ORGANISED LABOUR MAY DAY STATEMENT

READ BY

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SECRETARY GENERAL OF TRADES UNION CONGRESS (GHANA)

AT THE 2026 NATIONAL MAY DAY PARADE

HELD IN KOFORIDUA IN THE EASTERN REGION

1st MAY

THEME: PIVOTING TO GROWTH, JOBS, AND LIVELIHOODS BEYOND MACROECONOMIC STABILITY

Comrade Chairman,

Your Excellency John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana,

Your Excellencies members of the Diplomatic Corps

Honourable Minister for Labour, Jobs and Employment,

Honourable Minister for Eastern Region

Honourable Ministers of State,

Officials of the Presidency

Distinguished Employers and Social Partners,

Leaders of Organised Labour,

Distinguished Doyens,

Fellow workers of Ghana

Ladies and Gentlemen

OPENING REMARKS

I join the Chairman to welcome all of you to the 2026 National May Day Parade. A very special welcome to President John Dramani Mahama and Vice President Prof. Naana Opoku Agyemang to the national parade. Your Excellencies, we appreciate your presence, and we look forward to your message to Ghanaian workers on this auspicious occasion.

Your Excellency, organised labour is equally grateful to you for hosting us at the Jubilee House on March 17, 2026 and giving us the opportunity to discuss pertinent national issues including salaries, pensions and other labour market concerns. It is our hope, Mr. President, that government and organised labour will continue to have such regular interactions and work together to solve problems. This way, we can maintain and even strengthen industrial harmony.

Comrade Chairman, I now turn our attention to the theme of this year's celebration **"PIVOTING TO GROWTH, JOBS AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS BEYOND MACROECONOMIC STABILITY."**

THE JOBS/EMPLOYMENT CRISIS

Your Excellency, among many other things, this theme seeks to launch a national conversation about jobs or employment. I say with no fear of contradiction that decent employment or lack of it, remains one of the most significant economic and social problems in Ghana. And it has the potential to transform into a political problem if it remains unchecked. We are almost at crisis level.

Brother Chairman, this year's theme further invites us to move beyond of economic statistics and indicators. It calls on us to recognise that macroeconomic stability is not an end in itself. The real test of economic policy is whether it improves the lives of workers and citizens. Does it create jobs? Does it raise incomes? Does it secure the future? Does it build sustainable livelihoods? If it does not, then stability, however important, remains incomplete.

Your Excellency, the employment crisis can be framed as follows:

Despite consistent output growth – as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) - for four decades, young people educated at great cost to their families and society cannot find jobs, that is commensurate with their education/skills, delivers fair incomes and benefits. The problem is exemplified by the fact that young graduates have to wait for 5 years or more before getting their first job.

Your Excellency, a second dimension to the employment problem, is the poor quality of existing jobs. Greater proportion of people who have jobs earn low incomes, so low that they cannot take good care of themselves and their families. Majority are not registered for social security and therefore not contributing to pensions. They work long hours in unhealthy and unsafe environments. The poor quality of existing jobs has meant that many that are working are continuously looking for new jobs. This is compounded by employers who are constantly transforming existing permanent/stable jobs into fixed term contracts with inferior benefits.

Brother Chairman, Comrades, the over Five Hundred Thousand (500,000) young people that recently applied for recruitment into the security services highlight the magnitude of the employment problem we have on hands. The Ghana Statistical Service estimated overall unemployment rate of 13%. Youth unemployment is a staggering 34%. The data further show that for people in employment nearly 80% are informally employed.

Your Excellency, the employment challenge is both colossal and difficult. The challenge is not only *unemployment*; it is also that many of those in work remain insecure, underpaid, and insufficiently protected. They work full time, yet struggle to afford food, rent, transport, healthcare, utilities, and education.

Your Excellency, having a large pool of educated young people roaming the streets and sitting idle entails substantial waste of human resources. These young, educated Ghanaians are denied the opportunity to realise their potential and contribute to nation building. Our society is not reaping the much talked about "dividends of the youth bulge". Quite the opposite, educated jobless and frustrated youth has become a ticking time-bomb.

