



ILO CARIBBEAN OFFICE

**Report of the  
Caribbean Labour Ministers Meeting**

**Port of Spain  
Trinidad and Tobago  
18-19 April, 1996**



## REPORT

The Meeting of the Caribbean Labour Ministers which was convened by the ILO Caribbean Office in collaboration with CARICOM Secretariat, was held at the Trinidad Holiday Inn, Port of Spain, on 18-19 April, 1996.

2. The ILO Caribbean Office took the initiative to organise the meeting in response to suggestions made at the thirteenth session of the Standing Committee of Ministers of CARICOM responsible for Labour, held in Nassau (Bahamas) in April 1995, that Ministers of Labour should have the opportunity to meet more frequently than every two years, in view of the rapid pace of the changes taking place in the region. The meeting was intended to provide ministers with a forum for exchanging information and views on critical, current labour and social issues confronting the region and to coordinate their positions at the International Labour Conference, in order to enhance the effectiveness of Labour Ministries in dealing with those issues.

### Representation:

3. A list of official representatives, comprising Ministers and Officials from ILO member states, and representatives of employers, unions, CARICOM Secretariat, and the ILO Caribbean Office, along with national staff, who through the Ministry of Labour and Cooperatives, Trinidad and Tobago, provided support for the meeting, is attached as Annex I to this report.

### Opening Ceremony:

4. The Opening Ceremony was chaired by Mr. S.J. Goolarran, Senior Specialist on Industrial Relations and Labour Administration, ILO Caribbean Multidisciplinary Advisory Team, who also delivered the vote of thanks.

5. The Honourable Harry Partap, Minister of Labour and Cooperatives, Trinidad and Tobago, extended a warm welcome to Ministers, Official Representatives, Guests and all present at the Opening Ceremony.

6. Minister Partap noted that the meeting was taking place at a time of significant urgency for meaningful Caribbean cooperation and social partnership consensus; and he welcomed the presence of representatives of the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL), Caribbean Employers' Confederation (CEC), National Trade Union Center (NATUC) of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Employers' Consultative Association (ECA) of Trinidad and Tobago. He remarked that there was an urgent need to re-examine Caribbean labour relations policies and practices, and suggested a paradigm shift that would have as its key concern, labour-management cooperation and conflict-free relationships founded on human dignity and empowerment of the worker.

7. Mrs. Hong-Trang Perret-Nguyen, Director, ILO Caribbean Office and Caribbean Multidisciplinary Advisory Team, in her introductory remarks, delivered cordial greetings on behalf of the Director-General of the International Labour Organisation, Mr. Michel Hansenne, and extended a special welcome to the representatives of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the newest member of the ILO in the region, having been admitted to membership in June 1995.

8. She observed that the current and rapid changes in the global economy including the move towards market economies, the formation of regional trading and economic groupings were having a far reaching impact on the world of work and consequently the role of the social actors.

9. The ILO Director referred to the following main functions entrusted to the Ministries of Labour in the Caribbean, and those were assuming new dimensions and new challenges in today's world:-

- maintaining industrial peace by acting as advisers, conciliators or mediators to the social partners;
- protecting working people by enforcing labour legislation; and
- facilitating access to the labour market.

10. Mrs. Perret-Nguyen welcomed the progress which is being made in the region toward tripartite dialogue on economic, social and labour issues and more cooperative attitudes in labour-management relations, in order to promote social stability, productivity and economic growth.

11. Mr. Rudolph Collins, Assistant Secretary General, CARICOM, in his remarks welcomed Suriname as the newest member of CARICOM and spoke of the compelling need to deepen the process of placing people at the centre of any programme for the social and economic transformation of society in line with the direction emanating from the World Summit on Social Development held in Denmark in 1995.

12. Mr. Collins also spoke of the need for an improved labour administration system which had the capacity to be a catalyst for social progress and human development, and its vital role in the maintenance of economic and social stability and the equitable conduct of labour relations. He adverted further to some recent developments including the CARICOM Agreement on Social Security, entered into by several member states of CARICOM, and the impending legislation for the free movement within the region of

university graduates. He then issued a call for actions, which go beyond the traditional preserves of labour, to be taken by the institutions of labour, and for such institutions to enter new areas of activity as an integrated part of the process for the development of people and the protection of their welfare.

13. **Mr. Lloyd Goodleigh, President, Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL)**, stated that it was appropriate to meet under the common umbrella of the ILO and CARICOM since the challenges the region faced and must overcome, emanate from the region, the hemisphere, and the international environment. He noted that in terms of world labour markets, the ILO is the only international agency devoted to guiding the social partners on the issues; and that CCL was encouraged that the "rest of the United Nations", the **World Bank**, and the **IMF** had finally come around to many of the positions held by the ILO. The CCL, he affirmed, would argue that international trade could not be integrated without the establishment of a framework for the protection of workers, and called on the social partners to ensure that in the pursuit of hemispheric integration, the basic standards in the workplace were not compromised.

14. **Mr. Francis Emmanuel, President, Caribbean Employers' Confederation (CEC)**, in his remarks, stated that the CEC had been calling for the free movement of labour throughout the region and noted some progress in the free movement of professionals within the Community. He welcomed the move towards developing a single stock market within the OECS sub-group, even in the context of a slow pace towards the CARICOM single market. He felt that the region's social partners should be able to determine, measure, and understand the concept of productivity with the view to improving the competitiveness of the regional economies.

15. **The Honourable Basdeo Panday, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago** delivered the feature address. He joined

others in extending welcome to Labour Ministers, and Representatives from the region, and commended the ILO for its initiative and foresight in convening the first ever Meeting of Labour Ministers in Trinidad and Tobago.

