

Opening Remarks
MAHAMA CONVERSATIONS

Thank you, Joyce.

Good evening to you, my colleagues in the field of media and communications, and to you, the millions watching and listening from across our country and the world.

We are at a crucial moment in our nation's history—with 153 days to the next presidential and parliamentary elections.

Two years ago, in 2022, right here in this hall, in my prophetic address to the nation, I submitted to the government and to all Ghanaians that Ghana was at a crossroads. Unfortunately, the government refused to listen to that altruistic conversation and the raft of viable and innovative policy proposals I offered that evening.

Two years on, our country is in the worst state! In between the periods, I have been having a series of innovative conversations with you—conversations that do not talk down or talk at Ghanaians—truthful and honest continuous conversations that admit that our nation is in peril. Because Ghanaians have victory in our DNA, I know we can overcome our difficulties.

Let me thank you for your presence this evening for my first major media encounter ahead of the December 07 elections. In addition to my digital conversations, I intend to have a number of such media engagements, not only in Accra but in other parts of the country.

As I have done when I was president, I passionately believe in transparency and accountability, and engagements with the Fourth Estate have always been an effective way to reach the citizenry. This is why I am happy to be with you again tonight to sustain the conversation about our dear country, Ghana.

Do not worry. The media encounters and my virtual engagements will not deny you the opportunity to catch me for one-on-one interviews in your studios or at events.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the TIME FOR CHANGE. The TIME for CHANGE has COME! And it is not just a slogan but a clarion call to the heart and soul of our nation.

This is the Time for Change because of the urgent need for a transformative shift in the way we govern, the way we create jobs, the way we live, the way we provide social services, including HEALTH AND EDUCATION and the way we envision the future of our country, Ghana.

After almost eight years under the deplorable leadership of the Akufo-Addo and Bawumia administration, we have seen our country sink into a serious economic abyss. The current economic mess sums up the verdict on this NPP government.

The harsh reality is that, for most citizens, the piteous journey over the period has been a bitter experience of economic and social deprivation.

The unprecedented levels of poverty, unemployment, deterioration in livelihoods, and social inequity have exposed the dubious strategy of hiding incompetence under slogans.

It confirms without hesitation that the disruptive and hasty experimentation with the lives of the Ghanaian people was underpinned by naïve exuberance, arrogance, and selfishness.

I am referring to economic challenges that have shattered the dreams of our youth and the aspirations of the vulnerable. No one has been spared—children, adults, including the middle class, and the elderly have all been hit very hard.

Fellow Ghanaians, notwithstanding these challenges, I am imbued with optimism and a steadfast belief in my God almighty and the amazing creativity of Ghanaians to assure you, tonight, that together, we shall turn this tide.

We shall turn this government’s destructive tide into positive and progressive waves—waves that will reverberate in every home and corner of our country and across the globe, demonstrating that Ghana has once again gotten back on track.

Let me give you five good and solid reasons why we shall reset Ghana and turn the tide:

1. **Experience:** Unlike any other candidate, I have navigated Ghana through tough economic waters before. My presidency was marked by significant infrastructure development, building economic buffers for inclusive growth while ensuring macroeconomic stability. I understand the intricacies of national crisis management and possess the proven experience to RESET Ghana from the economic challenges we face today.

2. **Visionary Leadership for Economic Revival:** My vision for Ghana is rooted in sustainable development. I will focus on revitalising our economy for job creation through industrialisation, enhancing agriculture, and ensuring the efficient use of our natural resources. My administration will introduce cross-cutting innovative policies that are inclusive, growth-oriented, and capable of restoring hope to our youth.

3. **Commitment to Job Creation:** Recognising that our youth are the backbone of this nation, my government will prioritise and create decent, well-paying, and sustainable jobs. By fostering a conducive environment for entrepreneurship and innovation, the government and the private sector will not only tackle unemployment but also inspire a generation of change-makers and problem-solvers.

