

## **PUBLIC RELATIONS: A VITAL LINK FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE**

### **An Address by the Chief Executive of Ashanti Goldfields Company Limited at the Annual Lecture of the Institute of Public Relations, Ghana**

**Mr Chairman, Honourable Ministers, Members of the Council of State, Your Excellencies, Nananom, Fellows and Members of the Institute of Public Relations, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.**

**Let me first express my appreciation to the Institute for the very kind invitation extended to me to give today's address. The invitation as pleasant as it is came as a surprise given that for the last few years, I was as famous as the "don't touch me soap". Recently I walked into a function to find Jewel Ackah doing a rendition of the popular tune "Kufuor, J. A. Kufuor" I knew that the time of redemption had come. (Somebody say "I hear you").**

**Mr Chairman, the invitation carried with it a generous message that I could speak on any subject of my choosing. In this fast changing world, potential themes for public events such as this public address change by the minute. Therefore, I postponed almost to the last minute, the issues I wanted to raise tonight. Try as I did, I couldn't find a more relevant, indeed a more pertinent theme, than that which you have chosen for your celebration – Public Relations: A vital link for Good Governance.**

**Mr Chairman, ten years after the end of the Cold War, with the implosion of the Soviet Union and its satellites, there is an irresistible demand world-wide for the active involvement of people in the making of decisions that affect them. The demand for good governance is felt not just in political institutions but also in the corporate world. Those of us in business know only too well that in an era where capital is scarce, only companies which adhere to good corporate governance principles will attract investment interest. Equally, in the political arena, voters demand the right to withdraw their mandate if they are not governed well. Sadly, the history of Africa suggests that unless good governance is so obviously apparent, redeemers, liberators and saviours will arrogate to themselves the power, usually exercised through the barrel of the gun to change governments.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen, it is therefore not a surprise that corporate governance and how to promote it has become so very critical that the United Nations recently launched a Global Compact Initiative to promote this throughout the world.**

**Mr. Chairman, may I humbly remind this audience that, I am the Chief Executive Officer of Ashanti Goldfields Company Limited. As high sounding and glamorous as this title is, let me assure you that the tenure of my position is as secure as that of a football coach. As we know, he hardly ever wears a team jersey, but if the goals don't come, the casualty is always the coach. In my case, if I can not assure shareholders of good performance on a sustainable basis, I get kicked out to join the teeming crowd of the jobless.**

**Mr. Chairman, I make a living selling a product from an industry which has lost its lustre, and is located on a continent which seems to excite very little positive interest.**

**Let me first talk about my industry.**

**Mr. Chairman, in January 1980, the gold price stood at US\$850 an ounce. Today, the same ounce of gold will only fetch you US\$281 an ounce. Gold, which had traditionally been a safe haven in times of crisis, is no longer seen as such. All the macro-economic conditions which would ordinarily have forced a substantial increase in the gold price, have happened and yet the price of gold continues to slide downwards. These factors include the world-wide recession, the collapse of the equities market, the terrible events of 11 September, the on-going war against terrorism and fears about biological warfare. Gold should never have had a better opportunity to shine. Sadly, it has not, and not surprisingly, this has had a terrible knock on effect on the value of gold stocks. Over the last four years, gold stocks have lost an average of about 67% of their value.**

**Mr. Chairman, the entire capitalisation of gold mining companies – an industry which belongs very much to the old economy and even pre-dates the Pharaohs - is only US\$26 billion. To put things in perspective, America OnLine, a new economy company which has been around for less than half the age of Ghana, had a market capitalisation of US\$83 billion before its recent merger with Time Warner. Last week Coca-Cola's capitalisation stood at US\$111 billion and this is a business based largely on water, sugar and colouring!**

