

# **2012 MAY DAY ADDRESS**

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OF  
GHANA TRADES UNION CONGRESS  
ON  
BEHALF OF ORGANISED LABOUR**

**THEME: THE ROLE OF WORKERS IN SECURING PEACEFUL AND  
FAIR ELECTIONS**

Your Excellency, Professor John Evans Attah Mills, President of the Republic of Ghana;

Honourable Ministers of State;

Honourable Members of Parliament;

Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Leadership of Organized Labour;

Fellow Workers;

Our friends from the media;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Once again we have travelled and travailed through another year since the last May Day. May Day, as we all know, is a day for workers' solidarity worldwide. The day working people meet to review and assess their conditions as well as their place in the world of work and within society as a whole. It is an important occasion for working people to raise their collective voice with respect to their demands and the challenges facing them and their trade unions.

In Ghana, May Day is special because it does not only bring workers together but it also provides workers a unique opportunity to meet and engage with the President of the Republic, Ministers of State and Parliamentarians who despite their heavy schedules, have over the years made time to be with us on this special day when we meet to celebrate our contributions to the social, economic, political, and cultural development of our country.

This year's May Day is unique because for the first time in recent times the national parade is being held outside Accra. Organized Labour is grateful to the people and workers of Sunyani and the Brong Ahafo Region for your warm reception.

We are celebrating this year's May Day under the theme "***Election 2012: The Role of Workers in Securing Peaceful and Fair Elections***". Organized Labour is of the conviction that democracy, of which elections is an essential part, is a prerequisite for social and economic development. Our conviction of a united democratic Ghana is shared by all Ghanaians.

Therefore, in 1992, Ghanaians took a landmark decision to move our country from military rule to constitutional democracy. Despite considerable challenges at the time and even now, Ghanaians have demonstrated their resolve to use democratic channels in choosing their leaders. We have been patient to allow the democratic order to evolve as we gradually but surely nurture and perfect our democratic institutions. Our democracy has thrived and earned the country enormous international goodwill. Our country has benefited immensely from this image and the international goodwill it engenders.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen, we have a collective and historic responsibility to protect the democratic order and the gains that have flowed from it in the last two decades. We, the workers of Ghana, pledge to play their roles in this pursuit. Organized Labour reaffirms its commitment to resolutely defend and uphold the democratic foundations of our nation. We will continue to seek fulfilment of our aspirations, hopes and the achievement of our objectives, as a labour movement, through democratic processes and within the framework of a constitutional democracy and our concern for the welfare of the people of Ghana irrespective of their tribe, religion, age and gender. We reaffirm our commitment to ensuring that our country is governed democratically and that every Ghanaian has the right to participate fully in all decisions at all levels including our homes, workplaces, communities, districts, regions and at the national level.

We are convinced that it is only by deepening democracy that the aspirations of our people for quality education, access to potable water and healthcare, food security, housing, a living wage and other public goods can be assured. It is generally recognized worldwide that the trade union movement is a bastion of democracy and of human rights. The trade union movement concentrates within it the collective and organized will of the working people in whose name and for whose welfare the powers of governance are largely supposed to be exercised. Workers and their families form the majority of our society and their interests and well-being should be at the heart of the democratization.

Brothers and Sisters, as the country prepares for this year's presidential and parliamentary elections, Organised Labour pledges to remain non-partisan. We will, however, maintain a prominent voice in the national efforts towards free, fair and transparent elections. As we have stated before, Ghana is the only country we

have. We have nowhere to run to in the event of civil strife and political violence. We shall, therefore, not fail to organise and resist any attempts by any groups or persons that intend to subvert the current democratic dispensation or threaten the peace and stability we currently enjoy.

Your Excellency, the workers of Ghana and their leadership are fully aware of our role in ensuring peaceful elections. We are prepared to play our part to the best of our abilities. But ultimately, the onus lies on the Government of Ghana, the political parties, the Electoral Commission and the security agencies to ensure that we have peaceful and fair elections, come December 2012. In particular, Your Excellency, you have the singular responsibility and indeed the highest honour to see Ghana through this election peacefully.

We expect our political parties, the Government, the Electoral Commission and other stakeholders including civil society organizations, the mass media and indeed all Ghanaians to exhibit maturity, fairness and transparency in the electoral process. We demand of the competing parties and their presidential candidates serious debate over the main issues of our times, a clear vision of the future of Ghana and concrete policy alternatives that have the capacity to transform our economy and lift our people out of the mass poverty to a level where the average Ghanaian can identify with the middle-income status of our country.

Brothers and Sisters, we do not accept the politics of insults, the personality attacks and any form of violence. We entreat all Ghanaians to vote for candidates who have the greatest ideas about the creation of jobs, improvement in incomes, and access to housing, education, health, electricity, water and sanitation. We call on

other civil society organisations and the media to join us to place these issues on the political agenda and banish forever the politics of trivialities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we appreciate the effort of the Electoral Commission. They have managed our electoral processes excellently in the past 20 years. We expect the Electoral Commission to continue to be faithful to its constitutional mandate and jealously guard its independence. The Commission bears a heavy responsibility of maintaining the confidence the nation has in its integrity as an impartial referee in steering us through free, fair and transparent elections. Flawed elections easily become the lightning rod that sets society along the path of violence, civil strife and chaos.

We would expect the mass media to live up to their responsibility of fair and objective reportage of political news and events in the run-up to the elections. We would like to take this opportunity to caution the mass media, their editors, presenters, talk-show hosts and other commentators to exercise restraint and be circumspect in their utterances and statements. Hate speech and incitement to violence cannot be justified under the banner of free expression and all journalists should be guided by their own ethical principles and professional standards.

