

**GBC 80<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY LECTURE BY AMBASSADOR KABRAL BLAY-AMIHERE, CHAIRMAN OF NATIONAL MEDIA COMMISSION**

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*DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN*

I have been listening to a lot of morning shows and have learnt from regular panelists such as one Coach Opelee Aboagye, a Santaclausian and former Coach of Kumasi Asante Kotoko that the first thing one does when given a platform such as GBC has given me today is to use the opportunity to remember and greet friends and so let me with your kind permission use THIS AKONYA to greet all my classmates from Sefwi Bekwai, particularly Ben Ackah and Sainti Baffoe Bonnie,, the Obaheema of Sefwi Bekwai, Elizabeth Nzulu and my mates from St. Augustine's College Cape Coast, Bones, the class of 1970 and all the fine teachers who influenced our lives. I wish also to salute my school mate, Alex Bruks who last Wednesday oversaw the cutting of the sod to begin works on the Garden City Mall, the prototype of Church Private Partnership since the project involves the Methodist Church of Ghana, Asanteman Council and his company I may run into trouble If I do not greet my friends and relatives in Eikwe, particularly my brother, Tufuhene Agyeman Kwaw Blay. Let me also use this AKONYA to greet

my friend from our Paris days, Nana Edward Aidoo, Chief Executive of Cape Coast Ebusua Dwarfs and members of the GICEL Keep Fit Club.

I must of course thank the Chairman, Board Members, Management and staff of GBC for this rare opportunity that I never dreamt of growing up in Sefwi Bekwai a few decades ago.

**MR CHAIRMAN, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN< IT IS INDEED A PRIVILEGE AND HONOUR FOR ME TO BE ASKED TO DELIVER THE FINAL LECTURE OF THE 80TH ANIVERSARTY CELEBRATION OF THE GHANA BROADCASTING CORPORATION. GBC HAS INDEED GROWN LEAPS AND BOUNDS FROM ITS SMALL BEGINNINGS TO BECOME A MEGA BROADCASTING STATION, A CHAMPION STATION WITH NATIONWIDE REACH, AN ACHIEVEMENT THAT MUST CELEBRATED AND REFLECTED UPON.**

**IT IS ONLY PROPER THAT I BEGIN MY LECTURE BY PAYING TRIBUTE TO THE FOUNDERS AND PIONEERING STAFF OF GBC, NOT FORGETTING THE MASSIVE SUPPORT THAT THE GOVERNMENT OF OSAGYEFO DR. KWAME NKRUMAH, WHO BELIEVED IN THE POSITIVE ROLE OF MEDIA IN NATIONALL DEVELOPMENT GAVE TO GBC WHICH SUCCESSIVE REGIMES HAVE BUILT ON.**

**I AM AWARE OF THE MANY SACRIFICES, AND THE DIFFICULT CONDITIONS, BOTH PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PYHISCAL, UNDER WHICH GENERATIONS OF GBC MANAGEMENT AND STAFF HAVE WORKED OVER THE YEARS, PARTICULARLY DURING THE 21 YEARS OF OUR HISTORY WHEN GHANA WAS RULED BY THE GUN. THE PRESSURE HAS NOT BEEN ANY LESS EVEN UNDER CONSTITUTIONAL RULE BUT AS A TESTIMONY TO THE DEFIANCE OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT, GBC HAS SURVIVED THE GOOD AND BAD TIMES TO TELL ITS STORY” .**

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am sure you all know of plagiarism, the crime intellectuals commit when they borrow copiously from the work of others and fail to make the necessary attribution and acknowledgement. I am sure you know the punishment that such intellectual stealers face. Shame, disgrace, withdrawal of certificates and for politicians in other parts of the world truncated careers.

I must confess that almost all the last three sentences of my introductory remarks have been copied from a previous GBC Anniversary Lecture. The only reason that I cannot be charged with plagiarism is that just as it is today I was the person given the honour and duty of delivering the final lecture during the 75<sup>th</sup> GBC Anniversary Lectures under the topic-MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY-THE CASE OF GHANA and found the introductory remarks fit for today.

But if I had any thoughts that I could copy more from the speech I delivered five years ago, any such consideration evaporated when it dawned me on that there is a new topic I must address today- BROADCASTING- A VITAL TOOL FOR NATIONAL HARMONY AND COHESION.

Mr. Chairman, since it was your good self who presided over the lecture in June delivered by the Director-General, Major Don Chebe (Rtd) you may recall that the Master of Ceremony for the august occasion, George Sappor set very high expectations for me when he referred to the Bible and stated in his closing remarks that the best wine is always reserved at the end for guests.

Mr. Chairman beginning with the first lecture by Honourable Osei Kyei Mensah, audiences in this studio as well as GBC's numerous viewers and listeners have been treated to very elucidating and exciting

speeches by very eloquent wordsmiths such as Dr. Joyce Aryee, Prof Stephen Addei and Honourable Alan Bagbin. The last speaker, Major Don Chebe, gave quite a scholarly speech, which I found to be a rich mix of theory and practice; an insider's view of the good bad and ugly in public service broadcasting.

