



SPEECH

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

at the
Caribbean Federation of Police Welfare Associations
10th Intercessional Meeting Opening Ceremony

THEME:

Representation is not about oneself but representing the protector's interests through respectful dialogue, skillful negotiations, and fervent advocacy.

9:00 a.m.
9th November, 2023
Police Academy Samaan Drive, Western Main Road, St. James, Trinidad

I am honoured to address you today at this 10th Intercessional Meeting of the Caribbean Federation of Police Welfare Associations. For those who are visiting from other countries to participate in these meetings, welcome to Trinidad and Tobago.

I also wish to extend warm congratulations to you on your 16th Anniversary as a Federation.

I think it is important to discuss a few concepts in industrial relations, which I am sure you are familiar with, and the role of these types of Associations before we discuss your very important theme.

The first concept is social dialogue. Social dialogue is really the lynchpin of industrial relations and it lends to the promotion of socio-economic development in an industry and in a country. According to the ILO, social dialogue includes all types of negotiation, consultation or simply exchange of information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers and workers, on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy.

2/....Social dialogue is globally recognised

Social dialogue is globally recognised as the way to improve labour conditions, and it is very highly promoted by the ILO and its 187 member countries throughout the world. Social dialogue can be bipartite relations between the employer and the union only, and can involve the government when the government is the employer. Usually when the government is the third party in the dialogue it is referred to as tripartism.

Through social dialogue, structural improvement of working conditions can be achieved. For example, your members may desire an improvement in their terms and conditions of employment such as an increase in salary or a new benefit. You will be required to engage the employer (in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, the employer is the Chief Personnel Officer), in meaningful social dialogue with proposals to have the wage increase or to receive the new benefit. Similarly, there may be buildings that are unsuitable for work, due to occupational safety and health challenges, and you may wish that your members be relocated, you can engage in social dialogue with the employer to achieve that end.

3/...Social dialogue is really the pathway

Social dialogue is really the pathway for the prevention and resolution of disputes in the workplace.

Parties should always meet and treat in good faith and have genuine discussions to resolve issues.

The second concept is Collective Bargaining. In Trinidad and Tobago collective bargaining is compulsory. Unions and employers are mandated by law, in good faith, to treat and enter into negotiations with each other for the purposes of collective bargaining. Collective bargaining is really a subset of social dialogue. It includes all negotiations which take place between employers and unions or workers' associations.

The main purpose of collective bargaining according to Article 2 of the Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154), is to:

- a) Determine working conditions and terms of employment;
- b) Regulate relations between employers and workers; and/or
- c) Regulate relations between employers or their organisations and a workers' organisation or workers' organisations".

4/....The role of Associations, such as

The role of Associations, such as CFPWA, is to promote and advocate for better terms, working conditions and benefits for their members through effective respectful dialogue, skillful negotiations and rigorous representation.

In industrial relations, representation is provided by an association or a union for and on behalf of its members. The members of your individual Associations, are police officers and they have the right to representation under the law. When a worker enters into an employment contract with an employer, he/she is really offering to provide labour in return for a wage. He/she expects not only to earn a decent wage but also to enjoy decent working conditions. Workers, like your members, expect that their associations provide proper representation and advocacy on their behalf for grievances or disputes which arise in the workplace including issues which relate to salaries, pensions or other benefits. Unions level the playing field for workers through collective bargaining.

5/....Your theme “**Representation is not**

Your theme **“Representation is not about Oneself but Representing the Protectors’ Interests Through Respectful Dialogue, Skillful Negotiations and Fervent Advocacy”**, encapsulates the very meaning of what is representation and is very timely, as this region, and indeed the world, is recovering from a pandemic. The war between Russia and Ukraine has adversely affected the global supply chain and we are witnessing the escalation of crime in the region. These are but a few of the challenges which we are experiencing in this decade.

Let us look at your theme. Negotiation involves any form of discussion, formal or informal, with a view to reaching an agreement. As police associations and a federation, you may be interested in sharpening your skill in negotiation – what you put out when you are in negotiations, how much you want to show of your hand, how much and when the other side wants to show its hand. Effective negotiation is an essential skill which, in my view, all of your members should possess.

6/....Your theme makes mention

Your theme makes mention of 'representing the protectors interest'. Effective representation requires that the Executive Members of the various Police Associations in the region, namely, those who have been elected to serve, set aside their individual and personal interests and promote the interests and the needs of their members. If we were to use an analogy of an attorney representing a client – and I think everyone in this room would understand the analogy – when an attorney is retained, it is the duty of that attorney to promote the rule of law and advance and represent the best interest of the client. Similarly, the executive of a police association, is required to utilise its skills and resources and be unwavering in the promotion and protection of the interests of its members.

