

ALL AFRICA YOUTH CONGRESS

GHANA, 2022

KEYNOTE ADDRESS—OPENING CEREMONY

Your Excellency Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana,

Your Excellency Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Patron of the All Africa Youth Congress,

Your Excellencies, Heads of Churches in Ghana here present,

Your Excellencies, leaders of the churches and government of Ghana,

Your Excellencies, our esteemed guests from our numerous partners,

My dear colleagues, staff of AACC and Christian Council of Ghana,

The very honourable young people, as young adults with a liberally broad name of “youth”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. At its General Assembly in 2018 in Kigali, Rwanda, the All Africa Conference of Churches identified the issue of African patriotism, and Pan Africanism as key areas where AACC must become engaged in the following five years. The reasons were many.
2. The churches were greatly aware of the disconnect between the wealth of the continent and rapid development witnessed in most countries of Africa on several trends on the one side, and on the other side, clear signs of desperation and feelings of hopelessness experienced by the youth in Africa. The AACC was aware of the challenges frustrating the noble goal of reaching the aspirations of Africans, decided by our heads of states and governments as Agenda 2063, called “The Africa we Want.” In 2013 our

leaders said we aspire for a prosperous, integrated and peaceful Africa. The images and stories of young people dying while trying to flee from Africa to other continents were bitterly vivid.

3. So, the General Assembly said, we as churches, must work to assist the youth to refocus their energy to succeed and prosper in Africa. So campaign for African Patriotism became part of the AACC strategy (2019-2023). In our consideration we found an appropriate motto to lead this campaign: **AFRICA. MY HOME. MY FUTURE.** We try to popularize this because we have great conviction in it. The flagship program of this campaign is the **All Africa Youth Congress.** We had planned to hold it in 2020, targeting 5000 young people. We started, the churches in Ghana were very enthusiastic to host and welcome us, even supporting it financially at a large scale. Many churches in AACC constituency were ready to sponsor and finance thousands of youth fully to take part in the maiden congress.
4. As we were preparing, Covid19 came. We know what it did to all of our countries. Church services were banned. Travel was banned. Economies of all countries started declining. As a result, most churches have not been able to recover from the impact of Covid19. As Covid19 started to subside, there broke a war in Ukraine. It has accelerated the deterioration of almost all economies of the world into unimaginable inflation levels, and disruption in food supply and unprecedented high prices of energy, especially oil and gas. Churches are until today suffering as part of the wider society. They could not sponsor as many young people as they had hoped. We considered cancelling the Congress all together, but we thought we would then lose momentum permanently. We have decided to proceed at a more modest scale.
5. Now we are here. With great appreciation and gratitude to God, I congratulate and thank God for you all young people who have made it. I thank many churches which have sponsored their participants; it has been a great effort. I thank our partners who assisted us to sponsor a few more who were not able to get sponsorship from their churches

6. Your Excellencies, my dear brothers and sisters, allow me to take a few minutes to say a few things about this All Africa Youth Congress. We are convinced that, one of the greatest assets of Africa is its young people, its growing youthful population. When and if mobilized the young people are given an opportunity, they will change the destiny of the continent. Africa will be the next source and engine of growth and prosperity of the world.
7. But at the same time, we are saddened by the negative view the young people have of their countries and their continent, and given a chance, they would try to go somewhere else. Their negative attitude has reasons. It is true that they are disillusioned by the status of their lives in the continent. Many finish their years of education successfully and cannot find meaningful work for years. Many are not able or confident enough to start families, as they do not have hope in the future. It is true that many have been disillusioned by politicians and governments which pay attention to them only when they want their votes, and disappear until the next elections. They are angry because of lack of credible democratic processes. Some have seen only one president since they were born and agitate for change. Many give up hope and are ready recruits for human trafficking, slavery, radicalism and violent extremism. Some have lived in context of conflicts since they were born.
8. It is also true that in other continents, as they see on TV and media, life is easier and youth there have hope. They have seen some of their country people who moved there and are working there are better off economically. It is logical that they think they better leave go somewhere else, or die trying.
9. But, the reality is that the world is increasingly against migrants, particularly those of African descent. The ill-treatment of people of African descent across the world is appalling and growing. Governments sympathetic to migration and multicultural integration are being voted out almost everywhere. The fate of those who migrate is now precarious. We have seen what is being done to sports stars from Africa in recent

years, and what traders in China, and domestic workers in Eastern countries. Constant discrimination and abuse, imprisonment and scapegoating them for all evils of society are their portion. We must ask ourselves, why is it that even after 400 years, descendants of slaves settled in the Americas, why are they not treated as equal citizens? It is a bit naïve to think it is now going to be better. If you look at all these, you can only say: AFRICA. MY HOME. MY FUTURE.

