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**SPEECH BY SECRETARY GENERAL OF TUC  
DR. YAW BAAH  
AT THE 11<sup>TH</sup> QUADRENNIAL DELEGATES CONGRESS AT  
GNAT VILLAGE AT ABANKRO IN THE ASHANTI REGION  
23<sup>RD</sup> MARCH 2021**

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**The President of the Republic of Ghana, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo;  
Honorable Ignatius Baffour Awuah, Minister for Employment & Labour  
Relations;**

**H.E. Comrade Pedro Gonzalez, Cuban Ambassador to Ghana;**

**H.E. Mr. Gunnar Andreas Holm, Norwegian Ambassador to Ghana;**

**Brother Kwasi Adu-Amankwah; General Secretary of ITUC- Africa;**

**Brother Arezki Mezhoud, Secretary General of OATUU;**

**Mr. Daniel Acheampong, President of Ghana Employers' Association;**

**Mr. Alex Frimpong, Chief Executive Officer of Ghana Employers' Association;**

**Dr. John Ofori-Tenkorang, Director General of SSNIT;**

**Mr. Johann Ivanov, Resident Director of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (Ghana  
Office);**

**Our Special Guests;**

**Veteran TUC leaders;**

**Brothers and Sisters;**

**I deem it a great privilege and honour to welcome all of you to our 11th  
Quadrennial Delegates Congress. This Congress also marks the 75<sup>th</sup>  
Anniversary of the founding of the Trades Union Congress.**

**As you may know, we had to postpone this congress from August, 2020 to  
March, 2021, due to Covid-19 restrictions. We also had to reduce the number  
of delegates by two-thirds from 1200 to 400. For the same reasons, we had  
to relocate the congress to Abankro, at a very short notice, when the  
authorities of KNUST informed us that they cannot allow us to hold our  
congress at the Great Hall at the university. We apologize to our guests, our  
affiliates and delegates for any inconvenience these changes might have  
caused.**

**On behalf of the TUC Family and all the delegates and guests at this congress, I would like to congratulate the President on his re-election. I would also like to congratulate Hon. Baffour Awuah on his re-election as MP for Sunyani West and on his reappointment as Minister responsible for labour.**

**Seventy-five years ago, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) was established in the offices of the Railway Workers' Union in Sekondi-Takoradi to promote and protect the interests of the working people of the then Gold Coast. This was in response to the appalling working conditions at the time.**

**During the colonial period, the private sector of Gold Coast's economy was dominated by foreign investors in mining, manufacturing, construction, commerce, timber, exports, banking, and shipping. There were very few workers in wage employment at the time. Apart from those in the colonial public administrative structures (i.e., colonial government services), most of the wage earners were employed in these sectors. The relationship between the private sector employers and their employees was not different from the relationship that existed between the British colonial government and the indigenous people of the then Gold Coast - a relationship based on what one academic referred to as "British-contrived sets of values and relationships: ruler and ruled, employer and employees, a white progressive civilization versus backward tribes with a preference for leisure".**

**This false notion and the atrocious and inhuman policies based on it was a major determinant of the horrible working conditions the working people of the Gold Coast had to endure during the colonial period - low wages, forced labour, long working hours, poor health and safety standards, job insecurity, and total absence of workers' participation in decisions that directly affected their lives.**

**Confronted with such hostile colonial policies and very harsh working conditions, Gold Coast workers, naturally, had to resist. It was the quest for social and economic justice and the struggle for the dignity of African people that led to the emergence of trade unions in the country and, subsequently, the establishment of the TUC in 1945. This was to ensure that workers could participate in decisions that affected their lives at the workplace and by so doing improve their living standard.**

**A few years after TUC was established it became the centre of political agitations. TUC worked with the independence movement and mobilized workers in all sectors across the length and breadth of the country to support the struggle to free the country from the shackles of colonialism. TUC's national character, its spread and influence over the entire workforce made it an important ally in the struggle for political independence which was proudly achieved in March 1957, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah.**

**TUC has since become institutionalized with influence that transcends the world of work because of the significant role it played in the struggle for independence from British colonial rule. The TUC is now recognized and respected by all the important actors in the Ghanaian society.**

**So far, TUC has managed to guard the legal regime that allows workers to form or join a union of their choice and to bargain collectively. For instance, TUC used its influence in the Constituent Assembly that drafted the 1992 Constitution to ensure that trade union and workers' rights are firmly entrenched in the Constitution.**

**As we celebrate 75 years of TUC's existence, we are conscious not only of our achievements but we are also aware of the challenges ahead of us in the**

rapidly changing world of work, as aptly captured in the theme for this congress: *75 years of TUC: Building Stronger Unions in the Changing World of Work*”.

