

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY
DR. THE HON. ESTHER BYER SUCKOO, M.P.
MINISTER OF LABOUR
ON THE OCCASION OF
THE TRIPARTITE CARIBBEAN SYMPOSIUM ON
*“TRIPARTISM AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE: COMPARATIVE EXPERIENCES IN
DEALING WITH ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUES”*

TUESDAY, MAY 17, 2011 AT 9.00 A.M.

HILTON HOTEL

NEEDHAMS POINT, ST. MICHAEL

Cabinet Ministers of Government of Barbados

Hon Ministers from across the region

Sir Roy Trotman, Worker Vice-Chair of the Governing Body of the ILO

Ms. Elizabeth Tinoco Acevedo, Regional Director ILO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean

Senator David Massiah, President, Caribbean Congress of Labour

Mr. Marcel Meyer, President, Caribbean Employers' Confederation

Delegates from Barbados, the region, Mauritius and Singapore

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentleman

Good morning!

Firstly, on behalf of the Government of Barbados and the Barbados delegation here, I have great pleasure in extending a warm welcome to all delegates attending this forum which promises to be interesting and enlightening. An extra-special welcome is extended to those of you journeying from far-flung Singapore and Mauritius.

This symposium is but another vehicle being used by the ILO to encourage all of its constituent members to fully embrace the concept of tripartism and social dialogue as a critical aspect of social and economic development.

Barbados is proud to host this symposium, not only because we specialise in hospitality, but because our Social Partnership is seen as a success story.

As some of you may recall, Barbados, Singapore and Belgium were involved in the side event on tripartism and social dialogue at the International Labour Conference in 2010 and this symposium is intended to build on that.

(THE SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP)

The genesis of the Social Partnership here in Barbados was a direct result of the economic crisis of the early 1990s. Those were dark days. Victor Hugo got it exactly right when he said *“Emergencies have also been necessary to progress. It was darkness which produced the lamp. It was fog that produced the compass. It was hunger that drove us to exploration. And it took a depression to teach us the real value of a job”*. Out of the emergency experienced by Barbados eighteen years ago, a light flickered and an institution - The Barbados Social Partnership – illuminated this nation of ours.

During that crisis Government in collaboration with the International Monetary Fund implemented a number of structural adjustment programmes. The structural adjustment measures caused tremendous tensions in Barbados. Although the Trade Union Movement served as the nucleus of the protest which arose, employers’ organizations and civil society also asserted themselves and took part. As a result of the widespread protest, social dialogue became a strategy for ensuring nationwide problem-solving mechanisms. Through social dialogue, industrial unrest in the country was

reduced. Bridges of trust were eventually built which created a cordial environment for consultation and engagement by the parties.

In 1993 three distinct groups – Government, Employers’ Representatives and Trade Union Representatives signed the Protocol for the implementation of a Prices and Incomes Policy for the period 1993 to 1995. This event heralded the birth of the Social Partnership.

Since 1995 the Social Partners have signed five additional Protocols, each one building on the other with the sixth Protocol having been signed on Labour Day, 2011 – a mere two weeks ago. Through the Protocols, the partners identify economic and social issues for national improvement and make a commitment to actions associated with these issues, thereby placing the well-being of Barbados and its citizens front and centre.

Social dialogue has become entrenched in Barbados’ economic and social landscape. An enabling environment has been created for discussing challenges facing the nation. All the credit for this is due to the Social Partnership. Just as it did in the 1990s, the Social Partnership has assisted in mitigating the effects of the present global economic crisis. When the Social Partners established a special working group on the economy in October 2008 to collaboratively craft a short and medium-term action plan to address the global economic crisis, we signaled to the country that we were poised to strategically respond to matters that affect us greatly. The action

plan included a modest stimulus package which focused on social and environmental programmes to address the crisis. It also recommended reforms to address existing vulnerabilities. Among other things, the plan speaks to :

- establishing service standards in both the private and public sector to improve service delivery and quality;
- increasing the efficiency of critical public sector agencies whose functions support private enterprises and therefore influence their competitiveness and productivity;
- broadening export promotion by marketing and promoting critical foreign exchange generating activities and exploring new export opportunities; and
- implementing labour market reforms that will enhance labour market flexibility and labour productivity.

