

2026 BUSIA INSTITUTE LECTURE
THE GOVERNANCE VISION OF GHANA'S SECOND REPUBLIC
CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE FOR DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP
AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Keynote Address by
HON. DR MATTHEW OPOKU PREMPEH

London Hilton on Park Lane
22 Park Lane, London W1K 1BE, United Kingdom
Sunday, 9 August 2026

General Theme: Centre-Right Political Thought in Africa: The Ghanaian Experience

Protocol and Opening

His Excellency John Agyekum Kufuor, former President of the Republic of Ghana and Life Patron of the Busia Institute for Rural and Democratic Development; Kojo Oppong Nkrumah, The Honorable Member of Parliament- Ofoase-Ayirebi Chairman of the Board of the Institute and Chairman for this occasion; Members of the diplomatic community; distinguished scholars, policymakers and public servants; leaders and members of the Ghanaian diaspora; students; representatives of the media; ladies and gentlemen.

I am deeply honoured to join you for the first international edition of the Busia Institute Lecture. I thank the Board and the leadership of the Institute for asking me to reflect on a government that held office for little more than two years, and yet has never quite left Ghana's constitutional, intellectual and developmental conscience.

There could be no better city than London for this particular conversation. It was to this country that Kofi Abrefa Busia came as a young scholar, and it was in this country, at Oxford, that his mind was sharpened. It was here that he took refuge when the Preventive Detention Act made his own country unsafe for him. And it was here, on British soil, receiving medical treatment, that he learned in January 1972 that soldiers had seized the government he had been elected to lead. He would spend his final years here, in exile, a second time, and die at Oxford in 1978 before his country brought him home to Wenchi for burial. London holds a great deal of Busia's story: his formation, his refuge, and his exile. It is right that London should also hold this honest accounting of his purpose.

And let me be plain about one thing from the outset. Busia's years in Oxford shaped him, but they did not colonise him physically or mentally. He studied Western democracy closely but refused to

simply copy it. He examined African institutions on their own terms, defended the authority of our culture without ever surrendering the rights of the individual within it, and set himself the harder task: not to import parliamentary democracy, but to root it in the history, the social structure and the aspirations of Ghana.

My own standpoint should be clear, because you are entitled to know from what position a speaker speaks. I stand here as a beneficiary and a custodian of a living inheritance, not as a neutral observer of some vanished movement. That inheritance runs through Paa Grant, J. B. Danquah, Baffour Akoto, S.D Dombo, K.A Busia, John Agyekum Kufuor, Nana Addo Danquah Akuffo Addo, and through the many patriots whose labour carried it from the United Gold Coast Convention, to the United Party, to the Progress Party, and, in this Fourth Republic, to the New Patriotic Party.

But let me say this equally clearly: that loyalty buys Busia no exemption from me tonight. Belonging to a tradition does not oblige me to flatter it. It obliges me to tell the truth about it; to weigh the evidence in proportion, to place each decision inside the circumstances that produced it, and to separate the principles that guided this government from the errors that any government accumulates. Reverence that cannot survive honesty is sycophancy or hero-worship. It is nostalgia, and Busia the scholar would have had little patience for it.

So here is my argument this evening, stated clearly so that you may hold me to it. The Busia administration deserves to be remembered for three things above all: **1. For restoring constitutional government. 2. For the moral seriousness of its purpose, and 3. For the reach of its developmental imagination.** Its work was left unfinished; not because it failed, but because force cut its tenure short. Some of its economic choices were painful, because the economy it inherited allowed no painless ones. And some of its judgments still invite honest debate. But the purpose at the centre of this government was never the accumulation of power. It was something rarer, and harder: a democratic welfare society, in which freedom, responsibility and human dignity hold one another up.

The Second Republic as Constitutional Restoration

The Second Republic was inaugurated on the first of October, 1969, after more than three years of military rule. And the Constitution it brought into being did something deliberate. It restored elected civilian government. It revived Parliament. It protected fundamental rights. It recognised the authority of the courts. And it placed the executive: the Prime Minister himself, under a legislature to which he had to answer. It scattered power on purpose, because Ghana had already learned, at a terrible price, what happens when power is gathered into a single pair of hands.

Consider what Busia accepted at that inauguration. He took an oath under a constitution whose governing philosophy was restraint upon himself. He stood before the nation and acknowledged that all who govern are fallible, himself included, and he bound his own administration to

institutions built to check the very power he had just won. That is not the language of a reluctant democrat tolerating the forms of a constitution he would rather ignore. It is the language of a man whose years in opposition, and whose years in exile, had taught him in his own body that power must kneel to law. He stated the principle with characteristic candour:

“We are conscious of our fallibility as human beings, and we recognise the need to establish and develop institutions which help to tame the unbridled exercise of power.”

And this deserves more than a passing nod, because it is easily said and rarely done. The Progress Party held a commanding majority in Parliament. A commanding majority is precisely the circumstance in which governments are tempted to help themselves. Busia’s did not. It did not hijack Parliament. It did not pocket the courts. It did not silence the opposition. It did not turn the Prime Minister into a president-for-life. Citizens criticised the government openly. Litigants took the government to court. The opposition opposed. The newspapers argued back. I dwell on this because constitutionalism is not tested by whether a government is loved, or whether it escapes disagreement. It is tested by one thing only: whether disagreement is allowed to take institutional form; whether you can fight the government in Parliament, in the courts, and in print, rather than only in the streets or in the barracks. Under Busia, you could. Busia expressed that democratic test with admirable economy when he said;

“There can be no true democracy where there is no free expression of opinion in public affairs or criticism of the ruling body.”

