

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY KOFI ASAMOAH, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF GHANA TUC AT THE OPENING OF GHANA TUC NATIONAL YOUTH CONFERENCE, HELD ON 17TH DECEMBER, 2011 AT THE EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE CENTRE, GIMPA CAMPUS, UNDER THE THEME; “PREPARING THE YOUTH OF TODAY FOR A VIBRANT TRADE UNION MOVEMENT TOMORROW”

**Comrade Chair,
Executive Committee of TUC,
General Secretaries of TUC
RLF representatives,
FES representative
Representatives of GNUPS, NUGS & NASPAG
The National Coordinator of the National Youth Authority
Various SCRs,
Distinguished Invited Guests**

I bring you greetings from the Executive Committee and the entire members of the Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC). I add my voice in welcoming all of you to this maiden Youth Conference of the Ghana TUC. We warmly welcome the Head of African Department of the Centre for International Dialogue and Cooperation of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Dr Claus Dieter KONIG and your colleague Osmaune who travelled all the way from Senegal to grace this occasion. We wish you a happy stay in Ghana. It is indeed a privilege for the TUC

to host all of you from across the regions. We acknowledge and appreciate the support by Rosa Luxembourg Foundation in organising this Conference.

Brothers and sisters, The youth is recognised worldwide as the most valuable human resource potential that can propel the growth and development of any institution and the development of any nation. This underscores the important role that young people in Ghana can play for the advancement of our country and our society. Indeed the youth have been acknowledge as a dynamic agents for social change and therefore must be given the right tools and the supportive environment to operate.

The United Nations and in particular the International Labour Organisation((ILO) defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 24, however the project document of the National Youth Programme of Ghana defines youth to include persons between the ages of 15 and 35. The political parties in Ghana maintain a more flexible definition of youth... Members up to the age of 40 but I am told reliably that the NPP youth has no age limit at all. Most surveys on labour market in Ghana (largely by the Ghana Statistics Service) also adopt the ILO definition of youth. The main problem in using an age definition for youth is that it is difficult to reach consensus as to where youth begins and ends.

The Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC) Youth Policy adopts the definition of the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfares to include

persons aged between 15 and 35 years. This age cohort constitutes a very significant proportion of the Ghanaian workforce and by implication they constitute an important source of the trade union membership.

Currently the average trade union member is between 38 and 40 years. The youth are under –represented in all trade union activities in Ghana including educational and training programmes and negotiations. The under representation of the youth in trade unions is a reflection of the low proportion of the youth in formal employment. As the formal economy keeps dwindling the terms of its share in total employment and jobs continue to be in formalised. Trade Unions therefore have to put special efforts to attract and retain the youth into the trade union movement.

The world that the youth faced today, presents several faces and conflicting with one another thereby putting pressure on the youth. The youth of today in Ghana faces numerous challenges and particularly for this occasion may highlight those that evolve around negative effects of globalization- persistent high levels of poverty- lack of job opportunities- high and rising levels of unemployment and under-employment arising out of mismatch between education and the world of work,

Without a doubt, employment creation is the single most important challenge facing Ghana. The spectre of young, energetic Ghanaians roaming the streets of our major towns and cities is worrying; it portends real danger to social cohesion and political stability. Our nascent democracy cannot thrive when the economy fails to provide decent and productive employment opportunities to the people particularly the young ones. Ironically employment is on top of the list of issues that attract the least attention of policy makers beyond the usual rhetoric that precedes election.

The situation of youth unemployment currently is particularly alarming in our country and that urgent efforts are needed to provide real jobs, including apprenticeships and internships linked with training opportunities that provide qualifications, deepen work related skills and improve employability. Ghanaians should begin to judge the performance of our political parties and their governments by the number of jobs they are able to create.

This Youth Conference therefore is of extreme importance to the TUC. It offers young trade union members and other young ones gathered here the opportunity to share experiences and raise the concerns of the youth. As young workers, you have the opportunity to freely voice your concerns on your participation in trade unions. We hereby assure you that the leadership of the TUC will address your concerns.

Ghana Trades Union Congress (TUC) and affiliate unions recognise that young workers are valuable resource for the strengthening and advancement of the trade union movement and would therefore provide the necessary opportunities that would help integrate young workers to actively participate in the activities of the unions.

The theme for this conference “**Preparing the Youth of Today for a Vibrant Trade Union Movement Tomorrow**” therefore could not have been better. We have witnessed the waning of youth participation and activism in trade unions in Ghana. We believe that trade unions will see enthusiasm and commitment of young people to trade unionism in Ghana when young workers feel protected and encouraged to participate in trade union activities.

