

Preface

In keeping with our mission of support for progress in the areas of hemispheric integration and economic and social development, it was a great pleasure for the Summit of the Americas Center (SOAC) at Florida International University (FIU) jointly with the Bureau of International Labor Affairs of the U.S. Department of Labor to co-sponsor the Technical Workshop on “Unemployment Insurance Systems in the Americas.” FIU’s Latin American and Caribbean Center founded SOAC in 1995, with the backing of the Florida Legislature, to monitor and interpret the initiatives of the 1994 Miami Summit of the Americas. Since then, SOAC has provided Florida and the hemisphere with a constant flow of information, commentary, and research on the Summit process and related initiatives, through our website, www.AmericasNet.net, our publications, and conferences like the Technical Workshop held on November 14 and 15, 2002.

The Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor, an integral part of the Summit of the Americas process, operates within the framework of the Organization of American States. SOAC is honored to join the Bureau of International Labor Affairs in advancing the activities of that important body. At the XII Conference of Ministers of Labor, held in Ottawa and attended by delegations from 33 countries, with 25 labor ministers present, the U.S. delegate, Deputy Secretary of Labor D. Cameron Findlay, reiterated the U.S. administration’s commitment to free trade and the improvement of labor standards. As part of the XII Conference Plan of Action, the U.S. undertook to organize and sponsor a technical workshop on unemployment insurance, a commitment fulfilled with this event in Miami.

Labor codes of most Latin American and Caribbean countries are quite comprehensive with regard to dismissal of workers for economic reasons requiring relatively large severance payments. Reliance on severance payments has become the norm in the absence of unemployment insurance or other formal safety nets. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the enormous growth of the informal sector, resulting both from the lack of formal job creation and from the general economic crises battering the region, is now an established reality. In these circumstances, the feasibility of the expansion of unemployment insurance regimes becomes a large question and that issue was central to this workshop.

While most observers would find our subject of discussion—the legislation and programs of governments to cushion the loss of employment—a positive element of enlightened social policy, unfortunately it has not made significant new inroads in our hemisphere recently. The Miami Technical Workshop looked at why that is so and what new initiatives are under way to improve the record. Presenters, participants from 28 countries, and the sponsors all came away well satisfied with the success of the event.

Several individuals from the co-sponsoring institutions were deeply involved in the planning and execution of the workshop. The success of the workshop is largely the

result of their dedication and hard work. They include, from the Bureau of International Labor Affairs, Laura Buffo, Michael Magán, Jorge Pérez-López, Jane Richards, and Robert Wholey; and from FIU, Cristyn Casey, Elisa Gallo, Eduardo Gamarra, Alejandro Garcia-Lemos, Bruce Jay, Isabel Lopez, Laura Massa, Alisa Newman, Darren Nicholas, Aileen Solá, Ana Varela, Vilma Zamora, and the staff of the Latin American and Caribbean Center.

Florida International University, with the cooperation and support of the U.S. Department of Labor, is happy to publish these proceedings, and expects them to be a useful contribution to the policy discussions around our hemisphere.

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