



NATIONAL SECRETARIAT

UNIVERSITY TEACHERS ASSOCIATION OF GHANA

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All Media Houses.

All UTAG Branches.

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COMMUNIQUE

Tamale- The University Teachers Association of Ghana (UTAG) held its 21st Biennial National Congress at the University for Development Studies (UDS), Tamale, from the 11th to the 13th of October 2023. The Congress, which was held under the theme, **‘Labour Unionism and Socioeconomic Transformation in Ghana: Can UTAG be the Pacesetter?’**, brought together Delegates from all the 15 traditional public universities in Ghana to discuss the role of UTAG as a central pillar and intellectual hub in providing policy alternatives and shaping public policy discourse through research and advocacy. The discharge of this critical national duty, it is observed, has been fraught with challenges, many of which hit hardest at the core mandate of UTAG Members and their welfare, as well as the overall quality of governance and the socioeconomic well-being of all Ghanaians. UTAG is gravely concerned about the general economic outlook of the country, which imposes unprecedented hardships on citizens, particularly the ordinary worker, and the implications of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Programme agreed with the government for the running of public universities. Undoubtedly, the Free Senior High School (FSHS) policy has led to increased enrolments across our campuses without a corresponding increase in recruitment of Lecturers and infrastructure. Thus, our members are overly stretched and stressed with unacceptable Student to Lecturer ratios. Following extensive deliberations by Members of the Association on the critical issues and challenges facing the country, congress identified key areas of national importance. It made recommendations for immediate attention and action by the government, as captured below:

1. Constitutional Review

UTAG finds the non-implementation of the reviewed 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana very troubling. We take exception to the very partisan challenge of policy discontinuity that plagues our efforts at development and violates the Directive Principles of State Policy that enjoins regimes to continue with programmes initiated by previous regimes as much as possible. We note that having spent state resources to set up a Constitution Review Commission of Inquiry in January 2010 to undertake such a crucial exercise of nationwide public consultations culminating in a report submitted to the government in December 2011 and the issuance of the White Paper

University for Development Studies, UDS, P. O. Box TL 1350, Tamale, Ghana

Tel: +233504395605 (President); +233544057036 (Secretary)

E-mail: nationalutag@gmail.com

in June 2012, Ghanaians are yet to see real efforts from successive governments to implement the recommendations of the Commission. This is unacceptable given the difficulties of the current times where the practice of executive authority almost veers into the realms of authoritarianism, as well as the inefficiency in governance due partly to the enormous responsibility placed on the shoulders of the executive President. Thus, the deliberate stalling of Ghana's constitution review process does a great disservice to the quest for good governance and sustainable development and the general improvement in Ghanaians' physical quality of life. Based on the foregoing, we call for an immediate resumption and completion of the constitution review process to strengthen the fundamental laws of Ghana for good governance, inclusiveness, and sustainable development that "leave no one behind".

2. Curtailing of Academic Freedom

While UTAG has no objection to the establishment of the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), members note with extreme worry and concern about GTEC's current actions, including its unilateral decision and inconsistent implementation, which disregard the academic freedoms of public Universities, which is entrenched in the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. For example, the imposition of a single organogram on all public universities in contravention of the various Acts that set them up and the **unilateral decision to freeze the accreditation of new academic programmes** in public universities are examples of such clear violations of public universities' academic freedoms, among other things. UTAG, therefore, calls on GTEC to always endeavour to use participatory and consultative approaches in its decision-making processes. We believe in partnerships for the public good, so GTEC should always consult with key stakeholders in the tertiary education space, such as UTAG, in its decision-making. Most importantly, we recommend, as a matter of urgency, the commencement of multi-stakeholder engagements that will lead to amendment of the Education Regulatory Bodies' Act 2020 (Act 1023), which established the GTEC and other bodies to make it more responsive to the needs of contemporary higher education and conducive to the exercise of academic freedom of the Universities. GTEC should immediately **PUT A HOLD** on the decision to freeze accreditation of new programmes as this tends to thwart universities' efforts in designing new innovative programmes to meet the country's development needs. GTEC should undertake a holistic review of the accreditation regime for academic and professional programmes of public universities to meet the current needs of the world of work.

3. Operationalisation of the Ghana National Research Fund

Public university lecturers have three main responsibilities: conducting research, teaching, and providing community service to promote development. The promotion of UTAG members is often dependent on these tasks. These endeavours require a lot of funding, primarily obtained through foreign grants that ultimately dictate the research's agenda and focus. Sustainability also suffers when foreign agencies fund

local research. Thus, national funding can only achieve effective and sustainable research that addresses contextual developmental problems. UTAG highly commends the Parliament of Ghana for passing the National Research Fund Act (Act 1056) and calls for its immediate operationalisation. As a first step, the government could allocate 1% of GDP to operationalise the National Research Fund. UTAG clarifies that the implementation of the Fund should not replace the infamous Book and Research Allowance (BRA), which is a critical component of the conditions of service of the Members of UTAG, which has been delayed unduly for the already completed 2022/2023 Academic year as many Lecturers in public universities are yet to receive this reimbursable expenditure. This is creating tension on our campus. We are urging the Government to ensure that all UTAG Members receive their BRA by the 21st of October to avoid disrupting industrial harmony.