**Mr. Chairman as you can see, with other more attractive investment alternatives, my industry has to struggle hard to attract and indeed retain the interest of the investor community. Believe me it's a 'dog eat dog' affair out there, with each company fighting hard to remain in business. Not surprisingly, our industry is going through a major consolidation phase. This is the only way to ensure its survival. Now, only big is beautiful. Over the last five years, as gold mining companies have struggled to stay in business, the resultant consolidation has led to a halving in key gold producers from 26 (twenty six) down to 13 (thirteen). In 1986, Ashanti produced 220,000 ounces. Last year, we produced 1.7 million ounces. To give you a flavour of the seriousness of the situation and how it impacts on Ashanti, let me remind you that in 1996, Ashanti, which was then producing 900,000, had a market capitalisation of US\$2.2 billion. With a doubling of our production to 1.7 million ounces our market capitalisation is now less than US\$400 million! This is an industry-wide problem, but it is nevertheless fair to make the observation that the impact has been harder on African-based gold mining companies, than on gold mining elsewhere.**

**Mr. Chairman, this is because to be attracted to invest, investors are affected not only by the state of our industry but maybe just as importantly, by our geographical location, our address, in our case - Africa. Believe me Ladies and Gentlemen, Africa is a hard sell, though NOT an impossible one.**

**As we all know, the picture that foreign investors see of this continent comes through the lenses of the international media – CNN, BBC, REUTERS etc... and let's face it, it is not a pretty sight. It is about wars, famine, human rights abuses, coup d'états, insurrections, general mayhem etc... Others tell our stories for us and of course bad news sells! Talking about bad news, we never seem to disappoint!!**

**Mr Chairman, after nearly two weeks of being at the receiving end of the most hi-tech weaponry, the Taliban Government of Afghanistan reported civilian losses of about 300, yet a demonstration against the same event in Kano apparently resulted in the massacre of some five hundred innocent civilians in a matter of 24 hours. Ladies and Gentlemen, the entire Balkan crisis of recent years, the religious conflict in Northern Ireland, the Falklands War and the Gulf war in totality did not produce the close to 1 million dead which occurred in Rwanda in the three and a half month period of the 1994 crisis. The remarkable thing is that Africa achieves most of this wanton destruction of life with low-tech weapons such as machetes. Ladies and Gentlemen, what sort of mind would offer to ask whether one wanted a pair of long or short sleeves in order to decide the length of limb of his compatriot he is about to cut off? What bestiality will lead a man to de-bowel a pregnant woman visibly in glee? Yet all these events appeared on TV screens of potential investors everyday in 1994 and even today in past reviews of Africa.**

**So, Mr. Chairman when I go to New York to market my product - Ashanti stock - to the investor who does not know or indeed does not care to know about Africa; to him the continent is one small country. In his mind there is no difference between Burundi, Rwanda, the Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ghana.**

**Such an investor would have been conditioned by all that he sees on his TV set. Naturally, he is cynical, sceptical, suspicious and difficult to impress. Ask yourself the question, "who will have an easier job of selling his stock, a CEO of a Canadian-based gold producing company or Sam Jonah of Africa? No wonder the Ashanti stock and indeed all African-based stocks trade at a discount to their peers located elsewhere. But that we have survived at all over the years suggests that perhaps, we have been doing some things right. For instance in 1997, the Public Relations Society of America awarded Ashanti Goldfields with the Silver Anvil Award for excellence in Investor Relations. In the same year, INSIDE PUBLIC RELATIONS magazine gave us the CREATIVITY IN PR AWARD and THE GOLD QUILL AWARD sponsored by the INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen, the battle to win the hearts and minds of a dwindling shareholding base has forced us to implement Investor Relations strategies based on regular presentations of credible, timeous, verifiable and comprehensive information to the investment community. This is backed by frequent exchange of views with our shareholders through our corporate website, teleconferences, road shows, statutory announcements, publications etc... We have come a long way on this journey. We have had our successes and, my God, we have had our failures too. In these difficult times, we have come to appreciate even more, the need to have good relationships not just with our shareholders, but indeed with all our stakeholders – host governments, local communities, the media and various pressure groups. I must admit that this has not always been the case, because our public relations strategies have had to change to reflect Ashanti's own changing circumstances.**

**Mr. Chairman, before 1994, Ashanti was a private Company owned 55% by the Ghanaian Government and 45% by Lonrho, now Lonmin. It was a very cosy relationship and with Ghana's huge shareholding held on behalf of all of us by a revolutionary Government, it was not that essential to have a comprehensive Public Relations strategy. Conflicts on the labour front, agitations from the local communities and other pressure groups could easily resemble an attempt to take on the government itself. Under these circumstances, our Public Relations strategies were similar to that of a typical autocratic government anywhere in the world. Accountability and transparency were simply not fashionable.**

