

LIMITED  
LC/CAR/L.47  
29 July 2005  
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

**REPORT OF THE EXPERT GROUP MEETING:  
A CARIBBEAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE SUMMIT OF THE AMERICAS:  
EMPLOYMENT, POVERTY AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE**

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## Table of contents

Agenda item 1: Welcome and opening remarks .....	1
Agenda item 2: Presentation of the motto of the Fourth Summit of the Americas .....	2
Agenda item 3: Statement by the CARICOM Secretariat .....	3
Agenda item 4: Overview of employment issues and labour market trends .....	4
Agenda item 5: Overview of labour and employment issues .....	6
Agenda item 6: Social protection and poverty reduction in the Caribbean .....	8
Agenda item 7: Status of project documents to be adopted at the Summit in Mar del Plata .....	9
Agenda item 8: Discussion of issues of interest to the Caribbean to be included in the final declaration of the Fourth Summit of the Americas .....	10
Agenda item 9: Closure of meeting .....	10
Annex I: Agenda .....	11
Annex II: List of participants .....	12

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**Introduction**

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean and secretariat of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC), in conjunction with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat and the Government of the Republic of Argentina, convened an expert group meeting on 20 May 2005 at its offices in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The meeting was held in the context of the upcoming National Coordinators' Summit Implementation and Review Group (SIRG) Meeting to be held in June 2005 in Fort Lauderdale, United States of America.

The meeting was attended by representatives of Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Jamaica, Grenada, Saint Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago. The Association of Caribbean States (ACS), the CARICOM Secretariat, Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) were also represented. The list of participants is attached at Annex 2.

**Agenda item 1:  
Welcome and opening remarks**

Mr. Rudolf Buitelaar, Deputy Director and Officer in Charge of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, welcomed participants and outlined the purpose of the meeting. The main objectives were to provide a forum for technical discussions on employment issues in the Caribbean in preparation for the Fourth Summit of the Americas, as well as to facilitate further dialogue among National Coordinators, aimed at ensuring increased participation by Caribbean governments at the Summit.

He highlighted the current work in progress at the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters in the area of labour and employment issues, drawing attention to a consultancy commissioned to Professor Andrew Downes of the University of the West Indies (UWI). He also provided some background information and context for the meeting before inviting the representatives from the Embassy of the Republic of Argentina and the CARICOM Secretariat to present their opening remarks.

Mr. German Dominguez, Counsellor, Embassy of the Republic of Argentina in Trinidad and Tobago thanked the ECLAC Secretariat for hosting the meeting and the CARICOM Secretariat for supporting Argentina as the host for the Fourth Summit of the Americas in November. He then presented the motto of the Summit: 'Creating jobs to confront poverty and strengthen democratic governance'.

Mr. Colin Granderson, Assistant Secretary-General, CARICOM Secretariat, in his opening remarks expressed appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Argentina for hosting the Summit. He also thanked the ECLAC Secretariat for hosting this meeting as the CARICOM Secretariat was unable to host a preparatory meeting before June. He commented that the motto was important for CARICOM and its members who have recognized the linkages between good governance, poverty reduction and employment creation. He pointed to the challenge of how small countries could pool their resources in order to create more jobs and improve the welfare of their communities, the added challenge of integrating and bringing the factors of development together, and the challenge to development of human resources given the outflow of people in the CARICOM region. He then wished the group a productive meeting and again thanked the Government of the Republic of Argentina and the ECLAC Secretariat for contributing to the preparation for the Summit.

The meeting adopted the agenda which is attached to this report as Annex 1.

**Agenda item 2:**

**Presentation of the motto of the Fourth Summit of the Americas:**

*“Creating Jobs to confront poverty and strengthen democratic governance”*

**Summary**

Ms Noémi Gómez, Minister/Director of Regional Affairs and Head of Summit of the Americas Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Argentina, in presenting the motto of the Summit, “Creating Jobs to Confront Poverty and Strengthen Democratic Governance”, observed that the economies of Latin America were experiencing high levels of poverty and social inequality, which were resulting in a democratic crisis. Decisive action was needed to fight hunger, illiteracy and disease, which led to loss of autonomy and dignity. Social assistance policy was not enough as a main vehicle for social integration. Employment was placed at the centre of the political and social problems on the Summit agenda, linking it to other issues such as freedom, justice, security and protection.

