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Mr. President  
Mr. Director General  
Fellow Delegates and Advisers

I bring greetings to this 102<sup>nd</sup> Session of the International Labour from the workers of Barbados.

Mr. President, I wish to acknowledge that your report and that of the Director General have signaled that the ILO should move to institute a programme of reform to drive capacity building, through a renewed focus on social dialogue and Labour standards.

Mr. President, the discussions on the issue of social dialogue and collective bargaining have thrown up some interesting positions on the observance of practices in various member states.

The respect for and observance of these principles is paramount if social justice is to be achieved. I can report that the practice of collective bargaining is institutionalized within the industrial relations landscape of Barbados. It is to be stressed that Barbados subscribes to the principle of voluntarism, which to all intents and purposes forms the bedrock for the practice of collective bargaining in both the Public Service and the Private Sector.

It is to be admitted that Barbados is yet to adopt Conventions Nos. 151 and 154. However, freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are embodied in Chapter 361, Section 40 of the Trade Union Act, in the Laws of Barbados.

Added to this, a Grievance Handling Procedure is included in the Public Service Act 2007-41, and the newly proclaimed Employment Rights Act, which relates to the Private Sector and statutory boards. Here the role of the trade union is recognized and the process of collective bargaining is emphasized.

The Director General in his report to the opening of the Session of this Conference cited the need for reform if the ILO is to be more relevant and effective. For this to be achieved, the ILO must be able to successfully wield its influence in getting member states to embrace and observe standards, and to implement policies set by the body.

In assessing its effectiveness, the ILO has to re-examine its established processes of accountability for the purpose of satisfying the body that member states are putting the appropriate mechanisms in place to support and observe the fundamental rights of workers. In this specific instance, this applies to the promotion of social dialogue and collective bargaining.

It is for member states to develop a culture that allows for the existence of social dialogue and collective bargaining. Our considered opinion is that social dialogue and collective bargaining will more than likely exist, where a climate of participatory democracy prevails.

The birth of the Social Partnership in Barbados which dates back to 1991, has served to embrace and promote voluntarism, social dialogue and collective bargaining. This is reflected in the successive Protocols signed by Government, Labour and the Private Sector. To underscore the point, the Preamble of Protocol 6, refers to the fact that the partners subscribe to the principles enunciated in the International Labour Organization Convention #87, concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, Convention #98, concerning the Application of the Principles of the Right to Organize and to Bargain Collectively, the ILO declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, 1998, and ILO Convention 144 on Tripartite Consultation.

Within the protocols signed by the social partners, a commitment is expressed to observing the concept of voluntarism as conceptualized and applied to industrial relations in Barbados; particularly through those conventions and practices which have been carefully developed and followed over the years.

Barbados continues to boast of an industrial relations system which allows for collective agreements that are based on a gentleman's agreement made acceptable by custom and practice, and not driven by the force of law.

Admittedly, Barbados is yet to adopt Conventions No. 154 on the Promotion of Collective Bargaining and Convention No.151, concerning the Protection of the Right to Organize and Procedures for Determining Conditions of Employment in the Public Sector. Nonetheless, Barbados by way of practice, tacitly gives support to these conventions.

In Barbados, both registered trade unions and staff associations are members of the Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados. However, there is the need for the law to be amended so as to reflect that the Police, Fire and Prison Officers Associations respectively, are free to associate.

With regard to the right of Police, Prison and Fire Officers to freely associate, the ILO should use its good offices to influence member states to amend relevant laws, so as to allow these workers the right to enjoy the fundamental human right of freedom of association. To deny this category of public servants this right simply because they are classified as essential workers, can neither be fair nor just. Any insistence that the status quo should remain, would only serve to undermine efforts at strengthening social dialogue and the engagement of the process of collective bargaining.

Mr. Chairman, it is for this august body to accept that to exclude any sector within the public service or the private sector from being able to associate, is discriminatory in nature, and effectively does not lend to decent work. We therefore identify with the sentiments of the Chairman of the Workers Group, that social dialogue is to be strengthened and not undermined.

The ILO must therefore continue to encourage workers' organizations to commit to a united effort, working under the umbrella of the National Centre, in promoting labour standards.

Finally, it is for the ILO to recognize that it has an important role in ensuring its relevancy and effectiveness. The way forward in this quest, is for the ILO to commence a research programme, which is intended to identify best models of social partnerships at work; which in turn it could recommend to member states.

Barbados as a member of the small island developing states has such a model to showcase.

Solidarity Forever.

Mr. President, I am obliged to you.

**END**