**In 1994, Ashanti became a Public company with the government selling its interest down to 20%. This was also two years into the return to constitutional rule in the country. Political pluralism demanded accountability and transparency from the government just as our public listing also demanded from us greater accountability to all our stakeholders.**

**From dealing with essentially two shareholders, Ashanti now had to deal with literally thousands of shareholders world-wide, an army of analysts and brokers, fund managers and bankers, regulatory authorities in the various stock exchanges and different governments in the countries where we operate.**

**In addition, we had to relate to increasingly vocal and active local communities and environmental activists, who had considerable influence not just on governments and local communities, but also, on our banks and our shareholders. Clearly, our limited Investor Relations strategy based on a cosy relationship between two shareholders had to give way to a responsive, more accountable and more comprehensive programme.**

**It has been an interesting and challenging transition. Ashanti's public listing was a remarkable success as evidenced by the substantial over subscription for the shares abroad. The awards which I mentioned earlier and the fact that I am still at post, in spite of some past local difficulties, suggests that we have had some successes. But as I said earlier, we have had our failures too and one that disappoints me the most has been our relationship with our local investors. Mr Chairman, well over 30,000 Ghanaian investors bought our stock in 1994. Our marketing strategy did not differentiate between the culture of shareholding in the more developed parts of the world and ours, partly because of the Listing rules.**

**As we would no doubt all freely admit, in Ghana, stocks are bought and kept as part of the family jewels or heirlooms. Ladies and Gentlemen, the first principle of portfolio management is that you sell in a rising market and buy in a declining market. This principle is not understood in our infant market. Therefore most of the small shareholders who bought at the time of the listing when the price was US\$20, still kept their shares even though the price went as high as \$27, and later as low as US\$1.38. Other shareholders abroad, who understand the business of buying and selling publicly quoted stocks, made huge profits trading in and out of the stock.**

**Mr Chairman, our marketing strategy had not taken on board, the stage of development and other realities of the Ghanaian stock exchange and its associated Institutions. These**

**institutions were in their infancy. Analysts' reports on listed companies, as well as brokers' recommendations as to whether investors should buy or sell, target prices and related relevant information needed by shareholders to assist in their investment decisions - all these investor traditions were very much in their infancies. As a result the Ghanaian shareholders were not as well served as their foreign counterparts.**

**In addition, because there has not been much trading in our stock at our local stock exchange since our listing, Ashanti's price of €18,700 has stayed flat irrespective of market conditions, good or bad. Indeed, the Cedi equivalent of Ashanti's share price today on the New York Stock Exchange is about €26,000 as compared to Ghana's Stock Exchange price of €18,500.**

**Mr. Chairman, apart from the Ghana Government shareholding, the Ghanaian shareholder represents about 1% of the value of the shareholding in Ashanti. Nevertheless, we have found that this is a public that we can least afford to ignore. We must therefore take on the unusual responsibility for educating the Ghanaian market about the intricacies of shareholding in general and in gold stocks in particular. If we want to be good corporate citizens, then we must do this as our contribution to the development of a modern shareholding culture.**

**Mr. Chairman, good governance in a corporate world is about staying in business irrespective of market conditions. Clearly, you cannot stay in business if you do not have your shareholders on your side. You cannot stay in business if you do not meet the expectations of your various regulatory bodies. You cannot stay in business if you are insensitive to the needs of your local communities, host governments, pressure groups and all other stakeholders. Yes as a Chief Executive, keeping my company in business is my primary responsibility. In this regard, let me say that my relationship with the various publics is influenced by my vision for the company, my integrity and credibility, my accountability and my responsiveness to changing conditions. Every Chief Executive of a company literally faces all these challenges every day.**

**Mr Chairman, in recent times, Heads of State have been referred to as Chief Executives of their countries. I have no doubt at all that the challenges faced by Presidents and Prime Ministers, though similar, are more complex and challenging. Reduced to its simplest terms, the object of any government is to ensure the provision of better quality of life for the citizenry. This is to be seen in better education, healthcare, shelter, and other social facilities.**

