

**REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

**MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SMALL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT**

**STATEMENT BY**

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE JENNIFER BAPTISTE-PRIMUS**

**AT THE**

**ILO-UWI SALISES**

**RESEARCH CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF WORK IN THE CARIBBEAN**

**ST. AUGUSTINE**

***DECEMBER 4, 2017***

***8.15 A.M.***

Ms. Claudia Coenjaerts, Director at the ILO Decent Work Team and Office,

Professor Brian Copeland, Campus Principal, University of the West Indies (UWI),

Dr. Hamid Ghany, Director of the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies, UWI,

Mr. Richard Blewitt, United Nations Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative,

Distinguished Panellists,

Distinguished representatives of international organisations,

Distinguished Members of Academia,

Representatives of Employer and Worker Organisations and other Stakeholder Organisations,

Esteemed Colleagues,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It affords me great pleasure to address a few remarks to you this morning on the occasion of your joint Research Consultation on the Future of Work in the Caribbean.

Before treating with the subject matter, permit me to join the Organisers of this Consultation, the ***International Labour Organisation and the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies of the University of the West Indies*** in extending a warm welcome to what I am sure will be a very productive and far-reaching search for knowledge: a journey into a subject of extreme importance not only to us in Trinidad and Tobago but to the wider international community.

Many of you may not know, but the ILO has been and continues to be an integral partner of the Ministry. They have provided invaluable support, guidance and feedback to several priority agenda items we have set out to accomplish as the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development. I can only express my deepest appreciation to the Director of the ILO Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean for allowing me the chance to deliver these opening remarks at such a crucial and timely consultation; one that marks yet another step forward for the Caribbean in the Future of Work Initiative.

Our first step together for this Initiative, would have been at the Caribbean Future of Work Forum, held in February this year in Jamaica and which preceded the Tenth ILO Meeting of Caribbean Ministers of Labour. At that Forum, it was unanimously agreed that it will take the collective effort of the entire region to build our institutional capacity when dealing with the impact of the Future of Work in the Caribbean.

The Future of Work Initiative was addressed by Mr. Guy Ryder, the Director General of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in a 2015 Report. His Report addressed how the ILO is expected to shape its mandate on social justice as it enters the next century. The Initiative takes into account the World of Work, which as we all know is continuously undergoing major processes of change that require the ILO and its member states to deepen their understanding of this transformation. Only through these understandings are we able to effectively meet the existing, new and emerging policy challenges in the World of Work.

The ILO has gone through several eras and incarnations of “Worlds of Work”. Established in 1919, this vital Organisation will celebrate its one hundredth anniversary in 2019. With this in mind, the centennial International Labour Conference will certainly mark a prestigious milestone and in celebration of this milestone, the ILO has decided to place its emphasis on global reflection on the Future of Work in the year 2019.

As a member state of the ILO, we take our own introspection into account and reflect on the impact of the changes taking place in our world of work, specifically within our region. While looking at our future, we must be mindful that our conclusions will be considered by a High Level Global Commission and our policy approach would need to bear this in mind. With this said, we at the Ministry, certainly look forward to the dissemination of the Commission’s independent report at the International Labour Conference in 2019 as this will shape our thrust in the area of the future of work going forward.

In preparing myself to address you this morning, I was reminded of sentiments expressed in another place which I believe encapsulated the deep purpose and intent of your deliberations about to take place today. Here is what the speaker had to say. And I quote: “Studies done by the United Nations point to the fact that more than 470 million jobs must be created by 2030 to provide answers to the effects of the financial crisis and to absorb the growth of the world’s labour force. As such, new skills will need to be taught on a large scale to take advantage of the pace of technological developments, and especially to boost youth employment.

The speaker continued:

“The reality is that we have to be ahead of the times. Our responsibility to empower our people for employment in the new world is not an option. It is mandatory. More and more of our young people must stride out confidently and assuredly into the new dimension of work here in the United States and in the Caribbean. Together we must provide for today and prepare for tomorrow, forecasting and planning in a systemic and objective manner, unwavering and unflinching in our determination to provide the best educational opportunities for all our people under even the most extenuating of circumstances.” End of quote.

Ladies and gentlemen, this very futuristic Statement formed part of the Keynote Address delivered by the Prime Minister the Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley on the occasion of the Inaugural International Education Awards Presentation Ceremony of the Medgar Evers College, City University of New York, held on Thursday, May 5th, 2016.