10. Africa is my home. Come rain or sunshine, east or west, home is best. It is sad when we see some xenophobia within the continent, Africans turning against Africans from other countries. Africa, all of Africa, is a home for all of us and it belongs to us together. We should see borders between countries as borders between neighbours in the same village, or beacons of plots of land in a city. I have been in many countries in Africa, and I never hear car doors locked because I have just approached. I do not see funny faces and looks directed at me to demonstrate to me that I do not belong. I do not meet children touching me to see whether my dark skin is a paint or my hair is actually real. And I do not meet people in church or on the street asking me curiously, where do you actually come from? Or when will you go back? Whenever I am asked such questions, I sometimes sarcastically say, “when all Italians will come back from Argentina and all people of European descent will come back to Europe from the Americas. In spite of my boldness, such questions remind you always, you do not belong here. When people in the street of Addis Ababa, Abuja, Lome, Abidjan or Kigali ask me where I come from, it is because they presume I am from their country. Africa is really my home. Other places have more opportunities and life is easier. But they are not my home. They are like a rich neighbour with a more beautiful house than mine. When your home is leaking or has cracks, even in the remotest village in a town neighbourhood, people do not move to the neighbour with a better house. They simply must fix the roof or fill the cracks. They remain home, they are proud to have a place they call their own. Their HOME.

11. Africa is my future too. Africa is my future not because I am not wanted in other places. But it is my future because indeed there is tremendous

development in the continent after independence. The young people have no idea how Africa was like fifty to sixty years ago. For example at independence, my country Tanzania, there was no single university, and just a few dozen secondary schools mainly built by missionaries. There were only 12 university graduates in the whole country. Now the young people would not imagine that. Going to school has become a given. Illiteracy has almost been eradicated. Cities are growing like mushrooms and people are fighting to be sure they are connected to electricity. Having a first degree is almost a basic requirement in many interviews. Grass roofed houses are getting forgotten. Africa has developed pretty fast.

12. While many Africans, young or old have never opened a bank account or entered a bank, today, even from a teenager to a grandmother in a city or a remotest village in Africa has a bank account. But it is in a phone, able to purchase and transfer money sitting under a tree through mobile banking which was innovated by a young student in Africa. The West has not been able to catch up on this. Western banks which put all types of requirements to give us visa and master card can keep them to themselves. They are getting quickly outdated in Africa and the other continents have a catch-up work to do in this. We can give similar examples of the flourishing of Africa through and creativity. We say, IT IS POSSIBLE to prosper in Africa. We have seen thousands of innovative products, including African approaches to Covid19, which have until today left the world wondering. My future is Africa because it will certainly prosper.
13. Africa is our future of prosperity because indeed we have the needed resources. Some countries have proven that with proper management and political will, Africa will leapfrog other continents. Other countries see these opportunities. Do you see what other countries are seeing? Do you see the new scramble for Africa? Have you noticed that now Europe, which for long never took Africa seriously, now is flooding Africa with delegations to negotiate for oil and gas? Do you notice the cynicism of the European Union, when they pass a resolution criticizing Uganda and

Tanzania for building the East African Oil Pipeline while at the same time sending delegations to as far as Angola to draw plans for building oil and gas pipelines from Angola and Equatorial Guinea, via Cameroon and Nigeria, via Mediterranean Sea towards Europe? And is it not disgusting that they are using African young people to campaign against their continent in the guise of “climate change” and these same naïve young people do not say anything about the trans-Africa pipeline to Europe? Do you notice that almost all major countries, China, Japan, EU, USA, all of a sudden have huge strategic conferences for Africa with African leaders? What do they see in Africa what we as Africans do not see? They are not doing that simply because they love Africa, though some genuinely do. They want to make sure they have a piece of it because the future is here. They see natural resources. They see untapped economic potential. They are tying your future to unbearable debt levels, by offering to build magnificent structures. They are giving scholarships to our young people so that they become leaders sympathetic to them. They somehow make us despise our own products. They are giving gifts of strategy visibility like airports, stadiums, towers, etc, all written on them to make it clear they are gifts from those generous countries. Young people, the future is here. Do not be fooled.

14. Countries like Africa because we are a big market. That is why all famous brands and producers have Africa strategy. Our youthful population is a huge potential market. It is sad that when you travel to almost any city and village in Africa, you find the same type of shops selling same types of products, even consumer products. Most of these are imported from one or two countries. Very disappointing to go into our supermarkets and find very minimal products made from our countries. How is that Nestle never builds a chocolate factory in Africa? Why is more marketable to say something is “imported.” There is something wrong. That is not the future we want. Young people must push their governments to use their enormous procurement power to invest in their own people, their own entrepreneurs, their own innovators, and make sure they are enabled to succeed. I was impressed by my late President, John Joseph Pombe Magufuli who banned government offices from buying imported

furniture. That decision alone, stimulated a lot of production activity and employment for local young people. I saw the Kenyan young people on the streets making high end hospital beds during Covid19 when nothing could be shipped in. The future is here, in Africa.