16. The Prime Minister stated that this historic meeting signalled that Labour Ministers in the region were ready to enter into a higher level of cooperation to deal with matters of mutual concern, and that this was a fitting occasion for them to reaffirm their commitment to pursue and implement solutions to labour problems. He referred to poverty and unemployment as the two major problems confronting the region.

17. The Prime Minister stressed that the key to survival and development lay in focussing the region's collective energy in transforming people into people of the future: people who were sufficiently creative and adaptable to face the challenges of the work place in the twenty-first century.

18. The Prime Minister felt that no Ministry was better placed than a Ministry of Labour to fulfill its country's mandate regarding human resource development, and to act upon a Government's human resource policy. Ministries of Labour had a responsibility to influence the formulation of policies and strategies for human resource development, employment generation, and poverty alleviation.

19. The Prime Minister stated that opportunities for tripartite consultations had been best facilitated through Ministries of Labour which existed to ensure that the scales of social justice in a country were well balanced and that the social partners worked harmoniously towards achieving a better quality of life for all. In that context he referred to his Government's efforts to deepen and widen the tripartite process in Trinidad and Tobago.

20. The Prime Minister commended Ministers of Labour, the ILO, and CARICOM Secretariat for their work designed to improve the performance of the labour administration systems in the region and strengthen regional cooperation. He made particular reference to the development of model labour legislation, the CARICOM Declaration of Labour and Industrial Relations Principles, the Cost Sharing arrangement to support the region's candidate to the Governing Body of the ILO, and regional collaboration by the region's women in preparation for and during the Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing in 1995.

21. After observing that the greatest challenges facing the region and Labour Ministers were the creation of sustainable employment opportunities, the need for meaningful reduction of unemployment, and the challenge posed by jobless growth, the Prime Minister concluded by calling on Ministers of Labour to re-affirm their commitment to the mandate to improve the quality of life of the people of the region.

22. Following the Opening Ceremony, Ministers of Labour, and Heads of Delegations from overseas were introduced to the Prime Minister by Mrs. Hong-Trang Perret-Nguyen, Director of the ILO Caribbean Office, at an informal greeting session.

#### **BUSINESS SESSIONS**

##### **Election of Officers:**

23. The Honourable Orville A.T. Turnquest, Minister of State with responsibility for Labour and Public Service, the Bahamas, and current Chairman of CARICOM Standing Committee of Ministers with responsibility for Labour was invited to chair the meeting. The Honourable Harry Partap, Minister of Labour and Cooperatives, Trinidad and Tobago, was invited to serve as Vice-Chairman.



**Adoption of the Agenda:**

24. The following agenda, previously circulated in draft was adopted:

- Item One:** Labour/Management Relations in the Caribbean:  
A Caribbean Congress of Labour Perspective
- Item Two:** Labour/Management Relations in the Caribbean:  
A Caribbean Employers Confederation  
Perspective
- Item Three:** Social Dialogue and Mechanism for Tripartite  
Consultation  
(a) The Operations of Tripartite Committees  
(b) National Prices and Incomes Policies
- Item Four:** The Role of Labour in a Multipartite Process  
for Sustainable Economic and Social  
Development
- Item Five:** Labour Education and its contribution to  
National Development
- Item Six:** Socio-economic impact of Export Processing  
Zones: The Role of the Ministry of Labour
- Item Seven:** ILO's Programmes for 1996-97 in the Caribbean
- Item Eight:** Training and Development Interventions for  
Labour Administrators
- Item Nine:** The Eighty-Third International Labour  
Conference - Review of Agenda Items and  
related matters

Item Ten: Basic Human Rights Conventions: Status and response of the Caribbean members of the ILO

Item Eleven: Any Other Business

Item Twelve: Closing Remarks

**ITEM ONE: LABOUR/MANAGEMENT RELATIONS IN THE CARIBBEAN  
- A CARIBBEAN CONGRESS OF LABOUR PERSPECTIVE**

25. Mr. Lloyd Goodleigh, President of the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL) presented a discussion paper focussing on the changing regional and international socio-economic circumstances in which Caribbean industrial relations systems operated. The traditional theoretical framework of industrial relations had been changing, and policy-makers in Caribbean countries were challenged to ensure that industrial relations systems be modernized, in order to respond to changes in the environment.

26. He observed that still largely prevailing in the Caribbean were the traditional industrial relations systems which focussed on dispute resolutions, and were pre-occupied with collective bargaining, adversarial in orientation and reliant on unilateral actions, and leisurely in approach, with no sense of urgency to deal with the issues at hand. They did not encourage innovations in work organisation, acknowledge primacy of ongoing training, or promote new methods of compensation. They encouraged individualism. However, in 1996 the region was confronted with changed circumstances, and an emerging paradigm which required a rejection of the price auction model and the acceptance of new approaches to the labour market, a labour market, which in keeping with ILO definition, related to efficiency, equity, growth and social justice. The need to develop an institutional framework for a globalized, integrated and liberalized economy,

with the inclusion of social clauses in trade agreements, was a matter of urgency for policy-makers.

27. Mr. Goodleigh argued that in the context of an open market, and regional and hemispheric integration, policy-makers needed to hammer out common positions on labour in the region which would recognize the imperatives of the new paradigm, and reconceptualize industrial relations to cope with regional and global competition. They should aim at stabilizing industrial relations systems which were international in focus, and centered around protection of workers' rights, with collective bargaining not confined to wages and working conditions, but dealing with wider societal issues and speedy dispute resolutions mechanisms. These systems should strengthen cooperation between social partners, promote innovation in work organisation, on-going education and training, team approach, and innovation in compensation. The region should be committed to a social clause in international trade agreement, based on ILO conventions on freedom of association, collective bargaining, forced labour, discrimination, child labour and occupational safety and health. In addition, standards on maternity protection, holiday with pay, weekly rest, equal remuneration, termination of employment and minimum wage which are already commonly applied in the Caribbean, should be regionalised, as the region moves into wider groupings like the ACS. Mr. Goodleigh concluded by proposing the establishment of a **CARICOM Tripartite Working Group** to look at economic integration in the hemisphere and its impact on Caribbean Labour markets.

