



POST OFFICE BOX: GP 21207, ACCRA, GHANA. TEL: +233 20 961 2485

EMAIL: info@uniteandtransformghana.org

UNITE & TRANSFORM GHANA IS AGAINST THE BUILDING OF A NATIONAL CATHEDRAL

The President of Ghana Nana Akufo-Addo, as part of Ghana's 60th-anniversary celebration, unveiled the design for a National Cathedral in March 2018. This is an interdenominational cathedral to be built in Accra, the nation's capital. In an article published by Myjoyonline on 15 January 2023 with the title "What do we do with Ghana's National Cathedral?", the author Bright Simons noted that "The president of Ghana has assured the nation that the controversial "National Cathedral" will be ready by March 6th, 2024. That is to say, barely a year away". The writer continues, "This is, of course, an engineering impossibility unless the idea is to launch an uncompleted project. The National Cathedral is not just the cathedral; it also includes a bible museum and extensive "biblical gardens", among other structures. In fact, the proponents of the cathedral have promised no ordinary museum but the "biggest bible museum in the world". The cost of the national cathedral project is estimated at \$350 million by the Minister of Finance: <https://yen.com.gh/ghana/208547-national-cathedral-ofori-atta-raises-total-budget-for-construction-from-200-million-350-million/>)

In view of the economic predicaments facing Ghana, we, the members of Unite and Transform Ghana (UTG), vehemently oppose the construction of the national cathedral. It is not a national priority and its implementation contravenes the laws of the country.

The Decision on the use of public funds must not be taken unilaterally

The Government must ensure that national interest is paramount when applying public funds to a project or activity. We are not aware of any form of consultation with the citizens or civil society as regards the building of a national cathedral. On the contrary, it is alleged that the project was a personal promise the President made to *his* God. Such personal interests should be funded with private resources. Building such a monument with public funds at a time when the country is in an economic crisis is simply unconscionable. The country is currently confronted with serious fiscal challenges and unsustainable public debts, collapsing of financial institutions, high levels of job loss and unemployment, high cost of living and high inflation rates, depreciation of the local currency at the highest rate ever

experienced, lack of basic infrastructures, challenges in education and health services delivery, etc. It is hard to comprehend the Government's prioritizing the building of the national cathedral over necessities for the citizens.

The national cathedral is not a national priority

Ghana already has abundant places of worship, some of which have bigger capacities than that of the proposed National Cathedral. Almost every human settlement in Ghana has several places of worship, making the construction of the cathedral a wasteful and misplaced national priority. Some argue that the national cathedral will be a tourist attraction, hence will generate much-needed revenue for the nation.

We are yet to see a cost-benefit analysis and a feasibility study supporting this view. The biggest Roman Catholic Basilica in the world, which is next door, was constructed in 1980 by the late President Félix Houphouët-Boigny in Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast. Has anyone found out how many Catholics (not to mention Christians) in West Africa or Africa have visited the Basilica affectionately referred to as "the Basilica in the Bush"? If the idea is to boost tourism, then why not put the money directly into developing tourist sites in the country.

Violating the Constitution and avoiding Transparency

If the national cathedral is to be funded from the consolidated fund, there are laid down procedures to be followed. All foreseeable or planned expenditures of the government are to be budgeted for and authorised by parliament unless the expenditure is by law a charge on the consolidated fund. Article 178(1) of the Constitution provides for the process of using money in the consolidated fund and it states that parliamentary approval is required - except to meet an expenditure that is charged on that Fund by the Constitution or by an Act of Parliament.

This is the procedure the Government must use and that would mean introducing an expenditure item or a budget line for the National Cathedral and subjecting the same to parliamentary and/or public scrutiny. One would expect the Government to lead by example, obeying the laws of the country. In contrast, it has rather ignored the constitutional provision and rather financed the construction of the national cathedral from a contingency vote.

The disclosure was made by the Minister of Finance when he was questioned about the legality of the expenditure. His argument was that the money was paid out of a contingency vote, and hence from his point of view, it was legal. We, members of UTG, vehemently disagree with the Minister on this. This is because he assumed without admitting that the expenditure on the national cathedral qualifies to be classified as an unforeseeable expenditure. Contrary to using a contingency vote, the constitution provides two ways of handling such expenditures. To cater for unforeseeable expenditures, the constitution provides that:

1. the Government creates a contingency fund and not a contingency vote. This fund can be used to address unforeseen expenditures by the government, but this must be under the supervision of the Finance Committee of Parliament; or
2. the Minister of Finance prepares and submits a supplementary budget to parliament and obtains parliamentary approval before spending money from the consolidated fund on the national cathedral.