**Mr. Chairman, all over the world, citizens not only aspire to the good things in life, but expect to have a say in the way in which they are governed. Governments which are not responsive to the wishes of a citizenry and show no sense of accountability, will not last and, as I said earlier, sometimes their removal may be traumatic and of course unconstitutional. Given the history of governance in Africa, it is not a surprise that we have been plagued by all the problems that I have previously identified. We have been singularly unsuccessful in our economic management, and at the end of the day, that is what counts the most!**

During the campaign which ushered in the Clinton Presidency, his manager had a sticker in his office which read “It is the economy, stupid”. This provided the focus for their entire campaign strategy – all their messages had to relate to the fact that the economy had not performed adequately, and that any voter who thought otherwise was plainly wrong. In their view, that was the only way to remove a popular Republican president who had just won a war. How right subsequent events proved them to be! I believe most strongly that when it comes to the governance of a country, there could be no better theme than “It is the economy, stupid?” After all, good governance for the ordinary citizen must translate into affordable food, healthcare, shelter and education. This lies at the very heart of the security of the nation.

Mr. Chairman, as I said earlier, African governments have not made a good job of managing our economies. Let’s listen to Kofi Annan’s view on this matter:

“... the quality of the leader (ie African political leaders), the misery they have brought to their people and my inability to work with them to turn the situation round are very depressing. Unless we find a way of getting them to focus on resolving conflicts and turn to key issues of economics and social development, the effort that we are all making will be for nought.”

No wonder we have been singularly unsuccessful at providing good governance for our people.

Let’s look at the facts. Our own example in Ghana is not brilliant. Twenty years of economic restructuring has brought no joy to the ordinary Ghanaian. We can continue to be in denial and claim that we have made considerable progress, but I don’t believe that the progress made is commensurate with the resources that have been applied and the sacrifices which have been made.

Mr Chairman, I have not seen any statistics which seriously invalidate this view. Let’s look at Ghana’s debt levels as an example – after all it is that which made us declare ourselves, HIPC. In 1980, our overall debt per capita, that is the national debt at the time divided by the population was €1,068. Twenty years on, in the year 2000, the debt per capita had risen to €2.7 million. This is the burden of the national debt that each Ghanaian is now carrying. Our economy is not growing at the required rate to even cope with the demands of a rising population, let alone generate surpluses for the retirement of the national debt.

Our savings rate is incredibly low, life expectancy low, infant mortality high and corruption endemic. The tragedy is that this is what obtains in most places in Africa. The rule of law, respect for human rights, respect for property rights etc, are plainly endangered concepts. With populations increasing at exponential rates, joblessness engendering helplessness and hopelessness can be most destabilising. We are simply not investing enough yet in education, healthcare, infrastructure and jobs. Quite clearly, our

governments do not have the resources to invest at the rate which will keep pace with population growth and the requirements of the new world economy.

Mr Chairman, throughout the world there is broad consensus across the political divide, that the only source of these much-needed investments is the private sector. Investment capital is scarce and given the picture that is painted of our continent and our own performance in economic management, Africa does not present itself as an attractive home for such scarce capital. Yet Africa has great potential.

Mr. Chairman, capital is nomadic and will go where the greener pastures are, and by all accounts investors are finding greener pastures elsewhere. We are told that the period between 1993 and 1997 was generally the best for Africa in terms of Foreign Direct Investment Flows. Yet for that period Africa received about US\$6 billion per annum while over the same period, Malaysia, a single Asian country, received each year, about US\$5 billion and Singapore, a city state 3% the size of Ashanti Region, received US\$7 billion each year. Again in 1998, Brazil alone received US\$31 billion. Currently, Africa's share of Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) is a mere 1% of the global total despite the fact that Africa accounts for 15% of the world's population. Put differently, every sixth person in the world is an African. For us in Ghana, the impressive FDI we saw in the early 1990's were almost all in the natural resource sector. Even then, FDI fell from 233 million in 1994 to 115 million in 1999. Over the same period, Brazil's figure rose from US\$5.5 billion to US\$31 billion in 1999.

