

**REMARKS TO THE HEROES SQUARE EVENT SENSITIZATION OF THE PROCLAMATION
OF THE SAFETY AND HEALTH AT WORK ACT HOSTED BY THE LABOUR DEPARTMENT
FRIDAY, 28 DECEMBER 2012**

By DENNIS DE PEIZA, GENERAL SECRETARY, CTUSAB

- ♦ Dr. Hon. Esther Byer Suckoo, Minister of Labour and Social Security
- ♦ Senior and other officers of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the Labour Department
- ♦ Representative of the Barbados Private Sector Association
- ♦ Specially invited Guests
- ♦ Ladies and Gentlemen
- ♦ Members of the Media

The promotion of safety and health at work, and more so, the creation of an awareness of the legislation known as the Safety and Health at Work Act, for which the acronym is the SHaW Act, are the two principal reasons that bring us the members of the Social Partners in Heroes Square this morning, to engage you the members of the public.

The Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados, as the voice of the Labour movement of Barbados, is pleased to be associated with the campaign mounted by the Labour Department to sensitized the public of Barbados on the Health and Safety at Work Act; prior to its official proclamation at the start of the New Year.

The proclamation of this vital piece of legislation has been long overdue. This action should be the catalyst for raising the bar as far as it relates to the observance of health and safety practices at workplaces. With the proclamation of the Act, it is expected that employers will be forced to take more seriously their obligation to their employees in providing a safe place of work. As a consequence of this, it is envisaged that workplaces will take a more objective look at their operations, and move with haste to review or establish their safety policy, pay closer attention to risk assessment and develop a regime for safety audits.

Today, I take this opportunity to impress upon both employers and employees that the Act promotes and protects the interest of both parties, and therefore its full introduction into law ought to be welcomed.

The Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados has fully participated in the development of this Act, and is satisfied that it is a modern piece of labour legislation, which is intended to guide the standards that inform the observance of best practice, and to set out the regulatory framework that identifies the procedures and processes to be followed in the management of safety and health in all workplaces.

Consistent with the mechanism that drives the social partnership, of which dialogue, collaboration and consultation are fundamental elements, the legislation through its provision for the establishment of Safety and Health Committees, guarantees that there is engagement between the employer and employee. Moreover, it imposes shared responsibility of employer and employee for safety and health in all workplaces in Barbados.

Every employee and employer must recognize that under the Act, they will be held accountable for any action that compromises the health and safety of persons at work, the workplace in itself and or the workplace environment. You must be aware that there are serious penalties that apply for any contravention of the law. The Act therefore has to be taken seriously. In order to ensure compliance, it requires enforcement of the law. This is a responsibility which the Act has entrusted to the Chief Labour Officer.

The Act has brought with it several requisite changes that will impact upon the safety and health at work culture. Events in our recent history such as the Campus Trendz tragedy, and the safety and health concerns which finally lead to the closure of the Louis Lynch Secondary School, are amongst those that would have informed such changes.

It has been well publicized that the law will come into effect as of 1 January, 2013. This should serve as a wakeup call to employers that it will not be business as usually. The proclamation of the Act should certainly make a difference in speeding the readiness of workplaces for compliance with the law. It is clear that between the time of the Act being passed by Parliament and now, that there has been a more or less a moratorium in place. This would have given time for employers to put their houses in order.

It wouldn't come as a surprise to hear calls made for more time to make adjustments, but it is advisable that the authorities follow through on the implementation policy, even if consideration has to be given to granting some reasonable time concession; before some aspects of the law are fully enforced.

In paving the way towards the proclamation of the Safety and Health at Work Act, the labour movement can make bold to state that it has been in the vanguard in the education of the workforce on issues of Safety and Health, and on the significance of the legislation as it relates to health, safety and the welfare of the workplace. The work which has been done by CTUSAB as a body, and by individual affiliates through workshops and seminars, to educate the workforce on the role and functions of the Safety and Health Committee, cannot be overstated.

The Social Partners through the Week of Excellence have over the past five years been placing emphasis on Safety and Health issues, and in so doing, have directly or indirectly focused on provisions and requirements under the legislation. The beauty of these fora, is that they allow for the sharing of information, knowledge and

experiences. The employers, employees, private and public sector managers who attend these sessions also benefit from sound guidance and advice that is given.

In closing I wish to compliment the Labour Department on this initiative. As we enter into the year 2013, I take this opportunity to invite all members of the workforce, which includes employees, managers and employers, to take the pledge not to renege on their responsibility to observe the requirements of the Safety and Health at Work Act; for to do otherwise, would be to help perpetuate breaches of the law.

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