28. During the discussion, it was argued that a transformation of labour and industrial relations meant that the social partners must act together. Education was identified as a key factor in change, and the establishment of a **Chair in Industrial Relations** at the University of the West Indies, was suggested. It was pointed out that earlier attempts at establishing an industrial

relations chair at the University of the West Indies had not succeeded for want of funding; however, it was felt that with the support of the social partners, another attempt should be made.

29. The view was also expressed that the region's university system should extend its range of higher level and specialized programmes to incorporate the discipline of industrial relations, and that the underutilised facilities of the labour colleges in the region should be considered for better utilization in that regard.

30. The CARICOM Secretariat was requested to investigate the possibilities for the establishment of an industrial relations Chair at the University of the West Indies, and other options for industrial relations studies taking into account the infrastructures of the university system, and the labour colleges of the region.

31. It was recommended that a proposal be made to the Heads of Government for them to consider the idea of funding for the Chair. The Standing Committee of Ministers Responsible for Education was recognized as another body to give consideration to the proposal for the Chair. Reference was also made to the Consortium Graduate School at the University of the West Indies which might be able to provide some guidance. Other funding sources, such as the IDB, could also be explored.

32. The Chairman underscored the importance of establishing firmly the long-term sustainability of any option for a Chair in Industrial Relations, and that the emphasis should be on tripartite participation.

33. In relation to the proposal for a CARICOM Tripartite Working Group, a Committee comprising of Mr. Goodleigh (CCL), Mr. Freeland (Antigua/Barbuda) representing Labour Ministers, and

Mr. Emmanuel (CEC), was appointed to begin consideration of the economic integration of the hemisphere and its impact on Caribbean labour market. Informal meetings could be held in Geneva in June, 1996, during the International Labour Conference. CARICOM was asked to present some relevant documentation to facilitate discussions on the issue, and to present the item for the next Meeting of the Standing Committee of Ministers responsible for Labour.

**ITEM TWO: LABOUR/MANAGEMENT RELATIONS IN THE CARIBBEAN: A  
CARIBBEAN EMPLOYERS CONFEDERATION PERSPECTIVE**

34. Mr. Francis Emmanuel, President of the CEC, presented a paper in which he addressed free movement of labour, globalization and its implications, productivity and competition. He argued that CARICOM Governments, had not addressed the issue of free movement of skills in its entirety and hoped that the opportunity for other skilled categories to move freely would soon become a reality.

35. Mr. Emmanuel linked labour-management problems directly to foreign exchange earnings, high import bills, balance of payment problems, unemployment and underemployment. He stated that government, business, and labour must respond quickly to changes in the global economy and regional integration.

36. Productivity improvement was key to survival, in the view of the CEC President, in order to become more competitive in the international market. The world economy was described as competitive with many megablocks and countries in the region needing to be creative and innovative to make better use of human resources, and to conduct serious analysis for decision making.

37. In the discussion, it was conceded that although free

movement of labour was agreed upon, it was limited. However, CARICOM nationals would not be prevented from working in other member states through the work permit arrangement. It was also suggested that artisans should be included in the categories allowed free movement for employment purposes.

38. There was some concern that the whole issue of productivity, and, in particular, productivity measurement, needed to be more effectively dealt with in the Caribbean. It was hoped that the ILO might be able to provide some assistance in that regard, since the ILO had been providing assistance to the National Productivity Board of Barbados, and was open to requests concerning productivity matters.

39. It was stated that some small industries were suffering as a result of their inability to compete in the open market. Formerly, they enjoyed a high degree of protection but with modern industrialization and the liberalized economies, those industries which were not being retooled would eventually be phased out since they would be uncompetitive. That would have consequences for employment and the economies of the region.

40. It was re-iterated that tripartism, as advocated by ILO, was an extremely important approach in labour-management relations. The representation of labour representatives on state boards was mentioned as an example of tripartism.

**ITEM THREE: SOCIAL DIALOGUE AND MECHANISM FOR TRIPARTITE CONSULTATION:**

- (a) The Operations of Tripartite Committees
- (b) National Prices and Incomes Policies

41. Mr. S.J. Goolsarran of the Caribbean MDT introduced this

item on which he stated that:

- Social dialogue through tripartite consultation had been the strength of the ILO since its founding in 1919. ILO's commitment to the principle of social dialogue and tripartite consultation was evident in all major statements emanating from its international and regional conferences, its Governing Body and from the Director General and staff.
- The ILO encouraged, as a matter of high priority, social dialogue and tripartism within member states on social and economic matters impacting on labour. It actively promoted consultation and cooperation at the industrial and national levels among public authorities and workers' and employers' organisations in order to promote mutual understanding, good relations, and to find agreed solutions to problems.
- The Director General of the ILO in his report titled "Defending Values, Promoting Change: Social Justice in a Global Economy: An ILO Agenda" to the International Labour Conference in 1994, addressed the subject of Tripartism. It is worth underscoring some of the pertinent statements made by the Director General on Tripartism:
  - (a) The founding fathers of the ILO had decided that the ILO should be a tripartite organisation because they believed that the promotion of social justice in the field of labour could be achieved only if the social partners themselves were involved in the search for appropriate solutions through dialogue and negotiations;

- (b) Tripartism was a precious institution, but it was only as valuable as it was effective. Tripartism had its own virtues and a truly democratic society could not function without numerous active intermediary groups;
- (c) Tripartism had a "burning commitment" to succeed. That was already true at the level of each state because no institutional machinery for negotiations and dialogue could survive indefinitely in the face of a persistent stalemate or a permanent conflict;
- (d) Social dialogue, collective bargaining, compromise, must all be encouraged, everywhere and at every opportunity. The state often played a decisive role in the success of social dialogue and collective bargaining;
- (e) The state pillar of tripartism must be strong and effective.

