

2. Address by H.E. General Ignatius Kutu Acheampong, Head of State and Chairman of the Supreme Military Council

Read on his behalf by Lt. General F. W. K. Akuffo, Chief of the Defence Staff

Distinguished Guests, Your Excellencies, Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Head of State and Chairman of the SMC had hoped to be with you today, but has been prevented at the last minute by other pressing official engagements from doing so. He has therefore asked me to bring you his message and good wishes.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to this very important Seventh Commonwealth Education Conference, which is taking place, for the second time since the series began, on the continent of Africa. For us in Ghana, the holding of this Conference here this year — the 20th year of our attainment of independence — is of very special significance. We have in the first twenty years of independence trained one generation of Ghanaian students through our educational system. This is therefore a convenient time for stock-taking to find out what we have been able to achieve in the first two decades of independence in this vital area.

Independence gave us the opportunity, as a nation and people, to shape our destinies in three vital areas — political, economic and social. From the very beginning, however, it was recognized that education was fundamental to any changes that we could effect in each of the three vital areas I have mentioned. Consequently, education has consistently been accorded a very high priority in the programmes and policies of each successive post-independence government. Yet, this fact notwithstanding, it is also true that current dissatisfaction with the performance of the educational system is at an unprecedented high level. This is, of course, not to discount the fact that the more we get educated the more we find what is wrong with our education. This is a healthy sign. The situation in Ghana is not very different from that in nearly all the Third World countries represented in our comity of nations.

The problems of education in most developing countries, and certainly those of member states of the Commonwealth with identical historical traditions, are fairly similar. The broad outlines of these problems are there for all to see. In almost all Third World countries education has failed to produce those far-reaching changes of attitudes and values that are sweeping those societies. Education has continued to be elitist and has only served to maintain a *status quo*. As a result of these defects, the educational system has failed to produce the trained capacity that can handle pressing national problems expertly. Specifically, education has failed to train skilled technicians in the numbers and levels urgently needed for a rapidly developing society like ours. And for such little output, education in all Third World countries has become an unbearable charge on the national budget.

In the face of this crisis in formal education, it is appropriate that the theme of the Conference should be “The Economics of Education”. It is not my intention to burden you in this address with elaborate statistics

pertaining to the spiralling cost of education. In the lead papers which will be presented during the Conference and in your discussions you will have ample opportunity to look at the detailed statistical evidence. I wish, however, to draw attention to some of the salient features of the problem of educational financing which I believe must engage your attention. Nearly all Third World countries now devote more than one quarter — in some cases as much as one third — of the annual recurrent budget to education. The educational budget itself, when examined closely, shows serious imbalances in the allocation between various levels of the system. The least endowed is primary education; while the universities and other institutions of higher learning claim a disproportionate share of the expenditure within the recurrent budget. The most remarkable fact is that such a very small proportion — usually about 10–15% — is devoted to equipment and other teaching aids and materials.

I am sure that in almost all developing countries the governments have the political will to bear this mounting burden of educational expenditure. What I am not certain about is the political will to decide at which level of the system increased investment will yield the greatest dividend. This question, distinguished delegates, is linked with the question of what should be the structure and content of basic formal education. At the beginning of the 1960s most African countries accepted the attainment of universal primary education as a desirable goal. Fifteen years later, the plain fact is that most of these countries have not attained that goal. But perhaps what is most disturbing is the fact that the large army of school leavers we have turned out of our schools have not made the desired impact on our levels of development. How can they, when most of the basic education they have received has pre-conditioned them for nothing but unemployment? We in Ghana are attempting to address ourselves more realistically to this problem. We have to, because the phenomenon of the unemployed school leaver is becoming too alarming to be left unattended for long.

Education does not operate in a vacuum. It draws from the cultural heritage of the society in which it functions and it is also shaped by outside influences. In short, every society gets the education it deserves. Where the formal educational system is characterized by a broad base, a constricted middle section and a tiny apex — which is the common pattern in most Third World countries — it can only be a reflection of the elitism of the society in which it operates. Unless there is a fundamental restructuring of the society, it is difficult to see how the educational system can undergo significant revolutionary change.

Attempts made so far have been peripheral to the central issue. We have paid lip-service to the equalization of educational opportunity, while in actual fact deep inequalities exist both in the accessibility of the broad areas of education and in the distribution of facilities. I believe that an educational system which is relevant to the needs of the people must have a strong policy of self-reliance as its major component. This means that we have reached a point where we must focus our attention and invest our resources in the education of the large masses in order to improve their potential productivity in the economy. This is not to de-emphasize higher education. Surely, with the increasing complexity of the modern world, the specialist skill of the university graduate will continue to be required, but obviously he is not the only cog in the wheel. The present system whereby a tiny minority is highly skilled, leaving the majority in virtual

ignorance, is obviously untenable. Logically, therefore, if we must follow a policy of life-long education, we must continue to devise and support new systems for enhancing and developing adult education both within and outside the formal education structure.

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, the tasks facing this Conference are formidable. While we do not expect you to come out with magical solutions to some of the problems I have raised, we expect positive guidelines to emerge from your deliberations which will help to give new meaning and orientation to education. The world is moving towards a future whose outlines are barely perceptible at present. Caught between the phenomena of rising population and dwindling resources, mankind will have to face new pressures and tensions. A high level of skill, both in technology and in the management of society, will be required to deal with the challenges of the future. The formal educational system must therefore undergo a revolutionary change if it is to meet these challenges adequately. We have, through our present educational philosophies, developed a system of social ethics that looks up to leadership for sheer naked power and authority. Let us now, through a new educational ethics, redefine leadership as an opportunity to render greater service to the people. Only then can we develop the total commitment necessary to pursue any realistic goals in our social and economic development.

In conclusion, let me welcome you all to Ghana. I hope you will find time from your deliberations to go out and learn about our country and its people. Here in Ghana you are among members of your own family, and I know you will feel at home. I wish you all a pleasant stay and fruitful deliberations. Thank you and God bless you.