She emphasized that economic growth was a necessary, but insufficient, condition for addressing social problems. The three concepts of the Summit motto – employment, poverty and democratic governance – were directly linked and traditional models of economic growth must be complemented with new models of development. An institutional approach tailored to the particular context of each country would lead to a reduction of inequality within and among countries.

She also called for the active involvement of participants at this meeting and at the upcoming SIRG Meeting in Fort Lauderdale and hoped for a substantial CARICOM presence at the SIRG Meeting in Buenos Aires in September. She then thanked the ECLAC Secretariat for organizing this meeting and providing an opportunity to clarify and share the work of the Fourth Summit of the Americas.

## **Discussion**

The representative of Trinidad and Tobago pointed out that a note had been circulated by the United States expressing dissatisfaction with the Spanish to English translation of the Summit's motto, particularly the term 'enfrentar' translated as 'confront'. This issue was considered and various views were shared among the participants. Options included replacing the term with either 'fighting' or 'combating'.

### **Agenda item 3: Statement by the CARICOM Secretariat**

## **Summary**

The representative from the CARICOM Secretariat stated that the region was committed to combating poverty and stimulating employment through the realisation of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), the Single Market coming into effect on 1 January 2006 and the Single Economy on 1 January 2009. CARICOM has advanced the labour agenda through the development of labour legislation, the approval of a Declaration of Labour and Industrial Relations Principles, the incorporation of workers' rights in the Charter of Civil Society and by convening meetings of Ministers of Labour, the last of which was held in 2003. The Secretariat was considering convening a special Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) later in 2005 to check on the activities of its members on labour issues in the context of the regional labour market in view of the formation of the Single Economy.

He pointed out that while the ultimate aim was freedom of movement for all without the need for work permits, initially the established regional labour market would be distorted as only limited categories of skills would be allowed to move freely. Allowing labour movement would create greater competition in the regional labour market, ultimately leading to greater efficiency.

He also highlighted the 1997 CARICOM Agreement on Social Security that should act as a regional social safety net to protect nationals as they relocated during their professional careers. However, further collaboration was needed with other stakeholders such as the CDB, the Department for International Development (DfID) and the World Bank to advance the area of social protection and protect and raise the standard of living and work.

## **Discussion**

Following CARICOM's presentation, the ECLAC Secretariat raised the question of the time frame of liberalization and whether there was an incremental system of liberalizing the categories of labour. The CARICOM representative responded that the Tenth Special Conference in November 2004 had created a taskforce to consider this issue. It had already put forward the recommendation of an incremental liberalization up to 31 December 2008. He pointed out that this was only a stakeholders' meeting and that comments from member States were still pending.

The representative of Jamaica made reference to the CARICOM Reciprocal Agreement on Social Security and the fact that it was restricted to contributory social insurance schemes in the region and did not take into account the range of non-contributory social assistance programmes that existed. A description was given of various social assistance programmes in Jamaica including the National Health Fund which issues a health card for subsidised prescription drugs to persons with specified chronic diseases. It was suggested that consideration needed to be given to the issue as to whether CARICOM nationals taking up employment in another member State under the Free Movement of Skills Protocol should be entitled to such social assistance benefits.

The CARICOM representative responded that the region needed to go beyond the present social security schemes and pointed out that the Treaty included a protocol for contingent rights.

**Agenda item 4:**  
**Overview of employment issues and labour market trends**  
*Presentation by the ECLAC Secretariat*

**Summary**

The ECLAC representative focused on the following issues: growth, employment, productivity, human capital development, and attracting and retaining skills. He stated that although poverty was not a major challenge facing the Caribbean region where less than 30% of the population lived below the poverty line in all member States, except for Haiti, employment creation could reduce poverty. Significant and sustained economic growth via productive investment was necessary to combat unemployment and poverty on a long-term basis. However, economic growth in the region had declined since the 1990s and unemployment had increased in most countries, affecting particularly females and young people. In many countries more than a quarter of all unemployed were between the ages of 25 and 34.

He commented that although labour productivity in specific sectors and in specific countries had increased, overall total factor productivity had declined. This was the result of low investment in physical capital, in general, and due to a disproportionate share of low-skills in the employed work force, in particular. The latter however did not reflect the high levels of public expenditure on education.

Finally, he explained that there was significant importation of skills into the region, most of which were in the high skill category (other than Belize where most of the skills imported were low skilled agricultural workers). Movement of labour within the region was largely from countries such as Guyana and Jamaica and to countries such as Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago.

