



GRADUATE STUDENTS ASSOCIATION OF GHANA



(GRASAG)

NATIONAL SECRETARIATS' REPORT

**DELIVERED AT THE FIRST SITTING OF THE 26TH SENATE ON THE 7TH OF
SEPTEMBER, 2019**

AT KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (KNUST)

BY

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NATIONAL PRESIDENT**

1.0 Introduction

Madam Speaker,

Your Lordship the Chief Justice of GRASAG,

Honourable Local Presidents of GRASAG,

Senators,

Invited Guests,

Colleague NEC Members,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I seek your indulgence to commence my address by first and foremost thanking you all for your presence, commitment and dedication towards the progress of this noble association. May the good Lord continue to bless your effort.

2.0 Xenophobic Attack

Madam Speaker, permit me to add my voice to the condemnation of senseless and unwarranted attacks meted out to other Africans of Black origin by some citizens of South Africa. For the second time in a short while, some Africans have been at the mercy of unprovoked attacks from some citizens of the former apartheid country. The continual nasty and inappropriate act of brutality on some Africans who are going about their normal duty in a fellow African country is unacceptable. The danger is that, the same hatred if not curtailed could be extended to foreign

students pursuing their post graduate studies in South Africa. And this is why GRASAG is worried.

We have also taken note of comments by people in power of that country and this gives us a course to worry. The rather weak verbal intervention of the President, Cyril Ramaphosa, which sought to claim that the action is the handiwork of criminals, is something we find unconvincing. Especially at the back of comment passed by a top police chief and a subtle attempt by the South African High Commissioner to Ghana to justify the barbaric acts rather give credence to the fear of many that officialdom has sanctioned the attacks.

In this day and age of civilization, what one expects is a civil and matured way of dealing with grievances if there is any. We therefore add our voice to the many voices of reason to condemn the attack in no uncertain terms. We call on the African Union to as a matter of urgency relocate the Pan African Parliament from South Africa since they have proven to be anti-Africans and to also prescribe some level of sanctions against the country. We use this opportunity to extend our heartfelt condolences to all nations whose citizens have been directly affected by the animalistic behavior of the South Africans especially our brothers and sisters from Nigeria, and state that we stand with them in these hard times. We equally condemn in no uncertain terms, the senseless attack on businesses suspected of

being South African in Nigeria. Two wrongs can never be a justification for a right.

With such barbaric mindsets prevailing in a number of African countries, I dare say that Africa cannot give impetus to the **African Free Trade Continental Area** agreement, if fellow Africans are continuously seen as foreigners in other African countries. It is therefore worrying that African leaders are conspicuously quiet about these social uprisings and left we the youth to fight our own battles. We need action from our leaders and not just the issuing of statements to condemn the attacks. That really is the easiest thing to do. Beyond that what diplomatic actions are being taken by the African Union commission to forestall such future occurrence?

3.0 Sustainable Development Goals

Madam Speaker, we believe the time has come for the world over to start paying actionable attention to the Sustainable Development goals rather than the lip service and the sugar coated speeches we seem to be giving to these all important goals. Achieving these goals requires conscious efforts from all of us as human beings and especially as youth to play our part. This is why for us at the GRASAG National, we are taking measures to help the Ghana achieve this critical goals that have absolute bearings on the lives of all of us.

3.1 SDGs Champion Challenge

Madam Speaker, to play our part, GRASAG shall be organizing the *SDG Champion Challenge*. This program which shall directly be supervised by my office (ie office of the GRASAG President) will seek partnership with specific bodies to help Ghana implement some of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) so that no one is left behind.

Even though this policy may appear challenging, it is achievable if every GRASAG member gets involved. Our areas of focus will cover environmental protection, improving gender equality, and clean water and sanitation. Each local GRASAG institution will organize the **SDG CHAMPION Challenge** and the entries will be assessed based on stated criteria. The winner will receive funding for the chosen project. All GRASAG local winners will be put together at the national level to compete and the winner will be sponsored and given national recognition. The aim of the SDG Champions Challenge programme is to both raise awareness of the SDGs and to demonstrate, through the example of the Champions' engagement with sustainable development, that everyone in society can make a contribution towards achieving the 17 Goals.

3.2 HeforSHe

Madam Speaker, GRASAG National under my tenure, through the office of the Gender Commissioner, hopes to partner with the United Nations and other stakeholders to recruit more volunteers for the HeForShe campaign. The purpose of this partnership will be to change the stereotypical gender narrative in our society. The Gender Commission, through the local GRASAG will train community influencers to treat both males and females as individuals with similar aspirations who need equal opportunities to be successful with what they aspire to be. Each local campus will be tasked to identify specific gender related problem in the surrounding community and organise workshops toward deconstructing gender stereotypes in our society. Already, my able Gender Commissioner has tabled before us plans to extend this campaign to at least 20 selected rural Senior High Schools as part of incorporating SHSs into our HeForShe campaign. You can choose to call it our own version of *“The Year of Return”*. Indeed, graduate students are returning to our Alma matters.

