



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

ADDRESS BY

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE JENNIFER BAPTISTE-PRIMUS

MINISTER OF LABOUR AND SMALL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT

AT THE

**“EMPOWERMENT JOBS EXPO FOR UNEMPLOYED PERSONS:
TURNING ADVERSITY INTO OPPORTUNITY”**

*The National Energy Skills Centre (NESC),
Point Lisas, Couva*

Tuesday April 05, 2016

- Senator the Honourable Paula Gopee-Scoon, Minister of Trade and Industry;
- The Honourable Cherrie-Ann Crichlow Cockburn, Minister of Social Development and Family Services;
- Ms. Dagmar Walters, Deputy Director ILO Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean;
- Representatives from the ILO Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean;
- Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development Mrs. Jennifer Daniel and other Permanent Secretaries
- Deputy Permanent Secretaries in the Ministry Mrs. Marcia London McKellar and Mrs. Shanmatee Singh Ng Sang and other Deputy Permanent Secretaries and representatives from various Government Ministries;
- Representatives from the Employers' Organizations;
- Representatives from the Labour Movement;
- Representatives from the Financial Institutions;
- Booths Exhibitors from various sectors,
- Specially invited guests,
- Members of the Media,
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning

Today is a day of hope. Today is a day where we look to finding solutions to a problem that is being referred to as a “national crisis”, and that is the growing unemployment rate in Trinidad and Tobago. This ***“Empowerment Jobs Expo for the Unemployed Persons: Turning Adversity to Opportunity”*** was conceptualized to foster an empowering and enabling environment to address the multi-dimensional scope of unemployment. Ladies and gentlemen, there are few guarantees in life and today we guarantee that you will leave here with opportunities.

As the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development I am heartened by the response received from government ministries and agencies from both the private and public sector. I have to say this Expo is the true definition of a collaborative, multi-sectoral response to a major national issue. This is the result of synergizing our resources and capacity to address a problem that is bigger than any singular response and I want to thank everyone who agreed to work with us today to make this Empowerment and Jobs Expo a reality.

Ladies and gentlemen, the global economic downturn has impacted us all in some form or fashion. This situation has not only caused most

countries to adjust their current budgetary plans but has placed a damper on their ability to realize their current and future economic goals as revenues derived from the energy sector have fallen significantly due to either the plummeting oil and gas prices or a stark decline in demand for goods and services.

This crippling effect has prevented many companies from achieving their targets in their normal operations and as we have seen in the case of steel giant Arcelor-Mittal. The closure of this company's local plant saw the termination of its entire workforce of 644. Then there was the provision of retrenchment notices to 200 workers at Central Trinidad Steel Limited (Centrin). If you add to these figures, the 143 retrenchment notices reported to the Ministry from January to March 2016 and the 860 workers from Construtora OAS, you will realize that a total of 1,847 persons are on the breadline within a three-month period for 2016 alone. I want to point out that from 2012 to 2015 this Ministry received 4,457 retrenchment notices. Coupled with this, the unemployment figures reported by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) for the third quarter of 2015 was 21,900 when compared to 22,100 for the comparative period

in 2014 and the unemployment rate was 3.4%, up by 0.1 percentage point for that said period.

As Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, I am deeply concerned about the welfare of our labour force of just over six hundred thousand (600,000) persons and of all unemployed persons in Trinidad and Tobago. It should be noted that the unemployment situation is not unique to Trinidad and Tobago. In fact according to the International Labour Organization World Employment Social Outlook Trend 2015, “... over 201 million people were unemployed in 2014 over 31 million more than before the start of the global crisis and, global unemployment is expected to increase by three million in 2015 and by a further eight million in the following four (4) years. The global employment gap, that is the number of jobs lost since the start of the crisis, currently stands at 61 million and it has been estimated that an additional 280 million jobs need to be created by 2019 to close this gap¹.”

Ladies and gentlemen, I want to point out that with an absence of a proper labour market information system, it is quite difficult to get a true

¹ The International Labour Organization World Employment Social Outlook; Trend 2015/ILO Geneva 2015

picture of the **real number of persons** who have lost their jobs in both the private and public sector in Trinidad and Tobago. We will be addressing this situation soon.

The Government recognizes that unemployment is multi-dimensional and has social, physical, mental and psychological effects on workers, their families and their communities. In treating with this important issue, the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development (MLSED) has developed and received Cabinet's approval on its Ten-Point Action Plan titled "***Empowering Unemployed Persons – Re-integration into Decent Work: Turning Adversity into Opportunity***". This Plan utilizes a multi-pronged approach to counteracting the negative fallouts of the recent job losses. The main objective of this Plan is to provide a facilitating environment to enable unemployed persons to access guidance and advice on employment opportunities, financial management, social support and wellness, set up of co-operatives and small businesses, and training, re-training and upskilling opportunities. The aim is therefore to empower workers towards re-integration into decent work in the shortest possible time.

The Government holds true to the view that one job lost is one too many. Today is indicative of our commitment and that of our stakeholders who have demonstrated their commitment and genuine interest in working with the Ministry to provide possible support to unemployed persons and their families. At this juncture, I want to commend and thank all Ministries, Business Organizations, Trade Unions and other organizations for their tremendous support demonstrate here today. I apologize for not being able to identify each institution but I would like to acknowledge a few:

- Ministry of Trade and Industries;
- Ministry of Education;
- Ministry of Social Development and Family Services;
- Ministry of Health;
- Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts;
- Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago;
- National Insurance Board;
- Bankers' Association of Trinidad and Tobago;
- Credit Union League of Trinidad and Tobago;
- Employers' Consultative Association of Trinidad and Tobago;

- Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce;
- Energy Chamber of Trinidad and Tobago;
- American Chamber of Commerce of Trinidad and Tobago
- Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturing Association;
- National Trade Union Centre of Trinidad and Tobago (NATUC);
- Joint Trade Union Movement (JTUM); and
- Federation of Independent Trade Unions and NGOs (FITUN).

I thank the International Labour Organization Decent Work Team and Office for the Caribbean for their continued support over the years and for funding the much needed training for our frontline staff of the NES to serve with sensitivity to workers who will be accessing its services.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are more than 60 booths and several roving caravans ready and equipped to provide a range of services to you including individual psychological counseling, financial counseling, meeting with employers to discuss job opportunities and possible on-site interviews and sharing of information on training, re-training, upskilling and skills assessment and certification programmes. I believe we have something to suit everyone's needs.

I urge you to take this opportunity to visit as many booths as possible and ask your questions and utilize the services offered. And all I ask in return is that you share the information assistance in sharing the information you received here today with your co-workers, friends, neighbours, members of your communities or anyone seeking information and advice. I implore you to hold discussions with your counterparts and come up with collective ideas and business plans and take advantage of every opportunity that presents itself. Remember to register with the National Register of Retrenched Workers which can be accessed via the NES website at www.nes.gov.tt. You can also visit any of the NES satellite offices throughout Trinidad and Tobago to register.

In closing, I leave you with the words of Sir Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom *“A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty”*. I have faith that collectively we as a people will turn this economic adversity currently being facing into new and diverse business opportunities.

I thank you.