15. But if the youth aspire a prosperous future in Africa, they must make it happen. We have therefore prepared this first congress, to be a platform, a venue for African young people to meet, inspire each other, network and make determination, that they will change this continent and prepare for themselves a blissful future. AFRICA: MY HOME. MY FUTURE.
16. We wish the youth of Africa the same audacity which our freedom fighters had, under colonialism. With no money, no job, no offices, they rejected discrimination and decided to fight their colonizers. Many without arms gained independence after a few years. Those who were stubborn were fought militarily. In a span of 20 years after the declaration of the Manchester Pan African Congress of 1945, most African countries got their independence starting with Ghana. That audacity and hope is what is needed today by the young people of Africa.
17. Young people, you need to join forces to reach the aspirations of Agenda 2063, leading to the Africa we Want—prosperous, integrated, peaceful Africa. You must commit to a work and fight for a peaceful Africa anchored on reliable, sustainable democratic leadership. You must reject unconstitutional transfer of power, through your active citizenship, vying for political positions in your own countries to change the course of history. You must shun and fight unhealthy, disgusting indifference towards corruption and bad governance. You need to confront the evils of ethnic rivalries which are at the core of many of our conflicts, by building Pan Africanism and snubbing populist nationalism. For example, as active citizens, you need to ask your governments, when they agreed that there would be visa free travel in Africa by 2018, or silencing the guns by 2020, were they serious? Why is it still the case that in some countries there are visas are free for non-African citizens but it is a hustle and expensive to let Africans in their countries. It sounds very, very strange.

You are the ones to push the ratification and implementation of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area, since it will bring prosperity and make Africa one. You need to champion for climate justice, making your voices and actions known because without sustainable climate, our efforts will be rendered to nothing. You need to fight for gender justice, since without it, no sustainable development is possible.

18. The Bible says, **“Let no one despise because you are young, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity”**, (1Tim 4:12). I want to appeal to you young people of Africa, to learn from the past, that the successful leaders of Africa in politics, in church life, in business, in science, in arts, started when they were still young. The Protestant revolution was started by Martin Luther, a simple German monk, when he was only 29 years old, until the powerful Pope took notice and the political and religious context of Europe was changed for ever. Other reformers followed. John Wesley was only 35, when he shook the Church of England. In politics, we know the leaders of Pan Africanism who led Africa to independence were mostly young. Julius Nyerere formed and became a leader of a party for independence at 32 years. Yoweri Museveni started a revolutionary war in the bush when he was 36. Samora Machel was 37 when he took over FRELIMO. Nelson Mandela started the campaign against apartheid law when he was 30 years old. We can mention many others. Our own Patron of this Congress, His Excellency Chief Olusegun Obasanjo first became President of Nigeria, through appointment, when he was only 40.

19. Before I finish, let me explain why we chose Ghana as the first country to hold this Congress, which we plan to continue in the following years. Ghana was the first African country to gain independence. Ghana has gone through many stages towards political leadership and now it is seen as exemplary of how politics in Africa could be democratic, informed, constitutional and effective. Ghana’s economic stability (being fully aware that it is also economic challenges facing all countries as I said above) has been very inspirational. Its management of its population growth is noted. Its rule of law, even in times of challenges is desirable. But on the other

side was the readiness of the churches in Ghana to host this congress, under the coordination of the Christian Council of Ghana. Its relatively easier visa regime, and international travel connectivity were an added advantage.

20. I want to take this opportunity to express our very sincere gratitude to the churches and the council of churches in Ghana for excellent and hard work.
21. But most exceptionally, I want to express my very sincere gratitude to you, Your Excellency President Akufo-Addo, for your keen, personal support and interest in this endeavour. You have accepted all our requests to support this congress. You gave us significant support. You practiced the aspired “visa free travel” for all Africans. You instructed several of your state agencies to make sure this Congress is held well, safely and conveniently. Your presence in person is the epitome of your generosity, your commitment to the future of Africa, and to Pan Africanism, which has roots in this country. We will pray for you, as you fulfil the ministry God has given you to serve Ghana and Africa as President. May the blessings of the Almighty Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon you now and always.
22. My dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for your attention and I wish all of the young people a fruitful, pace-setting, monumental All Africa Youth Congress.