Mr. President, when we work together, as we must, we can ensure that this time-bomb does not explode, and that Ghana can reap the full benefits of growing and educated young population.

THE FAILURE OF ECONOMIC POLICY

Your Excellency, the employment problem did not just poop up. It has festered for many years. We in labour have blamed the problem on economic policy. In the mid-1980s, Ghana along with so many countries in Africa was forced to implement Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The SAP was based on neoliberal economics, which forced the state out of economic activities and deployed market forces. Since then, all our economic policies have been neo-liberal in form and content.

Your Excellency, Structural Adjustment, and all successor policies, made economic growth, measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a topmost priority of economic policy in Ghana. The policy goal is to achieve macroeconomic stability which is loosely defined as the attainment of positive economic growth, single digit inflation, stable exchange rate and positive balance of payment. Employment is missing from the framework because it is assumed, without any evidence whatsoever, that growth and macroeconomic stability automatically lead to the creation of employment.

Your Excellency, this assumption has been proven completely wrong. Since 1984 the Ghanaian economy has registered growth reaching a peak of 15% in 2011. Between 1986 and 2025, economic growth in Ghana averaged about 5.2%. In fact, between 2010 and 2013 average annual GDP growth rate was 9.6 percent. In these 40 years, we have also accustomed to celebrating macroeconomic stability. Price inflation has been relatively stable and so is the cedi exchange rate. Today, we are celebrating the lowest inflation since the 1960s. The exchange rate has achieved significant appreciation against major world currencies.

However, as we have enumerated above there is hardly any evidence that GDP growth has created decent employment in Ghana. Our ‘good’ set of macroeconomic indicators have excluded employment.

Your Excellency, our theme invites us to move beyond a narrow conception of economic success. It calls on us to recognise that macroeconomic stability is not an end in itself. The real test of economic policy is whether it improves the lived reality of workers and citizens. Does it create jobs? Does it raise incomes? Does it secure the future? Does it build sustainable livelihoods? If it does not, then stability, however important, remains incomplete.

Comrades, economic growth without jobs is exclusion. Stability without livelihoods is incomplete. An economy that grows while workers remain insecure is not yet an economy that has fulfilled its social purpose.

Your Excellency, while economic growth has not been entirely jobless – as previously assumed – the employment response has been extremely weak. The few jobs that have been created are of low quality. People undertake such activities primarily because their options are limited given the lack of good jobs. Why does an economy that has been growing consistently for more than three decades fail to create enough good jobs for its population that desire to work? How do we explain the contradiction of a robust economy unable to provide quality employment for its people?

ECONOMIC GROWTH AND EMPLOYMENT

Your Excellency, the answer to these questions lies in the economic policy we have pursued in the last four decades, and the level and nature of economic growth we have achieved. The neoliberal economic reforms of the mid-1980s reversed the negative growth of the 1970s and early 1980s. However, it failed to transform the structure of the Ghanaian economy in ways that would have produced quality jobs in sufficient quantities. Economic growth has been too sluggish to meaningfully transform the structure of outputs and employment. Also, Growth has been led principally by the production and export of natural resources and raw materials. These activities hardly create decent employment.

Your Excellency, in the last 40 years, China achieved average economic growth of 10% compared to our 5% average growth. More importantly China's growth has been based on manufactures; ours has been fueled by production and exports of natural resources and external aid. The gains from economic growth in China was shared through mass employment. This explains the phenomenal transformation of Chinese economy and society.

Your Excellency, addressing the employment challenge requires policies and actions that would boost the demand for labour. In simple terms Ghana must move beyond economic stability and accelerate the pace of economic growth. But economic growth must also be transformational. Growth anchored on the production and export of natural resources cannot give decent employment. Employment must remain central to economic policy. The quality of work must be treated as a development metric. Sustainable livelihoods must become a real benchmark against which economic governance is judged.