Our continent has attracted little attention or interest and you will no doubt recall the totally unfair front-page headline in last year's July Economist "Africa the hopeless continent".

Mr Chairman, some commentators have observed that the continent whose economies will be most affected by the terrible events of 11 September, will be Africa. There is a real danger that we shall become even more marginalized. Aid funds will flow to Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries to rebuild their economies, and this could be at the expense of Africa. It is estimated that some US\$350 billion will be needed to repair the effects of the 11 September attacks. These sums will come from the same sources to which we look for investment and assistance. If anybody is in doubt that we are marginalised, how come there have not been any references to Africa in the coalition-building in the efforts to fight terrorism when indeed two of the most terrible terrorist attacks allegedly perpetrated by the Osama Bin Laden group occurred here in Africa – in Kenya and Tanzania.

Clearly, life for us cannot continue as it is. We have to radically change the way in which we govern ourselves. Unless we do this, our situation will worsen. First we must take charge of our own destiny, tell our story and market our own selves. And if I may emphasise, for far too long, we have allowed others to mistell our story. We have not marketed our countries well. Our Heads of State must be our main marketing executives but lets face it, you cannot market a bad product.

**Investors, like voters are very discerning, and like voters, they are very cynical about politicians. Any strategies for attracting investment into our country must have some key components to which I will refer later, but here, the role of the Chief Executive of a country is of crucial importance because after all it is his vision of his country that is being marketed. But you cannot market any high falluting vision of a country when it is so obvious to the investor that the basic foundations to support that vision are not in place. If there is no rule of law, and no respect for property rights, your environment will not be conducive to investors because they will feel insecure. Perhaps one example will suffice.**

**You will recall that on the eve of the African African-American Summit in 1999 which was supposed to showcase Ghana as the investment destination of choice, a 68 room fully furnished hotel was destroyed in broad daylight. Apparently the organisers of the conference had even booked the hotel for use by some participants. The viciousness and the callousness that attended that destruction are unprecedented in Ghana. No attempt was made to retrieve any of the air conditioners -- some of which had not been installed--refrigerators, TV sets, kitchen equipment and utensils etc. With the advent of the Internet and the liberalisation of the airwaves in Ghana, this event was transmitted instantly world-wide. The question is not whether the owner had a permit to build. What should be of concern to all of us is whether the full legal process had been exhausted before the demolition. Legalities aside, the savagery of the demolition, soldiers in battle fatigues with AK47s primed for action, and the Air Force providing air support, the area entirely cordoned off, we could not have presented a better, friendlier, welcoming, attractive, indeed, a more conducive environment to investors!!**

**The post event Public Relations damage control made matters even worse. First, the spin was that the hotel had been built on a watercourse, then we had a totally different explanation which suggested that the hotel had been located in a security zone. Every new explanation made matters even worse and reminded me of the old saying, that “When you find yourself in a hole, it is wise to stop digging”.**

**Ladies and Gentlemen, we convey the impression that investors are somehow stupid and that we can direct our investment promotion efforts at the external markets to the exclusion of the local markets. It is estimated that as much as 40% of Africa’s GDP is held by Africans in overseas accounts and assets. I don’t want to go into the morality of the acquisition of these assets. What is strikingly interesting is that the holders of such wealth do not find their own countries attractive for their assets. Of course this is known to potential investors outside and therefore they must say to themselves that, if Africans cannot excite their own people to invest, how can they expect to excite other people from outside. In making their investment decisions, investors to any country take, as their reference point, how the local investors are being treated – after all, if citizenship cannot confer protection, then how on earth do we expect the foreign investor to feel safe?**

**Mr Chairman, investors don’t like uncertainties especially when they are already coming into a region which they perceive to have serious defects in vital areas such as rule of law, respect for property rights etc... Out there, Africa is bad news and therefore let us not add to our heavy baggage. In this regard, our utterances and our actions must be “in sync.”**

**You cannot separate one from the other. In the past, we have placed too much emphasis on “psy-ops” or psychological operations, spins, form, package and not content. If the message is not credible, no amount of spinning would make it palatable to a discerning voter or investor.**

