



Professor Naana Opoku-Agyemang

BA, MA, DStJ, PhD

Chancellor,

The connection between the peoples of Barbados and the Republic of Ghana has always been strong. It is an umbilical link, felt deep in the blood and reflected in our cultures, a link that may have been stretched over the centuries but has never been broken.

Over the past few years, Cave Hill Campus has been increasingly pro-active in celebrating its Ghanaian heritage. Celebration has found expression in a variety of forms, from the scholarly to the ceremonial, but undoubtedly the most impressive – up till now - has been architectural: namely, the new Administration Building, our very own Golden Stool.

I repeat: up till now. Because, Chancellor, I'm quite sure you will agree with me that no building can begin to match the exceptional Ghanaian woman we are proud to honour here this morning.

A scholar, educator and administrator of world-class distinction, Professor Naana Jane Opoku-Agyemang is a woman of multiple talents and accomplishments. She is a supremely effective chair of innumerable national and international boards and committees, an acknowledged expert in the field of African Literature and a hugely successful and popular lecturer. At the same time, Naana (her sister assures me she won't mind being referred to so informally) is also a superb cook, a gifted dancer and – demonstrably – an *aficionada* of Ghanaian fashion.

Her rise through the ranks of the University of Cape Coast, her *alma mater*, was rapid and unstoppable: from Head of English, to Dean of the Faculty of Arts, to Founding Dean of the School of Graduate Studies. But as one of her colleagues cogently puts it, the climb was not over. Three peaks waited, lined up.

First, she became a member of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Science. Next she was promoted to a full professorship. And then, in 2008, the ultimate summit: Naana was appointed Vice-Chancellor. She was the first and is still the only woman at a Ghanaian university to hold this highest academic and administrative office.

The admirable qualities and aptitudes that have brought Naana so far and so high were in evidence from a very tender age. I happen to know, for example, that she confidently drew up her family's weekly dinner menu when she was no more than knee-high to a grasshopper; also that she won a family dancing competition (which involved dancing around the living room table) by the ingenious ruse of including the table itself in her dance. Of such stuff are future Vice-Chancellors made.

I can't help thinking of a verse couplet by the great Irish poet W.B. Yeats, one with which I am sure Naana is familiar: "O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,/ How can we tell the dancer from the dance?" The implication of the lines is that who we are and what we do are inextricably connected. Naana has achieved all she has today because of the kind of woman she is: calm, kind, generous, modest, sophisticated, patriotic, tenacious, witty, vibrant, meticulous, eloquent, incisive, brilliant. These are not my words; they are just some of the epithets her friends, family and colleagues have shared with me to describe their beloved Naana.

For her outstanding contribution towards advancing education in traditional areas the Chief and Elders of the Komenda Traditional Council in Central Ghana once bestowed into Naana's personal care the founding sword of the State of Komenda. Chancellor, I don't think you have a ceremonial sword hidden under your gown. So I beg you to use what you do have - the authority vested in you by the Senate and Council of the University of the West Indies - to confer on Professor Naana Opoku-Agyemang BA, MA, DSEF, PhD, *doyenne* of Ghanaian higher education, the degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*.