

**REMARKS AT INAUGURATION OF GOVERNING BOARD OF GRAPHIC COMMUNICATION GROUP LIMITED ON JUNE 23, 2015 BY AMBASSADOR KABRAL BLAY-AMIHERE**

**Distinguished Members of the NMC**

**The Executive Secretary of NMC**

**Past Chairperson and Past Members of the Graphic Board of Directors**

**Incoming Chairman and Members of the Board of Directors of Graphic Management and Staff**

**Union Members**

**Ladies and Gentleman.**

It is an honour and privilege for the NMC to inaugurate a new Board of Directors for Ghana's media flagship, Graphic Communication Group Ltd.

As we all know or should know the NMC under the 1992 Constitution is mandated to appoint governing boards and chief executives of the four state-owned media, Graphic, New Times Corporation, GNA and GBC in consultation with the President of the Republic of Ghana.

Since this is the last time I shall have the opportunity to preside over the appointment of new boards for the state owned media and inaugurate them, let me say that I and the other members of the NMC have approached our task with a high sense of historic responsibility, as our contribution towards the consolidation of Ghana's democracy.

I hope the new Board members will in the coming days appreciate the enormity of the responsibility destiny has imposed on them, a responsibility which if well executed shall make them legends and celebrities in their own right when it comes to writing the history of Graphic and Ghana's democracy.

Having had the opportunity as the Chairman of the NMC to usher new boards into office let me simply state repeat the core message that underlies all my addresses when we inaugurate the boards.

First of all the NMC is quick to remind new boards about the duty of ensuring prudent financial management in order to guarantee the sustainability of the state-owned media, a prerequisite for the independence of the media.

Secondly we task the Boards to seek the welfare of staff and promote industrial harmony and peace. Because news, information is so vital and is the oxygen of democracy, and because again

the state-owned media have a constitutional mandate to give a voice to all the people, political parties, civil society and governments, we cannot afford situations where industrial strife deprive the people of information.

Thirdly we remind members of the board of directors that the business of the state-owned media is serious business when you consider the role defined for them by the 1992 Constitution. Serving on a Board of any of the state-owned media is a different ball game from serving on a normal company.

Fourthly we quote Article 173 and other provisions in Chapter 12 to remind Board members that the independence of journalists are guaranteed and that in spite of the broad functions and supervisory role of the NMC in Article 167, not even the NMC can exercise any control or direction over the editorial functions of a person engaged in the production of newspapers or other means of communication. That rule applies to the Boards.

I urge members to read Chapter 12 of the Constitution that clearly outlines the rules of engagement for the media and charges the NMC among other things to defend and promote press freedom, insulate the state-owned media from any governmental interference.

It is a duty that the NMC is asking the boards to undertake on its behalf- to ensure that the state owned media are truly free and independent and faithfully represent the voices of all Ghanaians and all parties and are not subject to external political influences.

As a board which shall be in place during the crucial election year of 2016, your duty shall be to ensure that right from today Graphic and all its publications abide by what Article 163 of the Constitution demands of the state-owned media- to afford fair opportunities and facilities for all divergent views and dissenting opinions.

On the question of editorial independence, professional standards and the supervisory role of the Board and Chief Executives of the state-owned which has often created some tensions let it be stated that CEOs by the contracts they sign with the NMC are ultimately responsible for any business that the media under their care undertakes. Accordingly it is required of CEOs to ensure that publications under their stewardship abide by all the relevant provisions in Chapter 5 and 12 of the Constitution.

It is informative to note that the first function assigned to the Managing Director of Graphic Communication Group Limited states in no uncertain terms that HE SHALL ENSURE THAT THE COMPANY COMPLIES WITH ALL PROVISIONS IN THE CONSTITUTION REGARDING THE STATE-OWNED MEDIA INCLUDING AFFORDING FAIR AND EQUITABLE COVERAGE OF DIVERGENT VIEWS AND DISSENTING OPINIONS.

It is in this regard that the NMC is urging all the state-owned media to come out with in-house manuals of guidelines that spell out the rules of engagement for editors and editorial staff within the framework of the constitution. Such an initiative shall then serve as the benchmark

for assessing the performance of the various media. I am aware Graphic already has such a manual but it should be revised to reflect the demands of the Constitution.

Some of these matters shall be discussed at a proposed retreat for all the Boards at a later date but for now let me highlight some of the challenges that will face you.

Luckily for all of us the last Board under the able chairmanship of Dr. Doris Yaa Dartey provided a consolidated end of term report that gives a fair idea of where Graphic is today and the challenges ahead.

Let me mention just a few of the challenges which I am quoting verbatim

#### **1. TONING DOWN ON CORPORATE MASCULINITY**

"The Graphic management staff is high on masculinity. The Company should therefore make a conscious effort to hire women as a way of diffusing the high masculinity and becoming more inclusive and sensitive to work places minorities like females and the handicapped.

Consequently any renovation of the Head Office and other Graphic premises should take into consideration accessibility needs of the handicapped in consistence with the disability Act". Something needs to be done to change the status quo.

#### **2. EXECUTING THE SOM CONSTITUTIONAL MANDATE**

The Board should endeavor to deepen the execution of the Constitutional mandate of the State-owned media. In particular, in these difficult times of declining newspaper sales, the company must resist the temptation that fly in the face of journalistic ethics. The Board should therefore keep an eye on the core principles underlying journalistic ethics. The newspapers should remain newspapers and do not slip into becoming advertising papers. The development of Ghana should drive the content and not the profit motive"

#### **3. STAFF RATIONALISATION AND PAY RATIONALIZATION**

"This board spent a significant amount of its time on staff matters. This became necessary as a result of petitions sent to it for review. In the course of discussing these issues, it became apparent that a certain level of unfair staff situations persists in the company. It is therefore recommended that the new board continue with a thorough process of staff rationalization and pay rationalization as a means to streamline human resource practices and outcomes of the company, and to bring about equity and enhance the level of employee satisfaction".

#### **4. DEBTS OWED BY ADVERTISING AGENCIES, MP As AND MMDAs**

Several Advertising Agencies owe Graphic large amounts of money. Additionally GCGL has been unable to collect debts owed by the MMDAs and MDAs through newspaper subscriptions and advert placements. All efforts to get them to pay their debts have so far proved futile because most of these MDAs and MDAs claim that they experience difficulties in receiving their annual

budgetary allocations from the Ministry of Finance. Trade and other receivables stand at GHS 18, 468, 946 as at 31st March 2015".

There are about a dozen more challenges that are presented to the new board in the report but I deemed it fit to cite these few because they address some of the core concerns I have been raising.

If I may add another challenge that should not escape your lenses it is Graphic's coverage of the news in the regions. All the four state-owned media have not reached out in spite of their longevity to cover the length and breadth of the country. I discovered on a recent visit to the North that major news houses like Graphic have very limited staff, sometimes two or three to cover all the districts and constituencies. In many instances reporters cannot move unless Ministers are moving. This state of affairs is denying many of our rural dwellers a fair access to the media. I know there are financial obstacles but we cannot continue to under report rural Ghana.

Because they say a journey of two years starts on day one I urge the new Board to begin that journey by firstly studying what their mandate is. Get to know the Constitution and quickly get to know Graphic.

For our part, NMC pledges to offer you every support because we are in this together.

Finally as I welcome the new Board let me use the occasion to thank the old board for their dedicated service to Ghana. Graphic will always remember you. You managed in your two years of office to lay solid foundation on which your successors can raise the fortunes of Graphic.