

U.S. Department of Labor provides cooperation to Jamaica on Inclusion of People with Disabilities



Washington, DC, October 21st, 2016

Given the vast experience of the United States in ensuring the rights of persons with disabilities, delegates from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security of Jamaica received technical assistance from the U.S. Department of Labor in the framework of the 9th Call for Bilateral Cooperation of the RIAL. The exchange, which took place during the week of October 17 to 21, included information, best practices and lessons learned in this area in order to effectively implement the National Disabilities Act which was passed by the Jamaican Parliament in October 2014. The Act is intended to promote, protect and ensure that people with disabilities enjoy equal privileges, interests, benefits and treatments with others in society. Thus, to effectively implement this Act, an enforcement mechanism called the Disabilities Rights Tribunal will be established in Jamaica to hear cases of discrimination against persons with disabilities and adjudicate same.

The delegation from Jamaica's Ministry of Labour and Social Security was represented by the Chief Technical Director of Social Security, Dione Jennings; the Director of Legal Services, Camille Bennett-Campbell; and the Executive Director of the Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities, Christine Hendricks.

Their activities began on October 17 with a meeting with representatives of the United States Department of Labor Civil Rights Center where they learned about the role of the various agencies of the Department of Labor and the Government as well as the history of civil rights legislation in the United States. The informative and technical exchange was prepared by the Center Senior Policy Advisor, Lee Perselay and the Chief of the Office of Compliance and Policy, Roger Ocampo.

During the second morning the delegation met with the Senior Policy Advisor of the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), Meredith DeDonna, who explained the role and mission of the Office in order to develop and influence policies and practices that increase the number and quality of employment opportunities for people with disabilities. In the course of the

afternoon they met with representatives of the Civil Rights Center, which is the institution that promotes non-discrimination and equal opportunities through implementation of federal civil rights statutes both within the Department of Labor, as well as programs receiving assistance from the department. This center investigates and rules on complaints of discrimination, develops the rules of civil rights, conducts compliance reviews, and provides technical assistance and training to groups of internal and external stakeholders.

The agenda for the third day included a meeting with the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) where they exchanged information with the Senior Attorney Advisor at the Office of Legal Counsel, Sharon Rennert, and the Director of the Field Coordination Programs at the Office of Field Programs, Malcolm Medley, who explained the role that this agency plays on enforcing federal laws prohibiting employment discrimination which include enforcing regulations covering the American with Disabilities Act (ADA).

On the morning of the fourth day, the Jamaican delegation visited the facilities of Gallaudet University, an institution whose core mission is to increase, promote, and support learning and leadership opportunities for deaf and hard of hearing people. At Gallaudet, the representatives explained the different programs they manage which help this group of people to discover their true potential and to improve their quality of life.



During the afternoon they met with the Access Board Executive Director, David Capozzi. The board is an independent federal agency that promotes equality for people with disabilities through leadership in accessible design and the development of accessibility guidelines and standards.

Finally, they concluded their meetings on the OAS premises where they met with the Director of the Department of Economic Development, Maryse Roberts; the Director of the Department of Social Inclusion, Betilde Muñoz-Pogossian, and the Chief of Labor and Employment Section, Maria Claudia Camacho. Invited to the debriefing meeting was the Alternate Representative of the Mission of the United States to the OAS, Julianna Aynes-Neville. During their last session, the Director of the Department of Social Inclusion informed on the actions and progress being made by the OAS to continue to support its Member States in the adoption of legislative, social, labor or any other measures to eliminate discrimination

against persons with disabilities in the Americas and to promote their full integration into society as per The Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities (CIADDIS).

The representatives of Jamaica went over their work week as well as the next steps upon their return to Jamaica. They thanked especially the auspices of the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL) of the Organization of American States (OAS) for making this activity possible.

RIAL was created by the Ministries of Labor of the Americas and the OAS in 2005 to support bilateral cooperation exchanges in the region.