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**Presentations to Standing Committee on Human Resources,  
Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities**

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**The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison [Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC]):**

I would like to call this meeting to order, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), for a study on employability in Canada.

I would like to welcome all our guests and thank them for being here.

As everyone is probably aware, we've been conducting a study on employability. That has been broad-reaching. We also are looking at seasonal work, older workers, and the whole spectrum of what affects employability in Canada. We were in St. John's, Halifax, and Montreal this week, in Toronto today, and we're heading out west in a couple of weeks. This is something that all parties unanimously agree is very important, which is why we are conducting the study moving forward.

So thank you very much for being here. We're going to give each person, each group, seven minutes to present. We're going to have a first round of questions of seven minutes, a second round of five minutes, and as long as time permits. I would ask you to try to stick to the seven minutes. I'll let you know at one minute that your time is coming to a close.

**Mr. Peter Sawchuk (Acting Head, Centre for the Study of Education and Work, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto):**

Good day.

I'm a professor at the University of Toronto, cross-appointed to the departments of education and industrial relations. I've been invited here as the head of a research centre at the university, the Centre for the Study of Education and Work. It's a mix of community, union, and academic representatives who compose the steering committee, and it includes a network of dozens of international experts in this area.

Ms. Karen Lior, the executive director for the Toronto training board and a long-time steering committee member, will present just after me.

First, a word about the centre. The Centre for the Study of Education and Work has existed for just over ten years. Along with dozens of smaller research projects, the centre has produced two of the largest academic-based research initiatives in Canada in the study of education and work. The first initiative, from 1996-2001, was in the form of the new approaches to lifelong learning project, which featured 30 qualitative studies and the first national survey dedicated to all forms of learning and work, with special attention to informal learning. The second initiative, from 2001 to the present, was in the form of the work and lifelong learning project that carried out an additional 9,500-person national survey on

lifelong learning and work, supported by 12 carefully selected qualitative studies to test its conclusions in various sectors and occupations and across various demographics. All this research is available on our website and in related publications, which you'll have listed in some of the notes.

Of all the ideas we could discuss here today, the two main points that Karen and I wish to express to you involve, first, rethinking the lifelong learning, work, and employability question, with special attention to skills transmission and underemployment, and secondly, immigration, credential recognition, trades and labour standards, which Karen will address.

Skills, knowledge, and expertise are what Canada hopes to use to compete in a global marketplace. However, Canada now leads the world--absolutely number one--in post-secondary educational attainment, and our research over the past decade has documented that Canadians engage in enormous amounts of non-credited training and in fact in self-directed informal learning. There is, in the words of Professor David Livingstone, the current Canada research chair in lifelong learning and work, a serious education and jobs gap.

While of course it continues to remain relevant to look at education training and other employability factors, evidence from our research makes it clear that the major problem facing Canada today is not actually skills shortage, but rather skills transmission and application in the workplace. In the absence of effective transmission and application mechanisms, Canadian workers are far more likely to face underemployment, which entails considerable economic waste, as well as inequities, which damage social inclusion. The major sticking point in our competitiveness is not the supply side of the labour market. Demonstrated quantitatively and qualitatively, these are the conclusions of over ten years of detailed work, the most massive that Canada has ever seen, in fact.

Ms. Lior is going to address the immigration and trades issue in a moment, but I want to leave you with key research issues that the evidence recommends we take seriously.

First, Canada would benefit enormously from the continuation of this national survey series by adding a 2008 national survey that would extend the 1998 and the 2003 surveys to make a ten-year analysis, with a midpoint. This survey already can guide important decisions on where energies and resources should be directed and should be continued. Further, basic and applied quantitative and qualitative research is needed in light of these issues. Specifically, that emerged around the sticking points of transmission, skills and knowledge, and around issues of underemployment.

We are now in a position to ask and answer crucial questions related to organizational and sectoral change, questions such as the following:

First, why do our workplaces not activate the enormous potential of Canadian workers across demographics, including across racial categories, social class categories, and categories of disability and gender?

Second, why are trade and apprenticeship programs not making use of the incredibly strong general educational foundation available in the Canadian population?

Third, why are traditional school-to-work transitions for youth failing to plug workers into productive, satisfying, and innovative jobs?

And finally, how do workplaces benefit or not benefit from the interrelations between the workplace and strong communities, neighbourhoods, and voluntary work participation? This is in fact a highly under-researched area that can add incredible economic value as well as increase social inclusion in our society.

I'm going to pass you over to Karen Lior now.

**Ms. Karen Lior (Executive Director, Toronto Training Board):**

As Peter said, I'm Karen Lior, and I'm the executive director of the Toronto Training Board, which is one of 21 local boards in the province of Ontario. We are governed by a volunteer board of directors representing seven labour market partners.

I'm going to talk about three things: the growing gap in labour markets, which is undermining Canadian civil society and creating barriers to economic and social integration; the fact that immigrants need systems that recognize their credentials and their off-shore experience and skills; and the fact that all workers need expanded and enforceable labour standards.

Canada is one of the few industrialized countries or developed nations that doesn't have an overall economic strategy, and it's one of the things that keep us from moving forward. My taxi driver yesterday was an accountant from Pakistan who is now back in school relearning all his accounting principles so he can practise in Canada. Things like that waste a lot of taxpayer dollars. Many of those who are working in the skilled trades, such as stone masons, bricklayers, carpenters, and those who operate heavy machinery, also do manual labour.

In case you're wondering, I'm going to jump around a little bit, because Peter said some of these things, and I'm going to be saying some other things.

The point I want to make about the skilled trades is that we make it difficult for people to get into the skilled trades. Fifty-two percent of this workforce is due to retire in the next 15 years. Their children, for a change, are not moving back into the skilled trades. They've gone on to other professions. Many of the trades have changed with the introduction of technology, which opens up opportunities for those who haven't considered going into the skilled trades, but we don't have the policies and programs in place to move people from high school or from university back into the skilled trades.

We talk about the three pillars of the educational system--college, university, and apprenticeship – but college and university have access routes between them, and apprenticeship stands on its own. We are one of the few nations in which apprenticeship is a solitude, one of our many solitudes.

Many of the new jobs we're seeing are part-time, low-paid, and part of the precarious workforce. We need labour standards that allow workers to get paid. In Toronto, there are millions of dollars owed to workers who have been hired by unethical employers and then let go, or who have employers who don't pay them. Over a million workers in the city of Toronto are living below the poverty level, and a third of those are families with children.

People with disabilities have very few opportunities to participate actively in the labour market. In our TOP survey--our trends, opportunities, and priorities survey--which we're doing now, people have written in questions about why we aren't addressing the issue of people with disabilities.

We need overall policies that allow people to move around in the same way that we allow goods and services to move around. There's a lot of mobility in the world around the globalization of goods and services, but we need the same kinds of policies so we can take advantage of the skills and expertise of our workers. We need policies that protect and encourage people's mobility, as well as product mobility. In order to compete in the global marketplace, we must find ways to use the skills and talents of all our workers. We need to understand that the security agenda is also a barrier to our economic agenda.

I think I'm just going to go to our conclusions.

We need policies that allow people, as I said, to move in and out of the labour force. We need policies that look at more than jobs. We need policies that look at overall sustainable livelihoods, that look at people as assets and not deficits, and not as something that needs to be fixed. We need policies that look at how people can help them fix what's wrong. . We need employment policies that are sensitive to the entirety of workers' lives. We need ways to allow women to go to work, to allow people with disabilities to go to work, and to allow all of us to be productive workers who participate in Canada's economic growth and productivity.

Thank you.