

**OPENING ADDRESS BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY JOHN DRAMANI MAHAMA**

**PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA**

**AT THE**

**THIRD AFRICAN UNION REFLECTION FORUM ON  
UNCONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES OF GOVERNMENT: YOUTH  
INCLUSIVITY FOR AFRICA'S STABILITY**

**3<sup>RD</sup> JULY, 2026, ACCRA, GHANA**

**Honourable Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the  
Republic of Ghana;**

**Your Excellency, Ambassador Rebecca Amuge Otengo, Chairperson of the  
African Union Peace and Security Council for the month of July 2026;**

**Your Excellency, Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, Commissioner for Political  
Affairs, Peace and Security of the African Union Commission;**

**Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and Permanent Representatives of the Peace and Security Council;**

**Members of the Diplomatic Corps;**

**Officials of the African Union, Regional Economic Communities, and Regional Mechanisms;**

**Distinguished Youth Leaders;**

**Representatives of Civil Society, Academia, and Think Tanks;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I would like to begin by welcoming you all to the city of Accra for the Third African Union Reflection Forum on Unconstitutional Changes of Government in Africa.

Accra is no stranger to this vital continental conversation. In March 2022, the city hosted the inaugural Reflection Forum on Unconstitutional Changes of Government, which culminated in the adoption of the landmark Accra Declaration. The Accra Declaration crystallised our collective position on and orientation towards addressing the scourge of unconstitutional changes of government. It committed us to comprehensively address the underlying drivers of unconstitutional changes,

particularly governance deficits and the manipulation of democratic processes by incumbent governments. The Declaration was subsequently endorsed by the 16<sup>th</sup> Extraordinary Summit of the Assembly in Malabo in May 2022.

Today, as we gather once again in Accra, we must not only to revisit our past commitments, but we should also take stock of the implementation of our commitment, assess progress and renew our resolve.

### **Distinguished Participants,**

The African Union's position on unconstitutional changes of government is clear and unequivocal. Article 4(p) of the Constitutive Act of the Union condemns and rejects such changes to the political leadership of our respective Member States. The Lomé Declaration of July 2000 provides the framework for our response, defining an unconstitutional change of government to include military *coups d'état* against democratically elected governments, intervention by mercenaries, and other situations that subvert the constitutional order of the State.

The African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance reinforces these principles. The Ezulwini Framework of 2009 enhanced our implementation measures, and the Malabo Declaration on Terrorism and Unconstitutional Changes of Government of 2022 further strengthened our collective resolve.

At the 39<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session, a few months ago, the Heads of State and Government, reaffirmed the Union's unwavering commitment to the democratic order and zero tolerance of unconstitutional changes of government. They reiterated a strong determination to silence the guns in Africa and expressed deep concern about the persistence of conflicts, terrorism, violent extremism, unconstitutional changes of government, and humanitarian crises across our continent.

These commitments that the leaders of Africa have taken are more than mere words on paper. They embody our collective aspiration for a continent governed by the rule of law, where power changes hands in accordance with the will of the people at the ballot box, not by the barrel of a gun.

**Excellencies,**

When we gathered in Accra in March 2022 for the 1<sup>st</sup> Forum, four Member States of our Union had been suspended for unconstitutional changes of government. By March 2024, that number had risen to six. As we meet today, in July 2026, we must ask ourselves honestly whether we have made sufficient progress.

For me, the answer is a mixed one.

We have seen successful transitions in some countries. Gabon and Guinea have restored constitutional order and have been welcomed back into our Union. These developments are encouraging signs that our collective support, at the

political, diplomatic, and economic levels, can yield positive results. They show that the path back to constitutional legitimacy, though demanding, is achievable.

Yet we cannot ignore the other reality. The resurgence of unconstitutional changes of government remains one of the most serious threats to peace, security, and stability in Africa. In 2025 alone, the continent witnessed two successful military coups and one failed attempt. Madagascar was suspended following an unconstitutional change of power. Guinea-Bissau experienced a military coup in November 2025, and Benin faced an attempted military coup in December 2025.

Several African countries remain suspended from our Union because of unconstitutional changes of government. This is not a statistic we can take pride in. Each suspension represents a failure, a failure of governance, of institutions, and of our collective preventive mechanisms.

### **Distinguished Participants,**

We must confront an uncomfortable truth. The phenomenon of unconstitutional changes of government is not merely about military coups. It encompasses a broader spectrum of democratic backsliding, manipulation of electoral processes by incumbents, tampering with constitutional provisions and term limits, and the gradual erosion of democratic norms and institutions. These

‘constitutional coups’, often under the guise of legality, are equally dangerous and subversive of our democratic values and governance.

