

Achimota School @ 80

Speech and Prize Giving Ceremony

10th November 2007

Speech by Patrick Awuah, Achimota Class of 1982

Honorable Minister of Health, Madam Headmistress, Members of the Board, Teachers and Administrators, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, our Dear Students,

Thank you for inviting me to speak at the 80th Anniversary Speech and Prize Giving ceremony at Achimota School. It is an honor to be here.

I spent seven years of my life here, back in the day when most students started boarding school when they were as young as twelve years. We came to live here, away from home, to learn and to play in a place that prepared us to be living water in a thirsty land. When we started, we were called *ninos*, and by the time we left, we were called *seniors*, *citizens* and *prefects*.

I did not spend much time back then thinking about the titles we were assigned in school, but in retrospect, I see that Achimota was trying to prepare us to be good citizens and leaders.

Achimota School, 80 years ago, began the work of educating leaders for this country. This institution is thirty years older than the Republic of Ghana. In fact the first president of The Republic, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, was a product of this school. Recently, another Akora, Jerry John Rawlings, completed his tenure as the longest serving Head of State of this nation. No doubt, these two men have had a bigger impact on the current political economy of Ghana than any other individual since Independence Day.

Whatever your views about the successes and failures of Presidents Nkrumah and Rawlings, there is no denying that through them, Achimota School has played a significant role in this country. To the extent that these two men were good leaders, Achimota has played a positive role in Ghana; and to the extent that they were bad leaders, Achimota has had a negative impact on Ghana.

It is best to leave judgment to future generations.

But these two examples alone demonstrate the gravity of the role that institutions such as Achimota play in our country's history. Apart from the two presidents that I just mentioned, thousands of other leaders have passed through these halls. They run financial institutions, security forces, the judiciary, hospitals, construction firms, schools, and the civil service. They serve in parliament. Some of them aspire to yet become President of the Republic of Ghana. The values and skills that these men and women developed while they were here will have an impact, for good or for bad, on our society. The question is have we prepared these leaders in such a manner that we feel confident about the future trajectory of our country?

As the founder and first president of Ashesi University College, I am myself, now engaged in the educational enterprise. Not a day passes when I don't ponder the ramifications of the work that my team and I do. Education, at its best is a project of enlightenment; and by enlightenment, I mean the process of acquiring the intellectual and moral virtues necessary for a meaningful and rewarding life. As

educators and students, we bear a great responsibility for the future trajectory of our society.

It is in this spirit, that I would like join you in a discussion this afternoon about the kinds of intellectual and moral virtues that we should aspire to cultivate in our future leaders.

Over the course of my career, I have had the good fortune of knowing and working with some truly phenomenal leaders. I have also read quite a bit on the topic of developing the minds of leaders. I recently read a book by Howard Gardener, a professor of psychology at Harvard University, in which he describes five cognitive abilities necessary for success in today's world. The five ways of thinking that he considers most important are:

- a disciplined mind
- a synthesizing mind
- a creating mind
- a respectful mind; and
- an ethical mind

A disciplined mind is simply a mind that has gained expertise in a specific field of study and that is trained to continue learning and growing over time. Lawyers, engineers, doctors, and so on, must all develop specific knowledge and systems of thought necessary to be effective in their jobs. They must also be committed to life-long-learning, and must be steady in their acquisition of new knowledge and insights within their chosen fields.

A synthesizing mind is one that has a breadth of knowledge and is able to make connections between different fields of study -- to decipher meaning by combining different types of information to develop new insights about our world. The synthesizing mind is critical for effective management and strategic leadership.

A creating mind is one that is able to achieve breakthroughs and innovation. It is especially important for visionary leadership, and for driving the cutting edge of the arts, sciences and technology.

A respectful mind is one that is able to understand the views of others, and see beyond differences. The respectful mind is blessed with the gift of empathy and understands the golden rule -- to treat others as you would have them treat you. Leaders who think this way are able to learn from others and to build strong, productive teams. Leaders with a respectful mind are able to bring people together, to bridge differences, and to move nations forward in a cohesive way. Leaders who lack this mode of thinking create deep divisions in their homes, their organizations, and their nations.

An ethical mind is one that thinks in a way that results in trustworthy behaviour. When I think of ethics, I think of integrity. The ethical mind interweaves with the respectful mind and is perhaps the most important of all the minds. Without it, people try to cut corners, to cheat, and to be excessively self-absorbed. In my opinion, without it, the other minds are compromised. An unethical mind that seeks to cut corners in school, for instance, does not learn, and therefore cannot achieve a disciplined mind or a synthesizing mind.

