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## **RECOGNISING THE ROLE OF PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS IN THE PROVISION OF LEGAL EDUCATION IN GHANA**

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ADDRESS DELIVERED BY MRS. IRENE ANSA-ASARE HORSHAM,  
RECTOR OF MOUNTCREST UNIVERSITY COLLEGE,  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 12TH MATRICULATION CEREMONY,  
27TH NOVEMBER, 2021

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On behalf of the Founders, management and staff of MountCrest University College, it is my pleasure to welcome you all to this 12th matriculation ceremony, admitting the 2021B cohort of law students.

Today's matriculation ceremony falls within a significant period in the evolution of legal education in Ghana. It comes at a time when the pursuit of access to legal education could not be more pertinent in our country's relatively young democracy. The keen interest of all stakeholders and the passion with which the discourse on access to legal education is held highlights the significant and unique place legal education holds in the future of Ghana's democratic development.

I am, personally, humbled by the significance of MountCrest's own part in shaping this development through the bold vision of our Founder, Mr. Kwaku Ansa-Asare, as the catalyst for widening access to legal education by the inclusion of private providers in conformity with the spirit of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana. As you know, MountCrest was the pioneer private tertiary institution in Ghana to offer the LLB programme to applicants from Ghana and beyond. We have faced many challenges but, in the spirit of togetherness, we have risen through the face of adversity to continue on our path of playing our part as pacesetters in making legal education accessible to all qualified persons, regardless of socio-economic backgrounds. We are eternally grateful to our staff and students, both past and present for their hard work, dedication and support in bringing life to our motto *Ut Vitam Habeant* (meaning 'that they may have life').

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I am delighted to say that our staff, alumni, and students have continually made us proud by striving for excellence and exceeding our expectations wherever they have found themselves. Year on year, the number of MountCrest graduates who are successful in the entrance examinations into the Ghana School of Law is at an impressive and enviable level, as is the number of our alumni who are called to the Bar. We find our alumni who undertake further studies abroad excelling at the highest levels, often emerging in the top tiers of their cohorts wherever they find themselves. We are also proud to say that we find our alumni in key positions in both public and private sectors, including Parliament, the Judicial Service, and the Ghana Armed Forces.

This brings me to the crux of my message to you today, which centres on the key role of private institutions in the provision of legal education in Ghana. I find it quite worrying to see that the discourse on reforming legal education in Ghana appears to lack full stakeholder engagement, and rather than increase access to legal education, seems to take us backwards by restricting such access, forgetting why the Ghana School of Law was established in the first place. Lest we forget, we must constantly remind ourselves that the provision of legal education in Ghana was originally intended to be inclusive for all, to widen access to legal education beyond the elite, and to satisfy the manpower needs of Ghana for socio-economic development. In terms of lawyer-citizen ratio, it is clear that we are worse off as a country than we were 50 years ago. It is time for a complete overhaul of our system of legal education and we need to have full stakeholder engagement in order to achieve this. That engagement must include government, regulators, policy makers, academics, students, and both public and private providers of legal education.

It is also time to stop labelling law faculties and their students as being of poor quality by virtue of one 2-hour entrance examination into the Ghana School of Law, which seeks to restrict access into same, and focus on addressing the real challenges that face the provision of legal education.

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That label wipes away the hard work put in by the accrediting authorities, the faculties and the students who have earned their LLBs on merit, and who are often demoralised by such insensitive remarks after they are denied access to continuing to undertake professional legal education. From my own interaction with students as a teacher of first year courses at MountCrest, I can confidently say that our students are bright, dedicated and hard-working and certainly of the required academic calibre by the accrediting authorities. Every student who graduates from MountCrest University College with a law degree awarded by our mentoring institution, KNUST, is deserving of the award, which is internationally recognised as being of high quality. The proof of the pudding, as they say, is in the tasting. Our alumni who find themselves in further and professional legal education abroad excel beyond our expectations.