Many people have contributed to the growth and development of the TUC in the last seventy-five years. We pay tribute to all the great leaders of the TUC and leaders of its affiliates. But we dedicate the celebration of our 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to all the hardworking union members who have paid union dues from their meagre salaries to sustain the TUC and its affiliates all these years.

Four years ago, five of us were given a mandate to lead this great union at the 10th Quadrennial Delegates Congress which was held at KNUST in Kumasi. We were under no illusion that the mandate was an easy one. We knew that stepping into the shoes of great union leaders like John Tettegah and others was not an easy task. The situation was worsened by the global corona virus pandemic which no one predicted. The world has not been the same since March, 2020 when the global lockdown started. Over hundred million people have since been infected and nearly three million have died. In Ghana, nearly 90,000 people have been infected and more than 600 people have died.

We have all been witnesses to the devastating effects of covid-19 on businesses, employment, livelihoods, health and well-being. As we all know, anything that affects employment and conditions of employment affects trade unions and their leadership. This is the unprecedented situation in which we found ourselves as leaders of TUC.

Nevertheless, we managed to achieve something significant in this quadrennial. At least, we can collectively boast of a relatively peaceful industrial relations atmosphere in the last four years. This was due, largely,

**to a stronger social partnership among labour, employers and government. I would like to take this opportunity to commend Hon. Baffour Awuah (Minister for Employment and Labour Relations), Hon. Ken Ofori-Atta (Minister for Finance), Mr. Daniel Acheampong and Mr. Alex Frimpong (President and CEO of Ghana Employers' Association respectively) for the cooperation and support we received from them.**

**The hands-on approach to labour relations which was adopted by the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, was particularly remarkable. The strikes that were recorded during the period under review were isolated incidences that should not have occurred in the first place, if the parties involved in those industrial disputes had brought their issues to the attention of the Ministry at the right time. The prevention-is-better-than-cure approach Hon. Baffour Awuah adopted required that he was constantly available for dialogue. There were times where the Chief of Staff had to come in very quickly to prevent or douse some fires that could potentially escalate uncontrollably. I am sure, with this hands-on approach, the peace on the labour scene will be sustained. We can even improve upon this achievement by extending the social partnership to cover all ministries so that they can also appreciate the implications of labour issues for national development and human security.**

**In addition to the peace on the labour scene, another achievement in the last four years, which has made all of us very proud, has to do with the refurbishment of the Trade Union Hall (The TUC Headquarters in Accra). That iconic building has been transformed and truly modernized. We achieved that through the collective efforts of the TUC and its affiliates with the support of government. We did not only refurbish the building, we completed it. The construction of the building started in 1958. The first three floors were completed with a loan from the CPP government (which was**

later converted into a grant). The fourth and fifth floors were built by the contractor (an Israeli company) who used them as the company's offices until they were transferred to TUC. The sixth floor was empty until one month ago. Today, we have converted the sixth floor into additional 20 offices. It took a total of 63 years to complete the building and that was achieved in the last quadrennial. We now have 195 offices in the building, three conference rooms, a canteen, a bank, a post office and a large space for a health centre, including a big space for a pharmacy.

I would like to pay special tribute to my colleague Executive Committee members for all these achievements and for their immense support – Brother Rev. Richard Kwasi Yeboah (Chairman), Brother Alex Nyarko-Opoku (Vice Chairman), Sister Philomena Aba Sampson (Vice Chairperson) and Brother Joshua Ansah (Deputy Secretary General).

On behalf of my colleague Executive Committee members, I thank all members of General Council of TUC for their support. The staff of TUC deserve special thanks for their support. Let us all be proud of what we have achieved individually and collectively during the quadrennial which is ending today.

The Chairman, Brother Richard Yeboah is retiring from the TUC leadership after this Congress. The rest of us have expressed our readiness to continue to serve this great union in the next quadrennial. We hope this Congress will re-elect us because we have more to offer this great union.

The challenges ahead are real. We will have the opportunity to discuss these challenges this afternoon at the business session when I present a full report covering our activities in the last four years and when the Policies and

**Resolutions Committee presents the Congress Policy Statement and resolutions on some of the key challenges.**

**Since H.E. The President and the Minister for Employment and Labour Relations and some of our special guests will not be here during the business session, let me take this opportunity to mention a few of these challenges.**