Our illustrious speakers would have said it all and even better and so we need Blessed Mary to tell her son, Jesus of Nazareth to do for me what he kindly did for the newly married couple when he turned ordinary water into vintage wine.

I will not throw my arms in Despair and shout out like Mario Barwuah Ballotelli-WHY ALWAYS ME AS THE LAST SPEAKER. I accept my fate to bear the cross of being the last speaker coming after all these good speakers and only ask God to anoint his poor servant with wisdom to satisfy your expectations. In fact He should complete his anointing by lowering your expectations to make my work easier. With such assurance from Him, that His will is always done when we ask and that it shall be well with me, I now wish to ask you to travel with me as we reflect on our topic-BROADCASTING: A VITAL TOOL FOR NATIONAL HARMONY AND COHESION.

### WHY THIS TOPIC

*As expected I have since* I was invited to deliver this address been wondering about the topic. I wanted to presume that the choice of this topic-BROADCASTING-A VITAL TOOL FOR NATIONAL HARMON AND COHESION- was possibly one way to add variety to the series of lectures for the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary since as many as four topics so far have focused on various aspects of public service broadcasting.

In another vein, I have tried to get into the minds of those who chose the topic because the role of the media, broadcasting or print and any other media is set in tradition and theory-TO INFORM, EDUCATE AND ENTERTAIN.

Inherent in this function is the corresponding capacity of the media to influence the affairs of men and women. In other words, the media have the power through its aggregate functions to set the agenda for a nation. The media always have an option; either to be part of the problem or part of the solution.

As a writer once noted-**MASS MEDIA REACH NOT ONLY PEOPLES' HOMES, BUT ALSO THEIR MINDS SHAPING THEIR THOUGHTS AND SOMETIMES THEIR BEHAVIOUR"**.

It may interest you distinguished ladies and gentlemen to note that when the Governor of Gold Coast, Arnold Hodgson sought to justify a budget request for starting Radio ZOY in the Gold Coast which has transformed into GBC, he had a unique role for his initiative..

According to Governor Hodgson, **"Radio (Wireless) would help prevent the spread of communism and also divert the educated Africans whose restless mind.....turn to agitation and anti-governmental, not to say communistic activities"**.

As noted by Professor Kwame Karikari in an epic lecture titled THE GHANAIAN MEDIA: NATIONAL PEACE AND COHESION, Governor Hodgson's Radio Station like other radio stations established by the British in its colonies was used subsequently to prosecute the colonial agenda and also mobilize colonial subjects to participate in and support the prosecution of the Second World War.

When the government of Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah assumed control of GBC in 1957 it had a totally different agenda for GBC whose main medium then was radio.

Comrade Kofi Baako, the then Minister of Education and Information outlined the vision for GBC when he informed Parliament that **“radio is a great unifying agency in our country (Ghana) Through it, people all over Ghana can appreciate that we are all of the same nation with the same ideas and aspirations. Ghana is a unity and in this small country there is no room for regional and tribal groups, each emphasizing their own differences from the rest of the country at the expense of national unity”**

This vision was strategically achieved by an outlay of programmes that stressed national unity and allowed a cross section of national languages to be heard on radio and television. The concept of community broadcasting was equally achieved by ensuring that GBC reached the length and breadth of Ghana with massive regional and district penetration.

The whole idea of preserving national harmony was taken to another height when the military regime of General Ike Kutu Acheampong came out with this powerful slogan –ONE NATION, ONE PEOPLE, ONE COMMON DESTINY which GBC forcibly advocated on its airwaves.

Successive governments have preached this message of unity with the media showing every support for an understandably noble cause for Ghanaians to be each other’s keeper.

There is no evidence up to date that the Ghanaian media have not kept faith with the national aspiration for peace and unity in our diversity, not yesterday and not today.

To quote Professor Kwame Karikari again-**IT IS INSTRUCTIVE THAT THE PIONEERS OF JOURNALISM DID NOT EXHIBIT NARROW SECTARIAN POSTURE LIMITED TO THEIR LOCALITY AND ITS ETHNIC POPULACE..... RATHER THE FOUNDATIONS THEY LAID HAS BEEN SUCH THAT, THROUGHOUT THE HISTORY OF THE PRESS UP TO TODAY, NO NEWSPAPER HAS CHAMPIONED THE CAUSE OF EXCLUSIONARY ETHNIC OR PROVINCIAL POLITICS”..**

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, if this is the record of the Ghanaian press, a fine example in patriotism what could have advised the organisers of the lecture to request that we begin a conversation to remind Broadcasters and the media at large that they should use their precious platforms to promote national harmony and peace.

Because we live in a global village in which radio and television in other countries notably in Rwanda and Kenya have been cited as serving as tools for social strife and genocide and secondly because there could be signposts that the media of Ghana could be drifting into that trajectory of destruction, it cannot be totally out of place for us to start talking about the issue, the potential role of the media as a tool for peace and national harmony.