42. Mr. Goolsarran pointed out that the importance of tripartite consultation would again be addressed by the International Labour Conference in June 1996 under the heading **Tripartite Consultation at the national level on economic and social policy** for a general discussion. We had included in delegates' folders, an extract from an ILO publication: **Towards Social Dialogue: Tripartite Cooperation in National Economic and Social Policy Making**, as background material for discussion on the two-part agenda item on - **Social Dialogue and Mechanism for Tripartite Consultation** by drawing from the experiences of some member states, i.e. Suriname and Guyana - on their experience on the operations of tripartite committees; and Barbados' experience on **Prices and Incomes**.



43. The Chairman then invited national presentations from Guyana, Suriname and Barbados, to be followed by discussions.

(a) The Operations of Tripartite Committees - Guyana

44. A presentation was made by Mr. Mohammed Akeel, Chief Labour Officer, Guyana on the Operation of Tripartite Committees in his country. Guyana had ratified ILO Convention No. 144 but in its earlier experience, tripartite consultations were done on an ad hoc basis. Since January, 1993, a national tripartite committee was set up under the Chairmanship of the Minister of Labour, along with six sub-committees, two each chaired by the three parties. The Chairpersons were drawn from the main Committee. Generally the committees functioned well and decisions were made on the basis of consensus.

(b) The Operation of Tripartite Committees - Suriname

45. The Honourable Jack Kross, Minister of Labour, Suriname made a presentation tracing the development and challenges of the Operation of Tripartite Committees in his country. Suriname had also ratified ILO Convention No. 144 after prolonged consultations between the workers' and employers' organisations. Given the recent turbulent and difficult times in Suriname, the social partners were cautious and moved gradually in their dialogues aimed at consensus building. The National Tripartite Body was therefore faced with the challenge to quicken the process of confidence and consensus building in these changing times. Since the Tripartite Body was expected to be apolitical in its approach at its regular meetings, there was some hope for more consensus. He concluded that Suriname would continue to promote social dialogue which could enhance social stability, and that the tripartite mechanism was the best option.

(c) National Prices and Incomes Policy - Barbados

46. The Honourable Rudolph Greenidge, Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations, Public Works, Community Development and Sport, Barbados discussed his country's experience with the establishment of a Prices and Incomes Protocol. He stated that within the region, prior to the establishment of the Protocol in Barbados, countries had been faced with a period of recession and many governments had been cash strapped. There were high levels of unemployment, and devaluation of currency was threatened everywhere. These problems which everyone sought to avoid were looming over Barbados, and the Government had to come up with some innovative answers for economic recovery and social stability. The overriding concern was maintaining the value of the Barbados dollar in relation to the United States dollar. The Social Partners met, and agreed that a Protocol on Prices and Incomes was the best option in Barbados.

47. The Protocol:

- Imposed a freeze on public and private sector wages for two years. Price increases on goods would be limited to goods that were recently imported and that would not be applied simply to make more profits.
- Established the National Productivity Board. In terms of productivity measurement there was still some work to be done.
- Ensured that costs were not unduly increased to the detriment of the consumer.
- Established a sense of job security for the worker although retrenchment remained a threat.

- Ensured that Government was given a somewhat stable environment in which to operate.
- Ensured that an employer only sent home workers when there were compelling circumstances, in order to save the business.
- Influenced workers' and their unions to act with understanding and restraint.

48. In the discussion, it was noted that each country was faced with different problems, circumstances, and traditions; and that each responded differently in finding the best solution for its situation. It was observed that other countries with a history of economic and monetary instability and less social cohesion might find it difficult to agree on a tripartite consensus. The Protocol was working in Barbados, but may or may not work elsewhere. However, it was an excellent model to pursue in various forms.

**ITEM FOUR:           ROLE OF LABOUR IN A MULTIPARTITE PROCESS FOR  
                          SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

49. Mr. Rudolph Collins, Assistant Secretary General, Human Resource Development, CARICOM, in his presentation, argued that the Caribbean countries needed to be sensitized as to the new realities of the global environment. A clear understanding of the need for change, based on a shared appreciation of the economic and social crisis in our societies, must be established. That crisis stemmed, for instance, from technological advances in the international arena. Rapid increases in production resulted in low cost production in other countries, and that had serious consequences for Caribbean economies, which had traditionally had protected markets.

50. The traditional economic paradigms in which the Caribbean previously operated, needed to be reassessed. Developing countries needed new economic strategies to adapt to the changing times - strategies which were people oriented. Education for instance was based largely on the development of the basic skills. That process had not been revised in any significant way to take account of the global and regional developments in the last two decades. There were also underutilised resources among which numbered youth, women and persons with disabilities. Policies were needed to ensure that they too became part of the development process. Since people were considered to be the primary resource, labour had a vested interest.

51. Mr. Collins disclosed that, at its last meeting, the Heads of Government of CARICOM had agreed to the convening of a Regional Economic and Social Conference later in 1996. In that forum, non-governmental organisations would be included to participate in the deliberations of the conference as they ought to be included in the development process. Actions on the commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development was also required.

