

PRESENTATION on the theme:

***“How to Use Social Dialogue to Achieve Positive Outcomes
In Increasing Productivity”***

DELIVERED to the:

**SUB-REGIONAL TRIPARTITE MEETING ON
OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH,
PRODUCTIVITY AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE
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I welcome the opportunity to participate and share in this Tripartite Meeting on Occupational Safety and Health, Productivity and Social Dialogue. I wish at the outset to thank the ILO Decent Work Team and the Caribbean Regional Office for the invitation extended to the Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados (CTUSAB), to have representation at this forum. It is therefore my pleasure to bring greetings from the President and Executive Board of the Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados, to this Sub -Regional Tripartite Meeting.

The theme I am asked to address is one with which I readily identify, as in my judgment it is related to the theme of the 9th Biennial Delegates Conference of the CTUSAB, which concluded just over a fortnight ago. The theme of that Conference was 'The Labour Movement: Prospects and Challenges.' Today in this forum, we address what I consider to be a sub-theme, as we focus on **'Optimizing Productivity at Safe and Healthy Workplaces through Social Dialogue.'**

As a teacher of thirty-nine years experience, I would always advise my students of the importance of identifying the key aspects of any topic and /or question before attempting to deal with it. I hope that if there are any teachers in this distinguished gathering, that I will have their acknowledgement for this

approach. As the student today, I have identified that social dialogue is the fundamental point to which we should threat; as it is in my considered opinion the mechanism that can be effectively used to influence and generate higher levels of productivity, and promote and encourage action that leads to developing healthy workplaces.

My presentation will focus heavily on the Barbadian experience in the use of social dialogue in creating a platform for change and for improvement in the labour management dialogue. As a starting point, I must emphasized that the adoption of the tripartite mechanism and the Social Partners Model that Barbados has practised since the economic crisis of 1991, has worked to the benefit of the governance and development of Barbados. It has contributed in no small measure to a stable workplace climate.

The embracing of consultation, collaboration and dialogue at the workplace between the employer and labour, to include both workers and their representative trade union, have made a fundamental difference in the relationship at the level of the workplace. This has also contributed to a different outlook by employers and management to addressing workers issues, and to developing a greater response to improving conditions of work that lend to improving the safety and security of workers. Generally, paying more attention to promoting the welfare of workers, has served as a means of motivating workers and driving their output.

This brings me to address at how social dialogue is to be used in realizing the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. With respect to the promotion of safety and health, decent work extends to include fundamental human rights, protection against accidents, injuries and diseases at work, social protection, protection from social exclusion and productive work.

The ILO advocates that the decent work agenda will only be achieved where tripartism and social dialogue are engaged. I call attention to the ILO's perspective on Social Dialogue, which reads as follows:

"Social dialogue plays a critical role in achieving the ILO's objective of advancing opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equality, security and human dignity. Social dialogue includes all types of negotiation, consultation and exchange of information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers and workers on issues of common interest."

Barbados is to be credited for embracing the ILO's Decent Work Programme and endeavoring to promote social dialogue through the mechanism of a Social Partnership. It is therefore not per chance that the Social Partners commit under Protocol VI, signed on May 1, 2011:

“Subscribe to the principles enunciated in the International Labour Organization Convention 87, Convention Concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, in the International Labour Organization Convention 98, concerning the Application of the Principles of the Right to Organize and to Bargain Collectively, the ILO's declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, 1998, and Convention 144 on Tripartite Consultation.”

The government of Barbados, the leadership of the trade union movement and the private sector are all cognizant that the growth of the nation is dependent on Gross Domestic Product, which is basically the collective output of the human resource. For the purpose of achieving and maintaining a highly motivated and productive workforce, the social partners of Barbados have a clear understanding that this depends upon an on-going individual and collective commitment to a philosophy of governance which is characterized by participatory democracy and for the subjugation of their sectorial interests to the national good.

The Social Partnership under Protocol VI, has identified some key objectives, two of these are: (1) the consolidation of the process of tripartite consultation and, (2) the continued national commitment to increased productivity at all levels.

The Partnership recognizes that improved competitiveness will contribute to sustained expansion of the economy with all its attendant social benefits. These objectives are attainable, and it is envisioned that they can be achieved where **participatory management practices are engaged as the norm.**

To reinforce this point, I refer to the comments made to Bro. Cedric Murrell, President of the Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados, in his address to the Opening Ceremony of the 9th Biennial Delegates Conference on 27 September, 2012.

