passed, faces several challenges that must be addressed for the bill to be successful in achieving its objectives.

## THE WAY FORWARD AND CONCLUSION

28. Mr. Speaker, the almost 15% representation of female in the 8<sup>th</sup> Parliament suggest a significant improvement in women representation especially when compared to the previous Parliaments under the fourth republic. However, there is the need for more commitment in addressing women equality and representation in governance at all levels. It is important to recognise that the political parties have taken a good leap by attempting to reduce fees for women contesting for political offices on their tickets yet those reductions seem insignificant if you consider the general high cost of elections in the country.
29. Mr. Speaker, there is an urgent need for the Affirmative Action Bill to be brought to Parliament now. Rt. Hon. Speaker, Parliament's official website report of 25<sup>th</sup> May, 2021 captures your opening remarks after Parliament resumed Sittings for the Second Meeting of the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the 8<sup>th</sup> Parliament as, "*the Speaker of Parliament, Rt. Hon Alban S. K. Bagbin has today opened the Second Meeting of the First Session of the Eighth Parliament with a firm commitment to see to the passage of the Affirmative Action Bill into law*". The report further suggests that, "*... the Speaker said the most critical amongst the Bills that needed immediate consideration was the Affirmative Action Bill which is also before the cabinet*". It is time cabinet releases the Bill to Parliament in whatever shape it is in. Parliament has the capacity to tailor the Bill into the form needed for passage with the help of Civil Society and the general public. It is time to pass the Affirmative Action Bill.
30. Mr. Speaker, the government and therefore Cabinet owes this country a responsibility to release the Bill to Parliament now more than ever. The passage of the Affirmative Action Bill is critical not only for the advancement of women but the entire country. In our drive towards fulfilling Agenda 2063 for the economic and financial empowerment of women, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Agenda 2030 of leaving no one behind in the pursuit of inclusive and sustainable development. Rt. Hon. Speaker, women's issues are social issues, therefore, it is now time to walk the talk by ensuring a more inclusive and *participatory* democracy for all by passing the Affirmative Action Bill into law.
31. Rt. Hon. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to make this all-important statement. Hon. Members and my fellow country women and men, lets **#EmbraceEquity** for the prosperity of our present and future.