Since as I have indicated, Rwanda has become a reference point in any discussion about the dangerous role the media or broadcasting, particularly radio can play in the making and unmaking of nations let us examine briefly the role the media and other actors played in the

genocide in which over 800,000 people in mostly Tutsis lost their lives and about 2 million people became refugees.

### **THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA VERSUS THE ROLE OF POLITICIANS AND OTHER CAUSAL FACTORS**

The role played by radio in the countdown to the genocide in Rwanda is often highlighted as a major cause and driving force for the carnage. The pro-Hutu, pro-government Radio Television Libre des Mille Collines and another pro-Hutu newspaper-KANGURA have been cited as being highly responsible for those crimes against humanity.

The Kangura newspaper cannot escape blame because there is evidence that it used its pages to preach hatred and indeed incited the massacre of Tutsis when in December 1990 it published its version of the Ten Commandments, in this case for Hutus with two commandments stating that-ANY HUTU WHO MARRIED A TSUTSI OR DID BUSINESS WITH A TSUTSI WAS A TRAITOR.

Radio Television des Mille Collines during the 100 days of carnage from July 1993 infamously used its platforms to encourage its Hutu listeners to exterminate Tutsis; to “cut down the tall trees and also crush the cockroaches” Coded broadcasts which simply asked “people to go to work” was an order for Hutus to get their cutlasses, sticks and any deadly weapon to kill Tutsis.

It is informative to note that the offending Radio station in the Rwandan crisis-RTMC was set up by hard hard-line Hutu extremists, wealthy businessmen, government ministers and various relatives of the President and president of the militia.



That local media, particularly radio served as catalyst in the Rwandan crisis has been well documented to the shame of journalism. Even the international media and organisations like the United Nations itself have been apportioned blame for not doing much to stem the tide of genocide or prevent it totally but there is another school of thought that puts the blame on others, on the political elite who exploited primordial factors such as ethnicity and political greed and successfully manipulated the media in the pursuit of their ambitions

A Human Rights Watch publication in March 1990-LEAVE NONE TO TELL THE STORY: GENOCIDE IN RWANDA- confirms this view when it notes that **“The (Rwandan) genocide resulted from a deliberate choice of a modern elite to foster hatred and fear to keep itself in power. This small privileged group set the majority against the minority to counter a growing political opposition within Rwanda. Then faced with rebel success on the battlefield and at the negotiating table, these few power holders transformed the strategy of ethnic divisions into genocide”**.

An American writer, Richard H. Robbins even situates the causes of the Rwandan genocide in a wider global context when he notes **that”** **contrary to media and many government reports, the genocide was the result of Rwanda’s political and economic position in the capitalist world system. It involved such monetary factors as its colonial history, the price of coffee, World Bank and International Monetary Fund policies, the global interests of Western nations, particularly France, the interests of international aid agencies and Western attitudes towards Africa”**.

What lessons or observations can be drawn from the Rwandan example?

It is very evident that the media of any country can be a double edged sword in the maintenance of public order, national unity and stability.

Secondly it is also clear that, interests groups particularly political forces in pursuit of their ambitions can and do exploit the power of the media, notably radio, to prosecute their agenda, that the media in Rwanda which threw all ethics and caution to the wind were manipulated and abused by their powerful political owners. Thus the role of politicians or the political class must be examined critically in any blame game.

Thirdly that there were indeed cracks and divisions in Rwanda ranging from very primordial factors such as ethnicity to modern factors such as political and economic tensions created by policies of Rwandese governments and even that of international and external bodies such as the World bank and the International Monetary Fund .

A fourth observation and lesson from the Rwandan crisis and similar crises in other countries such as Sierra Leone, Kenya and Cote d'Ivoire must be that any advocacy for national harmony, stability, peace and security must necessarily examine what factors exist in a nation that divide people and can serve as fertile grounds for social strife.

It is through a careful examination of the ground situation that the media and other actors can define for themselves an appropriate role in the elimination of factors that have the potential to set brother against brother; sister against sister, tribe against tribe, political party against political party and religion against religion.

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## HOW UNITED AND HARMONIOUS IS GHANA?

Ghanaians pride themselves as a united nation with a common destiny, a nation, which has become a beacon of peace and stability, a nation spared of some the bitter conflicts in other parts of the continent even if we have seen some flashpoints of limited violence and conflict in some parts of the country.

Ghanaians consider themselves so peace-loving that many cannot imagine that what happened in Sierra Leone which saw such human carnage could ever happen here. But Sierra Leoneans before their civil war thought similarly. So did the Ivorians who have been so assimilated by French culture that they view life as one of work and pleasure.

The late President of Ghana, Professor John Evans Atta Mills was reminding Ghanaians that we are no different from our brothers and sisters in other places who had taken up arms when he warned that a Kenya could happen in Ghana, just as many others have intimated that a Liberia could happen in Ghana.

