

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

NA BOHUGU MAHAMI ABULAI SHERIGA

THE PRESIDENT

NORTHERN REGIONAL HOUSE OF CHIEFS

**AT THE GHANA EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE
(GHEITI) SENSITISATION AND DISSEMINATION WORKSHOP**

25-26 JUNE 2013

GARIBA LODGE , TAMALE

Mr. Chairman

Members of the Traditional Authorities

Hon. Ministers,

Metropolitan /Municipal and District Chief Executives

Municipal and District Finance Officers,

Members of GHEITI NSC,

Representatives from Media Houses

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Join me in welcoming our friends from the Ghana Extractive Transparency Initiative (GHEITI) to the Northern Regional Capital, Tamale. I deem the gesture to include the Northern part of the country in the dialogue on extractive sector management very commendable.

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, many countries in Africa including Ghana can boast of natural resources worth trillions of dollars buried underneath or on the surface of their soil but yet are some of the poorest countries in the world with several developmental challenges. It is for this reason that Government must be committed to ensuring that our natural resources stimulate positive development.

We must also strengthen our institutions and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) enough to ensure that effective and accountable governance exist in the sector.

GHEITI like many other governance institutions provides Government with the data required to reform and make our institutions stronger.

You may all be aware that, some substantial amounts of minerals have been discovered in the North and some level of mining activities are already taking place here. The challenge however is that, the sector is dominated by Small scale miners whose activities when not properly formalized and regulated can become a source of danger to the environment, society and economy.

Mr. Chairman, there is therefore a major concern about increasing illegal artisanal and small scale mining and its attendant environmental and health hazards. Illegal miners have destroyed vast stretches of our landscape, and have repeatedly and carelessly used additives such as mercury for their illegal mining activities. They have caused the erosion of fertile soils thereby making potential post-mining activities, such as farming and livestock rearing almost impossible. Their operation of pits around environmentally sensitive areas, including rivers, destroys water resources and creates environmental health hazards through the water supply system.

I call on all stakeholders, Chiefs, Media, CSO, Donors and other citizens to condemn the irresponsible activities of illegal miners. Communities must begin to name and shame the individuals engaged in illegal mining because their wealth is acquired at the expense of the whole community.

Mr. Chairman, as a new entrant to the league of oil producing countries the challenges the country is likely to face are enormous and we need to be wary of the experiences and negative practices in other oil producing countries in the exploitation and utilization of oil and gas resources. The challenge in Africa has

been the inability of the countries that found these hydrocarbon resources to harness it for economic growth. Instead, most of these countries are characterized by civil unrest, conflicts, poverty and unstable political conditions. Majority of the people in these countries in spite of the oil wealth, live in abject poverty.

As a late comer to the industry, we have the benefit of learning from others' mistakes. Indeed we are in a better position to learn from the bitter experiences and best practices. We are determined to remain the shining star for Africa and to prove to the world that Africa's natural resource should not always be marred with conflict, corruption and under-development. By the promulgation of the Petroleum Revenue Management Act (PRMA), ACT 815, we have shown a strong commitment to manage our newly found treasure in a prudent manner.

The Act 815 provides clearly defined guidelines for managing revenues from the oil and gas sector. Most importantly, the Act also made provision for a Public Interest and Accountability Committee (PIAC), a citizen's based committee responsible for an independent oversight of the management of petroleum revenues as well as for consulting the public on setting priorities for the spending of petroleum revenue. We call on government and all stakeholders to support this Committee to achieve its laudable objectives.

As a people we must be committed to a sustainable exploitation of the country's hydrocarbon resources without compromising the safety of the environment. Indeed the best legacy we can leave for posterity is a safe environment.

However, **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen**, reaping oil and gas benefits demand a more sophisticated economic planning, fortified institutions to manage the inflow of revenue and a grounded social policy. Another, key ingredient for harnessing our new found oil for the real benefits of ordinary citizens is a well-informed society. This can be made possible by the work of the Ghana EITI. Increased access to information in a transparent way will embolden the citizenry to demand what is rightly theirs.

Lack of transparency in the natural resources sector will encourage corruption and breeds unnecessary mistrust that could intend spark confusion and destabilize the economy. It is, therefore, absolutely necessary that the tenets of transparency as entrenched throughout the Act 815 be safeguarded if we are to avoid the resource curse.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen as we learn today about the activities of GHEITI let use the knowledge gained to improve our work processes and incorporate in our respective activities greater transparency. We must be ready to open up our decision making processes to greater scrutiny and accountable. I entreat stakeholders to take seriously the responsibility of holding public office holders accountable for their deeds.

On this note I declare the workshop duly opened.

Thank you very much for a listening and have a fruitful session.

God Bless our Homeland Ghana.