

GHANA TRADES UNION CONGRESS
GHANA TUC/NLC/COSATU TRILATERAL CONFERENCE
ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL, BRO. KOFI ASAMOAH

Your Excellency, the Vice President of the Republic of Ghana, the General Secretary of ITUC-Africa, the General Secretary of OATUU, Brother Presidents/Secretary Generals of the NLC and COSATU, distinguished Trade Union Colleagues and distinguished invited guests; All protocols observed.

I wish to officially welcome our brothers and sister from NLC and COSATU to Ghana on behalf of the Executive Board of the TUC. The Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC) deems it a privilege to host Brothers and Sisters from Nigeria and South Africa for this historic trilateral meeting. Brothers and Sisters from the NLC and COSATU, we deeply appreciate your presence here.

Our countries and unions have a long history of cooperation. Right from the independence struggle to the anti-apartheid struggle, our countries and trade unions worked together at different levels. After the victories in the independence and anti-apartheid struggles, trade unions of Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa have cooperated in a number of areas with the most recent being research under the African Labour Research Network. The benefits of such cooperation to our unions and the working people of our countries cannot be gainsaid. It is in this light that we at the Ghana TUC see this trilateral conference very critical in safeguarding workers' solidarity beyond our national borders especially when the challenges that confront us in our

respective countries transcend national boundaries and therefore require our collective efforts.

Although trilateral meeting amongst us is a novelty, bilateral meetings are not new. Indeed the NLC and the Ghana TUC have held two bilateral conferences in 2003 and 2005. We therefore see this meeting as having come at the opportune time. We hope that this meeting would be the beginning of continued engagement among our unions.

The theme for this conference “**Strengthening Trade Union Solidarity in Africa**” could not have been better especially when continental unity and African trade union unity are recurrent themes in discussions on African development. I believe that like the pivotal role that trade unions in our countries played in the liberation of our peoples from the shackles of colonialism and apartheid, trade unions in Africa, especially in Ghana, Nigeria and South Africa have a duty to provide leadership in ensuring African unity and development.

Brothers and Sisters, it goes without saying that, the strength of trade unions lies in our solidarity and unity. Let us cease the opportunity of this trilateral meeting to discuss African trade union solidarity and unity.

Brothers and sisters, the challenges facing the working people in our various countries are not quite different. Indeed, we share common challenges and experiences. These common challenges include high poverty levels and widening income gap between the rich and the poor, high unemployment

among the youth, poor quality of education and the exodus of skilled human resources to Europe and North America. In the last three decades, the adoption of neo – liberal economic policies by many African states has retarded the continent’s growth and worsened the plight of its people. The adoption and implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) under the tutelage of International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) has brought with it massive retrenchment, decline in real incomes, growing informality of work and weakened trade unions on the continent. Further the adoption and implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategies have also failed to address the problems confronting us on the continent.

Africa has always been at the periphery in the global economy. Africa’s participation in the global economy has been mostly as supplier of raw materials for the advanced economies. It is now becoming apparent that the EU is scheming to get our countries to sign the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA). Comrades we are not unaware of the consequence of the EPA on jobs in our countries. This requires trade unions on the continent in solidarity, to form alliances with other progressive forces in meeting the challenges of the EPA.

Africa’s development is further challenged by the global economic crisis. This demands urgent attention, especially from us as workers’ representatives. I invite the conference to rise up to its responsibility and serve as a forum where good deliberation on the critical issues confronting our people will be discussed, appropriate strategies mapped out to address them and common areas of cooperation outlined.

Once again the Ghana TUC welcomes all participants to this conference. We wish you all a fruitful discussion. We look forward to the conclusion of this conference to serve as inputs and set the stage for our work towards organizing and uniting the workers of Africa through solidarity.

Long live the NLC

Long live COSATU

Long live the TUC

Long live Trade Union solidarity

Thank you.