

ADDRESS BY

HON. JEAN FRANÇOIS CHAUMIERE
MINISTER OF LABOUR, INDUSTRIAL
RELATIONS & EMPLOYMENT

*Seminar on 'Designing a Continuous Professional
Development Framework'*

organised by the

Association of Human Resource Professionals

Date: Friday 17 July 2009

Time: 1600 hrs

**Venue: La Plantation Resort & Spa,
Balaclava**

**Mr. Areff Salaroo, President of the Association of Human Resource
Professionals**

Executive Members

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Good afternoon to every one of you.

I am indeed, very pleased to be among you today and for the opportunity that the Association of Human Resource Professionals has given me to address you in the context of this seminar.

I would like at the very outset to congratulate the **Association of Human Resource Professionals** for this laudable initiative for holding this seminar on “**Designing a Continuous Professional Development Framework**”.

Ladies and gentlemen, human resources undoubtedly have been, are and will remain at the heart of every development process. Just the other day at a function the Prime Minister, Dr. Navin Ramgoolam, again spoke lengthily on the importance of Human Resources, and how this government, indeed, puts high premium on Human Resource Development. So much so that every effort is being made to develop our people – which remain our most important resources – so that in turn they can effectively and efficiently facilitate the achievements of our socio-economic goals.

The present international economic crisis and the serious slowdown in our economic activities bring new challenges that we must fully take into consideration. We have to ensure that we develop effective policy responses to this economic downturn on which we have no control. Even before the world economies became aware of the gathering storms, we had taken a series of measures. Had we not taken these bold and enabling measures in time, the country would not have been resilient to the present crisis and its negative impact would have been felt much earlier.

We have also come up with a Stimulus Package; along with other budgetary measures with a view to protect enterprises and workers. Additionally, other measures provided in the new labour laws, in particular the **Workfare Programme**, go in the same direction of what has also been recommended by the ILO in order to confront this international economic crisis.

In fact, the ILO has recommended to all its constituents a **decent work approach** to this crisis. Our government, like the ILO, believes that the **Decent Work Agenda** is an appropriate policy framework to confront the crisis.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is a growing consensus that competitive advantage in today's economies lies principally in fostering the skills and competencies of people. In order to survive in today's challenging business environment, it is important and crucial to reflect on how best to prepare human resource responses to these challenges.

Our future, indeed, depends on skills, competence, and knowledge management since there is a need to upgrade our products and services to further increase our market share. And above all, we need to develop a productivity culture and also the need to change our **work attitude and mindset**.

We are here talking of human capital and on how to optimise human capital. There is no one better than you as Human Resource Professionals to understand that employees are ultimately the driving force behind the success of every enterprise. There is a need to stand back and reassess our strengths and weaknesses.

Ladies and gentlemen, the **Chartered Institute of Professional Development** has defined **Continuous Professional Development (CPD)** as the conscious updating of professional knowledge and the improvement of professional competence throughout a person's working life. It is a commitment to being professional, keeping up to date and continuously seeking to improve. However, for me, as Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment - as professionals you would surely agree with me - that this has no meaning and no relevance, unless what you have actually gained in terms of knowledge and skills be put into practice and be translated into tangible results. For me, tangible results in this case means enhanced productivity, improved enterprise performance, and above all sound employee-employer relations, with a satisfied workforce working in a healthy and safe environment. **Achieving the Decent Work goals, as promoted by the ILO, should be the benchmark for all Human Resource Professionals.**

In line with government commitment to labour market reforms and market flexibility, we have come up with new labour legislation, namely the **Employment Relations Act** and the **Employment Rights Act** with a view to removing the existing rigidities as well as to better addressing the interests of both the workers and investors as well. These two laws are effective as from 2nd of February this year.

It was indeed high time to replace the outdated **IRA** and **Labour Act** which date back to the 70's and which could no longer respond to the exigencies of globalisation and our economic imperatives. Indeed, we cannot pretend to successfully address the current and future challenges with legislation that are more than 35 years old.