So the significance of the Second Republic cannot be measured by the calendar. Twenty-seven months is not long. But in those months, authority flowed from the consent of the governed, the government accepted the limits of the law, and the state was developed as a public trust rather than owned as a private estate. That is a real and rare African example of constitutional government; not a perfect one, but a genuine one. And this is why the events of the thirteenth of January, 1972, must be named for what they were. That coup did not repair the constitutional order. It shattered it. It did not correct a democracy. It interrupted one.

Which brings me to an error so common in the way African political history is written that we have half stopped noticing it: the habit of treating a coup as though it were a verdict; as though the mere fact that a government was overthrown proves it deserved to be. Let me put the counter-argument as bluntly as I can. Military success is not moral vindication. That soldiers were able to suspend the Constitution tells us something about the soldiers' guns. It tells us nothing whatsoever about the justice of their cause, and nothing about the worth of the principles they trampled on their way in. A government must be judged by what it did in office; not by the fact that armed men were able to end it.

Busia: The Scholar Who Accepted the Burden of Government

Few men have entered the government of any nation as thoroughly prepared to think about power as Kofi Abrefa Busia. Before he ever held office, he had been a teacher, an administrator, a social anthropologist, a university scholar, the foremost student of Ghana's own chieftaincy, the leader of the parliamentary opposition, and an internationally respected advocate for democracy. And running through all of his published work is a single, patient preoccupation: the relationship between authority and consent, between tradition and change, between education and citizenship, between freedom and the obligations we owe one another.

That scholarship was not decoration. It disciplined the way he saw the state. Busia understood something that governments in a hurry always forget: that a nation is not merely its ministries and its statutes and its official commands. A Nation is also its families. Its communities. Its chiefs and its shrines and its churches and its mosques. Its trades, its guilds, its associations, its inherited ways of making meaning. The task of government, as Busia saw it, was to coordinate these living forces of society, never to crush them. The modern state needs authority, yes. But a society needs room to breathe. A wise government knows the difference.

And here you find one of the most valuable instincts of the UP tradition, the instinct that still distinguishes it today. It refuses two opposite temptations at once. It rejects the all-devouring state that swallows every institution beneath it. And it equally rejects the cold neglect that abandons people to fortune and calls it freedom. It holds instead to a harder, more human middle: the dignity of the individual, the creative energy of enterprise, the binding value of community, and the duty of government being to build the conditions in which a person's freedom actually amounts to something.

So understand why this scholar walked into the arena of politics at all. Busia did not enter politics because his ideas had failed and he had nowhere else to go. He entered politics because his ideas had succeeded, because his study had convinced him that an idea which never takes institutional form can never actually improve a single human life. He was that rare and difficult thing: a scholar dragged into government by the logic of his own conclusions. A thinker who could not, in conscience, remain only a thinker. In a letter written in 1939 he observed:

“Knowledge is useless unless it makes us better servants of humanity.”

His public career was a sustained attempt to honour that conviction.

The Democratic Welfare Society and the Dignity of the Person

At the moral centre of this administration sat an idea contained in a single phrase: **the democratic welfare society**. And that phrase deliberately marries two commitments that our politics is forever trying to divorce. Democracy, that power must rise from consent, stay bound by law, and honour the freedom of the citizen. Welfare, the frank recognition that freedom on paper means very little to a person with no school for their child, no clinic for their mother, no clean water in their village,

and no honest work for their hands. Liberty without opportunity, Busia understood, is a promise made only to those who are already comfortable.

His inaugural address made the choice unmistakable. It put the human being, not the pride of the state, not the glory of the government, at the centre of every calculation. Roads, electricity, water, hospitals, housing, higher productivity: none of these mattered to Busia as monuments. They mattered only for what they did to the lived conditions of ordinary people. And he distilled the whole philosophy of his government into one sentence that I would ask you to carry out of this hall tonight:

“Our goal,” he said, “is to enable every man and woman in our country to live a life of dignity in freedom.”

I would put that sentence among the clearest statements of humane, centre-right thought produced anywhere in postcolonial Africa. Hear what it assumes. The citizen is not an instrument of the state; the state is an instrument for enlarging the citizen. And welfare, in this understanding, is not a hammock; not permanent dependency dressed up as compassion. It is a ladder. It widens opportunity precisely so that individuals, families and whole communities can stand, in time, on their own productive strength, and need the state less, not more.

This is a philosophy that walks a deliberate line between two failures. On one side, the cold economy that abandons the weak to misfortunes they did nothing to cause, and calls that freedom. On the other, the suffocating state that takes every decision, shoulders every responsibility, and slowly kills the very initiative on which a nation's prosperity depends, and calls that compassion. Busia refused both. For him, freedom and responsibility were never enemies to be balanced. They were partners, and each was incomplete without the other.

