

## Memorandum from the Commonwealth Relations Office on the independence of the Gold Coast (17 September 1956)

**Caption:** In a memorandum dated 17 September 1956, the Commonwealth Relations Office reports on the victory of Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah in the general election held in July 1956. His victory paves the way for the independence of the Gold Coast.

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SECRET

MEMORANDUM

THE GOLD COAST

The Secretary of State for the Colonies will shortly announce the intention of the United Kingdom Government to introduce into Parliament at the first available opportunity a Gold Coast Independence Bill and, subject to Parliamentary approval, to accord the Gold Coast independence within the Commonwealth on 6th March, 1957.

2. The events leading up to this announcement stem from the statement made on 11th May, 1956, in which the Colonial Secretary said that if a general election were held in the Gold Coast the United Kingdom Government would be prepared to accept a motion calling for independence within the Commonwealth passed by a reasonable majority in a newly elected legislature, and then to declare a firm date for the attainment of independence within the Commonwealth.

3. The Legislative Assembly in the Gold Coast was dissolved on 5th June and a general election was held on 12th and 17th July. As a result Dr. Mkrumah's Party (the Convention People's Party) was returned to power with only a slightly reduced majority. They hold 72 of the 104 seats in the new Legislative Assembly, i.e. over two-thirds of the total.

4. The new Legislative Assembly was opened on 31st July and on 3rd August a motion in the following terms was passed by 72 votes to none, the opposition members being absent:-

"That this Assembly do authorise the Government of the Gold Coast to request Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom as soon as practicable this year to procure the enactment by the United Kingdom Parliament of an Act to provide for the independence of the Gold Coast as a Sovereign and independent State within the Commonwealth under the name of Ghana."

5. The conditions attached to the Colonial Secretary's undertaking of 11th May have thus been fulfilled. The Gold Coast has enjoyed an advanced form of constitution since 1951, and something amounting very nearly to full internal self-government since 1954. The United Kingdom Government are confident that the time has now come for the final step.

6. The Gold Coast Government are aware that there is insufficient time this year to complete the legislative action and other formal steps which will be necessary, and despite the wording of the motion they are not expected to object should independence be deferred until the early months of 1957. In fact it has long been understood that the date of 6th March (which is the anniversary of the signing of the Bond of 1844 from which British power and jurisdiction are generally derived) would be particularly acceptable to local opinion.

7. The Northern Territories, unlike the rest of the Gold Coast, are a Protectorate, where both Her Majesty the Queen and the United Kingdom Government have Treaties with the Chiefs dating from the later years of the 19th century. During the last few years the Chiefs have, from time to time, argued that the existence of these Treaties could, and should, operate as a means of staying the grant of independence to the Gold Coast as a whole until such time as the successors to the signatories of these Treaties agreed to their abrogation. In the recent General Election, however, about half the / electors



electors in the Northern Territories supported the party which favours independence for the Gold Coast under a unitary form of government, and representatives of the Chiefs have said that they do not wish to delay the coming of independence and that they realise that this means the ending of the Protectorate.

8. In May 1956 a plebiscite was held under United Nations auspices in the Trust Territory of British Togoland, as a result of which the Trusteeship Council, in July, noted that the will of the majority was for union with an independent Gold Coast and recommended termination of the Trusteeship Agreement, to become effective upon the attainment of independence by the Gold Coast. The question has still to be considered by the General Assembly, sometime during the 11th Session. If the Assembly endorses the recommendation for integration the appropriate legal steps will be taken to include the territory within the independent Gold Coast.

9. The name Ghana, referred to in the Gold Coast resolution, derives from an ancient inland empire called Ghana or Ghanata, covering a large area in the Western and Southern Sahara. It is the name from which the word guinea was derived (cf. the Gulf of Guinea). Ghana is thought to have been founded about 300 A.D. and to have flourished until about 1100, when its cities were sacked by Arabs from the North and East. The fugitives were probably the ancestors of the Akan peoples of the Colony and Ashanti regions of the present Gold Coast.

Copies of the memorandum have been communicated to the Governments of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Union of South Africa, India, Pakistan, Ceylon and the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland.

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COMMONWEALTH RELATIONS OFFICE MEMORANDUM DATED 17th SEPTEMBER, 1956