



Statement by Hon Nana Oye Lithur, Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection, Republic of Ghana

Presented to the 69th Session of the Committee of Rights of the Child, 18 May

– 6 June 2015, Geneva, Switzerland

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**Your Excellency Chairperson of the Committee on the Rights of the Child,
Your Excellencies, Members of the Committee on the Rights of the Child,
Your Excellencies representatives of State Parties to Convention on the Rights of the Child,
Representatives of Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organisations,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is indeed a great pleasure, privilege and honour for me as the leader of Ghana's delegation to participate in this 69th Session of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and to present Ghana's 3rd, 4th and 5th Combined Report on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). I bring you warm greetings from His Excellency, President John Dramani Mahama and the people of Ghana.

Introduction

Madam Chairperson,

1. Ghana made history on 5 February 1990, by being the first country to ratify the UN CRC. Since then, guided by the 1992 Constitution and the Children's Act, 1998 (Act 560), the nation has striven steadily to realise the rights and improve the welfare of children in Ghana through a system of legal, policy and institutional mechanisms.

Constitutional, Statutory, Policy and Institutional Framework

2. Article 28 of the 1992 Constitution guarantees the rights of children and enjoins Parliament to enact laws to further realise the rights and ensure the wellbeing of children. In fulfilment of this provision, Parliament has enacted the Children's Act 1998 (Act 560), Juvenile Justice Act 2003 (Act 653), Human Trafficking Act 2005 (Act 694), Disability Act 2006 (Act 715), Whistle Blowers Act 2006 (Act 720), the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act 2007, Education Act 2008 (Act 778), and the Criminal Offences (Amendment) Act 2012 (Act 849) to name a few. Two Legislative Instruments (LIs) to fully operationalize the Human Trafficking Act and Domestic Violence Act are currently being finalised. Further protection is also being provided for children in the Property Rights of Spouses Bill, Affirmative Action Bill and the Intestate

Succession (Amendment) Bill, which are also being finalised through the parliamentary processes for passage into law.

Madam Chairperson,

3. The policy framework is founded on the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (2014 – 2017) (GSGDA) II, the flagship national development policy. The GSGDA II is the fifth in the series of medium-term national development policy frameworks prepared over the past two decades. The direct focus on children in the GSGDA II is captured under Key Focus Area 10 on ‘Child Development and Protection’¹ under theme 6 on Human Development, Productivity and Decent Work. The key strategies for children include promoting advocacy and creates public awareness on the rights of children; formulation and implementation of key policies and appropriate programmes to enhance child protection and development and Mainstreaming children’s issues in development planning at all levels especially those of children with special needs.

¹ Government of Ghana (National Development Planning Commission (NDPC)), *Medium-Term National Development Framework: Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda* (2013) p 108 – 109, 238 – 239. Available at http://www.mofep.gov.gh/sites/default/files/docs/mdbs/2010/final_draft_mtdpf.pdf (Last accessed on 7 April 2015).

4. To establish a child protection system that is 'fit for Ghana' and able to address the peculiar needs of children in Ghana, the Government – through a Cabinet approval - adopted a Child and Family Welfare Policy (CFWP) on 19th February 2015. The CFWP seeks to establish a well-structured and coordinated Child and Family Welfare System that promotes the wellbeing of children, prevents abuse and protect children from harm. The overall goal of the CFWP is to establish an effective child and family welfare system. A Justice for Children Policy (JfCP) is also currently being finalised to guide the interaction of children with the justice system of Ghana. The JfCP also seeks to establish a well-structured and coordinated Justice for Children System that promotes the wellbeing of children, prevent abuse, protect children from harm and promote justice for children. The JfCP focuses on all categories of children in contact with the justice system as victims of crimes, witnesses, offenders and other crimes involving children. Cabinet is expected to adopt and approve the Policy in June 2015.

Madam Chairperson,

5. The institutional framework has also received a boost with the restructuring of the Ministry of Women and Children (MOWAC). In 2013, by an Executive Instrument, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP)

was created to succeed the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC) established in January 2001 by E.I.8. MoGCSP is mandated to coordinate and ensure gender equality and equity, promote and protect the welfare and rights of children, the vulnerable and excluded and persons with disability, and empower them to fully participate in national development. The Ministry has also developed an 'Agenda for Change' document, which sets out its new vision and direction and how it fits into the national developmental agenda. Currently, MoGCSP is developing a five-year Strategic Development Plan. These measures are collectively expected to enhance staff performance and delivery on MoGCSP's outputs and enable it to meet its targets.

6. The Ministry is responsible for the overall coordination of all child-related matters in the country. The Department of Children (DOC) serves as a technical department under the Ministry and plays a lead role in carrying out this function of the Ministry. The DOC is therefore the main coordinating agency with the mandate to coordinate child rights implementation in Ghana. It plays a significant leading role in the effective formulation and implementation of child-related policies, as well as the enforcement of child-related legislation. For child rights promotion, DOC undertakes activities

aimed at fostering behaviour change of all actors in charge of child welfare and protection at the national, regional and district levels. Information management and documentation of relevant child-related information is key to DOC's work. Consequently, the DOC also carries out research, coordinates the collation and compilation of all relevant child-related information which allows periodic evaluation of the status of child rights promotion in the country.