I agree with the International Association of Chiefs of Police that the purpose of police in society is to provide stability for the communities they serve. The police play the role of social referees vested with the full power of government to provide individuals and communities with safety from violence and threats including crime, accidents and emergencies. In order to provide such stability in a community, the police organisation itself must be stable.

7/....This is where your individual police associations

This is where your individual police associations and the CFPWA come in, to ensure that there is stability among your membership and a common approach towards resolving crime, accidents and other problems and that there are no inconsistent responses from different branches of the police to the same problems. The public can view these types of inconsistencies as a lack of fairness, which can lead to a lack of confidence in police. Without confidence in the police, what is created is much more conflict and instability in society¹.

As a Federation, and an umbrella organisation, you will be required to lend support to the Police Associations in the 16 countries of the region where you have members and the two observer states and also to assist in promoting and advancing the interest of all police officers in the region.

Your theme correctly notes that, representation is not about you the individual member of the association, it is really about advancing the needs and the interests of your members.

8/...Mahatma Gandhi famously said,

¹ International Association of Chiefs of Police

Mahatma Gandhi famously said, “the best way to find yourself is in the service of others.”

When an association pursues and advances grievances and issues, and engages in collective bargaining for better terms and conditions on behalf of members, this gives voice to the voiceless, and that is what effective representation is about. Effective representation is the only way to ensure that the issues affecting workers are heard and understood, and it also serves in a very large measure to protect vulnerable workers from exploitation.

There are vulnerable workers everywhere, even in the police service. There are workers who are affected by harassment in the workplace, there are those who are treated unfairly and there are those who work in unsafe spaces and in conditions which can affect their physical and mental health. It is very important that workers have a voice, and the voice comes through you, the Association. It is imperative that in the service to your members, you maintain a high level of professionalism and respect to all the persons who may be involved in social dialogue.

9/....As I stated before,

As I stated before, it is really not about you, the individual member of the Executive, as your theme emphasises, but it is about the collective. It is about selflessly and steadfastly advancing, promoting and protecting the interest of your members. The work of Police Officers in Trinidad and Tobago, and I dare say the Caribbean, is not like the average workplace situation where workers sit and work with employers daily. In fact, there would be bureaucracy just to meet with the employer or the government to deal with issues. The fervent advocacy mentioned in your theme comes into play when you are engaged in social dialogue with the employer on behalf of police officers.

I respectfully suggest that you pursue whatever respectable means and opportunities are available, to actively listen to the needs of your members and to advance their concerns to the government or your employer. In so doing, you are ensuring that there is a respectable platform for the empowerment of your membership.

10/....Your website states that,

Your website states that, “the CFPWA is a regional organisation dedicated to promoting the welfare and well-being of police officers within the Caribbean. The CFPWA works diligently to address the welfare needs of its members, foster cooperation among police welfare associations, and advocate for fair treatment and conditions for police officers across the region. With a strong commitment to inclusivity and gender equality, the CFPWA strives to create a supportive and empowering environment for all its members.”

This is a powerful statement which not only captures representation but equality and empowerment.

I support the thinking, that effective representation by workers’ organisations such as yours, together with good industrial relations practices, provide a platform to promote social justice through inclusive growth, improved wages and better working conditions. This also has a profound effect on the sustainability of businesses and organisations.

11/....Police officers assist in

Police officers assist in maintaining law and order in the overall stability in countries. However, at the same time, Police Associations need to remember to always strike a balance between promoting the well-being of its members and ensuring accountability and public trust.

Police officers due to the nature of their work, are expected to operate with fairness, transparency and accountability in order to maintain public trust and ensure long term stability.

Finally, I want to respectfully suggest that your role and your contribution as Police Associations go beyond the confines of the CFPWA.

I invite you to pause and ponder for a minute, and you may agree with the perspective that your Federation is very important in the development of a more just, equitable and inclusive Caribbean, as you continue in your role as advocates for equity and justice for those who work in the police service. Collectively, your role is significant to your country and to the region as a whole. In my humble view, you are not only facilitating a voice for those who cannot influence decision making – your members, but you are in fact assisting in the promotion of inclusive and socio-economic

12/...growth in the region.

growth in the region. That my friends is what social justice is about. I will end with a quote from Albert Einstein which says that, “striving for social justice is the most valuable thing to do in life.”

Thank you for listening