WELCOME ADDRESS BY SAMUEL AFARI DARTEY

Mr. Chairman

Honourable Mr. Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations, and Chair of the Kofi Annan Foundation

Mrs Nane Annan

Hon. Nii Osah Mills, Minister of Lands and Natural Resources

Hon. Mahama Ayariga, Minister of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the President of the Republic of Ghana, H.E. John Dramani Mahama; the Minister of Lands and Natural Resources, Hon. Nii Osah Mills; the Board of Commissioners of the Forestry Commission and the organizers of the conference, I wish to extend my warmest welcome to you all. I wish to assure all participants, especially our international participants, that this is home and they will experience the rich Ghanaian hospitality.

This conference couldn’t have come at a more opportune time than this. According to the FAO, Africa loses an estimated 3.4 million hectares of forest every year. Ghana has been battling with deforestation and forest degradation driven by factors such as illegal logging, illegal mining, wildfires, and unsustainable farming practices, among others.
The vision of the Forestry Commission of Ghana is to “Leave future generations and their communities with richer, better more valuable forest and wildlife endowments than we inherited”. This is an ambitious and challenging vision and the country is therefore making strenuous efforts at significantly reducing deforestation and forest degradation and has embarked on a number of development projects to restore our lost forest cover by employing strategies that create “green jobs” and boost food production in the rural areas of Ghana. We have therefore used the opportunities presented by landscape restoration to contribute positively to the socio-economic development of rural areas in Ghana.

Through the implementation of these projects we have come to appreciate that landscape restoration is not just about planting trees; it is a long-term process of restoring functionality and enhancing human well-being.

In order to make Ghana an attractive destination for investment in forest plantations, we have had to re-engineer our business processes to allocate degraded forest reserve land to the private sector and forest-fringe communities to develop commercial forest plantations in collaboration with the Forestry Commission under fair and transparent land lease and benefit sharing arrangements. The stable political environment in the country, available inexpensive labour, availability of lands with suitable soils and
climatic conditions for forest plantation development coupled with fair and transparent benefit-sharing and land lease arrangements, has made Ghana a preferred investment destination for commercial forest plantation investments. These factors have contributed to very high productivity of established forest plantations with very attractive return on investments.

In line with the 2012 Forest and Wildlife Policy, the Forestry Commission has through an extensive multi-stakeholder consultative process developed a 25-year Forest Plantation Strategy, which we consider a blueprint for landscape restoration in Ghana. The strategy sets targets and actions for achieving landscape restoration through commercial forest plantations; enrichment planting of degraded forest reserves and promotion of trees-on-farm or farm forestry. It also outlines measures to mobilize public, donor and private sector resources to finance these actions.

Over the past six (6) months, three very important global and regional events have taken place that have significant implications for landscape restoration globally and worthy of mention.

On the 25th of September 2015, 193 United Nations member countries unanimously adopted the 17 universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 169 targets
that are to operationalize them. The world resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want, and to heal and secure our planet by the year 2030.

On the 6th of December 2015, barely two (2) months thereafter, during the Global Landscape Forum at the Climate Change Conference in Paris, the African continent united under the aegis of NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa’s Development) and the World Resources Institute (WRI) pledged commitments towards a Pan-African initiative, the African Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100), to restore 100 million hectares of Africa’s deforested and degraded landscapes by 2030. It is worthy to note that at the launch, out of a total of $540 million pledged by five international impact investors, the top two were companies who are already establishing large scale commercial forest plantations in Ghana in collaboration with the Forestry Commission under Public-Private Partnerships, these are Ecoplanet Bamboo LLC and Form International who respectively pledged $175 million and $150 million investments in forest plantations in Africa by 2030.

On the 12th of December 2015, just six (6) days thereafter, 195 UN member countries in Paris unanimously adopted the first-ever universal legally binding global Climate Agreement, requiring member states to embark on ambitious pathways towards a clean economy that averts the undesirable effects of climate change
These three recent events impose great responsibilities on us as citizens of the world with a common destiny. They present us with abundant opportunities and challenges to work in concert to tackle head-on the hydra-headed challenges of deforestation and forest degradation by embarking on ambitious landscape restoration projects and programmes, while at the same time taking actions to address the drivers.

It is my hope that these two days would be spent learning from good examples of best practices around the world. That we will seize the opportunity to share ideas, experiences and knowledge and to establish key linkages and networks that will facilitate the achievement of the objectives of this working conference.

It is my fervent hope that this conference would not be just an event but rather the beginning of a movement for the restoration of Africa’s deforested and degraded landscapes – a restoration of ecosystem functionality with attractive financial returns, that positively impacts livelihoods and helps conserves biodiversity.

I wish you all fruitful deliberations and once again, I say welcome, *Bienvenue, Karibu*

In Ghana, we will say *Miifala Nye, Woezor, Sannu da zuwa, Akwaaba.*

Thank you