**Discussion**

The representative of Argentina stated that the notion of economic growth had been a point of discussion in meetings in the past, but that growth was not sufficient and education policy had to change due to the observed trend of importation of high skills to the region.

The ECLAC Secretariat responded that economic growth should be consistent and sustained to combat poverty. However, intermediate policy programmes to create employment were needed while economic growth would create conditions for a high skill employment environment. Recommendations to set government policy would be made upon completion of the study being carried out by ECLAC on labour issues and labour market trends. In this regard, the representative from Jamaica pointed to research on the need to combine economic and social policies in addressing poverty and social development.

The representative of CARICOM commented that within the CSME context there were two types of movement: inside and outside migration. Based on data recently received on work permits in Barbados between 1997-2005, 998 skilled nationals were granted permits and it seems that low skilled workers were moving within the region and high skilled were moving out.

The ECLAC Secretariat pointed out that generally CARICOM nationals preferred to move within the region, however, barriers to movement in many cases deterred them. Since the Freedom of Movement in 2001, Trinidad and Tobago had received approximately 300 people. He also noted that the ECLAC study was based on work permit data, not taking illegal migration into account. Analysis of formal immigration would allow identifying bottlenecks as formal immigration usually consisted of higher skilled individuals. In fact, it was clear that, to a large extent, education systems in the region were not supplying the skills required by the private sector. This explained the support of the private sector in the formation of the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT) – an education facility specifically geared to meet the demands of the exploration industry in the country.

The representative of Grenada observed that there was an aspect of the Treaty of Chaguaramas called ‘non wage earners’, who were service providers who could establish businesses without a work permit. He suggested that the ECLAC study should look at this in the context of the single market. ECLAC stated that while the study did not incorporate this issue, another study on financial intermediation which would address the issue of non-wage earners within this framework was being conducted.

He further noted that productivity growth was the only true source of competitiveness. He noted the mismatch between graduates’ skills and market requirements and that youth unemployment required practical solutions such as apprenticeship programmes to enable local graduates to gain the experience required by employers who were currently seeking expertise from outside the region.

The representative of the ECLAC Secretariat informed participants that data limitations made measurement of total factor productivity in the region futile. With respect to the suggestion of apprenticeship programmes, it was agreed that education programmes should be linked with internship programmes. The meeting was informed that ECLAC had embarked on a new internship programme.

The representative of Argentina stated that he looked forward to the recommendations coming out of the final ECLAC study that would help to push forward the programme of action.

**Agenda item 5:**  
**Overview of labour and employment issues**  
*Presentation by the ILO*

**Summary**

The representative of the ILO gave an overview of the trends of unemployment and labour standards in the region, emphasizing that the region's performance was disappointing as opportunities were not being seized and that many challenges in view of the upcoming CSME remained. He thus signalled the need for labour market reform with the involvement of social partners, trade unions and employers.

Migration was identified as an issue with both positive and negative impacts. Advantages lay in the opportunities for countries with skill shortages to benefit from the free movement of skills. The disadvantage was largely in the area of emigration of skills or the "brain-drain". However, some benefit did accrue to countries that exported skills in the form of remittance inflows. Nevertheless, it was suggested that countries should seek to attract as well as retain skilled labour.

He then pointed to several strategies for the region. For one, there was a need to link macroeconomic policy to labour policies in order to generate political support for proposals. He also reiterated that economic growth and employment growth were not mutually exclusive and, therefore, macroeconomic policy could promote employment growth if efforts were focused on increasing productivity, which in turn increased competitiveness.

He indicated that labour market reform must provide adequate security and protection in times of change and that workers must be included in any formulation of future strategies to ensure they shared in the strategy's benefits. Finally, he mentioned the necessity to build linkages between critical economic sectors and businesses to have spin-off effects to other sectors.

**Discussion**

Following the presentation, the Assistant Secretary General of CARICOM enquired as to the evidence of disconnect between profiles of skills coming onto the market and those of existing vacancies. The representative from the ILO responded that over time the demand for the skills of workers at a tertiary level had grown fastest in Trinidad and Tobago, while the demand for the primary and no skill group had declined, noting that the data on technical and vocational skills were poor. The ILO representative also mentioned that in the tourism sector jobs were usually low and semi-skilled with few high-skilled jobs being created.

