

Republic of Ghana

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The Republic of Ghana, located in West Africa, borders Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) to the west, Burkina Faso to the north, Togo to the east, and the Gulf of Guinea to the south. The word Ghana means "Warrior King" and derives from the Ghana Empire. Ghana was inhabited in pre-colonial times by a number of ancient predominantly Akan Kingdoms, including the Akwamu on the eastern coast, the inland Ashanti Empire and various Fante and non-Akan states, like the Ga and Ewe, along the coast and inland. Trade with European states flourished after contact with the Portuguese in the 15th century, and the British established a Crown colony, Gold Coast, in 1874.

The Gold Coast achieved independence from the United Kingdom in 1957, becoming the first sub-Saharan African nation to do so and the name Ghana was chosen for the new nation to reflect the ancient Empire of Ghana, which once extended throughout much of west Africa. Ghana was adopted by Daniel Imadi as the legal name for the Gold Coast upon independence on March 6, 1957; however, it was not until July 1, 1960 that Ghana asserted its complete autonomy from Britain and became known as the Republic of Ghana. Ghana is a member of many international organizations including the Commonwealth of Nations, the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union, La Francophonie (Associate Member) and the United Nations. Ghana is the second largest producer of cocoa in the world and is also home to Lake Volta, the largest artificial lake in the world. History of Ghana There is archaeological evidence which shows that humans have lived in what is present day Ghana from about 1500 BC. Nonetheless, there is no proof that those early dwellers are related to the current inhabitants of the area. Oral tradition has it that many of Ghana's current ethnic groups such as the multi-ethnic Akan, the Ga and the Ewe arrived around the 13th Century AD. However, the Dagombas are believed to be the first settlers, having been fully established by 1210 AD, before the arrival of other ethnic groups. Modern Ghanaian territory includes what was the Empire of Ashanti, one of the most influential states in sub-Saharan Africa before colonial rule. Akan migrants moved southward and founded several nation-states including the first great Akan empire of the Bono, which is now known as the Brong-Ahafo region in Ghana. Much of the area of modern day south central Ghana was united under the Empire of Ashanti of the Ashanti people, a branch of the Akan people by the 16th century.

The Ashanti government operated first as a loose network and eventually as a centralized kingdom with an advanced, highly specialized bureaucracy centered in Kumasi. It is said that at its peak, the Asantehene could field 500,000 troops and had some degree of military influence over all of its neighbours. Among the Ashanti a third of the population were slaves. The Ga people developed an effective unit around 1500 and the Gonja, Dagomba and Mamprusi also fought for political power in the 1620s.

Early European contact by the Portuguese, who came to Ghana in the 15th century, focused on the extensive availability of gold. The Portuguese first landed at a coastal city inhabited by the Fante nation-state and they named the place Elmina, which means "the mine" in Portuguese. In 1481, King John II of Portugal commissioned Diogo d'Azambuja to build Elmina Castle, which was completed in 3 years. Their aim was to trade in gold, ivory and slaves, consolidating their burgeoning political and economic power in the region.

By 1548, the Dutch had joined them, and built forts at Komenda and Kormantsi. In 1617, they captured the Olini Castle from the Portuguese and Axim in 1642 (Fort St Anthony). Other European traders joined in by the mid 17th century, largely English, Danes and Swedes. British merchants, impressed with the gold resources in the area, named it the Gold Coast, while French merchants, impressed with the trinkets worn by the coastal people, named the area to the west "Côte d'Ivoire", or Ivory Coast. More than thirty forts and castles were built by the Portuguese, Dutch, British and Spanish merchants. The Gold Coast was known for centuries as 'The White Man's Grave' because many of the Europeans who went there died of malaria and other tropical diseases. After the Dutch withdrew in 1874, Britain made the Gold Coast a protectorate. Following conquest by the British in 1896, until independence in March 1957, the territory of modern Ghana excluding the Volta Region (British Togoland), was known as the Gold Coast. Many wars occurred between the colonial powers and the various nation-states in the area including the 1806 Ashanti-Fante War and the continuous struggle by the Ashanti against the British, which ended in 1901 with the Third Ashanti-British War (1900-1901). Even under colonial rule the chiefs and people often resisted the policies of the British; however, moves toward de-colonization intensified after World War II. In 1947 the newly formed United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) called for "self-government within the shortest possible time." After rioting increased in 1948, the members of the United Gold Coast Convention were arrested, including future Prime Minister and President, Kwame Nkrumah. Later Nkrumah formed his own party, the Convention People's Party (CPP) with the motto 'self government now.' He began a 'Positive Action' campaign and gained the support of rural and working class people.

