



Speech: Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice and Social Welfare Rt. Hon Ham Lini Vanuaroroa

Mr. Werner Blenk, Director of the ILO for Pacific Island Countries; Mr Lionel Kaluat, Commissioner of Labour and Employment Services; Mr Charles Calo, Council of Trade Unions; Mr Jacques Nioteau, Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Mr. Michel Kalworai, Secretary General SHEFA Province; distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen...

I would like to congratulate the Department of Labour and Employment Services, under the leadership of Commissioner Lionel Kaluat, the Vanuatu Council of Trade Unions under its President Mr Charles Calo and the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Trade Unions under its President Mr Jacques Nioteau for the hard work they have contributed together in order to reach this moment which we are celebrating today: the signing of Vanuatu's first ever Decent Work Country Programme with the Office of the International Labour Organisation.

I would also like to congratulate and to thank Mr Werner Blenk, the Director of the ILO Office for Pacific island Countries for the hard work he and his team have contributed during 2008, and in the years before that also, in order to facilitate the consultation process which has led to mutual agreement on the work to be done in Vanuatu over the next four years in partnership with ILO's tripartite constituents:

the Government, the workers represented by the Trade Unions and the private sector represented by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Also, my congratulations to the ILO for reaching its 90th birthday. We are very pleased to be able to celebrate this occasion with you here in Port Vila. Please pass on our congratulations to the staff in your offices in Suva, Manila, Bangkok and Geneva.

As we have heard during the speeches this morning, Vanuatu became a member state of the ILO in 2003. At this moment I would like to acknowledge the work done by our former Minister of Internal Affairs and current Minister for Health the Rt Hon Joe Natuman who initiated and led the process of Vanuatu becoming the 176th member state of the ILO.

Vanuatu has benefited directly and indirectly from our membership and partnership with ILO since 2003, and we look forward to that continuing and strengthening into the foreseeable future.

The completion of this DWCP document, the mutual agreement of the four priority areas on which it will focus from now until the end of 2012, and the alignment of these priorities with our own national development plans expressed in our Priorities and Action Agenda, are an important and significant step forward in the direction of a stronger and more productive working relationship between the Government, our Trade Union movement and our private and public sector businesses and employers in Vanuatu.

This tripartite relationship is of fundamental importance to the ongoing social and economic development of our country and to the achievement of our own goals and objectives, and we welcome the partnership with the ILO office and for their involvement and support in this regard.

I was particularly pleased to see that the issue of disability, and promoting the rights of Persons with Disabilities in the world of work, was a prominent feature of the priorities of our Decent Work Country Programme. As Minister for Justice and Social Welfare I am particularly proud that the Vanuatu government is the first country in the Pacific region to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled Persons. This week in the Le Lagon hotel, we are also hosting the Pacific Disability Forum. SHEFA Province has appointed a Provincial Disability Officer and there is much other good work being done in other parts of the country too, including ongoing work between the Department of Labour and the Dept of Foreign affairs to sign and ratify the ILO Convention C159 regarding the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Disabled Persons.

Inclusiveness is a central part of the culture of Vanuatu and it is important that we respect the rights and promote equal opportunities for all people in the world of work in Vanuatu, regardless of their gender, their age, their ethnicity or their physical and mental abilities or disabilities.

I was also particularly pleased to see that the issue of youth unemployment is being tackled as one of the four priority areas of our Decent Work Country Programme paper. This issue is of serious national concern to Vanuatu and we need to focus more of our attention and resources in providing realistic opportunities for our youth to engage in productive and dignified employment. It is important that, as we pursue increased economic growth, we ensure that the social development and wellbeing of our people, including our youth, is at the centre of all policies and actions. We are proud of our rich culture and history in Vanuatu. It is our strength. As we witness the financial crises and economic meltdowns in other parts of the so-called 'developed world', we know that our Vanuatu culture and community values will protect us from the negative effects of economic globalization. We must ensure that our education system, including vocational training, is enabling

our young people to develop their economic potential in ways that are positive for the future of Vanuatu. We must be creative and urgently provide much more opportunities for our youth and other potential entrepreneurs for accessing appropriate, affordable and flexible financial services both in urban and in rural areas. I acknowledge the achievements of VANWODs since 1996, but too many young people, who are enterprising and energetic, still cannot access the basic financial support they need in order to develop their income generating ideas. We need a significant combined effort to tackle youth unemployment and I welcome ILO's existing and ongoing support in this regard.

Social protection also features prominently in our DWCP paper. I acknowledge the work of Kelip Sandy and his staff at VNPF and I hope that ILO's support will indeed lead to extended social protection for our working people, both in the formal and the informal sectors.

The signing of this official document which outlines four priority action areas for ILO's work in Vanuatu over the next three and a half years to the end of 2012, is an significant and strategically important step for Vanuatu in our journey along our own path of continued social and economic development.

I encourage the Department of Labour and Employment Services, the Vanuatu Council of Trade Unions and the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry to seize this opportunity with both hands and to work hard together to achieve the objectives mutually agreed upon and laid out in this ILO Decent Work Country Programme document. It is in the interests of our country to do so - our institutions and our organizations and most importantly, our people.

Thank you.