I would like to suggest that Achimota School, and indeed all our nation's educational institutions must take note of these ways of thinking and find ways to develop them in their students.

Unfortunately, I think our educational system is currently not taking seriously enough, its role in the development of leaders. We are far too concerned with memorizing information. We spend for too little time seeking a deeper understanding of information. And we spend far too little time developing thinking minds. Don't get me wrong, I am not saying that training one's memory is a bad thing. But I do feel very strongly that training the memory alone is insufficient.

We must seek to stay abreast of recent developments around the world, and to upgrade the curricula that we teach in our schools. We need learn what others are doing in the world. I was recently struck by the comments of a Chinese scholar who told me that they had learned a lot from African proverbs. Listening to that Chinese scholar describe how they were learning from Africa and from the West, I was reminded about how reluctant we in Africa are to do the same. There is a certain arrogance here, which leads us to think that we know it all. Yet the irony is, because of this attitude, we fail to learn even from ourselves. We need to learn from others, and from our past. We need to do a far better job understanding the links between the various levels of our educational system and the interface between our educational system and the real world. Secondary schools like this one should make it a point to expose their students to a variety of ideas.

It is wonderful to hear about the academic achievements of Achimota students, and to learn about their successes in sports. It was a thrill to hear the musical performances this afternoon. But I have a few questions for all of us. Does Achimota School have an active career counseling office that invites representatives from universities and corporate Ghana to speak to students in order to help guide their career decisions? Do students here engage in community service? Do students here have a sense of responsibility towards the weak in society or even towards each other? I would suggest to you that the vision that Achimota represents would indicate that the answer to each of these questions should be a resounding yes!

Consider the motto of this institution: UT OMMES UNUM SINT – THAT ALL MAY BE ONE. What does this motto mean to you? Although I spent seven years here, I did not fully understand this motto until I went to a college where I was taught to think in an expansive way.

When I first came to Achimota School, I quickly learned that my rank of *nino* meant that I was supposed to do the most menial jobs in my boarding house, to wash and iron the clothes of the older boys, to hand over my food to them whenever to asked for it, and to run errands for them. And if I refused to do any of these things (which I often did), they called *me* "wicked" even as they slapped me around.

I once found myself in a very difficult situation when a "citizen" - an older boy- beat me up because I refused to hand over a can of milk from my chop box. I managed to escape from him and ran as fast as I could to the house master's house with this older boy in hot pursuit. To my utter shock, the housemaster listened calmly to my story and asked me to come back the next morning. It was about 10 PM. I will leave to your imagination the kind of trauma I experienced at the hands of that "citizen" when the house master declined to intervene.

Boarding schools such as Achimota School do not only educate leaders in classrooms. The education that students receive here also occurs outside the classroom. When I was here, we had a student culture in which the weakest among us –the *ninos*- we preyed upon by the strongest among us –*the seniors and citizens*. This is absolutely wrong. It violates the principal of OMNES UNUM SINT.

I believe that the founders of this institution, Sir Frederick Gordon Guggisberg, Dr. James Kwegyir Aggrey and Rev. Alexander Garden Fraser, sought to create a school that celebrated our common humanity. This is what our motto means, THAT ALL MAY BE ONE. I would like to argue this afternoon that the teachers, administrators and prefects ought to make it their business to help guide the student body towards a campus culture that values our shared humanity, that teaches students to see each other as ONE, that encourages the seniors to lead by example, not by the use of force, and that teaches the strong to protect the weak. In short, I urge Achimota to develop a campus culture that nurtures the respectful and ethical mind.

I know that Achimota has produced many excellent leaders. I share these thoughts as an alumnus who holds this institution in very high regard, and who would like to see Achimota rise to even greater heights. Alumni have an important role to play. My class, the Class of 1982 is currently renovating the Form 1 building. So far we have spent over ₵200,000,000 on the project. We hope to complete the project by the end of this year. The success of this institution will require a lot more alumni support, and I ask all alumni to contribute.

There is so much more work to be done in this country and on the continent of Africa. Our ability to transform this continent will depend on enlightened leadership – enlightened Africans. No one else will build this continent for us, because it is no one else's responsibility. And our success will depend on leaders who are present. Far too many of our best educate now live outside Ghana.

To the students present here today, I would like to say you are the hope of an entire continent. You really are the living water that will nourish a thirsty land. You should take pride in the project that lies before you –the project of transforming a continent. The promise of your tomorrow is incredible. You have the opportunity to drive a renaissance on this continent, and to become the forefathers, to whom future generations will be eternally grateful. You should see every challenge as an opportunity to learn, to be successful and to be significant. You will soon be in charge, and I wish you all the best of success –and significance– in the days to come.