

**REMARKS OF THE MINORITY LEADER, HON. CASSIEL ATO FORSON (PHD),
DURING THE DEBATE OF THE 2024 BUDGET STATEMENT IN PARLIAMENT ON
WEDNESDAY, 29TH NOVEMBER, 2023.**

1. Rt. Honorable Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the 2024 budget statement.
2. Mr. Speaker, this is the **bye bye** budget of the group of people who promised to move the economy from taxation to production and yet ended up inflicting tax, tax and more tax on the people of Ghana.
3. This budget is **uninspiring, cruel, insensitive, and completely out of touch** with the realities of the people of Ghana.
4. This government promised the people of Ghana heaven yet delivered hell; this government was high on promises and low on delivery!
5. Never in the history of the Fourth Republic was a government so hyped up, with massive goodwill and huge fiscal space enough to transform the country as the Akufo-Addo/Bawumia government.
6. Yet this government and the NPP have gone down as the worst government in the history of Ghana!
7. They clearly pulled a wool over the eyes of the people of Ghana by marketing themselves as the solution to our problems.
8. In opposition, they held lectures and “fixed” **ALL** the problems facing Ghana.
9. **Dr. Bawumia** addressed a lecture on **Restoring the Value of the Cedi**, at which lecture he pontificated and “restored” the value of the Cedi.
10. But today, here we are! Seven (7) years on, President Akufo-Addo and Vice President Alhaji Bawumia have run Ghana’s economy aground. **They have collapsed the economy!**
11. Mr. Speaker, this government has failed; their record has been abysmal.

They inherited the following:

INDICATORS	2016	2022
Public debt % of GDP	55.6	103
Public debt per Capita	4,813	18,181
Inflation	15.4	54.1(Dec22)
Food inflation	8.7	49.3(Sept23)
Unemployment	8.4	13.9(sept23)
Youth Unemployment	21.2	32.8
Lending rate	28.1	36.6
T-bill rate (182days)	22.1	31.9(13Nov23)

12. Mr. Speaker, **numbers don't lie!** The government has failed big time! Their performance has not been worth the hype, the goodwill, as well as the resources entrusted in their care over the last seven years.

13. Rt Hon. Speaker,

- a. the economy is **broken**,
- b. the exchange rate is **broken**, in fact it has broken jail.
- c. lending rates are **broken**.
- d. business confidence is **broken**.
- e. inflation is **broken**.
- f. ***And sadly, Mr. Speaker, families are broken because bread winners can no longer afford to put food on the table.***

14. This is what the Ghana Union of Traders Association (GUTA) had to say about the budget that has just been presented:

"... we were consulted, and we gave our inputs and we thought that they were going to be considered because we made very meaningful inputs, but our demands were not met, especially those of us in the trading community".

15. Mr. Speaker, you recall in 2017 this same Finance Minister told this House that they were removing so called "nuisance taxes".

16. That was a hoax! Today, we are witnessing an **epidemic of nuisance taxes**, taxes, and more taxes!

17. This government has burdened Ghanaians with over **50 taxes** despite their promise “to shift the economy from taxation to production”.

18. Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the over **50 taxes** imposed by this government since 2017, this 2024 budget is introducing additional taxes worth **GHS11 billion!**

19. These taxes are burdensome, regressive, insensitive, and counter-productive, especially as the incidence of the tax will be on the already suffocating Ghanaian.

20. The NDC Minority therefore cannot at this time support these new taxes for the following reasons:

a. We cannot support these new taxes because the poverty level in the country is just too high. Any additional tax will erode the disposable incomes of families and worsen their standard of living.

- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) says 25% of the population in Ghana have been pushed into extreme poverty.
- This means that more than 8 million Ghanaians have been pushed into extreme poverty under this NPP government.

Mr. Speaker, any additional tax will worsen the extreme poverty in our dear country.

b. We cannot support these new taxes because they will put an extra burden on businesses. Already businesses are collapsing because of the high cost of doing business in Ghana.