The representative of Jamaica made three observations. The first was that the informal sector (amorphous in nature, ranging from professionals evading taxes to persons engaged in economically marginal jobs or even lucrative illegal activities) was increasing in size in the developing world, including the Caribbean, and this group generally lacked coverage under the social protection system. It was further stated that while Jamaica's National Insurance Scheme



(NIS), which came into force in 1966, made provision for the informal sector which currently constitutes 57% of the labour force, the participation rate was low for this category of workers as many had not been contributing to the scheme as required in the National Insurance Act. This was reflected in the fact that only a third of the population of pensionable age met eligibility criteria for NIS benefits. Strategies had therefore been put in place to strengthen compliance levels among informal sector workers. This situation highlighted the need for a regulatory framework to formalize the informal sector. The second point made was that there was an overall need for labour market reform, and thirdly, that the definition of a worker and issue of core labour standards must be revisited within the context of the changing character of the labour market and the growing informalization of work. Concern was expressed particularly in respect of cases where many workers were being categorised as ‘contractors’ to evade payment of social security contributions, which often made them ineligible for social security benefits and severance or redundancy pay. It was also stated that as part of the Labour Market Reform programme in Jamaica the Labour Relations and Industrial Disputes Act (LRIDA) was amended to settle the issue of the definition of ‘worker’, but difficulties were still being encountered with some employers in terms of their classification of persons hired. Reference was also made to the need to carefully analyse the issues of unemployment insurance and other forms of unemployment compensation.

The representative of the ILO stated that currently significant funds went to public works programmes as a means of unemployment compensation. While severance pay might be considered as a form of savings in the economy, current proposals included investing part of severance pay packages in a fund. Reform processes must look at different possibilities and must keep track of developments to adapt labour standards to incorporate sectors developing in the informal sector. Hence, several sectors had a high migration rate due to a low wage policy as the outcome of macroeconomic policy. This depletion of human resources was not easily replaceable and was in fact significant in many member States. Pointing to recent structural adjustments, he noted that, for example, in St. Kitts and Nevis approximately 15% of the employed labour would become redundant after the closure of the local sugar industry.

The ECLAC Secretariat noted that agriculture was critical with respect to food security. Several countries were currently restructuring, for example, Barbados was currently undertaking a feasibility study; Guyana was improving its sugar efficiency; and Brazil was assisting Caribbean countries with restructuring the sugar industry. He also pointed out that the sugar factory in St Kitts had not closed down but had rather scaled down and was looking at an option of cogeneration of electricity for domestic production.

**Agenda item 6:**  
**Social protection and poverty reduction in the Caribbean**  
*Presentation by the CDB*

**Summary**

The CDB presentation focused on the issue of social protection and poverty reduction. The representative explained how the region was characterised by vulnerabilities that needed to be matched by social protection instruments to broaden the scope of coverage of risks and to

target beneficiaries more effectively. Programmes such as social insurance were in need of reform to incorporate the informal labour market, the poor and the unemployed. In addition, a further challenge was that programmes overlapped and were often uncoordinated. They were poorly documented and evaluated and had a weak planning and implementation capacity, which had led to the potential of social protection funds not being realised.

Thus there was need of a regional social protection framework to reduce the adverse impact of vulnerability on growth and development; to protect the living standards of households and communities and to promote their capacity to invest in their future. Member States needed to be more systematic in protecting against risks and vulnerabilities by strengthening public sector capacity and promoting efficient and effective targeting of social protection instruments. Social protection needed to be on the region's development agenda and the CSME agenda.

## **Discussion**

The Assistant Secretary General of CARICOM raised the question of how countries could bring issues of social protection into the context of increasingly liberalized international financial institutions. He stated that social protection programmes existed but were inefficient as there were overlapping programmes that were not linked to human capacity development. What was needed was prioritising and redesigning of social protection programmes. Labour programmes should allow people to develop skills to reduce their dependency on public work programmes. More strategy was needed to coordinate all agencies involved in social protection under a one targeting system.

The representative of Jamaica commented that although social protection was perceived as charity by some persons, it was in fact a social right according to the United Nations Charter and the 1966 Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights. Consequently, governments should ensure that an adequate social protection system was in place. Jamaica had embarked on a Social Safety Net Reform Programme since 1998 which included steps to enact new social assistance legislation to replace the old Poor Relief Law of 1886. The reform also promoted a developmental or human capital investment approach rather than the conventional welfare mode. She further noted that the working poor were increasing in number and the minimum wage was generally too low to lift people out of poverty.