After the Government was exposed for the “bad” practice of using the contingency vote, the Government in the 2023 budget complied with the requirement of Article 178(1) by making a provision of GHS 80 million for the National Cathedral project. It was also indicated in the budget that GHS 64 million, GHS 75.5 million and GHS 108 million will be used for 2024, 2025 and 2026, respectively for the national cathedral project - notwithstanding the billions set aside for the contingency vote that may also go to fund the same project.

The Public Procurement Act was also violated

The procurement of works (constructions), goods and services using any public fund is regulated by the Public Procurement Act 2003 (PPA) as amended. All public procurements are to be done in a transparent manner through competition except as provided by the PPA. **The procurement activities relating to the national cathedral (architectural designs, the construction works etc) have been procured using single source and or direct selection methods contrary to the provisions of the PPA.** Section 40(1) provides that a single-source procurement with the approval of the Public Procurement Board may be used under the following conditions:

- a. “Where goods, works and services are only available from a particular supplier or contractor”
- b. “Where there is an urgent need for goods, works and services and engaging in tender proceedings or any other method of procurement is impractical due to the unforeseeable circumstances”
- c. Where owing to a catastrophic event, there is an urgent need for the goods, works or technical services”
- d. Where the procurement entity having procured goods, equipment, technology or services from a supplier, contractor or consultant determines that additional supplies must be procured from the supplier, contractor or consultant because of standardization or compatibility with existing goods, equipment, technology or services”
- e. Where the procurement entity seeks to enter into a contract with the supplier or contractor for research, experiment, study or development”

- f. Where the procurement entity applies this Act for procurement that concerns national security and determines that single-source procurement is the most appropriate method of procurement.

Furthermore, the PPA provides under Section 66(3) that a procurement entity with approval of the Board may use direct invitation if necessary for economic and efficiency reasons where:

- a. The services to be procured are available only from a limited number of consultants, if it invites expression of interest from all these consultants;
- b. The time cost required to examine and evaluate a large number of expressions of interest would be disproportionate to the value of services to be performed, if it invites proposals from enough consultants to ensure effective competition, or
- c. Direct invitation is the only means to ensure confidentiality or is required in the national interest, if it invites enough proposals from consultants for effective competition

We members of UTG are of the view that none of the above conditions warranting single source procurement apply in the case of procuring goods, works or services, nor direct invitation to consultants for the national cathedral. We are yet to see any approval of same from the board of the public procurement authority which is a requirement of the PPA. Unfortunately, Government appears to be of violating the laws of the country and we are vehemently opposed to procurements for the national cathedral in breach of the PPA.

Location of the national cathedral

The location of the national cathedral is also problematic. Very expensive and prominent private and official buildings were demolished to construct the national cathedral. One may ask if it was not possible to locate the national cathedral outside the central business district of Accra? Given the congested motor traffic situation in and around the ministries, could the cathedral not be located on the way to Aflao, Dodowa, Suhum, Cape Coast or completely outside Accra? We find the demolition of official and private buildings that are of more importance to the nation than the national cathedral as very unfortunate and unacceptable- the president must be held liable for the financial lost to the state.

Parliament is requested to disallow the contingency vote

Covid 19 is a good example of unforeseeable events that require spending of public funds and the Government rightfully used the Contingency Fund as reported in paragraph 19 of the Auditor General's report, which stated that GH¢1,203,792,295.77 was deposited into the Contingency Fund on 8 April, 2020 and was used for COVID-19 expenses. The Government, in a bid to avoid transparency and accountability (as provided for by the constitution) introduced

a “black box” called contingency vote in the national budget instead of using the contingency fund. The risk is that if Government is allowed the continued use of the contingency vote, it will be the floodgate by which monies can be wasted, stolen, or spent on fruitless and wasteful expenditures under the disguise that such amounts were taken from the contingency vote.

Unite and Transform Ghana, calls on parliament to cancel the budget line for the contingency vote and request the Government to create a Contingency fund or submit supplementary budgets in accordance with the constitution. It is unlawful and unconscionable to ignore or circumvent the procedures provided by the constitution for addressing unforeseen and unbudgeted expenditures and instead introduce a contingency vote to avoid public and parliamentary scrutiny. The annual budget for contingency votes is usually huge and keeps increasing. For instance, the contingency vote for 2022 was GHS 186.8million and was increased to GH¢ 1.41 billion for 2023 and is expected to increase to GH¢3.41billion, GH¢5.9billion, and GH¢14.5billion for 2024, 2025 and 2026, respectively.

This is unacceptable as it defeats the purpose of budgeting and subverts the approval powers of Parliament. In other words, the contingency vote is a subtle way of pushing unauthorized and controversial expenditures through Parliament without subjecting them to effective scrutiny.

Conclusion

We, members of UTG, call for the cancellation of the national cathedral project and request an audit of the expenditures. Officers (public and private) who are found complicit in the project should be held accountable by way of recovering the amounts spent and be made to go through criminal prosecution.

By Unite and Transform Ghana