The main object of the **Employment Relations Act** is to consolidate the law relating to Trade Unions, fundamental rights of workers and employers, labour disputes and related matters. **The main thrust, however, is on Collective Bargaining**, while stating that Collective Agreements may be reviewed every two years.

As regards the **Employment Rights Act**, the object is to consolidate the law relating to employment, contract of employment, hours of work, payment of remuneration, other terms and conditions of employment with a view to ensuring appropriate protection of workers. The focus is also on the **Workfare Programme** which provides assistance to laid-off workers through the payment to them of a Transitional Unemployment Benefit, and active support either to find a new job, or be trained for greater employability or start a small business.

Dear friends, as Human Resource Practitioners, you will be the main actors whose contribution would be highly valuable in ensuring that these new laws are properly understood and properly implemented by enterprises for which you are working presently. In fact, to a large extent, the successful implementation of these new laws will rest upon you – as Human Resource Professionals.

I wish to stress that that ultimate aim of these new laws is to find solutions to industrial relations problems through speedy conciliation and settlement of disputes and putting in place processes for agreements on labour issues to be reached to the satisfaction of all parties concerned.

You will be surprised to learn that during last year alone as many as **16,800 complaints** were registered and dealt with at the level of my Ministry. A total amount of not less than **Rs54.7 million was recovered** on behalf of workers, of which **Rs36.7 million through mediation and conciliation** efforts and a further **Rs18 million through the Industrial Court**.

Many of these complaints relate to **non-compliance with labour legislation**. I wish, therefore, to seize this opportunity to invite all Human Resource practitioners that necessary efforts are made for the proper implementation of each and every provision of these laws. I am sure I can also rely on the support of the **Association of Human Resource Professionals**, among other related organisations, in this regard. I hope to see a reduction in the number of such complaints referred to my Ministry, which would be a sure indication of an improvement in industrial relations in enterprises.

Ladies and gentlemen:

The Industrial Relations System is steadily moving away from its traditional 'adversarial' nature to the wider concept of Human Resource Management with both workers and employers increasingly working together to achieve enterprise objectives for their mutual benefits. This is both a challenge as well as an opportunity for Human Resource Professionals. It is a field in which Human Resource Practitioners have to play a more pro-active role, because the real competitive advantage of enterprises will lie ultimately in the **quality and skills of their workforce, on a judicious utilization of the Human Capital**, and more importantly on a **new work culture and a new mindset** among all stakeholders.

Ladies and gentlemen:

The Human Resource Profession has a future that is bright and full of promise. Your knowledge, skills and passion can all contribute to growing and adding value to the human resource profession, your organisation and our country. Human Resource Professionals need to understand that **our future also depends on innovation, changes, new technologies, training and productivity improvement** so that we may sharpen our competitive edge.

Your organisation could also help to further strengthen our sensitisation campaign with a view to making the workforce fully aware of the positive implication of a **24 by 7 mauritian economy**. You could thus help to destroy this 09.00 to 04.00 syndrome which is posing a serious threat for the labour market. Your organisation could also facilitate debates and constructive discussions on such issues as **corporate social responsibility**,

workers participation and profit-sharing schemes, Health Programmes in the workplace and **Collective-Bargaining** as a tool to improve and promote sound industrial relations, amongst others.

Ladies and Gentlemen, since I took office as Minister of Labour, Industrial Relations & Employment, I have made it a duty to promote continuous social dialogue with all stakeholders. I believe that confrontation does not resolve problems. The answer to many of our Industrial Relations problems lies in effective and continuous Social Dialogue based on mutual respect. In this regard, I am pleased to inform you that very soon I am setting up a **'National Tripartite Forum'** with a view to further strengthen and promote social dialogue – particularly in the World of Work. The National Tripartite Forum will be appropriate Forum for not only the traditional constituents but also other stakeholders, such as HR organisations, Health & Safety Associations, and relevant NGOs to meet and discuss issues related to the World of Work.

With these words, I wish to thank you again for giving me the opportunity to address this august gathering.

I thank you for your attention.