

**SECOND BIPARTITE REGIONAL MEETING OF
THE CARIBBEAN EMPLOYERS' CONFEDERATION (CEC) AND
THE CARIBBEAN CONGRESS OF LABOUR (CCL),
27-29 SEPTEMBER 2017, HYATT REGENCY HOTEL
PORT OF SPAIN, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

The Caribbean Employers' Confederation (CEC) and the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL) having met in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 27 -29 September 2017;

Noted the participation of representatives from 13 CARIFORUM countries¹ and further noted with concern that the representatives from Haiti were unable to obtain the required Trinidad and Tobago visas in time to travel, and the representatives from the Commonwealth of Dominica were unable to travel because of the devastation of Hurricane Maria;

Conscious that social justice is the basis for a peaceful, more equitable, environmentally sustainable, and prosperous Caribbean region;

Recognizing the CARICOM model law on Occupational Safety and Health and the Working Environment provides a template for the formulation of national legislation, noting the lack of a regional policy framework to improve national OSH Systems, and inadequate national enforcement and monitoring systems, as well as acknowledging their responsibility to champion a preventative culture to make workplaces in all sectors of economic activity safe and healthy;

Reaffirming that social protection is a human right and acknowledging the need to build complete and coherent social protection systems which use the most appropriate combination of social protection mechanisms to progressively achieve universal coverage;

Noting that CARICOM's Council of Human and Social Development (COHSOD) had agreed to the development of a regional social floor consisting of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Migration

¹ Antigua and Barbuda; The Bahamas; Barbados; Belize; Dominican Republic; Grenada; Guyana; Jamaica; Saint Kitts-Nevis; Saint Lucia; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Suriname; and Trinidad and Tobago

Conventions and the 8 Fundamental Conventions binding on ILO member States by virtue of their membership;

Convinced that greater bipartite cooperation is an instrument to more effective influence on policy-making at the national and regional levels, they reaffirm their commitment to bipartite consultation and formulation of joint social and economic policies;

Have endorsed the following positions and conclusions:

1. **Maintaining a fair playing field while respecting Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) standards and increasing competitiveness**

- a. In building a regional OSH framework, the ratification of Convention No.155 and Convention No.187 by all countries and the development and application of OSH legislation, OSH regulations, and OSH standards would create a fair playing field within the region. In addition, they would advocate for an OSH Policy and Strategy at the Caribbean level as necessary elements in a comprehensive approach to the issue;
- b. OSH regulatory and enforcement authorities should be strengthened and work proactively in a coordinated manner with stakeholders to gather information, set priorities, raise awareness, develop standards, educate, and train;
- c. More health professionals need to be trained and receive support in occupational health and occupational medicine so as to be able to adequately address occupational diseases in terms of prevention, diagnosis, and treatment, bearing in mind that each country shall prescribe a list of occupational diseases as per Recommendation No. 194 of the ILO;
- d. It is critical to adopt a risk management approach by promoting self-regulation and a systematic management approach to OSH at the enterprise level;
- e. They will promote and integrate into their agendas awareness-raising, increased OSH training at all levels, and workplace

policies including return to work policies, as well as health and well-being promotion at the workplace;

- f. Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, particularly in the services sector, should be supported to develop a preventative approach to OSH;
- g. Social dialogue should be supported at the national level by formalizing tripartite consultative bodies, which must function to facilitate the effective involvement of the representative organizations. At the enterprise level, joint safety and health committees or management-employee consultation mechanisms should be implemented as a means of strengthening worker participation and social dialogue.

2. Minimum Wage Setting

With a view to promoting consistency in approach across the region, the CCL and the CEC recognize the need to:

- a. Promote the Ratification of ILO Convention No.131;
- b. Establish, or strengthen where they exist, national tripartite structures to guide the setting and reviewing of minimum wage;
- c. Collect and publish data to conduct impact assessments and to inform evidence-based recommendations on setting and reviewing minimum wage;
- d. Collaborate with tertiary and other appropriate institutions to build and sustain capacity of social partners.

