

Caribbean trade unionists on solidarity mission

5 May 2009 (AlterPresse www.alterpresse.org) - Trade unionists from the Public Services International (PSI) concluded their solidarity mission to Haiti on 5th May, according to information received by the online news agency, AlterPresse.

Andrew Garnett, representing Guyana's local government officers' union, said that the visit enabled the PSI delegates to learn about the situation of Haitian unions and to establish solidarity links with different sectors of Haitian civil society. The trade unionists said that they also took advantage of their presence in Haiti to participate in activities celebrating Labour and Agriculture Day on 1st May.

Professor Camille Chalmers of the Platform to Advocate for Alternative Development (PAPDA) said he considered the visit as a way of reinforcing the solidarity links between Haitian trade unionists and the global union movement. Chalmers described the PSI as a vast global network of unions bringing together nearly 20 million workers involved in the public sector all over the world.

Andrew Garnett, who met with various representatives of Haitian civil society, said he hoped that public services in Haiti could be improved. He said access to essential public services such as water, energy, waste management, and transport is essential for an effective fight against poverty.

Dominica's Public Service Union general-secretary, Thomas Letang, said he was impressed by initiative and entrepreneurial spirit of Haitians. Welcoming the way the the informal sector organised itself so well, Letang stressed the important contribution to the economy made by women.

Cecilia Babb, representing the Caribbean Policy Development Centre (CPDC), said she had an entirely new view of the reality of Haiti following the visit and the meetings she had participated in. The regular media reports depicting Haiti as a poor country where people eat cakes made of mud are false, she said, stating that she saw enormous potential. Babb said she saw that the country's wealth was very unevenly distributed and that, in her view, was one of the country's biggest problems. The CPDC's Babb promised that her organisation would help the other peoples of the Caribbean to gain a better understanding of Haiti, and also promised to defend the Haitian cause at the level of CARICOM.

Angela Edwin of the St Lucia Civil Service Association echoed this view, and rejected suggestions that Haiti is a country devoid of production. "I have visited the mountains, and I have seen the fruit and vegetables, yet it is always being reported that Haiti is a country where people depend on aid." Like her colleagues, Edwin called for equal access to quality public

services in Haiti, arguing that without this no country can ever hope to develop. She added, "Quality public services are very important for the prosperity of the people."

The PSI represents public service unions in more than 150 countries. To date the Federation of Workers at the State Electricity Company (Fédération des syndicats des travailleurs de l'Electricité d'Haiti - Festredh) is the only Haitian organisation that is a member of the PSI. The PSI representatives promised to enlarge the network to include other Haitian organisations.

(translated from French by Charles Arthur for the Haiti Support Group)

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