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CHAUMIÈRE
MINISTER OF LABOUR, INDUSTRIAL
RELATIONS & EMPLOYMENT

WORLD DAY FOR DECENT WORK
(National Trade Union Confederation)

Date: 07 October 2008

Time: 10.30 hrs

*Venue: FCSOU Trade Union House,
Coromandel*

Mr T. Benidin, President of NTUC

Mr A. Balluck, General Secretary of the NTUC

Dear Participants

Ladies and gentlemen

A very good morning to all of you. It is a a great pleasure for me to be among you this morning for the opening of this seminar organized by the **National Trade Union Confederation** in the context of the **World Day for Decent Work**.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am just coming from another opening ceremony of a similar workshop organized by another workers organisation. You will no doubt bear with me that the message on this particular day could not be different. I will, therefore, reiterate the same message.

At the very outset, I would like to congratulate the National Trade Union Confederation for joining the hundreds of trade unions worldwide in response to the call of Global Unions and the International Trade Union Confederation to organize this activity to mark this World Day on Decent Work.

This is indeed an unparalleled opportunity for trade unions and organizations across the world interested in promoting the concept of Decent Work in their respective countries.

Decent Work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive, freely chosen and delivers a fair income, security and safety in the workplace and social protection for the worker and his/her family, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.

The Decent Work Concept was, as you may all know, first expressed and formally mentioned by the ILO Director-General, Juan Somavia, in his Report to the International Labour Conference in 1999, almost a decade ago.

This concept has subsequently been fashioned out through various other ILO papers and documents to finally result with the following main characteristics:

- It is productive, secure and safer work
- It ensures respect of Labour Rights

- It provides an adequate income
- It offers social protection
- It includes social dialogue, union freedom, collective bargaining and participation amongst, others.

Having said this, let me assure my friends from the Trade Unions that Decent Work has been and will be at the heart of our national economic and social strategies. In fact, much emphasis is being laid by Government on the creation of productive and decent employment, which is considered central to efforts made towards poverty reduction as a means of achieving equitable, inclusive and sustainable development.

Mauritius is facing a sharp transition from dependence on trade preferences to open competition in the global economy. The triple shocks of dismantling of the Multi-fibre Agreement, soaring oil prices until recently, and the sharp cuts in the guaranteed sugar price have impacted negatively on key sectors, namely the sugar industry, textile sector and on our national economy in general.

As a caring Government, we have shouldered our responsibilities and have undertaken bold and major reforms, a few of which have challenged the comfort of traditional outdated practices and expectations. These courageous measures, however, are already showing positive results.

My dear friends, the new economic model is still in the making. The process of profound changes is still on. Globalisation today is an objective reality with which we are condemned to live and to work. We have not chosen it. It has been imposed upon us and we have to adapt. The challenge today is to shape the social dimension of globalisation.

It is essential, therefore, that globalisation be rendered fair and socially balanced. We have reached a time when we must seek to give globalisation a human face. In this regard, we must ensure that all measures towards achieving Decent Work goals be not only undertaken, but also implemented.

Here, I would like to mention the array of schemes and institutions that have been set up with a view to further improving the quality of life of workers and their families, namely:

- Empowerment programme
- SEHDA
- EWF
- Labour and Employees Welfare Funds in various sectors like the Sugar Industry, Transport, EPZ, Fishermen, Hotel and Tourism, amongst others.

I need not elaborate further on the various social protection schemes that exist in terms of contributory and non-contributory pension benefits,

without forgetting other benefits derived through our Welfare State system. Today, Mauritius is rightly quoted as a reference by many other countries for its social protection system.

In Addition to the reforms undertaken by the government on the Economic and Social Front, other measures have also been undertaken in the World of Work in order to fulfill our obligations with respect to the Decent Work Agenda.

At the level of my own Ministry, we have not only spearheaded the ratification of the **Eight ILO Fundamental Conventions**, but also ensured that necessary measures are taken with a view to making all our Labour Laws in compliance with these fundamental conventions – which are of direct relevance to **Decent Work principles**.

In this regard, as you all know, the parliament has adopted two new Labour Laws namely, the **Employment Relations Act** and the **Employment Rights Act**, with a view to:-

- Remove existing rigidities
- Provide for better protection of workers
- Strengthen effective tripartism and social dialogue
- Promote Collective Bargaining

As I have just said, this new Legislation provides for necessary conditions, and the legal and institutional framework for effective Collective Bargaining, which remains the Trade Unions most important function. The focus is more on finding solutions to industrial relations problems and reaching agreements through speedy conciliation and settlement of disputes.

In the context of these on-going reforms, we have ensured that workers are not penalized if they ever lose their jobs. We are putting in place a flexi-security programme which, whilst allowing for greater labour mobility, will also afford workers a protection which is far better than what exists now.

These measures, incorporated in the **Employment Rights Act** and known as **Workfare Programme**, will enable every laid-off worker to be taken on charge by Government for a given period of time. The Government will facilitate his placement in an appropriate job or his training for greater employability or if he so desires, assist him in starting his own business. During that period, the person will benefit from a monthly unemployment allowance which will not be below subsistence rate.

As regards **gender equality** and **discrimination**, I wish to inform you all that the Government has already taken cognizance of the study that was carried out by my Ministry in collaboration with the ILO and UNDP, on the **elimination of all forms of discrimination** in the existing national Mauritian Laws. The findings will serve as reference to enabling the

Government to take such steps and measures so as to remove existing discrimination in our laws – in line with ILO Conventions 100 and 111.

May I also take this opportunity to inform you that very soon the **Equal Opportunity Bill** will be presented in the Legislative Assembly for adoption.

Dear friends, another fundamental issue that we have to address in the context of Decent Work agenda in **Occupational, Safety and Health**.

Changes in society, work organization and production methods are leading to new types of occupational risks that demand new measures and solutions. The World of Work is changing rapidly and work-related health issues are changing too. It is under this background, that on 1st September 2007, a new **Occupational Safety and Health Act** came into effect. The primary objectives of this new legislation are to further strengthen and broaden the legal framework on safety, health and the welfare of employees at work – both in the **private sector** and the **public sector** as well.

The provision of decent work at the workplace ranks high on the agenda of the Government, and of my Ministry in particular.

In order to optimize the benefits that can be drawn from the ILO Cooperation Framework, the ILO Sub-Regional Office based in Madagascar, in collaboration with my Ministry is embarking on the preparation of a **Decent Work Country Programme**. The main objective of this exercise will be to contribute to the best possible use of available ILO resources to advance the **Decent Work Agenda** and thereby improve the working and living conditions of men and women workers in Mauritius.

I am pleased to inform you that during my recent visit to Madagascar, I had discussions on this topic as well with ILO Regional Director for Indian Ocean.

You will, no doubt, agree that the promotion for decent work should not be the concern of Government only. We need the support of all stakeholders. Hence my appeal today to all of you to harness your efforts with a view to further strengthening your respective organizations to enable you to better represent the interests of the workers in general.

By way of conclusion, let me reassure all our friends from the Trade Unions of my commitment to provide them with the necessary facilities in terms of capacity-building, through seminars and training, technical advice and with relevant institutional set up so as to enable them to pursue their activities having as main objective the fulfillment of our obligations under the Decent Work Agenda.

I wish all participants fruitful interactions during this workshop and I now have the pleasure to open this workshop.

I thank you for your attention.