**Mr. President, too many Ghanaians are working under very poor conditions; earnings are too low for a large section of the Ghanaian workforce; just about 12 percent of the total workforce have access to pension and for those who are lucky to have access to pension nearly 80 percent of them receive less than GHS1000 per month; income inequality is increasing because a very tiny fraction of Ghanaians are benefiting directly from the remarkable economic growth we have witnessed in Ghana in the last three decades or so; formal and decent jobs are very hard to find and so the informal economy has now become the main source of employment and livelihoods for about eleven out of the estimated thirteen million Ghanaians in the workforce. Consequently, millions of Ghanaians, including workers, are poor. We believe that Ghana can do better with the resources available to us.**

**Mr. President, I would like to highlight pensions. Last year government committed itself to top-up lump-sum benefits for retirees who retired under Act 766 whose lump-sum benefits from their past credit plus payments from their second-tier schemes fell short of the lumpsum paid to their counterparts who retired fully under PNDC Law 247. Mr. President, we are expecting the payment of the lumpsum top-up this year, as promised. In fact, workers who are retiring in 2021 are facing the same challenge. They all deserve lump-sum top-up.**

**We are aware that the Director-General of SSNIT, Dr. John Ofori-Tenkorang and his team are working on this assignment. We are confident they will do a good job and provide the basis for the computation of the top-up. Since 2017, SSNIT has improved its operational efficiency tremendously under the leadership of Dr. Addo Kufour and Dr. Ofori-Tenkorang. The number of employers paying contributions to SSNIT increased by 20 percent from 54,000 to 65,000; active contributors to SSNIT grew by 28 percent from 1.27 million to 1.63 million; the net assets of SSNIT increased by 13% from GH¢ 8.4 billion to GH¢\$9.52 billion; administrative cost as a percentage of total expenditure decreased from 9.4% in 2017 to 6.6% in 2020; and more importantly, retirees now receive their first pension within two weeks of submitting their pension application compared to 47 days or even a longer period which was used to process pension applications. In 2019, we had the opportunity to visit all the regions with the Director-General, Dr. Ofori-Tenkorang and a team of dedicated staff, to participate in Regional Councils of Labour forums on pensions. We look forward to continuing our educational programmes on pension when the pandemic is over.**

**Mr. President, before I conclude my remarks on pensions, we would like to draw your attention to our concerns about your government's policy to allow a parallel non-contributory scheme for security agencies. We think such a policy will undermine the solidarity principle which is the bedrock of all successful pension schemes. We trust that you will reconsider that position because we believe that there are alternatives to this policy that, if adopted and implemented, can improve pension for all of us.**

**I would also like to highlight the need for the establishment of the proposed National Unemployment Insurance Scheme. In 2020, government promised to establish this scheme which is being designed to include training and retraining and job search assistance programmes as some of its key**



**components to support all those who have lost their jobs due to Covid-19. We are looking forward to working with the social partners to complete the process of establishing the Unemployment Insurance Scheme this year.**

**Another important issue which needs to be highlighted is housing for workers. We think government's approach to the delivery of housing should change radically. Instead of congregating large housing units in specific locations in and around the cities, we urge government to consider giving housing loans to workers and make it possible for more workers to benefit from rent-to-own housing schemes. Our expectation is that all workers in both the private and public sectors will be able to own their homes at their preferred locations which they can fully pay for within 20 years of their working lives. We expect the proposed National Development Bank to focus attention on housing loans for workers.**

**There is also the issue about workers' education. In 2016, the Board of Trustees of SSNIT agreed to fund the reconstruction of TUC's Ghana Labour College in Accra, as part of its corporate social responsibility to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of SSNIT. Just after the buildings at the college were demolished for the project to begin there was a change of government and a change of leadership at SSNIT which necessitated a comprehensive review of all such corporate social responsibility projects. We have since continued to engage SSNIT Board but we have not made any good progress yet. We hope we can make very good progress this year. This Congress will discuss and adopt a resolution on the establishment of Workers' Education Fund. We appeal to government, employers and international partners to support us financially and technically to reconstruct our Labour College and to revamp workers' education.**

**Brother Chairman, I would like to conclude. We thank H.E. The President for honouring this and all our previous invitations. The 2021 May Day celebration will be held in Accra. We expect it to be a low-key event due to the Covid-19 restrictions. Once again, we would like to respectfully invite the President to join us to celebrate the working people of Ghana. We thank all our guests for honouring our invitation to this special congress.**

**Lastly, on behalf of the TUC Family I would like to thank the Chairman of TUC, Brother Reverend Richard Kwasi Yeboah, for his dedicated service to the TUC. We will miss his forthrightness, his patience, and his punctuality. Brother Chairman, we have reserved the only 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Award for you. We will respectfully ask the President to present this special award to you after his keynote address. We wish you good health and God's protection in your retirement.**

**May the Good Lord bless us!**

**Long Live TUC!**

**Long Live Ghana!**

**Thank you for your attention.**