As students of Ghana's premier private law faculty, I urge you all to be proud of who you are, of your unique circumstances, and of where you find yourselves today. The key lesson that we, at MountCrest, took away from the process of your admission into the MountCrest family was that you applied to MountCrest as your preferred institution of choice and not as a fall-back position. This is significant in highlighting the role that private providers play in the provision of education in Ghana today. I am often taken aback by the description of private institutions as 'mushroom schools' by some people in places of authority. I find this description to be most unfortunate especially when it is made by people who ought to know better. Rather than being labelled as inferior institutions in our educational space, private providers of education ought to be viewed as equal and vital partners in our socio-economic development as a nation. More importantly, individuals and organisations who contribute their quota to society by dedicating their personal, family, and organisational resources to the provision and financing of education ought to be commended and not vilified.

The undeniable fact is that government cannot do it all. Government cannot educate all the millions of Ghanaians who are in need of education with the limited resources available to it without the participation of the private education sector.

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If we are honest with ourselves as Ghanaians, we will admit the glaring reality that it is the private sector that has saved basic education in Ghana. I do not know about you, but I do not know of anyone in government today or in my personal and professional circles whose child attends a government basic school. And by government schools, I am not referring to mission schools assisted by the state like our local Anglican, Methodist or Presbyterian basic schools. I am referring to true government basic schools like those attended by some of our parents and grandparents that were administered by district and municipal authorities. Our children today attend private basic schools which provide an excellent foundation for further studies. The fact is that it is these privately educated children at basic level, with their excellent foundation, who make up the majority of students in our top secondary schools and tertiary institutions. It is important to recognise the commendable role that these private basic schools play in the development of our nation.

As far as secondary and tertiary education is concerned, the private sector plays a significant role that must not be undermined by careless labels like ‘mushroom schools’. I, on behalf of MountCrest, reject that label with the contempt it deserves. I am certain that my fellow heads of Independent Universities in Ghana would join me in rejecting such a label as being inimical to the progress this country seeks to make in terms of increasing access to tertiary education by widening private participation guaranteed by the Constitution. I would urge you and all students of private tertiary institutions, in particular private law faculties to also collectively reject that label of being students of a mushroom faculty with the contempt with which it deserves. You are not in a mushroom school. You are a student of Ghana’s premier private law faculty. Be proud of yourself, hold your head high, place your hand on your heart and proclaim yourself to be a proud student of MountCrest University College.

Let us remember that we are here to read law to become ethically responsible law graduates who are ready to contribute our quota in the transformation of our society, and to excel wherever we find ourselves. We are not here to learn strategies and techniques solely aimed at passing a 2-hour entrance examination at the end of our studies.

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In joining the MountCrest community, it is important to always remember that you will be admitted into MountCrest as junior members of the University College. You should also remember that your attendance at MountCrest is a privilege and not a right. Just as we are privileged to have selected you to join our community, so must you feel privileged that, having made the choice to apply, you have been selected to be admitted to join us. Therefore, when you take your matriculation oath, please take the contents of the oath seriously and acknowledge that you will now be a member of the MountCrest community and act accordingly.

We are a family here at MountCrest and as in all families, there will be good times and challenging times. We welcome in good faith and appreciate all the constructive feedback we receive from you. We also promise to strive to address your needs positively. Let us all work together in harmony as a family and a close-knit community and promote and protect our image jealously. I am confident that by subscribing to the values for which MountCrest stands, we will together build a great institution that fulfils its vision and mission. You, our new students, must strive to carry the torch that has been passed on to you by your predecessors and must always bear that mark of excellence in all that you do, whether academically, professionally or in your private lives.

On behalf of the Founders, may I take this opportunity to thank all the teaching and non-teaching staff of MountCrest for their hard-work, dedication, and sacrifice in building this institution. We are truly grateful. On behalf of all staff and continuing students of MountCrest, I welcome you all to the family. AKWAABA!!! Congratulations.

*Mrs. Irene Ansa-Asare Horsham*  
*Rector, MCU*



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