

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

Subregional Office for the Caribbean

Executive Training on Social Security and the Social Protection Floor

Prepared by:

**Sir Roy Trotman
General Secretary
Barbados Workers' Union
12th May, 2011**

SOCIAL PROTECTION, SOCIAL SECURITY & SOCIAL JUSTICE

In the International Labour Organisation's World Social Security Report for 2010/2011 due to be debated at the International Labour Conference in June 2011, the Director General of the ILO posits the view that the current crisis has proved "how important a role social security plays in society in times of crisis and adjustment."

Your presence today at this Executive Training programme presents you with an opportunity to examine that view of the ILO and, possibly through your discourse with your principals in Government, Capital or Labour, influence the eventual conclusions which will be reached in Geneva in another month or so and the action programmes which will be determined.

It would be useful for you to reflect on the full statement. It goes on to claim that (social security) "works as an irreplaceable economic, social and political stabiliser in such hard times - both for individual lives and the lives and the lives of the society as a whole. Social security plays this role in addition to its other functions - providing mechanisms to alleviate and also to prevent poverty, to reduce income disparities to acceptable levels and also to enhance human capital and productivity. Social security is thus one of the conditions for sustainable economic and social development. It is a factor in development. It is also an important factor in a modern democratic state and in society."

Your task is not an enviable one; for we are asking you today and tomorrow to wrestle with not one, but **two** major multidimensional issues and to assist as leaders in your community and in its governance in fashioning the social and developmental platforms for our national and regional success.

The second of these giants of which I have made mention, is the matter of a social protection floor. Put as briefly and as bluntly as I can put it, this represents the establishment of a minimum pool of social security benefits for all persons. Although this may apply now to any community anywhere, it was specifically intended to be a response which the world's economic and financial leaders were persuaded to take to save themselves as well as poorer economies from the ravages of the global crisis. For your information the strategy is known as the Global Jobs Pact.

Part of what makes your assignment quite difficult is the indecent haste which global capital has made in declaring that the global crisis is over. Within a year of the adoption of the Global Jobs Pact in *June 2009* the Employers' group within the Governing Body of the ILO has been demanding that the world at large should abandon any social protection postures it had developed and should surrender again to a free unregulated market, without any notice being given to the havoc created only a few short years earlier.

An important consideration for you should be the question of whether we should reflect on these two elements of human development only as they relate to the recent financial crisis. And if as capital claims, the crisis is over, are we as a result free to treat the world social security report as an historical document to be addressed for its intellectual value only?

My own suggestion is that you note the accuracy of the Director General's statement; but that you read the Report as another in a series. If that is done then the pivotal role we need to recognise could be seen for this crisis and may be viewed as well against what it is that the ILO has been aiming at through Convention #102.

You will also arrive at the wrong conclusions if you make the assumption that the Convention was unanimously adopted all over the world, was ratified by each country without dissent and made law everywhere. Nothing can be further from the truth. Although in 1919 the foundations of the ILO were laid on the commendable principles of Peace, Bread equality and Democracy we are still having one hundred years later to re-enact or revisit those principles. As we meet in 2011 there are still influential parties who consider that the real economy should concern itself only with the market. We should leave the question of values to their proper promoters; we should instead realise that the market should be left unfettered so that wealth may be created.

Matters like Freedom of Association, the Right to bargain collectively and the Right to Social Security should only be applied gradually over time after satisfactory wealth thresholds have been reached.

Those of you following this programme may even have to look inside yourselves to see the extent to which as a disciple of "free enterprise" you are committed to this view and to compare it to the level of your belief in certain fundamental human values or Human Rights. For example, should each community have an agreed minimum level of social conditions below which no one should be asked to live? Is Social Security a Human Right to be enjoyed whether you work or not, and whether you work for a large company or you sell combs at the street corner?

The challenge set for participants over the next two days will be addressed with our realisation that certain unpalatable truths are with us regarding poverty and what keeps our region within what we could call a trap - The Poverty Trap.

The truth is to be found in the fact that although enlightened persons, including in the Caribbean, have long insisted that the ILO should embrace a universal basic needs programme this was never done within countries or among countries. Of course some work was done; but you have only to reflect

on where and how water or electricity made its way into the home to capture my meaning.

The ILO is seeking today to demonstrate that there never was naked altruism in ensuring that infant mortality rates were reduced, or in having potable water preferably in the house for all, in having universal health care, including for migrants, in ensuring that everyone has access to food and to education. We have to refine that to say equality of opportunity in education.

All of what is mentioned here builds a community, prevents war, violence, social destruction and disharmony and serves to create wealth for all and not merely for the privileged few. This was part of the foundation of our ILO.

The ILO is providing an excellent opportunity for us to revisit the quality of our social planning. Two days will only whet your appetites to unleash your genius onto a fuller study of the subject.

It will be a bonus for the planners if your further study produced ideas which you will share with us even if you formulate them after the Conference is over.

Sir Roy Trotman