7. The Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), a constitutional body, is responsible for the monitoring of human rights implementation. It has established a unit on children, which addresses cases involving children and monitors the implementation of children's rights. The Commission conducts annual monitoring of various sector policies and their implementation. Its findings are published in an annual report on the state of human rights in Ghana.

Addressing the needs of vulnerable children

Madam Chairperson,

8. In fulfilment of its obligation under the CRC to address the needs of vulnerable children, the Government has prioritised its interventions for girls,

children with disabilities, children of asylum seekers, refugee children and children of immigrants, children exposed to sexual and gender-based violence, children living with HIV/AIDS and children living or working on the streets or both.

9. To address the situation of girls lagging behind boys in accessing education, the establishment of a Girls' Education Unit (GEU) within the Basic Education Division of the Ghana Education Service (GES) of the Ministry of Education has given new impetus to the removal of barriers to education for girls. The 'Take Home Ration' initiative by the Ghana Education Service (GES) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in the three northern regions of the country has helped to bridge the gender disparity in education in deprived communities. Currently, food rations have been provided to 90,000 girls in the Upper West, Upper East and Northern Regions.

Madam Chairperson,

10. For children with disabilities, the most prevalent disabilities noted in Ghana are mobility, sight, speech and hearing difficulties. Data from the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) indicates a reduction in the number of registered children with disabilities from 1,834 in 2002 to 937 in 2003, and 485 in 2004

and 1,068 in 2008. As at the end of 2013, the number stood at 445. Government has also directed the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD) to allocate 2% of the District Assembly Common Fund to support persons with disabilities and other vulnerable children in every district with basic assistance.

Improvement in Birth Registration

11. Birth registration in Ghana has improved from 17% in 2002 to 66% in 2013 as a result of measures including: free registration of new born babies within twelve months of delivery; recognition of a “Birth Registration Day” every 1st September and child health promotion weeks every May as annual calendar events to educate the public on the importance of registering infants. The legal framework has also been strengthened with a draft Bill on Birth Registration, which is currently being considered by Cabinet for approval. The registration process has been documented under the Bill.

Right to health and health services

12. The Ghana Health Service (GHS) – among its various functions – has striven to improve the nutritional status of children by improving maternal nutrition and capacity-building of health staff in skills and competencies for

counselling, and essential nutrition actions. Since 2008, the Community-based management of acute malnutrition has been implemented and is currently in 97 Districts. It had begun in 2 Districts in 2008 and now in 97. It helps with early identification and treatment of severely malnourished children in their communities. As further evidence of the reach of health care services across the country, the Ghana Living Standards Survey 6, reports that less than 2% (1.7%) of children 5 years and below in the country had not received any vaccination at the time of the survey.

13. A model for community-based health service delivery known as the Community-based Health Planning and Services (CHPS) has taken health care closer to the people. There has been a significant increase in the number of functional CHPS compounds nationwide following the relatively slow start in CHPS implementation over the previous years. Implementation of functional CHPS compounds, for instance, increased from 868 in 2009 to 2226 in 2012, to 2580 in 2013 and to 2948 in 2014. This increase has also been met with a correlated increase in the number of community health officers, most of whom have already had training in CHPS service delivery as part of their pre-service training.

HIV/AIDS and Children

14. Ghana is noted by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) as one of five countries in West Africa whose prevalence declined by more than 25% between 2001 and 2011. The successes chalked by the nation in reducing the prevalence of HIV/AIDS can be attributed to a number of policy and programme interventions covering awareness-raising campaigns, capacity-building of relevant staff and direct support services for people living with HIV and AIDS.

15. HIV prevalence among pregnant women attending antenatal clinic has dropped from 2.1% in 2012 to 1.9% in 2013 recording a rate below 2% in two decades for the first time. Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) services have been integrated into sexual and reproductive health services². This has ensured wider access to women in reproductive ages. It is also recorded that in 2012, 70% of all HIV-positive pregnant women received Anti-Retroviral (ARV) medication to prevent MTCT, an increase from the 2011 coverage of 50%.

²GAC, (2013) 'Achievements and Challenges with respect to MDG 6' p 3.

Eliminating harmful traditional practices

16. On 15th December 2014 the MoGCSP closed down the Bonyase witch camp in the Northern Region. 55 inmates were integrated into their communities and social protection support under Local Enterprise and Skills Development Programme (LESDEP). The Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) intervention and National Health Insurance are being extended to them. The Ministry is currently working to close down two more camps, which have children as part of the inmates. A National Conference on Witchcraft Accusations was also held in Accra in 2014 to develop a national consensus on the underlying issues surrounding the phenomenon of witchcraft accusations and to chart a way forward to eliminating the practice.

