



JAMAICA EMPLOYERS' FEDERATION

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ADDRESS OF MRS. JACQUELINE COKE LLOYD AT THE UNITED NATION'S GENERAL ASSEMBLY'S INFORMAL INTERACTIVE HEARINGS ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT - *CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICIES IN SENDING AND RECEIVING COUNTRIES*

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates, Ladies and gentlemen.

I am greatly honoured to have been afforded the privilege of addressing this hearing on the topic of migration and development – the challenge for economic and social policies in sending and receiving countries. As is obvious from the fact that we are meeting to deliberate this topic, migration is an issue that is becoming increasingly important particularly in the face of today's intensified movements towards globalization. I say this because globalisation has increasingly created close linkages between disparate and distant countries. Business linkages that result in cross-border production and cross border office structures; cultural linkages with music and sports uniting countries and communications technology beaming the culture of different countries into the homes of distant people in distant lands. My own country has cultural and economic ties in countries ranging from the United States of America to China in the Far East. These linkages, particularly with countries such as the USA,

have been intensified because of Cable Television and satellite broadcasts that beam intimate details of the way of life of the people of these places into our homes. In this context, migration is sometimes just the culmination of a union that took place long before the physical passage of one person from one country to another.

It is no wonder then that migration is such a significant phenomenon of our time. UN estimates indicate that approximately 191 million people were living away from their country of origin in 2005. About 150 million of them were people from developing countries living in developed ones. Jamaica alone, with a population estimated to be in the region of just over 2.6 million people, accounted for over 100,000 of the world's migrants over the period 2000 to 2005. When the figure is disaggregated by years over the same period, the annual number of migrants from Jamaica varies between just over 12,000 to just under 19,000. These numbers speak clearly to a phenomenon that cannot be ignored.

The issues attendant on this phenomenon are complex and vary in perspective by factors such as whether or not the viewer is from a receiving or donor country, an employer or employee and skilled or unskilled migrant.

From the employers, perspective, regardless of country of origin, we welcome the freedom of movement of individuals as vital to the continuation and success of enterprise. Migrant skills contribute greatly to business both in technical and non-technical areas. Indeed, the US space programme was engineered by a German migrant who had pioneered the development of jet propulsion in Germany. Migrant workers also form the core of agricultural labour in countries such as the United States and Canada. Conversely, developing countries often depend upon migrant professionals and technical people to drive the development of their industry and infrastructure.

Notwithstanding, there are negatives associated with migration with which we must wrestle. Prominent among them is the so called "Brain Drain".

The Brain Drain

Using Jamaica as a reference point, in the early years of our development, people travelling out of our country were largely comprised of the less educated who were looking for better employment opportunities and those seeking to advance their education in one area or another. In more recent times this has changed. The advent of more local opportunities for tertiary level education has increased the number of people in our country who are skilled. This factor in tandem with a demand in the more developed countries for more skilled workers in areas such as Education and Health Care, has changed the composition of

migrants to include more of the highly skilled and trained professionals. The result is that countries such as ours now face the much talked about brain drain. It has been argued, and anecdotally supported, though not yet proven by empirical evidence, that our Education and Health Care Systems, have been significantly reduced because of the migration of skilled practitioners. It has also forced our employers, government and non-government, to import, in some instances, re-import skills at much inflated rates. This is compounded by the fact that it is our taxpayers, who through the government's training and educational delivery systems, pay for the training of these professionals. It raises the question as to if and how overseas recruiting bodies could be made to contribute to the sustenance of our local education/training system.

Barrel Children

The movement of our people has also created another phenomenon that has had some negative impact on our society. I refer to the so called "Barrel Children. These are children of economic migrants who are left in the care of an older relative, friend or sibling and who receive barrels of goods and remittances at varying frequencies. Many of these children become socially maladjusted and develop poor social skills. Some of them develop psychological defects such as feelings of parental rejection that haunt them through out their lives. Some join the throngs of the lawless and become burdens on the state. The case of John malvo provides a useful example.

Sometimes immigration policies prevent the early reuniting of children with their migrant parents. Other times, it is the legal status of these migrants that keep them apart from their children. While it is ultimately the parents and not the host country who must take responsibility for separation from the children, the economic realities that some of these parents face leave them with no option but to take what in this case would amount to the lesser of two evils. The other choice would be to stay home in abject poverty with their children. Many of our employers operate in or near communities where they must relate to the social dislocations that result from these separations. They also grapple with a workforce that includes products of these dislocations. These conditions stultify business. Employers are therefore keen to see greater resolution to this problem. Ease of travel for migrants would keep them more in touch with their relatives in their homeland. This suggests that countries should consider administering their immigration policies in ways that are more sensitive to the circumstances of migrants. More relaxed immigration policies would encourage more frequent contact of migrants with their homeland because of reduced fear of deportation on re-entry into host countries and for this reason also, discourage illegal entry and stay in host countries.

Remittances

On the other hand migration has created what might be considered a virtual industry for Jamaica and other similar countries around the globe. In this regard, Remittances now account for major contributions to our GDP. While this may raise eyebrows as to the impact that outward remittances might be having on the host country, it is indicative of the productive role that migrants are playing in the host countries. The contributions of these individuals help to stimulate the local economy and keep business vibrant. Indeed, remittances have opened up new opportunities for business that are now being exploited by our financial sector. Our policy considerations should deliberate on how these remittances might be more greatly facilitated in both sending and receiving countries.

Another positive relates to the fact that many of the more developed countries are experiencing negative population growth – a trend that is expected to exacerbate, not lessen due to factors such as declining birth rate and increasingly elderly populations. The viability of these societies is supported by migrant skilled and productive people.

As earlier indicated, many migrant workers also return to countries such as ours with skills and capital that contribute to the growth and development of their countries of origin. Employers who operate in technical areas are particularly concerned to see that there is an in flow of such workers.