



CARIBBEAN VOICES - SIDS 2014

Senator Dr. the Hon. Esther Byer Suckoo, Minister of Labour, Social Security and Human Resource Development, Barbados

On the occasion of the 3rd International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS Conference) being held in Apia, Samoa, from September 1 - 4, 2014, this United Nations (UN) sponsored conference highlights the importance given to ensuring that the voice of small islands has a prominent place within the international global community. I commend the UN for convening this timely conference as there has always been an urgent need to have our perspectives heard given the vulnerability of small island developing countries and their interdependence with larger developing countries and the developed world.

The SIDS face many challenges in achieving their respective national goals; many are negatively affected by various national and economic 'shocks'. Indeed in the last two (2) decades, much attention has been paid to the effects of climate change on SIDS and how this phenomenon would impact on our economic development. Central to this discussion therefore is the provision of decent work for all, which is necessary for sustainable economic development given the special constraints to development which SIDS encounter. These include, but are not limited to, high rates of unemployment, gender discrimination, outdated labour legislation, large informal sectors and limited financial resources. As small states they are very vulnerable to external shocks. Their small size also means limited market size for indigenous businesses. They therefore need to attract foreign investment, while ensuring labour standards are upheld.

Critical to ensuring that decent work is achieved, is an environment which encourages good governance, respect for human rights, transparency, health and safety, social dialogue, protection of vulnerable workers and the promotion of best practices in employee/employer relations.

The labour market continues to evolve in response to changing economic demands. I would therefore suggest that a greater focus be given to the following:

- i. the promotion of entrepreneurship and small business development, including access to developmental funding. This is critical for those SIDS like Barbados which have graduated from such funding but whose sustainability requires this new emphasis during and after the recession;
- ii. the creation of initiatives to empower the most vulnerable groups in society, notably women, the youth and the disabled and to integrate them into the labour force. Youth unemployment is undermining social, political and economy stability in many countries, including SIDS;
- iii. the production of green goods and services;
- iv. a shift away from fossil fuel to renewable energy and capitalizing on the waste- to-energy drive;
- v. the development of anti-discrimination legislation;
- vi. translating International Labour Standards into law and practice;

- vii. the allocation of increased resources to research and development;
- viii. training and retooling of persons with a view to aligning skills with that of emerging labour market needs; and
- ix. capacity building for labour institutions.

In closing I urge delegates to frame their discussions around these realities and to develop workable solutions to achieve desired results which will redound positively to improvements in the quality of life for our nationals.