Indeed inflammatory statements by several politicians across the political divide and echoes from by-elections in Ghana and the intensity of political campaigns during party primaries and national elections are signposts that Ghana could travel the tragic path of other countries.

We may continue to believe that we are a peaceful people, a united nation but there are enough indices to show that Ghana needs to do

more to remain an oasis of peace and unity and that indeed all that is glittering in Ghana is not gold, not even bronze..

### **GHANA'S MINI-TIME BOMBS**

I am no prophet of doom but I dare to say that our beloved Ghana today sits on many mini-time bombs which unless defused by all and sundry, particularly the political elite can explode in our faces any day.

I have this work in progress, my thoughts on several issues I consider time bombs titled-THE PROBLEM WITH GHANA, inspired and modeled on a book with a similar title-THE PROBLEM WITH NIGERIA authored by the legendary Chinua Achebe.

In this book I identify the following as problem areas for our beloved Ghana:

1. A Leadership Crisis
2. The Winner Take All Syndrome of our Political System
3. Tribalism and Chieftaincy
4. Corruption
5. Institutional Failures of the Governance System
6. Unemployment
7. Religion and fatalism
8. The Growing Gap between the Rich and the Poor
9. Unbridled and Irresponsible Exercise of Our Rights to Free Speech and Free Press and
10. The Encircling Economic Doom as alarming factors that can bring the skies falling down on our beloved Ghana.

Time will not permit me to go into details about my diagnosis but permit me to dilate on a few of the elements I have cited above.

Let us consider for instance the undercurrents of tribalism in this country which many of us accept poses a danger but is a taboo subject that few dare to address with honesty and courage. In a political system where some parties confidently pitch their ultimate victory on their fortunes in their World Banks and Strongholds we cannot speak of a society where elections are won on progressive ideas. The mistrust and suspicion that exist between and among various tribes in the country can only be a recipe for social tensions

Even within ethnic groups and communities of the same heritage, there is a lot to worry about with unending disputes about land and chieftaincy titles. Recent incidents in Bimbilla, the Nanumba-Kokomba War, the Alavanyo-Nkonya clashes, and the Dagbon crisis are painful reminders that even among communities who share common culture, history and geography there are undercurrents of conflict, yet to be resolved.

**Our politicians and their surrogates in the media must never exploit and manipulate our diversity as was done in Rwanda.**

Let us shift to the battle ground for political power in this country, elections to elect our President and parliamentarians. Here we have on our hands not a mini-bomb but a mega bomb waiting to explode every four years. Ghana is a very politicized and polarized society with the winner take-all syndrome of our politics further alienating and marginalizing losers in the electoral process.

The pariah status of losers even if the margin of their loss is very narrow, as we saw in the 2012 elections can explain the DO-AND DIE, ALL DIE BE DIE, BUMPER FOR BUMPER, EYE FOR EYE AND JIHADIST rhetoric and nature of our politics.

I sincerely believe President John Mahama's statement on the eve of the Talensi bye-elections that it was a dress rehearsal for the 2016 elections was neither a wish nor prediction for a replay of the violence that marked the Talensi election. I am of the opinion that all that he was saying was that the NLC would win the bye –election and by extension the 2016 elections, a prediction also made by the leader of the NPP, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo in different words.

But aside what was said by various politicians on the eve of the bye-election and against the backdrop of the unfortunate display of violence begat violence spectacle at the bye-election, Talensi could indeed be the tragic dress rehearsal of the 2016 elections.

**Once again the political class and the media must do everything in their capacity to prevent electoral violence which can bring the country down.**

We should all be worried and fearful that our five successive elections in the Fourth Republic have often brought us to the brink of war with a section of the media often beating the drums for war.

I was alarmed when I read the abstract of a chapter in a book edited by security expert Kwesi Aning and a colleague Kwaku Danso titled-  
MANAGING ELECTION-RELATED VIOLENCE FOR DEMOCRATIC

STABILITY IN GHANA, in which two contributors, Kwake Danso and Ernest Larrey observe that-“T

**“The increasing optimism generated by Ghana’s series of successful elections has led to the deception of Ghana as a bastion of democracy. This image is so misleading given the multiple dysfunctional complexities that accompany Ghana’s electoral and political process”.**

The writers, Kwaku Danso and Ernest Larrey, did not share the optimism of many and go on to warn that---“... **electoral violence has been a recurring issue that continues to push Ghana towards the brink of all out violence each year Such is the seriousness of the problem that it is difficult to predict with certainty if Ghana will survive the upcoming general election in 2012 without major political upheaval”.**

Ghana of course survived after the elections but the next eight months was a long period of tension as the nation awaited the verdict of the election petition that not only heightened the political temperature but made the governance of the country quite difficult.

Tensions will be higher in 2016 with some parties which have so far exhibited pacific postures, now threatening to form electoral vigilante groups with fearful names like SEA LIONS from the animal kingdom and the Atlantic Ocean, to protect their turfs in order to enhance their electoral fortunes.