- Again, even private toilet operators have announced that they will now charge GHS2 from 1st December 2023 as a result of high cost of operation.

- Many people have lost their jobs and livelihoods. Any additional tax on the already collapsing businesses will shepherd them to their graves. We, the NDC Minority, do not want businesses to fold up!
- Already, Ghana has lost its attractiveness to foreign investors due to the high cost of doing business under this government.

Mr. Speaker, any additional tax will further make our dear country **not competitive**.

- c. We cannot support these new taxes because currently tax exemptions pending before the Finance Committee amounts to **GHC5.5 billion**, equivalent to **USD449 million**.
- d. Mr. Speaker, we are reliably informed, and we believe same to be true, that there are an additional **GHC7 billion** tax exemptions waiting to be processed to Parliament.
- e. Put together, these tax exemptions will amount to **GHC12.5 billion**, which outstrips the **GHC11 billion** new taxes.
- f. Mr. Speaker, how does a government give away **GHC12.5 billion** to family, friends, and cronies, and then turn around to burden ordinary Ghanaians to pay **GHC11 billion** in new taxes?
- g. This is not only mind-boggling but also a typical case of robbing Peter to pay Paul.
- h. The NDC Minority calls on the government to withdraw these tax exemptions which can lead to abuse and corruption.
- i. Mr. Speaker, how is a government which has folded its arms and awaiting the IMF to disburse **USD600 million** able to tell Parliament to grant **USD449 million** in tax exemptions?
- j. We cannot out of good conscience support these painful and burdensome new taxes, particularly when this government has been reckless and wasteful in the management of public resources.

- k. Already there is too much hardship from the bad policies of this government, with Dr. Bawumia as Chairman of the Economic Management Team.
- l. Too much hardship, high inflation rate, high lending rate, high unemployment, high monetary policy rate and high food inflation, coupled with “**massive uncontrolled corruption**” in this government.
- m. Mr. Speaker, we cannot support these new taxes because apart from government appointees and their families, friends and cronies, there are no winners in this budget.

21. Mr. Speaker, countless cases of corruption abound in this government.

22. The situation is so bad that the Catholic Bishops Conference have had cause to recently complain about what they described as “**massive uncontrolled corruption**” in the Akufo-Addo/Bawumia government.

23. Even Diplomats who usually maintain dignified silence on internal affairs have had cause to publicly express concern about the alarming level of corruption in this government.

24. A typical example is the British High Commissioner to Ghana, Harriet Thompson, who recently complained that “corruption is holding Ghana back”.

25. No wonder our ranking has sharply deteriorated on Amnesty International’s Corruption Perception Index, from a rank of 56 in 2015 to 72 in 2022.

26. Mr. Speaker, Ghana’s Misery Index is at its highest in the fourth republic. The Misery Index is a measure of the distress felt by people in their daily lives due to increasing joblessness and inflation.

27. Ghana’s Misery Index score in 2016 was 23.5. Sadly, Mr. Speaker, in 2023, on the watch of President Akufo-Addo and Vice President Dr. Bawumia, Ghana’s Misery Index has spiked to 47.7, the highest in the fourth republic.

28. This represents over 100% spike in Misery or ahokyer³ since 2016.
29. The higher the value of the misery index, the worse the economy is or the higher the suffering of the citizens.
30. Mr. Speaker, regarding Gross Domestic Product per capita, which is a measure of the wealth of every citizen.
31. Ghana and Ivory Coast were almost at par in 2016, with USD1,982 and USD1,989 respectively.
32. This simply means that an average Ivorian was as rich as an average Ghanaian as at 2016.
33. In 2023, Ivory Coast increased its per capita income to USD2,728.08 while Ghana recorded only USD2,309.
34. This also means that under President Akufo-Addo and Dr. Bawumia, an average Ivorian is now richer than the average Ghanaian.
35. In fact, every single Ivorian including the one born today, is USD420 richer than every Ghanaian.
36. Mr. Speaker, the cost of living has also deteriorated significantly, due to the depreciation in the value of the Cedi and high level of inflation.
37. According to a recent World Bank report on Food Security Update released on 13th November, 2023, Ghana is fifth on the list of top 10 countries in the world with the highest food price inflation.
38. Yet, this government claims to have invested billions of Ghana Cedis on its so-called flagship programme, Planting for Food and Jobs.
39. Alas, they were Planting for Inflation and Unemployment.
40. Mr. Speaker, Ghana's debt has become highly unsustainable, and investors, including pensioners, were left with no option other than to suffer a haircut.

