

FROM THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

Dear Countrymen/women & Friends,

Given the euphoria surrounding the African Nations Cup, Ghana CAN 2008, folks, let's talk football and nationalism in this issue of the newsletter. Let me begin with a congratulatory note to all Ghanaians and friends of Ghana for successfully hosting this year's African Nations Cup - Ghana CAN 2008 - soccer games in our country. Who would have thought that we would have four (4) internationally acceptable venues ready within a couple of years for the matches? Yet, the Ohene Djan Sports Stadium in Accra, the Baba Yara Sports Stadium in Kumasi, Essipong Sports Stadium near Sekondi-Takoradi, and the Tamale Sports Stadium played host to the matches.

Football, or soccer has always been a unifying force and this year's games played just that role. The tournament served as a rallying point of nationalism not only for Ghana but for all countries which participated. Love for one's country showed through frenzied support for national teams with incredible display of national symbols and colours. The Ghana national flag, exhibiting our national colours, adorned nearly every vehicle, home, office, street and building. These colours were worn as attires either fully or partially and decorated nearly every piece of architecture. The national flag flew everywhere! Ghanaians dressed in national colours to their places of worship and some churches sang the Ghana national anthem as though it was an item in the church hymnal! Such was the passion and nationalism that, for once, the entire country was united - - unified in support of the Black Stars!

Such tournaments provide their own uniqueness in the way they stimulate the national psyche and engender a sense of commonality and oneness. It is the period when the names of players are recited by all and everyone becomes "a national coach" selecting the best team to face the next opponent. It is the period when discussions centre on football and virtually nothing else. It is the period when politics appears suspended and acrimony discarded. The usual political divide appears destroyed and it is possible to see political rivals embracing each other especially after a hard won victory by the national team. Cheer leadership, during the tournament, knew no gender barriers as both ladies and gentlemen joined hands to cheer the national team, the Black Stars. The level of support was a real marvel!

Our national team's preparedness for Ghana CAN 2008 was heralded by their excellent performance at the World Cup in 2006 and their subsequent victory over the Green Eagles of Nigeria in a friendly match played in London in 2007. During Ghana CAN 2008, I was blessed to have watched the match between the Black Stars and Morocco live at the Ohene Djan Sports Stadium. Of course, Ghana won!

Although the football fiesta is over and the Ghana national team - the Black Stars - came third, the level of nationalism exhibited during the games must live on. It should translate into the renewal of hearts and minds for national development. As we continue to develop essential national democratic institutions to consolidate our democracy and solidify Ghana's statehood, the efficient functioning of those institutions would depend on dedication and commitment of all. Through dedication, commitment and nationalism we should be able to strengthen the foundations of nation building.

Ghanaians, both at home and in the Diaspora, have a stake in the development of our country and the deepening of our democracy. Perhaps, we all have something to learn from the dedication and commitment exhibited by our national team, the Black Stars who played their hearts out, and from the pride and love demonstrated by us all for our beloved country during the tournament.

As we celebrate the 51st anniversary of Ghana's independence, let us ponder anew the concept of nationalism awakened by Ghana CAN 2008 to build hope and confidence in Ghana's development and progress. On this note, on behalf of the President of the Republic of Ghana, His Excellency John Agyekum Kufuor, his Government and members of my staff I wish you all God's Blessings and a Happy 51st Anniversary.