



2016 Data Protection Conference, Accra, Ghana

29 January 2016

Honored Guests, Madam Chief Justice Wood, the Honourable Minister of Communications, my friends and colleagues of the Data Protection Commission, thank you for the invitation to join you briefly at the opening of this important conference.

It is a pleasure and an honour to have this opportunity.

As the Chair of the International Conference of Data Protection Authorities and Privacy Commissioners one of my roles is to make connections with other groupings of data protection authorities and Privacy Commissioners, to ensure we all benefit from the networks, and gain an understanding of the way in which common issues are approached in different cultural, legal and national contexts.

The last few years have seen a sudden surge in the number of African nations adopting data protection laws with at least 24 nations having some kind of data protection regulation. This confirms the African continent as a very important bloc. The international conference welcomes the increased diversity that this trend brings, and looks forward to sharing with, and learning from African nations.

The topics that you will be discussing over the next two days are of greatest importance, and are on the agendas for discussion in the Asia Pacific region, in Europe, and in the Americas. Each region in which these topics are discussed

brings a slightly different perspective to the discussion, and when we convene as an international collective, our discussion is enriched as a result.

Many countries are grappling with the new security environment, and how security and intelligence agencies should have sufficient legal authority to keep us safe, yet enough oversight to retain the trust and confidence of the populace. As your eminent countryman Kofi Annan said in 2003

“Our responses to terrorism, as well as our efforts to thwart it and prevent it, should uphold the human rights that terrorists aim to destroy. Respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law are essential tools in the effort to combat terrorism – not privileges to be sacrificed at a time of tension.”

These are wise words to be born in mind in times when security fears can lead to disproportionate intrusions into the lives of the vast majority of citizens who are unconnected with terrorist activities.

Social media, cloud computing, data breaches, all of these are on the agendas of conferences like yours from Paris to Mexico.

All around the world governments and businesses are searching for ways of realising the undeniable value and benefits of “Big Data”, but we must come together and agree on how this value can be realised in ways which respect individual privacy. Kofi Annan again:

“Big data can predict the spread of viruses based on a community’s behaviour on search engines and how often they type in keywords such as flu. It can make the management of disaster response work more efficient by predicting refugee movements and preparing first responders ahead of time. But again, without the right policy framework ensuring that big data is not abused, our privacy, indeed our liberty, will be in danger.”

Your deliberations on these subjects are as important as any other in the world, and your contribution to the international discussion will be essential, in this age in which data respects no borders.

In 2014, at our international conference in Mauritius, it was a pleasure to welcome the Ghana Data Protection Commission as a member of the International Conference. In addition to recognising the GDPC as an independent Data Protection authority with the important responsibility of protecting the privacy rights of Ghanaians, with that accreditation, the GDPC joins a collegial association of some 110 authorities representing all regions of the world.

When we next convene, for the first time on the African continent , in Marrakesh in October this year I am sure there will be opportunities for the insights you have gained during this conference, to contribute to and inform our deliberations.

I wish you well for your conference and look forward to hearing of its ideas and successes. Thank you again for the opportunity to join you briefly.