**The Ghanaian is now more politically aware, better informed, more demanding, hungrier for information and as I said earlier, more discerning than at any time in our history. The challenge for our government in dealing with this new situation is to have a comprehensive communications strategy. This is best if it is a proactive, consistently credible strategy, that is sensitive to public opinion and deliberately structured to provide for a two-way communication between the Government and its various publics. In this regard, your special PR role in the formulation and implementation of this strategy is pivotal.**

**Now distinguished members of the IPR, from the kind of insight I have given about the workings of the international marketplace, the challenges to your profession are obvious. You have a responsibility for marketing our country.**

**For me, the starting point is the image of the profession itself. For the dynamics of this highly technological information age to be appreciated and even managed, the Public Relations professional needs necessarily to have a high sense of intellectual judgement, creativity, confidence and above all courage. The days when Public Relations only conjured images of the messenger, a smart Protocol Officer, and the other man in the corridor, should be left in the sands of history. The world has reached a stage when Public Relations practitioners should be involved and influential in policy formulation, presentation and dissemination. As advisors to the Head of State, Ministers or to Government departments, PR managers should make significant inputs to speeches, press interviews and press releases to spare us the agony of hearing several different versions of a government policy from the same source.**

**I am aware of instances where Heads of State have been humble enough to take the advice of the PR advisors in either improving their public speaking or in tidying up their dress code. But in these situations, you needed a PR practitioner who knew his job, had a great deal of confidence in his ability to persuade his boss and even more importantly the courage to call attention to the shortcomings of his Chief Executive.**

**Once the image of the PR advisor is redeemed, this country should not find wanting world-class PR practitioners who, on a point of principle would resign their positions on account of persistent refusal of their bosses to respect their advice.**

**Mr Chairman, your colleagues elsewhere in the world, are most influential in policy formulation and dissemination and, indeed, no Head of State in any developed country would make a speech or grant an interview to the media without significant influence from their public relations advisors.**

The world is replete with instances of Heads of State or Chief Executives of companies who have come to grief because of utterances made in their unguarded moments. A couple of examples will suffice. I will start with myself.

During Ashanti's crisis, I was interviewed by the Financial Times and against laid down company policy, I did the interview on my own. In answer to a hypothetical question, which involved the word reckless, I was quoted as having actually said, "We were reckless". It was even repeated with greater prominence, understandably by the Graphic here in Ghana. Another edition of the Financial Times immediately effected the necessary correction but some damage was done. Can you imagine how much more damage would have been done if we hadn't effected the correction. Shareholder lawsuits would still have been flying from all directions.

Then there is the famous Ratners' case. Some years ago, the Chief Executive of Ratners – one of the fastest growing jewellery chain shops – got carried away by all the attention he was getting that in an unguarded moment he described his product as "junk". The market and his shareholders took him at his word and voted with their feet. Within weeks, the company collapsed inspite of massive damage limitation work by his PR team. Now as you all know Ratners, is no more.

In recent times in Ghana, we have had very liberal use of highly value-loaded expressions like criminals and murderers to describe individuals who have never appeared in court even for traffic offences. To the investment community out there, the impression we convey is one of capriciousness, lack of respect for entrepreneurship, lack of respect for due process, indeed lack of respect for human rights and, sadly, doubts about the independence of the judiciary. Can you imagine the further damage that is done to the country when we even confirm the worst suspicions of a cynical public with the revelation on BBC radio of all channels that, African governments can concoct evidence against individuals or institutions they don't like.

Sadly, we are always shooting ourselves in the foot. In the process we create careers and professions in explanations and interpretations of the sayings of our great leader meant. Ladies and Gentlemen, the business of running a country is too serious to be left to the idiosyncrasies of any individual.

Another problem confronting us in the area of Good Governance and PR is the proclivity of African governments' for secrecy. That culture may well have suited the pre-information age when governments could control the flow and integrity of information released to the public. I am reminded that when Herbert Henry Asquith, the British Statesman, was asked why the War Office kept three different sets of figures he explained, "One to mislead the public, another to mislead the Cabinet, and the third to mislead itself".

