

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY MR. JOSEPH WHITTAL, DEPUTY COMMISSIONER,
CHRAJ, AT THE MAIDEN GRADUATION CEREMONY FOR PARTICIPANTS OF
THE 2013/2014 BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS COURSE FOR HEALTH
PROFESSIONALS HELD AT THE WA HEALTH ASSISTANTS TRAINING
SCHOOL ON 29TH JULY, 2014**

Distinguished Chairman,

Regional Director, Ghana Health Services, Upper West Region,

Respected Principal of Wa Health Assistants School,

Tutors and other Officials of the College Present,

Invited Guests,

Brothers and Sisters from the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I bring you warm and fraternal greetings from the Commission Membership who could not all be here to share with you their thoughts on this momentous occasion, they are nevertheless with you in spirit.

We have gathered here today, to honour the hard work of some of this great Institutions illustrious sons and daughters who, despite a tight and congested course outline on your main curriculum, still made time to study the Basic Course on Human Rights for Health Professionals for the past five months and having acquitted yourselves creditably, as I am made to understand from the Course Instructors, will be graduating today.

You will accordingly be awarded certificates signifying that you have acquired basic knowledge on human rights that will be very essential when you complete your course of study course and settle down to work .

However, it will be useful to pause and reconsider the significance of what these students voluntarily undertook to study to equip themselves with knowledge as they complete their course of study and getting ready to join the world of work in

the light of recent events and happenings in Ghana with particular reference to the Health sector.

The Suweiba Baby Scandal at Okomfo Anokye Teaching Hospital is still reverberating around us. This Commission will soon finalise and release its Report on investigations it conducted on the two babies who lost limbs in Northern Region through the direct action or inaction of Health Professionals.

Almost every week that passes by we are made aware through the media of one too many health related issues with direct impact on human life. When Medical Officers are not on sit down strike where they lay down their stethoscopes, they are on work to rule or something similar to that. After they resume work, Pharmacists take over. When that dies down, nurses or nursing students take to the streets!

Yet, these actions have serious implications for the lives of ordinary people. People are left unattended to in the wards and some actually die as a direct result of these actions of public officers considered essential staff under the labour law and who should not go on strike.

It must be stressed, that the Commission understands and appreciates the reasons given for these actions such as the high cost of living in the wake of the economic down turn and similar other reasons and would therefore call upon Government to do everything possible to meet its side of any agreement with any workers designated essential service under the labour law who cannot embark on strike.

Nevertheless, it is equally important at the same time for the Commission to strongly urge workers designated essential service such as nurses to consider the human rights implications of any such decisions to strike.

Mr. Chairman,

The Ghana Health Service is one of the Public Services of Ghana and the implementing wing of the Executive Arm of Government with regards to the protection and fulfilment of the right to health.

Article 12 (1) of the 1992 Constitution, requires that: **“ The fundamental human rights and freedoms enshrined in [chapter 5] shall be respected and upheld by the Executive, Legislature and Judiciary and all organs of government and its agencies and where applicable to them, by all natural and legal persons in Ghana and shall be enforceable by the courts”** (emphasis supplied)

The direct effect of Article 12 of the Constitution is that all public officers must have knowledge of human rights as duty bearers in order to be able to respect the rights of persons they render service to.

The best way to meet this Constitutional directive is to mainstream human rights education into the curricula of all Professional Training Institutions and schools which train professionals for service delivery in the public services. Anything short of that would mean that we train people on only professional knowledge who do not appreciate that the goal of their work is to protect, respect and fulfil the rights of persons they serve.

Chairman,

The need for the introduction of the Basic Course on Human Rights for Health Professionals arose out of findings made over the years by the Commission in its monitoring of the fulfilment of economic and social rights by the State and its Agencies. For the past ten (10) years, the Commission has concentrated its efforts on monitoring how the rights to health and education in particular are being fulfilled by the State and its agencies such as the Ghana Health Service.

The findings on the delivery of service, and the standards of service rendered to Ghanaian citizens by most health professionals has been most disappointing to say the least. From a range of rude and intemperate language towards people who are ill and call on their facilities for health service, to actions and decisions that clearly manifest maladministration of the health facilities made available by the taxes of Citizens.

This Course, presently running in ten Nursing Training Colleges is the Commission’s effort at inculcating the respect for human rights and values in our

nurses who deal more directly on a day to day basis with persons attending health facilities for service.

Seeing the success rates and the interest student nurses have shown in this course, and having regard to the Constitutional directive to all public officers and other persons to respect human rights and freedoms, the Commission would engage the Nurses and Midwives Council; the Medical and Dental Council; the Pharmacy Council and similar professional oversight or regulatory bodies of the health sector with proposals and course outlines regarding the mainstreaming of human rights in their curricula if they do not already have and to discuss the possibility of making such courses examinable ones.

The Commission wishes to extend its gratitude to the Principal and tutors of the School for the cooperation accorded our staff when they were carrying out the programme. To our students, we are truly proud of your decision to undertake the Basic Course of human rights for health professionals and we hope the knowledge gained will come in handy when you begin your professional work.

Thank you All