“Our Congress’ contribution to the industrial, social and economic development of this country is now legendary for indeed, the Social Partnership is legendary. We can look anyone in the face and proclaim that

CTUSAB has been the foundation on which the stability, maturity and genuine dialogue among the Social Partners has been built. We do not boast about this but see this as part of our contribution to nation building and as natural as night follows day.

CTUSAB, born in 1995, has had a profound influence on our Nation through its ability to help shape the agenda for development and by its contribution to social dialogue, legislation and the creation of the protocols, six so far."

When reference is made to the work force, there is the tendency for the most part, to identify primarily with able bodied persons and often to ignore the members of the disabled community. In addressing the issue of productivity and a safe and healthy workplace, there can be no exclusion of this category of workers.

The Congress in 2006 developed a Statement of Policies Document. In that document, it promotes tripartite action. It urges the social partners to use every opportunity to advance the concept of consultation and collaboration in the interest of Barbados and its citizens. To accentuate the point, the medium of social dialogue has engaged and effectively so, the attention of all stake holders including Civil Society and the NGO community, in paying rapt attention to the plight of this category of worker. The end result is that there is more attention being paid to meeting the needs of workers with disabilities, so as to enhance their abilities and output. The social partners in specifically addressing the subject 'Persons with Disabilities' in Protocol VI, acknowledged that *they have an individual and collective responsibility to ensure the existence of an environment which would allow the full integration and participation in a society of all persons with disabilities.*

Today, one of the main safety and health challenges that faces the workplace, and threatens to undermine productivity, is that of HIV and AIDS. This disease as we are all aware is a threat to society and our working population. The fight against this pandemic requires a collective effort, and it is here that the mechanism of social dialogue has to be fully utilized. As a response the Social Partners of Barbados have committed to individual and collective efforts, and to encouraging and supporting efforts of community groups, civil society and the private sector, as they seek to educate, inform, facilitate and implement programmes aimed at combating the disease.

Treating to this as a major Occupational Safety and Health issue, the CTUSAB has embarked on a number of collaborative training and education workshops. It has undertaken programmes with government through the Ministry of Labour, and the private sector, working with the AIDS Foundation of Barbados Inc.

It should interest you to know that labour collaborated with the private sector in the launch of 'The Employers Charter on HIV- AIDS', and completed two workshops on HIV and Human Rights.

In Barbados the emphasis placed on Occupational Safety and Health by the Social Partners has been driven by the need to satisfy the spirit and intent of the ILO's C#155 Convention. The in-depth consultation has lead to the drafting and putting into law the Safety and Health at Work Act 2005-12. This modern day piece of legislation serves the purpose of addressing the welfare of both employers and employees, and more importantly, contributes to creating more safety conscious workplaces and stimulating a more productive workforce. Towards meeting these, the Act specifically makes provision for:

- (a) Securing the health, safety and welfare of persons at work
- (b) Protecting other persons against risk to health and safety in connection with activities of persons at work
- (c) Controlling certain emissions into the environment
- (d) Consolidating the law relating to health, safety and welfare in the work place.

There are some fundamental provisions of the Act, which are meant to secure the health, safety and welfare of persons at work, which by the same token can improve their level of workplace productivity. For example at Section 103 of the Act, *"Every employer in a workplace shall consult with his employees or their representative for the purpose of developing measures to promote safety and health at such workplace; and make arrangements for the participation of the employees in the improvement and development of such measures"*.

Added to this the Act makes it mandatory for the establishment of a Safety and Health Committee in workplaces where there are 25 employees or more, and for a safety delegate to be appointed at a workplace where there are less than 25 employees.

One way of optimizing productivity at safe and healthy workplaces, would be to address the issue of Risk Management identification. Social dialogue is an important element in realizing the process that leads to compliance with rules and regulations in order to maintain standards, towards reducing operational risks and promoting and building trust and confidence amongst workers at the workplace. It is at this stage that serious consideration is to be given to putting in place adequate protection to safeguard the welfare of employees, as far as it relates to safety and health and workplace productivity.

I have so far given a succinct view of social dialogue, but at this juncture I feel obliged to broaden it, so that a better understanding could be had of its application.

