
ADDRESS BY SECRETARY GENERAL OF TRADES UNION CONGRESS

DR. YAW BAAH

AT THE NATIONAL WORKERS' PARADE HELD ON

MAY DAY, 2017

AT BLACK STAR SQUARE, ACCRA

Brother Chairman;

President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo;

Honourable Ministers of State;

Members of Diplomatic Corps;

Colleague Organised Labour Leaders;

Brothers and Sisters in the trade union fraternity;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Today is a great day. It is the day we join workers around the globe to celebrate work and international working class solidarity. It is also the day we remember all those who have made a lasting contribution to the development of the trade union movement and protection of workers' rights, nationally and internationally.

The number of workers at this parade and those at the parades in all the ten regions is an indication of the importance Organised Labour attaches to this day, here in Ghana. The presence of the President of the Republic and his ministers at this parade is a further indication of the importance this government, like previous governments, attaches to social partnership with Organised Labour. It also shows that government appreciates the contribution the

working people of Ghana are making towards the development of our dear country.

Sisters and Brothers, I, therefore, invite you to join me to welcome our Special Guest of Honour, President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, to the National May Day Parade. We also welcome all the Honourable Ministers of State present at this parade, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, our international partners and all other dignitaries.

This May Day celebration coincides with the celebration of Ghana@60. We are, therefore, celebrating this day as part of the celebration of Ghana@60 hence our theme: *“Ghana@60: Mobilising for Future through the Creation of Decent Jobs”*. With this theme, the working people of Ghana are signaling to government and the good people of Ghana that we are ready to rally behind our leaders towards faster economic growth that is driven by decent jobs. As we celebrate May Day and the 60th anniversary of independence let us reflect on our past and use the lessons to carve out the future we want for ourselves and for future generations.

At independence in 1957 there was hope. Those who were celebrating and jubilating when Ghana achieved independence did so because they thought the lives of their children and their

grandchildren and great grandchildren would be better than theirs. But their hopes were shattered within a decade or so after independence. To many Ghanaians life has now become something to endure because they lack the very basic necessities to enjoy life. Ghanaians in some parts of the country still share water from guinea-worm infested ponds with their cattle, sheep, goats, chicken, pigs and dogs. A significant number of Ghanaians sleep in the streets because they have no homes to go to at night after a hard day's work. Some young Ghanaians, out of desperation, try to reach Europe through dangerous routes where many of them meet their deaths.

As a nation, we have done quite well in nurturing our democracy to this point where we have managed to conduct seven general elections peacefully. At least, we have kept ourselves together as a nation and in peace. In spite of our challenges, we are still a model of democracy in Africa. But, the bitter truth is that we have failed in economic management.

The socio-economic challenges facing Ghana today is an indicator of this failure. Joblessness among the youth remains the greatest challenge facing Ghana in spite of our enormous wealth. After 60 years of independence, a significant number of Ghanaians cannot afford housing and education for their children. Many Ghanaians

cannot even afford basic healthcare. They rely on unorthodox medication even when there is a clear need to consult a doctor. It is becoming a curse to grow old in Ghana because we are unable to take care of the elderly in our society. Our compatriots with disability have to beg on the streets of Accra and other cities to survive. Communities feel insecure because of armed robbery. They fear for their lives and property because they know that the police will not respond to their emergency call partly because there is one police officer for every 1000 Ghanaians and the few police officers lack the necessary logistics they need to protect us. Prisoners live in conditions that are considered unfit even for animals. Our roads are comparable to war zones because many Ghanaians die on these roads every day. Too many pregnant women are dying because of lack of care. Many Ghanaians have died from conditions that could have been prevented if they could have access to healthcare in their communities. But they could not because there is only one doctor for every ten thousand Ghanaians. It is a shame that many Ghanaian children still go to bed without food and a significant number of them die before their fifth birthday. A large number of children have to work under very hazardous conditions to support themselves and their families, including thousands of them who are forced into illegal mining activities across the country. Girls and boys are being trafficked within and across our borders. The recent labour force survey conducted by the Ghana Statistical Service

revealed that many workers in Ghana are still receiving slave wages. Some are being forced to work overtime and under dangerous conditions.

