

## Launch of Dialogue Solutions

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Let me first congratulate the founders of Dialogue Solutions Limited, with what I understand is a rather successful initial period of its existence, drawing on a wealth of experience and professionalism dedicated to alternative dispute resolution in a number of number of sectors of Trinidad and Tobago, including labour and industrial relations.

As some of you might now, the ILO celebrates its Centenary during this year – as the only part of the Versailles treaty that ended World War 1 that remains today.

The decision to create an organization such as the ILO, came out of an understanding that achieving social justice was key to preventing another war like that happening again, and an understanding that the main actors all needed to have a say, have their voices heard, and influence the decisions made. Therefore the organization was made tripartite, inviting workers and employers to sit at the table together with governments, while doing what was at the core of the ILO's work from the very beginning, and continues to be so today, developing the international rules of labour relations, the International Labour Standards. The very first was "on hours of work in industry", and the latest so far – approved this June is Convention number 190 on violence and harassment in the world of work.

In its first 25 years, the Organization's greatest achievement was probably that it survived. It overcame the great depression, authoritarianism, the Second World War, the collapse of the rest of the League of Nations and wartime exile.

Emerging from this dark period, the ILO adopted the Declaration of Philadelphia: Concise and compelling, a vision for a better world, and an integral part of the ILOs constitution. Signed 10 May 1944, 75 years ago. It states:

*The war against want requires to be carried on with unrelenting vigour within each nation, and by continuous and concerted international effort in **which the representatives of workers and employers, enjoying equal status with those of governments**, join with them in free discussion and democratic decision with a view to the promotion of the common welfare*

In the world of work there is an inherent conflict of interest and simultaneous interdependency.

Because of this inherent tension, conflict and disputes will arise from time to time – it is normal, in the world of work, as in most fields of human interaction.

What is important is how we handle these issues. After all, social peace – generally achieved through real and perceived social justice – is in everybody's interest.

It is clear that alternative dispute resolution, such as negotiation, mediation and arbitration is ultimately both better, faster, more effective and cheaper, than the steps coming after, such as litigation, or in cases of a collective labour dispute- strike.

For the ILO, all of this falls in under what we refer to as social dialogue. Social dialogue also includes efforts to “pre-empt” the disputes and conflicts, to find common ground and joint solutions before there is a problem that needs solving.

It seems very simple, straightforward and – one could even say – downright obvious. Why is it then that the reality of it is so difficult and - to stay within the world of work – there are relatively few places in the world where we find solid, well-functioning and effective system for social dialogue, collective bargaining, and alternative dispute resolution?

At least some of it has to do with the necessary preconditions for effective dialogue not being in place:

- Strong, independent workers' and employers' organizations with the technical capacity and access to relevant information to participate in social dialogue;
- **Political will and commitment to engage in social dialogue on the part of all the parties;**
- Respect for the fundamental rights of **freedom of association and collective bargaining;** and
- An enabling legal and institutional framework.

When I speak to these issues, I like to add one: **results.**

While the main prerequisites need to be in place for dialogue to be effective and produce results, the sustainable results produced through dialogue is its best advertisement as the preferred means of resolving disputes and conflict.

Although the Caribbean is a region with a relatively strong culture of dialogue as part of labour relations, and various examples of important institutions and mechanisms of dialogue, there is large variation across the region and still important strides to be made in order to have true, well-functioning and effective mechanisms for social dialogue.

By way of ending, I would like to point to one of the outcomes of the ILOs centenary year, the report of the Future of Work Commission and the Centenary Declaration. Both of the documents, pointing towards a “human centred future of work”, outline a number of areas of focus in order to reach “the future of work we want”, - the Declaration highlights no less than 17 - and at the heart of it all, as the engine to drive the necessary policy decisions forward, is social dialogue.

Finally, let me once again, on behalf of the ILO, congratulate Dialogue Solutions Limited on its official launch and wish the company all possible success in fomenting and promoting a culture of dialogue and alternative dispute resolution in Trinidad & Tobago and across the Caribbean region.