

**Welcome Remarks**  
**By Professor Kwesi Yankah**  
**OPEN ACCESS CONFERENCE 2009**

**“Harnessing the Rapid Growth of Fibre Infrastructure for Social Economic  
Development”**

Protocol

The Minister of Communications

The Secretary General AAU

The Vice-Chancellors here present

Participants

The Local Organising Committee members

Our Partners,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me take this opportunity to formally welcome you all conference participants to the 2009 Open Access Conference hosted by the University of Ghana. Ideally, this opening ceremony ought to have taken place on the University Campus, where those of you coming here for the first time, would have gotten the opportunity to see our beautiful campus and perhaps determined our Open Access potential or readiness. But I do believe one or two activities have been scheduled for the campus later today.

My information is that in 2003, endorsed by the UN ICT Task Force, and sponsored by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), an initiative was taken to start the Annual International Conference series on Open Access.

In Africa, the conference has since then been hosted by three Countries. First in Maputo, Mozambique by Universidade Eduardo Mondlane in May 2005; in Bagamoyo, Tanzania in 2007; and last year 2008, in Lilongwe, Malawi.

At the closing session of Open Access, 2008, it was agreed that even though the series of Open Access Conference have made some contribution to the growth of ICT in Africa, there were still regions of Africa, where the benefits of Open Access to communication resources are not yet fully deployed or accepted. It was argued that West and Central African are examples of such regions. Ghana was therefore urged to host the 2009 Open

Access Conference to bring the idea of open access closer to these neighbourhood regions. This information filtered to us around January 2009. Much as we like the idea, we did not readily accept it because of budget constraints. The University budget was done in November, 2008 and getting a request in January 2009 to host such an important event was rather challenging.

Nonetheless, our mind was put at ease when we were informed that the practice has been for the hosting Institution to solicit for funds from Foundations, Corporations and other benevolent organisations.

Following this, the University of Ghana, and the newly formed Ghana Academic Research Network (GARNET), in collaboration with The Royal Swedish Institute of Technology (KTH), accepted this challenge to host the 7<sup>th</sup> Open Access Conference.

Soon after, an Organizing Committee to spearhead this conference was set up. It identified a theme for the conference as *“Harnessing the rapid growth of fibre infrastructure for Social Economic Development”*. A very relevant and appropriate theme, particularly in Ghana, where several under the sea fibre cables, I understand are going to be available very soon in addition to SAT3.

As I understand it also, and permit me to quote from the concept paper of the conference organization Committee as follows:

“An important objective of this conference is also to focus on the relevance of Research and Education Networks in all these endeavours. Research and Education Networks are initially, potentially the largest anchor customers for broadband links and need to nurture their infrastructure provider community. Universities are also the strongest driver of the knowledge society, both directly via projects they engage in and indirectly by producing students that are exposed to broadband services and will demand such services also when they get into their working lives in different sectors of society. This is why a primary meeting ushering the Open Access will focus on Regional Research

Education Network (RREN) that will lead to the formation of WACREN, by bringing together the key players in West and Central African Universities, in an attempt to launch a Regional Research Education Network (RREN), called WACREN. In East Africa where the conference has been hosted a number of times, it has helped strengthen their RREN, the UbuntuNet Allianceö.

The University of Ghana, with its experience in hosting International Conference, is therefore the appropriate Institution to hold such a conference and I am happy this is the case.

My first duty this morning is simple, that is to welcome you all on my behalf, the University of Ghana and the Organizing Committee, to this 7<sup>th</sup> Open Access Conference.

My second duty before I take my seat, is to thank the Organizations that made this Open Access Conference 2009 possible, by generous donation of funds. They are the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Partnership for Higher Education for Africa (PHEA), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). The University of Ghana is most grateful for your continued support as always.

It is unfortunate that the several telecom networks in the country, in spite of the fierce competition for attention, failed to respond to our request for sponsorship. But I believe they have their ears to the ground and will follow proceedings and the outcome of this Open Access Conference.

On this note, let me welcome you to Ghana, and to the Open Access Conference 2009. I wish you a very fruitful deliberation in the two days ahead.

Thank you.