4. **Championing Social Justice and Equality:** I wholeheartedly believe in a Ghana where every citizen, regardless of their background or gender, has equal opportunities to thrive. Under my leadership, social interventions and educational reforms will be strengthened. The vulnerable in our society will be protected and given the opportunity to change their circumstances. Let me add that gender equality will be a cardinal feature of the Mahama Jane Naana Opoku Agyemang Flagstaff House.

We would lead an administration that promotes gender inclusivity in every government policy. That is why we propose to establish a national women’s bank to empower women to close the

gender gap financially. One million women will benefit from the women's bank to finance their small and medium-scale businesses.

5. A Call to National Unity: Ghana's strength lies in its diversity. The polarisation and partisan politics that have characterised the current government's tenure should have no place in the Ghana we aim to build. As President, I will foster a spirit of national cohesion, encouraging all Ghanaians to contribute towards nation-building, regardless of their political or ethnic affiliations.

To the youth of Ghana, I say: I understand the frustration and disillusionment many of you feel. I can relate to the recent cynicism and massive mistrust in our body politics because the current government has been undeserving of your trust!

The challenges of today might seem insurmountable, but I urge you to look beyond the present and dream with me of a RESET Ghana—The Ghana we all want, where your talents and hard work determine your success.

I promise a Ghana where you are not sidelined but at the forefront of change, where you can live happy lives and still achieve your optimum potential. This is not just a promise; it's a commitment. I will reset the Economy, and Ghana will be open for business for 24 hours.

Leadership is about vision, and the 24-hour economy is the vision to create decent and well-paying jobs. When I talk about a 24-hour economy, we need to understand the underlying vision. The 24-hour economy is the means to an end—and the end is putting Ghana on a solid path to accelerated growth and development.

We need to attain the growth rhythm that will turn our country into a developed economy and eliminate the abject level of poverty we witness today. An economy that will manufacture many of its needs, including food and beverages, drugs, clothes and more. Such that we can address exchange rate volatilities due to needless imports.

The world is growing fast. We need to keep up with this new rhythm, so first, think of the 24-hour economy as an accelerator—the best accelerator or catalyst we could possibly have. A 24-hour economy will increase the production and distribution of goods and services and accelerate the economic exchanges between people and companies. With that, we will start growing at an unprecedented pace while providing decent jobs for the youth.

I have said that leadership is about vision, and I stand by it. But leadership is also about caring, about giving people genuine, solid hope. This is what a 24-hour economy really is about.

Let me explain.

The 24-hour economy is a solid way to replace imports with homegrown production of goods and thus create a solid base for a vibrant Ghanaian industry. In many instances, we don't import goods because they're better than ours; we import them because nobody produces them here, in Ghana, in the first place or because the local production is insufficient.

The stimulus package for companies wanting to participate in the 24-hour economy will convince businesses, and I am sure of it, to start producing import substitutes. Do you know why? Because the market for such products already exists. Through the 24-hour economy, businesses will be incentivised to start producing for this market. It's the simplest way to start growing sustainably.

And when this begins to happen, imagine the number of new jobs that will be created!

And here's another thing about the 24-hour economy: it will boost exports. Many Ghanaian companies will start looking for foreign partners to develop their businesses to take advantage of the new opportunities available to them via a 24-hour economy.

Thanks to the African Continental Free Trade Area, these partnerships will open new foreign markets to Ghanaian companies. Goods produced in Ghana will then be exported to other parts of the continent, India, Europe, or North America, using the connections of foreign partners.

As I have said before, I will personally chair an Accelerated Exports Development Programme that will identify and promote exports in the manufacturing, agricultural products, textiles, fruits and beverages, pharmaceuticals, and extractive sectors.

It is important to understand that the 24-hour economy will generate a network of foreign markets for Ghanaian entrepreneurs and will transform Ghana into an export-led economy.

