

**Seminar on the Fashion and Garment Industry  
and Economic Development in the Caribbean**  
Castries, Saint Lucia, 1 and 2 July 2015

**Speech by Mr. Antonio Leone**

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Honorable Emma Hypolite, Minister of Commerce, Business Development and Investment, Government of Saint Lucia.

Mr Rodinal Soomer, Head, Economic Development Policy Unit, Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission

Her Excellence Ambassador of Barbados in Venezuela, Sandra Phillips

Dear participants,

In behalf of the Permanent Secretary of SELA, Ambassador Roberto Guarnieri we would like to give to all of you our best regards a welcome to this seminar. I have the pleasure in sharing with you all this opening session at this Seminar on the Fashion and Garment Industry and Economic Development in the Caribbean, in which SELA is delighted to organize in collaboration with the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Commission as well with the Ministry of Commerce, Business Development and Investment, Government of Saint Lucia and the Saint Lucia's Trade Export Promotion Agency (TEPA.)

The Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA) is a regional intergovernmental organization established in 1975, therefore is celebrating 40 years in the next October. The headquarters of SELA are in Caracas, Venezuela, SELA groups 27 Latin American and Caribbean countries. The main objective of this organization is to promote consultation and coordination among its Member States for the participation of the Latin American and Caribbean region as a block in international forums or economies of the world. It also aims to foster cooperation for the promotion of integration and the economic and social well-being of our countries.

In this regard, it should be noted that one of the most important programs developed by SELA since the end of 1990s is related to the improvement of conditions for the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the cornerstone of the economy, employment and well-being of Latin American and Caribbean countries.

The textile industry has always been a very active sector in the global economy. In particular, the fashion design industry has recorded US\$ 1.7 trillion in 2012, employing about 75 million people worldwide.

During the "Seminar on the Apparel Industry and Economic Development in the Caribbean", held in Bridgetown, Barbados, participants analyzed the problems faced by the SMEs sector in the Caribbean, particularly those micro-enterprises working in the fashion and apparel sectors, identifying several niches with a high potential for these Caribbean businesses to develop (clothes for men and women, wedding dresses, accessories and upholstery). In addition, the seminar also examined the increased activity of this sector in our region and others regions, particularly in African markets, which has rapidly emerged within the textile industry and has attracted several international high fashion brands to different countries of the region.

Among the main conclusions and recommendations of the seminar held in Barbados, experts and representatives pointed to the need to promote the development of a fashion industry with potential for global marketing; change strategies in terms of the use and adoption of the sectoral method to reposition the sector with a key focus on the capacity of designers and manufacturers to create partnerships; and design a single identity for selling brands. Furthermore, they made a recommendation to promote the establishment of national associations and a Regional Association of fashion designer.

The objectives of this activity are as:

- i) Raise awareness of the importance of strengthening sectors with potential for development; in this case, the textile sector, as a mechanism for economic growth and employment generation;
- ii) Increase awareness of the importance of value chains in the Caribbean, in order to facilitate goods manufacturing opportunities, knowledge sharing and access to textiles and raw materials;
- iii) Review successful programs for implementation of activities related to the fashion industry;
- iv) Promote the creation of a network of institutions and experts related to the industry in order to exchange of the best practices implemented in other regions, to allow the sector to access to international markets.
- v) Foster and strengthen training of personnel in the design and manufacture of products related to the fashion industry.

Finally, I would like to reiterate our appreciation to the collaborating organizations in the conduction of this activity, and speakers and all of you, dear participants, for attending to this invitation, which ensures that both presentations and proposals emerging during these days will help design new activities that lead to the development of the insertion of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises into regional markets.

Thank you very much.