52. Mr. Collins concluded by stating that what was being advocated as a response to the challenges of our times was an intersectoral and inter-disciplinary approach to development planning, which involved the principal stakeholders and the social sectors in an integrated effort at creating the conditions for sustainable development. All the interest groups were enjoined to recognise that common thread. Labour needed to take an unapologetic initiative in that regard, for in the development of people and the protection of their lifestyles and livelihood, lay the surest way for the workforce to enjoy the benefits which the institutions of labour were committed to enhance and protect.

53. In the discussions, there was some concern that NGOs were too numerous, and not necessarily representative and that they bogged down the system. It was felt, however, that although some organisations and governments had some negative experiences and reservations, the contributions and inputs of the NGO's should not be ignored and should be encouraged, since the networking in which NGO's were involved allowed them access to information and services that the governments did not have, and in several instances their contributions had been quite constructive.

54. The need for legislation, recognizing the rights and special needs of persons with disability was also mentioned, and it was suggested that information should be shared between the countries to assist them in developing policies on legislation in this regard.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 5: LABOUR EDUCATION AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

55. Mr. George De Peana, Senior Specialist in Workers Activities of the ILO Caribbean MDT presented a discussion paper in which the role of labour education in national development was examined and discussed. Trade union education was seen to be a subset of labour education which focused on improving the level of knowledge of all workers in all fields. Due to lack of adequate support from the other social partners, labour education programmes were mainly carried out by the trade union movement, emphasizing the following:

- improving the knowledge of senior functionaires of trade unions;

- the training of shop stewards to upgrade their representational skills;
- sensitization of members of trade unions to the economic problems at the international, regional and national levels;
- underlining both the rights and responsibilities of workers in such areas as production and productivity and their contribution to the national economy;
- providing trade union functionaries with the "tools" of industrial relations.

56. Labour education programmes were in need of financial and other support from government, employers and workers alike, to enable them to contribute meaningfully towards national development, and should be seen in the same context of general education at the tertiary level.

57. It was acknowledged that some countries in the region, in particular, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname and Guyana provided substantial government subventions to labour education.

58. ILO Convention 140 on Paid Educational Leave had been ratified only by Guyana in this region. It was pointed out, however, that while collective bargaining agreements provided for attendance to seminars and related activities, attendance was too dependent on the employer's discretion.

59. Following the presentation and during the ensuing discussions, the ILO was commended for its positive contribution towards labour education in the region, and for its efforts in collaboration with workers' organisations, and with Governments and Employers' organisations.

60. It was suggested that the existing education system should be reformed to take account of education for labour, and avoid the creation of a parallel education system, in the circumstances of scarce resources. The need for curriculum reform, in particular, was emphasized.

61. With respect to accessing funds for labour education, it was recommended that combined efforts from regional bodies or groupings, would have a better prospect than isolated requests for assistance to multilateral agencies.

62. In view of Mr. DePeana's impending retirement after some twenty years of service with the ILO, the Meeting paid tribute to his outstanding service to the labour movement in the region.

**AGENDA ITEM 6: THE SOCIO ECONOMIC IMPACT OF EXPORT PROCESSING  
ZONES: THE ROLE OF THE MINISTRY/DEPARTMENT OF  
LABOUR**

63. Mr. S.J. Goolsarran of the ILO Caribbean/MDT introduced this item in which he stated that:

- The Growth of Export Processing Zones (EPZs) in developing countries was one of the structural changes which took place in the world economy. Employment in those zones grew from some 50,000 in the 70's to some 4 million world wide currently.
- The operations of EPZs, no doubt had contributed to the overall development of many countries. Those operations however needed to be monitored closely, in the absence of trade union representation, and the absence of a coordinated and integrated approach by key government ministries/agencies which often resulted in

difficulties. Ministries of Labour were often not involved or were unaware when other arms of government entered into contractual arrangements for the establishment and operations of EPZs. Sometimes arrangements allowed conditions which were contrary to national labour legislation and resulted in the de facto denial of trade union rights.

- During the 1996-1997 biennium, the ILO would be undertaking a major global review and evaluation of EPZs. Discussion and information from this region could be an important contribution to the ILO study with the following long-term goal as set out in its Work Programme:

"the creation of an industrial relations climate conducive to attracting and expanding investment in EPZs; and the operation of these zones in such a way that they contribute to the development of an environment in which foreign and domestic investments yield positive results for all those involved directly and indirectly by the activities of EPZs. This requires respect for basic international labour standards in EPZs and the establishment of tripartite national machinery to ensure social dialogue concerning their operation."

64. The Chairman then invited the following national presentations followed by discussions:



(a) The Belizean Experience with Export Processing Zones (EPZ) and Commercial Free Zones (CFZ)

65. The Honourable Elito Urbina, Minister of Home Affairs and Labour of the Government of Belize emphasized that Export Processing Zones were a relatively new phenomena in Belize, dating back to 1990 when the Export Processing Zone Act No. 8 was passed.

66. There were six (6) EPZs in Belize operating under the supervision of an Export Processing Zone Committee (EPZC), and employing approximately 560 persons. Details concerning the composition, operations and functioning of the Committee, including assessing fines for violations and recommending the revocation of work permits, were outlined. In addition, any new business wishing to operate within the EPZ must seek the approval of the EPAC.

67. The role of the Customs Department was also discussed, in particular with respect to inspection of imports and exports. The Customs Department maintained and operated an on-site office at each EPZ to carry out its responsibilities.