This action plan laid the foundation for a more comprehensive medium-term development strategy for Barbados for 2010-2014. This strategy defines a broad framework of policies and programmes to help lead economic recovery from the global recession. An important feature of the strategy is the focus on maintaining macro economic stability through sustainable fiscal and debt management measures.

It is therefore evident that the Social Partners have made a contribution to the medium-term development strategy of Barbados for 2010-2014. As Chairman of the Sub Committee of the Social Partnership I am extremely happy with this outcome.

Having said all of this, let me say that we in Barbados are not complacent. Although we have come a long way in creating and sustaining our Social Partnership we are not perfect. We are still in the learning curve. Every challenge teaches us something, and this recession is no different. I have made a commitment to the Social Partners that I will devote a special meeting, or meetings as the case may be, to specifically examine how we can strengthen the partnership. We in Barbados will pay special attention to the discussions over the next two days as we intend to draw from the experiences of other countries in our quest to strengthen our Social Partnership at home.

As a policy-maker supporting regionalism, I wish to commend the ILO for convening this forum given the concerns in many CARICOM countries about the need to strengthen the institutions of social dialogue and the lessons that may be learnt from the experience of others. As we continually seek ways and means to strengthen the regional integration movement, the topic for Panel 3 “*Taking Advantage of Tripartism and Social Dialogue to support*

Regional Integration and enhance its Benefits” should provide useful insights.

(CARICOM)

We the members of CARICOM naturally want the best for ourselves. We want to say to the world at large that we, the Caribbean people are special. We share a common history and culture. We are a proud and resilient people, having survived genocide, wars, slavery and indentured servitude. Rising above all this adversity we have succeeded in crafting our own creolized culture.

At the core of our regional development effort is the need to develop and use our resources – both human and natural – effectively and sustainably. Concerted efforts are constantly being made to effect this goal. In 2007 the 28th Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the CARICOM Community approved the report prepared by Prof. Norman Girvan of the University of the West Indies - ***“Towards a Single Development Vision and the Role of the Single Economy”***. The report provides a vision for the development of the Caribbean Community to which all stakeholders can give their support. It serves as the basis for decisions by the Heads of Government on a road map for the further implementation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy. It was the product of an extensive process of

consultation with regional stakeholders and with the relevant organs of the Community.

The Single Vision for development of the Caribbean Community as enunciated by Prof. Girvan is for sustainable development which encompasses economic, social, environmental and governance dimensions grouped into six broad elements:

1. self-sustaining economic growth based on strong international competitiveness, innovation, productivity, and flexibility of resource use;
2. a full – employment community that provides a decent standard of living and quality of life for all citizens; elimination of poverty; and provision of adequate opportunities for young people constituting an alternative to emigration;
3. spatially equitable economic growth within the Community, having regard to the high growth potential of member states with relatively low per capita incomes and large resources of under-utilized land and labour;
4. social equity, social justice, social cohesion and personal security;
5. environmental protection and ecological sustainability; and

6. democratic, transparent and participatory governance.

These broad elements equate to a very ambitious programme – a programme which our various governments with our scarce resources will find daunting.

In developing strong systems of tripartism and social dialogue in our respective countries we will more effectively grapple with issues like these which not only address country objectives but which have a huge bearing on the successful functioning of a vibrant single market and economy.

In addressing the enabling environment with regard to social and institutional structures, the Girvan report categorically states that the implementation of the regional development strategy will be based on a solid foundation of social partnership among the key stakeholders of Government, business, labour and civil society. The purpose of social partnership is to establish an agreed framework and understanding of mutual rights and responsibility as the basis for co-operation in the attainment of strategic goals.