41. Ghana is sinking in debt, excessive debt, unwarranted debt, astronomical debt, and unexplainable debt. We have defaulted in the payment of our external debt.

- We have refused to pay.
- we have neglected to pay.
- and we have failed to pay.
- In fact, the government has lost the ability to pay our debt.

42. At the end of 2002, debt to GDP was over 103%. Today, we are being told that our debt is nearly GHS600 billion.

43. Mr. Speaker, this GHS600 billion excludes the interest of all our external debt we have accrued and refused to pay since December 2022.

44. This GHS600 billion also excludes ESLA BONDS, SYNOHYDRO LOANS, DAAKYE BOND and many more undisclosed debts.

45. Mr. Speaker,

- We owe the Chinese USD1.9 billion, and we have refused to pay.
- we owe the Paris Club and other bilateral lenders USD3 billion, and we have refused to pay.
- We owe multilateral lenders over USD8 billion, and we have refused to pay.
- we owe Eurobond holders and other commercial lenders over USD16 billion, and we have refused to pay.

46. Mr. Speaker, we have refused to pay both the interest and principal of all our external loans.

47. In fact, the relative stability of the Ghana Cedi to the US Dollar is largely because we have refused to pay our external debt.

48. Once we begin servicing our external debt, the Cedi will depreciate against all the major international currencies because we will lose international reserves.

49. Mr. Speaker, it will interest you to know that there is a deadlock in the negotiation between Ghana and the International Creditors Committee (ICC) made up of China and the Paris Club

50. There is a major disagreement on the cut-off point, regarding the external debt that must be excluded from the restructuring.

51. Mr. Speaker, I do not need to sound the alarm that at this point, Ghana is between the rock and a hard place.

52. Ghana will need to decide either to accept the cut-off date as proposed by the International Creditors Committee and get the IMF Board to approve our USD600 million second tranche or refuse to accept.

53. The consequences for accepting the ICC cut-off point will mean that there will be more debt that will be excluded from the debt restructuring. Hence, immediate provision must be made in the budget to service the debt.

54. The moment we begin the servicing of our external debt, everything in this budget will change.

- Our deficit will change.
- Our fiscal space will change.
- Our economic growth will change.
- Our inflation will change
- Our lending rate will change.

Mr. Speaker, this explains why Hon. Ricketts-Hagan described the budget as an “economic garbage... in fact, a dysfunctional and a distorted budget”.

55. Mr. Speaker, this government has successfully collapsed almost all **state-owned enterprises** and institutions.

- Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) recorded a loss of GHS395 million in 2017, a loss of GHS78.2 million in 2018, a loss of GHS320.6 million in 2019, a loss of GHS426 million in 2020, and a shocking loss of GHS2.4 billion in 2021.

- Cocoa Board has been making losses since 2017 when this government took over.
- Who would have thought that the once vibrant COCOBOD will today be bankrupt to the extent that it cannot repay its debt to cocoa bondholders, cocoa road contractors, Licence Buying Companies (LBCs) and fertiliser suppliers?
- Other state-owned enterprises including Ghana Grid Company (GRIDCO), Northern Electricity Distribution Company (NEDCo), Volta River Authority (VRA), National Buffer Stock Company, GIHOC Distilleries, STC and Ghana Airport Company Limited are all struggling.
- Ghana's Central Bank, the Bank of Ghana, is now bankrupt. In 2022, it recorded a colossal loss of over GHS60.8 billion and a negative equity of over GHS55 billion.
- All the 23 universal banks recorded massive impairment losses of over GHS18 billion in 2022 under this government.

