

ENTRE' - DEEP RIVER, MY HOME IS OVER JORDAN.

As we gather in this historic place this morning, at this historic time; let us each remember that today is not just about our past, but about our future. Today is not just about the shared pains that we are right to feel from our history of slavery, it is also about the commonality of our destiny; which we are also right to claim. And as we remember, weep if you may, because of yesteryears; but let us join hands and hearts, and work we MUST for better years ahead.

Excellencies; Officials of the Ghanaian Government;

Ambassador Johanna O. Vanikier, Founding President and Chair, HACSA SUMMIT; Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Special Guests;

Distinguished Sons and Daughters of Africa;

Friends of Africa: Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am humbled by the historic weight of the occasion, and deeply grateful to be here. It is especially joyful to be in the presence of brothers and sisters from across the world, with whom all Africans are forever bonded by our history of

slavery. I am also thankful for the opportunity to share these special moments of reflections, celebrations and precognitions with all of you.

I stand here alone, but I bear warm greetings to you from your brothers and sisters in LIBERIA, the LAND OF LIBERTY for all peoples of negroid descent. Liberia, like our host Ghana, is indelibly etched in history. As Ghana became one of the PLACES OF NO RETURN; SO WAS LIBERIA ESTABLISHED AS THE PLACE OF RETURN, for all peoples of African descent.

And so, Ghana and Liberia symbolize not only Points of Departure into slavery, and Point of Return as freed men and women dedicated to the quest for freedom, self-governance and self-determination; but like the vast expanse of our Continent, together, we represent, however imperfectly, an oasis of hope, freedom and aspirations for the black race. Notwithstanding the challenges we may face, Liberia and Ghana are forever dedicated to govern ourselves **justly, equitably and with dignity for all**, and thereby, continue to contribute not only to the richness in diversity, culture and history of our WORLD but also to the quest of our humanity to be advanced **in peace, in justice, in the sciences, in industries, in good governance and in the equality, improve the lives of our people and ensuring equity for both genders.**

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen: Permit me to speak for all of us, in expressing our heartfelt gratitude to His Excellency Nana Addo Danquah Akufo Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana, Officials of the Ghanaian Government, and the great people of Ghana, for availing to our disposals, this beautiful and thriving country, of whose stellar leadership, unprecedented development and special place in the history of the black race, we are all very proud. Since our arrival, we have each felt the warmth of AKWAABA, which leaves each of us with a heightened sense of truly being at home.

I am also grateful to you, Ambassador **vanikier**, and the team at HACSA, for the foresight, leadership and dedication, by which we are assembled. By these undertakings, HACSA has provided us a key to the historical BOX which we must, together, unlock, and thereby commit to **never being closed again**. We must come to stare at the fullness of its historical contents, reconcile ourselves to the truth therein, learn from the stories that are revealed, and be motivated to forge ahead, with renewed hope and unmatched valor and dedication.

And yes, under the aegis of HACSA, one of the values of our coming together must be to commit ourselves to expand and incorporate the stories of slavery from all along the West African Coast, so that the fullness of the chilling experiences of the **Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade** receives all of the attention and understanding it truly deserves. After four hundred years, the time has come to LIFT the hidden, inhumane stories of HORROR from the corners, onto the pages of history books, and expose the gruesome inhumanity of man to man. It is time to acknowledge the fullness of the wrong perpetrated against the black race, and to incorporate the lessons learnt into our lives, as we boldly declare, by the clarity of our words and the persuasion of our actions: “THAT SLAVERY, IN ALL OF ITS ANCIENT AND MODERN MANIFESTATIONS, MUST NEVER BE ALLOWED TO HAPPEN AGAIN!”

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, My Brothers and Sisters: After 400 years, today we meet on hallowed grounds, though agonized by history and overwhelmed by the weight of its attending responsibilities; WE come to solemnly declare:

“NOT JUST THAT WE ARE FREE, - AND INTEND TO REMAIN FREE - BUT IN EQUAL AND FORCEFUL REPUDIATION, BY OUR PRESENCE HERE WE CLEARLY PRONOUNCE THAT OUR FREEDOM IS FOREVER LINKED TO THE FREEDOM OF ALL MEN AND WOMEN OF AFRICA FIRST, THEN THE WORLD AT LARGE!”