68. The roles of the Ministry of Labour and the Immigration Department were linked, in particular with respect to the issuing of work permits, which were required for all foreign nationals working on a regular basis for an EPZ business. EPZ businesses were subject to payroll and other taxes, and the provisions of the Labour Act also applied to EPZ developers and EPZ businesses.

69. The differences between Commercial Free Zones (CFZs) and EPZs were highlighted, the former being a product of private sector initiative and government support, which came into existence through Act No. 27 of 1994 dated 8 February, 1995. A commercial free zone was a geographical area designated by the

Commercial Free Zone Management Agency where investors might establish business and conduct trade and commerce free of the national customs regime. Unlike EPZs, the Commercial Free Zones can be involved in several types of activities ranging from tourism to financial services and manufacturing. Similarly, articles produced in the Zones may be sold both locally and abroad. CFZs employed approximately 160 persons.

70. Both the EPZs and the CFZs were viewed as means of minimizing the unemployment situation in Belize. However, the situation needed to be monitored closely. The Minister concluded by stating that Belize was still looking for guidance and to draw from the experiences from countries which had more experience in that area.

(b) Some Issues in Jamaica's Experience with Export Processing Zones

71. The Honourable Portia Simpson, Minister of Labour and Welfare of Jamaica indicated that EPZs began operating in Jamaica in the late 1970s, starting in Kingston and later Montego Bay with the prospect of expansion into other areas.

72. The advantages for EPZ operations were highlighted, including the relaxing of licensing controls and duty free concessions on capital and consumer goods, raw materials, and components in the manufacturing process.

73. The benefits of EPZs to the Jamaican economy were also highlighted. EPZs have made an overall positive contribution to the development of the Jamaican economy, through foreign exchange earnings, expansion in trade, enhanced competitiveness, creation of new employment with new forms of labour discipline, and reduced unemployment, and by extension assisted in poverty alleviation. Free zones had helped to change the macro-economic

culture, provided market access, and expanded the network of joint ventures.

74. Problems in the free zone operations included the dependence on low-wage, unskilled female labour, few opportunity for managerial skills development, rural migration to the cities, inadequate transfer of modern technology and links with local manufacturers, and the pressure for super-concessions backed up by the threat to "pull out".

75. The Ministry of Labour was expected to assist in creating a facilitating environment for investors, and to encourage good corporate citizenship among the investors. Its particular tasks were to monitor and inspect safety and health standards in the free zones, to ensure the protection of the environment, and also the protection of workers by seeking to improve the conditions under which they worked.

76. Minister Simpson concluded by emphasizing the need for planners to find ways of ensuring reinvestment of some of the proceeds from these free zones, and the need for a strategy to involve more local companies in the supply of raw materials, services and other inputs used by free zone companies. It was argued that investors in the EPZs must be challenged to exercise greater social responsibility by providing technical assistance to local companies, and by their participation in community programmes.

(c) Trinidad and Tobago's Experience in its Operation of Export Processing Zones

77. The Honourable Harry Partap, Minister of Labour and Cooperatives of Trinidad and Tobago emphasized that Trinidad and Tobago's experience with EPZs was limited, and still in the initial stages of growth and development. A Trinidad and Tobago

Free Zones Act No. 19 was enacted in 1988 and amended, after careful consideration, in 1995. There were twenty-four (24) EPZ enterprises in Trinidad and Tobago ranging from manufacturing to services, and providing employment for approximately 670 persons.

78. The Minister stated that the Free Trade Zones in Trinidad and Tobago were governed by all the laws of the country. The EPZ programme was considered successful, in particular since it had been able to attract enterprises that required a qualified, highly skilled, and productive work force.

79. Free Zone enterprises were exempt from land and building taxes, fees for work permits, corporate and capital gains taxes. In addition, the Free Zones programme also provided opportunities for local investors to set up manufacturing and international trading export operations in Free Zones, and to invest in the development and management of Free Zones.

80. The benefits of EPZs ranged from taxes on salaries and on profits, to exposure to new technologies and systems.

81. The Ministry of Labour had been very vigilant in monitoring the development of EPZs, and intended to strengthen its relationship with the Free Zone Companies.

82. The Ministry was committed to ensuring adherence to labour laws. In particular, the Ministry ensured that all businesses adhered to the provisions of the Minimum Wages Act and relevant Minimum Wages Orders, in addition to investigating industrial accidents and ensuring that employees worked in a healthy and safe environment.

83. Minister Partap concluded by indicating that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago proposed to encourage all relevant organisations to conduct research in the area of costs and

benefits associated with EPZs as that could inform future policy and planning and redound to the benefit of the region.

84. During the discussions, the meeting was informed that the ILO Workers' Activities Branch was currently engaged in a study aimed at developing an international guide on EPZs before the end of 1996. Specifically, the guide would provide information in the following areas: industries, laws, scope of coverage of labour laws, collective bargaining and freedom of association. In addition, a map indicating EPZ locations worldwide would be included in the guide.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 7: ILO'S PROGRAMME IN THE CARIBBEAN 1996-1997**

85. Mrs. H.T Perret-Nguyen, Director of the ILO Caribbean Office/Multidisciplinary Team stated that the ILO's programme in the Caribbean for the period 1996-97 would be executed in an environment of financial uncertainty on account of prolonged delays in the payment of contributions by a number of member states. As a result, the ILO started the 1996-97 biennium with an expenditure budget reduced by 4.7 percent. In addition, a temporary measure of establishing preliminary allocations for 1996-97 at a level equivalent to 80 percent of the reduced budget, was enforced. Those reductions would mean that the ILO would have to supplement its own resources by some form of cost-sharing with the beneficiaries of its activities, or by accessing donor funding.

