

# Prof. Takyiwaa Manuh wins Franco-German Prize



By Kester Aburam Korankye

**A** FORMER Director of the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana, Professor Takyiwaa Manuh has been awarded the Franco-German Prize for Human Rights and the Rule of Law.

The prize, awarded on the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which fell on December 10, 2023, was also received by 12 eminent human rights defenders from countries around the world.

Prof. Manuh was presented with the award at a cocktail reception attended by members of civil society movements in the country, academics and diplomats. The event was held at the residence of the French Ambassador to Ghana in Accra last Monday evening.

A citation accompanying the award said Professor Takyiwaa Manuh had been and still is a strong advocate for respecting Human Rights for All.

"Her whole life, she has raised her voice on various occasions in the defence of human rights and the rule of law. She was part of the group of 18 prominent Ghanaians who publicly advocated the respect of human rights and the rule of law in the context of the controversial draft private member bill regarding sexual orientation," it stated.

## Award

The Franco-German Prize for Human Rights and the Rule of Law, established in 2016, rewards each year women and men who advocate for freedom of expression and the media and for the promotion of equality



• Prof. Abena Takyiwaa Manuh with her Franco-German Award for her Human Rights advocacy

between women and men, who fight against torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, enforced disappearances, as well as violence.

## Universal rights

Speaking at the reception, the French Ambassador to Ghana, Jules-Armand Aniambossou said the award was to recognise the work done by Prof. Manuh over the years to inspire the younger generation to also become human rights advocates.

"Our aim with this award is to thank you for the work you have accomplished

and also to honour you so that the younger generation can continue your commitment," he said.

He also stressed that it was essential to affirm the universal rights which applied to all human beings, whatever their gender, religion or nationality.

"It is essential to reaffirm this universality at a time when, in recent years, certain rights that were thought to have been definitively acquired are being called into question in different parts of the world.

"This challenge is accompanied by a relativist narrative, which claims that human rights do not apply to everyone, that they are "Western" rights, good for some but not for others," he said and further emphasised that those rights were not reserved for a minority, they were universal and applied to everyone.

"It is not for a few minorities but for everyone simply because they aim to recognise freedom and equality in dignity and rights for all, which is why the United Nations adopted them," the ambassador stated.

## LGBT rights

Mr Aniambossou described issues on LGBT rights as a complicated subject which had to be raised anyway.

"I know it is a complicated subject, especially when it's mentioned and discussed publicly. I'm not trying to promote anything but I would like to remind you that we have also come a long way in France, leading to the decriminalisation of homosexuality only in 1982 and then passing the law opening marriage to same-sex couples in 2013.

"This gave rise to fears and protests, many demonstrations. And what we can see today is that these demonstrations

are no longer necessary, that many politicians who were opposed to this measure have changed their minds and that French society has not been upset by these developments," he said.

He explained that he was sharing such examples to emphasise that promoting human rights, required a mutual and firm commitment, as well as an unwavering will.

## Constitution

In her remarks to accept the honour done her, Prof. Manuh noted that the ushering in of the Fourth Republic in January 1993 with the promulgation of the 1992 Constitution, promised Ghanaians a break from arbitrariness and violations to a society anchored on respect for human rights of all persons, and adherence to the rule of law in personal and national life, through guarantees of the equality and dignity of all persons.

She said such rights must be guarded and vigorously defended even against the state and any citizen who may seek to restrict or deny their enjoyment by other citizens on account of their gender, identity, beliefs and practices, in clear violation of the provisions of the Constitution and other instruments that Ghana is signed on to as a sovereign state.

"These fundamental freedoms and protections have been largely upheld but we know that they cannot be taken for granted.

"We must also recognise the intersectional ties among human rights and the rule of law, an inclusive society and a dynamic civil society," she said.

She added that adherence to the rule of law, for example, cannot consist of a selective promotion of some rights over others or political considerations of what and whose rights we will defend when it suits us.

"Ghana's democracy is still young and a work in progress that we must seek to ground in our everyday actions and concerns, without regard to parochial interests," she said.