56. This government has failed to deliver almost everything that it promised the people of Ghana.

57. Instead, they have delivered one scandal after the other. Hardly a week passes without a new scandal.

- The PDS scandal
- The Ameri Novation
- The BOST five million litre contaminated fuel saga
- The Inflated Sputnik V contract
- The looting and distribution of Covid-19 funds to NPP officials, members, and supporters
- The unfolding Cecilia Abena Dapaah's millions of dollars packed in her home.

58. The broken promises of the government, many of which are captured in Alhaji Bawumia's voice have become sound bites on radio, TV and social media.

59. He promised to provide

- Every village in Ghana with water and toilet
- one million dollars per constituency per year
- one village one dam
- one district one warehouse
- and one child one hot chocolate drink

60. Mr. Speaker, this government does not keep its word, not even its most solemn promise.

61. The president's personal promise to God that he will build a National Cathedral has not been kept. I daresay, Mr. Speaker, that even God has been betrayed.

62. Despite demolishing judges' homes, the then Passport Office, properties of private developers and committing over USD100 million of state resource to the National Cathedral.

63. All this government has to show after sinking USD100 million is a huge hole in the middle of Accra; clearly, the most expensive man-made hole in the world.

64. The insensitivity on the part of the New Patriotic Party and its audacity to neglect the development needs of the people of Ghana is unbelievable.

65. Across the length and breadth of this country, chiefs and people continue to lament the total neglect of their development needs by the Akufo-Addo/Bawumia government.

66. Across the length and breadth of this country, Ghanaians are demonstrating against this government over bad roads, riddled with giant-sized potholes.

67. Yet, not enough allocation has been made in this budget to help alleviate the suffering of motorists and commuters.

68. Mr. Speaker, this government has received the most resources, despite their usual excuse of COVID19 pandemic and Russia-Ukraine war.

69. The needs of the people of Ashanti Region have also been neglected by this NPP government, as is the case in many other regions. It must take recklessness on the part of this NPP government to neglect the needs of the people of Ghana.

70. I was particularly heart-broken to see, not too long ago, that the Asantehene, who neither manages the resources of the Republic nor is the custodian of tax revenues, has taken it upon himself to raise funds to “Heal Komfo Anokye Teaching Hospital” in Kumasi.

71. That speaks volumes about both the neglect and monumental failure of this NPP government.

72. Mr. speaker, I am proud to say, the NDC under the leadership of John Mahama, with limited resources, significantly invested in all regions, including the Ashanti Region.

- The NDC under the leadership of the visionary nation-builder John Mahama built
 - the ultra-modern Kejetia Market,
 - Tafo Market,
 - Atonsu Market,
 - Rattray Park,
 - extended potable water to Kumawu and Mampong
- The NDC secured the loan and awarded the contract for the Kumasi Airport.

- The NDC is also responsible for the Afari Military Hospital, the Regional Hospital at Sewuah, the Kumawu District Hospital, the Bekwai District Hospital, the Asante Mampong water project, and the Kumasi inner city roads.

73. Mr. Speaker, lately, I have observed a trend in this House. NPP Members of Parliament easily get nervous and agitated when one mentions the name of Dr. Bawumia, chairman of the Economic Mis-Management Team.

74. I do not understand why NPP MPs do not want to be reminded of the claims Dr. Bawumia made during their days in opposition, his failure at the job and the resultant economic mess.

75. But it is an undeniable fact that Dr. Bawumia chairs the Economic Management Team. It is also a fact that every major economic decision of the government from 2017 till date has happened with his full knowledge, supervision, and approval.

76. Dr. Bawumia is the person who has supervised the mess in the economy, including the collapse of most of our State-owned Enterprises.

