



President Jerry John Rawlings, former President of Ghana

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Biography



Jerry John Rawlings was born in Accra on 22nd June, 1947, to a Ghanaian mother from Dzelukope, near Keta, in the Volta Region, and a Scottish father.

He was educated at Achimota School where he obtained his General Certificate of Education 'O' Level in 1966. He enlisted as a Flight Cadet in the Ghana Air Force in August, 1967, and was subsequently selected for officer cadet training at the Ghana Military Academy and Training School,

Teshie, in Accra.

In March, 1968, he was posted to Takoradi in the Western Region to continue his course. He passed out in January, 1969, as a commissioned Pilot Officer. He won the coveted "Speed Bird Trophy" as the best cadet in flying and airmanship. He earned the rank of Flight-Lieutenant in April, 1978. He was an efficient officer with a close rapport with his men.

During his service with the Ghana Air Force, he witnessed the deterioration of discipline and morale, reflecting the corruption of the regime of the Supreme Military Council (SMC) at that time. His awareness of the injustices in society was growing. He was thus regarded with some unease by the SMC.

He read widely and discussed social and political ideas with a growing circle of like-minded friends and colleagues.

On May 28, 1979, President Rawlings, together with six others, appeared before a General Court Martial in Accra, charged with leading a mutiny of junior officers and men of the Ghana Armed Forces on 15th May, 1979. There was strong public reaction, especially after his statement had been read in court, explaining the social injustices that had prompted him to act. When an execution looked imminent he said, "Leave my men alone. I take responsibility for the actions of my men." This defence and courage by President Rawlings is what sparked the special bond between him



and the men, something never heard of from officers before. The ranks of the Armed Forces, in particular, expressed deep sympathy with his stated aims and that changed the course of history.

When he was scheduled for another court appearance on 4th June, 1979, President Rawlings was sprung from custody. With the support of both military and civilians, he led a revolt, which decisively ousted the Supreme Military Council from office and brought the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) into being.

The AFRC, under the chairmanship of President Rawlings, carried out a "house-cleaning exercise" aimed at purging the Armed Forces and society at large of corruption and graft as well as restoring a sense of moral responsibility and the principles of accountability and probity in public life.



Meanwhile, following the programme already set in motion before the 4th June Uprising for civilian administration, general elections were held. On 24th September, 1979, the AFRC handed over to the civilian Government of the People's National Party (PNP) under President Hilla Limann.



On 31st December 1981, President Rawlings led a section of the Armed Forces to overthrow the PNP administration. A Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), composed of both civilian and military members, was established, with President Rawlings as the Chairman.

His interests include reading, building model aircraft, horse riding and swimming. He is married to Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings. They have four children - three girls and a boy.

President Rawlings ceased to be a member of the Ghana Armed Forces with effect from September 14, 1992. He formed the National Democratic Congress, which contested and won the 1992 Presidential and Parliamentary elections. He and the party again won the 1996 elections. His term of office ended in the year 2000.

He is the joint recipient of the 1993 World Hunger Prize. He holds an Honorary Doctor of Law Degree from Medgar Evers College, City University of New York and Lincoln University Doctorate Degree for Diplomacy and Development.



Achievements as President

- Achieved political and economic stability in a region rife with conflicts (for example Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Guinea Bissau and Sierra Leone).
- Created 110 districts through non-partisan district level elections. Education, infrastructure developments and healthcare all devolved to the district level. Annual government subvention by law goes to the district — unthinkable in many other African countries. Absorbed over one million Ghanaians living in Nigeria who were expelled. Housed them at El -Wak stadium in 1983 and then moved them to their family homes. Most other economies, including even advanced ones such as Germany saw their economies suffer when they reunified with integrated citizens (for example German reunification) . Turned this crisis into a symbol of national unity.
- Built first ever memorials to Kwame Nkrumah and W.E.B. DuBois.
- Followed an independent foreign policy
- Returned Ghana to democratic rule in 1992, after a public referendum by a wide majority approved a new constitution. Neither Nigeria, Iraq, Togo, nor Côte d'Ivoire were able to achieve this feat (in Nigeria two governments were overthrown during this period).
- Passed the value added tax (VATR of 10%) to secure government revenue base, which today funds most government public expenditures.
- Passed the Ghana Educational Trust Fund (GET Fund) that is today educating millions of Ghanaians.



highlight the successes of the country.

