



Trades Union Congress (Ghana)

Headquarters Secretariat, Hall of Trade Unions

P. O. Box 701, Accra - Ghana

Website: www.ghanatuc.org - Email: info@ghanatuc.org

Tel: 0302-662568 / 669675 / 666803 / 667161 / 669649

Fax: 233-302-667161 / 660618

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NEW YEAR MESSAGE - 2021

On behalf of the Executive Committee of the Trades Union Congress, I wish all workers a very Happy, Prosperous and Peaceful New Year!

Impact of Coronavirus Pandemic

Last year (2020) was a very challenging year. The coronavirus pandemic affected all of us economically, socially and psychologically. Many businesses collapsed. Thousands of workers lost their jobs and suffered severe poverty. Nearly 56,000 Ghanaians have so far been infected by the virus. The large majority have survived the disease but we have lost 336 of our compatriots to Covid-19. Our hearts and thoughts are with their families. May the Good Lord grant them the courage and strength they need to deal with this great loss.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 has followed us into 2021. The number of active cases remains quite high. We urge all workers to continue to observe the safety protocols especially the wearing of face masks, social distancing, frequent handwashing and the use of hand sanitizers. Union leaders must ensure that appropriate personal protective equipment (PPEs) is provided by their employers at every workplace. There is strong evidence that effective use of the PPEs helps to protect us from infection. Our heroes and heroines, who are working in the health sector, deserve our commendation. We urge government to do whatever it takes to protect them from infection. We are confident that government will work tirelessly to ensure adequate supply of Covid-19 vaccines in Ghana as soon as possible.

Achievements

In spite of the misery caused by the pandemic in 2020, we can still boast of some significant achievements including a successful completion of another political cycle, albeit with some challenges. We managed to conduct general elections to elect new leaders for the next four years. We

commend the commissioners and staff of Electoral Commission (EC) for all their efforts.

We take this opportunity to congratulate H.E. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo on his re-election as President of the Republic of Ghana. May the Good Lord grant him good health, wisdom and courage to lead our country.

We commend Former President John Dramani Mahama for his decision to seek redress to his grievances at the Supreme Court. That is the right thing to do. We recall that at one of the interactions between Former President Mahama and the leadership of TUC in 2016, he made an emphatic statement that “naturally, I am not a violent person”. By choosing to seek redress to his grievances at the Supreme Court, he has reaffirmed his commitment to the principle of nonviolence. Moreover, he has demonstrated that he is following the footsteps of Former President Professor Evans Atta Mills who was affectionately called “Asomdweehene” (King of Peace) because of his avowed commitment to peace. We believe strongly that our respected Supreme Court will, once again, deliver a just verdict in the election petition.

We congratulate the newly-elected Speaker of Parliament, Honorable Alban Bagbin, the Deputy Speakers, and all Members of Parliament on their election or re-election.

Leadership

We count on the new leaders to deliver us from mass poverty that has afflicted a significant section of the people of Ghana. As we have pointed out time and again, it is unpardonable that, almost 64 years after independence from colonial rule, millions of Ghanaians have no access to basic necessities such as clean water and sanitation facilities; 4.5 million Ghanaians have no access to electricity despite the fact that Ghana has excess capacity of electricity; a significant number of Ghanaian children and women of childbearing age are suffering from chronic malnutrition and anemia; many children are dying needlessly from malaria and other preventable diseases because of the unhygienic conditions and poor healthcare; our roads are comparable to war zones in terms of the number of people who lose their lives through preventable road accidents every day; many Ghanaians are living in streets because they have no access to housing; our national daily minimum wage is a paltry GHS319 per month; and young graduates cannot find jobs many years after graduation.

The task ahead is huge. In his Inaugural Address, the President acknowledged ***“the considerable amount of work that is to be done over the next four years in our drive to take our nation***

firmly onto the path of progress, prosperity and development following the havoc wreaked by COVID-19”.

That is why we urge NPP and NDC to find a way of working together, not only in the parochial interest of their parties but, more importantly, in the supreme interest of the good people of Ghana.

The President gave some indications of his commitment to lead us away from poverty to prosperity in his last State of the Nation Address (SONA) and his Inaugural Address. He promised that his government will provide water and electricity to the communities without these basic social amenities, construct more hospitals to improve healthcare, and provide more houses for the people. He reiterated his commitment to *Ghana Beyond Aid* with its emphasis on economic transformation, self-reliance, attitudinal change, and respect for core values including honesty, hard work, compassion, social partnership and patriotism. We believe that we can propel our country to higher levels of prosperity and progress if we pursue this vision more vigorously.

