

Need for public education on recession—Thomas-Felix

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There is the need for public education on what is a recession and the impact of global economic developments on this country.

President of the Industrial Court of T&T, Deborah Thomas-Felix, said citizens are in panic mode and have a different view and interpretation of the meaning of a recession.

She said: "There is dispute about whether we are experiencing a recession and what should be done in households and at workplaces to treat with this situation."

Thomas-Felix said the country should have those types of discussions if it was interested in cushioning itself from the effects of the global economic turbulence.

In her address at yesterday's Meet with the Court symposium at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Port-of-Spain, she said the stagnation in the economy and the announcement of a recession had people

searching for answers and, in doing so, they look for places to lay the blame.

"Some of the blame is levelled at the court. You fire 68 workers without the blink of an eye, you blame the court.

"You close up your shop without giving thought to what is due to workers and the rights of workers, you blame the court."

The Industrial Court, which she said upholds and adheres to standards and international best practices of the International Labour Office, will not support practices that are contrary to the principles of good industrial relations in T&T.

For the period 2011-2015, Thomas-Felix said court statistics showed that out of 2,744 cases, only 34 were referred to the Court of Appeal.

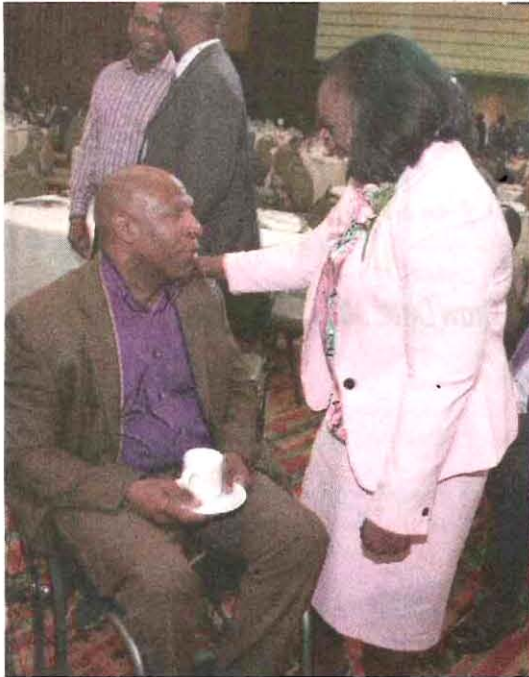
She said: "I don't know of any other court in this country which as a policy encourages bilateral discussions between parties and which adjourns matters time and time again for parties to meet and talk."

Figures showed that 12 disputes had been filed under the Retrenchment and Severance Benefit Act last year. However, from January 2016 to date, 14 matters were

filed. "In this process of economic adjustment, however, it is important that both employers and employees do not abuse the law and the principle and good practice of industrial relations even as they adjust to the changing economic times," she added.

The symposium is aimed at stakeholder engagement which discusses issues relevant to the industrial relations landscape. Yesterday's symposium was the fourth since 2013 and was entitled Lay-offs and Retrenchment: Is there Adequate Regulation and Legislation?

Source: Sunday Guardian, p. A12



President of the Industrial Court Deborah Thomas-Felix shares a light moment with independent senator Ian Roach during a symposium hosted by the Industrial Court on lay-offs and retrenchment at Hyatt Regency, Port-of-Spain, yesterday.

PHOTO: DION ROACH