

ADDRESS BY PROF. CHRISTOPHER AMEYAW-AKUMFI
HON. MINISTER OF HARBOURS AND RAILWAYS
AT THE 4TH MARITIME LAW SEMINAR FOR JUDGES HELD AT THE
COCONUT GROOVE REGENCY HOTEL, ACCRA ON FRIDAY
OCTOBER 10,2008

MR. CHAIRMAN

HER LADYSHIP, CHIEF JUSTICE OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA

COLLEAGUE MINISTER

JUSTICES OF THE SUPERIOR COURTS OF GHANA

DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

It gives me great pleasure to be associated, once again, with the Maritime Seminar for Judges of the Superior Courts. I am glad to observe that this collaboration between the Ghana Shippers' Council and the Judiciary which started some time ago has been maintained as we witness today the 4th in the series of the Maritime Seminar for Judges.

The need for our distinguished Justices to continually update their knowledge in maritime law and related disciplines cannot be over emphasized. That is why I find this annual seminar relevant and commendable and I wish to pledge my Ministry's continued support for such a programme.

Maritime transport the world over has been in the forefront of the carriage of the bulk of international cargo and Ghana is no exception. Over 90% of Ghana's international trade cargo is carried by sea and the volumes keep rising. Maritime transport is thus affecting the lives of many more people; either as service providers, including shipping lines, terminal operators, sea freight consolidators, freight forwarders, warehouse operators, cargo hauliers, etc. in the logistics chain, or as shippers (importers and exporters) who have a direct interest in the cargo, or even as consumers of the cargo who are spread all over the country.

It is in the midst of all these activities and the different players involved in the maritime industry that the need for an efficient legal regime and administration of justice must be emphasized.

Advancement in technology, competition and the need for efficiency have also changed the way international carriage of goods with a sea link is done. Multimodal transport and the use of electronic documents are some of the developments that require new legal regimes both at the international and local levels.

The new Draft Convention on Contracts for the International Carriage of Goods wholly or partly by sea, which was concluded in July this year, is one such comprehensive document that not only takes account of new developments in the shipping industry but also seeks to

steer a middle course between the Hague-Visby and the Hamburg Rules for easier acceptability by cargo interests and ship owners.

I therefore wish to urge distinguished Justices of the Superior Courts to acquaint themselves with the new draft Convention as it is likely to replace the Hague, the Hague-Visby and the Hamburg Rules for those countries that may be acceding to it, and would become the basic law for the carriage of international cargo with a sea link.

Mr. Chairman, distinguished Judges, Ladies and Gentlemen, the recent discovery of oil and gas in commercial quantities in Ghana has brought to the fore the issue of the requisite legal regime for an efficient exploitation of these resources and I am glad that one of the topics for this Seminar is in this direction and would be addressing the issue of local content in the oil and gas business.

Understanding these issues from the outset puts the Judiciary in a better position to adjudicate expeditiously on these matters when they come before them. It is therefore timely that these Maritime Seminar series have come to fill the gap to ensure that our distinguished Judges are not found wanting in the area of maritime transport and related disputes ..

Mr. Chairman, Her Ladyship the Chief justice, ladies and gentlemen, the vision of making Ghana a maritime hub for West and Central Africa is still alive, and therefore everything must be done to ensure that Ghana is not only an attractive place for maritime business but also a preferred transit corridor for her landlocked neighbours. I have no doubt therefore that this seminar will offer an opportunity for the exchange of ideas and information for the adjudication of justice in the maritime sector, and to recommend policy reforms that would make Ghana a competitive country.

As the law is dynamic and new challenges arise daily as a result of technological advancements, security issues, legislative changes and judicial decisions, I am encouraged that the Ghana Shippers' Council under the auspices of my Ministry would continue to organize such seminars.

I am also encouraged by the work of the Ghana Shippers' Council in protecting the interests of Ghanaian Shippers (Le. importers and exporters) on all matters that affect the shipment of their cargoes, especially in the wake of arbitrary charges by the suppliers of international shipping services, especially shipping lines and their agents.

It must however be noted that even though Government is committed to creating a liberal environment for shipping, no supplier of shipping service must take undue advantage of our shippers, especially since most of them have no hand in the choice of shipping lines that carry their cargoes. It is in this vein that I think that this forum can come out with suggestions that would position the Ghana Shippers' Council to effectively play its role of protecting the interest of shippers in Ghana.

Even as government, in partnership with the private sector, continues to ensure the implementation of reforms and other infrastructural development programmes. we must collectively resolve to put the interest of the nation above parochial interests. In this regard, all stakeholders must endeavour to conduct their activities in a professional, honest, transparent and effective manner.

Finally, I wish to assure you that Government will continue to create the enabling environment for increased trade and maritime transport activities through trade facilitation measures to help achieve competitiveness for Ghana in her international trade transactions .

Let me once again congratulate you all for this 4th Maritime Law Seminar. which I believe has indeed come to stay. I wish you all beneficial and fruitful deliberations.