



**REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

**MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SMALL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT**

**SPEAKING POINTS BY**

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE JENNIFER BAPTISTE-PRIMUS**

**MINISTER OF LABOUR AND SMALL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT**

**AT THE**

**ONE-DAY MEETING ON KEY SELECTED TOPICS**

**FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK IN THE CARIBBEAN**

**INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION**

**PANAMA CITY, OCTOBER 1, 2018**

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

Distinguished Panelists,

Fellow Ministers,

Permanent Secretaries and other officials,

Mr. Wayne Chen, President of the Caribbean Employers' Confederation,

Ms. Jennifer Isaacs-Dotson, President of the Caribbean Congress of Labour,

Dr. Laurette Bristol, Programme Manager, Human Resource Development at the  
CARICOM,

Assembly woman, Marslyn Melville-Jack, Secretary for the Community Development,  
Enterprise Development and Labour at the THA,

Representatives of Employer and Worker Organisations and other Stakeholder  
Organisations,

Esteemed Colleagues,

Members of the Media,

Ladies and gentlemen,

A pleasant Good Day,

I am pleased to join you at this One-Day meeting on key selected topics for the Future  
of Work in the Caribbean. It is therefore with great pleasure that I bring greetings from

the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and to once again reaffirm our commitment to youth development and obtaining the tools for improving employability of youths. Over the years, I have developed a passion to ensure that our youths are provided with work-based training and sustainable employment opportunities and it continues to be an honour to be part of such meaningful dialogue that attempts to address the youth employment challenge in the Caribbean.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago continues to play its part by investing in ways to improve our On-the-Job Training Programme. The On-the-Job Training Programme was integrated as a Division of the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development in June, 2017, but was created sixteen (16) years ago. The Programme is geared towards addressing the challenge of adequately preparing our youth to meet labour market needs and to fit into the ever-changing structure of the modern organization. It was recognised that our youths were exiting the education system without being adequately prepared for the World of Work and that there was a need for a smooth transition that would bridge the gap between classroom learning and experiential learning on the job. New workers needed an opportunity to apply their acquired knowledge in a safe environment that stimulated maximum exposure to the field with minimal threat of disciplinary action or expulsion if the worker did not immediately exhibit full competence upon assuming duty. Since most of the job opportunities available require substantial work experience, this limited the number of opportunities for the youth population now seeking to enter the world of work. The On-the-Job Training Programme seeks to answer the one question asked by every young person graduating from secondary or tertiary education: “where am I expected to get two years’ work experience, if I am not given a chance to be employed?”

It is with this goal in mind that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago sought the participation of private sector, public sector and non-governmental organisations across various industries, who at the same time were expressing the need for labour that is aptly tailored to meet the market's dynamic needs. While these organisations required experienced workers, new workers needed opportunities to acquire the requisite experience. In order for these needs to be met, it was imperative that a solution be implemented to satisfy labour market requirements. The OJT Programme, therefore, facilitates a significant contribution to Trinidad and Tobago's development of its Human Capital through helping to meet labour market needs by producing not just workers but **able** professionals, through the provision of work-based training activities.

The OJT Programme targets nationals between the ages of sixteen to thirty-five, offering them an opportunity to intern at a public or private sector organisation for a maximum of two years in order to increase their employability. The focus of the Programme is to enable participants to acquire professional development as well as practical occupational skills and work experience that will help them to gain a secure foothold in the labour market or even create self-employment opportunities for themselves. This is done through matching the academic and vocational skills of prospective apprentices with labour market needs. Presently, the OJT Programme facilitates internships across a wide spectrum of industries including civil and mechanical engineering, social work, legal, agriculture, education, information technology, accounting, business, health and much more. It is important to note that vocational qualifications are not side-lined by the Programme in favour of academics. Every attempt is made to include persons with Technical and Vocational training

qualifications. Therefore, our trainees are also afforded apprenticeships in areas such as masonry, electronics, welding and plumbing. The OJT Programme strives to be inclusive in all regards, and not just with regards to qualifications.