Your Excellency, Ghana must manufacture something. We must do agro-processing. We must manufacture some of the basic products that we import. The large volumes of imports that have saturated our markets mean we are exporting jobs. Ghana can create employment in the right quality and quantity if we can manage to produce a significant proportion of what we consume.

Your Excellency, for this to happen we need a hospital economic policy framework that support sectoral diversification and makes domestic production feasible and profitable. The current framework excessively rewards imports and punishes domestic production.

Your Excellency, government must prioritize support to the private sector as a cornerstone of our quest to end the employment debacle. We support the efforts by government to directly provide employment to our young people, but in the in the medium to long-term the private sector is the solution to the employment challenge. The Ghanaian private sector is severely burdened. Government must actively support the private sector.

Your Excellency, the private sector must find market either internally or externally for what it produces. The export market is difficult for most domestic firms. Unfortunately, the domestic market has been taken over by imports. This is the result of an unbridled trade policy. It is the reason we are not manufacturing anything. We must change it. We cannot produce export champions that are so badly beaten on the domestic market. If we do not change our trade policy, the emerging 24-hour economy markets will join Melcom and the China shops in selling imported products.

Your Excellency, government must also intervene in the money lending market to bring down interest rates. Despite the decline in inflation and the Bank of Ghana prime rate, lending rates have remained high. Government must seriously consider capping the spread between the lending and deposit rate. This could have the twin effects of stimulating savings and bringing down lending rates. We must work together to secure long-term patient capital at affordable rate for our domestic enterprises.

Your Excellency, the efforts to create decent employment must also address concerns over productivity. Most people including the unions agree that productivity is low in Ghana. We have previously proposed a "Productivity Week" in which the social partners highlight the issues and agree on a roadmap for improving productivity every year. We have further proposed a five-year programme to drive productivity in Ghana with a year-long programme of simply creating awareness of productivity. Mr. President, we urge your government to consider these proposals.

Your Excellency, in 2015, you launched Ghana's first Employment Policy. The overall objective of that policy was to adopt inter-sectoral and integrated approach to achieve decent, productive, and freely chosen employment for all Ghanaians who are able and willing to work. Today, we have so many able and willing Ghanaians who cannot find decent employment. We urge Government to work social partners to revise the National Employment Policy as part of conversation on jobs and livelihoods.

Brother Chairman, let our message today be clear: Ghana does not need macroeconomic stability alone. Ghana needs stability that creates good quality jobs in their right quantities. Ghana needs growth that raises incomes, improves and stabilizes livelihoods.

Comrades, as I bring my address to a close, permit me to draw government's attention to some of our major concerns as workers of Ghana. The first issue is the persistent low wages and salaries of Ghanaian workers. Mr. President, the Minimum Wage is still GHS21.78 per day or GHS588 per month. In 2026, the minimum pay on the SSSS is GHS809 per month. This translates into US$75 per month. Mr. President, we repeat these low salaries are barely sufficient for a worker who takes hausa kooko for breakfast, gobbe for lunch and another kooko for dinner. How workers on this salary, pay for food, rent, clothing and utilities for themselves and their families remains a puzzle.

Your Excellency, we welcome the initiative to establish the Independent Emoluments Commission. We are only skeptical about the proposal to phase its implementation. While this Commission can help address the pay inequalities in the public sector, it may not in itself address the old-age problem of low pay.

Mr. President, we therefore appeal to your government to work with us to adopt a proactive incomes policy as a foundation for the work of the emolument commission; an incomes policy that addresses the basic needs of workers and their families. That policy must be a ***LIVING WAGE***.

Comrades, the second issue relates to pensions. Pension coverage remains low at less than a fifth of the eligible population. Significant proportion of people on pension receive less than GHS500.00 a month (less than US$50.00). Inequities in pension have persisted. The least pensioner gets GHS400 while another pensioner gets GHS213,000.00. The situation where some public officials do not contribute to pension but retire on their salaries is no longer tenable.

Your Excellency, we need pension reform. Pension unification must happen under your leadership. It will make a big relief to the already stretched government budget.

