**CEATAL’S PERSPECTIVE ON “THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES”**

**OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**WASHINGTON, DC – JUNE 14, 2015**

Mr. Chair, Ministers, Heads of Delegations, and Distinguished Representatives,

I represent the Canadian Employers Council and the Business Technical Advisory Committee on Labour Issues (CEATAL). CEATAL is the organization that represents the employer organizations of each OAS member state. Through these organizations, CEATAL represents literally tens of thousands of small, medium and large employers across the Americas.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the theme of this year’s General Assembly. It is among the most challenging theme we have seen, since it requires us to reflect on the current state and activities of the OAS and to imagine the OAS of the future. We believe that the best approach to the theme requires each of us to take into account our past experiences working with and within the OAS – what lessons have we learned, what should be continued, what should be improved? In responding to the theme, it is important to be measured and realistic, but it is also important to be ambitious. We should commit to charting a course for the OAS that will leverage its strengths for the benefit of everyone in the hemisphere.

From the employer perspective, the OAS has demonstrated an impressive capacity to advance important labour and socio-economic issues, facilitate bilateral and multilateral dialogue, develop and disseminate best practices, and promote the sharing of research and information amongst member states. The OAS’ efforts in these areas have been concrete and meaningful. Recall that in 2005, the Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labour established the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL) as a mechanism within the OAS to promote cooperation on labour administration and labour market issues. A decade later, we can see that the RIAL has strengthened the capacities of governments and social partners throughout the hemisphere by sponsoring and coordinating projects, dialogue and research.

Initiatives like the RIAL serve as models for the future since they demonstrate the OAS’ actual and potential role in the Americas. Such initiatives succeed because governments commit to working with each other, with the social partners, and with other social actors. The OAS strength lies in its unique ability to bring these agents together in a coordinated and coherent pursuit of common goals. The OAS is in fact the only hemispheric body that could hope to play this role.

The future of the OAS must be focused on leveraging its unique place in the hemispheric order to assist countries in achieving constant and sustainable economic growth and social development. As employers, we believe that social and economic progress are inextricably linked. Addressing poverty, inequality and other social deficits in the Americas depends on growing local and regional economies, creating decent and productive jobs in the formal sector, and making important investments in education, skills development and health care.

For this to occur, a vital private sector is critical, and must be respected and supported. In most countries, the private sector is not only the major driver of economic activity but is also the predominant (and sometimes only) creator of new jobs. The creation of decent and productive jobs in the private sector therefore must always be a priority for the OAS, member states and social actors.

As actors within the private sector, employers recognize that economic growth must be inclusive and sustainable. This means that growth in a country must be broad-based across sectors and shared fairly amongst members of the labour force including women, young people and the disabled. For such growth to occur and be sustainable, governments must have the technical capacity to act in the public interest, must work to eliminate public and private corruption, must promote safety and security in our communities and workplaces, and must respect democratic values and the rule of law. In all of these areas, it is easy to imagine an important future role for the OAS as a coordinator of regional and hemispheric initiatives and a promoter of cooperation, social dialogue and the sharing of best practices.

On an occasion when we are discussing the future of the OAS, and its role going forward in the development of the hemisphere, it is only natural that we should consider the impact of what we decide to do now on future generations of Americans. Through all of our efforts, working within the OAS and in our home countries, we can have a real and positive impact on the lives of young people. So, please allow me to say a few words about the youth of the Americas.

We should be mindful of the fact that youth unemployment in our region is currently much too high. Prolonged unemployment entails a higher risk of future unemployment. Prospective employers often have a negative perception of the suitability of a worker who has been out of the workforce for a long period of time. Furthermore, the longer workers are unemployed the more discouraged they may become, causing them to give up looking for work altogether and perhaps turning to activities outside the formal economy.

A future OAS agenda for promoting economic development and social inclusion must prioritize young people and must target the conditions that can impede their full involvement in socio-economic life. Employers would like to see a renewed and expanded focus within the OAS on education, training, and the promotion of entrepreneurship.

**Entrepreneurship Programs**

Allow me to say a few words about entrepreneurship. The economic future of the Americas depends in large part on today’s young people going into business for themselves, establishing new micro and small enterprises, and creating decent, productive jobs in the formal economy.

The ILO has recognized the value of entrepreneurship and has recommended that governments implement programs and policies relating to training, support services, and access to financing for entrepreneurs. In particular, the ILO has made the following recommendations:

* Governments should include entrepreneurship education and training in schools;
* Governments should enact policies that ease access to financing for entrepreneurs; and
* Governments should provide a range of support services, such as marketing, distribution chains, export capabilities, and public procurement, to entrepreneurs.

In developing entrepreneurship policies and programs, national and local governments can leverage the private sector’s experience and insight through broad-based consultation and public-private partnerships. In addition, there is a clear role for the OAS, as the pre-eminent hemispheric body on social and economic issues, to coordinate national programs in this area and facilitate the sharing of information and best practices.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, private sector actors look forward to a continued and expanded engagement with the OAS in the coming years as we seek regional and hemispheric solutions to problems that are shared by most if not all countries. We believe that the OAS must define its future role as a promoter of economic growth and social development and as a facilitator of bilateral and multilateral initiatives to share information, best practices and dialogue among member states and the social partners.