



**REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE STEPHEN MC CLASHIE**

**MINISTER OF LABOUR**

**AT THE**

**C-SUITE CONVERSATIONS HOSTED BY THE HUMAN RESOURCE**

**MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO  
(HRMATT)**

**ON**

**“THE FUTURE OF WORK”**

***HYATT REGENCY TRINIDAD, WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN***

***WEDNESDAY 13 JULY 2022***

***7:00 A.M. TO 11:00 A.M.***

Good morning.

It is my pleasure to address you this morning in the context of your C-Suite Conversations. An event such as this demonstrates that although we may have varying perspectives which may stem from our occupational fields, constructive and meaningful dialogue is possible. I commend the Human Resource Management Association of Trinidad and Tobago (HRMATT) for organizing this event to create synergies from our dialogue and deliberations as you seek to formulate and implement a working roadmap for the future of work.

As Minister of Labour, I am happy to share some of my perspectives on the Future of Work as well as to learn from you, the HR experts, on how we can together create a future that is productive, empowering, innovative and rewarding for our employees and employers.

The term “future of work” is conceptualized in various ways. Quite commonly, it is defined as the projection of how work, workers, workplaces and work relations will evolve in the years ahead. In fact, we are currently living the future of work that was being spoken of since 2010 when the ILO opened dialogue on this subject. The future of work is indeed an evolving concept that will engage our minds perpetually.

As we conceptualize the future of work, we must address five (5) fundamental questions:

- (a) What the work is or will be in the future?
- (b) How the work is done?
- (c) Who does the work?
- (d) Where is the work done?
- (e) When is the work done?

In the time I have allotted, I will not attempt to answer these questions, as I believe that you the experts are well positioned to answer them, but I would rather offer some considerations both from a public policy perspective as well as a practical approach as you address these questions in your organizations as well as in the various sectors that you represent.

In 2022, we are witnessing the combined effects of the Fourth Industrial Revolution characterized by rapid technological change and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic which catapulted the world into the 'Future of Work' perhaps faster than we would have expected. **It is therefore safe to say that the “Future of Work” of which we have been speaking since 2010 and even before that is upon us. We are living the “Future of Work”.**

The World Economic Forum estimates that the Fourth Industrial Revolution is expected to transform more than one billion jobs in the next decade, which is almost one-third of all jobs globally. It is also expected that technological transformation is estimated to create 133 million new ones, jobs we have not yet heard of at this time. Added to this is the current transition towards a green economy which experts suggest will see some traditional jobs being phased out and new ones being created.

In light of all this, the first consideration I wish to share is that **the future of work centres around people**. While we appreciate that rapid advances in technology characteristic of the Fourth Industrial Revolution has led us to speak about automation, robotization, digitization, digitalization, artificial intelligence, telework and the like, the critical element of our workforce will continue to be the people. It is for this reason that our *Roadmap for Trinidad and Tobago Post the Covid-19 pandemic* has a specific objective of **leaving no one behind**.

The Roadmap also emphasizes **human capital development** where the workforce is provided with the knowledge and skills required to drive sustainable growth, competitiveness and innovation across sectors such as ICT, energy, construction, manufacturing and education. The Roadmap calls for urgent action to nurture a future ready workforce that can dynamically adopt and utilize existing and new technologies and digital solutions with ease. On this note, I am elated to see on the Agenda for this session that there is a launch of a Human Capital Investment Fund.

Additionally, the World Economic Forum calls for a “Reskilling Revolution”. It is said that we need to prioritize re-skilling and re-tooling where people have the education, training and skills to meet the demands of their changing jobs today and prepare for the jobs of tomorrow.

We need to also prioritize the mental health and well-being of our employees. Improved physical, mental and emotional health of families, workers and the community at large continue to be a priority of Government. While the Government seeks to pursue initiatives aimed at fostering healthy lifestyles and improving access to and delivery of public health services, as HR professionals you have a great responsibility within your organizations to be the custodian of the health and well-being of your employees. Note also that is further emphasized in light of the adoption at the 110<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference of the International Labour Organization held in June 2022 of a **safe and healthy working environment** as an addition to the **fundamental principles and rights at work**.

The second point that I wish to make is that the future of work requires us to **focus on the institutions of work** and how they

function. Organizations are not just about systems, policies, procedures and controls but rather about harnessing the creative and innovative energies of the workers in the changing environment to provide cutting-edge goods and services. It is time for us to do some introspection on how our institutions operate, how work processes are organized and how decisions are made. It is time for us to realize that the top-down approach, the ivory-tower syndrome cannot work in these dynamic times and we need to deliberately invest in modes of communication that would facilitate the involvement of our workforce in the important decisions that we are called upon to make. Mechanisms that promote Tri-partite Dialogue between employers and employees representatives and Government should not only be encouraged but should form an integral part in determining policy, legislation, organizational systems and work processes.

Thirdly, the **future of work calls for a focus on decent work.**

Despite all the changes that are taking place in the world of work



where the only constant is change, one thing that must never change is the priority and respect that we accord to fundamental principles and rights at work. I know that you are all too familiar with these rights inclusive of the right to a safe and healthy work environment, the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining and the right to an environment free from discrimination, violence and harassment to name a few.

As Minister of Labour, I am deeply concerned about the many reports that are made to the Ministry of Labour, particularly over the past two years, where these rights have been flouted, where the Covid-19 pandemic was used as an excuse to circumvent national laws aimed at protecting rights at work. These include workers' pay being cut without any consultation with them or their representative organizations, failure by employers to make NIS payments, breaches of the Minimum Wage Act and Sectoral Orders as well as the Maternity Protection Act.

We must work together to ensure that work is productive, rights are protected and it adds dignity to people's lives. I am also fully aware that workers have important obligations and responsibilities to the organizations they serve and, as such, at the Ministry of Labour we are not only interested in protecting the rights of workers but in also ensuring that both employers and employees uphold their responsibilities in the workplace.

Conversations such as this help in defining policy objectives and eventually legislation. In this regard the Government is actively framing the current pieces of legislation including but not limited to :

1. The Industrial Relations Act
2. The Trade Union Act
3. Workmen's Compensation
4. Employment Standards

## 5. Maternity Protection

## 6. OHS Amendment etc.

Crafting these laws and amendments and finding consensus among parties with varying agendas is no easy walk in the park. Employers, employees, trade unions and government will have to find common ground, change perspectives and adapt in ways that have not be seen before. Businesses without walls, jobs without set working hours and employee appraisals in virtual environments are but a few things that will require changes in strategies. This is also true for the approach to employer / trade union negotiation. We will all have to have the difficult conversations in the coming years to manage our way through the emerging maze that threaten to be confrontational and maybe even nasty at times; but the dialogue must be had. I do see the possibility of working together to overcome our differences and look forward to being part of the solution rather than being the problem.

Additionally, may I add that at the global level, discussions on the future of work have been featuring prominently, including at the level of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). In joining with the ILO in celebrating its centenary anniversary in 2019, the Ministry of Labour organized a series of Centenary activities around the theme of the future of work. Some of you may have been part of these discussions. Following this, it was determined that a number of follow-up activities would be pursued, recognising the need to continue engaging stakeholders on this important issue. It is for this reason that I embraced your kind invitation to share some thoughts at this forum.

In closing, I wish to once again thank you for the opportunity to address you this morning and commend you for taking the time out of your very busy schedules to deliberate on such an important topic. I look forward to hearing from the very esteemed

panel and learning from your experiences and realities as we continue to work together in creating a future of work that generations to come can enjoy.

I thank you.