****

**Conference on Fisheries and Coastal Environment**

**Remarks by USAID/Ghana Deputy Mission Director Steven E. Hendrix**

**College of Physicians and Surgeons, Accra**

**September 27, 2017, 10:40 a.m.**

**Honorable Yaw Osafo-Maafo**,Senior Minister

**Honorable Francis kingsley Ato Codjoe**, Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Aquaculture Development;

**Professor Joseph Ghartey Ampiah**, Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Coast;

**Professor Livingstone Sam-Amoah**, Provost, College of

Agriculture and Natural Sciences;

**Professor Denis Aheto**, Director of the Centre for Coastal

Management, University of Cape Coast;

**Maurice Knight**; University of Rhode Island;

**Nana Kodwo Condua VI**, Paramount chief of Edina Traditional Area and

Other Traditional Authorities, Chiefs and Queen Mothers present;

**JoJo Solomon**, Acting President of the Ghana National Canoe Fishermen Council;

**Ms. Regina Solomon**, the President of the National Fish Processors and Traders Association (NAFTA);

Fishermen and Fishmongers;

Directors of the Ministries and Agencies;

Members of the Press;

Distinguished guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Friends and all;

All Protocols Observed,

Good morning,

It is my privilege to join you on behalf of the United States Agency for International Development as we bring the Conference on Fisheries and Coastal Environment to a close this morning. It is remarkable to see so many stakeholders in the fishing industry vowing to promote the sustainable development of Ghana’s fishing industry. Your attendance over the past three days demonstrates your commitment to ensure these plans come to fruition.

I want to highlight three important priorities in relation to our collective vision of building a thriving fish sector: the importance of protecting livelihoods; boosting the nutrition of vulnerable communities; and combatting the trafficking of children.

First, preserving Ghana’s marine systems is absolutely critical for Ghana’s growth because it provides employment to approximately 2.2 million people. There is no doubt that the preservation of Ghana’s fish stocks is important for the well-being of Ghanaian citizens. By adopting responsible fishing practices, as well as reporting and preventing illegal fishing, we can safeguard livelihoods and protect the declining fish stocks in the seas. This is where our partnership with the University of Cape Coast and the University of Rhode Island is striving to make a difference.

Through Feed the Future, the U.S. Government’s global hunger and food security initiative, we work with the Ghana Government and academic institutions to strengthen evidence-based policy making for the fish sector methods. To promote evidence-based policy making, we train Masters’ and undergraduate students in costal management to address social and economic challenges in the fishing industry. Our aim is to strengthen the governance of marine and fisheries resources in Ghana to improve coastal livelihoods for the long-term.

To the students here studying fisheries and coastal management; this is your moment. This is not just an academic exercise. Your country needs you. You know current fishing practices are not sustainable. You understand that a collapse in fishing stocks will slash the incomes of fishermen and the jobs of those in the markets that sell their catch. You comprehend what needs to happen now to help communities respond to the challenges. You understand the need for accountable, responsive governance in the sector. You know that fisherfolks need a move effective voice in the national policy debate. This is your moment to stand up and have an impact. How will you respond so that tomorrow’s children will have food? How will you help communities to save their jobs?

Second, ensuring adequate nutrition among the most vulnerable households along the coastline can ensure the stability and prosperity of this country. Fish remains an extremely important protein in Ghana. It makes up 60 percent of the animal food protein supply in the Ghanaian diet. We want to ensure that the fish we consume is healthy, free from contamination and good for consumption.

Finally, I want to tell you a short story about an amazing young man named Kojo. At the age of twelve, Kojo was trafficked from Ghana’s Central Region to Liberia where he was forced to work long hours and endured an incredible amount of mental and physical abuse. Today, Kojo now serves as an advocate in his community. Our Feed the Future program trains former victims, like Kojo to combat child labor and trafficking in Ghana’s coastal communities through advocacy. It is absolutely crucial that we enforce appropriate labor and safety standards in the fish sector, so other children do not share his fate.

It is my hope that our conversations today will serve a two-fold purpose: to inspire you and your counterparts to actively rebuilding Ghana’s fisheries and encourage everyone here today to help lead this transformation in your respective communities, like Kojo continues to do.

I truly believe that if we all work together: fishers, processors, traders, government agencies and development partners, then we can avert a fishing collapse and achieve a healthy and profitable fishing industry in Ghana. The time is now. Thank you.