3. Social Protection

- a. CEC and CCL will support the implementation of Social Protection Floors as an integral part of social protection systems. Additionally, they recognize the social and economic need to build systems that provide higher levels of protection to as many people as possible;
- b. In addressing the social protection challenges in the region, the CEC and CCL must engage in building political will and joint ownership for the process of policy design, formulation, implementation and monitoring, and evaluation;
- c. Tripartite participation in policy design and implementation as well as consultation with other relevant and

representative organizations of persons concerned is necessary for achieving universal social protection;

- d. Ratification of ILO social protection instruments, notably Convention No. 102, the adoption of ILO Recommendation No. 202, and baseline studies need to be implemented as a first step in creating a regional framework on social protection;
- e. In building complete and coherent social protection systems, workers' and employers' representatives endorse the principles included in Article 3 of Recommendation No. 202 of the ILO;
- f. CARICOM Policy/Strategy on Social Protection for the Caribbean needs to be developed, implemented, and disseminated.

4. Protecting people and employment: A path to sustainable development

Achievement of sustainable development and protection of people and employment depend on closing the regulatory gap in national policy which has resulted in persons engaged in non-standard employment (NSE) not receiving treatment equal to those workers in forms of employment considered standard. In this regard:

- a. Collective bargaining must be enhanced to safeguard worker and employment protection while the advantages of flexible work arrangements are maintained for both workers and employers;
- b. Social protection systems must be expanded to protect workers in NSE and in the informal economy to manage social risks and accommodate transitions;
- c. Employment and labour policies need to ensure equal treatment regardless of contractual status; and exclusive contracts should guarantee minimum hours so as to provide income security;

- d. Regulations should be established to provide clear guidelines to determine the employment relationships and the responsibilities of multi-party arrangements.

5. Recognized status for CEC and CCL in COHSOD and COTED

- a. A strategy must be developed to advocate for recognition at Council of Trade and Economic Development (COTED), the first step of which is a joint letter from CEC and CCL which will be addressed to the Ministers responsible for Labour in the first instance to get their support for Regional Tripartite Social Dialogue arrangements;
- b. The social partners will seek to place this item on the agenda of all national tripartite bodies to lobby for government support for recognition of CEC and CCL.

6. Compliance with ILO Fundamental Conventions

- a. The gap analyses provide a platform for national tripartite mechanisms to make national legislation compliant with the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work;
- b. The determination of what constitutes essential services is best addressed at national level based on their specific circumstances.

7. Harmonization of Legislation

- a. The status of the COHSOD decision should be used to determine the starting point for further work in this area;
- b. The major areas for development would be those of minimum labour standards, social protection, and contingent rights, noting that protection of migrant workers would fall under each of the earlier mentioned categories;
- c. Work in this area will be driven by a bipartite CEC/CCL Committee of four persons.

8. Alignment of Education with Labour Market Needs

- a. Entrepreneurship and employability skills should be a theme throughout the education life-cycle;

- b. Youth participation and the particularities of the SME sector should be cross-cutting in the alignment of education outcomes with labour market needs;
- c. Education system must cater for the reintegration of dropouts as a matter of urgency;
- d. Recognising that work experience enhances employment prospects, specific attention should be paid to school to work transition;
- e. Recognising the importance of certification, existing Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQ) should be easily accessible, and CVQs developed for skills not yet covered as a matter of urgency.

9. EPA Social Aspects Chapter

- a. Employers' and workers' organizations must continue to pursue access to information related to the EPA implementation and seek to be involved in any monitoring mechanisms already established or which may be established in the future.

10. Bipartite Social Dialogue and Cooperation

- a. The Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL) and the Caribbean Employers' Confederation (CEC) have benefitted from the closer cooperation engendered under the EU-funded Project and it is in their interest to continue to work together to advance their common agenda.