

The Social Partnership Option for National Development

Remarks by **Samuel J. Goolsarran**, Consultant Adviser of the Consultative Association of Guyanese Industry Ltd. on 30 September 2015 at an **ILO-EU Seminar for CEC and CCL** at the Pegasus Hotel, Georgetown, Guyana.

Salutation.

National dialogue on social and economic matters should be encouraged and promoted as a matter of high priority. This approach promotes active consultation and cooperation at the industrial and national levels among governing authority, the political parties in the National Assembly as well as workers' and employers' organizations in order to foster mutual understanding and good relations, to find agreed solutions to socio-economic problems and to forge a consensus for national development. The promotion of social justice in the state community could be achieved only if the social partners and stake holders themselves are involved in the search for appropriate solutions through negotiations and genuine dialogue. The Government and the National Assembly however, have a major responsibility in the success of a multi-tripartite social dialogue process.

Genuine national dialogue guarantees participation in a democratic process. The developing of our economy offers opportunities from which all can gain, but these have to be grounded in participatory processes and institutions if they are to confer legitimacy and sustainability on economic and social policies.

The pillars constituted by the National Assembly, Government, private sector and workers' organizations must commit themselves to engage in determined dialogue, based on the principles of mutual trust and good faith. Success in the mutual outcome of national dialogue also requires national commitment and national political will, and the full commitment of private sector and workers and their organizations, and civil society. National dialogue processes need, to be strengthened, encouraged and supported. The building of that trust, its maintenance and its sustainability requires a high degree of commitment and leadership.

There were successful broader social partnership agreements in other jurisdictions such as the outstanding models of national social partnership agreements in Ireland and Barbados. From the late 80's and early 90's, the social partnership and consensus-based approaches in Barbados and Ireland resulted in national agreements, which have had a continuing positive impact on the achievements of economic growth and social progress. These agreements were the outcomes of serious negotiations undertaken in good faith between the governments and the other social partners. This recourse to the social partnership option had widespread support among the major social and economic interests in these countries, and fundamentally changed the traditional confrontational approach in managing national socio-economic affairs.

The social partnership agreements provide a solid foundation for the economic growth and development of these countries. These have resulted in a very good social and mature political relations and an environment conducive to building consensus for national development to the extent that Ireland is attracting many substantial investors, and is one of the fastest growing economies in Europe. In recent years, both Ireland and Barbados have recorded the lowest incidence of disruptive political and industrial action within the European Union and CARICOM respectively. The social partnership at the national level in Ireland is an attractive model for Caribbean countries. Barbados, drawing from the Irish model, developed its own national agreements.

In the Guyana context, the real challenge is to develop national consensus in the form of social partnership agreements in the interest of the wider national community. National partnership agreements provide the framework for national strategies to achieve international competitiveness, higher standards of living, and improved social protection, a stable currency, investment-friendly policies and a more development-conducive social and political climate.

Effective management of the economy in a climate of good governance with proactive involvement and participation of civil society is crucial for agreeing on measures for a balanced economic, social and political development. The Governing Authority of the national Assembly and the Government bears responsibility for ensuring that governance as: *“The manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development”* reflects fairness and effective social justice.

A State that is committed to such good governance will ensure that there is genuine participation by the social and political partners with credibility, transparency, and accountability in the administration and management of national affairs.

The challenges, in terms of national strategies to promote economic growth, social, political and human development, call for actions at the national level. It is for the governments, the political parties, private sector, the labour movement and civil society in Guyana: -

- (a) to respect, promote and realize in good faith the fundamental principles of human rights enshrined in our Constitution and laws, and International Labour Conventions; and
- (b) to adopt the social partnership option in the management of change in national socio-economic and political affairs through sustained national dialogue which must be promoted in a paradigm shift - from the prolonged confrontational posture to one which cultivates consensus and cooperation in the national interest.