Another way the OJTP attempts to meet their mandate of decent work for all is by ensuring that the differently-abled in our society are provided with the same work-based training opportunities. Today, we can proudly boast of providing even more employment opportunities for the hearing impaired, visually impaired, wheel-chair restrained and speech impaired. OJT offices are strategically located across the islands to ensure that young persons from even the most remote areas of Trinidad and Tobago have access to registration and placement opportunities. The Programme facilitates trainee placements at five different qualification levels, which include (i) high school or (ii) craft level certification, (iii) advanced proficiency diplomas, (iv) associate's degrees, (v) undergraduate degrees and (vi) master's degrees. Trainees are also paid a stipend consistent with their qualifications.

In addition to the acquisition of work experience through hands-on, work-based training, the OJT Programme goes beyond to ensure not only employability through technical knowledge, but also through the development of professionalism in attitude and work ethic. To facilitate this, trainees attend a mandatory four-day professional development programme before they assume duty at their respective organisations. They are trained in the areas of: Ethics in the Workplace, Money Management, Customer Service, Career Development, Human Sexuality, National Pride, Self-Esteem, Communication Skills and Conflict Management. This training element of the

OJT Programme mobilises the objectives of developing professional and interpersonal skills necessary for workplace success; encouraging positive work attitudes and strategies to enhance employability; and facilitating improved self-respect, self-esteem and confidence. The professional development element of the OJT Programme is critical, since the Programme strives to do more than just *introduce* youth to the world of work. It prepares them to excel in the world of work with a level of professionalism that positions them to not only acquire but also sustain gainful employment.

The Training and Development incentive is further enhanced by the monthly Monitoring and Evaluation exercises conducted by the Placement and Marketing Officers. Each trainee is assigned to a direct supervisor at the organisation who acts as a coach or mentor. The supervisor as well as the trainee, maintains a working relationship with the trainee's Placement and Marketing Officer at the OJT Programme who makes scheduled visits to trainees on a regular basis. These field visits are conducted in order to ensure that a relationship with the trainee and training provider is maintained; that a safe work environment is provided for each trainee; and they are receiving the requisite training. The Trainee Development Officers who facilitate the professional skills development workshop also conduct post-training field visits in order to ensure that trainees are in fact making sound application of all that was instructed and that they are maturing well as professionals. Any feedback provided at this stage is used to further develop training content to meet the specific needs of the trainees.

Some of the main results of the On-the-Job Training Programme are as follows: an active trainee listing of approximately 4500 to 5000 trainees per month; regular offers of permanent or contractual employment to trainees at the institutions they would have previously served at as interns; research work undertaken by trainees have, in the past, been used to further develop programs in the Agricultural, Health and Manufacturing Sectors; and finally, international training opportunities have been offered to trainees whose potential is recognised by the training provider.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to sustained development of the programme and is continuously seeking even more ways to improve the programme. At the moment, we have accepted the generous offer of the ILO to conduct a survey with our past, present and future trainees to determine their specific experiences and expectations as well as to receive general feedback from the young persons of our country. The project is also expected to determine the benefits of the OJTP as well as how it impacts on the youth citizenry. It is intended to host a series of Hackathon Discussions with selected trainees as a means of generating ideas to meet their specific needs. There is also a suggestion to develop a mobile application that will aide our monitoring and evaluation function and improve communication with the staff, training providers and trainees.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to once again express appreciation to the Director of the ILO Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean for her continued support in the region's youth development initiatives. Trinidad and Tobago thanks your organisation for all its support and the Government remains committed to working along with you and your team.

As we move forward, I have taken note of the increase in the youth unemployment rate in the Caribbean and I am open to any incentive that will help steer our youth away from a life of crime and violence. The young persons of the Caribbean must be encouraged to use the power of education to reduce brain drain and ultimately develop the region. It is with this in mind that we rally around any initiative of the International Labour Organisation that will help us to learn even more about youth employment and to help us develop and sustain this initiative.

I thank you.