

Thursday 16th April, 2020

Dr. The Honourable Keith Rowley
Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Office of the Prime Minister
13-15 St Clair Avenue
St Clair
PORT OF SPAIN

Dear Honourable Prime Minister:

These are extraordinary times and the country is facing a very grave crisis. The private-sector and the labour movement, understanding the seriousness of the crisis, know that we must come together to help the nation through this crisis. Both the labour movement and the private-sector acknowledge the Government's response and measures in dealing with the health crisis caused by the coronavirus.

As of today, 16th April 2020, it appears that these measures have been largely successful. Though we still await the outcomes of the wider community-based testing to confirm the efficacy of these far-reaching measures, it is critical that we immediately start planning for the restart and the recovery of the economy.

The ILO reported last week that it has noted the loss of 14 million jobs in the Latin American and Caribbean region; this devastating impact is felt not only by our nation, but by our trading partners. Indeed, we have already witnessed job losses and lay-offs in Trinidad & Tobago with the threat of more if the current situation persists. In the profound words of the economist, philosopher and Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen, cited by The Sunday Guardian in its Easter Sunday editorial: "the presence of disease kills people, and the absence of livelihood also kills people".

We are, therefore, writing to you to express our continued support for the measures that have been introduced, but also to raise our very serious concerns about the impact of these measures on the livelihoods of the citizens of this country.

Both the private-sector representative organisations and the trade union movement have committed to doing all they can to preserve jobs through this crisis. Individual unions and employers have been meeting to discuss what can be done at a company-level to preserve jobs. Unfortunately, such bi-partite collaboration is not enough to achieve stability of short-term employment and set the foundation for national recovery.

We strongly believe that the time is now right to expand these discussions to a national level, facilitated by the Government of Trinidad & Tobago, and to jointly identify what actions can be taken to preserve jobs. We believe that this discussion is two-fold: (1) keeping the economy and employment alive during this crisis period and (2) rehabilitating the economy and employment when we start to emerge out of the current restrictions.

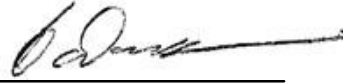
Prime Minister, we respectfully request that the Government, under your direct leadership, convene an urgent meeting, within one week, of the three social partners, government, labour and the private-sector, to discuss the issues that we face and identify possible mechanisms to navigate and survive this crisis with as much of the economy intact and as many jobs preserved as possible.

The National Tripartite Advisory Council (NTAC) could be a possible forum for meeting. However, we believe that such an important meeting, due to the urgency and critical nature of the crisis should be chaired by you, the Honourable Prime Minister of our country.

Yours sincerely,



Mr. Michael Annisette
General Secretary
National Trade Union Centre of Trinidad and
Tobago



Mr. Ozzi Warwick
General Secretary
Joint Trade Union Movement



Mr. Joseph Remy
President
Federation of Independent Trade Unions and
NGOs



Dr. Thackwray Driver
President and Chief Executive Officer
Energy Chamber of Trinidad & Tobago



Mr. Gabriel Faria
Chief Executive Officer –
Trinidad & Tobago Chamber of Industry &
Association Commerce



Mr. Nirad Tewarie
Chief Executive Officer
American Chamber of Commerce of Trinidad and
Tobago



Mahindra Ramesh Ramdeen
Chief Executive Officer
Trinidad and Tobago Manufacturers'