Rural Development as Equal Citizenship

Nowhere did this human-centred philosophy show itself more plainly than in rural development. Busia's government grasped a truth that Ghana had been polite enough to ignore for too long: that our independence was not yet complete, could not be called complete, so long as the accident of where a Ghanaian happened to be born decided whether they would have a road, clean water, electricity, a clinic, a market, a school, or any presence of the state at all.

And mark the framing, because it matters. The rural programme was never conceived as charity; as a gift graciously sent from Accra out to grateful, passive villages. It was an argument about equal citizenship. The countryside grew the food. It grew the cocoa and felled the timber that earned the foreign exchange the whole economy ran on. It held together the social fabric, and it fed the cities their people. Rural Ghanaians were not supplicants. They were creditors, owed a fairer return, in infrastructure and services and opportunity, on everything they had already contributed to the nation.

And this was not merely spoken; it was legislated. Parliament passed the Rural Development Fund Act of 1970, giving the mobilisation of resources for the countryside a statutory backbone rather than leaving it to ministerial goodwill. The government wove community self-help into formal development planning and pressed forward on water, health posts, feeder roads, rural electrification, schools and community facilities. And this is not a Party claim; peer-reviewed historical scholarship confirms that Busia made rural development the flagship of his government and turned the nation's attention, at last, toward the countryside it had neglected. Busia described the programme in practical terms:

“We plan to provide good drinking water to a greater number of towns and villages, provide health and sanitary facilities, extend rural electrification, and expand education facilities, all in a determined effort to bridge the gap between the rural and urban areas and to correct the imbalances in regional development.”

Now, let me be honest, because our tradition can afford honesty. Rural development did not begin in 1969, and no serious historian would let me say that it did. What changed under Busia was not the invention of the idea but its ***promotion***; its elevation in priority, in scale, in the emphasis of the governing mind. Busia took the rural citizen from the footnotes of policy and moved them into the centre of the national argument. And even in a tenure too brief to finish the work, that shift of emphasis mattered profoundly.

Permit me here to step out from behind the historian's desk for a moment, because on this subject I am not only a reader of the record. I have sat in the seat where these choices are actually made. More than half a century after Busia strung electricity to rural Ghana on teak poles and had teak plantations for this purpose, because imported steel was too expensive to reach that far, I served as this Republic's Minister for Energy, and I will tell you something the intervening fifty years have not changed as much as we would like to believe. The distance to the last village is still the distance. The cost of the final mile still resists the market. The gap between what the state can promise a citizen in Accra and what it can deliver to a citizen three hours past the regional capital has narrowed, but it has not closed. I say this not to draw attention to my own work, but to bear witness to his: what Busia began in the countryside is not a finished project. It is an inheritance still being paid down, and I know that firsthand, because paying it down was part of my own charge.

The administration also understood its own limits; that the treasury alone could not remake every locality overnight. So it built partnership: between the state, local authorities, the traditional leaders, and the communities themselves. And it understood what community self-help was, and was not. It was not a trick for the government to excuse its own absence. It was the opposite; a method of joining public resources to local initiative, so that people had a real hand in building and maintaining the very facilities they had asked for.

Future generations should study this and admire it, because Busia's government arrived, by conviction, at a principle the whole development world would only fully embrace decades later: that policy is strongest when people are treated not as passive beneficiaries of what is done to them, but as participants; with knowledge, with agency, and with responsibility, in what is done with them.

Local Administration, Chieftaincy and Social Pluralism

Busia's concern for rural life led naturally into a concern for how the country is actually governed below the level of the capital. The Local Administration Act of 1971 sought to give government beneath the national tier a coherent legal footing. Behind it lay a settled conviction: that authority should not sit forever hoarded in Accra while the institutions closest to people's daily lives were left with responsibility but no power to exercise it.

And the same deep respect for Ghana's own social foundations produced the Chieftaincy Act of 1971. Here Busia the scholar and Busia the Prime Minister became one man. His life's academic work had taught him what impatient modernisers never learn; that traditional authority cannot simply be wished away by a postcolonial state that finds it inconvenient. Chieftaincy endured because it did real work: in land, in identity, in customary law, in mediation, in cultural continuity, in the mobilisation of whole communities. The task, then, was not to abolish it and not to abuse it; not to turn our chiefs into partisan foot-soldiers, and not to treat our own institutions as embarrassments to be hidden from visitors. The task was to recognise chieftaincy, and to give it an honoured and regulated place within the constitutional order. He joined cultural inheritance to institutional modernity: I quote:

“Whatever of value that we can contribute to the cultures of the world must stem from our own traditions and achievements.”

On Chieftaincy, he maintained,

“is an institution which can fit into the future; it gives us a special identification as a people and we must cherish it.”

