

TEACHER UNIONS

PRESS STATEMENT BY THE PRE-TERTIARY EDUCATION UNIONS (GNAT, NAGRAT, TEWU, CCT-GH) ON HAPPENINGS IN THE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS: THE RAVAGING COVID-19 AND MATTERS ARISING

Our friends from the inky fraternity, Once again, we would like to let the Ghanaian public know our views on the ravaging COVID-19 pandemic as it is happening in our Pre-tertiary Education Institutions following the recall of the final year students to prepare and sit for their final WASSCE, BECE examinations, as well as the gold track batch of the SHS to finish their semester.

We wish to state clearly that when His Excellency, the President of the Republic, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo Addo decided to close the Universities, SHSs and Basic Schools (both Public and Private) as one of the measures to curb the spread of the Coronavirus, we endorsed the move. However, when he announced that the final year students of all the institutions were to reopen, to enable the students to go prepare for their examinations within the framework of some prescribed protocols, we are not only distraught, but anxious, jittery and worried because we were not sure the arrangements could work, our children, wards as well as ourselves, had armageddon hanging over our heads!

The reopening came off and we became a bit relieved, following assurances from the Director General of Ghana Education Service in a paper titled Guidelines for Schools: from School Closures to a Resilient Education System. The idea was that they were going to operate the schools safely and healthily, during the COVID-19 Reopening. According to the Director General, the number one goal during these times "is...health and safety", but then went on to stress:

Please remember that your health and safety begin with you ...

The Director General of GES came up with fundamental guidelines within which the schools would be reopened and run. Among them are

- The Sick Stay Home: Students, teachers and other staff who (fall) or feel sick should not (go) come to school.
- Enhanced Hygiene Protocols: Schools should enforce regular hand washing with soap under running water, the use of alcohol rub/hand sanitiser and regular daily disinfection and cleaning of school surfaces.
- Face Masking: Schools should enforce the wearing of face masks by all students and staff at all time.
- Social Distancing Protocols: Schools should promote social distancing, to include the splitting of classes (the SHS level – maximum 25 students, the JHS level – maximum 30 students); limit on large gatherings, dining in batches, restriction on sporting activities, etc.

Then came the Director General's conditions for

the reopening. Among them are

- Disinfection: All educational institutions... public and private, to be disinfected, prior to the arrival of (the) students.
- Provision of WASH facilities: All educational institutions... to be provided with a determined set of Veronica buckets, soap and hand sanitisers (for use of the students, teachers and ancillary staff).
- Provision of facemasks: All... students, teaching and non-teaching staff... to be provided with a set of three (3) **washable and re-usable facemasks**... to be worn at all times, to, during and from school.
- Mapping of all schools to health facilities: All... institutions... to be mapped to health facilities... Each Head of school... to establish his/her direct emergency protocols with his/her health institutions, **including the assignment of a healthcare professional to each... institution.**
- Boarding schools to organise boarding in batches to reduce overcrowding and promote social distancing, dining tables to seat a **minimum** of 5 students and **maximum** of 6 students.
- **No visitors allowed on... school campus(es)... to reduce and prevent exposure of students (to the COVID).**

The students were, among others, entreated to;

- Wear masks at all times
- Wash (their) hands with soap under running water, or rub (their) hands with alcohol-based hand sanitisers(s) before entering a school compound
- Always observe social distancing of, at least, 1 meter (3 feet)
- Avoid handshaking or body contact.

These were/are the conditionalities upon which the reopening of the schools were hinged; they look/looked so dazzling, assuring, and formidable. In the light of these, the schools reopened, and the students returned. The aftermath?

To our utter shock and dismay, the conditionalities which were to ensure the safe and invigorating atmosphere in which our students could study soundly did not materialise. All the protocols and provisions were either limited, or **just** not there. And COVID-19 entered the campuses; COVID-19 raided the campuses, and there was nobody to rescue them; pathetic, unfortunate, and saddening!

The media carried the goings-on with screaming headlines:

10 more SHSs hit by COVID-19 ... Ho Mawuli, Bishop Herman, Archbishop Porter Girls among others, affected, Reported the **Ghanaian Times** on its front page of its Monday, July 13, 2020 edition.

According to the **Times**, Mawuli, Mawuko Girls, Bishop Hermans, Kpando, Dabala Technical School, all in the Volta Region, Archbishop Porter Girls, Ahantaman Girls, Diabene SHTS and Adiembra, all in the Takoradi municipality, as well as Nsein SHS in the Nzema East District – all of them in the Western Region, and the Suhum Senior High Technical School in the Eastern Region and Accra Girls SHS in Greater Accra, are all in the clutches of the COVID. Mawuli and Dabala have each recorded three cases of the COVID, Diabene and Adiembra, 1 each and Suhum, 1. We do also remember the sad incident at the KNUST Senior High School, Kumasi, in which the student lost his life. May he find peace profound in the Lord, while we commiserate with his parents!

Below are few examples of people calling for the closure of the schools;

- The Catholic Bishop of Accra
- The National Parent Teacher Association of Ghana and
- Many other well-meaning Ghanaians have called for the closure of the schools.

The situation is really grim and deadly! And this is what the country finds itself in at the moment! This notwithstanding, the Electoral Commission has intruded into the schools, allegedly to register the students for the 2020 general election, thus breaching the protocols the more, and making more infestations open.

Voices are being heard in Ramah (Ghana) mourning and weeping greatly Rachel (Ghanaian women, parents) weeping for her/their children And refusing to be comforted (See Jeremiah 31:15)

Our children are the prey, the target, our children are on the receiving end, while such critical bodies as the Ministry of Finance, the Bulk Oil Storage and Transportation Company Ltd (BOST) the Ghana Grid Company Ltd (GridCo) and the Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) among others, are either on partial or total lockdown

In the light of the above, We the Pre-tertiary Teacher Unions: GNAT, NAGRAT, TEWU, CCT-GH have no option than to ask that the schools be closed down. For how long can we stand and look while our children are consigned to imminent death? We cannot stand any unwarranted catastrophe. Our children are our future, and we must protect them. Nigeria has postponed final examinations and Israel shut its schools again when they were reopened and the pandemic started eating its students up. So, Ghana can also do it and do it expeditiously. We should remember, "A stich in time saves nine"

Thank you, and may God continue to bless our homeland Ghana

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