So, I say that the 24-hour economy is also about national pride. It is about creating jobs through enhanced productivity, connecting Ghana with the wider world, and making Ghanaians proud of what they can accomplish here.

Once the 24-hour economy is set in motion, the rhythm of growth will start to accelerate exponentially. And Ghana will be open for business 24 hours. My 24-hour Economy initiative will anchor my determination to change the structure of the Ghanaian economy through the active support of private sector-led growth.

Be assured that the 24-hour economy initiative is a well-thought-through, data-driven, evidence-based, and comprehensive policy to expand critical and strategic segments of our economy sustainably. It will liberate Ghanaians from the shackles of unemployment and economic dependence.

Governance—Fighting Corruption for Development

I am committed to drastically reducing the size of government—and rightly so! This government has sufficiently proven to Ghanaians that with over 120 ministers and deputy ministers, all they could offer was to run the economy aground. I will run a lean, highly effective, and efficient government of no more than 60 (sixty) ministers and deputy ministers.

This is solid proof of my genuine commitment to curbing government expenditure. My leaner government will be the cleanest government Ghana has ever experienced.

It will serve Ghanaians far better and set higher standards for future governments. What we have now can obviously never be and should never be a yardstick.

My goal is to launch a renewed fight against corruption. I will keep my appointees in check, and Ghanaians can be assured that drastic steps will be taken to punish the corrupt officials and their accomplices in this present government. No actor in this NPP corruption enterprise will be spared. We will also take action to repossess what has been unlawfully stolen from the Ghanaian people.

As we all know, government procurement is a significant source of corruption. No economy can sustain inclusive and equitable social and economic well-being with the penchant for public service holders to be self-serving and corrupt, as is currently the case.

The use of public finances will always be compliant with national laws, transparent, justified by contemporary value-for-money tests, and solely in the interest of the broader citizens.

If we want to eliminate corruption, we must increase accountability in government procurement processes. Accountability gives power back to the people. God willing, as the incoming president and leader, I assure the people of Ghana that the NDC is fully committed to accountability.

This is why one of our key policies will be to set up an independent value-for-money office to scrutinise all government procurements above a \$5 million threshold or as shall be recommended by Parliament.

Transparency and accountability are the keys to fighting corruption. We will fight corruption by creating an office that will dynamically scrutinise all government procurements. Coupled with a lean government of no more than 60 ministers and deputy ministers, I guarantee you that we will win this fight!

Developing the Agriculture and Agribusiness sector with specialised zones in all regions, with support from the Farmer Service Centres and Exim Bank.

Ladies and gentlemen, some say agriculture belongs to poor people, but I say agriculture can generate significant wealth and employment.

We live in a world crippled by the ever-increasing effects of climate change. In this uncertain and sometimes volatile world, food security becomes a strategic issue. To put it simply, we cannot even begin to think about transforming Ghana if we don't put the right focus on agriculture. We cannot be successful in anything if we do not first put food on the table at an affordable cost for our people.

Agriculture is the cornerstone of growth. Ignoring it is like trying to build a house without a foundation: the slightest storm will bring it down. Without reliable access to affordable and nutritious food in sufficient quantity, growth and development are impossible.

So, I don't look at agriculture as an occupation for the poor—I look at it as the very basis of our future. The simplest way to achieve food security is to produce food locally. If you produce food locally, you are not dependent on imports, so you can still feed the people even if the international distribution lines are broken.

This is the food security strategy I am fighting for. This is why I'm looking at farmers, fishermen, and other protein producers as strategic partners in building the Ghana we want—a modern, vibrant, thriving Ghana.

Others may look down on agriculture. I don't. I am a farmer myself. I see farmers as my close brothers and sisters because of their strategic importance in helping Ghana become a true Black Star not only of Africa but of the world. They inspire me, and I hope I inspire them too.

Let me share just 3 (three) examples of policies we will implement as soon as we form the next government.

We shall establish special agro industrial zones in all sixteen regions to add value to local crops they have a comparative advantage to produce and thereby boost exports and reduce raw material imports.