These threats should be taken seriously because not only have we democratized politics, free speech and free many things in this country. The signs according to security experts are that we seem to have also

democratized violence with the increasing number of arms in the system.

Media reports say that some of the political thugs at the Talensi bye-election openly wielded the all-fearful and lethal AK-47 as against the certified Ghana Police Officers wielding batons and sticks from the colonial era.

Ghana is certainly not the United States of America with an expansive wild west of cow boys and survival kit of guns but official sources indicate that in 2003 as many as 211,581 guns were officially licensed for first time owners. The number for first time gun-owners might have declined to only 4, 494 in 2012 but security experts say that there is a disturbing proliferation of unlicensed guns and small arms in Ghana and the sub-region that pose grave danger to peace and security. Today's Daily Guide and some publications have this alarming report that 800 boxes of guns were seized yesterday at Techiman. That news should worry us.

Let us remember that more arms beget more violence as chieftaincy and land disputes as well as bye-elections have shown in Ghana.

### **THE ECONOMY**

Mr. Chairman besides the tensions and divisions generated by the political system of Winner Take All, the economy if not well managed with regard for equity and justice can be the mother of all our problems for a united and peaceful Ghana.



. I am not going to walk the high theoretical ground of Dr. Mahamudu Bawumiah, Dr. Abbey or Dr. Nii Noi Thompson and predict that we could go the way Greece is going, but simply put Ghana's post-independence politics and economics have failed to deliver the high expectations of the people.

We may not necessarily have on our hands the classical class society that Lenin and Marx preached about which was fuelled by capitalism and industrialization but we are nevertheless creating a society of have and have nots-East Legons, Tressacos and Soddoms and Gomorrahs. The divisions this time are being created by politics of greed.

The post-independence economy of Ghana has so far not succeeded in creating a socio-economic landscape in which people sincerely believe they can have a fair share of the national wealth. We cannot talk of peace and harmony when some traditional leaders speak of injustice against their regions as the Omanhene of Lower Axim and the President of the Western Region House of Chiefs, Awulae Attibrukusu II, is reported to have said against the backdrop of high expectations of discovery oil in the Western Region not too long ago in a public meeting with a Minister of State.

**“The Western Region is really deprived of development. Our children have no jobs so they naturally migrate to bigger towns in search of work, Our towns and villages are decaying and our youth are becoming restless.”**

The Omanhene concluded his remarks by asking **“the government and the oil companies to correct mistakes and injustices in the region has suffered for over 100 years”**.

Paramount chiefs from other regions from time also make such complaints and ask for a fair share of the national wealth for their communities.

We indeed have on our hands a large population of frustrated and restless unemployed youth whose anger constitutes a time bomb of its own. Just imagine the fact that our universities produce about 70, 000 graduates every year. Add to that the hundreds of thousands of SSS students whose academic life and future are truncated at about age 16 and have nowhere to go and end up in the streets as hawkers. A nation should be worried if it has not only associations of serial callers which is good for free speech but on a negative note an Association of Unemployed graduates with a membership of over 24000, according to its leadership

President John Mahama rightly identified youth unemployment as a threat to our stability when he told the 47<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the ECOWAS Heads of States Summit the growing unemployment among the youth posed a threat to the peace and tranquility in the region.

The spate of strikes and demonstrations in recent years, with state attorneys going on an unprecedented strike reflect the growing despondency, a feeling of injustice and alienation among a good number of Ghanaians. National harmony and cohesion eventually suffer under the weight of some of the elements I have cited so far, particularly any thoughts that there is no economic justice for some.

Add to all these considerations, the fact the International Monetary Fund, which President Julius Nyerere described as the International Ministry of Finance is actively involved in our economy and prescribing

all kinds of medication that are bound to deepen the cracks and divisions in Ghana.

**Against such a backdrop it becomes the duty of government and all state institutions to relentlessly work towards the elimination of all negative forces that divide the nation.**

The 1992 Constitution **in Chapter 6, The Directive Principles of State Policy** outlined the building blocks for national harmony and unity with several provisions, which when followed can keep the nation glued together.

Our politicians when in government and when in opposition must see to it that the aims of the Directive Principles are fulfilled. The Media can help promote national harmony by faithfully hold the government and all institutions accountable as they are mandated to by Article 162(5) of the Constitution.

The history of this nation tells us that bad governance has been the bane of our development as a united nation, that the political class often exploit primordial factors such as religion and ethnicity to set us against us as against each other, that some politicians particular in these times that they constitute a significant part of the ownership structure of broadcasting, do attempt to manipulate and misuse the media to prosecute their search for and maintenance of power.

It is probably the fears of bad governance plunging the nation into disorder that the 1992 Constitution in Article 162 (5) charged “ **all agencies of the mass, at all times, be free to uphold the principles, provisions and objectives of this constitution, and shall uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people**”.

