

Good Morning

Honorable Jean-Pierre Blackburn, Minister of Labor of Canada; Authorities and Representatives of the Ministries of Labor of the Americas; Representatives of the Advisory Bodies of the Conference –COSATE and CEATAL; Representatives of the International Labor Organization, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

As Director of the Department of Social Development and Employment of the Organization of American States, it is indeed an honor for me to be here in Ottawa today for the opening of this workshop on labor migration. For us, as the Technical Secretariat of the Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML), this event represents the latest effort in a long history of collaboration between the OAS and the Conference, which is the oldest ministerial forum of the Inter-American System, having begun its activities in 1963.

Within this framework of over four decades of uninterrupted advocacy and cooperation on labor issues, this workshop has a very special significance for the Secretariat, for the following two reasons:

Firstly, it marks a significant milestone in the long and fruitful relationship between the OAS and the IACML, since this is the first event organized within the framework of a new cooperation mechanism, known as the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (or RIAL, its Spanish acronym). Managed by the Department of Social Development and Employment, RIAL is an initiative aimed at improving institutional capacity building through horizontal cooperation between the region's ministries of labor. Following priorities and guidelines established by the IACML, RIAL serves as a hub that processes information on the supply and demand for cooperation generated by the ministries. Policies, programs and methodologies are then selected from the portfolios assembled by our Department and shared with network members through a combination of high-impact workshops and distance learning aided by virtual tools and improved connectivity.

The RIAL proposal was prepared jointly by the OAS and ILO following a request by IACML. It is now operative thanks to a grant from the Canadian Government to the OAS which has made possible this workshop as well as a series of activities that will be undertaken during 2007 leading to the 15th IACML that will take place in Trinidad and Tobago next September.

Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Canada's Ministry of Labor for its enthusiastic support to the RIAL initiative and for its confidence in our Department's capacity to implement it. We look forward to a long and productive relationship with our Canadian partners in order to advance our shared commitment to strengthen the Conference's role as the leading hemispheric forum on labor issues.

The second reason for this workshop to have special significance is related to its main theme, this is, labor migration. The relevance of this activity today was evidenced when the international community identified migration as a phenomenon of political priority, as it has been pointed in diverse forums such as the Summit of the Americas, the UN High-Level Dialogue last September, and more recently, the XVI Ibero-American Summit in Montevideo.

We must bear in mind that the IACML and the OAS are well positioned to address this political challenge since they have a broad experience in migration issues. In fact, in 1971 the Regional Seminar on Migration Services Establishment in the Ministries of Labor took place, which focused its analysis in migration of seasonal workers and the responsibility of guest countries to provide adequate living conditions for migrants, as well as in the participation of unions from receiving countries on this regard.

Afterwards, and in response to a mandate from the VI IACML Conference, held in Lima in 1978, the OAS, with the support of the Government of Spain, implemented from 1981 to 1993 the Project on Domestic and International Migrations. Among the diverse results of this initiative are demographic and juridical studies from 20 countries and assistance to create Migration Technical Units in the Ministries of Labor of Argentina, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Mexico and Guatemala. Furthermore, 15 Inter-American Courses on Migration were undertaken, most of them in Buenos Aires and Madrid, in which 38 officers from 22 OAS member States were trained.

We believe it is opportune to refer to activities undertaken in previous decades since they induce to reflection on the changes and challenges presented by the specific nature of the current migration phenomenon, which apart of registering a significant increase, present particularities such as diversification of migration destination, increase in qualified migration, and economic and social impact of remittances sent by migrants to their original countries.

Apart from the characteristics already pointed, in recent times, the need to assure the human rights approach for considering and governing migration process has been strongly stated. This is due to the existence of overwhelming evidence showing that migrants and their families are highly vulnerable since they are exposed to serious risks, such as human smuggling and trafficking, irregular detentions and deportations, violence in the border and transit regions, and discrimination and exclusion in receiving countries.

The workshop we are inaugurating is enclosed in the rights approach as it is stated in its title that openly mentions protection of labor rights of migrants.

Due to this, the workshop can be considered as a specific contribution of the IACML to the initiative launched by Heads of State and Government gathered in Quebec to celebrate the Third Summit of the Americas in 2001. In that moment, they expressed their will to establish an Inter-American program, within the OAS framework, to promote and protect the human rights of migrant workers and their families, taking into account the activities of the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights and supporting the work of the Special Rapporteur on Migrant Workers of this Commission. In this regard, I am pleased to welcome to this workshop to Commissioner Freddy Gutiérrez Trejo, who works as Special Rapporteur on Migrant Workers.

We must point that the mandate of the Third Summit is today a reality thanks to the implementation of the Inter-American Program for the Promotion and Protection of the Human Rights of Migrants, Including Migrant Workers and their Families, approved by the OAS General Assembly in 2005. The Program, entrusts 33 specific activities to the different areas of the General Secretariat, each of them with a broad scope that goes from dissemination of information on current legislation, to concrete action for the promotion of human rights of migrant workers.

Within the framework of this Program, the Department of Social Development and Employment has been invited to participate in the development of their activities, particularly in its role as Technical Secretariat of the IACML, this will allow us to be the mean privileged to facilitate coordination of actions among the Ministries of Labor and the Inter-American Program. On this

regard, I am in position to inform you that we are invited to attend the last session of this year of the Program in which advancements will be examined, and where we will take the opportunity to present the IACML activities based on the framework of the working plan approved last year in Mexico and, especially, the results of this Workshop.

Finally, I would like to refer to the workshop's program, hosted by the Ministry of Labor of Canada, with the collaboration of the Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare of Mexico, and the support of the Technical Secretariat.

The objectives for this workshop are:

- A) To promote dialogue and cooperation among Ministries of Labour of the Americas on the protection of labour rights of migrant workers and on migration processes undertaken by States according to their national legal systems.
- B) To share experiences and programs on the promotion and protection of labor rights of migrant workers and labour market programs, with special emphasis on Canada's temporary foreign workers program.
- C) To identify lessons learned and key guidelines for future inter-American action on this topic.

To meet these objectives, the program is structured as follows: today's morning we will hear two presentations that will give us elements to understand the context of migration issues, one by Virgilio Levaggi, from the ILO, and the other from researcher Heather Gibb from the North-South Institute.

During the afternoon, 6 countries will present their experiences and initiatives to Project the labor rights of migrant workers, including Mexico, US, Ecuador, Brazil, Peru and Costa Rica.

Tomorrow, we will continue with presentation by countries, including Canada, then the Caribbean, represented by Trinidad and Tobago, and Saint Kitts and Nevis. In the afternoon, we will have the perspectives from social actors with the presentations of COSATE and CEATAL. Furthermore, after the presenting the conclusions of the Secretariat, Mr. Anthony Giles, from Human Resources and Social Development Canada, will close the workshop.

I will end my intervention thanking to each of you your attendance to this event, and to our hosts from the Ministry of Labor of Canada, for the excellent organization of this workshop. I hope that the deliberations that will initiate today, serve as a path in the search for the best forms to assure the protection of migrant workers rights.

Thank you very much.