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**ORGANISED LABOUR**

**MAY DAY SPEECH**

**THEME:**  
***“SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND DECENT  
WORK: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL PARTNERS”***

**DELIVERED BY**

**DR. YAW BAAH**  
**(SECRETARY GENERAL OF TRADES UNION CONGRESS)**

**KUMASI, 1<sup>ST</sup> MAY, 2018**

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**BROTHER CHAIRMAN;  
PRESIDENT NANA ADDO DANKWA AKUFO-ADDO;  
HONOURABLE CHIEF OF STAFF;  
HONOURABLE MINISTERS OF STATE;  
COMRADE PEDRO L. G. GONZALEZ, AMBASSADOR OF  
REPUBLIC OF CUBA TO GHANA;  
BROTHER AREZKI MESHOUD, SECRETARY GENERAL OF  
ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN TRADE UNION UNITY (OATUU)  
BROTHERS AND SISTERS;  
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN;  
FELLOW WORKERS;**

May Day is an important day for all working people across the globe. Here, in Ghana, the celebration is taking place in all the ten regions.

On behalf of all working people in Ghana, I welcome our President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, the Chief of Staff, Ministers of State and other government officials who have come to celebrate this important day with us, here, in Kumasi.

I would also like to welcome Comrade Pedro Gonzalez, the Ambassador of the Republic of Cuba to Ghana, and his wife, to the parade. We appreciate all the efforts of the Cuban Embassy in Ghana towards strengthening the cooperation between our two countries. As we celebrate the 2018 May Day with him here in Kumasi, some comrades from TUC are celebrating the May Day in Cuba as part of an exchange programme H.E. Comrade Pedro Gonzalez initiated last year. This is indeed another indication of true friendship between our two countries. We look forward to strengthening our cooperation with the working people of Cuba in the years ahead.

This year, we are celebrating May Day under the theme ***“Sustainable Development Goals and Decent Work: The Role of Social Partners”***.

Mr. President, we chose this theme purposely to highlight the importance of social partnership and what a strong partnership, characterized by mutual trust and respect, can achieve.

As we all know, the lack of decent employment is the greatest challenge facing Ghana today. Out of nearly 13 million Ghanaians who are eligible to work, just about 2 million (or 15 percent) have jobs that can be described as decent, in relative terms. About 11 million Ghanaians (or 85 percent) are working in very precarious conditions with no hope for the future.

Mr. President, it is indeed very disheartening to note that even the few Ghanaians who have some form of decent employment are constantly being threatened with redundancy. In 2015, we witnessed a mass redundancy exercise at AngloGold Ashanti Obuasi Mine which affected over 5000 mine workers. In March this year, there was another mass redundancy exercise at Gold Fields Ghana Limited (Tarkwa Mine) which affected over 2000 permanent workers.

When workers protested against the exercise at the Tarkwa Mine, armed police and military personnel were deployed to quell the protest. Some of the protestors suffered severe injuries while others were arrested and thrown into police cells with very appalling conditions.

This is not acceptable in a country which prides itself of 25 years of uninterrupted parliamentary democracy. What is democracy if workers cannot protest against a mass redundancy exercise that only aims at profiting foreign shareholders and a few privileged Ghanaians? These are our resources and we should take control over them.

Mr. President it may surprise you to know that the same company, Gold Fields Ghana Limited (Damang Mine), carried out a similar exercise two years ago and we know that it has notified the Labour Department of its intention to carry out another mass redundancy exercise which may affect all workers at its Damang Mine.

This is happening in other sectors including banking and maritime sectors. Almost all the newly-registered stevedore and shore-handling companies in our maritime industry are using contract and/or casual workers while the existing companies have either laid-off workers or are in the process of turning all permanent employees into casual workers for no apparent reason other than profiteering.

We are appealing to you, Mr. President, to stop these unwarranted changes in modes of operation that are designed only to make supernormal profits in favour of foreign shareholders at the expense of Ghanaian workers. We call on government to ratify International Labour Organisation (ILO) Covention 158 concerning termination of employment and to review the Labour Act, 2003 (Act 651) to make it an effective instrument for protecting Ghanaian workers from employers who want to take advantage of the lapses in our labour law.

Brother Chairman, before I shift our attention from this issue, allow me to take this opportunity to thank the Minister for Employment and Labour Relations, Honourable Ignatius Baffour Awuah, his Deputy, Honourable Bright Wireko-Brobby, and Minister of Lands and Natural Resources, Honourable Peter Amewu and the staff of the two ministries for helping to restore peace in the mining industry. But for their timely intervention, these mass redundancy exercises could lead to an industry-wide strike

action in the mining sector which could trigger a nationwide solidarity strike.

We in Organised Labour hold a strong view that the current unenviable employment situation in our country can be attributed, mainly, to policy failure. In the last three decades, or so, Ghana has religiously implemented free market capitalist policies and programmes sponsored by the International Monetary Fund. These bad policies and programmes have brought only misery to the majority of Ghanaians, either directly or indirectly. That is why we support government's decision to end the IMF programme this year. No country has ever prospered by implementing IMF policies and programmes and Ghana will not be the first to do so. When we finally liberate our country from the IMF we should never repeat those mistakes in economic management which will force us back to implement IMF-sponsored programmes and policies. The on-going IMF programme should be the last one.

