

SPEECH DELIVERED BY DAN ACHEAMPONG, PRESIDENT OF THE GHANA EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATION AT THE 11TH QUADRENNIAL DELEGATES' CONGRESS OF THE TRADES UNION CONGRESS (GHANA), AT THE GNAT VILLAGE, ABANKRO ON TUESDAY MARCH 23, 2021

Salutations

On behalf of the entire membership of the Ghana Employers' Association (GEA), I wish to thank the entire leadership of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) Ghana for inviting me as a Special Guest to offer an address at the union's 11th Quadrennial Conference, which happens to fall on its Diamond Jubilee.

Indeed, the TUC has come a long a way, and shall always be referenced as one of the strong pillars of our labour market actors offering critical policy inputs for industrial harmony and development of Ghana.

It is therefore my candid expectation and hope that TUC shall grow from strength to strength to better achieve its corporate objectives, serve its members well, cooperate with employers and also continue to contribute significantly to the socio-economic progress of our dear country.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I duly acknowledge the presence of the President of the Republic of Ghana, His Excellency Nana Addo Danquah Akuffo-Addo. Permit me also to use this opportunity to congratulate His Excellency the President for his reelection into office on January 7, 2021.

I would further like to acknowledge the presence of all employers' representatives here present, and other dignitaries and invited guests.

I must disclose to you that I am very elated to meet all of you here in show of solidarity and to support the TUC to make this occasion a memorable and befitting one.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we are all aware, the year 2020 was a very difficult one, not only for employers and workers but the Ghanaian and global economy at large. The vagaries of the COVID-19 pandemic have transcended beyond being a health crisis to causing major disruptions and uncertainties in all sides of Ghana's economy and labour market.

The economic dimensions of the pandemic directly affected the demand and supply activities of businesses and employers that significantly called into question the very survival and sustainability of many enterprises.

In a survey conducted by GEA to ascertain the impact of the pandemic on employers and employment trends, the results indicated that 62 percent of employers had their business operations completely disrupted. More than 75 percent of employers postponed their investment decisions, while 64 percent of employers responded that demand for their products had fallen below normal levels due to the effect of the pandemic on their customers.

The situation also affected the recruitment potentials of employers and management- employee relations. The survey further indicated that more than 60 percent of employers had ruled out the possibility of engaging new employees, whilst 25 percent indicated that they had suspended employment contracts in order to stay afloat.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to indicate that prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Ghana had made significant progress towards macroeconomic management, economic growth, business investments and employment creation. The implementation of the various economic and social policies, and solid foundation laid by Government would have put the economy on

the path of sustained growth for the realization of the "Ghana Beyond Aid Agenda" in the near foreseeable future.

Ghana's economic growth rate over the last two decades averaged between 5 and 6 percent. In 2019, the country attained an improved growth rate of 6.8 percent, one of the highest growth rates for any Sub-Saharan African country at the time.

The outbreak of COVID-19 however posed a serious threat to this blissful economic trajectory, and had the potential of significantly derailing this performance. These developments could have resulted into widespread and prolonged economic disruptions but for the timely intervention of Government.

It is on this note that we would like to commend His Excellency the President for the quality leadership displayed in putting together proactive measures to control the pandemic since its outbreak in March, 2020. Employers appreciate the well thought through health policies, protocols and infrastructure as well as the fiscal and monetary policies implemented to enable the country reach this far in its fight against the pandemic to the admiration of even powerful countries around the globe. I must say that

the policies have created a clear direction of how Ghana can successfully come of the difficulties that accompanied the pandemic.

Particularly, the employers' community view the design and implementation of the GH¢100 Billion Ghana CARES Programme as the key flagship programme that will restore and sustain macroeconomic stability to incentivise and make employers and businesses to be more enterprising.

