**STATEMENT FROM THE PEASANT FARMERS ASSOCIATION OF GHANA (PFAG) TO JOHN DRAMANI MAHAMA, FORMER PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF GHANA ON THE STATE OF AGRICULTURE IN THE COUNTRY**

1. **BACKGROUND**

On behalf of the Board and Management of the Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana (PFAG), we wish to express our sincere gratitude for the opportunity to engage you today. We are grateful that you have taken time off your busy schedule to meet with us to deliberate on the state of agriculture and the way forward.

Your Excellency, the Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana (PFAG) is an association of smallholder farmers formed in 2005 with the mandate to advocate for pro-poor agriculture and trade policies that impact the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in Ghana and beyond. The association’s vision is “life of dignity for the peasant farmer”. Membership of the association currently stands at over 2000 registered Farmer Based Organizations (FBOs) made up of over one million individual members in thirteen operational regions of Ghana. Majority of the association’s members earn their livelihoods from farming, livestock rearing, agribusiness, fishing and all manner of petty trading.

Your Excellency, the past few years has been one of the most difficult periods in the history of this country for peasant farmers as it was characterized by unprecedented levels of inflation catalyzed by increasing food and energy prices. Most farmers were faced with increasing cost of inputs, thus, fertilizer, agro-chemicals, seeds and mechanization services, which limited their ability to maintain their farm sizes, leading to reduced crop yields, lower food supply and contributing to the astronomical food prices. Indeed, the rate of increase of cost of production was so high that farmers decided to either reduce their farm sizes or divert into other areas that they find lucrative. The cascading effect of this situation has led to the collapse of major agricultural ventures in recent times, where about 70% of poultry farms have collapsed while the remaining 30% have to scale down their operations to half of their production capacity due to high cost of poultry feed, thus maize and soya beans.

Your Excellency, agricultural related policies initiated by the government such as the One Village One Dam, Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ) among others has been poorly managed and unnecessarily personalized. The contracts for such projects were awarded to underserved and inexperienced contractors leading to poor delivery. For instance, the quality of fertilizers supplied under the PFJ is of inferior quality that many farmers are less interested in fertilizers from such suppliers, moreover, a research we conducted in 2020 indicated that about 80% of the 1V1D are not serving the intended purposes.

Your excellency, as key actors in the agricultural value chain, our major concern now is how programs and strategies of the sector are run at the whim and discretion of the Sector Minister, whiles neglecting the need to develop short, medium to long term plans for the Agriculture sector. Due to this development, the Minister of Food and Agriculture takes unilateral decisions without consulting farmers, stakeholders or even technical staff at MoFA leading to policy failure in most occasions. One such instance is the establishment o PFJ market.

Your Excellency, another important phenomena of significant impact on the activities of smallholder farmers today is climate change. Rainfall patterns and intensity has changed drastically posing serious risk to farmers’ productivity in recent times. While all agrarian countries have prioritized irrigation development as an adaptation strategy to climate change, Ghana is utilizing less than 2% of its irrigable land area. When you take Egypt for instance, their agriculture revolves around the Nile River which makes Egypt self-sufficient in food production. In Ghana, the river Volta flows through thousands of kilometers of arable lands good enough for cultivation of all manner of food crops for domestic consumption, industry and for export, yet the Government finds it prudent to prioritize huge investment for construction of National Cathedral instead.

One important decision this government took on irrigation development that we were all excited about was the sod-cutting for the construction of the Pwalugu Multi-Purpose Dam in 2019. Unfortunately, 35 months after the sod-cutting, nothing has been done so far as our visit to the dam site in October revealed the contractors have left site due to unavailability of funds.

On 27th October 2022, thousands of our members from Upper East and North East region marched in Nalerigu to petition the Vice President on the need to prioritize the Pwalugu Multi-Purpose Dam’s construction even during the ongoing IMF negotiations. Fortunately, we had the privilege to meet the Vice President yesterday where he also assured of doing everything possible to ensure its construction. Whiles we are hopeful that this is accomplished, we are also mindful of the current economic challenges and the difficulty for government to allocate resources for that purpose.

**OUR APPEAL**

Your Excellency, given your experience in governance and with an impressive record of heavy infrastructural development in Ghana, the association and partners are hopeful that, if given the opportunity to lead Ghana again, you will pay attention to these key challenges confronting small holder farmers in Ghana.

1. Constitute a Technical Committee with PFAG as a member to develop short term strategy for agricultural development for your tenure in office. This will include, strategies, investment plans and milestones. In this policy, we could develop modules for large scale commercial agriculture and different modules targeting smallholder farmers and also for the livestock sector. This could form part of your 2024 manifesto for which we are readily available to assist.
2. Adopt the Nile river concept, by prioritizing the construction of the Pwalugu Multi-Purpose Dam and other dams across the entire nation.
3. Incentivize the youth to go into farming. The youth are no longer interested in farming due to limited access to mechanization services. Access to tractors and other agricultural equipment at the Agric. Engineering Directorate are limited due to its high cost and unfavorable payment terms. The PFAG on our own have purchased few tractors and are managing them for smallholder farmers. We therefore appeal for the establishment of Farmer Service Centers to be managed by credible institutions like PFAG on hire purchase bases across all farming districts across the country
4. Farmers are not getting the maximum output and outcomes from the PFJ and in some instances they have been worse off due to the PFJ arrangements. The supply of expired and poor quality fertilizers have characterized the program with some state institutions reneging on their mandate to protect farmers and consumers. Credible and experienced companies have gradually withdrawn their participation in the program whiles cronies are being awarded to supply these sub-standard fertilizers. Over the years, numerous stakeholders have called for a review of the program to reflect the current situation, but this has fallen on deaf years. We therefore appeal, that when given the mandate, kindly review the current arrangement of the PFJ to a model that allows farmers to access affordable credit with low interest rate and will allow them to purchase quality inputs.
5. On marketing and food security, Ghana is currently in a serious food crisis, contrary to claims by MoFA that, food being smuggled into neighbouring countries is the cause of food shortage and high food prices. It is important to note that Ghana also depends on Burkina Faso and Togo for other food stuffs such as tomato, onions and livestock, hence a reciprocation of the ban of foodstuffs from their end will rather make us worse off. We suggest the strengthening of NAFCO to also mobilize and stock for domestic use. The PFAG is currently mobilizing and supplying grains to Guinness Ghana and poultry farmers and could support in this regard.

In conclusion, Your Excellency, we appeal to your high office to improve engagement with smallholder farmers across the country and consult PFAG when developing your party’s manifesto for the 2024 elections and even deepen the consultation process when given the mandate by Ghanaians to lead again. We also hope that if given the opportunity to lead again, anchor the recovery of the economy on the agricultural sector as it is the best and most efficient way to save the economy from total collapse.

Thank you.