- First Ghanaian President in 20 years to be received on a state visit of the US.
- Expanded electricity to Northern parts of Ghana - hitherto ignored by ruling elites since 1957.
- Both Bill Clinton and Queen Elizabeth II visited Ghana during Rawlings tenure to



- The NDC's agricultural policy and programme 1994-2000 resulted in the recognition of Ghana's Food Production Index of 148% for 1995-1997 as "the third highest achievement in the record after Jordan (157%) and China (156%) in the World Bank's "1999-2000 Development Report."
- Contributed immensely towards dispute resolution and peace keeping in several of the unstable countries in the West African sub-region and beyond.
- Started the Expansion Project and the Renovation of the 37 Military Hospital.
- In the urban road sector, reconstructed the entire Kumasi city roads, Sekondi-Takoradi city roads and Accra city roads. In Accra, these included the six-lane dual carriage road leading to the four-lane dual carriage road from the Tetteh Quarshie Interchange to the Independence Avenue.
- Constructed the Kumasi-Sunyani asphalt road; the Kintampo-Tamale-Bolgatanga-Paga Faso asphalt road; and the double surfacing bitumen Bibiani-Awaso-Sefwi Wiawso road.



- Established the University for Development Studies, and used his Hunger Award Prize Money to buy books for the University's Library.
- He upgraded the Winneba Advanced Teacher Training College into a full-fledged public University of Education, Winneba, thus adding two new public Universities to the three that had existed since independence.
- Introduced the policy of allowing the establishment of private tertiary institutions, including Universities, to supplement the public sector Universities. Implemented the policy of one region, one Polytechnic.
- Made sure that every district had at least two senior secondary schools.
- Constructed the modern regional hospitals at Cape Coast, Ho and Sunyani. Numerous modern district hospitals were constructed in the district capitals all over the country.



- Potable water was provided for so many communities that at the time he was leaving office, guinea worm infestation had virtually been eradicated from Ghana.
- The housing sector, the sprawling housing estates at Adenta, Sakumono, Lashibi, and on the Spintex Road all in Accra and the SSNIT Estates all over the country were constructed during His Era.
- There was the smooth, historic transfer of power from the NDC to the NPP in 2001.
- The creation of District Assemblies' Common Fund, the GetFund, the Road Fund, the EDIF and the Energy Fund Ghana's huge reputation in international peace keeping, coupled with the ability of President Rawlings to get the illustrious son of Ghana, Kofi Annan, elected as the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Post-Presidency Activities

President Rawlings later played a key role as a check on the NPP government during his time as the then erstwhile president. He has given numerous lectures at universities around the world, including a recent lecture in Oxford University titled 'Security and Democracy in Africa' and an address at the New York University titled "Mobilizing African People for Economic Development". He has also been invited as guest speaker at various functions around the globe, and continues to do so. He also serves as a member of the African Presidential Roundtable, a signature programme of the African Presidential Archives and Research Centre (APARC) at Boston University, where he makes valuable contributions on development issues in Africa.



He is a close friend of both Nelson Mandela and President Bill Clinton, and plans to play a constructive role in Ghana and Africa's development despite his retirement from politics. In 2008/09 President Rawlings played a vital if not decisive role in returning the NDC (National Democratic Party) to power, and he persists in publicly guiding the government and party to uphold the values of probity, accountability, freedom and justice.

Also see his blog at <http://jjrawlings.wordpress.com/>