This was a mature and sophisticated idea of how you build a nation. National unity, Busia understood, does not require cultural erasure. You do not have to flatten a people to unite them. Loyalty to family, to hometown, to one's own community can be enlarged into loyalty to the nation, but only on one condition: that every citizen is assured of equality before the law and fairness in the institutions that serve them. The state's task in a plural society is a delicate one: **to stop inherited identity from ever becoming a weapon of exclusion, while preserving everything in that identity that gives people belonging, meaning and strength.**

And that lesson has not aged a single day. Ghana is not at its strongest when we pretend our differences do not exist. **Ghana is at its strongest when our differences are held together by equal citizenship, by a shared loyalty to the Constitution, and by ordinary mutual respect.**

Education, Knowledge and the Architecture of Opportunity

If you want proof of what education can do to a single human life, you need look no further than the life of Kofi Abrefa Busia himself; a boy from Wenchi who rose, by the ladder of learning, to Oxford, to a professor's chair, and to the office of Prime Minister. He knew what education was worth because he had lived its full return. And so he never made the mistake of confusing education with the mere collection of certificates. To Busia, education was the formation of judgement, of skill, of character, and of civic responsibility; the making of a whole citizen, not merely a qualified one. His book, *Purposeful Education for Africa*, argued that our education must answer to the real needs and conditions of African societies, rather than reproduce inherited colonial forms without ever pausing to ask what they were for. He captured the task with unusual clarity:

“Education must pass on the heritage of the past, cope with the present, and prepare for the future.”

Now, his government governed education under a hard fiscal ceiling and against fast-rising demand; more young people wanting more schooling than the treasury could simply pay for outright. And within that constraint, the Second Republic tried to do a responsible thing: to keep the door of opportunity open while making the financing of that opportunity something the nation could actually sustain year after year. That is the origin of the Students' Loans Scheme Act of 1971; a statutory mechanism to support students through higher education. Whatever one thinks of its design, that scheme is itself the evidence: this was not a government trying to lock the poor out of the university. It was a government searching for a durable way to share the cost of widening the gates.

And let me speak here with a particular directness, because this is ground I know. Reasonable people may argue, then and now, about how student financing should be designed; I have spent no small part of my own public life inside exactly that argument. But what cannot be honestly alleged, against the weight of all the evidence, is that Busia was an enemy of education. His biography refutes it. His scholarship refutes it. His legislation refutes it. The real question his government wrestled with is the same question every education minister since has wrestled with; the one I have wrestled with myself: how does a state with limited means extend opportunity to more of its children without making promises the economy cannot keep? That is not hostility to education. That is the daily burden of trying to fund it honestly. 30years later, President John Agyekum Kufuor introduced the Free Compulsory Universal Education (FCUBE): 50years after, President Nana Addo Danquah Akuffo Addo gave us Free Senior High School policy.

Consider, too, a quieter law that tells you a great deal about the mind of this government: the Ghana Library Authority Act of 1970, which gave our public library system a firmer statutory foundation. A library is not a dramatic thing. No one cuts a ribbon on a reading room and makes the evening news. But a government that troubles itself to strengthen libraries is a government that understands knowledge itself as a public good, and reading as a genuine instrument of national development. That instinct is worth more than it looks.

Because a state that builds schools but starves its libraries, neglects its teachers, ignores research, and lets the culture of inquiry wither; that state has built only half an education system, and the emptier half at that. Busia's whole intellectual inheritance stands as a reminder we still need: that real development demands minds trained to judge, every bit as much as hands trained to produce. A nation needs both, or it will find itself with neither for long.

Enterprise, Ghanaian Participation and Productive Freedom

At the heart of the Second Republic's economic thinking stood productive enterprise. And here the contrast with the ideology that had gone before it was sharp and deliberate. Busia's government did not regard the private sector as a suspect to be tolerated, grudgingly, in whatever corners the state had not yet occupied. It saw the farmer, the trader, the artisan, the industrialist, the professional as citizens; citizens whose energy and initiative could generate wealth, create employment, and lift families up the ladder of social mobility. Enterprise was not a threat to the nation. It was one of the engines of the nation.

But, and this is the balance that defines the whole tradition, the administration never confused a belief in enterprise with the abandonment of public responsibility. It understood that a free market does not build its own roads, write its own fair rules, train its own workforce, or open its own doors to those born outside the circle of capital. Government had duties: to provide the infrastructure, to hold the rules steady, to widen access to credit, to invest in human capability, and to ensure that Ghanaians could take a meaningful part in their own economy rather than watch it operate over their heads. A contemporaneous World Bank report records one concrete expression of exactly this: a Credit Guarantee Scheme for small borrowers, set up in December 1969, designed to coax lending toward Ghanaian entrepreneurs and sound projects that were viable in every way but one: they lacked the conventional collateral the banks demanded.

And in the reasoning behind that scheme lies one of the truest insights in the whole of development economics, which I will put as clearly as Busia's government understood it: talent is distributed widely; but collateral is not. Ability is scattered by God across every village and every income; the security a bank asks for is hoarded by the few who are already wealthy. A centre-right economic policy worthy of the name does not shrug at that gap and call it fate. It defends property, and it defends enterprise; and, at the very same time, it builds real bridges by which a capable citizen without inheritance can still reach finance, still acquire skills, still enter the market and compete. Freedom to trade means little to the man the banking system will not see.

It is in exactly this light, and no other, that the Ghanaian participation policies of this government must be read. Their purpose was to enlarge the economic space available to citizens who had too long been pushed to the margins of commerce in their own country. The aim was Ghanaian inclusion and national economic capability; not, whatever its critics would later claim, mere hostility toward lawful foreign enterprise. The goal was to bring Ghanaians in, not simply to shut others out. Busia stated the underlying principle plainly:

“We cannot be economically independent unless the economy of Ghana and the whole financial network is, to a large extent, in the hands of Ghanaians themselves.”