The labour market produces younger work force that is highly exploited in all sectors of the economy facing challenges of job and income insecurity. Trade Unions need to organise these young people and nurture them on the ideals of trade unionism.

Comrade chair, the UN estimates that about 1 billion young people will join the world’s labour market in the next decade. In Ghana about 250,000 young people seek to enter the labour market every year according to the Institute of Statistical, Social & Economic Research’s (ISSER) 2009 report. Indeed these young people are the next generation of workers and the future of the trade union movement.

As you may be already aware, there had been growing recognition of the importance of young people's participation in trade union activities particularly in decision making processes over the years. The Ghana TUC had encouraged and created space for young people to contribute to the progress of the labour movement. The establishment of the youth desk in particular had facilitated the youth understanding of the principles, the vision and values of trade unionism and had helped to sustain the interest of young workers in the unions and created opportunities for the youth to assume some leadership positions in the unions.

We encouraged affiliate unions to establish youth desks and provide adequate resources to fund youth activities in the union. You therefore have the duty to position yourself to take advantage of the opportunities the unions will offer.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) is aware of the challenges that some young workers face in exercising their rights to form and join trade unions as provided for by the laws of Ghana. Some employers consciously prevent their workers from joining trade unions. These are mostly young men working in the private sector particularly in the services and financial sector, MNCs. These young people are made to believe that trade unions are not relevant and are rather encouraged to form enterprise based unions and welfare associations.

We would like to sound a note of caution to employers who prevent their workers from joining or forming trade unions to desist from that practise because very soon we would name and shame them for violating the labour laws of the land. It is the right of every worker to join or form a trade union of his/her choice as stipulated in Constitution of Ghana and the Labour Act 2003 (Act 651). It is also the responsibility of government to ensure enforcement of the labour law in that regards.

We hope young workers will articulate their views without fear and stand up for their rights at workplaces and insist on their rights to join or form trade unions at workplaces for the protection of their economic and social rights.

Comrade chair, I would like to entreat the young people gathered here to be ambassadors in the union movement and to help organise their peers into the trade union movement. We hope the youth who find themselves in the job market will join trade unions and stand for their rights at the workplaces for job and income security. We challenge the unions to create space for young workers in the trade union movement and young workers to avail themselves to opportunities offered by the unions for knowledge building and self development.

We wish you fruitful deliberations and duly declare this conference open.

Long Live Trade Union Unity and Solidarity;

Long Live the Trade Union Movement of Ghana;

Long Live Ghana;

I thank you.

We will endeavour to use next year's Youth Conference to finalise preparation of the youth policy take a serious look at youth in trade unions there is the need to clearly articulate the position of the youth in unions and set standards and strategies to ensure the effective participation of youth in trade unions.

You would agree with me that trade unions globally played pivotal roles in Africa's independence struggles and the youth were not left out in that cause. The

youth have been one of the key agents for change in the independence struggles in countries such as South Africa during the anti apartheid struggles, Ghana during the positive action and beyond. In many cases the youth were even the architects for these changes. Today, experiences from Tunisia and other Arab countries will attest to the fact that the youth can make a difference. This is not in a way to support unjustifiable uprising.

Comrade Chair, unfortunately in the trade union movement today, there is some level of apathy among young people. The reasons are not farfetched and that is because there are no adequate sustainable jobs in the country, many young people prefer bad jobs to the better jobs where there are no opportunities to join or form trade unions. There are also some violations of labour rights in the private sectors particularly as a result of lack of information about the core values and ideals of trade unionism as well as the provisions in the labour Act, 2003 (Act 651) concerning the rights of workers.

Due to the lack of job creation, young people globally are faced with unemployment and underemployment. It is being estimated that additional 45 million young people will be added to the unemployment statistics yearly. Globally the UN also estimates that about 90% of the 25% world's working population are in developing countries and the youth unemployment is three times higher than the adults' unemployment. Youth unemployment in Ghana is estimated around 36%. Compounding the challenges of youth is the fact that the majority find themselves in precarious employment with lack trade union protection.

In fact I am happy to say that at the last ILO 12th African Regional Meeting held in Johannesburg from 10th to 14 October, 2011, it came out clearly from the member states that youth unemployment and underemployment is alarming and therefore

prioritised to address these challenges. It appreciated the need to address both the supply and the demand sides of the national labour markets. The meeting reiterated the need for an integrated approach and pathways in addressing youth employment challenges and as a matter of urgency.

Brothers and sisters, the interest of the Ghana TUC in youth affairs goes beyond participation in trade unions. Indeed we have been concerned about the high rate of joblessness. We have therefore used several avenues to raise the high youth joblessness to our policy makers. We are aware that about four years ago Ghana joined th