

**A SPEECH DELIVERED BY SECRETARY-GENERAL,  
BROTHER KOFI ASAMOAH, AT THE 11<sup>TH</sup> NATIONAL  
QUADRENNIAL DELEGATES' CONFERENCE OF MARITIME  
AND DOCKWORKERS' UNION 5<sup>TH</sup> – 8<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2012**

**THEME: “DEALING WITH THE CHALLENGES OF  
INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS PRACTICE IN THE MARITIME  
INDUSTRY: WAY FORWARD”**

**Brother Chairman,  
Your Excellency, The Vice President  
Honourable Ministers of State,  
The General Secretary and leadership of MDU,  
Executive Board Members here present,  
Distinguished Delegates and Observers,  
Brothers and Sisters,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the Leadership of the TUC and on my own behalf, I bring you warm greetings from the entire membership of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and indeed the working people of Ghana. Let me congratulate you for your hard work in the last Quadrennial which enabled our union to serve its constituents well in the last four years and also enabled the union to meet its constitutional obligation of organizing yet another impressive and well attended conference.

Bringing together such large numbers of delegates in a conference of this nature is not an easy task. As we are no doubt aware, it requires enormous financial and human resources as well as high level organizational skills. As trade unions we have always dedicated ourselves in mobilizing such resources in pursuit of our constitutional mandates. We demonstrate our commitment as unions not only to internal democracy but equally importantly our commitment to democracy at the national level whenever we gather in such conferences. Leadership of your union has worked hard to make this conference a reality. To the support staff in the secretariat of the union, who, have worked tirelessly behind the scene over the last four years and as part of the preparation for this conference, I say Ayeeko!

Addressing MDU Conferences gives me in particular, the opportunity to meet old friends each time, and to say “Thank You” to MDU the UNION that made me what I am today. I will forever be grateful to MDU and I hope it would inspire all of you to help build this great union stronger than you met it to help seek the well being and aspirations of the members of the union and in so doing remind you of the sacrifices

the forbearers of this great union made in the past to the union that you are part of today.

I am here with leaders of the affiliate unions of TUC and other activists from the trade union fraternity in our numbers to support you and to show solidarity to you for a successful conference.

Brother Chair, before addressing the opportunities and challenges that face us in the labour movement generally, permit me few minutes of your time to speak to the theme of this conference and to highlight some of the immediate challenges facing – workers and their families.

Comrades, you will agree with me that the labour relations atmosphere is heating up. The challenges in the implementation of the Single Spine Pay Policy for public sector workers are beginning to show up. Unions and workers dissatisfied with their lots are beating the war drums given that official response to perceive problems appear lukewarm. In an election year it will do a lot of good for industrial harmony if officialdom sits up and address the challenges that are coming up and refrain from castigating workers who demonstrate their frustrations with the system.

Ladies and gentlemen a good Labour Relations atmosphere is extremely essential for increased productivity. Consequently as a country we have instituted a number of laws, regulations and institutions to govern the relations between employers and workers at all levels to ensure peaceful and harmonious working relationship. This body of laws and institutions are intended to protect the interests of both employers and workers.

Brothers and Sisters, despite these laws, regulations and institutions, industrial relations practises in this country continue to suffer from serious challenges. Over all, worker- management relations at the enterprise level are deteriorating. Workers rights are infringed sometimes with impunity; there is an upsurge of worker rights violation at most sectors of the economy.

One of the most important trends over the past decades is undeniably the growth of insecurity in the world of work. Unimaginable numbers of workers suffer precarious work, permanent casual work, and contract work, insecure, uncertain, and unpredictable working conditions. Employers have adopted means to shift risks and responsibilities on to workers through work performed in uncertainty as to the duration of employment, multiple possible employers or a disguised employment relations or ambiguous employment relationship, a lack of access to social protection and benefits usually associated with employment, low pay and substantial legal and practical obstacles to joining unions and bargain collectively. Workers on temporary contracts of various durations, be they directly employed or hired through an agency, may benefit from a job in the short term with lack of clarity as to the identity of the employer.

While the National Constitution and the Labour laws clearly guarantee rights and duties of workers including freedom of association and the right to form or join a trade union some employers continue to resist the desire of the workers to exercise that right. In some case, workers who opt to form or join trade unions are victimized and threaten with dismissals.