We believe that there are other policy options that can bring prosperity to all Ghanaians. What we need is a selfless leader who will lead us away from corruption, ineptitude, laziness, indiscipline, poverty, ignorance and superstition to a path of hard work, patriotism and prosperity. Mr. President, we are confident that you and your government can do that for Ghana through a stronger social partnership which will involve all Ghanaians in the economic and social development process. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an excellent basis for a medium to long term economic and social development planning with special reference to Goal 8 which focuses on economic growth and decent

work. Given Ghana's huge natural resource endowment, there is no reason why we cannot achieve all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

By 2030, no Ghanaian should suffer poverty; no Ghanaian should suffer hunger; all Ghanaians should have access to good health, clean water, and adequate sanitation; all our children should have access to quality education; no Ghanaian should suffer gender discrimination; all Ghanaians must have access to affordable and clean energy; all Ghanaians in the working-age population should be able to work in freedom and dignity; we should be able to provide the necessary infrastructure for innovation for our industry to thrive; we must reduce all forms of inequality; we must take good care of our compatriots with disability and the aged, we must eradicate child labour and child trafficking, we must protect girls from all forms of harmful tradition including female genital mutilation and child marriages, we must take good care of our compatriots in prison; we should be able to build sustainable cities and communities; we must produce and consume responsibly; we should be able to protect our environment especially our water bodies, our forests and life on land and life below water; we should be able to build strong institutions; we should be able to formalize our economy and sustain high economic growth. Above all, we should achieve peace and ensure justice for all Ghanaians by 2030.

Organised Labour would like to assure government, once again, of our support for all initiatives and policies aimed at creating conducive environment for private sector businesses to thrive, expand and create decent employment for our people. We appreciate the reduction in taxes and utility tariffs as well as the monetary easing policies introduced by the Bank of Ghana aimed at reducing cost of doing business in Ghana. The

introduction of the new benchmark interest rate (i.e., the Ghana Reference Rate) should lower the cost of capital and help create decent employment in the private sector in the medium to long term. We commend government for the 100,000 jobs being created across all districts in the country under the Nation Builders Corps programme.

But, Mr. President, government can do more. One area that needs further attention is trade. The current unbridled free trade policy is not helping Ghana to create jobs. That is why we support the recommendation by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) to impose special taxes on some selected imports that can be efficiently produced in Ghana, especially poultry products. We urgently need policies that will remove the constraints limiting the ability of the private sector to expand and create jobs. Some of these constraints were identified in a recent IEA Business Confidence Survey. They include high cost of raw materials, high taxes and high government charges, high utility tariffs, high cost of credit, and low or insufficient domestic demand for goods produced in Ghana. We will support further initiatives that will ease the heavy burden on domestic investors.

Mr. President, I would like to touch on pensions. The three-tier pension system which was introduced seven years ago has experienced very serious implementation challenges that need urgent attention. We have raised a number of issues on the SSNIT Scheme including issues regarding the formula for the computation of benefits. We are working with the Board of Trustees of SSNIT to address those issues. The second tier pension scheme has more challenges. As you are aware, Mr. President, a large chunk of the second tier funds that were lodged with Bank of Ghana was finally released

this year in a form of bonds with maturity periods ranging from two to ten years, thanks to you and your government. Workers who will retire in or before 2020 do not have enough time to invest their funds to generate adequate returns to ensure income security during retirement.

Some retirees have brought to our attention the past credit SSNIT has computed for them. In all cases, retirees are receiving lump-sum benefits that are far below what they could have received under the PNDCL 247. The pension reforms that were recommended by Late T. A. Bediako's Pension Reforms Commission aimed at enhancing retirement income but not to worsen it. We would like to appeal to you, once again, Mr. President, to set up a special committee to review both the first and second tier pension schemes. Organised Labour will submit detailed proposals to government for the review of the two pension schemes.

In the meantime, we expect you, Mr. President, to reconstitute the board of National Pensions Regulatory Authority (NPRA). The delay in the reconstitution of the governing board of NPRA is contributing to the delay in the implementation of some important sections of the National Pensions Act, 2008 (Act 766). We would also like to appeal to you to reconstitute the National Labour Commission and the governing board of Fair Wages and Salaries Commission.

Brother Chairman, before I conclude the statement, I would like to turn my attention to my fellow Ghanaian workers. Sisters and brothers, we need to change our lackadaisical attitude towards work. As we appeal to the President to end IMF programmes and lead us to take control of our natural resources, we owe it a duty to demonstrate that we can indeed manage these resources efficiently and effectively. Our success or failure

will depend on how disciplined we are, as Ghanaian workers. We cannot build a prosperous country with lateness, laziness, and indiscipline. We should all pledge our support for and work very hard to achieve the President's noble vision of ***Ghana Beyond Aid***, as soon as possible. I believe that with hard work, dedication to duty, and discipline we can move this country forward and achieve prosperity for all Ghanaians by 2030.

Thank you for your attention.

Long Live Workers' Solidarity!

Long Live Ghana!