

Caribbean Congress of Labour
Declaration and Plan of Action on
Regional Integration and the Economic Partnership Agreement and their
Social and Labour Dimensions

Representatives of workers' organizations of the English and Dutch-speaking Caribbean¹

Having met in Christ Church, Barbados during the period 23 – 25 June 2008, at the ILO/CCL Round Table discussion of the theme: *“Globalization, Regional Integration, and the Economic Partnership Agreement: the Social and Labour Dimensions”*,

Reaffirming that solidarity and unity are fundamental trade union principles and essential tools in the struggle to protect workers' rights, improve the conditions of work, eradicate poverty, and to promote equality and social justice for the peoples of the Caribbean Community,

Recognizing, within the global developmental context, that the Caribbean region is economically fragile and vulnerable requiring the creation of the necessary synergies among governments, state and non-state institutions aimed at accelerating the establishment and implementation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy,

Recalling Labour's Platform for the Caribbean (2007) which espouses a novel approach to national development, and by extension to the management of the regional economy, promoting sustainable development and placing decent work and full employment at its heart while acknowledging a pivotal role for the state,

Recalling the Rose Hall Declaration of July 2003 in which the political leaders of the region restated their resolution to realize the hopes and expectations of the people of the region in fulfilment of the aims, purposes, objectives and undertakings of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas,

Reconfirming continued support for and commitment to the Decent Work Agenda based on the ILO four strategic objectives, namely (i) promoting and realizing standards and fundamental principles and rights at work, (ii) creating greater opportunities for women and men to secure decent employment and income, (iii) enhancing the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all, and (iv) strengthening tripartism and social dialogue,

Recognizing the importance of the ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization of June 2008 which has the central purpose of placing social justice at the heart of globalization,

¹ Countries and territories represented: Anguilla, Aruba, Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Netherlands Antilles, Saint Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago.

Having discussed and assessed globalization, the status of regional integration, the initialled CARIFORUM-European Union (EU) Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and their social and labour implications on the region, and

Have adopted and committed ourselves to the following Plan of Action:

To call for a review of the recently initialled CARIFORUM-EU EPA with a view to its renegotiation to

- i. Consider limiting its obligations to the requirements of WTO-compatibility and the maintenance of existing levels of market access to the European Union,
- ii. Insert Protocols on the principal CARIFORUM productive sectors providing for the identification of legally binding bilateral cooperation measures to be provided under the agreement. These Protocols would be the juridical basis for the subsequent preparation of detailed CARIFORUM-European Union Sectoral Partnership Development Programs, specifying activities, policies, resources, and timelines to achieve the stated objectives,
- iii. Insert legally binding development benchmarks designed to measure the socio-economic impacts of the EPA on key sectors of our economies and key segments of our societies, in particular, workers,
- iv. Include a provision for a mandatory review within three years of signature of the agreement, with the possibility of renegotiation,

To present labour's positions on the various areas affecting the labour market and working people of the region and to urge direct consultation with governments and the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery in relation to the content of the EPA and all other external trade agreements,

To seek that the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL), national trade unions, employers' organisations and governments ensure that mechanisms are implemented to guarantee that provisions of the EPA and other external trade agreements are supportive of the Tripartite Declaration and Plan of Action for Realizing the Decent Work Agenda in the Caribbean (October 2006),

To establish a mechanism to permit a closer working relationship between the Caribbean Regional Negotiating Machinery and the Caribbean Congress of Labour to allow for labour's participation in the process and to benefit from its negotiating skills,

To seek the establishment of tripartite national and regional committees to monitor the impact of the EPA and all other external trade agreements,

To call on national parliaments to debate this issue as an urgent matter of public interest,

To hold meetings with workers and employers to make them aware of the implications of the measures contained in the EPA, and to develop, with the technical assistance of the ILO and other regional and international institutions, materials on the EPA and other external trade agreements for the purpose of awareness-raising,

To establish networks with ITUC regional organisations and other subregional trade union groupings contending with economic partnership agreements and other external trade agreements,

To call on the ILO to continue lending its resources and technical support to the Caribbean social partners for capacity-building, research and education in the area of external trade agreements,

To call on CARICOM governments to provide institutional strengthening and capacity-building to national and regional trade union organisations,

To establish collaborative arrangements and knowledge networks with regional universities and labour colleges in order for them to play a leading role in research, education and awareness creation on regional integration, external trade agreements and their implications,

To call on CARICOM governments to conclude the harmonization of labour laws and to establish a social floor as a requisite for the Caribbean Single Market and Economy,

To call on CARICOM governments to take the necessary actions to ensure that nationals enjoy the same treatment irrespective of their country of origin and to conclude the establishment of the Regional Accreditation Body for Education and Training,

To demand that CSME matters take precedence over the provisions of the EPA, as they relate to goods, services and labour, in order to strengthen the supremacy of the regional process,

To call on governments to establish consultative status for the Caribbean Congress of Labour and the Caribbean Employers Confederation at the meetings of the Heads of Governments,

To call on CCL, its affiliates and other partners to provide a report on the actions taken, at both the national and regional levels, with respect to the implementation of this Plan of Action within six months of its adoption.

Barbados, 25 June 2008