Broadcasting and the media in general must practice what has been defined as PEACE JOURNALISM, journalism that “takes an advocacy interpretative approach that concentrates on stories that highlight peace initiatives, tone down ethnic and religious differences; prevent further conflict; focus on the structure of society and promote conflict resolution, reconstruction and reconciliation”

And from lessons gained from the Rwandan case and the realities and challenges of our own Ghana the media should without fear or favour confront all the fundamental issues that produce and provoke social conflict and mayhem.

The notorious Nazi propagandists, Joseph Goebbels who appreciated radio as the eight greatest power and saw the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the age of radio just as the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the age of the print press and might rightly describe this century as the age of broadcasting and social media once said that:

A radio (and for our times broadcasting and the media as a whole) that does not seek to deal with the problems of the day does not deserve to influence the broad masses... and soon becomes an empty playground for technicalities and intellectual experiments” and if I may add mere noisemakers.

To promote peace, and national progress the media must have the courage to deal with issues of the times in order to be relevant. For instance, the media should not be intimidated by recent invocation by Parliament of something called CONTEMPT or SCANDALIZING PARLIAMENT and therefore shy away from critically reporting the role of our law makers.

In our democracy which has stripped even the High Office of the Presidency any immunity, in a democracy where The President of the Land is subjected to all kinds of criticisms and sometimes insults and nobody gets hauled before the Presidency to explain and defend his verbal attacks, the media should begin the debate on whether the law that purportedly allows Parliament to summon black Rastafarians and black professors to the august house is proper or not.

At the core of this emerging trend is the question of the citizen's right to free speech. For instance should the media keep mute when some Parliamentarians during the State of Nation Address by Presidents in the name of Parliamentary Privileges and Immunities to heckle and harass the President of the Land?

Broadcasting must impact positively our national aspirations for peace, stability, good governance, unity and progress.

But beyond appeals, litanies and pontifications for media responsibility and ethical conduct, there should be policy backed by legislation to ensure that the media as it were "behaves responsibly".

It in this regard that I am happy that the process for a Broadcasting Bill has reached an advanced stage. Only yesterday the NMC and the Ministry of Communication held a stakeholders conference on the proposed Broadcasting Bill that will strengthen the industry and provide the framework for responsible broadcasting.

The NMC is as mandated by the Constitution taking all appropriate measures including effective monitoring and evaluation of broadcasting. Our Monitoring and Evaluation Project kindly supported by the European Commission is in full flight. The NMC will very soon

launch our Mobile Monitoring Unit, once again funded by the European Commission. The NMC per the spirit and letter of the Constitution does not intend to bite and should not bite but we shall ensure that all in the broadcasting and print media operate by rules and regulations informed by best universal practices and our history.

Public Media, particularly GBC, the Community and indeed the private media, both print and electronic indeed need to be financially sound and independent to undertake their mandate which leads me to share a few thoughts on the resumption of TV Licence Fee collection.

### **WHY MUST WE PAY TV LICENCE FEE**

As a starter, let it be stated that this is not a new law but one that has been in existence for decades in Ghana. The rate then was 30 pesewas. It did not make too much economic sense to kill, collect 30 pesewas with a higher amount and so the NMC mandated the Board of GBC under the leadership of its Chairman, Mr. Kwame Asante and Management to take steps for a review of the fee.

Ghana's Parliament in its wisdom passed the appropriate legislation to adjust the rate to a reasonable fee of GHC3 per month with related adjustments for other users.

Since the NMC announced the resumption of the TV Licence at revised rates, Ghana's vibrant airwaves and social media have been inundated with mixed comments. Some have ridiculed and dismissed the idea of collecting TV Licence in these times that Ghanaians are being asked to pay more for petrol and other services. A hashtag campaign of WE WONT PAY-YENTUA TV Licence Fee has even been launched. As the messenger of what some consider very bad news, I have been

confronted by friends with echoes of WE WONT PAY, although others have asked me to justify why on this earth called Ghana they should pay TV LICENCE FEE.

**I have heard statements such as why should I pay TV Licence Fee for boring GBC. I DO NOT WATCH GBC AND SO WHY I SHOULD I PAY TV LICENCE FEE. GBC IS USELESS AND SHOULD SOLVE ITS PROBLEMS BY FIRST DEALING WITH ITS BLOATED STAFF. GBC SHOULD COMPETE WITH THE PRIVATE BROADCASTERS AND NOT WASTE OUR TIME. GBC IS NO BBC AND SO STOP THE ARGUMENT THAT TV LICENCE FEES ARE PAID IN THE UK, SOUTH AFRICA, AUSTRALIA AND OTHER PLACES. SOME HAVE EVEN QUESTIONED WHY PRIVATE BROADCASTERS SHOULD ENJOY FROM THE TV LICENCE FEE.**

Indeed these views have been expressed by all manner of people. Some comrades and fellow travellers have for once chose n different paths in the debate. My consolation is that many more comrades, like Kwesi Pratt, Jnr. Peter Simon Awuku and Akwasi Agyeman have stayed the course with the NMC and came to our defence, a defence we welcome because these voices of support are as important and weighty as those who have argued forcibly against the resumption of TV Licence Fee, like Dr. Charles Wereko Brobbey, Egbert Faibille, Amos Anyimadu and some powerful radio talk show hosts.

