

Remarks to Occupational Safety and Health Week 2017

Delivered by Dennis de Peiza, General Secretary,

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Let me at commencement of my brief remarks to this Opening Ceremony today, congratulate the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Human Resources Development and the Labour Department, for having chosen to organize the 2017 Occupational Safety and Health Week, under the theme ‘Safe Workplaces are Productive Workplaces’.

As we all know, 2017 has been dedicated the year of productivity, and in the context of this, the theme is but appropriate.

In making a link of safe workplaces with national productivity, it is to be recognized and understood that the business of safety and health in the workplace must be seen as an investment. While it becomes important to promote productivity, there must be recognition on the part of employers that they must ensure that their employees work under safe and healthy conditions. If this is practiced, employer can be satisfied that their efforts

would help to motivate and promote efficiency amongst workers, so that they can contribute actively to technical and organizational innovations.

There is also the responsibility placed on employees to observe the occupational safety and health policies guidelines, to maintain the workplace standards, and to commit to following best practices.

In promoting safe and productive workplaces, the Congress of Trade Unions and Staff Associations of Barbados (CTUSAB) refers to the guidance of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Both organizations have placed emphasis on the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations; the prevention among workers of leaving work due to health problems caused by their working conditions; the protection of workers in their employment from risks resulting from factors adverse to health; the placing and maintenance of the worker in an occupational environment adapted to his or her physiological and psychological capabilities; and to the adaptation of work to the person and of each person to their job.

Employers are implored to ensure that good practices exist and are followed, as these are the links between health and safety at work, the wellbeing of workers and productivity. It can therefore be surmised that safety, health and wellness are tied to the country's economic development.

While we may tend to pay close attention to the physical state of the workplace and the practices to be observed, we ought not to lose sight of the need to improve workplace organizational culture. This is integral to the development of workplace productivity. You need not be reminded that the cost to be incurred can be phenomenal.

Contributory factors to this, could amongst other things, include sickness absence, worker's compensation, loss of employees' discretionary effort, healthcare costs, staff turnover, private insurance arrangements, social security, and early retirement. We should not be oblivious to the fact that the failure of both private sector employers and government to address improvements in management so as to ensure safe workplaces, can also lead to a decline in productive workplaces.

In order to arrest the social fallout and financial losses due to a decline in productivity, there needs to be the

promotion of a positive over a negative workplace culture. It is to be underscored that the latter emerges from the misalignment of employer and employee interests.

Finally, it is labour's view that whereas the Safety and Health at Work Act sets the conditions for ensuring the existence of safe and productive workplaces, there is yet further work to be done by the members of the social partners, through the process of education, for the benefit of employers and employees, in an effort to enhance safety, health and productivity in the workplace.

I wish to call attention to the fact that whereas a safe workplace ought to be a productive workplace, this can would only happen if both employers and employees play their expected part.

CTUSAB expresses its best wishes for a successful and productive Occupational Safety and Health Week 2017.