

2014 Caribbean SUBRAC

Summary report



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The Garraway Hotel in Roseau, Dominica was the venue of the 2014 Caribbean sub-regional advisory committee meeting. Forty-three trade union leaders and activists (24 women and 19 men) representing 22 of the sub-region's 24 affiliates met on March 8 and 9 to review work in 2013 and to make recommendations and plans for 2014/2015. Among them were eight young workers (2 men and 6 women). Affiliates come from 20 countries and territories; populations range from 5,000 in Montserrat to 10 million in Haïti; there are 6 official languages and multiple currencies; the countries are small open economies comprising islands and parts of the Central and South American land masses; some countries have political independence, others are British Overseas Territories with self-government, and others are parts of metropolitan countries (France, Netherlands).

2013 sub-regional priorities and plans for 2014/2015: The [SUBRAC](#) meeting reviewed work carried out in 2013, noting the linkages to PSI's 4 strategic priorities. Gender equality, young workers, communications and union development (specifically material writing) were also key components of the work carried out. The activities in 2013 covered issues of anti-privatisation, precarious work in the public service sector and PPPs; fair taxation and funding of public services; relations with global and regional financial institutions; violations of trade union rights; collective bargaining in the public sector in times of crisis; and the growth and sustainability of public service sector trade unions, with special linkages to trade union renewal.

The committee especially noted the excellent opportunities provided through the 2011-2013 [FES-PSI cooperation project in the Caribbean](#). The project design allowed the sub-region to focus on PSI's strategic priorities, and the specific and unique realities in the sub-region, while at the same time continuing to build the skills, knowledge and capacity of trade union activists and their unions. Project participants developed skills and prepared research studies and briefing papers on precarious work in the public sector; fair taxation and the Robin Hood tax; case studies on collective bargaining in times of crisis and experiences with private public partnerships; sustainable development and the transition to a green economy; and trade union renewal. The result is a cadre of activists – many of whom are women and young workers - who are equipped to represent the PSI and Caribbean public sector trade union case at various fora.

Sectoral work: See [recommendations](#) from the SUBWOC meeting. SUBRAC also **approved** the entire [report](#) and recommendations

Anti-privatisation:

Trinidad & Tobago: The Joint Trade Union Movement (JTUM) of Trinidad & Tobago has sought PSI's assistance with their anti-privatisation campaign in Trinidad & Tobago. The sub-regional office has been in contact with the JTUM and has offered PSI's support. SUBRAC members **reaffirmed** their commitment to fighting various forms of privatisation, recognising that it is one of PSI's strategic priorities. The meeting also noted the struggles in

Belize related to the negative impacts now being felt as a result of the privatisation of the prison.

Bermuda: The meeting noted the recommendations for wide sweeping privatisations in Bermuda as contained in the [SAGE report](#). The Bermuda Industrial Union and the Bermuda Public Services Union (BPSU) **agreed** to keep the sub-regional informed.

Haïti: Jn Nathan Aristil, deputy general secretary of the CTSP reported on the plans of the government and board to follow a path of Public Private Partnership in the electricity sector in Haïti. He advised the meeting of the dire financial situation affecting the electricity company and CTSP's concerns regarding mismanagement of the state entity. FESTRED, the federation of electricity workers, a member union of the CTSP, **called on** PSI to assist in developing an anti-privatisation campaign.

Trade union rights:

Guyana: The General and Local Government Workers' Union (formerly GLGOU) updated the meeting on its struggles in the City Council of Georgetown. The co-ordinated [action supported by PSI](#) contributed to the union being able to negotiate improved salaries and wages which had been backdated to 2013. The union is in discussion on funding and staffing issues in the town council. SUBRAC members **congratulated** the union on its strategic handling of the matter. PSI will continue to follow the developments and assist in coordinating solidarity action.

