

ADDRESS BY

**HON. JEAN FRANÇOIS
CHAUMIERE
MINISTER OF LABOUR,
INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS &
EMPLOYMENT**

One-day Seminar on Trade Unions and Youths

organised by

Government Servants Association

Date: Thursday 30 October 2008

Time: 0930 hrs

Venue: Unity House, Beau Bassin

Mr. R. Sadien, President of Government Servants Association

Members of the Executive Committee of the GSA

Dear participants and guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish to thank the President and members of the Executive Committee of **Government Servants Association** (GSA) for inviting me to address this gathering on the occasion of the opening of this seminar today.

I would equally wish to congratulate the GSA for having chosen to discuss during this seminar on such an interesting and important theme as Trade Unions and Youths.

Dear friends, since I took office as Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations and Employment, I have made it a duty to promote continuous social dialogue with all stakeholders, and particularly with the Trade Unions and Workers.

Today, we are at the cross road of our development, and more than ever before, we need the understanding and the support of all stakeholders, and above all, of the Trade Union organisations in our country. The changing world economic and social order, the process of globalisation and the drastic emergence of new technologies have certainly an impact on our social and economic structures and systems that necessitate a complete overhauling.

It is under this economic and social background that we have been compelled to implement a number of reforms, a few of which have challenged the comfort of traditional out-dated practices and expectations.

In the context of these reforms, government has also introduced the Employment Relations Act and Employment Rights Act - having as main objective to put in place a legal and institutional framework, which will not only respond to economic imperatives but also, to **better protect workers, promote effective Collective Bargaining** and to effectively strengthen tripartism and social dialogue.

The focus of these new legislations is more on finding solutions to Industrial Relations problems and reaching agreements through speeding conciliations and settlement of disputes – and of course, primarily through Collective Bargaining which remains the Trade Unions most important function.

Dear friends, the economic and social changes that are unfolding before you must compel you as well to do some re-thinking regarding the new roles and objectives of Trade Unions. If Trade Unions have the right to comment on and question economic and social reforms, they have also the duty to think of their own reforms, and find ways and means that will help them to adapt to the new environment.

Trade Unions should realize that the Mauritian Society is undergoing a complete transformation and mutation due to globalisation. In order to better respond to these changes and challenges, trade unions should re-invent themselves, review their methods of operation and invest more with respect to Capacity-Building.

The holding of this Seminar is not a coincidence, but rather the outcome of a clear-cut policy that the GSA has with regards to empowering its members through Workers' Education and Training.

The GSA is one of the oldest trade unions in the Civil Service. If your organization can legitimately boast itself of many remarkable achievements to its credit, it is certainly due to the foresightedness and vision of its leadership. The holding of today's workshop for the youths and young workers who have just joined your association recently comes at a very opportune time, indeed.

The youths and young workers are indeed the future of the Trade Union movement. Dealing with young people's concerns and expectations, informing them of their rights and responsibilities, amongst others, and achieving thus their full integration in trade unions is crucial to the strengthening, revitalization, creativity and future of the trade union movement.

At a time, when the mauritian trade union movement is characterized by a multiplicity of organisations, with as many as over 350 unions and over 18 Trade Union Federations with an overall declining membership trend, it is but fitting that the GSA focuses its activities on the youths with a view to further strengthen its membership base.

I hope that the GSA, like any progressive organization, will develop trade union youth policies and actions programmes to deal with not only labour and industrial issues, but also with pertinent social and economic issues as well.

Dear friends, young people will only join unions when trade unions wake-up, rethink their strategies and further strengthen its services to its members. The trade unions leaderships also need to

change its image, attitude and approaches towards young people. The leaders need to conduct their activities in such a manner so as to enable them to attract and recruit young people into unions.

In this regard, it requires a deep commitment of the trade union movement to work hand-in-hand with young trade unionists to make the unions a more attractive and open place for the young. Furthermore, it is important for the unions to ensure that young people are properly represented at all levels of the organisations, and that sufficient resources are allocated for trade union youth programmes and for Capacity-Building in general.

In this regard, I am happy to note that the GSA does not stick to the traditional role of trade unions, and in its dealings it has gone beyond the traditional bread and butter issues. Through your numerous activities and the formidable array of services, your organisation, the GSA, is playing a much more meaningful role as a responsible trade union whose impact would certainly be felt by both your membership and by society at large.

I also note that the GSA, over the years, has been able to make good use of its resources by providing the necessary services to its membership with respect to grievance handling, improving their conditions of work and quality of life, and also by providing the necessary Workers' Education and Training.

Let me inform you, in this regard, that I also intend to reinforce the Workers' Education Unit of my Ministry. Necessary actions are being taken with a view to further strengthen our Workers' Education and Training Programmes for the benefit of not only the organised but also the unorganised workforce. We also envisage to make Radio and T.V. programmes; all these with the overall objectives of preparing our workforce and all stakeholders in the context of the new legal framework that government has already proposed by coming up with the **Employment Relations Act and Employment Rights Act**.

Dear friends:

In the context of globalisation and competitiveness, the public service is bound to offer quality services to our citizen. The government has already embarked on a series of initiatives to transform the public sector into a most modern and most efficient one that will be able not only to address the challenges of the day, but also to act as the engine of development of our country.

However, these reforms cannot be successful unless we get the full support, participation and collaboration of all stakeholders, including the trade union organisations. Your union, the GSA, has therefore, an important role in upholding the reforms initiatives taken

by our Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, for a more efficient public service.

Let me conclude by wishing all the participants fruitful deliberations.

Thank you for your kind attention.