I have heard some opposition MPs angrily attacking the collection of TV Licence Fee and wondered whether they as Members of Parliament were playing a Rip Van Winkle during the process that resulted in the revision of the TV Licence Fee. .

For the records I believe Ghana's Parliament did the right things when they passed the appropriate legislative instrument to revise the long-

standing TV Licence Fee. I believe they had a bigger picture of how the payment of TV Licence Fee can guarantee the financial independence of GBC and thus wean it from government subvention and deeply insulate it from governmental control because HE WHO PAYS THE PIPER CAN CALL THE TUNE.

Between the NMC, the Ministry of Communication and other stakeholders such as the Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association we sincerely believed that funds generated from the TV Licence Fee would ultimately be to the benefit of the entire media industry, both private and public owned, training institutions and professional associations and further guarantee their independence and promote high professional standards. It is true that GBC will remain the highest beneficiary but there are many good reasons that GBC should be funded by the state to serve its mandate of serving as a true public service broadcaster.

Supporting private and community broadcasting, particularly the many disadvantaged broadcasters outside Accra will be an attractive way for them to produce and broadcast programmes that could serve the national cause and ensure that they exist to serve their communities.

Again for the records the debate about the relevance of TV Licence Fee in this age and times is also going on the United Kingdom where the Conservative Party based on its ideology and anger by what it perceives as anti-Tory bias of the BBC is moving all the heavens and earth from former colonies to abolish TV Licence Fee..

Many of us in Africa love BBC for its interesting and educative programmes but even in the UK there is again a debate about the



relevance of BBC because there is a vibrant private broadcasting sector with equally good programmes.

Making a case for BBC, a British Journalist, Chris Byrant of the Independent, had this so:

**“Why a Conservative government will want to yet further cut our soft power across the world or diminish a British institution is beyond me. We do need reform at the BBC. It should make sensible efficient savings, cut waste, do more for young audiences, monitor top salaries, cut unnecessary managements cost---. My fear though is that if the government war on Aunty is successful the BBC will be a national irrelevance in 2027”**

On the relevance of BBC the writer notes:

**“At key moments, BBC has helped to define us as a nation-and I will argue as a united nation. Think of the bombings in London or the week that Princess Diana died. Or the general election or the Olympics. In time of sorrow and of celebration it can be the glue that holds us together and I for one think that is public service. The British creative industries work because it has the BBC at its heart. The BBC doesn't harm the industry, it fosters it. It creates a competition for quality-surely a laudable thing for a free market Tories. It develops skills and talent in front of the camera and beyond the camera that other broadcasters often end up using. The 3.7 billion pounds sterling from the license fee is the largest investment in the arts”.**

## **THE RELEVANCE OF GBC**

Mr. Chairman, GBC is no BBC but it is not as useless and irrelevant as some would make us believe and has over the years been doing many of the things BBC does so well to ovations from us. In fact the BBC we all like to praise as a model in broadcasting has achieved its reputation because of the TV Licence Fee British citizens have paid over the years irrespective of whether they watch BBC or not. It is TV Licence that enables BBC to broadcast special programmes like HARD TALK to its former colonies and the world.

GBC's full potential has often in our history been truncated by underfunding from the state which gave it a public service mandate in its early years and even after the 1966 coup when it was permitted to do some commercial broadcasting which the BBC incidentally does on some of its domestic channels.

Again military interventions and the long hand of governmental control, the CPP government, the PNP government, the NDC government and the NPP government have not allowed GBC to become a truly public service broadcaster, the ugly and bad side of its operations which the 1992 Constitution has sought to rectify.

Mr. Chairman, GBC is not, let me repeat as useless as some would have us believe. It was once Ghana's soft power on the African continent with its external service broadcasts to Africa; GBC has defined us as a nation by allowing major and minority tribes like my own, to have a voice and access to radio and television. Accra is a Ga-Adangbe land but it is swarmed with radio stations which use TWI.

It is GBC that has allowed the Ga-Adangbes, owners of the national capital and its environs a chance to have a voice with a dedicated radio station.

Measure GBC's relevance by the popular TWI and English political shows in urban Ghana, Accra and Kumasi and you will dismiss GBC with poor marks, but go to the regions where non-English speakers depend solely on GBC for broadcasts in local languages, programmes that may sound boring to many DSTV addicts but are popular to the people in those communities.

GBC IS INDEED NOT AS USELESS AS SOME WOULD MAKE U BELIEVE. Many of the opponents of GBC may be right when they say they never watch or do not watch GTV, the flagship of GBC. I should be honest before you and confess that I Kabral too do not always watch GTV.

