

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE HON DEPUTY MINISTER FOR  
CHIEFTAINCY AND TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS, MR. JOHN  
ALEXANDER ACKON AT THE 8<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL RICE FESTIVAL  
OF THE CHIEFS AND PEOPLE OF DEKPOR HORME/WHETA  
IN THE KETU NORTH DISTRICT OF THE VOLTA REGION  
SATURDAY 19<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2014 AT DEKPOR HORME**

Chairman,

Togbui Adela Dartey III Chief of Dekor

Torgbuioo

Mamawo,

Elders of the Dekpor Traditional Area,

Distinguished Invited Guests,

Citizens of the Dekpor/Wheta Traditional Area,

Representatives of the various Media Houses,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All too soon, one year has gone and another festival is with us again.

Thanks to God Almighty for His blessings. It is my singular honor to inform you that the minister for Chieftaincy and Traditional Affairs Dr. Henry Seidu Daanaa has asked me to express his

appreciation and gratitude to you for the invitation extended to him to once again join you as you celebrate your annual Rice festival, the 8<sup>th</sup> in edition. He recounted his experiences last year when he was with you to celebrate the 7<sup>th</sup> edition. The warm reception, the hospitality that was accorded him, the rich culture and indeed the pomp and pageantry that was showcased at the celebration.

He has asked me to say a big thank you for the honor; “Akpe na mi”.

Indeed, Chairman, Togbuioo, Mamaoo, it was the expectation of the Hon Minister to be with you today to once again share in your joy and festivity; but unfortunately, equally prior arranged engagements have compelled him to delegate me, as his Deputy to represent him. He has requested me to sincerely apologize for his inability to be with you, and hoped that God willing, he will join

you next year. He has therefore with your permission asked me to stand in for him.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, as we all know, festivals are celebrated by various communities for one reason or another. Generally however, festivals are traditional occasions to celebrate our values as a people and also for social and family re-unification. Today, festivals have become platforms for planning development projects and seeking investments to enhance the socio-economic life of the people. Today's celebration therefore provides us with another opportunity to take stock of the past and re-build our programmes for the future. I am happy to note that the institution of the Rice Festival seven years ago by the chiefs and people of the Dekpor Traditional Area is not only for merry making, but importantly an occasion to spearhead the development of the area. This is a laudable idea and initiative which should be greatly commended.

Today, the government spends a lot of foreign exchange in the importation of food products including rice to supplement local production in order to meet local demand. I wish to refer to the state of the Nation's Address delivered by H. E. the President John Dramani Mahama in February on the gloomy picture of our import bill on the consumables. For instance, in 2013 alone, the government spent an amount of almost \$1.5 billion in foreign currency on the importation of rice, sugar, wheat, tomato products, frozen fish, poultry and vegetable oils. It is indicative to note that Rice alone accounted for \$374 million, which could have otherwise been invested in the local economy. Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen, the truth is that this situation is not sustainable if we need to grow the economy, create more jobs for our people, expand infrastructure and become self sufficient in food production. There is therefore the urgent need to create an economic structure that will serve best our needs and purposes for a greater tomorrow.

One of the prudent measures being taken by the government to reverse the decline, in the economy is to resource the agricultural sector which holds the key to improving the economy. The measures include extending financial assistance and technical cooperation to local investors for increased production of poultry, rice and other food crops. There is no doubt about the fact that rice cultivation in the Dekpor area has contributed significantly to the economy. It has helped to improve the supply situation in the country.

It is therefore appropriate to commend you for your effort in this direction towards rice sufficiency in the country. It is to be noted that the production of rice in the traditional area has greatly improved the Wheta irrigation project though we still need to do more.

Another good news is that the project has created employment for the citizens of the area, particularly the youth who otherwise

would have moved to the cities looking for greener pastures, thereby compounding the rural – urban drift.

I wish to assure you that following the success story of the Wheta Irrigation project, the area will also receive government attention when the economic support programmes are rolled out. This is one project which is dear to the heart of government because of its potential to increase rice production in the country. I hope the chiefs and people of the Dekpor and Wheta traditional area will make good use of the opportunity.

Chairman, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, since the assumption of office of H. E. the President, John Dramani Mahama, in 2009, the policies and programmes of the government have been largely directed towards transforming the economy for an accelerated growth. This is anchored on the government's vision of building a strong and resilient economy, one of the four pillars of the President's approach to governance

and socio-economic transformation which will propel the development of the country.

The government's economic policies are driven by the need to change the basic structure of the economy from import driven economy to export oriented one. This entails adding value to our products, encouraging the consumption and patronage of made in Ghana goods and making the country self sufficient in food production. This will go a long way to cut down on our import bill, especially on food importation. Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, these measures require the collective efforts of all of us to make the vision a reality. As the president said, we need to produce what we consume and consume what we produce.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, there is the need to underscore the fact that the agricultural sector remains a key priority of government notwithstanding the fact that the sector has

lost its prime spot to the services sector as the largest contributor to the nations GDP.

The records indicate that the government's vision of ensuring food sufficiency in the country has been largely achieved.

I wish to acknowledge the reference made by His Excellency the President John Dramani Mahama in his state of the Nation Address this year to the effect that Government's vision to ensure food security in Ghana has made tremendous progress. In 2013, the report of the UN Food and Agriculture (FAO) and the AU Forum for Agriculture Research in Africa recognized Ghana for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of reducing hunger and malnutrition in advance of the 2015 target date. The fact is that as a result of the pragmatic measures by successive governments over the years to revamp the rice industry in Ghana, local rice production has increased by about 60% over the last decade. Commendation to the relentless efforts of our farmers.

Notwithstanding these achievements however, the government will continue to support the Agricultural sector through the provision of improved planting materials, subsidized fertilizers, extension services and improved access to credit. The government through public-private partnership is considering the establishment of new rice processing factories in Nyankpela in the Northern Region, Sogakope in the Volta Region and Atsutuare in the Greater Accra Region to give a further boost to rice production in the country to reduce import.

These measures are in addition to other programmes initiated by the government including irrigation projects which have added almost 1,300 hectares of land to the stock of irrigable land, mainly for rice production. So far in total, 15,200 hectares of land has been devoted to rice cultivation and production. It is the expectation of government that Ghana in the near future will become net exporter of rice.

Togbui Chairman, Mamawo, Togbuioo,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, before I take my seat, permit me to address one of the key issues which has become very dear to the heart of our noble chiefs. I am referring to the amendment of Section 63 (d) of the Chieftaincy Act. I wish to inform you that the amendment is currently before Parliament for consideration, and after parliamentary approval will become law to enable you assert your authority within the prescribed legal framework.

It is the expectation of the Ministry and the government that the final amendment will go a long way to strengthen the Institution of Chieftaincy in the country for it to continue playing its role in promoting peace, stability for national development. It is my hope that Nananom/Togbuioo will use their authority derived from the amended section 63 (d) in the interest of the community.

On this note, I wish to congratulate you for coming this far and to urge you not to relent on your good works towards the development of your community.

Finally, my commendation goes to Torgbui Dartey who in his wisdom instituted the festival seven years ago with the view to promoting development in the traditional area, the creation of job opportunity for his people and also improving the production of the Wheta Irrigation Project. Torgbui,we say Ayekoo.

Thank you.