This emphasis on indigenous enterprise and private-sector-led wealth creation later found renewed expression under President John Agyekum Kufuor. In his inaugural address of 7 January 2001, Kufuor identified the private sector as the principal agency of wealth creation and expressed his desire to

“launch a golden age of business and enterprise in our country.”

His formulation was not a mechanical reproduction of Busia’s programme, but a contemporary restatement of the tradition’s enduring conviction that political freedom must be accompanied by productive opportunity, Ghanaian entrepreneurship and broad participation in the national economy.

The Aliens Compliance Order: Intention, Cost and Historical Proportion

I come now to the hardest part of this account, and I do not intend to walk around it. No honest address on the Second Republic can avoid the Aliens Compliance Order of 1969, and I will not try.

Let me not reach for soft words. Roughly half a million people; the great majority of them Nigerians, many of them long settled among us, some of them born on our soil; were compelled to leave this country, often at short notice, and often into real hardship. I will not stand in London, of all the cities in the world, and describe that in the gentle vocabulary of policy. It was a wound. It was a wound to the people who suffered it, and it was a wound to Ghana’s standing among her neighbours that took a generation to heal. Our tradition is strong enough to say so plainly, and it is diminished if it cannot.

Having said that first, because it must be said first, let me then ask you for something that honesty equally requires: proportion, and context. Ghana’s immigration law did not begin with Busia. The Aliens Act was passed in 1963, under the government before his, and it already regulated the entry, the residence, and the employment of non-citizens. The Compliance Order of 1969 sought to enforce documentation and residence requirements that had been law for six years but had never been consistently applied, and to widen economic opportunity for Ghanaians in sectors where they felt shut out of their own economy. The aim in itself, that a sovereign state may decide who

lawfully lives and works within its borders, is not a sinister aim. It is an ordinary responsibility of government, exercised by every nation represented in this room tonight, including the one that is hosting us.

So the distinction I would ask you to hold is this; and it is a distinction, not an excuse. The legitimate purpose of the policy is one thing. The manner of its execution was another. A lawful aim demanded time, demanded discretion, demanded a scrupulous regard for the dignity of every affected person; and in too many cases, those safeguards were not there, and people paid for their absence. To distinguish the aim from the execution is not to wave the hardship away. It is to locate the failure precisely where it belongs: not in the principle that Ghana may order its own borders, but in the way that principle was carried out.

And so the mature judgement is neither denunciation nor denial. We should study this order. We should remember its human cost honestly, as I have tried to tonight. And we should carry its hard lessons directly into how we govern migration in our own time; for these are not settled questions anywhere in the world today. But one episode, however painful, cannot be permitted to reach back and erase the constitutional philosophy, the rural-development programme, the educational vision, and the public-service ethic of an entire administration. A serious people holds both the wound and the whole record in view at once. That is what maturity asks of us.

Economic Difficulty and the Courage to Govern

The economic record of the Second Republic is usually told as a simple morality tale: that Busia inherited a healthy economy and then, through his own choices, inflicted hardship on the people. I want to state, with the evidence in hand, that this account does not survive contact with the facts.

Busia's government inherited an economy already in serious trouble: burdened with external debt, thin on reserves, dangerously dependent on the single crop of cocoa, squeezed by import pressures, and marked by a long decline in real income per person and in domestic savings. This was not my Party's characterisation; it was the World Bank's. Its analysis from the period traced Ghana's debt burden back to strategies pursued since independence, and described severe constraints on growth, on imports, on the very ability to service what the country already owed. These conditions were not manufactured in the twenty-seven months Busia held office. He was handed them.

Then the world made it worse. Cocoa prices collapsed in the late 1960s, and Ghana's external position, resting on that one crop, collapsed with them. Later IMF historical analysis reached a clear conclusion: it was this deterioration in the terms of trade that forced the devaluation of the cedi in December 1971. Forced. The decision was severe, and it was politically fatal, but it did not spring from any indifference to the suffering of ordinary people. It sprang from an unforgiving arithmetic: the widening gap between what the currency was officially declared to be worth, and what the country could actually earn to back that value. A currency is a promise. Busia's government was being asked to keep a promise the economy could no longer fund.

And let me not pretend that devaluation is painless, or that the people who suffer it should be grateful for the economics lecture. Citizens do not experience a devaluation as a line in a budget. They experience it in the price of what they buy, the value of what they earn, the savings they had put by, and their confidence in tomorrow. The hardship was real. The government put compensating measures in place: adjustments to cocoa producer prices, to wages, to fiscal charges, and those measures could not remove the immediate pain, but they tell you something about intent: this was not conceived as a punishment of the ordinary Ghanaian. It was an attempt to reorganise an economy whose inherited obligations had simply outrun its productive means.

Now I must be careful here, because I am about to say something that could be misheard, and I do not wish to be misheard. The men who overthrew this government seized upon that public hardship and dressed it up as a justification for their coup. And their very first economic act was to reverse the devaluation, and it was popular, for a season. But reversing a hard truth by military decree does not make it stop being true. Ghana's structural problems did not vanish because soldiers wished them away. They deepened. What followed that coup was not relief; it was a long descent: into controls, into shortages, into inflation, into currency collapses far more brutal than the one Busia had been condemned for. The verdict of the decade was not kind to the men who claimed to be rescuing the people from Busia's economics. It was the harshest possible vindication of him.

