

## **TRADES UNION CONGRESS (GHANA)**



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### **PRESS STATEMENT ON THE PROPOSED NATIONAL CATHEDRAL**

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Ghanaians from all walks of life have expressed their opinions about government's plan to construct a national cathedral. While some argue strongly in favour of the construction of the cathedral, others vehemently oppose it. Others have suggested that government should change the proposed location of the project to save the existing public buildings on the land and/or consider a reduction of the size of the project to reduce cost.

Those who are against the project contend that a national cathedral should not be a priority, given the prevailing socio-economic circumstances in the country. They see the construction of such an edifice for worship as a waste of scarce national resources.

Those who are in favour of the project argue mainly from a religious point of view. Some say we should be ready to spend whatever amount it takes to build a cathedral to glorify the Good Lord.

There are also those who have argued in favour of the project mainly because they are members or sympathizers of the ruling party and so they do not want to be seen as critics of their own party's initiative.

While the debate rages on the President, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, is reported to have said the proposed national cathedral is "a priority among priorities". According to President Akufo-Addo, since 70 percent of Ghanaians are Christian the cathedral will be a rallying point for strengthening unity among Ghanaians.

Ordinarily, TUC would not have joined this debate because of its religious and partisan nature. But we cannot sit on the fence for a cathedral to become a "priority among priorities" in Ghana.

We agree with the President that we need a rallying point for strengthening unity among the people of Ghana because, as we all know, partisan politics has divided and continues to divide the people of Ghana. But we do not believe that we need a special national cathedral to serve as a rallying point to strengthen unity among the people of Ghana. The construction of a cathedral for only Christians may even divide us further because there are many other religions in Ghana. Christians may constitute the majority of the population but that does not make Christianity a national religion and it should not be seen as more important than the other religions. A national cathedral for Christians, regardless of their share of the population, should never find space on the list of priorities for Ghana. If the proposed cathedral is for the glorification of God, we would like to refer the President to the Book of Acts 7:48-49 in the Christian Bible:

***The Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says: Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? Says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things? (NIV)***

Currently, over six million Ghanaians do not have access to clean water; one out of every four Ghanaian children is affected by chronic malnutrition; anemia affects 66 percent of young children and 42 percent of women of childbearing age; only 15 percent of urban residents and 6 percent of rural residents have access to sanitation facilities; a very significant number of households lacks access to toilet facilities and so open defecation is quite common; there is only one doctor for 8000 Ghanaians compared to World Health Organisation (WHO) standard of one doctor for 5000 people (in some regions, there is only one doctor for over 50,000 residents); many children are dying needlessly from malaria and other preventable diseases; the amount of money available for healthcare for Ghanaians under the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) is just about GH¢120 (or about US\$25) per person per year; pregnant and nursing mothers and their babies are sleeping on wooden benches and in hallways in our hospitals; our compatriots in our overcrowded prisons survive on GH¢1.80 per inmate per day; we have only three psychiatric hospitals and 18 active psychologists in Ghana for a population of nearly 30 million; many Ghanaians live in the streets because they have no access to housing; because of lack of infrastructure, we are forced to introduce double-track system in our second cycle institutions; our road infrastructure is in shambles and thousands of Ghanaians lose their precious lives on our roads every year; and our youth cannot find employment after so many years of schooling.

Why should a national cathedral be “a priority among priorities” in these circumstances? Why should government use scarce national resources to construct a national cathedral when we have all these social and economic challenges to deal with?

We are fully convinced that if Ghanaians, including Christians, were to be asked individually to list their priorities for the country a national cathedral would never feature in the first one thousand items on the list of priorities, even if it features at all.

We would like to appeal to President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo to shelve this plan otherwise we will invite all Ghanaians to join us to campaign vehemently against this misplaced priority and to protect the national purse.

Our workplaces, our schools, colleges and universities, and all places of worship across the country would be more effective rallying points for strengthening unity among Ghanaians than a national cathedral located in Accra which can be accessed only by the privileged class in society. Moreover, we should encourage more inter-marriages among ethnic groups in the country and facilitate the learning of multiple languages as a means of strengthening unity among all the ethnic groups in Ghana.

The TUC will continue to support government initiatives that seek to address the social and economic challenges facing our country including the President’s vision of *Ghana Beyond Aid*, the free SHS programme, the National Builders Corp programme and similar progressive projects. But we cannot support the construction of a national cathedral. We believe even the Good Lord will not approve this project, given the social and economic challenges facing Ghana today.

**[SIGNED]**

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