Haïti: Ginou Jean Baptiste, young workers' secretary of the CTSP Haïti, reported on the situation affecting workers at the Port-au-Prince City Hall. Current records indicate that commencing in 2007/8, 387 workers have been dismissed with no reason given, no salaries, no severance pay. In addition, 150 pensioners have not received their pensions, though deductions had been made from their salaries. The Syndicat des Travailleurs –euses de la Mairie de Port-au-Prince (SYTMAP), a member union of the CTSP, together with CTSP have staged sit-ins, held street demonstrations, have written to the authorities and have lodged court actions. All to no avail. CTSP is now seeking international support on this issue. SUBRAC **agreed** to provide solidarity support and that the sub-regional office will co-ordinate the action appeals with CTSP and PSI's Equality and Rights Department.

Collective bargaining in times of crisis: SUBRAC members received and discussed reports on the experiences of various affiliates. Committee members also noted a recent meeting with the public sector unions in the 9 member states of the [Organisation of East Caribbean States](#) (OECS). The government strategy in all cases has been common: to invite trade unions to consultation meetings to advise on the state of the economy; to highlight the high-debt and low growth situation; to advise the inability of governments to negotiate salary increases for public sector workers and to call for productivity in the public sector. SUBRAC members **recalled** previous efforts in the Caribbean to measure productivity in the public sector, with the many arguments about the methodology used. The committee **agreed** that it was time for unions to be proactive on this issue.

Governments in the region have held discussions and/or negotiated Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with public sector unions in the face of high debt and a need to reduce fiscal expenditure. One of the most recent has been in [Bermuda](#). The concern is that these Caribbean-wide consultations and MoUs may be used/considered as replacements for the collective bargaining process.

SUBRAC **agreed** the need for a coordinated approach especially given the commitment by governments to have more consultations. Committee members **recommended** that there be clear and consistent guidelines for affiliates. This would require collaboration between the sub-regional federation of public sector unions, the Caribbean Public Services Association (CPSA), and the sub-regional confederation of unions, the Caribbean Congress of Labour (CCL). Representatives of the two organisations agreed on this, stating that they **welcomed** PSI's assistance.

Influencing policy: consultation, social dialogue, advocacy: In analysing affiliates' engagement with the IMF teams during the Article IV consultations, the committee noted the importance of ensuring that public service sector unions are fully involved. In most cases, the Ministries of Finance invite the national centres – where they exist – to the consultations. The sub-regional office **reiterated** its commitment to providing information, guidance, noting that timely notice of upcoming consultations is important.

SUBRAC noted that there are IDB [Civil Society Consulting Groups](#) (ConSOCs) in the Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Haïti, Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago. Affiliates which had not yet done so **agreed** to register and establish working relationships with the IDB country offices. In some cases, the national centres had registered and in those cases, affiliates **agreed** that they would seek to become more involved in consultations and other activities. SUBRAC members acknowledged that building a profile and credibility are key factors when engaging with IFIs and regional development banks and institutions.

The sub-regional office **agreed** to compile affiliates' success stories and lessons learnt in interactions with the IMF, IDB, CARICOM, the Caribbean Development Bank and other institutions as part of a set of framework guidelines for all affiliates.

Mark Langevin, sub-regional secretary for North America, highlighted his work with [Peter Bakvis](#), Director of the ITUC's Washington office, advising that he would soon be in contact with affiliates providing more details and with a call to action. The focus at this stage is on establishing a set of labour safeguard standards for the World Bank's public sector lending branches. Mark referenced standards recently established by the [African Development Bank](#). He **requested** all affiliates to support the call to establish the labour safeguard standards.

Collaboration with the Caribbean Congress of Labour: Members of SUBRAC heard from the president of the CCL (who is also general secretary of the Antigua & Barbuda Workers' Union) on how the CCL and PSI affiliates can work together on issues such as human and trade union rights; trade agreements; tax justice; climate justice and green jobs; migration and development. The CCL has a place at the table at key forums and this provides an opportunity to further develop advocacy and broaden social dialogue. SUBRAC **agreed** that the CCL and especially the CPSA would further discuss ways in which together they can push the quality public services agenda.