86. Within the framework of the priorities identified for the ILO as a whole, and for the Americas region, the following priority objectives were established for the current biennium:

- Promoting Employment Creation and Poverty Eradication;

- Improving Social Protection and the Working Environment;
- Promoting Sound Systems of Industrial Relations;
- Promoting Respect for International Labour Standards and Human Rights;
- Strengthening the Technical and Organisational Capacity of Governments, Employers' and Workers' Organisations and other Relevant Institutions.

87. It was mentioned that the activities contained in the Work Programme were a mix of sub-regional and national activities, and ranged from technical advisory services and policy advice, to seminars and workshops. The programme was somewhat flexible, due, on one hand to financial uncertainty, and on the other, in order to accommodate new requests and needs of the constituents.

88. The major areas of emphasis of the Programme, were highlighted under each priority objective, in particular:

- Stimulating national dialogue on the dimensions of the employment problem and its impact on specific socio-economic groups; and on the best mechanisms to incorporate employment concerns in the macro-economic framework.
- Exploring the employment and income-generating potential of non-traditional areas, such as culture, sports, and the environment;
- Advising on the reform of social protection systems, in light of the consequences of structural adjustment programmes;

- Revising occupational safety and health policies and legislation;
- Setting up tripartite advisory bodies and upgrading the conciliation skills and techniques of labour officials;
- Continuing national workshops on international labour standards;
- Promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women through gender sensitization courses;
- Improving the capacity of the labour administration system for more effective delivery of services; and
- Strengthening the organisational and technical capabilities of trade unions and employers organisations.

89. Following the presentation, the ILO was commended for its outstanding technical work, advisory services and training activities involving the social partners, in spite of the reduced budgetary allocation within which it was operating.

**AGENDA ITEM 8: TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS FOR LABOUR ADMINISTRATORS**

90. Mr. S.J. Goolsarran, Senior Specialist for Industrial Relations and Labour Administration of the ILO Caribbean MDT presented a paper in which the major ILO Conventions dealing with an effective labour administration system were highlighted, together with the tasks to be performed by adequately trained labour administrators. These tasks included the preparation, administration, coordination and review of national labour

policy, the promotion of collective bargaining, the regular inspection of workplaces for compliance with laws and for occupational safety and health purposes. In addition, the conventions were seen as valuable guidelines and sources of authority, not only for the recruitment and selection of suitably qualified staff but for such staff to have access to training.

91. Continuous staff training and development was seen as necessary to ensure the Department of Labour was adequately staffed with suitably qualified and trained personnel. It was pointed out that there was a need for ministries of labour to establish an in-house training capability to provide for systematic, on-going in-service training. It was further indicated, that with the exception of the Labour Ministry in Suriname, no labour ministry in the region had its own specialized focal point for training.

92. It was emphasized that it should be the policy of the labour ministry to ensure that staff already in the system without the higher level academic qualifications were given every opportunity to pursue higher level formal studies at the certificate, diploma or first degree level, as appropriate, whether on a part-time, day release or time off basis. It was therefore imperative for labour ministries to devise and implement the necessary training policy for labour administration staff, and in particular, for senior officials to give full support, and accept responsibility for the development of staff.

93. Specific ILO initiatives aimed at strengthening the competencies and capabilities of labour departments for the effective delivery of labour administration services and for sustained human resource development throughout the region were identified, including a training course in conciliation methods and techniques, to take place in August 1996, and the training of Labour Administration trainers in October/November 1996.



94. The initiatives required on the part of the labour ministries were reiterated, in particular the development and implementation of a training policy, the development of an in-house training capability, and the provision of opportunities for staff to pursue further studies at tertiary institutions to upgrade their academic background.

**AGENDA ITEM 9: THE 83RD INTERNATIONAL LABOUR CONFERENCE**

95. Mrs. H.T Perret-Nguyen, Director of the ILO Caribbean Office/Multidisciplinary Team introduced this item. She provided details on the programme and timeframe of the Conference, including the dates, agenda items, and time limits for speeches, as highlighted in the Memorandum for the 83rd Session of the International Labour Conference to be held in Geneva in June 1996.

96. The second week of the conference was identified as being the most important week, and Caribbean delegations were urged to participate, in particular on the following days:

Monday 10 June:	Governing Body elections
Tuesday 11 June:	Report of the Director-General in plenary and visit of President Jacques Chirac of France.
Wednesday 12 June:	Ministerial meeting on child labour.

97. It was also indicated that during that week an informal meeting for women delegates would be held, in which Suriname would be making a presentation on the ILO Inter-regional project

on "Training and Information Dissemination on Women Workers' Rights".

98. With respect to the elections to the Governing Body, it was disclosed that the following countries from this region had been nominated as titular members for the period 1996-1999: Canada, Chile, Colombia, Panama and Suriname. Alternate members nominated were: Argentina, Cuba, Mexico, and Peru.

99. The Director of the ILO Caribbean Office concluded her presentation by urging that Caribbean delegates should be present for those elections since last minute changes were always possible.

100. During the discussion which followed, Minister Kross of Suriname thanked the countries of the region, in particular Trinidad and Tobago, for its role in ensuring its nomination for a Governing Body seat.

101. Minister Partap of Trinidad and Tobago took the opportunity to express his country's interest in, and offer its candidacy for a seat in the Governing Body for the period 1999-2002. It was suggested that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago should advise the CARICOM meeting of Foreign Ministers to be held May 1996, so that appropriate action could be taken.

102. During the discussion, certain Governments also expressed their commitment to cost share expenses related to the Governing Body seat which Suriname would hold from 1996-1999. It was requested that those commitments be formally communicated to the CARICOM Secretariat.