### **Agenda item 7:**

#### **Status of project documents to be adopted at the Summit in Mar del Plata**

The representative of Argentina presented the status of the project documents to be adopted at the Fourth Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata in November 2005. The SIRG approved the theme 'Creating Jobs to Fight Poverty and Strengthen Democratic Governance' in June 2004. In October 2004, a base document was presented and commented on at an SIRG meeting in Washington. This base document was the backbone of the Draft Declaration circulated at the beginning of 2005. Following the March 2005 SIRG meeting, a deadline of 2 May 2005 was set for the submission of comments on the base document and the Draft Declaration. Upon these a first revision of the Draft Declaration was to be circulated in the week of 23 May 2005. Further submissions of comments could be made verbally at the June SIRG

meeting in Fort Lauderdale. The next and final meeting of National Coordinators would discuss the Plan of Action document to be adopted by Heads of State and Government.

At the Fort Lauderdale meeting, Ministers of Foreign Affairs would also meet alongside the Organization of American States (OAS) Assembly to evaluate the preparatory work undertaken for the Summit. The Joint Summit Working Group would prepare for a joint meeting with National Coordinators at the September SIRG meeting in Buenos Aires. The Draft Guidelines for the Plan of Action document was circulated among participants. Based on comments and contributions a revised version would be circulated before the September SIRG meeting. All Summit documents, comments and submissions could be accessed at <http://www.summit-americas.org>

## **Discussion**

Following the presentation, the representative of Trinidad and Tobago informed participants on the status of preparations for the Summit. He stated that due to human resource limitations, member States found it difficult to be fully engaged in the Summit preparation process and also observed that this limitation prevented an adequate follow-up after such meetings.

He noted that as part of the Summit preparation process there was interest in the areas of small and medium enterprise development, skills development and the retraining and retooling of workers. It was noted that social development could have a bearing on poverty but the main issues must be considered as a whole. There was also limited engagement by the private sector in these matters, where organizations such as chambers of commerce did not provide responses or feedback to enquiries from government.

With regard to the Summit preparations, the representative of Antigua and Barbuda was unable to provide an update on his country's position due to the short notice of the current meeting. The representative of Grenada stated that his country had established an inter-ministerial taskforce; however as a result of the lack of progress in the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), overall enthusiasm had decreased. The medium-term objective of Grenada was to fight poverty.

The CARICOM Secretariat had participated in OAS labour meetings. Based on previous experience there were a lot of project proposals but financing did not follow and delegates felt discouraged.

The representative of Grenada stated that due to the importance of trade revenue to member States, one must bear in mind the World Trade Organization/African Caribbean Pacific-European Union (WTO/ACP-EU) negotiations when dealing with the issue of poverty and social protection. The representative of Jamaica concurred and emphasized the link between poverty, vulnerability and the environment. The representative of Trinidad and Tobago added that the issue of vulnerability and natural disasters was raised in Washington and must remain on the agenda.

**Agenda item 8:**  
**Discussion of issues of interest to the Caribbean to be included in the  
final declaration of the Fourth Summit of the Americas**

The Counsellor of the Argentine Embassy in Trinidad and Tobago announced that shortly a Note would be sent to all the Foreign Ministries of the region requesting the designation of a Foreign Liaison Officer (FLO) for the Summit of Mar del Plata. This official would be responsible for all communications dealing with national delegations in aspects such as accommodation and other logistical arrangements. He stressed the critical importance of a timely response in this respect.

**Agenda item 9:**  
**Closure of meeting**

The Chairman thanked all representatives for their participation and declared the meeting closed.

Annex 1

**Agenda**

1. Welcome and opening remarks
2. Presentation of the motto of the Fourth Summit of the Americas: Creating jobs to confront poverty and strengthen democratic governance
3. Statement by CARICOM
4. Overview of employment issues and labour market trends: Presentation by ECLAC
5. Overview of labour and employment issues: Presentation by ILO
6. Social protection and poverty reduction in the Caribbean: Presentation by CDB
7. Status of project documents to be adopted at the Summit in Mar del Plata
8. Discussion on issues of interest to the Caribbean to be included in the final declaration of the Fourth Summit of the Americas
9. Closure of meeting

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