In this information age, you cannot get away with such deceptions. If you are in doubt, listen to the local FM stations. You are now dealing with more informed and discerning publics. They are hungry for knowledge and truth and the success of any government in marketing its policies and achievements to all its publics - external and internal - will

depend on the level of professionalism, which you as PR practitioners bring to bear upon your work. With all the negatives out there against us, let's not kill the few success stories we have. Let us tell our stories from our own perspectives using verifiable achievements. In doing that, let's look beyond the politics of individuals, let's celebrate entrepreneurship – a commodity which is in short supply in our part of the world - in short let's put our best foot forward every time.

An effective Public Relations arm of government is essential to aid this process. As I have already said earlier, many of you may work for employers who have a tendency to be secretive and manipulative. This tendency will certainly make the work of convincing people and establishing a credible status for your employer even more difficult. You must therefore use the whole range of skills that you have learnt to harmonise and exchange views in a manner which will allow full public appreciation of issues confronting your employers and the public with whom you deal with.

You must advise against the tendency to make “policy on the trot”. You must prevent the consistency of messages being undermined by too many spokesmen singing from different hymn sheets. You should also ensure the reinforcement of accountability for government actions and policies. You must share best practices between government departments by providing a forum for feedback, thus ensuring a free exchange of ideas and principles upon which good democratic government is based.

Mr Chairman, our people spoke loudly for change in 1992. The change they desired is very clear, a government that is accountable, that respects the rule of law, that respects human rights and that is committed to involving the people in the management of the affairs of the state.

Our people have tasted a new freedom and hopefully next year we shall be celebrating ten years of that. Whether this new freedom becomes institutionalised or not, depends on all of us, the government and the citizenry at large. But I dare say that given the relevance of your profession, which is all about helping us to manage our relations with all our publics, a lot is expected of you. Creativity, ingenuity and perseverance will be required in this effort to establish a culture of transparent and honest dialogue between government and its people. Government PR has a multitude of tasks: communicating with our international partners, government to government, between ministries and with the public. Where the same approach may not be appropriate, new paradigms are needed and the society expects you to act as PR midwives in their birth.

As Ghana becomes networked, Government has a ready online audience both inside and, outside the country. Thus by harnessing the power of the internet, an efficient electronic exchange, communication and open discussion of public information at all levels of government can be initiated both within Ghana and around the world.

We can examine the best practices from other countries, where parliaments are online, *where* web-sites have been established to allow the public to debate with their representatives, where Presidents and Prime Ministers have their own home pages and in

**the US, the President weekly radio broadcasts. In all of these cases, we see modern Government moving closer to the people they represent.**

**This is the task our government has today in Ghana, to convey their ideas, their vision of a corruption-free, prosperous, inclusive and just society to every Ghanaian and to every facet of Ghanaian life.**

**In the end though, policies have to deliver what has been promised. PR cannot replace reality!**

**Mr Chairman, I know it's been a long speech but it would be remiss of me not to use this opportunity to share with you an event which encapsulates most of the concerns that I've raised tonight. Please for the last time forgive me, it would only take a minute.**

**In May 2000, Ashanti held its Annual General Meeting. AGMs provide all shareholders with the opportunity to hold the Board and the Management to account and by far the most important item of the meeting is the receipt and approval, or rejection, of the audited accounts of the Company. The accounts were put to the vote and the Ghana Government as a shareholder voted in favour. That very evening's 7 o'clock TV news carried an announcement that the Serious Fraud Office of Ghana had been asked to look into the administrative costs of the accounts which had been approved that day. Let's pause for a moment and review the damage that that announcement did to all parties.**

**First to the existing shareholder; understandably the share price took a dive, after all who would like to be associated with a company which is the subject of a serious fraud enquiry, particularly when there are alternative investment opportunities elsewhere?**

**Secondly, to the Ghana Government as a shareholder; the value of our 19% interest suffered.**

**Thirdly, Ghana as an investment destination suffered because serious questions were raised about the credibility and the integrity of the investment promotion efforts of the Government.**

**Eighteen months later, the Serious Fraud Office gave the company a clean bill of health. But the verdict confirmed the worst fears of shareholders, potential and present about the capriciousness and the shortsightedness of whoever ordered the enquiry in the first place.**

**Thank you for your understanding.**

**May and God bless Ghana and all her people.**