



Welcome Remarks

delivered by

Her Honour Mrs. Deborah Thomas-Felix
President of the Industrial Court of Trinidad and Tobago

at the

Meet with the Court Symposium 7

The Labour Market and Industrial Relations Post COVID-19

A decorative graphic in the bottom left corner consisting of several overlapping geometric shapes: a large grey hexagon, a smaller black hexagon, and a purple hexagon.

The Port of Spain Ballroom
Hyatt Regency Trinidad, Wrightson Road, Trinidad and Tobago
9:00 am – 4:00 pm, 10th June 2023

I adopt the protocols of the Master of Ceremonies Senator Dr. Paul Richards.

I formally welcome each of you to the Meet with the Court Symposium.

While I was preparing for today's symposium, I went on a short journey of nostalgia. If you would indulge me for a few minutes I will share my thoughts with you.

REFLECTIONS

When I conceptualized the symposium in 2013, the staff and I had several meetings planning the event. The night before the event, we were in this very hall after 2 in the morning, putting everything together for the next day; and we planned everything down to the very colour. The following year, the same thing happened, however, after the second year, I did not have to be there late in the night. In fact, I will pop in about 11 to show support and the staff will have had everything arranged.

Now in 2023, while I would still pop in the night of each event. The staff has been able to do all the logistics behind the scene.

I got nostalgic when on Thursday this week, which was a holiday, some members of staff, despite me trying to dissuade them, insisted on coming to work to plan for this event so I had no choice but to join them. We worked until very late Thursday night and I do want to say that the staff at the Industrial Court, apart from being very friendly and approachable, they don't take "ah mental day", "hard wuk, no mental day". I want to share publicly that We have one of the most industrious body of staff in the public service and I deeply appreciate all their efforts to make this important event and I want to

publicly thank them for all the hard work they have done behind the scene. To the members of staff that are here, on behalf of the Judges of the Court, I want to say thank you.

The second thing I wish to ponder about, is when I became President of the Industrial Court, I embarked on a series of judicial education training for judges and his Lordship the Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr Justice Ivor Archie, attended the opening of each session. In 2013, when we started the symposium, those of you who have been here from the very inception, will remember that the learned Chief Justice has attended each session and spent the day with us.

I just want to say that the presence of the Chief Justice at these functions means a lot to us. Chief Justice, 10 years after, I am very happy and pleased that you are here with us today and I thank you for the support which you have given to the Industrial Court in all of its events.

As I continued my nostalgia, last year I accepted an invitation to deliver the feature address for the opening of the law term of the National Industrial Court of Nigeria. Unlike Trinidad and Tobago, where the opening of Court is one day, the National Industrial Court of Nigeria celebrates an opening week. I was deeply honoured and extremely pleased to meet the President of the National Industrial Court of Nigeria his Lordship, Mr Justice Benedict Kanyip and the Judges of the Court. His Lordship and I held several discussions on a possible collaboration between the National Industrial Court of Nigeria and the Industrial Court of Trinidad and Tobago.

Within a month or so of me leaving Nigeria, his Lordship was appointed as a member of the ILO's Committee of Experts on the application of Conventions

and Recommendations, a committee of which I have been a member for the past eight years. So, when I went to Geneva in November for the meetings of the Committee I met His Lordship Kanyip for the second time in two months and we spent a considerable amount of time working together. I am deeply honoured that His Lordship has accepted an invitation to attend this symposium. On behalf of the Vice President, the Chairman of the Essential Services Division, the judges, the staff, My Lord, I welcome you to Trinidad and Tobago and I welcome you to this Symposium. I know it is your second trip to Trinidad and Tobago and I thank you so much for attending.

THE FUTURE OF WORK POST COVID-19

Today we will look at the future of work post COVID-19 and some of the things which are evolving in the world of work. A number of persons, when they think about the future of work, they think of artificial intelligence. However, cognitive technologies is only one aspect of what is evolving in the workplace.

Before the pandemic, the ILO's Global Commission on the Future of Work was established to undertake an in-depth examination on the future of work that can provide the analytical basis for the delivery of social justice in the 21st Century. The COVID-19 Pandemic propelled us here in the Caribbean, like the rest of the world, into the digital age and into extensive reform on working methods. Post pandemic, there are several converging trends which have profound impacts on all aspects of work, this of course, has implications for employees, unions, businesses and society in general.

Today Shingo Miyake, Labour Law and International Labour Standards Specialist from the ILO, will examine one aspect of the future of work, which is *Telework after COVID-19* and the implications of this method of work to the employers and the employees and their representative unions and the socioeconomic fabric of our countries.

Senior and renowned Economist, Dr. Shelton Nicholls will discuss with us today *Post-pandemic Global Economic Trends: Implications for the Labour Market in Trinidad and Tobago*. The International Monetary Fund Blog on the Global Economy of January 30, 2023 says that “the global economy is poised to slow this year, before rebounding next year. Growth will remain weak by historical standards as the fight against inflation and the Russia’s war in Ukraine weigh on activity. Despite these headwinds, the outlook is less gloomy than in our October forecast and could represent a turning point, with growth bottoming out and inflation declining.” I look forward to Dr. Nicholls’ perspective on what is taking place in the region.

Justice of Appeal, Justice Jefferson Cumberbatch’s presentation today is on the very important topic of Collective Bargaining. Collective bargaining among the social partners is a mandatory legal requirement in Trinidad and Tobago and is a critical and very useful tool to shape the future of work. Before and during the pandemic, I urged the social partners to use social dialogue to resolve the new and myriad challenges which are emerging at work and also to use the social dialogue mechanism to embrace the opportunities which present themselves in this changing world of work. In my humble opinion, the future of work with artificial intelligence, remote work, the gig economy, among other things, is inextricably linked with collective bargaining through social dialogue and it is of profound value in the quest for

flexible and consensual solutions at work. I will go further to say that collective bargaining can contribute to shape new rights, regulate the use of new technologies and to foster labour market security and adaptability.

Finally, Dr. Leighton Jackson will examine the pertinent issues which affect unprecepted security guards, the lack of social protection and the possible impediments to their right to decent work.

I again welcome you. For those of you who are attending for the first time, there is a vase in front of you...

Do enjoy your day and Thank You.