

Get the Church to Contribute...

Even More!

In recent days, Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia, the Presidential Candidate of the New Patriotic Party, has broached the subject of taxing churches while on the campaign trail. He has since clarified that his remark was made in jest, suggesting instead that the public should be giving to the church, not taxing it. Indeed, we should not be taxing churches; rather, the state should be providing more support to enable them to do more.

Ken Ofori-Atta, the former Finance Minister, recognized this. His ministry's compact with Faith-Based Organizations was designed to leverage their networks to deliver more value for public funds in the provision of social goods. Budget allocations for this purpose were included in several of his submissions to Parliament. This initiative was a step in the right direction. Instead of contemplating taxes on churches, the state should be enhancing support to amplify their capacity to deliver social goods such as healthcare and education.

In Ghana, the Church's contributions, particularly in healthcare and education, have been significant. Without the Church's involvement, these sectors would struggle to function. Across the country, numerous primary healthcare facilities are established and operated by Catholic, Presbyterian, and various other denominational missions. Similarly, in education, the Church has been a foundational pillar, building a network of secondary schools that have educated many Ghanaians. These schools remain highly sought after by parents and students alike.

Today, on May 14th, 2024, the birthday of Dag Heward-Mills, Founder and Chairman of the Ghana Charismatic Bishop's Conference, it is fitting to reflect on his ministry's contributions over the past 35 years. His ministry, which began while he was in medical school at Korle-Bu, Accra, Ghana, has expanded to over 100 countries on all continents. With congregations in places as distant as Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, and Fiji, it stands as one of Ghana's most global organizations. The ministry's impact extends beyond spreading the Gospel; it has also provided significant social and economic benefits. For instance, the annual "Give Thyself Wholly" Conference held by Dag Heward-Mills in Ghana attracts thousands of international visitors, supporting Ghana's tourism aspirations.

The Church in Ghana can and desires to do even more for its members and the public. We have seen remarkable initiatives, such as the Church of Pentecost building a modern prison

and Dag Heward-Mills' ministry establishing a world-class prosthetics center offering free services in Amrahia, Accra. The Catholic Church's efforts in education, particularly in northern Ghana, are also noteworthy. To facilitate such contributions, Dr. Bawumia should not jest about public support for the Church. Instead, there should be more robust institutional and fiscal recognition of the Church's efforts.

Many diplomatic organizations in Ghana benefit from tax waivers on imports under the Vienna Conventions. While we value these relationships, the socio-economic contributions of the Church far surpass what many diplomatic missions offer. Churches play a crucial role in providing education and healthcare, and they deserve comparable, if not greater, support.

We propose the creation of a charter recognizing the charitable works of churches and other faith-based organizations. Such chartered organizations should receive public recognition, privileges, and fiscal support to continue their work benefiting the Ghanaian public. Why should a church importing wheelchairs or hospital equipment for the disadvantaged pay import duties, while an ambassador's car is exempt?

A threshold could be established, for example, US\$2 million spent on charitable works, to qualify for special recognition and support. These chartered organizations could be audited annually by reputable firms, ensuring transparency and accountability. This approach would foster the right behaviors among churches and faith-based organizations, promoting societal benefits.

Churches are eager to contribute more to Ghana's development. The state should create the necessary institutional and fiscal frameworks to unlock this potential. This is no joking matter.

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