We have come together from FAR AND NEAR. Many of you have travelled from distant lands to be here. Let me say in the local Ghanaian dialect (TWRE)- AKWABA - which means WELCOME ; and in my native dialect (KPELLE) *Ka Sher Pai*, which means THANK YOU FOR COMING.

We gratefully recognize that those of you who have come, are here not just as a TESTAMENT to the BOND of our shared history but also as an ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE COMMONALITY OF OUR PURPOSE, being peoples of the same race. We must therefore come to understand, appreciate and accept that together, we must rise from our COMMON PAIN to claim our COMMON PURPOSE - we must look to our shared history to claim our shared destiny.

And lest we forget, Our COMMON PURPOSE is not one dedicated to racial superiority; because to think and act as being racially superior would be to relive the tragedy of history in which one race lost the essence of its humanity by the subjugation of another race - only because of the COLOR OF THEIR SKIN. We are all too keenly aware that racial harmony and respect for the rights of all of God's children are the essential elements by which we collectively rise in shared responsibilities and contributions to a better world for ourselves, and for posterity.

To borrow a famous mantra: RACIAL SUPERIORITY IS WRONG, HOWEVER MANIFESTED, AND WHEREVER PRACTICED. IT WAS WRONG YESTERDAY, IT IS WRONG TODAY, AND WILL BE WRONG TOMORROW!

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen: We have returned to these sacred shores to lay bare the burdens of our history; to rededicate ourselves; and to make just claims for a better world. A world in which all of God's creation will live in racial harmony and equality, no longer disparaged or discriminated against by the color of their skin; but as the iconic civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. dreamt, that one day we will live in:

“A WORLD IN WHICH ALL WILL BE JUDGED, NOT BY THE COLOR OF THEIR SKIN, BUT BY THE CONTENT OF THEIR CHARACTER.”

It is reasonable to claim that Dr. King’s dream still eludes us. And so, four hundred years after our ancestors were **enchained, enslaved and entreated** as less than humans and undeserving of rights conferred by our shared humanity, only on account of the color of their skin, **we come together in remembrance of the past, in renewal of our spirits, and in expressions of the quintessential values of humanity with which we are all similarly endowed.**

Here, we assemble on the grounds which once filtered the blood, sweat and tears of our ancestors, as they were being involuntarily and inhumanely shipped away into slavery. Here, we come to seek understanding, not necessarily about HOW AND WHY it happened but that in all of its presenting manifestations, it should:

NEVER BE ALLOWED TO HAPPEN AGAIN.

Here, on these sacred grounds, we have come to seek SOLACE, not in crying on each other’s shoulders as the songs of our enslaved forebears fill our hearts and minds with mixed emotions, and vicariously transport us to their years of **inhumane toils, anguish, degradations and deaths**, but also to be enjoined in joyful celebrations that the darkness of yesteryears has been overcome and replaced by the shining light of human consciousness and decency.

Here, we have come to truly lean on each other in mutually rewarding partnerships, from which we can all learn and grow together, so that we can lift ourselves and our brothers and sisters out of poverty and despair; so that we can stand together against the lingering vestiges of racism and discrimination that abound all around us; and so that we, whose forebears were once slaves, will commit ourselves to never allowing ourselves to be enslaved or to participate in the enslavement of our brothers and sisters, in the quest for either political power or economic wealth.

Here, we have come together, to be reminded about the difficulties of our past which was tied to an attempt by the slave masters to leave us mentally enslaved, with the false sense that we were not good enough or beautiful enough.

“OUR FOREBEARS WERE TAKEN AWAY AS SLAVES TO WORK ON PLANTATIONS AND IN COTTON FIELDS. BUT BENEATH IT ALL LURKED THE GRIEVOUS ATTEMPT TO DISCONNECT THE BONDS BETWEEN US, TO ERASE THE MEMORIES OF OUR GREATNESS, TO ERADICATE OUR CULTURE, AND TO DECIMATE OUR HERITAGE. SLAVERY ALSO ATTEMPTED TO DRAIN US OF OUR SPIRIT OF ENTERPRISE AND LEAVE US FEELING AS IF WE WERE NOTHING.

