Honorable Minister of Justice and Attorney general,

Honorable members of the parliament of Ghana and invited members of foreign parliaments,

Honorable Commissioner of the Ghana Commission on Human Rights,

Dear Human rights defenders, and representative of the civil society organizations,

Dear representatives of the press,

Dear colleagues ambassadors,

Dear friends,

I am pleased to open this event dedicated to discuss on the abolition of the death penalty. The Embassy of France in Ghana, in cooperation with the several NGOs, among them Amnesty International Ghana, has been organizing over the past years, various events in favour of the abolition of the death penalty in Ghana.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as it is well known by all of you, the commitment of France in favor of the universal abolition of the death penalty is one of the priorities of its foreign policy on human rights. Universal abolition is also a priority of the external action of the European Union.

The abolition of the death penalty is a matter of principle. Inefficient, unfair, error-prone, the death penalty should not be a decision of justice. Moreover, it has been proven that the death penalty has no deterrent effect on crime. It was only recently, not so long time ago, that the death penalty began to be gradually rejected for what it is: an act of cruelty, inhuman and degrading
treatment. In recent decades it has continued to decline. If I’m not wrong, 139 countries have now abolished or adopted a moratorium against the death penalty, when in 1977 only 34 had done so.

France has, like a hundred other states, abolished the death penalty on behalf of human being universal rights, because the death penalty is a violation of fundamental human rights. In the case of France, our journey towards abolition was particularly long. This issue has divided France until 1981. At that time, the public opinion was overwhelmingly in favor of the death penalty. The initiative came from the highest level and today, thirty-four years later, the abolition is part of our heritage and is enshrined in our Constitution. Public opinion cannot be an excuse to keep the death penalty. To abolish the death penalty, you have to be against the flow, to show the way. We must show courage, determination and perseverance.

That's why today, we continue the fight. That's why France has made abolition a priority for the French diplomacy and that’s why we lead a global campaign that mobilizes our entire network. What do we do? Our embassies are partnering with NGOs, media, associations, intellectuals, students. We work with legislators, who are obviously key players. We act primarily towards young people, because they are the citizens, and for some, the decision makers of the next years.

At the international level, with our partners in multilateral fora like the UN or the Human Rights Council in Geneva, France keeps the momentum and is using its influence to strengthen the global trend in support of a moratorium on executions. France has ratified all commitments under the United Nations or the Council of Europe: the most important being the “Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights” adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989, in favor of the definitive abolition, and the “European Convention for the Protection of humans rights and fundamental freedom” that protects the right of life for every individual.

In 1998, the European Union adopted guidelines on death penalty aimed to raise it in one of the main priorities in the field of human rights. Indeed, abolition of death penalty is a pre-condition for accession to the European Union.
Many states have been observing de facto moratoriums, sometimes for several decades. What obstacles prevent states moving from moratoriums to abolition?

In Africa, 18 states have abolished the death penalty in law, when in recent years a positive trend has been observed. In 2014 there has been a 28% reduction of the number of known executions compared to 2013, 46 compared to 64. In Africa fewer countries carried out executions and imposed death sentences (3 countries in 2014 versus 5 in 2013), although the overall number of death sentences increased. At least 46 judicial executions were carried out in 3 countries. Progress towards the abolition in the region is slow but real, Madagascar Parliament recently adopted a bill abolishing the death penalty.

In Ghana, since the independence in 1957, 210 executions took place. Even if, as we all know, there are no executions since 1993, there are still more than 100 prisoners sentenced to death penalty in the jails. His Excellency President Mahama, in the exercise of his prerogative of mercy and in accordance with article 72 of the 1992 constitution, has recently commuted 14 prisoners sentenced for death to life imprisonment. But at the same time, in 2014 nine death sentences were imposed by the criminal courts.

In 2011, the Constitutional Review Commission recommended to the President that the death penalty should be abolished. This recommendation was accepted by the Government of Ghana. However, as one of the entrenched clauses in the Ghana’s 1992 Constitution, the recommendation for the abolition of the death must go to a referendum for the people of Ghana to make a decision. Ghana is therefore at a crossroad on this issue.

Abolitionist strategies to be implemented in Ghana must rely on several groups: politicians, of course all the members of the Parliament, the civil society organizations, and other national institutions, religious leaders, traditional leaders, non-governmental organizations, trade unions, student unions, professional associations such as bar associations, regional economic communities, educational institutions, and medias. This battle must be collective. There are battles we cannot win alone, and the fight against the death penalty is one of them.

Ladies and gentlemen,
We all know here that the road to abolition is long and difficult. Ghana, who has a good reputation in good governance and a strong democratic record, would be the perfect country for leading the abolitionist movement in Africa.

As a conclusion let me remind that all countries that are moving in this direction will find France with them. France is convinced that abolishing the death penalty is a step towards justice and faith in dignity of the human being.

Thank you