3.3 Green Campaign

Under the able leadership of my General Secretary, two times Eastern Regional GJA Best Journalist in environmental reporting, GRASAG is putting measures in place to partner with some state agencies such as the Environmental Protection

Agency (EPA) and the Forestry Commission to plant at least 2000 trees across the country. The Green Campaign will be done hand in hand with the “**GRASAG Year of Return**” program which is under the Office of the Gender Commissioner so that every visit to every SHS will not only be about Gender issues but will also incorporate training on how to protect our environment and plant at least some 100 trees in the school.

Hon. Senate Members, the world’s lung is on fire. The amazon which experts say provide over 20 per cent of the world’s oxygen is burning. It’s impact according to experts will be grave in the coming years and it is incumbent on all of us to do our widows-mite in replacing the amazon if not at a centralized location like it is now, at least spread it across the world and this is what our **Green Campaign** in the “**GRASAG Plant 2000 Trees**” project is about.

4.0 Graduate Accommodation

Madam Speaker, the issue of accommodation for graduate students on our respective campuses has become a challenge for many students. In some of our campuses, Graduate Students have no access to the school’s provided accommodation at all while some schools have just about one tenth of their accommodation space reserved for graduate students. Sadly even schools with

some few rooms reserved for graduate students have started converting such rooms to undergraduate rooms. This is indeed a challenge for many of our members.

Honourable Members of Senate, GRASAG national is therefore stating its position on the graduate students accommodation issues as follows;

1. Universities need to identify strategic funding partners to support Institutional efforts to increase accommodation on campus.
2. Government must establish a special purpose vehicle to secure external funding to construct new halls of residence on campus just as was done with the university of Ghana medical center.
3. Government must shelve/abandon the intended privatization of traditional halls of residence.

For us, we believe accommodation on our various campuses must not be based on profiteering. No one does any Student favours by providing accommodation for the Student. Graduate students are partners in our socio-economic development and must be given the needed supports to make meaningful contribution to our growth as a nation.

5.0 Public University Bill

Madam Speaker, on a more pressing matter of the PUBLIC UNIVERSITY BILL, which has been drafted by Government, pending parliamentary consideration and

approval, GRASAG has strong reservations against the bill and call for outright withdrawal of the bill from our public discourse. It is our considered view that, laws are essentially made to solve societal problem or cure a mischief. However, certain provisions of this bill only create the avenue for mischief and largely destroy academic freedom. The drafters of this bill may have good intentions but leaving certain provisions of the bill remaining the way it is now will only create avenue for a politician with ill intentions to manipulate and unduly control policy directions, appointments and promotions to our public universities in Ghana. At this time we want to quote the popular idiom, “if it is not broken, do not fix it”.

In trying to centralised the control of our Universities, government refuses to acknowledge the fact that each University has its own unique history, purpose of establishment and strategic plans.

Madam Speaker, the bill as it stands now only creates a culture of intimidation, fear, and politicization which will just stifle academic progress, and with best practice across the world that is not what is done.

5.1 Institutional Autonomy

Madam Speaker, I was watching a news item yesterday and saw with utmost sadness that the headmaster of Aggrey Memorial Zion SHS in Cape Coast has been sacked for admitting some second years into the boarding house, a phenomenon

which used to be the case in almost every secondary school. He is accused of trying to sabotage government policy with that decision by the School Management Committee. Let's me state that government had the liberty to take such action because all secondary schools are fully under the control of government and by extension government can use them for its politically expedient program without recourse to the school's original mandate and aspirations. We cannot afford to have similar situation in our PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES, where government can impose a decision on University council and expect the university to comply. We should not give any politician the room to have control over our University education, the way have controlled our secondary schools and almost destroyed our public basic education.

Allowing such a bill to stand will mean a change in political leadership of Ghana, may mean a change in academic policy direction in our public universities.

It is the argument of GRASAG that the bill in its current form, would stifle initiative and politicise the Universities. The bill if it passed would take away any incentive for public universities to seek to be innovative and progressive.

Hon. Senators, it is important to explain that some of the fine proposals by government in the bill can actually be implemented without putting it in an amalgamated public university statute. For instance, the centralised admissions is a policy that can be implemented without necessarily enacting a new statute. We

shall ensure that we follow this issue with all the seriousness it deserves. (No admission fees, only processing fees due to challenges of reconciliation.)

6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, Madam Speaker and Honourable Senate Members, I wish to state that the Samuel Sago administration has no doubt whatsoever about the enormity of the challenges ahead of us but we assure all GRASAG members that we shall do whatever within our means to make GRASAG more visible, vibrant and relevant. Our challenges may be enormous, but with God in our boat and the support of my able local Presidents, NEC, Senate and all members of GRASAG, we shall surely prevail.

Thank you.

Samuel Sagoe

(National President)