

Tripartite Labour Advisory Council launched in Vanuatu

Port Vila, Vanuatu (ILO News): For the first time since independence in 1980 government, workers and employers have formally joined forces to create a tripartite advisory body to help guide Vanuatu's development of new labour and employment policies.

The Vanuatu Tripartite Labour Advisory Council was launched following the signing of a formal agreement by the Pacific Island country's Deputy Prime Minister, the Honorable Mr Joshua Kalsakau, together with the Presidents of Vanuatu's Council of Trade Unions and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The Council has the official mandate to provide recommendations, advice and proposals to the Government on all matters relating to the labour market. The structure enables the voices of workers and employers to be heard, on an equal basis, by government policy makers and legislators. Strengthening the governance of the labour market is expected to result in a variety of direct and indirect benefits to workers and employers.

The Council was proposed and then conceived during an ILO facilitated workshop in September 2010. Following the workshop, a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding was agreed leading to legislative amendments which cleared the way for the Council's launch. Workers, employers and government each have three representatives on the Council. It is chaired by the Commissioner of Labour, Mr Lionel Kaluat. Care has been taken to ensure gender issues in the labour market are properly addressed, and three women have been nominated as Council representatives.

The new council has been acclaimed by both workers' and employers' organizations.

"The Council should have a broader impact on the people, and the workers of Vanuatu," Ephraim Kalsakau, General Secretary of the Vanuatu Council of Trade Unions stated.

"It should help to encourage them to become more engaged in the political processes, especially those concerning workers issues, and to see themselves as agents of positive change in our country."

Tony Ryan, vice president of the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry had also earlier commented "(We) hope that the establishment of this Council will be the single organization to represent employers, employees and government in any future labour arrangements so as to bring about the long term economic goals of this and all future governments."

On Labour Day (Sunday 1 May), the day of the launch, and as a further example of tripartite cooperation, government and workers' and employers' organizations came together for the first time to participate in a parade through the capital, Port Vila.

The colourful parade, led by the Vanuatu military brass band, culminated in a public gathering in Saralana Park, opposite the Parliament House. Food and live music were provided free of charge. The Commissioner of Labour presided over the formal events, which included speeches from the Minister of Labour as well as representatives of workers and employers.

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