These should not be the features of a very wealthy country like Ghana after 60 years of independence. Clearly, we have mismanaged our economy. We chose a certain path that has led us here. This is not where Ghana should be, given our massive natural resources. Ghana has no reason to be counted among poor countries.

What happened to the billions of dollars we received from our gold, diamond, manganese, bauxite, timber and cocoa in the last 60 years? What happened to the billions of Ghana Cedis we generated from taxes? What happened to the billions of dollars we have received from donors? What happened to the billions of dollars we received from external and domestic loans?

Many Ghanaians have already lost hope for the future. They do not know what to expect in future. But it is never too late to develop. We now have the opportunity to chart another path that will lead us away from poverty, hopelessness and vulnerability to a path that will lead us to a great future full of hope and prosperity for ourselves, our children and our children's children.

Mr. President, we are counting on you to lead us into this future. We in Organised Labour would like to pledge our support for you and your government. Together with business owners and employers, in the true spirit of tripartism and social partnership, guided by the principles of mutual respect, we can achieve faster growth and create decent jobs for Ghanaians. We believe that you can lead us out of poverty and restore hope in Ghana.

Restoring hope requires that we create decent jobs for Ghanaians. It means we need to revitalize all the major sectors of the economy including agriculture, manufacturing, mining, quarrying, construction, trade, transport, finance, utilities, education, health, security and all other sectors.

The textile sector, for example, can generate tens of thousands of jobs for young people across the country. We, therefore, expect some of the factories under the one-district-one factory programme to be textile factories. The agricultural sector is and will remain the backbone of our economy in the foreseeable future. All these sectors can potentially create hundreds of thousands of decent jobs for Ghanaians.

That is why we have pledged our support for all government initiatives designed to create decent jobs, as contained in the 2017 Budget and Economic Policy including the one-district-one-factory, one-village-one- dam, small business development, planting for food and jobs, national entrepreneurship and innovation programme, and one - million - dollar - one-constituency. We will also support government's initiative to undertake employment audit of all government-funded projects and programmes.

With these assurances, we trust that government will quickly start engaging Organised Labour on all issues affecting the working people of Ghana and their families. We believe that we can achieve a lot together through social dialogue.

We are already witnessing very positive developments in economic management in the last four months. Inflation and interest rates are declining sharply. The Ghana Cedi is regaining its value. We have to work together as social partners to consolidate and sustain these gains. In the meantime, we commend government for its decision to end the IMF-sponsored Extended Credit Facility programme in April, 2018. We think that is the way to go. Ghana can develop without IMF programmes.

We have a number of issues to discuss with government including the intended privatization of the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG). We hold the view that the Compact should be reviewed. We do not think it is good for Ghana in its current form.

We also need to discuss how to sustain the industrial peace and the need for financial and logistical support for the labour administration institutions including National Labour Commission (NLC), Labour Department, Factories Inspectorate Department and Fair Wages and Salaries Commission. Low wages on the Single Spine Salary Structure, low pensions and low pension coverage, abuse of workers' rights by some local and foreign employers, occupational health, safety and environment, including the fight against illegal mining activities are among the issues we would like to discuss with government.

We would also like to discuss the urgent need for support for public sector institutions to perform their functions effectively and efficiently. Here, we would like to single out the Prison Service. We need to pay special attention to the appalling conditions in our prisons. It is unwise to treat our fellow Ghanaians in our prisons like animals. Prisoners have rights and we need to respect those rights. We agree with Fyodor Dostoevsky who said "The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons". We

believe that Ghana is a civilized society. Therefore, the conditions in our prisons must reflect that.

Mr. President, brothers and sisters, fellow Ghanaians, as we celebrate May Day and our 60th anniversary of independence let us keep in mind that the task ahead is even more daunting. At independence the population of Ghana was just about 6 million. Now we are almost 28 million. By 2050 the population of Ghana will pass the 50 million mark. Let us continue to work hard. There is something we are doing right that has brought peace to our land. Let us keep doing those things. But there are many things we are not doing right. We have to change our ways.

Before I resume my seat, let me, on behalf of all Organised Labour leaders thank the National and Regional May Day Planning Committees for a very good job done. We would also like to thank the President, ministers of state, members of the diplomatic corps and all of you here at the national parade and at the regional parades for joining us to observe the 2017 May Day.

May the Good Lord bless us!

Long Live Ghana!

Long Live International Working Class Solidarity!