4. The Establishment of New Universities

The Government has hinted at establishing five (5) additional universities to augment the existing ones. Ordinarily, this should be welcome news for UTAG as it expands access to higher education for all Ghanaians. However, given that all existing public universities are seriously underfunded and suffering from severe infrastructural deficits, coupled with undignifying conditions of service for public university Lecturers, we strongly submit that this should not be a priority for the government. Rather, to improve the quality of tertiary education, the government should apply such resources to improve the conditions of the existing public universities through the expansion of infrastructure, improvement in working conditions of university lecturers, recruitment of more Lecturers, research support and the payment of subventions, which the government has reneged as a responsibility to all the public universities. This should be the focus and priority of the government now. We note the non-provision of seed grants for establishing new universities in recent years, such as UniMAC, CKT-UTAS, SDD-UBIDS, AAMUSTED, UESD, and others. We loudly call on the government to focus on providing seed funding for these universities to thrive and provide a conducive teaching and learning environment for our members and students in these universities.

5. Implementation of the Labour Market Survey (LMS) and Other Conditions of Service

Over the years, the government has entered into MoAs with UTAG to avert industrial action from our members but consistently failed to respect and honour the same, which is completely unacceptable. This is exemplified by the lack of implementation of the LMS Government agreed to complete by the end of 2021, to be implemented in 2022, and documented in an MoA signed with UTAG. Furthermore, the unilateral suspension of the payment of the agreed ex-pump rate for Vehicle Maintenance (VM) and Off-Campus allowances despite agreement to the contrary further illustrates how Government continues to renege in fulfilling its side of the bargain. Such bad faith conduct worsens our members' economic well-being and brings untold hardships to us and our families, affecting morale and welfare. We are, by this communique, putting the Government on notice that should it fail to pay the negotiated ex-pump rate,

together with all accrued arrears by the 1st of November 2023 as agreed, and restore our market premium (MP) as part of the implementation of the LMS by the end of December 2023, which would mean a one-year moratorium given to Government, UTAG Members will not return to the classroom in January 2024. We also call for the immediate payment of the universities' portion of the agreed Online Teaching Support Allowance (OTSA), including arrears where applicable.

6. Reconstitution of Councils of Public Universities

The continued failure to reconstitute the governing councils of many of our member public universities whose tenure has expired continues to constrain the smooth running of these universities. This has implications for our members as those who deserve to be promoted cannot, while critical decisions that would enhance the operations of these universities have been put on hold. Therefore, we urge the government to ensure that the governing councils of all public universities whose tenures have expired are reconstituted immediately to ensure the smooth running of these universities.

7. Attack on the Media and Freedom of Expression

Congress of UTAG observed with sadness the increasing attacks on the freedom of expression and of the Media. These developments are not in the interest of our growing democratic dispensation. The recent attacks on journalists and some media houses in the country are attacks on freedom of expression as guaranteed in Chapter 12 of Article 162 of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. While condemning these acts of violence and lawlessness, UTAG commends the police for acting swiftly to arrest some individuals who recently attacked journalists and panellists at United Television (UTV). We call on the Inspector General of Police (IGP) to ensure that perpetrators of all attacks on journalists, including the one on Citifm journalists, media houses and killings of journalists in the country, are arrested and prosecuted without fail.

8. Perennial Floods in Accra and Other Places

UTAG is concerned about the perennial floods in the national capital, Accra, and other major cities (Kumasi, Tamale, Cape Coast and Takoradi) and communities along the White Volta basin. We have seen the disturbing displacement of individuals and communities along the peripheries and catchment areas of the Akosombo Dam because of the spillage of the dam. Communities along the White Volta, especially in the Northern part of Ghana, are displaced annually due to the spillage of the Bagre dam in Burkina Faso. This seriously impacts the shelter, health, livelihoods and general welfare of the people and the communities. We entreat and call on NADMO and the various district assemblies along the catchment areas and other agencies and development partners to assist these displaced Ghanaians urgently. A

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E-mail: nationalutag@gmail.com

multidisciplinary approach to dealing with these perennial floods is recommended in the medium to long term. Also, UTAG suggests that the government expedite the construction of the Pwalugu Multipurpose Dam and others along the White Volta for irrigation and other uses. In this regard, UTAG is ready to partner with city authorities and government to develop a comprehensive strategy to deal with these perennial floods, among others, permanently.

9. Need for Peace Towards Election 2024

Countries with not-so-good democratic credentials practice surround Ghana. The recent coup d'états in Burkina Faso, Niger and others should be a source of worry to all of us. The disturbances in Burkina Faso and the active presence of jihadists in the area have the potential to spill over to Ghana, especially through Bawku, where a tribal conflict has been raging on over the last two years with no end at sight. UTAG, therefore, entreats government, citizens and development partners to take concrete steps to address all security challenges across the country to ensure a peaceful election in 2024. It is also important for the rightful systems and structures to be put in place for a credible election come December 2024.

10. Development Workers/Citizens' Manifesto for Election 2024

UTAG would want to support the Trade Union Congress (TUC) in its call to develop the workers'/citizens' manifesto for adoption of all political parties heading into the 2024 general elections. We strongly believe that this move will place the workers'/citizens' welfare at the centre of the national development agenda. We also believe that such development will make the political parties more accountable to the people and thus reflect the needs and aspirations of the ordinary Ghanaian. In this light, UTAG will make available its expertise across the various sectors of the economy to the TUC for the development/deployment of the manifesto.

Thank you.

END



Prof Mamudu A Akudugu
National President



Dr Eliasu Mumuni
National Secretary