17. The legal framework has been strengthened with the amendment of the Criminal Offences Act, 1960 (Act 29), to criminalise female genital mutilation or cutting (FGM/C). To emphasise the seriousness of the offence, the punishment is a term of imprisonment of not less than 5 years and not more than 10 years. A new section 101A also makes sexual exploitation an offence

and punishable in the case of a child to a term of imprisonment of not less than 7 years and not more than 25 years.³

18. Further from the 2006 and 2011 MICS, early and forced marriage appears to be increasing nationwide from 25.9% in 2006 to 27% in 2011. This increase may be attributed to poverty, which is compelling parents to give off their girl-children in particular to marriage. To combat the phenomenon of child marriage, MoGCSP in conjunction with UNICEF established an Anti-Child Marriage Coordinating Unit under the Domestic Violence Secretariat of the Ministry in September 2014. Under the Ending Child Marriage Initiative, the Unit has carried out these activities, namely:

- Development of factsheets; frequently-asked-questions (FAQs), training packets and a resource guide on child marriage to enhance the efficiency of stakeholders and service providers in responding to cases of child marriage;
- Provided regular updates of information on social networking platforms created by the Unit on child marriage; and
- Established a 13-member Committee of Experts to advise the Unit, chaired by the President of the National House of Chiefs.

³ Section 101A(2)(b) of Act 29.

Children and poverty

19. Generally, there is a reduction in poverty in Ghana, and a reduction at the household level has indirect effects on childhood poverty. Ghana is noted as the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to have achieved the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 1 target of halving the population living in extreme poverty ahead of 2015. This significant reduction has been possible as a result of a number of policy and programme interventions by Government such as LEAP, MASLOC, GSOP, and LESDEP, to name a few. LEAP has been the nation's flagship social intervention programme for poor and vulnerable families. MoGCSP has provided cash grants to a total of 411,990 beneficiaries across the country under the programme, of which 131,348 are children. Of the 169,790 vulnerable persons on the LEAP Register, 60,294 are children. Out of the total payment, 7,616 beneficiary households in 9 districts and 7 Regions received electronic payments of the LEAP Grants in 3 piloted ecological zones for the purposes of ensuring timely and efficient transfer of cash to beneficiaries. The pilot is completed and electronic payments will be rolled-out for all beneficiary households by the end of 2015.

Access to education

20. In the Education Strategic Plan (2010 – 2020), the Government recognises the contribution of the private sector to education in Ghana, noting that at all levels, nearly one in five children is educated in a private institution. Government has always encouraged the participation and partnership of the private sector in education delivery. Government continues to acknowledge the contribution of the private sector in this endeavour. Some of the measures taken to improve access to education include:

- **Capitation Grant:** For the 2012/13 academic year, the Ministry of Education has provided Capitation Grant amounting to GH¢24,472,840.00 for 5,741,198 pupils in basic schools. The Ministry has also subsidised the registration cost of 391,079 candidates for the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) to the tune of GH¢9,031,338.00.
- **Free School Uniform and Exercise Book Programme, 2009:** The Free School Uniform and Exercise Book Programme was initiated in 2009 in fulfilment of the Government's commitment to ensuring that no child is denied access to quality basic education. According to the 2012 State of the Nation Address by the President, 1,258,690 school

uniforms and 39,536,199 exercise books were distributed in the 2010-2011 academic year.

- **Ghana School Feeding Programme:** Under the Programme, over 1.6 million pupils are fed with one hot nutritious meal on every school going day. This has increased school enrolment, attendance and retention by 80%.

21. To bridge the gender gap in access to education, a total of 15,700 girls from Junior High School (JHS) have benefited from scholarships through the Participatory Approach to Student Success. Under the Gender Responsive Skills and Community Development Project (GRSCDP), MoGCSP granted scholarships to 668 girls from 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 academic years, and presented equipment to government vocational institutions. To improve ICT in education, 60,000 laptops have been provided to Basic Schools in all ten regions of Ghana under the Basic School Computerisation Program. 50,000 Basic School teachers have also benefited from ICT training.

Child Labour

22. Child labour is still a challenge for the country and efforts are being made to address it. The National Plan of Action on the elimination of the worst

forms of child labour is being reviewed to address the challenge of child working in the mining sector among others. There has also been sensitisation programmes to educate community members on the hazards of involvement of children in mining. According to the latest round (6) of the Ghana Living Standards Survey (GLSS) there are very small proportions of children in Ghana working in the mining sector.

Conclusion

Madam Chairperson,

23. There are challenges of financial, human and material resource constraints as well as structural limitations still to be addressed. The progress made so far would not have been possible without the political commitment, support from all stakeholders, including Civil Society Organizations and our Development Partners.

24. In this opening statement, I hope to have touched on a number of the issues that I am sure will be raised and discussed throughout the day. I hope I have given you a summary of the Government of Ghana's commitment to realising the rights of the child and assured you of our commitment to fulfil our obligations under the CRC.

25. Once again, we are delighted to be here with you today and welcome the opportunity to learn from you and discuss further with you, our progress to tackle the issues affecting children in Ghana.

Thank you

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