

Remarks by Dr Prince Hamid Armah, Member of Parliament for Kwesimintsim and Vice Chairman of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Education at the Second Sitting of the Second Session of the 17th Parliament of the University Of Ghana

Prince Hamid Armah, PhD | 30th July 2021

Good evening.

Thank you all very much for the opportunity to be here and to witness this event. I want to congratulate you all, especially the speakers for putting together such a wonderful performance. I have to say that it is great to see so many of you taking such a keen interest in the big debates about policy and the country's future. In fact, universities should be about such debates. As centres of research and inquiry, you are well placed to dispassionately examine the questions that we face as a country. It is also important because events and conversations such as this prepare you for the real world that you will soon enter. Personally, I believe that students must see themselves as real stakeholders in the country's future. You are not just the future leaders; you are very much active participants in shaping that future.

The debaters have made some good points this evening. We must keep in mind, however, that government's Free Senior High School policy is not in fact to the detriment of other stages of education. A lot is happening at all the other levels. In fact, access, participation and completion have improved at all levels of education since 2017. We are making much greater investments in education, while making serious attempts to improve quality, including the curriculum and assessment systems, which until recently, I myself led. Ensuring that everyone has at least secondary education will have real positive consequences for the economy, for quality of life and the future of the country and this is the rationale for the Free SHS policy.

It is a measure of government's commitment to the future of this country that it has invested so much in Free SHS. In 2017, the first year of the policy's implementation, we spent GHc 480,000,000 on it. As more students have entered, we have matched the increase with commensurate spending - GHc 1,137,861,816 in 2018; GHc 1,682,641,924 in 2019 and GHc 2,429,257,748 in 2020. Due to exigencies of COVID 19, in 2021 will see slightly lower spending of GHc 1,974,021,968, the first year in which we would have spent less than we did the year before it. This has not meant that other levels of education have been neglected. There have been matching increases in spending on primary, JHS, COTVET, teacher training and other tertiary institutions. Last year, government absorbed the registration fees for 403,878 registered candidates from public Junior High Schools across the country and it will do so again this year. In our first year in government, we restored the teacher training allowances. Total tertiary education enrolment has improved tremendously from 320,746 in the 2015/2016 academic year to 491,038 in the 2018/2019 academic year. Our gross enrolment ratio at the tertiary levels is

now at 18.8, the highest in Sub Saharan Africa. The president has set us an ambitious target of reaching 40% by 2030 and we are taking the necessary steps to make that possible.

These debates must however continue – both here on campus, in parliament and around the country. No one person or institution has all the answers so it is important that we continue to engage with one another in the spirit of finding the best solutions to the problems we face in education and other sectors of national life

Let me once again congratulate the speakers and organisers of this event. I want to urge you keep up your interest in national affairs. I will not be surprised if, in the not-too-distant future, I see some of you joining us to help steer the ship of state. Our country needs our best and brightest working to make it better and it will be well served if some of you can join us for this task.

I thank you again for inviting me. It has been a great pleasure to be here.

I wish you all the best in your studies. May God bless you all and our nation.

Thank you.

The author is a Member of Parliament for Kwesimintsim, Vice Chairman of the Parliamentary Select Committee on Education and former Director-General of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.