

ADDRESS BY HON. JEAN FRANÇOIS CHAUMIÈRE
MINISTER OF LABOUR, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS &
EMPLOYMENT

DECENT WORK COUNTRY PROGRAMME

(Tripartite Workshop)

Date: 07 May 2009

Time: 09.15 hrs

Venue: Imperial China Restaurant

Trianon

Mr Georges Okutho, Director ILO Sub-Regional Office for Eastern Africa

Mrs Ramsamy, Permanent Secretary of my Ministry

ILO Representatives

Representatives of Employers organizations

Representatives of Workers organizations

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

A very good morning to all of you. It is a great pleasure for me to be among you this morning for the opening of this two-day **tripartite workshop** concerning the elaboration of a **Decent Work Country Programme for Mauritius**.

I would like, at the very outset, to express my deep appreciation and thank the ILO for its continuous support, be it in terms of finance or technical experience in connection with the elaboration of a Decent Work Country Programme for Mauritius.

I would also like to seize this opportunity to welcome to Mauritius Mr Georges Okutho, Director of the ILO Sub-Regional Office for Eastern Africa and members of his team who have travelled all the way to assist us in the elaboration of a Decent Work Country Programme.

Ladies and gentlemen, 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 or her family. The concept also implies better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for the 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.

This Decent Work Country concept, which was initiated by the ILO Director-General, Juan Somavia, 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 protections
- ❖ It includes social dialogue, union freedom, Collective Bargaining and participation, amongst others.

Ladies and gentlemen, having said this, let me assure all of you, particularly representatives from Trade Unions and Employers Organisations – 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.

In fact, Decent Work as defined and promoted by ILO, has all its relevance today and more particularly at this time of international crisis that our country is facing. As you are all aware, the effects are already being felt across different sectors of our economy, namely tourism and the manufacturing sectors.

The present financial crisis and the serious slowdown in the economic activities bring new challenges that we must fully take into consideration. We have to ensure that we develop policy responses to this global economic turmoil. It also means placing Decent Work at the center of these policies.

As a caring and responsible Government, this is, in fact, what we have been doing and will continue to do.

Like many other countries, Mauritius too has come up with a **Stimulus Package** in order to mitigate the impact of this international economic crisis. This Stimulus Package, along with some of the measures provided in the new Labour Laws, in particular the Workfare Programme, goes in the same direction of what has also been recommended by the ILO in order to confront the crisis.

In fact, the ILO has recommended to all its constituents a **decent work approach** to this crisis. Our Government, like the ILO, believes that the **Decent Work Agenda** is an appropriate policy framework to confront the crisis, as it is central to eradicating poverty, improving the lives of women and men and thus enabling people to live in peace and dignity.

Our visitors from the ILO would wish to know that the **Stimulus Package** of the Government comprises also the following measures as recommended by the ILO, namely:- *Unemployment benefits, re-skilling of redundant workers, public investment in infrastructure and housing, support to SMEs, social dialogue at enterprise, sectoral and national levels.*

Ladies and gentlemen, today Mauritius is rightly quoted as a reference by many countries and international organizations for its social protection system. In addition to the array of social schemes and institutions that have been set up with a view to further improving the quality of life of workers and their families, Government has also set up, since 2006, a **National Empowerment Foundation** (NEF). The objectives of the NEF are to unlock opportunities for the unemployed, for those recycled from their former jobs, for women, for our young people entering the labour force and for small and medium entrepreneurs. This very ambitious programme with a life span of 5 years and a project value of 5 billion rupees, will also facilitate the transition from sugar, textiles and other activities hit by shocks, into higher value added activities with better paying jobs.

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 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, Government's commitment and determination to reform the industrial relations framework, so as to promote effective collective bargaining and strengthen dialogue with social partners, has been translated in the adoption of the **Employment Relations Act 2008 and the Employment Rights Act 2008** which came into effect on 02 February 2009.

The **Employment Relations Act** 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 within a given time-frame.

The new thrust imparted to negotiations on terms and conditions of employment within the framework of collective bargaining by the Employment Relations Act 2008 stands as a powerful means and golden opportunity for trade unions and employers to promote the Decent Work Agenda.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have also 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 existed previously.

Ladies and gentlemen, request for ILO assistance in respect of specific programmes and projects is being proposed in the document. These proposals will be further discussed among the stakeholders during this two-day workshop. This forum will also provide an opportunity to reinforce collaboration among the various stakeholders where greater impact could be made by joining forces in the promotion of decent work. Here, I would like to make an appeal to the participants to be fully involved in discussions so that we can come out with suggestions for effective Decent Work strategies and programmes.

Ladies and gentlemen, the challenge will be in the implementation of the various programmes and proposals, after the validation of the document by the stakeholders. Thereafter, focus will have to be placed on delivering results that could positively impact on people's lives.

On this note, I would like to conclude by wishing all participants fruitful interactions.

I have now the pleasure to declare this workshop open.

I thank you for your attention.