And this is where I must pause, and speak with great care, and with the deepest respect; because the truth of what I am arguing is not confined to the history books. It is sitting in this room.

Mr. Chairman, His Excellency will, I hope, forgive me for speaking of him in his presence. But the record is the record, and this audience knows it as well as I do. Thirty years after Busia was punished for telling Ghana the truth about its currency, another government of this same tradition inherited a cedi in free fall and an inflation rate above forty per cent: an economy, in plain terms, that was broke. And that government, too, chose the hard and unpopular path over the comfortable delay. We gave it the name HIPC. It was mocked, and it was resisted, and it was right. Within a single year, inflation was halved, and the currency was steadied, and a decade later no honest person disputes that the courage of that decision laid the foundation for the recovery that followed.

I draw the parallel deliberately, and I draw it with admiration, because it makes Busia's point far better than I ever could from a lectern. His Excellency President Kufuor learned in his own presidency what Busia had learned in his: that being economically right and being immediately popular are almost never the same thing on the same morning. But the verdict of a decade is a wiser and a kinder judge than the verdict of a news cycle. Busia was denied that decade by force. President Kufuor was granted it by the ballot, and he used it to prove the very principle for which Busia was overthrown. Two men of one tradition, one lesson, thirty years apart. That is not a coincidence of history. That is the continuity of a conviction.

So let me offer a definition, and then move on. Statesmanship is not the art of choosing only the popular thing. It is the moral courage to look the nation in the eye, explain a hard necessity, share

out the sacrifice as fairly as you can, and then stand and take responsibility for it. By that measure, the only measure that ultimately matters, the economic ordeal of the Second Republic should be studied not merely as the cause of its downfall, but as evidence of the burden willingly carried by a civilian government that tried to reform an economy under conditions that would have broken most others.

The Sallah Case and the Proper Measure of Constitutional Fidelity

The Sallah case, and Busia's broadcast that followed it, are the exhibits most often produced against this government's constitutional good name. His blunt words, that no court could compel the government to employ, or to re-employ, any person, are quoted again and again. But they are almost always quoted with the actual legal posture of the case stripped away, and that omission does real violence to the truth.

So let us be precise, because precision is the friend of fairness here. The Supreme Court issued a declaration concerning Mr Sallah's office. It did not issue an order compelling his reinstatement. That distinction is not a lawyer's quibble; it is the whole heart of the matter. Later legal scholarship has cautioned, rightly, against portraying Busia's broadcast as the defiance of an enforcement order; because the Court had made no such order to defy. What was genuinely in dispute was a hard and legitimate constitutional question: what is the legal effect of a judicial declaration, and where exactly runs the boundary between the judgement of the courts and the executive's own responsibility for public employment?

And notice what did not happen. The courts did not close. They went on sitting. They went on hearing cases brought against the government. They went on building the law of Ghana. The very heat of the Sallah dispute is itself the proof of constitutional life; you do not get a great public argument about the powers of the courts in a country where the courts have been silenced. That argument could only happen because the institutions were alive.

Still, the episode leaves a lesson worth taking, and I will not soften it: disagreement with a court, when it comes from those who hold power, must always be expressed in a way that protects, rather than corrodes, public confidence in the courts themselves. That is a standard every leader in a constitutional order must hold, ours included, in every era. But the fair historical conclusion stands: the Busia administration remained a constitutionally ordered government, even in the moment when a brand-new Constitution threw up genuinely difficult questions about the balance between executive and judicial power.

Foreign Policy: Independence of Judgment

Busia carried the same disciplined independence of mind into Ghana's dealings with the world. At the inauguration of the Second Republic, he refused to kneel to either bloc in the Cold War, neither East nor West, and asserted Ghana's right to weigh each international question on its own merits,

by its own interests and its own principles. He placed Ghana's African neighbours at the very centre of our diplomacy, while still seeking workable relations clear across the ideological divides of a divided age.

His most controversial foreign-policy position, the proposal of dialogue with apartheid South Africa, belonged to that same habit of judging for himself rather than following the crowd. And here he has been badly misrepresented, so let me be exact about what he did and did not say. Busia did not defend apartheid. He did not propose to accommodate it, or to make peace with racial tyranny. His stated object was the elimination of that system, and he regarded dialogue as one additional tool, to be used alongside pressure, and alongside support for those who were resisting oppression from within. He stated the desired end without ambiguity:

“The aim of my Government is this: We would like to see in South Africa a multiracial society in which every citizen, whatever his origin, race, colour or creed, enjoys the same human dignity, rights, privileges, and opportunities as every other citizen.”

The parliamentary record of the time confirms it. One may judge the proposal mistaken; many did, and many still do. But its purpose was peace with justice, never surrender to injustice.

And the deeper principle beneath it has lost none of its force: a sovereign African state must never allow international fashion, or the rivalry of great powers, or the sheer weight of external pressure, to do its thinking for it. Our friendships with other nations must serve our peace, our development, our trade, our knowledge, and the cause of African cooperation. They must never harden into dependency. Busia understood, long before it was fashionable to say so, that the first thing a free country must own is its own judgement.

Public Service, Competence and Moral Authority

For Busia, politics was never a career. It was an avenue of service, and he meant that literally, not as a pleasant thing to say at a podium. It carried hard obligations: to treat public power as a trust held on behalf of others, to treat public money as the nation's resource and never one's own, and to treat public institutions as inheritances far larger, and far older, than the brief careers of those temporarily placed in charge of them.