The law enforcement agencies, particularly the Police and the Judiciary, must not only act with professional independence and efficiency in dispensing election-related justice but must do so in a professional and unbiased manner.

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen, let me take a quick detour to our economy which is the number one security issue. A faltering economy is good ammunition for undesirable political outcomes. It is difficult, if not impossible, to

find and recruit young men and women in decent jobs for political violence. For those who are in decent employment, the opportunity cost of engaging in acts of political violence is too prohibitive. It is, therefore, imperative that our economic policies do not only generate growth but, equally importantly, they must create decent jobs.

Your Excellency, under your administration, Ghana has registered the highest level of economic growth in our country's history. The available data also indicate that the country achieved the longest period of macroeconomic stability in our recent economic history. In addition, our international reserve position is at its highest level. These are significant achievements.

Your Excellency, the reality, however, is that the unprecedented growth rate like the previous periods of economic growth since the structural adjustment has failed to create decent for Ghanaians. Joblessness is on the rise. Nearly all new jobs are being created in the informal economy where incomes are low and workers have very little protection from the country's labour laws. The vast majority of young women and men coming out of our universities and other tertiary institutions cannot find decent jobs.

Brothers and Sisters, high economic growth has failed to create jobs because our growth policies have been based on the exploitation of natural resources which do not create enough jobs. As oil and gas come on stream, and we achieve the highest economic growth rate, the manufacturing sector declined by about 15 percentage points in 2011. Policymakers have failed to address the monumental challenges that confront domestic industry compelling many of our manufacturing firms to convert their factories into warehouses as they join the lucrative import trade. But

the need to create decent jobs in their sufficient numbers is urgent; it is about placing people at the heart of economic growth and development. Joblessness, especially among the youth, constitutes the biggest challenge to national peace and stability. We expect improvement in the economic and social circumstances of the people of Ghana when the economy is doing well. The people of Ghana should feel it in their pockets. It is our opinion that the surest way to improve the living conditions of people is to ensure that economic growth and its associated macroeconomic stability translates into the creation of good quality jobs for the people. Employment-generating growth is the only sustainable way to stem poverty, social exclusion and foster inclusive development. We can pursue palliative measures in the short to medium term to alleviate the suffering of the people but in the longer term growth must deliver decent employment.

Your Excellency, a major part of the solution to the jobs crisis is to give meaning to private sector development. Our private sector is over-exposed to unfair international competition. It is about time we reviewed trade policy and brought it in line with our employment objectives. Additionally, we urge Government to take immediate steps to address the many constraints that face domestic industry. We do not accept the situation where in the era of macroeconomic stability banks continue to charge high and usurious lending rates. Indeed, some have suggested that the behaviour of our banks casts doubt on the credibility of the macroeconomic stability. Simply appealing to the banks to lower their lending rates will never work. We expect government to intervene directly and strategically to bring down lending rates. In the short to medium term, we expect government to play a more direct role in the efforts to create jobs by offering jobs in the priority sectors of the economy including education, health, sanitation and public security. A recent World Bank report estimates that Ghana losses GHC420 million or 1.6

percent of GDP every year due to poor sanitation. Employing young people to fix the sanitation crisis will, therefore, pay for itself.

Brothers and Sisters, ladies and gentlemen, Organised Labour is concerned about the rapid depreciation of the Ghana cedi. In the first quarter of the year, the national currency has depreciated by 8.3 percent against the US Dollar compared to 2 percent depreciation in the same period of 2011. In January 2012 alone, the cedi recorded 5.9 percent depreciation against the US Dollar. And the depreciation continues with no end in sight. Yet the Ghana cedi is one of our important national symbols and a source of pride. The cedi needs to be defended and protected.

Mr. President, in our view, the weakness of the national currency is structural and symptomatic of the failed economic policies that have been pursued over the last three decades under the auspices of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. With our import dependency a depreciating cedi raises the domestic prices of imported basic products. This has adverse implications for the living conditions of workers whose salaries are fixed throughout the year. This is a major concern for Organized Labour. In our view, merely depleting the national reserves to shore up the Cedi amounts to treating the symptoms rather than focusing on the diagnosis. The fundamental issue has to do with the nature of economic policies that have been pursued over the last 30 years. Part of the problem is the over-liberalisation of our external payment system allowing the transfer of foreign currency of any amounts out of the country. Halting the depreciation of the cedi would require addressing the fundamental issues: weaning the country from import addiction and an overhaul of our external payment system to stem the illegal transfer of foreign currency out of the country. Above all, we call on government



to break the tradition of fiscal recklessness that have characterized every election year.

Your Excellency, on behalf Organized labour, particularly public sector unions, I wish to commend government and the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission (FWSC) for the strides made in the implementation of the Single Spine Pay Policy. While commending government and the FWSC, it is our view that the agitations and industrial action which have characterized the migration of some public sector workers onto the Single Spine Salary Structure (SSSS) is an indication of the inability of the SSPP to address the low pay syndrome that has characterized public sector compensation. We call on government and employers to support us in our quest for a living wage. We believe that a living wage for all workers and improved working conditions can also contribute to the political development of the country.

Before I take my seat, I would like to take this opportunity to caution the employers who violate workers' rights with impunity. Our Constitution and labour laws allow Ghanaian workers to form or join unions of their choice. We will continue to defend all workers of Ghana against employers who are taking advantage of the joblessness in the country to cheat their employees.

On behalf of the Leadership of Organised Labour, I say Ayekoo to all workers in Ghana.

May God Almighty Bless us All!

Long Live Workers Unity and Solidarity

Long Live Ghana

