

ADDRESS BY MR. FRANCIS ADJETEY SOWAH

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3RD GPEST ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AND 1ST CONGRESS ON
EXERCISE IN MEDICINE.
FROM 6-8 JUNE, 2012.
AT GHANA COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS, ACCRA.
TITLE: DISABLED SPORTS – TRENDS AND CHALLENGES**

Your Excellencies, organizers of this epoch-making event, **Nananom**, our dear participants and invitees from the fraternity of persons living with disability, special invited guests, ladies and gentlemen.....all protocols duly observed...

Having gone through quite a number of challenging times in my role as a leader of various groups of persons living with disability, I am glad and grateful to have been given the opportunity to share a few thoughts on the trends and challenges that characterize disabled sports, not only in Ghana, but on the entire African continent, in the main.

The point has been made, and rightly so, that any nation that does not give equal opportunity to all its citizens shall always face strife and dissent from groups that feel deprived within the larger community. Ghana and Africa's strategic positioning amongst the community of nations and continents places a huge responsibility on those of us in the current generation to do our utmost best to ensure equity in the allocation of resources for the development of the citizenry.

I would want to draw a little on the history of the last two decades and then focus more heavily on the story of disabled sports over the last five years or so. Having dilated on the trends and challenges, I shall then proceed to propose an assertive strategy to ensure that the trends and challenges that I am about to enumerate shall, with all certainty, become a thing of the past!

Over the last two decades, disabled sports in Ghana have witnessed fluctuating fortunes. We have witnessed the following high points:

- Sixth position in the last Amputee Football World Cup held in Argentina
- Vice-President of the Ghana Association of Sports for the Disabled, Mr. Francis Adjetei Sowah, elected President of the Amputee Football Federation of Africa, becoming the first person living with disability to attain such a high position in the hierarchy of amputee football.
- Successful staging of the 3rd Cup of African Nations for Amputee Football [CANAF 2011], which was held in Accra in the latter part of November 2011: Ghana came second to Liberia in this competition

These epoch-making achievements have positioned Ghana as one of the leading country in African Amputee Football.

In terms of disability sports in general, our athletes and participants in continental and world disability sports have also put up wonderful performances. From the All Africa Games in Abuja [2003], through the 1st Africa Deaf Football Championships, the 2004 Athens Paralympics and various commonwealth games, Ghanaians living with disability have scaled the heights of wondrous achievements.

It is pertinent and worthwhile to note that these achievements were chalked against the backdrop of societal trends that have been more militating than mitigating. Factors such as.....

- Lack of political will
- Poor infrastructure
- Lack of equipment
- Social stigmatization
- Low self-esteem
- In-fighting amongst persons living with disability
- Exploitation of persons living with disability

have be-devilled disabled sports for years on end.

Lack of political will: too often, only lip-service is paid to issues relating to disability sports and recreation. Leaders [political, social, religious and traditional] are quick to make sweeping and sweet statements on public platforms only to renege on the promises that they make to persons living with disability. This points to a general lack of political will to move the agenda for better inclusion of persons living with disability in our sports and recreation agenda as a nation. This attitude leaves African Nations with good laws and acts on disability with practically no concrete actions on them. For instance, whereas Ghana has a laudable Disability Act (2006) Act 715, many, if not most, of the provisions are not being implemented.

Poor infrastructure: there are no facilities for sports and recreation for persons living with disability in most African countries. Even our existing national stadia are built without due consideration for persons living with disability since the design and access ways of the stadia are not disability-friendly, let alone a facility tailored for the specific needs of persons with disability.

Lack of equipment: vitally needed equipment for sports and recreation are seriously lacking for persons living with disability, this is a resultant effect of a lack of disability centres.

Social stigmatization: very often, persons living with disability are made to feel like they do not belong to the larger society and this is manifested in various ways.

Low self-esteem: too often, we ourselves have a low level of self-esteem with attendant “small-mindedness”. This makes it difficult for persons living with disability to take advantage of the

few opportunities that come our way. Unfortunately, there are very few specialists on the continent to encourage them to come out the problem.

In-fighting amongst persons living with disability: where rare opportunities have presented themselves, persons living with disability have conspired against themselves to reduce the positive impact that these opportunities would have afforded us.

Exploitation of persons living with disability: unscrupulous individuals, having gained access to knowledge of opportunities available to persons living with disability, have taken advantage of these opportunities at the expense of persons living with disability, in some cases it is done in connivance with fellow persons with disability. In this regard, specific reference could be made to the infamous case of “hearing impairment” who were miraculously found talking and hearing in faraway Australia!! That incident has become a big blot on Ghana’s record and governments, together with corporate Ghana and Africa have become very skeptical about disabled sports and the motives with which persons enter this arena.

As the President of the Amputee Football Federation of Africa, I have faced a lot of challenges trying to actualize the numerous projects and programmes earmarked to raise the sport to a higher level. However, financial constraints have limited our ability, as a Federation, to give hope to amputees who otherwise would have added to the begging canker among some persons with disability.

We were looking forward having another African nation host the next Cup of African Nations for Amputee Football (CANAF) after Ghana hosted the last event in November, 2011 with greater success than the two previous ones.

Mr. Chairman, as the situation stands at the moment, we are yet to have one nation volunteer to take up that responsibility. Obviously, lack of financial support from government could be mentioned as reason for this.

This indicates to a large extent the common challenges faced by African Nations in promoting the disability agenda. The commonalities in this sector are numerous.

But in spite of these challenges, we have been able to chalk the feats that I enumerated earlier on in this presentation: and we continue to press on to that higher calling of achievement that posterity has bestowed upon us.

As is my custom, I would, once again, want to use this opportunity to appeal to the nation’s political, social, religious and traditional leaders to increase the level of attention that is given to the inclusion of persons living with disability into our sports and recreation agenda as a nation and continent. With the right attitude and a genuine commitment to integrating our valiant and determined compatriots living with disability into our national sports and recreation agenda, Ghana stands to chalk even more achievements and earn greater recognition among the League of Nations.

As I bring my presentation to a close, I call on we ourselves to be more focused and united in our drive for inclusion. On too many occasions, we have been our enemies when we have

engaged in pettiness and unnecessary bickering. My brothers and sisters, a house divided against itself can never stand. If we unite around the agenda for better recognition and equity, no force can withstand our influence on Ghana, in particular, and the world at large. Together, we can and must win the battle to reverse the negative trends and challenges plaguing disabled sports!

I thank you all for your kind attention and wish us all well in all our endeavors!

GOD BLESS YOU!