His government held professional administration in genuine regard. Ministers gave political direction, that is their proper role, but the permanent public service carried the technical knowledge, the institutional memory, the continuity that outlasts any single government. And Busia understood the healthy balance between the two, which is neither of the two easy corruptions. It is not rule by an unaccountable bureaucracy. And it is not the seizure of the public service as partisan property, to be handed out as spoils. It is something harder to sustain than either: democratic leadership, informed by competence, and disciplined by law.

A political tradition founded on freedom is not kept alive by sentiment. It is kept alive by principled debate, by disciplined organisation, by competent leadership, and by public conduct worthy of the names it invokes. Its good name is not a possession it inherits once and keeps forever. Its good name is re-earned, or squandered, by the character and the judgement and the service of every generation entrusted to act in its name.

And so, for those of us who stand in the New Patriotic Party, this inheritance is two things at once, and we must be honest that it is both. It is a source of confidence – yes. But it is also a standard that judges us. It was built by people who paid for it: through sacrifice, through the hard years of opposition, through scholarship, through patient organisation, through public duty discharged when it was costly. And our task is not to bask in what they built. It is to carry their constitutional principles forward into the real policy choices of our own time: with discipline, with seriousness, and with a national rather than a narrow outlook.

The Coup and the Unfinished Work of the Second Republic

On the thirteenth of January, 1972, Ghana's constitutional experiment was ended; not by the voters, not by Parliament, not by any lawful process, but by force. Parliament was dissolved. The Constitution was suspended. The elected government was removed at gunpoint. And with it went the single thing every democracy depends upon: the chance to be corrected without being destroyed. The Second Republic was denied the ordinary democratic opportunity to fix its own errors, to win back public trust, to finish what it had started, and above all to submit its record, in the end, to the judgement of the people who alone had the right to pass it.

That fact must sit at the very centre of any honest verdict. A democracy is built to be corrected, through argument, through Parliament, through the courts, through elections, through the lawful handover of power from one government to the next. A coup does something entirely different, and something dishonest. It freezes a government at the precise moment of its greatest difficulty, and then it hands the pen to the very men who overthrew it, and lets them write the first draft of history's verdict. Let us be clear about what did and did not happen here. The Busia administration was not defeated at an election. It was prevented from ever reaching one.

And its work was left visibly, painfully unfinished; rural transformation still under way, local administration only beginning, Ghanaian enterprise still finding its feet, educational opportunity not yet secured, and the fragile habits of parliamentary democracy not yet set. Some of those measures would surely have needed revision; some would have matured into real institutions with time. We will never know which, because none was allowed the years that institutional results require. That is the true cost of a coup: not merely the government it removes, but the futures it forecloses.

Let me give you the single clearest example of that theft; one that is rarely told, and that ought to be told in this hall tonight. Busia's government drew up plans for a national service scheme, to

send Ghana's educated young people out to serve the development of their own country. It was overthrown before it could bring that plan to life. And here is the fact that history has quietly swallowed: the National Service Scheme that this nation knows today, the one that has since sent generation after generation of our graduates into the classrooms and the clinics and the district offices of Ghana, was enacted in 1973 by the very military government that toppled him, and given its full legal architecture only in 1980. Think carefully about what that means. An idea Busia conceived, but was not permitted to finish, was carried to completion by the very people who had removed him, and it endures, serving Ghana to this day. If you want proof that ideas outlive the tenures of the men who hold them, and even outlive their enemies, there it is. That is what "unfinished work" truly means. The work did not die with the government. It waited.

For the coup did not merely remove a Prime Minister. It broke the slow, patient formation of constitutional habit; the muscle a democracy only builds through uninterrupted practice. Ghana was flung back into a long, punishing cycle of military and unstable government that consumed the better part of two decades. And when we finally emerged, when the Fourth Republic was founded in 1993, notice where the nation returned to. It returned to the very principles Busia and his tradition had argued for all along: to elections, to the supremacy of the Constitution, to the authority of the courts, to political pluralism, to the peaceful handover of power.

That return is the whole reason the Second Republic must never be filed away as a failed detour, a curiosity between coups. It is nothing of the kind. It is part of the direct constitutional ancestry of the Ghana we live in today. We are, in a real sense, the republic Busia was trying to build.

What the Second Republic Offers Ghana Today

So what should we, democratic leaders, and citizens of a democracy, actually take from this administration? Let me not give you a list of ten abstractions to forget by morning. Let me give you the handful of convictions that matter, and say them directly.

1. That power must be bound by law even when, especially when, it rests in the hands of people we trust. For constitutional restraint is no insult to a good leader. It is the very thing that protects the citizen from the bad one, and protects the good one from himself.
2. That development is only ever worth what it does for a human being. Growth, roads, reforms, institutions, these earn their moral value in one currency only: whether they enlarge the knowledge, the security, the health, and the dignity of an actual person. And that the rural citizen is not a lesser claimant on that promise, but an equal one, for the countryside is not the charity case of the nation; it is one of its foundations.
3. That enterprise and social responsibility are not rivals but partners, that Ghana needs citizens free to create, to own, and to prosper, and at the very same time needs public institutions strong enough to widen the door of opportunity and to catch those whom hardship would otherwise crush.