The primary goal of social dialogue is to promote consensus building and democratic involvement among main stakeholders in the world of work. Successful social dialogue structures and processes have the potential to resolve important economic and social issues, encourage good governance, advance social and industrial peace and stability, boost economic progress, encourage respect for the fundamental rights of freedom of association and collective bargaining, and to provide appropriate institutional support that gives rise to social protection and social safety nets.

I wish to suggest to you today, that the practice of social dialogue, allows for the social partners to exercise their corporate social responsibility. If we accept that corporate social responsibility is about doing the right thing, then the practice of social dialogue has an important role to play in creating and maintaining safe and productive workplaces. This can be achieved provided that there is compliance with the spirit of the law, ethical standards, and international norms. In summary the actions that followed will be sure to have a positive impact on employees.

In today's workplace, there is much concern over down time, known to be caused by chronic lateness and absenteeism. The lack of a conducive and safe workplace environment, and concern over the existing safety and health culture, are in some instances to carry the blame for the incidence of tardiness, absenteeism, demotivation of workers and work related illnesses and accidents. It is here that the use of social dialogue can be engaged to address these problems, ensure sustained productivity, and promote a safety

and health culture aimed at reducing workplace accidents, injuries, errors and work related illnesses.

It has been advanced that social dialogue has been a part of Caribbean industrial relations culture for decades. Further, that it has the potential to improve quality of work and productivity. The extent to which these are achieved will depend largely on how the region makes the link between development and social dialogue. We here in the Caribbean may be inspired by the words of Professor Juma Kapuya, Minister of Labour of the Republic of Tanzania and Chairperson of the Bureau of the Labour and Social Affairs Commission of the African Union, who underscored the point that “Social Dialogue and Productivity go hand in hand.”

We in this part of the hemisphere should take heed to the advice of the Director of Social Affairs Department of the African Union Commission Ms. Meriama Cisse, who holds the view that for the promotion of the social dialogue to be more effective, tripartite and dual institutions needs to be set up in areas where they do not exist.

Riding on that advice, we in the Caribbean region must embrace Social dialogue as an effective mechanism to bring about overall change which lead to enhanced productivity. This will require a change in employer and employee attitudes, as this is the foundation on which workplace cooperation is developed. The process of dialogue can be used effectively as a means of reducing the incidence of industrial action, particularly strike action. By encouraging consultation at the level of the workplace between management and workers, this will inevitably lead to workers involvement in the decision making process. Such has been the Barbadian experience.

In advocating the use of social dialogue, the point is to be stressed that it can impact positively in changing the workplace environment, which in turn can contribute to making it more productive. I suggest in working towards this, that the dialogue must focus on promoting a healthy and safe working environment, mutual trust among employers and employees, the participation of employees in decision making, encouragement of initiative and creativity and providing opportunities to use and develop skills.

In the context of this presentation it is important to make reference to the introduction of progressive labour legislation which would tend to shape and

change the character of the work environment. The social partners use the medium of social dialogue to identify best practice, and thereafter convert the ideals into provisions of appropriate legislation. The outcomes of this approach bring a measure of comfort and satisfaction to employees, as the legislation inevitably addresses conditions of employment.

In Barbados, the Safety and Health at Work Act, and the recently passed Employment Rights Act, reflect a feature of consistency. Take for example, under the Employment Rights Act, an employer can not dismiss an employee for becoming a shop steward, member of the Safety and Health Committee, delegate or member of a trade union.

As it relates to the workplace, both the Safety and Health at Work Act and the Employment Rights Act, make provision for the Chief Labour Officer to inspect whether day or night, any workplace without previous notice.

Let me leave you with a vote of confidence for social dialogue and the tripartite social partners mechanism. In doing so I refer you to the comments made by the Minister of Labour and Social Security in Barbados, Dr. the Hon. Esther Byer-Suckoo, as she addressed the Opening Ceremony of the 9th Biennial Delegates Conference of the Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados.

“We are brothers, whether in Government, labour or capital. I am sure that you can all relate to the phrase which has now become a mantra that ‘One hand can’t clap’. We need to work together to achieve a vision for Barbados. We must be our brothers’ keepers. It is only through the spirit of cooperation –tripartite co-operation that we can assist each other to achieve a single goal, the best for our members and the country of Barbados as a whole.”

Fellow participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, I recommend to you this approach as an effective means of driving productivity at safe and healthy workplaces.

I thank you for your attention, and it is my hope that this presentation would have offered you some meaningful insights.

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