



Regional Group Africa



Meeting of 8. March 2012 with a Parliamentarian delegation from Ghana

Address by Mr Louis Ide, Chairman of the Belgium-Africa Group in the framework of the Belgian Group of the Inter-parliamentary Union



On behalf of the Belgian branch of the Inter-parliamentary Union, I can tell you that we are very honoured indeed to have you here with us today. This meeting is part of the visit from the Finance Committee of the Ghanaian Parliament to the Belgian Parliament. Visits like these undoubtedly have an added value. Indeed, as they are unique opportunities to provide us with inspiration, to exchange relevant information and to learn about each other's cultural and institutional characteristics, they may be enriching and educational experiences. Hence, it is paramount not to hesitate to build bridges between cultures and thus allow us to grow towards each other by understanding each other better and by respecting each other's particularities.

Belgium has always kept a close watch on what is happening on the African continent. Moreover, wherever we can, we try to be of help with political, financial or technical support in close collaboration with our African partners, the appropriate NGO's, the concerned EU-departments, etc.

We are happy to see that Ghana continues to be a beacon of stability in her region. This is a relieve for the West Coast of Africa, an area which is confronted with severe instability. Indeed, remarkable progress has been made in the field of government capacity and human rights protection, two ideals we particularly foster. We were also pleased to see that your country respects the basic democratic principles as your elections are free and fair. In this way, Ghana sends a very important and confidence-building signal to the rest of the world. Your political leader is backed by a popular mandate which legitimizes his actions at home and abroad. Thus, Ghana's political system has proven full-fledged and guaranteeing participation, stability and order to the country's citizens.

We hope that the political stability and the steady consolidation of Ghana's democracy positively reverberates on her neighbours' political situation. It would be good for Ghana to take on a stabilizing role allowing the entire West Coast of Africa to start working for peace, stability and prosperity. In the past, Ghana did not hesitate to play the role of a regional trailblazer: indeed, after your independence in 1957 and under your first President, Mr. Nkrumah, Ghana pioneered Pan-Africanism and regional integration. Today, your country is well placed to play this role once again.

We also see that Ghana successfully tackles poverty as it looks like she will meet the Millennium Development Goal to halve poverty by 2015 without too many problems. We firmly believe that this trend will continue, especially when, in the nearby future, Ghana will get even more accustomed to the basic principles of good, democratic and efficient governance.

In my capacity as a doctor, I have worked for *Médecins sans Frontières* for a considerable time and, as a result, I am particularly interested in the development of health care in Ghana. Yet, until today, unequal access to medical services has seemed to remain a problem. On the one hand, there is a lack of doctors and trained medical staff, a consequence of the "brain drain" as many leave the country in search of higher wages. On the other hand, the geographical spread of medical facilities is somewhat unbalanced: in some areas, patients have to come from too far to see a doctor. Still, the efforts of the Ghanaian authorities on this field are reassuring.

We see that Ghanaian economy is performing well. While quite a lot of Western countries carry the burden of a financial and economic crisis, over the last years year, Ghana has managed to grow in a stable manner. This is a very positive signal. We hope to be able to develop a durable trade relationship based on mutual appreciation and trust. In the meanwhile, for a number of products, Ghana has become a crucial trade partner for Belgium. This is the case for, amongst others, cacao, an essential ingredient of one of our national specialties: chocolate.

Undoubtedly, the find of oil is an extra asset for Ghana. Using this asset in a clever and efficient way, may generate substantial economic prosperity for the country. Indeed, re-investing the oil revenues into an intelligent, dynamic and competitive economy, may allow Ghana to increase her prosperity and to lift the standard of life of many common Ghanaians to a higher level. In any case, we hope that this extra prosperity will eventually narrow down the gap between the poor and the rich. Therefore, it is important to actively strive for more equality in order to avoid the risk of polarization between a large group of poor citizens and a small but wealthy elite.

In short, we are very pleased to see that Ghana is well on the road to prosperity. With admiration, we watch the distance you have covered during the last decades. A path resulting in concrete effects, such as: peace, stability, democracy and a successful tackling of poverty. We hope that this positive trend will continue during the years to come. Whenever Europe feels able to add value to this process, it will not hesitate to offer assistance.

I hope that your visit, which was mainly focused on "budgetary issues", was helpful and I wish you a successful completion of your mission here in Belgium.