Prof. Girvan saw the formation of the Caribbean Business Council in June 2006 as a significant step in setting up a mechanism for dialogue and consultation for the forging of a dynamic public/private partnership that is key to strong growth performance in the economy.

The functions of the Caribbean Business Council include providing direct private sector inputs into the discussions and deliberations of regional decision-making at all levels, up to and including the Heads of Government,

as well as providing a conduit to allow regional private/public sector interest groups both national and sectoral, to be heard. It seems to me that the Caribbean Business Council can become a viable mechanism for strengthening regional integration. At this juncture it appears that its activities are fledging. I hope that as time passes it will become a truly powerful force.

(ILO)

It is with satisfaction that I note that the ILO and the OAS continue to place tripartism and social dialogue on the front burner. I attended the 17th American Regional Meeting of the ILO, Santiago, Chile in December last year. That forum included a series of four dialogues to allow in-depth discussion of themes of particular interest in the region. One such dialogue was “*Lessons from the crisis; Public Policies and the Role of the Social Partners in efforts to Promote Recovery within Decent Work*”. This session forcibly underscored the importance of social dialogue to the recovery agenda.

At the 16th Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labour of the OAS held in Buenos Aires in 2009, the Ministers committed themselves to the Declaration of Buenos Aires “*Facing the crisis with development, decent work and social protection.*” Among the many commitments made was the resolve that broad and inclusive social dialogue at the national level, by sectors and at the enterprise level would be encouraged. The Ministers

acknowledged that this was an efficient mechanism for maintaining employment levels, preserving skills and sharing the cost of the crisis as well as the benefits of the subsequent economic and social recovery in a fair manner.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this year marks a milestone in the life of the ILO which celebrates the one hundredth year of the International Labour Conference. Since its inception, the ILO has been true to its core goal of promoting social justice. As the world has changed, the ILO has adapted its agenda to the new conditions as seen in the 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia which focuses on a series of key principles that embody the work of the ILO and the 1998 Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work which among other things posits that social progress goes hand in hand with economic progress.

The ILO repeatedly emphasizes that successful global development can only be realized if the aggressive agenda which supports free trade, the protection of private investment and intellectual property rights and the creation of an environment which gives impetus to financial and capital mobility, are equally yoked with concerns for social justice. I speak about matters relating to labour mobility, codes of conduct for trans-national corporations and the development of sound rules governing international competition. The ILO's seminal report the **World Commission on the Social**

Dimensions of Globalization, with its emphasis on a people-centred approach to globalization, should be internalized by Governments, employers, employees, enterprises, civil society and individuals everywhere. That report succinctly heralds the value and power of dialogue as an instrument of change. This is a fact that is revered by Social Partners throughout the world.

A measure of the impact of the fundamental principles and rights at work on the practice of trade liberalization would be the extent to which the implementation of the decent work agenda across boundaries and multiple social and economic settings is realized. In fact, in support of the view that trade liberalization should proceed in a manner which facilitates access to decent work, the ILO reported that the G8 Summit of 2007 noted its commitment to the decent work agenda recognizing that it is central to “..... globalization with social progress.”

As constituents of the ILO, we know only too well the mantra of the decent work agenda – the promotion of rights at work, enhancement of social protection, encouragement of sustainable employment opportunities and strengthening of social dialogue. This important agenda constitutes an essential part of the strategic framework within which the national development of all our countries can be successfully carried out.

I wish to pay tribute to the ILO for the sterling work which it is undertaking in the region. In particular, the ILO is doing a tremendous job in providing support for the implementation of Decent Work Country programmes throughout the subregion. Barbados expects to launch its Decent Work Country Programme by August 2011.

(CONCLUSION)

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, we in Barbados are excited about this forum. We anticipate a rich exchange of ideas from our neighbouring territories and our visitors from Singapore and Mauritius. Mauritius and Singapore have both successfully used social dialogue to grapple with the challenges arising from the global crisis. Let me say again how happy I am that Barbados is host to this important forum and how pleased we are that you could be here with us. We look forward to the discussions and anticipate an interesting two days ahead of us.