

**TRADES UNION CONGRESS**  
**STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL, BROTHER KOFI**  
**ASAMOAH AT THE 2012 TUC/GJA INTERACTION**  
**VENUE: GHANA INTERNATIONAL PRESS CENTRE**  
**DATE: DECEMBER 21, 2012**

Sister Chairperson;

GJA President;

Colleague General Council Members of TUC;

Our friends from the Media;

Brothers and Sisters;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All too soon another year is coming to an end and we are about to usher in a new year. As we did in previous years we have gathered here today not only to fraternise but, equally importantly, to take stock of the year's activities while preparing to usher in a New Year.

Sister Chair, ladies and gentlemen, you will agree with me that 2012 has been a momentous year for Ghana for many reasons. First, for the first time in our history, Ghana experienced the untimely death of a sitting President. I am referring to the death of President J.E.A Mills. For us in the trade union movement and, I believe for all Ghanaians, the death of President Mills was a very difficult moment. May His Soul Rest in Peace! We also had to deal with untimely death of H.E. Aliu Mahama, the former Vice President.

Secondly, and in the midst of our collective grief, Ghanaians rose to the occasion once more. We demonstrated our common humanity as Ghanaians despite our uncompromising political differences. Above all else, Ghana and indeed Ghanaians showed our commitment to the democratic order that we have chosen for ourselves. By allowing the constitutional processes to run their natural course resulting in the swearing-in of the then Vice President as President of the Republic we showed our civility. We can only be proud of our growing political maturity as a nation.

The Presidential and Parliamentary Elections were held earlier this month. This year's elections have been adjudged the most peaceful elections by all the major stakeholders. Yet, a major stakeholder, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) has not conceded defeat. And as we all know, the NPP has raised issues with the collation of the results and has signalled its intentions to seek redress in court.

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, the TUC has already congratulated the President-elect. Our congratulatory message was based on the fact that by the dictates of the 1992 Constitution it is only the Electoral Commission that is mandated to declare the results of Elections. And once the Commission has discharged that constitutional duty, our faith in constitutionalism leads us to accept that verdict. Until the declaration of the Electoral Commission is set aside by a court of competent jurisdiction we expect that follow-up constitutional processes will be carried through.

Brothers and Sisters, we have equally commended the NPP for choosing to head to the court to have their grievances of alleged electoral malpractices addressed. Again, that commendation is based on our belief that democracy and indeed the rule of law does not end with the holding of elections and subsequent declaration of results. Indeed, this belief is founded on the Constitution itself which makes elaborate provisions for aggrieved parties in any electoral

processes to petition the courts for redress. We, therefore, think that the NPP's going to court to challenge the results of the 2012 Presidential Election should be seen as part of allowing the constitutional processes to run their course. Once that option has been chosen we expect all the political party activists to refrain from any act of violence that potentially can undermine the peace and stability in the country.

Prior to the 2012 elections, the TUC signalled its intentions to resist any attempts by any group of people to subvert the sovereign will of the people. We still stand by this resolve. It is in keeping with this that we have commended the stakeholders for the initiatives they have taken so far. We continue to entreat all actors to exercise restraint and allow the rule of law to prevail. More importantly, we expect all sides to respect the decisions of the courts. That will be a further boost to our democratic credentials.

Sister Chair, ladies and gentlemen, let me turn your attention to the economy of the Republic. Ghana's economy has been acclaimed to be doing well in the last few decades. The economy continues to register impressive growth rates. Last year, our economy registered one of the highest GDP growth in the world. On the basis of these economic growth statistics, Ghana has officially been designated a lower middle-income country.

Ladies and gentlemen, despite these impressive growth statistics, many Ghanaians are increasingly feeling marginalised. Economic growth is not impacting positively and adequately on the lives of the majority. Many young people who have been encouraged and who, together with their parents, invested time and their limited resources in education are not getting the jobs that match their skills. And for the first time in our history we have registered an association for unemployed graduates.