103. Governments were reminded to keep the ILO Caribbean Office informed about: (a) their intention to field a delegation to the Conference and the composition of their delegations, and;

(b) when writing to the Clerk of the Conference to indicate the date they would wish to speak in the plenary session.

104. Mrs. Hong-Trang Perret-Nguyen, Director of the ILO Caribbean Office and Multidisciplinary Team indicated that she would be present at the Conference and would be happy to offer any assistance to the Caribbean delegations.

**AGENDA ITEM 10:           FUNDAMENTAL INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS  
AND THEIR APPLICATION IN THE CARIBBEAN**

105. Ms. Constance Thomas, Senior Specialist in International Labour Standards of the ILO Caribbean Office MDT presented a paper on this subject in which the fundamental ILO Human Rights Conventions were highlighted. These include: freedom of association and collective bargaining, prohibition of forced and child labour, non-discrimination in employment and promotion of equal opportunity and treatment, and equal remuneration for work of equal value. It was noted that the emphasis on promoting fundamental human rights received a new impetus at the World Summit on Social Development in 1995, which made an appeal to all countries to ratify ILO basic human rights conventions.

106. The application of each of these Human Rights Conventions was discussed. The basic principles in each Convention were highlighted, as well as any violations noted by the Committee of Experts on the application of the Conventions. Reporting problems, comments, and/or individual requests from Member States in the region were also discussed and clarified. Ms. Thomas also indicated which countries were most likely to be called before the Conference Committee on Application of Standards, based on the Report of the Committee of Experts on Application of Conventions and Recommendations.

108. The number of ratifications of ILO Conventions in the Caribbean sub-region was then discussed. In general, ratification was considered relatively low in comparison to Latin America and other regions in the world. However, most of the countries in the region had ratified the majority of the Conventions concerning fundamental human rights. Ratification levels of other important Conventions, such as No. 144 on Tripartism and No. 81 on Labour Inspection were also disclosed, along with ratification prospects.

109. It was further recalled that in 1993, the Standing Committee of Ministers Responsible for Labour identified several important Conventions that still needed to be ratified by CARICOM Member States including Convention No. 147 on Minimum Standards in Merchant Shipping, Convention No. 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities, and Convention No. 137 with respect to Dock Work. In 1995, the Standing Committee of Ministers Responsible for Labour again called for the ratification of these Conventions.

#### **AGENDA ITEM 11: ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

##### **(a) Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labour**

110. The Tenth Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labour was held in Buenos Aires during the period 1-3 October, 1995, under the auspices of the Organisation of American States (OAS). The purpose of the Conference was to promote wide-ranging discussions among Ministers of Labour on labour aspects of economic integration, and to adopt a declaration and action plan on economic integration. The Honourable O.A.T. Turnquest, who attended the Conference, presented a brief report. The Meeting was informed that delegations from the Bahamas, St. Kitts and Nevis, and Suriname participated in the Inter-American Conference

of Ministers of Labour, hosted by the Organisation of American States, and held in Buenos Aires, Argentina in October 1995.

111. A copy of the Declaration of Buenos Aires was circulated, and the following points concerning the outcome of the meeting were highlighted:

- Four Working Groups were established to deal with the following subjects:
  - Economic Integration and its Impact on Employment and Labour Migrations;
  - Social Dialogue and Collective Bargaining;
  - Modernization of the Ministries of Labour and Information on Labour Markets;
  - The Labour Force of the Future: Productive Restructuring and Vocational Training.

112. The Meeting was further informed that the ILO's Regional Office in Lima was following the activities of those Working Groups very closely, and any information that was received from the Working Groups by the ILO Caribbean Office would be circulated to Member States.

(b) Report of the West Indian Commission: Revision of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, and Preparation of a CARICOM Charter of Civil Society

113. Mr. Rudolph Collins, Assistant Secretary-General of the CARICOM presented this item. He stated that having considered the Report of the West Indian Commission, the Conference of Heads of Government had established an Inter-Governmental Task Force, to develop a Charter for Civil Society and prepare the revision of the Treaty of Chaguaramas. In that connection, the views of the Ministers of Labour were sought on two issues, namely:

- (i) "Labour mobility in relation to the treaty revision process, and whether there is a specific need to have treaty-based obligations in this area - while bearing in mind genuine national concerns."
- (ii) Which of the terms "arbitrary" or "unfair" would provide a wider ambit of protection to the worker in case of dismissal of workers by their employers, in the Charter of Civil Society.

114. The consensus was that there was no need to have treaty-based obligations regarding Labour mobility; and that the word "unfair" would provide a wider ambit of protection.

#### CLOSING REMARKS

115. Brief closing remarks were made by the CARICOM Representative, the Director of the ILO Caribbean Office and Multidisciplinary Advisory Team, and the Chairman of the Meeting.

116. The meeting was considered stimulating, positive and useful. There was a general consensus that the ILO should continue to arrange such inter-sessional meetings of Labour Ministers in the future.

117. Special thanks were expressed to the staff of the ILO Caribbean Office, and the Ministry of Labour and Cooperatives, Trinidad and Tobago, for their work and support, and to the Chairman for the smooth and efficient conduct of the meeting.

118. Expressions of appreciation and support for the work of the ILO were received from other Ministers and representatives at the meeting, as well as the usual exchange of courtesies.

119. In response to the call for future meetings, the Director of the ILO Caribbean Office and Multidisciplinary Advisory Team gave a firm commitment on behalf of the ILO to convene intersessional meetings in the future.

120. After expressing appreciation to his colleagues, other representatives, the ILO, and all who contributed to the success of the meeting, the Chairman, the Honourable Orville A.T. Turnquest, declared the meeting closed.





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