Secondly, we shall create opportunities for farmers to improve food security and bolster economic growth through the establishment of farmer service centres across the country. This will be enhanced by well-established farmer cooperatives, advanced farming techniques, modern digital tools, and the promotion of agribusinesses.

And three, we will launch a programme similar to "Operation Feed Yourself and Industries" of the early 1970s to make Ghana self-sufficient in basic staples and curb unnecessary imports.

All three policies exemplify to the highest degree my vision of agriculture as the cornerstone of our future growth. True leadership, like I said, is about vision and about empowering people to live that vision.

Digital youth

Let's face it—the digital revolution is here to stay. It has already transformed our lives in ways that were simply unpredictable only a decade ago and will continue to do so.

Around the world and here in Ghana, we now have digitised factories and even digital agriculture. This is the fourth industrial revolution. The fifth industrial revolution – the Cognitive Age that brings human and machine intelligence into close proximity for sustainable growth – beckons. The sooner we embrace it, the more prosperous we'll become.

This is why I am a true and firm believer in the right to affordable and reliable internet. I believe that currently, everybody should have access to the Internet. You may remember that four years ago, I promised Ghanaians that, if elected President, I would provide them with universal and affordable internet access.

My promise still stands because my vision of a digital Ghana is as strong as ever. It is a vision that led me, as president, to deploy massive fixed and wireless broadband for reliable internet across our country. It remains an undying vision.

We need to be young in mind and in spirit. This is a fabulous time in our history, a time in which we must be bold, create, and take advantage of the huge opportunities the digital world, particularly the digital economy, offers us.

Based on this vision of a new, vibrant, digital Ghana, the next NDC Government will partner with local tech start-ups and businesses to launch a 'Digital Jobs Initiative' to create at least 300,000 skilled employment opportunities for the youth.

Imagine this: 300,000 employment opportunities for our youth! And this is in a field they not only love but often excel at. I look at my children, nieces, and nephews, and I'm amazed at their digital skills, as I'm sure many parents in Ghana are.

So, I am telling you, like I tell everybody else, let these kids thrive! They are our future, so let them build this future. It will be glorious, I promise you! All they need from us is our support and understanding – and I promise all of them my full support and my wholehearted understanding!

My dearest young Ghanaians, I stand by you 100%, and I always will!

When we talk about the digital revolution, we also need to talk about the digital divide – about those who are left behind. On my watch, I will do whatever it takes to provide universal access and bridge the digital divide in our country. We shall close the digital gap.

The NDC promises you this: we shall train One Million Coding Professionals in in-demand digital skills for the growing Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and Knowledge Process Outsourcing ecosystems, ensuring no one is left behind in the digital revolution.

One million coders – think about it! And we can do it! This is our plan. This is our pledge to you: no Ghanaian will be left behind in the digital revolution!

Let me assure the sports fraternity that we shall develop our stadium infrastructure for track and field sports, fix the deteriorating football pitches, and pay stipends to footballers in the premier league. What we call the lesser-known sports shall receive equitable attention.

I have good news for the creative industry. Our overarching policy for the industry shall be the Black Experience. This will be geared towards boosting the tourism and creative arts sector. It will include Pan African Month, Ghana Film Festival and Awards Month, Ghanaian Heritage and History Month, Fashion and Food Month, and Diasporan Month.

Additionally, we will rehabilitate all our regional Centres of National Culture and make them available for the creative industry. We will also support ageing artists.

Conclusion

Together, we shall overcome. Together, we shall reset the narrative and restore Ghana to its rightful place among the comity of nations. The time for change has come, and the time to change this non-performing, corrupt government is now!

Let us seize this moment to build the Ghana we want together for a brighter future for our children and for generations to come.

God bless our homeland, Ghana.

I would like to stop here and invite you to ask your questions so we can continue the conversation about the many other issues I have left out for now.