

**Remarks delivered by Dennis de Peiza, General Secretary, CTUSAB to the Opening Ceremony of Occupational Safety and Health Week, 6 July 2009, Accra Beach Resort & Spa**

I welcome the opportunity this morning to briefly address this Opening Ceremony of the 2009 Occupational Safety and Health Week.

At the outset let me commend the Labour Department on the work it has done and continues to do, in promoting Occupational Safety and Health as a key component of decent work. The staff is to be congratulated on the training programmes that the department has developed, and from all reports on the efficient manner in which they have been delivered.

During the course of this week we have been asked to focus our attention on the theme: 'Decent Work a Priority For All'. The theme could not be more apt, when we consider the challenges facing employees arising from the global economic recession, and as well as the emerging fall outs from the ever changing work environment, seemingly as a direct consequence of globalization.

It is common knowledge that the Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados has been in the forefront of championing the decent work agenda. I can assure you that the Congress will be paying close attention to the outcomes of your deliberations.

In addressing the subject of decent work, it is customary to place the focus on the ILO principles of equal opportunity, equal treatment and mainstreaming. Added to this, we identify with the fact that decent work demands that there be high workplace standards, that quality jobs are to be offered and that persons have good working conditions.

It is opportune that the message is conveyed to all that it is essential to promote and observe the core labour standards, and to do so to give effect to providing quality work, a minimum wage, social security benefits, security of tenure and the development of a Safety and Health Policy at the enterprise level.

I contend that the current economic climate that features a down turn in the economy, coupled with the negative fall outs of globalization, combined to emerge as potential occupational hazards. These are the agents for emotional, physiological and social stress. These stressors are linked to the fact that workers who have no security of tenure, live and work under a cloud of uncertainty, and more so as many are unable to secure sustainable employment.

In promoting decent work for all it is important that efforts are directed at removing those threats that hinder or limit the access of persons to acquiring sustainable employment opportunities. To this end, there is a need to focus on the removal of barriers that limit access by persons to vocational training because they lack the basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Arguably, access to education and training, the placing of emphasis on professional development and the investment in the human resource, will lead to the attainment of decent work for all. It is through these means, that full and productive employment can be achieved.

It is therefore important that the youth, elderly and the physically challenged are provided access to quality training and retraining. This would go a long way in building their capacity to compete for higher quality and productive employment.

I wish to suggest that one significant way of ensuring that everyone is exposed to decent work, is for a greater emphasis to be placed on improving working conditions. Where there is adequate labour legislation, this can have a major impact on job quality. In the case of Barbados, the proclaiming of the Safety and Health at Work Act 2005, and the passing of the Employment Rights Bill before year end, will surely be a step in the right direction.

In treating to decent work as a priority for all it requires that there be a commitment to addressing the deprivation of people through the reduction of high levels of unemployment, underemployment, low pay, no social protection, long hours of work and the employment of persons on short term and informal contracts. There must be sustained efforts aimed at ensuring that persons do no work under unfavourable and precarious working conditions. We must safeguard and defend the right of workers to

join a trade union and to be engaged in collective bargaining. It is equally important that workers have a voice at work, and are involved in the decision making process.

Finally, there is the need to stress safe work. In addressing this, there must be an awareness of the growing work related diseases and the many hazards and risks facing workers. It is imperative that there be increased and sustained action to protect safety and health and the environment. Moreover, we must undertake to gather the appropriate information, which would enhance the capacity to design and implement effective occupational safety and health policies and programmes.

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General Secretary, CTUSAB

6 July 2009