

31st session (15 octobre-3 November 2001)

Mr. AMEYAW-AKUMFI

Mr. President of the General Conference, Madam Chairperson of the Executive Board, Mr. Director-General, Colleagues, Honorable Ministers, Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

My delegation and I bring you warm greetings from the Government and people of Ghana. Mr. President, I join earlier delegations in congratulating you on your election and wish you the very best during your tenure. We are confident in your ability to discharge your duties creditably. Please permit me to commend the Director-General on the laudable reforms which he has initiated in his attempt to strengthen UNESCO.

Ghana identifies itself with the contents of the draft Medium-Term Strategy 2002-2007, document 31 C/4, and the Draft Programme and Budget for 2002-2003, document 31 C/5, and the process of consultation involved in their preparation. We are pleased to note that a mechanism for review based on cost-benefit analysis has been put in place. Mr. President, may I seize this opportunity to commend the Director-General once again on the ongoing exercise in decentralizing UNESCO's programmes and activities. Ghana wishes in particular to express gratitude first to the Director-General for selecting Ghana to host a sub-regional office and also to the sister countries that supported the Director-General's selection.

Mr. President, I wish to take this opportunity to report to the General Conference on a recent major political development in Ghana. In January this year, for the first time in the political history of Ghana, an elected constitutional government successfully handed over the reins of power to another elected government. The smooth transition was made possible because of Ghana's commitment to the rule of law and to democratic principles. This is why we wish to reiterate our Government's commitment to UNESCO's culture of peace programme which seeks to promote good governance and human rights.

We are grateful to the international community for the moral and material support which facilitated this smooth transition. In spite of this political achievement, poverty continues to be a matter of serious concern to the Government and people of Ghana. We therefore fully subscribe to the emphasis placed on poverty eradication in the projects relating to cross-cutting themes, particularly as they focus on the improvement of the lives of women.

Mr. President, permit me at this juncture to share our heartfelt joy at the honour bestowed on the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, with the award of the Nobel Peace Prize, which he shares with the United Nations. He has made Ghana, and indeed all of Africa, proud. The humble beginning of the Secretary-General and his achievements thus far clearly demonstrate that, given the opportunity, sons and daughters of less developed parts of the world can shine. It is our hope that, through the concerted efforts of both the developed and the developing world, all children born under the sun may have relevant opportunities opened up for them.

Ghana has made some progress in its attempts at achieving the objectives of Education for All in spite of serious financial constraints. While some success has been recorded in the areas of access, we are still grappling with the problem of quality. At the tertiary level, funding remains a daunting task. The Government has set up a Ghana Education Trust Fund (GET Fund) to assist with education financing, with considerable emphasis on infrastructural improvement and student support at the tertiary level. Ghana calls on UNESCO to come up with a balanced strategy to support all levels of education.

Mr. President, like many Member States gathered here, Ghana feel threatened by the alarming rate at which the

HIV/AIDS pandemic is spreading. Ghana has established an Inter-Ministerial Commission which is presided over by His Excellency the President, Mr. John Kufour. We are grateful to international non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations that have collaborated with the Government to raise HIV/AIDS awareness in the country.

Ghana is pleased with the choice of the issues of land and water for joint action by the International Hydrological Programme (IHP) and the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) programme. We also consider the establishment of the International Geological Correlation Programme (IGCP) Young Geoscientist Award a good move as it will motivate young people to conduct deeper research into the earth sciences.

We note with appreciation the UNESCO flagship programme relating to the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, particularly the programme for reinforcing normative action in the field of culture in order to protect the planet's cultural and natural diversity.

Mr. President, the Government of Ghana would like to keep abreast of developments in the digital field and is therefore making every effort to make the Internet accessible to as many people and as many institutions as possible.

Our greatest concern is the problem of access to a modern telecommunication service and its affordability. I am sure most of my colleagues in the developing countries are facing similar problems.

Mr. President, I cannot conclude this delivery without referring to the 11 September 2001 tragedy. Ghana, like the rest of the world, received with shock and dismay the news of the tragedies in Washington, DC and New York City in which thousands of lives were lost and property destroyed. We condemn the acts and their perpetrators in no uncertain terms. The Government and people of Ghana wish to express their sincere sympathy to the Government and people of the United States of America on this sad occasion.

We also take this opportunity to express our deepest appreciation to all those who sent us words of sympathy and assistance following the unfortunate soccer incident at the Accra sports stadium on 9 May 2001 in which a number of people lost their lives. The two events are instances of terrorism and violence respectively. Mr. President, humanity has to strive to eliminate conditions that promote tendencies towards terror, violence and intolerance. We

must learn to live together in peace - in the home, in the community, in our countries, within continents and across continents. The message of peace is in Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and in all indigenous religions and cultures. We must hear it, we must appreciate it, and we must live with it.

I thank you, Mr. President.