The Accra Declaration rightly calls on Member States to respect their Constitutions, particularly by observing presidential term limits, and to organise free, fair, transparent, and credible elections in accordance with national laws and international norms. These principles must guide us all.

**Excellencies,**

If we are to effectively combat unconstitutional changes of government, we must address their root causes. Coups and unconstitutional power grabs do not occur in a vacuum. They are symptoms of deeper ailments in governance.

The African Union Peace and Security Council has identified governance deficiencies as a primary driver. When institutions are weak, the rule of law is undermined, corruption goes unchecked, citizens are excluded from political participation, and leadership fails to deliver on the promise of development, these conditions create fertile ground for unconstitutional interventions.

As we are all aware, my brother, H.E. President Ramaphosa, in his report to the Peace and Security Council in February this year, observed that unconstitutional changes of government reverse democratic gains and development across our continent. He is absolutely right. Each coup not only interrupts democratic

governance but also sets back economic development, scares away investments, and destabilises entire regions.

We must therefore adopt a comprehensive approach. Our response cannot be limited to sanctions and suspensions after the fact. We must strengthen foresight capacities and preventive mechanisms. We must invest in resilient democratic institutions. And we must promote inclusive governance that delivers benefits for all citizens, not just the privileged few. We must ensure that our constitutions are respected and that term limits are honoured. We must create conditions in which the peoples' will is expressed freely and fairly at the ballot box and election outcomes are respected by all.

### **Distinguished Participants,**

Allow me to speak briefly about Ghana's commitment to this cause.

Ghana has a proud democratic tradition. Since our return to constitutional rule in 1992, we have held eight successive democratic elections, including three peaceful transfers of power between political parties. Our democracy is not perfect, no democracy is, but we remain committed to the principles of constitutionalism, the rule of law, and respect for democratic norms.

As I have stated publicly, I am committed to leaving office at the end of my constitutional term limit. I will not seek constitutional amendments to allow me to

run for a third term. This commitment is not only to the people of Ghana but also to this Union, because leadership by example matters.

Ghana's election as First Vice Chairperson of the African Union for 2026, ahead of our anticipated assumption of the Union's Chairmanship in 2027, is both an honour and a responsibility. We take this responsibility seriously. We will use our position to advance democratic governance across our continent. We will work to support the implementation of the Accra Declaration and all relevant AU instruments. We will continue facilitate dialogue and reflection on critical governance issues.

### **Excellencies,**

In concluding, let me speak clearly that the road of democratic governance before us is not an easy one. It has many formidable challenges. But those challenges are surmountable and it begins with our political will.

First, we must reaffirm, unequivocally and without qualification, our collective commitment of zero tolerance for unconstitutional changes of government. There can be no exceptions, no justifications, and no compromises. As the AU Commission Chairperson has rightly stated, our zero-tolerance stance applies regardless of context or justification.

Second, we must strengthen our foresight and preventive mechanisms. This means investing in early warning systems, activating the Panel of the Wise, enhancing the capacity of the Peace and Security Council, and working more closely with Regional Economic Communities to detect and address threats to constitutional order before they escalate.

Third, we must ensure the full and effective implementation of our sanctions regime. Sanctions must be applied consistently, without dilution or erosion. We must close the loopholes that enable those who seize power unconstitutionally and hold their populations to ransom to evade accountability.

Fourth, we must address governance deficits that create conditions for unconstitutional change. This means promoting inclusive growth, combating corruption, strengthening national institutions, and ensuring that our democracies deliver tangible benefits for our people. We cannot expect citizens to defend democracy if it does not defend their interests.

Fifth, we must learn from successful transitions. Countries that have returned to constitutional rule, such as Gabon, Guinea offer valuable lessons. We must document and share their lessons across the continent.

Finally, we must never lose sight of the people. Unconstitutional changes of government are not abstract political events. They affect real people, families,

communities, and entire nations. They disrupt lives, destroy livelihoods, and dash hopes. Our commitment to democratic governance must ultimately be a commitment to the welfare and dignity of every African citizen.

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Africa has come too far to allow the clock of democracy to be turned back. We have sacrificed too many lives, too much blood, too many tears, too many dreams to surrender to the forces of authoritarianism and unconstitutional rule. Our people deserve better. Our continent deserves better. Our future depends on it.

The Accra Declaration was a milestone. Let this meeting be a recommitment to the principles that unite us, a reaffirmation of our shared values, and a renewed determination to build a continent governed by the rule of law, not by force; by the will of the people, not the ambition of the few.

Let us work together, in solidarity, in mutual respect, and in unwavering commitment to the cause of democracy and constitutionalism in Africa.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and declare this meeting duly opened.

I thank you for your kind attention.