



RAO Convention 2007

Welcome Address by Dr. Yao Graham on behalf of G-RAP Advisory Board

Hon Deputy Minister, Invited guests, ladies and gentlemen, it gives me a lot of pleasure to welcome you all to this RAO convention. I am wearing an Advisory Board hat and I would like to extend apologies on behalf of Professor Akilagpa Sawyerr who is the advisory board chair who could not be with us today. He extends his best wishes for this meeting.

I think this convention is another milestone in the growth of the RAOs community as well as the G-RAP. It is under the auspices of the G-RAP that these conventions have emerged and I think it is fair to say that G-RAP has significantly improved the applicable funding available to organizations working on research and advocacy programs in Ghana. Although this is a very small proportion of the large and diverse numbers of CSO in this country, I think the groups who have benefited from G-RAP make an important contribution to the overall vigor that CSOs bring to the nation. It is fair to say that that diversity is a microcosm of the day to day concerns, engagements, visions projections, fears and lived experiences of ordinary Ghanaians and I think it is because of that diversity and contribution that the theme we are discussing today **“Achieving an Enabling Legislative and Regulatory Framework for NGOs/CSOs: An Agenda for Good Governance in Ghana’s Fourth Republic”** is important. It is important because this discussion must be located within the framework of the Ghanaian constitutionalism and the expansion of the boundaries of space and free expression and freedom of association for Ghanaian citizens.

Ghana has been held up by many people particularly in the way democratic regimes have developed since 1992 as offering both positive and negative lessons but predominantly positive lessons for the rest of the African continent. It is fair to say that it is the openness of the state for free expression organizations within which citizens and diversity of organizations feel able to organize, express themselves to contest and act to influence where the country is going that we are able to say that a lot of progress has been made. I think that for us here, really it is important to remember the provision in the constitutions, the ones which I always refer to at this moment is Article 37 which enjoins the government to basically facilitate the self-organizations of citizens to defend their interests in the development process. That formulation recognizes at once the importance of government’s role in leading national development as well as its responsibility to deepen and widen the space of free expression as well as to recognize the freedom of citizens and their organizations to take any positions for, or against any existing policy to project and dream beyond what policy may be today. So for me that is why this theme for this meeting is quite important. And it is out of the richness of that capacity to act in diversity that great nations are built.

It is my hope that our deliberations today contributes to move the discussions forward. It seems to me also that looking at the history of the bill it is important for the community of CSOs, perhaps, to note in addition to whatever else they would say about what the law itself contains, as far as its diverse and limitations are concerned or what may be failures in the process side with government to ask questions about some of the challenges as regards our own organization which we faced. We might be better able to influence areas of public policy that affect directly the space in which we organize. But I will leave notes for the organization



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of the meeting to deal with that. In fact, it is the very heart of the organization of the meeting for today.

What I would like to focus on is to say a few words about what has happened as far as the experience of the G-RAP has been in the past year. When we met last year, in the last convention, at the end of it there was an invitation to participants to make comments on some agenda in relation to the reform of the governance of G-RAP. For the intervening year a lot has happened as regards the progress of that governance reform. Later in this meeting some presentations will be made about the latest proposal to the table. The Advisory Board, reaching out to the community of RAOs working with the consultants and also active participation of the donor community have come to a point where they have concrete proposals on the table for the reform of the governance structure of the G-RAP. It is our belief that that reform will further enhance the way in which the G-RAP as a mechanism is responsive to the needs of the RAO community as well as it is more open to influence by the RAO communities in terms of delivering the outputs that we all desire so as to make the RAO community an ever more vibrant participant in Ghanaian national life. In the period a lot has been done for example in areas of discussion of engendering of G-RAP. This discussion started very early and a lot of progress has been made and I hope these are the areas that some presentations will be made later. But I think what has been achieved in the past, (in terms of the reforms of the access criteria for potential G-RAP beneficiaries and governance programs) with regards to the evolution of G-RAP mechanism, has been very profoundly influenced by the RAO community, and it is an engagement which I will urge all of you not only to continue but to lead.

Speaking for myself as one of the two elected representatives of the RAO community of the Advisory Board there has been a small core of a reliable group of organizations and their leadership who made our work easy. It is fair to say that by and large the response of many who ought to respond positively was somewhat disappointing. I think when people are elected to represent a group their capacity to represent the group is very critically strengthened or weakened by their sense of reinforcement or engagement that they get from the community that they represent. The possibility of not representing is deepened when communication between the representative and the community is weak. I think that it is very important as we enter in the coming period a new governing regime that the lapses and weaknesses - in terms of how the RAO has supported those they elect and to represent them on the G-RAP board - is improved. This is important because most of the time, it is only the immediate beneficiaries who have tended to take an interest in what is being decided outside conventions but it is also true that even among the beneficiaries not all of them take an interest in what is being decided. I am making an appeal really that we need to scale up the way in which we pay attention to the governance of G-RAP. It is true that we all have 2000 things to do and meetings can be boring but out of the minutiae, some small discussions can be very important decisions so if we don't pay attention to the minutiae, big decisions are made and we suddenly wake up and ask "where are these decisions coming from?"

I also like to take this opportunity to thank the donors who have continued to contribute to G-RAP and who as far as I am aware have committed to extend the life of G-RAP and who are working with the Board to lay down a mechanism which ensures a certain essential character for the fund so that in future others who are interested in entering, the objectives that inform the establishment would remain true. I am of course talking about the DFID, CIDA, The Royal Netherlands Embassy and DANIDA. On behalf of the RAO community, I would like



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to thank them for their support because the open ended nature of the fund is an indication of creating a culture of vigorous engagement and citizens' expression in this country.

On a final note, let me thank all of you for coming and I hope that in the next couple of days we will have a very good discussion around the theme of this convention. Hopefully this will contribute to moving the discussion forward so that at the end of the day we have a law which facilitates the free expression and organization of Ghanaian CSOs, even as it helps ensure the trusts that people repose in CSOs as working for the public good. This way, transparency and probity will be enhanced without the law becoming a restraint to self-organization and freedom.

I thank you for your attention.