We all know why we are here this afternoon, when we should be in our offices and behind our desks, working. Our elders say that when people in a community abandon the comfort of their homes in a hot and sunny afternoon into the open, then all is not well with them. This adage is apt in our current circumstance. We have had to abandon our offices and assemble here this afternoon owing to the sudden and shocking death of our late President of the Republic of Ghana, Professor John Evans Fiifi Atta Mills.

Although the demise of Prof. Mills is a great loss, nationally, the loss is more grievous to us at the Forestry Commission, in view of his vision, for afforestation and environmental serenity – a vision, he pursued with demonstrable and abiding consistency and total commitment.

**Plantation Development Programme**

The first year into his administration, Professor Mills launched the National Forest Plantation Development Programme at Abofoo in the Offinso District of the Ashanti Region as a critical national intervention to, among other things, resuscitated the dwindling fortunes of Ghana’s forest resource base, reduce wood raw material deficit, increase food production, create jobs and alleviate poverty. The late President walked his talk and made annual budgetary provision for the plantation programme!

One recalls the late President’s admonition to Ghanaian on the need to secure the sanctity and integrity of our forest, when he launched the plantation programme at Abofoo: “We must guard the forest resource base for the sake of posterity and as moral obligation. We must all respect and use this strategic resource judiciously. The activities of illegal loggers and chainsaw operators are not only depriving the nation of huge revenue over the years but also contributing to environmental degradation in diverse ways. We can no longer sit by and encourage the degradation of our forest resources and forest reserves, without the appropriate sanctions being applied.”

Presently, all the 170 Political Districts in the country are covered under the programme and 30,000 hectares of degraded and deforested land have been planted, making the country-side clean and green again and creating 68,000 jobs. Ecosystems and watershed management system have been improved as result of our forest restoration programme.
Achimota Eco Park

President Mills showed to us his total support to the concept of developing Achimota Reserve into a first class Ecotourism Park in the country and gave his total commitment to this Eco Park innovation to happen during his time.

International Conventions under Wildlife Conservation

Some International Partners working with FC like Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Agreement on the Conservation of African- Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)) has sent a letter of Condolence to the Commission and Ghana stating the unprecedented collaboration and regional cooperation towards safeguarding endangered species, migratory waterbirds, marine turtles, marine mammals and Sharks they have experienced this short time under the leadership of the late President Mills.

Implementation of Single Spine Pay Policy has also enhanced the remuneration package of staff of the Commission.

Herein resides the justification in our dirge on the occasion of the astounding death of Professor Mills - a man with an astute vision for forestation and the environment. But as we mourn the sudden death of our beloved father, let us, as employees of the Forestry Commission, have space and time to celebrate and cherish his legacy of sound forest management, which the great Professor has bequeathed to us. It is our sacred duty to requite and reciprocate this invaluable legacy from our late President to us.

Suffice it to say that it is our responsibility, as stewards of the forest, and by extension, the wildlife therein, to sustainably develop, manage and protect this strategic resource. The commitment of the late President to the sustenance of this resource therefore, provides us with the tonic, vim and verve to ensure that we leave future generations and their communities with richer, better and more endowed forest and wildlife resources, than we inherited. It is our fervent hope his successor H.E John Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana will offer the same support and commitment to restore the nation`s forest and wildlife estates.

This done, the soul of our late President would perfectly rest, as his toil would not have been in vain. Thank you for your attention. ON BEHALF OF STAFF AND MANAGEMENT OF FORESTRY COMMISSION

SAMUEL AFARI DARTEY

CHIEF EXECUTIVE