Your Excellency, we have on several occasions expressed our unhappiness with the growing government control over the management of SSNIT. We have also expressed our dissatisfaction with the decision to move pensions from the Ministry of Labour, Jobs and Employment to the Ministry of Finance. Government failed to consult organised labour about this decision and the Minister of Finance has also refused to meet us over pensions. Yet, NPRA without any Ministrial communication is proceeding with so-called engagements to amend the Pensions Act. We reiterate our call for a national stakeholder engagement on pension.

Your Excellency, my third issue is one which is dear to the hearts of workers. It is about labour rights. Mr. President, in the last few years we have witnessed a surge in labour right abuses. Workers are victimized for opting to join or form a union. Some employers have turned redundancy into a pathway for labour substitution. Workers are declared redundant, and shortly thereafter the same job reappears under private employment agencies or outsourced arrangements, often under inferior conditions and weaker protections.

Your Excellency, we have repeatedly complained about the operations of employment agencies. They administer payroll, exercise control over placement, and shape contracts of employment, yet both the agencies and the client enterprises deny employer responsibility when disputes arise. This leaves the worker in legal limbo, uncertainty as to who truly bears legal accountability.

Your Excellency, in the public sector we are witnessing increasing politicization. Workers are being promoted, transferred, rewarded and punished on the basis of their actual or perceived political views. The usual excuse that the other party or government did same is inexcusable anymore because it places the country and its institutions on the road to the abyss. Mr. President, you are uniquely positioned to reset the country away from this path.

Your Excellency, we need to work together to conclude the reform of the labour law to give workers more and stronger protection. 37. We are appealing to Government to adopt a policy that will compel employers to give a worker a reason for terminating their employment. Government must invest more social dialogue by providing more resources to the institutions for social dialogue.

Your Excellency, Organised Labour sincerely commend you and your government for revoking L12462, which had permitted mining in Forest Reserves. But ***Mr. President***, mining is still ongoing in our forest and river bodies. If we do not stop galamsey, Ghana will not rivers in the next few years. organised labour is urging you and your government to lead a final onslaught on galamsey. It is a duty you owe to the future of the country; we will have your back.

Mr. President, the sight of young nurses and teachers marching through the streets of Accra asking either to be employed or to be paid their salaries is heartbreaking. At the last negotiations, we agreed to a paltry 9% to enable government recruit trained nurses and teachers. Mr. President, do whatever you can to give our young nurses and teachers a lifeline employment given that, we need more teachers and nurses.

Your Excellency, fuel prices are rising across the world because geo-political conflicts are disrupting key supply routes. The situation is already affecting jobs, livelihoods and overall economic stability. It is time to build energy sovereignty to ensure availability and affordability of fuel products. Government must support BOST energies and TOR, the state entities at the forefront of our energy security. We must strengthen our refinery, storage and transport capacities.

Finally, Mr. President is the issue of Cocoa. The country is in a watershed moment. For the first time in living memory producer price of cocoa has been reduced. This is painful for our cocoa farmers and their families. But even more painful is the situation where cocoa is not bought at all. This is having a toll on the wellbeing and morale of cocoa farmers and their families. Mr. President, government must step in immediately to assist COCOBOD and the Produce Buying Companies to buy the stockpile of cocoa across the country.

Your Excellency, Organised Labour remain committed to dialogue and partnership. We seek genuine, timely, and structured dialogue that aims to solve problems. Where workers are denied meaningful space for engagement, tensions will inevitably deepen.

Let this May Day be remembered not merely as a national parade, but as a defining moment, one in which we begin honest conversation about jobs and livelihoods and commit to put our young women and men to work.

Finally, on behalf of the leadership of Organised Labour, I would like to thank the Chairman and Members of the National May Day Planning Committee who worked tirelessly to ensure a successful May Day celebration.

I wish all the Working People of Ghana a Very Happy May Day Celebration.

Long live the Ghanaian worker.

Long live Organised Labour.

And long live the Republic of Ghana.