In visioning this United Nations global development outlook, the Prime Minister was alluding to the future of work from two clear perspectives. In the first instance, Prime Minister Rowley was emphasizing the reality that between now and the year 2030, just a mere 13 years away, over 470 million jobs would have to be found and secondly but even more succinctly he was posing the question: how does one transform the way in which work is performed over the same 13 years to, at worst, keep pace with the bewildering changes in science and technology or, at best, to be ahead of the phenomenon even in the face of the staggering pace of change which had now become perhaps the most intrinsically daunting dilemma of the new world civilization.

It is within this context that this very clinically engineered research consultation eminently hosted by these two influential institutions must indeed be grounded.

Bridging the gap between the worlds of work as is practiced today and what it is envisaged to be tomorrow stands out as one of the most unprecedented dilemmas faced by modern man.

It is for these reasons that the organisers of this consultation, in their absolute wisdom, have been spot on in identifying three strategic objectives which today’s exercise is intended to achieve.

If ever such objectives were urgently demanded to guarantee the Caribbean region a stellar role in shaping the transformation of the world of work over the next 13 years, the time to pursue those noble milestones is now. Now more than ever.

At the end of the day, proper research is the very engine of progress and development for society and it must be **meaningfully** applied to our everyday lives.

It is the reason why in August 2016, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago under the auspices of the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development engaged the multipartite partners in multi-dimensional discussions in a Symposium whose overarching theme was: The Future of Work.

The full day’s deliberations saw multi-sector social partners testing the knowledge, experience and expertise of others in search of answers: answers that would have led to conclusions as to whether, for example, the purpose of work in Trinidad and Tobago was changing or has in fact changed; whether there are gender gaps in the workplace in Trinidad and Tobago. If yes, in what areas do they exist and why, and how do we bring about gender equality in the workplace.

We stretched our minds to ascertain whether employment practices contributed to engendering racial, colour or class discrimination or divide Trinidad and Tobago: If yes, what did we need to address the issue. If no, how do we preserve or improve the status quo. We looked for answers to determine what were the opportunities and challenges for Trinidad and Tobago in responding to the changing world of work; how do we build a future with decent work, how do we engage the Social Partners, build confidence and trust and level the playing field. We sought to fine tune the roles of the Government, Labour, the Private Sector, the Employers, and Civil Society Organisations all in the pursuit of Decent Jobs for all.

Ladies and gentlemen, such was the scope and depth of frank and open discussion which dominated the atmosphere of the Symposium; arguments that helped determine what institutional and legal frameworks and labour codes needed to be either reviewed or introduced in Trinidad and Tobago; laws and codes and policies which respect the rights of the disables and facilitate the ease of employment of the differently-abled. Considerable time was devoted to finding ways and means aimed at breaking down the barriers to borderless employment in the Caribbean Region, treat with the challenges of inexperience, under-qualification and over-qualification in the current and foreseeable marketplace. And not the least, find common ground regarding what should be Trinidad and Tobago’s priorities in constructing a reliable pathway to creating and maintaining full employment and sustainable jobs.

Moreover, at the Forum, there was special recognition of the impact that technological change will undoubtedly have as it consistently transforms the world of work as we know it and can reveal immense potential for both job destruction and job creation. We should not be afraid of technology, many of us fear what it may bring, but I believe that technology should encourage us to prepare ourselves for new forms of work. Technology challenges us to train and retrain the workforce to develop and sustain skill sets so much so that at the end of a course, some of the information learnt may become obsolete within just a year’s time. It allows us to understand and acknowledge that the world is forever changing. In addition, the Forum even considered the role of "soft skills”, more commonly referred to as emotional intelligence, which are required now more than ever to work in a modern world of work.

These are just a sample of a myriad of issues which as a people we came together and pondered upon. And the work continues. The search for the right formula or combination of strategies that will guarantee access to Decent Work, an assurance of industrial peace and undertaking of opportunity for all.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have absolutely no doubt that your deliberations today will act considerably to the momentum which requires continuous attention, if, as a people, we are committed to overcoming the social, economic and indeed cultural and technological issues which confront all our Caribbean Societies.

I wish you well. I wish you success.

And so, as I conclude my remarks to you this morning let me say how much of a pleasure it has been for me to share these sentiments and experiences with you.

I extend every good wish and a productive session to all the participants and facilitators of this research consultation and I look forward to continued engagement and collaboration in our region as we build bridges, overcome barriers and work together to improve the welfare and quality of lives of our people. I have no doubt that when all is said and done, you will leave here this afternoon fully convinced and spiritually fortified that you are on the right track and that the future of work for all is in Trinidad and Tobago and in the wider Caribbean rests in the safety and sanctuary of capable and responsible hands.

As English Writer John Ruskin once said “*The highest reward for a person's toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it.”* Let us become the future of work.

I thank you and may God continue to bless us all.