But GBC is not just GTV. GBC consists of many channels which many people love to watch. GBC is made up of the ten regional radio stations that rural communities listen to identify with. GBC is also the training school that has over the years produced broadcasters for itself and the entire broadcasting industry'

We have been told so much about the migration from analogue broadcasting to digital broadcasting. Ghana missed the June 2015 deadline but must migrate by next year. For those who may not be aware of it is the nationwide technological infrastructure of GBC which is providing the biggest platform for Ghana's migration process. GBC is finally the station that provided the basis for the take-off of JOY FM and METRO TV.

At the national level, GBC with all its constraints is the platform that defines as a people which provides unbiased, objective and nationalistic programmes. GBC has been a promoter and preserver of our diverse culture. It is through GBC that many people see their rich cultures, be it

Kundum, Afahye, Homowo, Hogbetsotso, Damba or what have you on television.

If it is farmers' day, it is GBC that broadcasts and celebrates the contribution of our farmers to national development. By freely broadcasting the 8-month election petition in 2013 which others would have exacted high fees to do, GBC kept the nation glued together, deepened our democracy and helped prevent any disaster as ordinary Ghanaians soaked themselves in pink sheets and better and further particulars. The public broadcasting of sessions of Parliament and the work of some Committees such as the Public Accounts Committee certainly does not harm our governance system but fosters it.

Our creative arts have benefitted from the platforms offered by GBC all over the years and like the BBC, GBC develops skills and talent in front and beyond the camera that other broadcasters often end up using. But for its midwifing role, the broadcasting industry would be worse than it is today.

GBC has promoted sports in Ghana. It allowed us to follow the fistic achievements of the great Azuma Nelson. GBC has over the years united the nation by broadcasting free to its viewers major sporting events like the African Cup of Nations, the World Cup and the Olympics Game.

GBC religious programmes have allowed the various faith groups to be represented on the airwaves even if they do not have the monies to pay for commercial rates.

Furthermore, let it be stated clearly that GBC under its Act of Establishment and under the 1992 Constitution like all the state owned

media have been given a public service role which explains why unlike those in the private sector , GBC is obligated to afford all parties, and all presidential candidates fair and equitable access to the public owned media.

Like the BBC, GBC needs some reforms, right rationalization of its staff, prudent financial management which previous boards and the current Governing Board have tackled and are tackling with all the attention it deserves.

Those who think GBC and the other state-owned media are so irrelevant should take their advocacy to the highest point by calling for the privatization of GBC and all the state-owned media at which stage the state and the nation shall be spared the agony of supporting the state-owned media.

I dread that day because it will sink our democracy since smaller voices will be denied fair and equitable access to these powerful public media- Graphic, Times, GBC and GNA. When that hour comes, probably as fast as possible, so that we offload the burden of paying TV Licence Fee or any other tax to support the public owned media, the highest political bidder will acquire GBC and the other state-owned media.

Then there will be no level playing field for the smaller parties and even the two biggest parties should one of them, possibly the NDC if the sale takes place before the 2016 elections manage to acquire GBC. When that happens, the NPP cannot go to the Supreme Court as it did in 1994 to demand that GBC gives it equal time to offer its views on a budget statement as it had offered to the NDC.

I sincerely believe that the TV Licence fee is good for GBC, for the media industry but Parliament which has made it possible for this new realistic fee of GHC3 per month, may in its wisdom listen to those who say YENTUA and abolish TV Licence totally.

But that single act will not end state-funding of GBC because the Government of the day unless it also decides to privatize GBC or close it down as happened to the public broadcaster in Greece, will still use the tax payers money to fund GBC and exploit that as a leverage to control it even if the Constitution without providing any money orders that the state-owned media should be insulated from governmental interference.

State-funding of public and private media is nothing new, Many Scandinavian countries, notably Norway, Finland and Sweden have come to the conclusion that media performs better, that media accessibility is better and higher if the media as a whole is supported by the state. France shares the same view. The budget for support for the private media in 2013 was 400 million Euros. Benin and Togo also fund the private media even it is in the low range of about 600,000 US dollars per year.

Of course state-funding should not result in governmental control of the media, private and public owned. In fact one of the rational of TV Licence Fee everywhere is to totally insulate public broadcasters from governmental control and ensure a truly public service broadcasting system and not state broadcasting which has been the lot of GBC because the government of the day in our history directly funds GBC and uses this relationship as possible leverage of control because he who pays the piper can control the piper.

As we all know the state in Ghana is expected to support the state-owned media. But there is a policy to wean them off governmental subvention. The current regime of support is not good media independence. Statements by some critics that GBC continues to be a mouthpiece for governments, a view which is not entirely true, in indeed a very good reason to fund GBC through another means outside direct government subvention.

I believe sincerely that payment of the TV Licence Fee will help GBC and others in the industry. The NMC will be welcome to any proposal for a model that will ensure this vision, but for now whilst the law is there let us do what is right, either get the law abolished or do our patriotic duty of respecting the law by paying the revised fee.

Finally let me assure the nation, the NMC shall ensure judicious use of monies collected under the TV Licence Fee and any other fund established for the purpose to promote true public service broadcasting in Ghana and generally promote high professional standards in the Ghanaian media.

Thank You for your attention and God Bless Ghana..