



9th ILO Meeting of the Caribbean Ministers of Labour

DECENT WORK FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Windsor Ballroom, British Colonial Hilton in Nassau, The Bahamas
3-4 March 2015

Address by the ILO Director-General, Guy Ryder, at Ministerial Meeting, Nassau, Bahamas, February 2015

The Honorable Perry Christie, Prime-Minister, Prime-Minister and Minister of Finance of the Bahamas, the Honourable Shane Gibson, Minister of Labour and National Insurance of the Bahamas, the honourable Dr. Douglas Slater, Assistant Secretary-General, Council for Human and Social Development of CARICOM, honourable ministers of labour of the Caribbean region, the representatives of the Caribbean Congress of Labour of the Caribbean Employers' Confederation, dignitaries, my colleague Giovanni Di Cola, my colleagues from the ILO, ladies and gentlemen:

Let me begin by saying that it is an enormous pleasure to be here in the Bahamas, in my case for the first time, and how honoured we feel by your presence, Prime Minister at our gathering. Thank you for being with us and thank you Minister Gibson for having brought us together here in the Bahamas.

I would like to begin my brief comments by insisting – and I want to do this in the strongest possible terms – on the significance and the importance of this ministerial meeting. Ms. Giovanni has said “we are strongly committed at the ILO to supporting and convening this meeting. I am personally committed to participating with you in it, and this is because we are convinced that this meeting is not simply a formal gathering of ministers but a meeting that could produce very practical and important results and it is in this direction I believe our efforts should be directed.

I think our challenge is to distil from the individual national experiences of each of your countries and territories some of the common challenges of the Caribbean region to see how we can work together to advance our Decent Work Agenda in Caribbean, to see how we can sharpen and progress our cooperation with CARICOM, which I think Dr. Slater has come forward leaps and bounds in recent years and I think it's an important opportunity for all of us at the ILO to listen and to be guided by our tripartite constituents here in the Caribbean.

I want to make two strong points to you: as I made clear when a number of you came to the Americas' Regional Meeting of the ILO in Lima, Peru last October: the ILO is absolutely committed to recognizing and responding to the specifics of the Caribbean Sub-region in our work and in our structures. And to that end, if any of you had any doubts, our office in Port-of-Spain will continue its activities, we'll serve you to the best of the ability of our Organization and I trust that we will be able to strengthen its activities and increase its resources in the future. Being here in the Bahamas, I feel I should say "I tell you that."

Ladies and gentlemen, I am equally encouraged that the very high level in participation in our meeting means reflects the fact that you see things the same way, that this meeting is an event that can truly progress our joint endeavours. I want to just reiterate what has just been said. Your region has taken on new and very encouraging protagonism in the ILO and in the multilateral system in recent months. You were present at our Americas Regional Meeting in Lima in record numbers. There was a tripartite Caribbean presence at the UN Small Island Development States Conference last year.

I had the good fortune to one of those left by Ambassador Ashe as he presided over the UN General Assembly 68th Session last year. These are all good and encouraging signs but we must, of course, build upon them.

Ladies and gentlemen, the agenda of our work this week - and I'm going to simplify it somewhat to make my point - cover two points of substance and one point of method. The two points of policy substance, and you know them, relate to what I believe are universal priorities in the world of work; the fight against youth unemployment and the fight against climate change.

We already when we met in Port-of-Spain in July 2013 adopted important conclusions in respect of youth unemployment. But I doubt there is any minister in this room, any trade unionist, any employer who could truly say that we have progressed as we would want and that we have succeeded in finding decent work opportunities for young people as we must. Let's just remember: if you're under 25 in the world, you are three times more likely to be without a job. There are 75 million under-twenty-fives out of work today.

This impels us to further action and I think the fact that we are focusing particularly at our meeting today and tomorrow on skills formation for young people and on the productivity element of youth unemployment is, I believe, highly appropriate. Ladies and gentlemen, I also think that there is probably no better place in the Caribbean to consider the fight against climate change and how it relates to the world of work.

I personally have seen in a relatively short space of time I must say, I would say something like ten years, how the ILO and its tripartite constituents have assumed the fight against global warming and climate change as a world of work issue. This was not previously the case. I do remember the time, not so distant, when the feeling amongst our constituents we had to choose. We had to choose either between jobs and decent work on the one hand, or protecting the planet on the other. Fortunately, that apparent dilemma belongs to the past.

Our constituents have come together in realization that what we need to do is to combine these two objectives in a process of integrated sustainable development and not only that, but that this is perfectly possible. It is perfectly possible to defend sustainable ecological

development and create jobs. That is not automatic. We have to work at it. We have to work to make sure that a just transition to a low-carbon future with good jobs for all is an integrated part of public policy.

Let me say, Mr. Prime Minister, that since I've been in your country, I have learned that very important initiatives have been taken by the Bahamas to make a reality of this principle and I'd like to congratulate you upon it.

Ladies and gentlemen, these are the two points of policy, substantive policy. The point of method has to do with social dialogue. As you can imagine, the ILO, as a tripartite Organization bringing together workers, employers and governments, promotes social dialogue as a principle, but not only as a principle. I believe that social dialogue must be seen by us all as an important and a practical instrument of good labour market policy making.

Like everything else, social dialogue needs to show results. If social dialogue does not show results, its credibility will be called into question. Therefore, we have to make sure that we engage in social dialogue on the basis of capable representative independent organizations to come together with genuine intent to reach solutions to what are often very difficult questions.

I am delighted that since our last ministerial meeting in Port-of-Spain, developments with CARICOM have come forward very significantly and that I've already acknowledged the Caribbean Congress of Labour and the Caribbean Employer's Confederation, so that these two organizations can be recognized within CARICOM processes as representatives of their constituents.

I think that if we are able to consolidate social dialogue at the regional level, we will have made a great contribution to labour policymaking in your region and added a social dimension to CARICOM processes, which can only rebound to the advantage of your region. I have said that we need capable organizations and I'm delighted that the ILO has been able to mobilize funding from the European Union to build the capacities both of the Employers' Confederation and the Labour Congress. This is part of the story and I'm encouraging it.

But Prime Minister, we all know that we want social dialogue to have content. We do not want to build super structures which are purely formalistic. It is therefore vitally important that social dialogue is built from the national level, that each of your countries engages in serious, sincere and firmly based social dialogue processes. How appropriate then, and how encouraging to learn as I have on my arrival that I understand the passage into legislation of the National Tripartite Council here in the Bahamas is imminent. Congratulations, bravo to the Bahamas!

Ladies and gentlemen, there is much else to say but I should not say it because others need to take the floor. I just want to make one appeal to you: we have our annual Conference in Geneva in June and we always felt that we would find a very numerous presence of the Caribbean member States at our Conference. We know that this demands on your time and your resources. The good news is that our conference this year has been shortened to just two weeks, I say just two weeks. We hope that makes it easier for you to come.

We will be discussing very important issues. We will be discussing the formalization of the informal economy. We will be discussing the promotion of small and medium size of enterprises where two thirds of the Caribbean jobs come from. We will also be convening – at least this is my intention to do so – a Summit Day, a World of Work Summit Day during our Conference when we will discuss the issue, so much in our agenda, of climate change in the world of work.

I have invited President Hollande of France to attend that Summit, I hope he will come, and of course he will be hosting the major climate change Conference in Paris in December. Please come. Our Conference is not our conference without the Caribbean presence. Thank you for having us here, thank you Prime Minister for your presence, good luck with your work this week.