BUT OUR GATHERING HERE TODAY PROVES THAT WE ARE STILL POSSESSED OF THE DREAMS, HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF OUR FOREBEARS AND THAT EVEN SLAVERY COULD NOT TAKE AWAY OUR INATE DESIRES TO BUILD, AND TO GROW INTO THE EMINENCE THAT WAS ONCE OURS TO BEGIN WITH.”

Four hundred years earlier, when our forebears were gathered here to be sold, it was involuntary. Their destinies were controlled by others. They were **heartbroken, chained together, transported across the seas under horrific circumstances and taken to lands unknown.** Thankfully, today we are able to gather voluntarily as freed men and women; the chains of slavery broken. Though our hearts are heavy, our spirits are uplifted for we are assured that our destinies are ours alone to determine.

The question then remains - HOW CAN WE HARNESS ALL OF OUR EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES, TO BUILD AFRICA, THE LAND OF OUR ANCESTRY, TOGETHER?

Excellences, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen: The story of the slavery of our forebears is an exacting tale of inhumanity laced with paradoxes.

Today, I do not feel justified to bore you with the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade except to recall that in August of 1619, in Jamestown, Virginia, a Dutch Ship named the White Lion carrying twenty enslaved Africans who had survived the “**ship of blood**”, docked at Port Comfort. Of course, Port Comfort offered the twenty Africans no comfort at all, as they became the first to be sold out into slavery, and to change the economic flow of the world through the transatlantic trafficking in slaves.

It is told that between 1514 and 1865 AD, at least 12.5 million Africans were taken away to labor in mines and plantations. In addition, approximately 1.8 million died during the Atlantic crossings and about another 2 million died in Africa *en route* to the coast. By 1808, ‘slavery’s official end’, some historians set the tally to the chilling number of about **200 million Africans** who had been **kidnapped, branded, illegally transported, terrorized, raped, abused, enslaved or killed. WHAT A TRAGEDY!**

This, too, is a part of our history - the history of the struggle of the black race!

But thankfully, that is not all of our history. Voluntarily or involuntarily, even when we suffered the inhumanity of slavery, we were an integral part of changing where ever we found ourselves. On our weary and broken backs, great civilizations and economies were built.

On our bruised heads were placed the burdens of building giant architecture and constructions. And out of the tragedies of our experiences, came the kindling of the fire to be ENLIGHTENED and FREE- **a fire that has heretofore never been quenched in our souls.**

Our forebears endured the pains and humiliation of slavery and inhumanity but they bequeathed to us **legacies of greatness**; that there is really nothing that members of the black race cannot do for themselves, if only we commit ourselves to doing it.

You see, our collective history of slavery should never allow us to be BITTER but to be BETTER.

Our history commands us to be better versions of ourselves - to dream, to reach for our dreams, and to excel in all that we do. For if as slaves, we could fight for freedom and rights, then as freed men and women, we can protect rights and freedoms of ALL.

If as slaves, we could hold onto our cherished cultures and values; then as, freed men and women, we can celebrate our rich cultures and values, and pass it on to the next generation

If as slaves, we could improve the economies of others; then as, freed men and women, we can manage our economies, end corruption, adapt systems of good governance, demonstrate respect for the rule of law, protect human rights, and provide opportunities for our children to achieve their dreams; **so that they do not end up as slaves across the seas into lands which once held our forebears in bondage.**

If as slaves we could teach ourselves to read and to write, and to create and invent through the sciences; then as, freed men and women, surely we can provide quality education to our young generation.

If as slaves our forebears were trapped by what they could imagine and hoped to become; then as, freed men and women, surely we can unchain our minds, adapt to changing times, and unlock the fullness of our human imaginations and potentials so that boys and girls alike - **indeed all of our children - can dream**, and be limited only by the power of their dreams, and their determination to work to realize their dreams.

