

**EVENING OF REMEMBRANCE IN HONOUR OF  
EMERITUS PROFESSOR J.H. KWABENA NKETIA**

**Welcome Address by Chairman of University Council,  
Prof. Yaw Twumasi**

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, Good Evening.

It is my task, a solemn one though, to welcome you all to this Great Hall of Legon, to participate in this evening of remembrance in honour of Emeritus Professor J.H. Kwabena Nketia who passed away on Wednesday, March 13, 2019, at a grand old age of 97. For those who were used to seeing him in good health every year, he passed away too soon.

Professor Nketia came to national attention early in his life because of his musical compositions and publications. And for this the nation recognises this, and he will be given a state burial this weekend. But we at Legon claim him as one of our own, hence the decision of the University to organize this Evening of Remembrance for him. This will give the Legon community the opportunity to express their views on his immense scholarly works and the broad array of contributions he made to Legon, the country and the scholarly world as a promising and mature scholar and academic. Those who work closely with him in this community and elsewhere will also pay tribute to this genuinely distinguished academic. And I would like to acknowledge in this welcome address the presence here of Professor Nketia's immediate family – his surviving children, Prof. Mrs. Akosua Perbi, her sister, Rev. Priscilla Naana Nketia and Mrs. Nana Adjoa Nketia Adutwum, also his grandchildren and great grandchildren, and we welcome you all; and our heartfelt condolences.

Professor Nketia was blessed with long life, and was throughout his life a very active researcher, teacher and music practitioner. So he touched many lives, including mine and I would therefore insert something here a brief personal note! When I gained admission to Legon immediately after independence in 1957, Professor Nketia was a faculty member already, famous for his brilliant researches but for me he was a remote person. When I became a faculty member by mid 1960s, I became more familiar with him, and it was during this period that he suggested to me to consider transferring to the Institute of African Studies (IAS).

I knew him thirdly as a well-published academic who regularly attended academic conferences, especially in the USA. At some point in this period I was at the United States teaching at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and Professor Nketia regularly attended conferences here, so many conferences. And this enabled me to have long conversations with him over dinner on many occasions during these academic visits, he told a lot about Legon, a lot about this country, a lot about himself, and I was privileged to know a bit more about this distinguished person.

I would like to make three points about him at this point. First, Professor Nketia was a genuinely humble person. Everything about him was quiet except his laughter. Second, Professor Nketia was an academic institution – builder. Dr. K. A. Busia and his teacher at Oxford Meyer Fortes, ‘discovered’ him and saw him as a person of great academic promise. And he encouraged him to go and read and come back and Prof. Busia interviewed him on occasion at Akropong where he was teaching. Prof. Busia got the University to recruit him as a researcher and he attached him as a research fellow at a small unit at the Department of Sociology where he was given enormous resources to study the musical traditions of Ghana. The first principal of the University of Ghana, David Balme advised him to do careful research and not rush into publication. The underlying reason in this advice was the current British belief that those who publish too quickly and too much could not but be superficial and just write potboilers. Professor Nketia ignored him and his advice and went ahead and published his researches findings; and some of the literary products became classics like his Akan Funeral Dirges and Drumming in Akan Communities.

So when the Institute of African Studies was established, Professor Nketia became a founding member, and greatly helped to lay a solid foundation for this academic institution. With the support of such expatriate scholars like Thomas Hodgkin and Ivan Wilks, it is not surprising that the Institute of African Studies became an international centre of research. Prof. Nketia became the first African Director of Institute of African Studies after Hodgkin left after 1966 and the Institute became even more well-known at home and abroad.

Prof. Nketia was also a Foundation Fellow of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences where he worked quietly and steadily to enhance the reputation of the Academy. As the first Director of the International Centre of Music and Dance (now an important archival institution), he centrally contributed to its world-wide reputation. Also, as Chancellor of the Akrofi Christaller Institute of Theology Mission and Culture at Akropong his influence in its growth is apparent to all. Prof. Nketia has undoubtedly been a great academic institution-builder, what has been on display in these institution-building activities are his great intelligence, great capacity for hard work and the ability to work as a team member and team leader.

Finally, one of the great legacies of Prof. Nketia is his scholarship in African music and culture. When he assumed leadership of African Studies at Legon, the subject was viewed with derision, a subject students at Legon laughably described as *dondology*. Under his leadership, Prof. Nketia changed all this and, in his scholarly works and musical compositions he raised the study of African Studies to a high academic level, locally and internationally. The way he did it was simple but profound and is spelt out in his latest book written when he was about 94 years - Reinstating Traditional Music in Contemporary Context.

For him it is always important to situate African musical traditions, and their knowledge in the contemporary context and that for any scholarly work or publication to surpass in scholarly achievement and accomplishment, it must be brought into agreement or concord with universal knowledge.

To be able to do this one needs wide knowledge and learning and Professor Nketia had it all, for he started his scholarly career with the study of linguistics, anthropology, history and later (as is clear from reading his works) the social sciences. Prof. Nketia was a polymath, a person with encyclopaedic knowledge. He has left an important legacy and will be greatly missed. This legacy is, however, likely to remain for a very long time.

Prof. Yaw Twumasi  
April 30, 2019  
Great Hall, University of Ghana