Some employers are actively promoting enterprise or house unions with no links with traditional or established trade unions. These unions negotiate wages and other working conditions with the assistance of consultants and are often too weak to protect the rights of their workers. Employers are not adhering to the tenets of social dialogue at the enterprise level. Within the Maritime industry in particular the problem is compounded by the prevalence of permanent casual labour and the resort to the use of contract labour. This undermines job and income security with long term adverse implications for worker commitment and productivity.

Brother Chair, Some employers refuse in some instances to review or negotiate a new collective agreement even after the expiration of an earlier one. There are also instances where employers actively discourage workers from cooperating with their unions and rather urge them to hire independent consultants to negotiate on their behalf. It is sad when employers fail to adhere to the provisions in CBA's and be guided by the Labour Act (Act 651). These are clear indications of what undermine labour relations in the country.

Brother Chair, ladies and gentlemen the growing spate of industrial accidents is a matter of serious concern to the TUC and its affiliates. The national labour laws oblige employers to provide safe and healthy work environment and to work with unions to prevent workplace accidents. For the most part, employers flout these simple life-saving guidelines in their blind pursuit for profit. I urge workers to abide by safety procedures at work but they should hesitate to withdraw their services when in their best judgement the working environment is not safe and healthy.

All this labour right abuses have been made possible by the failure of the state and its agencies to enforce the provisions of our labour laws. The state has not invested sufficiently in the labour market institutions and in social dialogue in particular.

The poor state of the Inspectorate Division of the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare (MESW), for example, makes it extremely difficult to enforce the labour laws. The division lacks the requisite manpower and logistics to undertake inspection in most of our companies. The National Labour Commission (NLC) has only one functioning office in Accra effectively denying residents of other regions access to the services of the commission.

The way forward is to strengthen your union, build it strong and dependable enough and capable of grappling with the numerous challenges facing working people in the Maritime Industry at all times. The Social Partners –Government; Employers and

Workers have a collective responsibility to build healthy labour relations to help maximise national productivity.

The state has a duty to protect workers from worker rights violations in the enforcement of laws and the strengthening of institutions mandated to enforce the labour laws of the country thereby helping to promote labour relations in Ghana

Organising and the need of the growing precarious work and the attendant job insecurity requires revitalising the traditional organising models as well as new strategies and new thinking to consolidate the power of the unions to defend the rights of workers.

Brothers and Sisters, in addition to these industrial relations challenges, the workers of Ghana continue to suffer from the harsh economic and social realities of our country. The steep depreciation of the cedi is fast eroding the incomes of workers given that this country continues to depend on imports for basic products. The Living condition of workers and their families is deteriorating and sooner than later something has to be done about levels of pay.

Brother Chair, the International Monetary Fund has itself recognised the fact that the depreciation of the cedi is impacting negatively on Ghanaians. The irony, however, is that in spite of this admission the IMF is reported to have called on government to raise fuel prices. This means that workers who according to the IMF are suffering from the depreciation of the cedi are being expected to pay more for fuel. This advice can only come from an Institution that is either oblivious to reality or chooses to ignore the reality.

Brother Chair, Ladies and gentlemen, the TUC and its affiliate unions would like to make it clear and loud that it would not countenance any attempt to worsen the plight of workers and their families by following the advice of the IMF. We would like to re-state our position that fuel price increases have wide ranging effects on the living conditions of workers, their families and indeed the generality of Ghanaians. Consequently, we re-affirmed our belief that the state needs to maintain some amount of subsidies on petroleum products to cushion the impacts of prices increases particularly on the working poor. The TUC will therefore resist any attempt to withdraw subsidies. The TUC wishes to admonish government to ignore the advice by the IMF since any increase in fuel prices will exacerbate the already harsh situation of Ghanaians.

Brothers and Sisters as the country prepare for this year presidential and parliamentary elections, organised labour had pledged to remain non-partisan. We will, however, maintain a prominent voice in the national efforts toward free, fair and transparent elections. As we have stated before, Ghana is the only country we have. We have no where to run to in the event of a 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. Let us campaign and advocate for peaceful 2012 elections.

Brother Chair, ladies and gentlemen, our union is at the cross-roads. You are expected to elect leaders who will steer the affairs of the union for the coming quadrennial. From all indications, the contest is expected to be keener. I admonish all contestants to stick by the rules and exercise circumspection and decorum in the knowledge that there must at all cost be a united MDU after this contest. The contest must not be allowed to undermine the unity, solidarity and the strength of the union. Winners must celebrate in moderation and losers must embrace their lots graciously.

On this note, I wish you very fruitful conference.

Long live Workers Solidarity!

Long Live MDU!

Long Live TUC!

Long Live Ghana

Thank you!