Job Creation

In the State of the Nation Address, the President mentioned the recruitment of 95,000 health workers into the public health sector, which helped the nation to fight COVID-19. We note the recruitment of additional teachers, security personnel and the implementation of Nations Builders Corps (NABCO) as well as the state-sponsored entrepreneurship development programmes. We expect more of such initiatives to help address the employment crisis facing our youth. In the next four years, all efforts towards economic recovery and transformation must focus on job creation. We have to work together as social partners to create more and better jobs for young Ghanaians in both public and private sectors of the economy. We can make a huge difference if we work together to remove the numerous constraints in the way of domestic production including corruption, high interest rates, ultra-liberal trade policy, and the deficit in our social and economic infrastructure.

The *One-District-One-Factory* and the *Planting for Food and Jobs*, if pursued more vigorously, can strengthen the domestic private sector. These initiatives need rapid expansion and support from all social partners. They can make a significant difference in strengthening the industrial base of our economy for job creation, especially in rural communities.

Unemployment Insurance

As part of efforts towards addressing the devastating impact of COVID-19 government, with the support of social partners, started a process towards the establishment of National Unemployment Insurance Scheme

(NUIS) and training and retraining programmes. We pledge our commitment to these initiatives. We hope that we can complete the process in the first half of 2021.

Pay Rise

For obvious reasons we have not been able to negotiate increases in the National Daily Minimum Wage and the Base Pay on the Single Spine Salary Structure for public sector workers for 2021. The TUC has already written to the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations requesting for a meeting of the National Tripartite Committee meeting to commence negotiation of national minimum wage for 2021 to pave way for the negotiation of base pay. We expect the negotiation of the national minimum wage and base pay for 2021 to be concluded before the National Budget is presented to Parliament in March 2021.

Pension

In 2020, the TUC petitioned President Akufo-Addo to approve a top-up of pension benefits for workers who retired in 2020 under the new Pensions Act (Act 766) to ensure that they were not worse-off compared to benefits they would have received if they had retired under PNDC Law 247. Government graciously granted our request. We expect the top-up to be paid to the beneficiaries as soon as possible. We know that workers who will retire in 2021 and 2022 may also face the same challenge. We appeal to government to ensure that no worker is worse-off no matter which year they retire. Government must bear the full responsibility of any shortfall in pension benefits until the benefits under Act 766 and PNDC Law 247 are equated.

In his State of the Nation Address, the President announced government's decision to exclude all security agencies from the unification pensions. We regret to inform the President that TUC cannot support such a policy. It should be noted that pension unification is an important component of the pension reform. The decision to allow security agencies to continue to enjoy benefits under the non-contributory CAP 30 scheme undermines the solidarity principle which served as a key guiding principle for the pension reform initiative. That decision also contravenes the principle of equality of treatment in employment, as clearly stipulated in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 111 (Discrimination–Employment and Occupation) which was ratified by Ghana in 1961. It entrenches a class system in pension administration where workers under the Social Security and National Insurance (SSNIT) scheme, who contribute toward their pensions, have inferior pension benefits compared to those who do not contribute towards their pension under the CAP 30 scheme.

Once again, we are calling on government to convene a stakeholder consultation forum to discuss this and other pertinent pension matters.

The TUC will refer this matter to the ILO if government goes ahead to implement this discriminatory policy.

Governance

We take note of the significant improvements in budgetary allocations to institutions of state, including the accountability institutions. We also note the creation of other institutions including the Office of Special Prosecutor. But the perception remains strong among Ghanaians that institutions of state are unresponsive to the needs of citizens and that state institutions serve the interests of the ruling elites. Ghanaians are also unhappy about the manner in which state institutions misuse state resources.

The perception that the rich and politically-connected get away easily with corruption has been deepened by the way government has handled those who have destroyed our forest and water bodies through industrialized galamsay as well as those whose actions and inactions brought about the banking crisis which has cost taxpayers a whopping GHS21 billion. We expect these fundamental governance challenges to be tackled persistently and consistently.

Social Partnership

The TUC and its affiliate unions will continue to work with social partners on important matters of state. The TUC will continue to play its role to promote industrial peace which is necessary for economic and social transformation. We will continue to offer our perspectives on critical issues of national development in the spirit of social partnership. We expect our social partners (i.e., government and private sector employers) to play their respective roles. We also expect government to commit resources to strengthen social dialogue institutions as part of efforts towards strengthening social partnership and good governance.

Once again, we wish the working people of Ghana a very prosperous and happy new year!



DR. YAW BAAH
SECRETARY GENERAL

ACCRA
11TH JANUARY 2021