

WELCOME AND REMARKS DELIVERED TO THE
CONGRESS OF TRADE UNIONS AND STAFF
ASSOCIATIONS OF BARBADOS
HIV/AIDS EDUCATION WORKSHOP
by
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Barbados Workers' Union Labour College

I join with the Chairman this morning in welcoming you to this HIV/AIDS Education Workshop which is sponsored by the Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados.

I wish to recognize the presence of and welcome the members of the Executive Board of CTUSAB, the officers of the Ministry of Labour HIV/AIDS Project Unit lead by Ms. Rhonda Boucher, the Principal of the Barbados Workers' Union Labour College, and of course those presenters for this workshop who are present this morning.

I warmly welcome you the participants. It is pleasing that you have accepted to represent your various affiliates at this workshop. As you are aware, this workshop is directed at non-management personnel, and is designed as a train the trainers' workshop.

I also graciously welcome the members of the media to the opening of the workshop, and invite your full coverage of the workshop.

Let me offer an apology for the absence of our President, Senator Sir Roy Trotman, who due to another pressing commitment, is unable to attend this opening session of the workshop. It is my pleasure on his behalf and that of the members of the Executive Board of the Congress, to bring greetings to you this morning.

Today's workshop signals the start of a series of training programmes to be initiated by the Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados. Three years ago, CTUSAB developed a training programme that placed emphasis on two main components, the first of which was Safety and Health, with specific reference to Managing HIV/AIDS in the Workplace, and secondly, that of Leadership Training. The rolling out of these programmes was frustrated by the financial constraints that faced the Congress. I believe that we can mask that frustration by identifying with the cliché that say.....'Nothing happens before the time'.

It is important to pronounce on the fact that CTUSAB is committed to the promotion of Safety and Health in the workplace. It sees HIV /AIDS in the workplace as an issue that warrants the full attention of the Social Partners, and hence it has joined hands with Government and the

Private Sector in the promotion of education and awareness programmes that target the workforce and the population at large.

It should be publically known that CTUSAB in contributing to furthering the work at the national level, is represented on the National HIV/AIDS Commission; with its representative being Comrade Orlando Scott, Chairman of CTUSAB Safety and Health Committee.

In turning my attention to the background of today's workshop, I can tell you that it emerges from CTUSAB's belief that there is a need to develop strong communities and partnership amongst workers in various sectors, towards providing an enabling environment.

The workshop therefore will focus primarily on HIV/AIDS prevention methods, stigma and discrimination and workplace programmes.

There is the expectation that at the end of the workshop that the participants will, 'Create an awareness of HIV/AIDS prevention, Encourage the employer and management in setting standards for best practices in the workplace, Encourage employees to observe safety procedures in the prevention and reduction of risk factors, and be conversant with confidentiality and legal issues related to HIV/AIDS'

Based on all the information that has been made public over the years, I am reasonably sure that you would concur that HIV/AIDS is a workplace issue that cannot be taken lightly. We are told that HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death in the 15-49 age groups. Following on this, it begs the question as to what are the implications of this. As a consequence it can be concluded that it will severely impact on the most productive segment of the labour force, and indeed the national population. It will therefore decimate the labour force, lead to major decline in productivity and create social mayhem.

Based on the estimates provided by UNAIDS, (United Nations approximately 360,000 people in the Caribbean region are living with the disease.

Information coming out of the 2008 UNGRASS (United Nations General Assembly) reports, give little comfort for Barbados. The figure show that Barbados recorded 3,600 infected persons, being only surpassed by the Bahamas (10,841), Belize (4,131), Jamaica (25,000), Suriname (4,358) and Trinidad and Tobago (18,378).

We are to be warned that there is no place for complacency. Labour must play its part in the education and awareness of the workforce in addressing prevention, care and treatment, and denouncing and eliminating any threats of discrimination.

I urge that we all take the threat of HIV/AIDS seriously. The point made by Juan Somavia, Director of the International Labour Organization, in his 2005 Statement for World AIDS Day that *“Nine out of ten people living with HIV and AIDS are of working age – most of those at risk are also working women and men”*

The data coming out of the new ILO Report on HIV/AIDS tells us that, “it estimates that in the absence of increased access to treatment, the number of workers lost to the labour market due to HIV/AIDS will increase to 48 million by 2010 and 74 million by 2015, making HIV/AIDS one of the biggest causes of mortality in the world of work.”

The burning question that may now rest on your minds is that of ...How is labour responding to this crisis?

I can tell you that CTUSAB supports a three prong strategy that features sensitization of the workforce through the medium of Training Programmes, the development of HIV/AIDS workplace policy manuals, and the promotion of the non-discrimination of people living with the disease in the workplace.

Labour is under no doubt or illusion of how it should address the challenge facing it, for the ILO Code of Practice on HIV/AIDS and the World of Work, published in

2001, remains the guide to the strategies that are rolled out by trade unions.

I invite you to acquaint yourself with these ten key principles of the HIV/AIDS Code of Practice.

1. Recognition of HIV/AIDS as a workplace issue
2. Non-discrimination on the basis of real or perceived HIV status
3. Gender equality must be an integral consideration in a workplace response
4. Providing a healthy work environment for all concerned parties
5. Social dialogue in developing and implementing a workplace strategy
6. No screening for purposes of exclusion from employment
7. Confidentiality of HIV-related personal information
8. Continuation of employment relationship
9. Prevention strategies in the workplace
10. Care and support for infected and affected workers

In closing, it is now left for me to offer thanks to the Ministry of Labour HIV/AIDS Project Unit for facilitating the workshop, the BWU Labour College for hosting the workshop, and finally to wish for a successful workshop.