The role of public service sector unions in **re-structuring national economies:** SUBRAC members received a presentation on the involvement of the Jamaican trade union movement in the national committee overseeing the implementation of the [IMF arrangement](#) in Jamaica.

In reflecting on the information presented, affiliates also commented on the calls from many Caribbean governments for a restructuring of economies to pull them out of the [debt spiral](#). The meeting **agreed** that the model could be applied even when there is no IMF agreements

or arrangements in the country. SUBRAC members also **agreed** to further examine how they could adapt the oversight committee model used in Jamaica to other countries in the sub-region.

Public sector lay-offs in Barbados: Dennis Clarke, general secretary of the National Union of Public Workers (NUPW Barbados) provided updates on the situation, providing important background information to help inform the union's actions. SUBRAC members appreciated the insight into the process and actions taken, noting that they provided valuable lessons for other affiliates in their respective countries. SUBRAC members **agreed** on the importance of effective communication to members and the general public in such instances. The sub-regional office **offered** its support and assistance especially in this regard.

Trade union renewal - trade union self-reform and growth strategies: Young workers presented a summary of their research on trade union renewal in public sector unions in the Caribbean. They presented their [dreams](#) of the movement in the future. They challenged current leaders to make the necessary changes to ensure the continued relevance and sustainability of trade unions. SUBRAC members **welcomed** the work done and congratulated the young workers. The paper will be published at the beginning of May 2014. The sub-regional office will continue to work with the team to continue the work. The sub-regional office will also assist affiliates in their efforts to implement trade union renewal.

Young workers: SUBRAC also heard of plans from the CTSP young worker to welcome a group of young workers from the rest of the PSI Caribbean family. During the 2012 SUBRAC, a caucus of young workers recommended a solidarity visit to CTSP Haiti to celebrate International Youth Day as well as part of the campaign to promote trade union rights, decent work and quality public services in Haiti. The visit is proposed for August 2014, and will include visits to selected workplaces, a workshop and tour, culminating with public activities on August 12 – International Youth Day. SUBRAC **endorsed** the proposal and **recommended** that PSI supports the activity.

Items from partner organisations: SUBRAC members noted upcoming congresses of Global Union Federations and the ITUC. The meeting **agreed** that wherever possible, those affiliates attending these congresses should take full advantage of opportunities to push the public service case as well as a common Caribbean perspective.

Affiliates also **agreed** to consult with their national centres, governments and the ILO sub-regional office in Trinidad & Tobago on attendance and participation in the [2014 International Labour Conference](#) and the ILO Regional Conference in Lima.

IAMRECON 2015: While noting the proposals for the next Inter-American regional conference, SUBRAC members highlighted the special circumstances of the 12 affiliates in the sub-region at the 100% index. The 100% index is more indicative of the respective country's human development index and not necessarily the fortunes of the union. Members also expressed some interest in some of the proposed workshops. SUBRAC members agreed to await further details and thorough discussion at the regional executive committee meeting and the report backs from the Titulars..

Proposed new system for project applications: The committee received the proposals and members suggested that this required further examination. The meeting noted some concerns and Titular members **committed** to represent the sub-region's views and concerns to the regional executive committee.

Proposals for 2014 regional work plan: SUBRAC members noted the list of proposed activities. Affiliates **requested** details on the meetings. Titular members **committed** to represent the sub-region's views and concerns.

The sub-region's proposed workplan for 2014/2015 include the above, as well as the commitments and recommendations from the SUBWOC meeting.

Jillian Bartlett, National Union of Government of Federated Workers of Trinidad & Tobago (NUGFW TT) and Wayne Jones, Jamaica Civil Service Association (JCSA), co-chaired the meeting. For further information on the 2014 SUBRAC, please contact the [Caribbean sub-regional office](#).

See also:

- [Summary report of 2014 Caribbean SUBWOC](#)
- [We too have a dream](#)