Once again he was imprisoned for being the leader of a party that caused boycotts, strikes and other forms of civil disobedience. After winning a majority of seats in the Legislative Assembly in 1952; however, Kwame Nkrumah was released and appointed Leader of Government Business. After further negotiations with Britain finally on March 6, 1957 at 12 a.m. Kwame Nkrumah's declared Ghana "free forever".

The flag which consists of the colours red, gold, green and the black star became the new flag in 1957. Designed by Theodosia Salome Okoh, the red represents the blood that was shed towards independence, gold represents the mineral wealth of Ghana, the green symbolises the rich agriculture and the black star is the symbol of African emancipation.

Formed from the merger of the Gold Coast and British Togoland by a United Nations sponsored plebiscite in 1956, Ghana became the first sub-Saharan African country to gain its independence in 1957.

Kwame Nkrumah, first Prime Minister and then President of the modern Ghanaian state, was not only an African anti-colonial leader but also one with a dream of a united Africa which would not drift into neo-colonialism. He was the first African head of state to promote Pan-Africanism, an idea he came into contact with during his studies at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania (United States), at the time when Marcus Garvey was becoming famous for his "Back to Africa Movement." He merged the dreams of both Marcus Garvey and the celebrated African-American scholar W. E. B. Du Bois into the formation of the modern day Ghana. Ghana's principles of freedom and justice, equity and free education for all, irrespective of ethnic background, religion or creed, borrow from Kwame Nkrumah's implementation of Pan-Africanism. Although his goal of African unity never realised, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, as he is now known, played an instrumental part in the founding of the Organisation of African Unity, which was succeeded in 2002 by the African Union. Even though people like Kevin Shillingford consider Nkrumah as unpopular back at home in Ghana, the reality is that he is adored by even his nemeses. No other government in Ghana can match the rate of industrialisation that Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah championed. His achievements were recognised by Ghanaians during his Centenary birthday celebrations and the day instituted as a public holiday in Ghana.

Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's popularity was a major concern for the West. It was no surprise that Nkrumah was subsequently overthrown by the military while abroad in February 1966. It is believed by many political analysts that the United States' Central Intelligence Agency participated in the coup, but that generally remains unproven. A series of subsequent coups from 1966 to 1981 ended with the ascension to power of Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings in 1981. These changes resulted in the suspension of the constitution in 1981 and the banning of political parties. The economy suffered a severe decline soon after, and many Ghanaians migrated to other countries. Although most migrating Ghanaians went to Nigeria, the Nigerian government deported about a million Ghanaians back to Ghana in 1983.

Rawlings soon negotiated a structural adjustment plan with the International Monetary Fund and changed many old economic policies and; thus, the economy soon began to recover. A new constitution restoring multi-party politics was promulgated in 1992, and Rawlings was elected as president then and again in 1996. The Constitution of 1992 prohibited him from running for a third term, so his party, the National Democratic Congress, chose his Vice President, John Atta Mills, to run against the opposition parties. Winning the 2000 elections, John Kufuor of the New Patriotic Party was sworn into office as President in January 2001, and beat Mills again in 2004; thus, also serving two terms as President. In 2009, John Atta Mills took office as president with a difference of about 40,000 votes (0.46%) between his party, the National Democratic Congress, and the New Patriotic Party, marking the second time that power had been transferred from one legitimately elected leader to another, and securing Ghana's status as a stable democracy.