If as slaves we could sing with unfading hope “We Shall Overcome” when each day was filled with hopelessness; then as, freed men and women, so full of the blessings of life and the hopeful promise of a better tomorrow, surely we can sing today; **THAT WE HAVE TO OVERCOME.**

We have overcome, not by surrendering our fate to some external force, **but by setting our own course and determining our own destiny.**

Today as we gather here, let it be known, that Africa is the true home of all men and women of color. And that those who remained on the Continent and those who were involuntarily taken away, share Africa as a common sacred heritage. Let it be known that we are **ONE PEOPLE, WITH ONE DESTINY AND THAT WE ARE ALL EQUAL.**

Therefore, as we set the new course, we agree that we are enjoined in partnerships toward ending wars in Africa, which are being essentially waged over our mineral resources. We agree to trade with and amongst ourselves, improve our governance and delivery systems, and exploit our natural resources for the benefits of all of our peoples.

As we gather, it would be remiss of me, were I not to mention the center of the matter; that **the African woman, the bearer of futures and destinies; must be elevated to her rightful place as an equal; as was intended by our Creator. Across AFRICA AND THE WORLD.**

She must be CAPACITATED in order to be able to proudly stand and to assume her rightful place, side by side with our Male counterparts; as a full partner both around the family and national tables of decision-making. In truth, the pain of slavery will never be assuaged until the African woman fully shares in the joy of this freedom, and until her voice and participation is accepted as the norm and her opinion regarded as to the affairs of her body, family, community, country, and the world.

As we gather here, let us keep in mind that the pain of slavery will never be forgotten until the youthful African population become the energized dividends that they are; through the provisions, access and availability of quality education to which all of our children are justly entitled, as well as through the equality of opportunities, here at home, to live better and more decent lives.

As we gather here, let us keep in mind that the pains of slavery will never abate until being born into a particular tribe, gender or village is not restrictive to what a child can grow to become.

As we gather here, let us keep in mind that the pains of slavery will never subside until we end female genital mutilation, infant and maternal mortality,

sexual and gender based violence, the proliferation of drugs and human trafficking!!

Finally, My Brothers and Sisters: note that it is a special privilege to be here at this point in time. For even if I wished it to be so, none of us here today will make it to the next four hundred years for the reflections on slavery or the celebrations of the benefits of our freedom. However, we can meaningfully impress upon the character of that convocation by what we commit to, going forward. We must let it be known by our positive contributions and outstanding legacies, which will be recorded in the annals of our collective history; **that as freed people, we embraced our freedom, accepted all of the attending responsibilities, cherished and protected all of its values and virtues, and utilized the awesome collective knowledge and experiences to create a better WORLD.**

We must let it be known then, that by our collective actions, the course of human history was transformed on **issues of equality, democracy, development, innovation, unity, peace and the elimination of all forms of violence and slavery.**

We can certainly, let it be known then, that rather than escape the choking conditions of our Continent, our young people returned home in droves, laying just claims to the Continent we so dearly love and bequeathed to them.

We can let it be known then, that we whose forebears are connected by the pains of slavery, came to accept each other as brothers and sisters, and that we forged new partnerships to make our **Africa Great**.

We can also let it be known then that by the unmatched progress and advances achieved, Africa ceased to be known as the Dark Continent - that wars, famine, disease, hatred, disunity, inequality, corruption and mismanagement no longer stunted our progress and development, but that we became instead the guiding light that brightened the consciousness of the world, and changed the course of humanity, for the better.

Yes, we can let it be known then that in world affairs, Africa assumed her deserved place around the family table of the **WORLD**, and by the quality of her continued leadership and representation, our world became **ONE OF EQUITY AND FAIRNESS**.

And May it be known then; that we lifted ourselves from the burdens of our historical pains of slavery to embrace our common purpose of forging a better future for ALL.

May our forebears hear us proudly and meaningfully sing, with hearty renditions and new meanings, with our voices reaching to the heavens and declaring with unmatched clarity and certainty: WE HAVE INDEED

As we commemorate this 400-year journey, would each of you kindly stand with me as we sing together the Black National Anthem. OVERCOME!

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
let our rejoicing rise,
high as the list'ning skies, let it resound loud as the rolling sea
sing a song full of faith that the dark past has tought us,
sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
facing the rising sun of our new day begun,
let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chast'ning rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet,
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Here now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,

Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might,
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
everyday we lit
Shadowed beneath thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to our native land.