The implementation of GH¢750 Million Coronavirus Alleviation Programme Business Support Scheme (CAP-BuSS) for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) came in handy to support the numerous enterprises that would have lost their existence to the pandemic. One good thing about this programme is the gender dimension that has been mainstreamed to support majority of female-headed businesses.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On March 12, 2021, the Caretaker Minister of Finance, Hon. Osei Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu, presented the 2021 Budget and Economic Policy Statement to the August House of Parliament. We wish to commend Government, specifically, for the additional stimulus packages doled out to sectors hardest hit by the disruptions occasioned by the pandemic. Mention can be made of the tax rebate of 30% on income tax due for companies in the hotels and restaurants, education, arts and entertainment, and travel and

tours subsectors; suspension of income tax instalment payments for the next three quarters for small businesses using the income tax stamp system, and extension of the waiver of interest as incentive for early payment of accumulated tax arrears to reduce cash flow challenges for businesses and employers.

The interventions by both the GEA and Organized labour in resolving outstanding issues at the workplace that could have hampered the harmonious work environment we have enjoyed over the past years is also worth commending. Let me thank TUC for their monumental, understanding and cooperation in working with employers to reduce or minimize the impact of the pandemic on job losses and potential business closures. I have no doubt that history will be kind to you for this yeoman role.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The uncertainties and labour market disruptions that accompanied the pandemic, emergence of advance technology in the world of work and the role of the TUC in shaping Ghana's Labour and Social Polices since the past 75 years, have necessitated a review of how union activities should be carried out going forward.

Therefore, your theme for this year's Conference "*75 years of TUC: Building Stronger Unions in a Changing World of Work*" is timely and could not have been chosen at a better time. The world of work has taken a new dimension, and so there would be the need for a review of the skills sets that are currently in the possession of workers and the ones that would be required in the new future.

Issues of career and skills development will play a critical role in the future of work. We may not survive the workplace of tomorrow if we are unable to train and retrain in order to be continuously relevant to the labour market. We must be forward looking and always anticipate skills that may be required in the future. What we acquired yesterday may not be needed or relevant tomorrow. Upskilling yourselves will enhance your market value and the organizations success and growth.

The World Economic Forum at its October 2020 conference indicated the following on skills development worth sharing with you on this occasion:

- 1. 50% of all employees will need reskilling by 2025, as adoption of technology increases.**
- 2. Critical thinking and problem-solving top the list of skills employers believe will grow in prominence in the next five years.**
- 3. Newly emerging this year are skills self-management such as active learning, resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility.**

4. Leadership and social influence

5. Technology use, monitoring and control

As workers, we must take responsibility for our career development. Let us learn to acquire or cultivate knowledge so that we can harvest it in order to survive the workplace of the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Permit me to touch on the special topic of Social Dialogue. The success achieved in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic would not have been completely possible had it not been the deployment of Social Dialogue, and this will be critical in this challenging world of work.

It is important to note that Labour-management cooperation cannot exist, thrive or survive without dialogue. It is indeed the life blood of industrial relations. The ILO define SD to include all kinds of negotiations, consultations, discussions, briefings or simply exchange of information among representatives of Employers, Workers and Governments on issues of common interest to economic and social policy.

This everchanging world of work, requires Employers and Unions to cultivate, deepen and entrench the culture of dialogue, negotiations,

consultations at the enterprise level. Permit me again to add that SD can be successful when the following three key factors are present; Credibility of Representatives, Credibility of the Processes and Credibility of the Outcomes.

Enterprises are facing new and numerous challenges, and we need the support and cooperation of Employers, Unions and Government to work together to ensure the progress of Ghanaian enterprise.

In conclusion, let me once again stress that the world of work is taking a new dimension, and this is happening very fast. Therefore, issues of lifelong learning, reskilling and upskilling to interact well with technological advancement for productivity growth are focal areas to engage your attention in this Conference.

Once again let me thank the leadership and entire membership of TUC for the honor done me to address this august gathering.

I wish you successful deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.