Sister Chair, what is most disturbing about the employment crisis we have on our hand is that beyond rhetoric, policymakers and politicians appear to have very little incentives to address the situation. In the view of the TUC and its member unions, the employment debacle emanate directly from bad economic policies. The national economic policy framework, based on the Washington Consensus, has been the bane of the economy. The economic policy framework has been based on managing inflation and growing the economy anyhow regardless of whether the growth creates jobs or not. This, in our view, is bad for employment creation. The last 30 years of jobless growth provides powerful testimony of how inflation management and the blind pursuit of growth do not create jobs. And our view is that solving the employment problem must begin with changing the economic paradigm that we have implemented for the last 30 years. We have spent considerable resources and time in several youth employment initiatives that are supposed to provide the youth employable skills so that they can, on their own, access jobs in the open labour market. The sad truth, however is that, such jobs do not exist. No wonder that most of these initiatives have floundered. Transitory programmes have become entrenched because those employed into those programmes soon realise that they have no option and it becomes politically more difficult to end the programme.

Sister Chair, ladies and gentlemen, economic policy has to change in several areas: from trade policy, interest rates policy to the role of government in economic management. The TUC has consistently emphasized the inconsistency of the national trade policy and the national employment objectives. Going forward will require that trade policy is reviewed to give some relief to promising but struggling domestic firms that are important sources of jobs.

Beside trade policy, we have expressed grave concern about the high interest rates being charged by the banks. In our view the banks are holding the rest of the business community to ransom. And we would continue to call on government to directly intervene to bring down interest rates since the banks have failed to self-regulate themselves.

Sister Chair, the last 30 years of economic management have been characterized by a vision to develop the private sector. This, in our view, is a laudable initiative. However, the current state of the private sector clearly is not the best and points to the fact there is something wrong somewhere. One thing is obvious to the TUC: the exercise to develop the private sector as the engine of economic growth has failed precisely because the public sector has not lived up to expectation. The private sector needs support, protection and indeed a range of complementary services from the State in order to develop. In a situation where state institutions are not performing their roles effectively private sector development initiatives are bound to fail. The message is simple: the private sector cannot be strong when the State and its agencies are weak. The last 30 years of neo-liberal economic policies have waged a relentless war on the State. In the process many of our State institutions have been thoroughly deformed and fallen into disuse. Basic services that the State used to provide and for which, citizens identify themselves with the State have either been withdrawn or poorly provided. This situation has to be reversed. The State and its agencies have to be rehabilitated to serve not just citizens but, equally importantly, the business community.

We have, on various occasions, commended Government for the implementation of the Single Spine Pay Policy (SSPP) and the Single Spine Salary Structure (SSSS). The new pay policy was developed, among other objectives, to address the inequities and distortions in the public sector

compensation system and to deal decisively with the low pay syndrome in the public sector. However, 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 in the public sector. 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 improving productivity in Ghana. It is certainly time to move to a Living Wage to reflect our middle-income status. This is important especially when our pensions depend directly on our salaries. The low pensions in Ghana are a reflection of the low pay in both the private and public sectors. The living conditions of pensioners are deplorable. We urge our social partners to work with us in the coming years to improve wages and salaries as a means of raising pensions.

Sister Chair, ladies and gentlemen, I cannot end this address without a word on the right of workers to freely associate or join trade unions of their choice. The right to join a trade union is a fundamental right enshrined and entrenched in our national Constitution. It is, therefore, very sad to see some employers denying their workers the rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic. There are many workers who are undertaking their daily tasks under constant fear either of their managements or of the unhealthy and unsafe working environments. Productivity cannot improve in such working environment. We will continue to vigorously resist employers with such tendencies.

Sister Chair, the TUC as a leading force of the country's democratic movement, cannot fail to make its voice heard on a matter that goes to the very foundations of our democracy: I am referring to the constitutionally guaranteed right to information and the veritable contortions that the Right to Information Bill has gone through since the first draft in 2003. Ghana TUC has taken anxious note

of the fact that despite pious promises of a commitment to the passage of a genuine right to information legislation, Parliament is far from performing this fundamental duty it owes the people of this country.

In particular, we would like to emphasize that TUC will resist any attempt to pass into law the current Right to Information Bill, without the necessary amendments proposed by the people of Ghana during the nation-wide consultations by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Communications and Legal, Subsidiary Legislation and Parliamentary Affairs. Such amendments, in our view, should include the following: provision for an independent information commission; that timelines for disclosure of information are radically reduced; that all exemption clauses are subject to public interest test; and a host of others suggested by the public.

Sister Chair, ladies and gentlemen, on this note, on behalf of the Trades Union Congress, I wish the working people of Ghana and our social partners a Merry Christmas and a prosperous new year.

Thank you.