77. Over the last seven years, every single budget statement or mid-year budget review has been presented to Parliament with his prior approval.

78. In fact, he reviews the policies at the meetings of the Economic Management Team and takes them to Cabinet with Finance Minister Ken Ofori-Atta.

79. Dr. Bawumia is therefore fully responsible for the suffering and the misery (**ahokyer3**) of the Ghanaian people.

80. We clearly recall President Akufo-Addo saying that he has no knowledge of economic issues, so he has nominated Dr. Bawumia, his economic messiah, to partner him.

81. The President further claimed that Dr. Bawumia was going to resolve the challenges in the economy. Today, here we are! We are right to blame the economic mess on Dr. Bawumia.

82. President Akufo-Addo's poster boy on managing the economy, Dr. Bawumia, has run the Ghanaian economy aground and mismanaged our livelihoods.

83. President Akufo-Addo out-sourced all matters of the economy to his economic guru, Dr. Bawumia, who has now disappointed the people of Ghana.

84. Today, the economic messiah Dr. Bawumia avoids talking about the economy because of the mess that he has created. His favorite subject now is digitalisation.

85. As then Vice President Kwesi Amissah-Arthur rightly predicted, the time will soon come for Dr. Bawumia to answer his own 170 questions.

86. The time is now! Alhaji, I beseech you in the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful, please answer your 170 questions!

87. Alhaji, truth be upon you!

88. Finally, Mr. Speaker, which of these pledges has the Akufo-Addo/Bawumia government kept?

- I shall protect the public purse
- I am too old to steal Ghana's money
- I am not corrupt and will never be
- I will fight corruption with the Anas Principle
- Yèti sikaso na enso èkom de y3n

- We don't need to borrow money to build roads; just toll the various sections of the roads and we will get all the money to build our roads.
- I can develop Ghana without borrowing; the money is here.
- I will transform Ghana in 18 months
- I will not operate a family and friends' government
- I will make the Korle Lagoon and the Odow River tourist sites
- I will give each constituency USD1 million per year
- I will arrest the Dollar
- I will make fuel price hikes a thing of the past
- I will make Accra the cleanest city in Africa
- NPP will build 350 new secondary schools
- We will never go to the IMF, we are a proud nation.
- Try me too and see (and now we are seeing pepper)

89.Mr. Speaker, we the NDC Minority are vehemently opposed to the imposition of additional taxes at this time when inflation and excessive fiscal adjustment have significantly eroded huge portions of disposable income of the average Ghanaian.

90.This government is introducing the following new taxes in the 2024 budget;

- Imposition of VAT on selected items - expected to generate over GHS4.2billion and the items include,
 - a. Financial services (you recall NPP's opposition to VAT on financial services)
 - b. VAT on Real Estate (5% flat rate) on the sale of commercial premises.

Rt. Hon. Speaker, let it be stated here that, it is for a good reason that successive governments exempted certain goods and services from the payments of VAT.

Sadly, this government is introducing VAT on the following items.

- a. Textbooks
 - b. Exercise books
 - c. Newspapers
 - d. Publications
 - e. Architectural plans and similar plans
 - f. Scientific and technical works
 - g. Magazines
 - h. Periodicals
 - i. Trade catalogues
 - j. Price list
 - k. Calendars
 - l. Diaries and stationery
- Mr. Speaker, they will also be introducing VAT on domestic transportation of passengers by road, rail, and water.
 - Expansion of entities subject to communication service tax (CST) – Expected to generate GHS622 million.
- b. Voting in favour of the principles of the 2024 budget statement and economic policy of the government which includes a proposed increase in taxes will further drive Ghanaians into extreme poverty.
 - c. Voting in favour of the principles of the 2024 budget statement and economic policy of the government which includes a proposed increase in taxes will further drive more businesses to their early grave.
 - d. Mr. Speaker, we, the NDC Minority, cannot in good conscience support the principles of this budget.

91. Rt. Hon. Speaker, I thank you.