

***REMARKS BY DENNIS DE PEIZA, GENERAL SECRETARY
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***ILO/CIDA REGIONAL LABOUR CHILD PROJECT –LABOUR
INSPECTORS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING AND IMPACT FRAMEWORK
WORKSHOP, TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2005, HARCOURT LEWIS
TRAINING CENTRE, KEITH BOURNE COMPLEX, BELMONT ROAD***

Over some three hundred years ago, the people of the Caribbean embarked upon a new direction, at the heart of which was the removal of all traces of exploitation of our people as workers. The platform for further change was founded on the social unrest of 1937, which led to fundamental freedoms, rights and privileges being guaranteed, and today these are clearly reflected in this island's constitution.

Following on this, it would seem that we as a people had crossed the hurdle of exploitation and oppression. However, considering that we assemble here to discuss the vexing issue of the 'Elimination and Prevention of the Worst Forms of Child Labour', this suggests to me that we still have a far way to go.

Speaking to what seemingly exists within the mainstream employment sectors in Barbados, the local trade union movement is pleased that the

available evidence suggests that the incidence of child labour is not a looming phenomenon that engages its undivided attention.

This is not to say that the labour movement is oblivious to the fact that there remain pockets of child labour within the society. The 2002 Dunn's Rapid Assessment Report on Child Labour in Barbados reminds us that there are children who are working in the sex industry, and who are involved in drug trafficking.

Taking the reported rate of the spread of HIV/ AIDS amongst teenagers across the Caribbean, and in Barbados in particular, and the high incidence of crime and violence that is associated with drug trafficking, which in turn has a connect with our youth, policy leaders are now charged with a greater sense of responsibility, in working to finding ways of addressing the exploitation of our young people by those who seek to use them in order to maximize the financial benefits that they wish to accrue.

Based on past legislation that has been enacted, successive Governments of Barbados are to be commended on their commitment to securing the human rights and welfare of children. Whilst it is to be noted that the Education Act in Barbados makes it mandatory for children between 5-16 years of age to attend school, which is said to be strictly enforced, we as a people should not throw us into a false sense of security in believing that the exploitation of child labour does not exist within the walls of our society.

We in the Caribbean and Barbados in particular, should not feel that we are excluded from the ILO's estimates that speak to the fact that 250 million children of ages 5-14 are victims of child labour around the world; tens of thousands of whom are caught in the worst forms of child labour.

Considering that Barbados falls within the 25% of the 170 ILO members' states that are signatories to Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, today's consultation in my opinion is a very important one. It forces us to move beyond the realm of complacency,

and to seriously focus on the issues of prostitution, pornography and the use of children under eighteen years of age in illicit and hazardous activities.

CTUSAB applauds the Ministry of Labour & Social Security for having hosted this workshop. The Congress views that this is in keeping with its call on Government to pursue all necessary action to eliminate the scourge of child labour.

As we debate the subject of the elimination and prevention of child labour, CTUSAB takes this opportunity to remind members of the private sector not to import items for sale or use in Barbados, where there are reasonable grounds to support the fact that child labour was used in the manufacturing or production process.

Government in demonstrating its commitment to eliminating the worse forms of child labour, not only in its own backyard but also on a global scale, should move to put monitoring systems in place, to ensure that

items imported into Barbados for sale or use, are not produced with the use of child labour.

When we look at the attitude of our young people today, it seems evident that they are primarily interested in earning a quick dollar. What comes across is the fact that they seem to have little regard for conditions of service in their employment. Following on this, the point is to be emphasized that as policy makers we have a responsibility to safeguard and protect their interest.

We must not lose sight of the fact that amongst us are some unscrupulous employers who are blinded by mere self interest, and who have little regard for the principles of decent work. To drive home the point, it is not a guarded secret that there are some employers who oppose union recognition and the unionization of employees. With this being the case, labour must continue to win the support of Government in an effort to uphold fundamental human rights as provided under the constitution of Barbados, and to ensure that the principles of decent work, and the provisions of the ILO Convention 182 are observed.

We can take some comfort in the fact that the Labour Department has the authority to conduct spot checks on enterprises to verify compliance with the law, and moreover, is empowered to take legal action against any employer who is found to have engaged under age children.

However, I contend that if we are to effectively police all enterprises to ensure that there is total compliance, it is necessary that Government moves to increase the current complement of inspectors in the system.

Finally, whilst this workshop focuses on the prevention and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, I consider it equally important that attention be paid to the social factors within the society that provide a platform for some employers to engage in the callous practice of exploiting child labour. Moreover, participants should be challenged to identify strategies that can be employed to combat the abuse where it exists.

It is my wish that the deliberations to follow prove to be fruitful, and I look forward to the outcomes of this workshop.