4. That our differences, of tribe, of tradition, of faith, need not divide us, so long as they are held together by equal citizenship and a shared loyalty to the law. That hard economic truths must be told honestly and early, and their burdens shared fairly, rather than hidden until the system breaks.
5. And a political party earns its place not by winning offices, but by becoming an institution of memory, of ideas, and of honest leadership, and that opposition, too, is a form of patriotism, when it tells the truth and offers a real alternative, rather than merely obstructing.
6. Above all this: that history does not finally judge us by the power we accumulate, but by the standards we refuse to abandon under pressure. The truest fidelity to Paa Grant, Danquah, Akoto, Dombo, Busia, Kufuor and Nana Addo is not to carve their names more deeply into marble. It is to translate the principles behind those names into how we actually govern, and how we actually conduct ourselves, today.

The Responsibility of the Diaspora

And to the Ghanaians of the United Kingdom gathered in this room, the Busia legacy carries a particular invitation addressed directly to you. Understand first that you are not outside the national project. You never were. You are a constituency of it; a reservoir of knowledge, of investment, of professional standards, of cultural confidence, and of public responsibility that Ghana needs and too rarely knows how to call upon.

What Ghana lacks is not your goodwill; it is the channels for it. We need far better structured ways for our citizens abroad to strengthen our universities, our hospitals, our technology, our enterprise, our archives, our public policy, and the development of our home communities. And we need something else from you that is less comfortable to ask for: that you insist upon evidence, that you refuse the political misinformation that travels so easily across these distances, and that you decline to import the poison of partisan intolerance into the Ghanaian communities you build here.

Many of you have spent your working lives inside mature institutions, and so you know a truth that rarely makes a speech: that national progress rests, far more than we admit, on the unglamorous habits that no one applauds; the keeping of proper records, the maintenance of what we build, punctuality, professional ethics, predictable rules, and the patient, unrewarded enforcement of standards. These are not small things. These are transferable forms of developmental knowledge, and Ghana needs them carried home as surely as it needs remittances.

So understand what the Busia Institute has really done by convening this lecture in London. This is not mere commemoration. It has placed Ghanaian political thought where it belongs, in an international intellectual setting, unashamed, and it has asked the diaspora to become not spectators of a tradition, but participants in its renewal.

Conclusion: A Heritage Worthy of Informed Admiration

Ladies and gentlemen, let me bring us back to where we began, and let me be brief, because the argument is now made.

The Second Republic should never be remembered as a mere entry in a chronology, a government inaugurated in October 1969 and disposed of in January 1972. It should be remembered for what it actually attempted: to rebuild constitutional government after the concentration of power; to place institutions above personality; to marry freedom to social responsibility; to make the rural citizen an equal citizen; and to measure every public act against a single standard, the dignity of the human person.

It inherited an economy already breaking under debts and dependence accumulated over many years. Its remedies caused real hardship. Its judgements drew real controversy. Its execution was, at times, imperfect. But, and hold both halves of this sentence together, for the whole of my argument tonight lives in the space between them, none of that establishes bad faith. All of it reveals the brutal conditions under which a young democracy was trying, honestly, to govern well.

Kofi Abrefa Busia deserves our admiration, not because he never erred; he did, but because the central direction of his entire public life was principled. He believed power must be restrained. He believed politics was service. He believed education should build the human being. He believed tradition and citizenship could live together. He believed enterprise should widen opportunity rather than hoard it. And he believed, above all, that the point of development was to let every Ghanaian, every single one, live a life of dignity in freedom.

The UP tradition has earned its enduring place in Ghana's constitutional history honestly, through its defence of liberty, of pluralism, of parliamentary government, of private initiative, of social responsibility, and of the dignity of the individual. But an inheritance is not a monument to be dusted. Its obligation to us is not that we preserve it in memory. Its obligation is that we renew it; in our policy, in our conduct, in our service.

That is the charge I leave with this room. We must study our history honestly enough to name its wounds. We must defend its good name responsibly enough to deserve it. And we must apply its principles intelligently enough to meet the conditions of our own time, for fidelity has never required the denial of difficulty. It requires only confidence in the enduring principles by which difficulty is understood and, in the end, overcome.

A brief tenure did not make this republic small. The soldiers who suspended the Constitution could not kill the constitutional idea. The interruption of its programmes could not erase its devotion to the countryside. And its faith in the dignity of the ordinary human being still has the power to instruct governments standing very far from 1969, including, if we are honest and if we are worthy, our own.

Let us then ensure that the generations coming after us meet this administration neither through caricature nor through nostalgia, but through evidence, through proportion, and through gratitude. Let them find a government that accepted office at a hard hour, that tried to reconcile freedom with welfare, that chose the neglected countryside as a field of national justice, and that looked hard economic truth in the face without ever abandoning the constitutional order.

That is a heritage worthy of informed admiration. It is a legacy worthy of preservation. And it is now the continuing responsibility of the New Patriotic Party, and of every one of us who claims to stand within the UP tradition.

May this lecture deepen our understanding, strengthen our fidelity to constitutional government, and renew our commitment to a Ghana governed by law, developed through enterprise and social responsibility, and united around the dignity of all its people.

Thank you.