

Remarks by Alicia Bárcena
Executive Secretary

Lecture by Professor Harley Shaiken
“Economic and employment crisis in the United States”

Santiago, 9 October 2009
Sala Celso Furtado - ECLAC

Professor Harley Shaiken, Chair of the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley,

Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

First of all, I would like to wish everyone welcome and, in particular, I am delighted to extend a very special greeting to Professor Harley Shaiken, our speaker this morning. He possesses vast analysis and research experience in the fields of labour, information technologies, global economic integration and trade. Professor Shaiken, welcome to ECLAC, the largest abode of the United Nations in Latin America.

Allow me to briefly introduce our distinguished guest: his journey, as he himself refers to it, began some time ago as he sought to shed light on the intersections involved in the reshaping of the industrial workplace with the emergence of information technologies, focusing on the automobile plants of his native Detroit.

In a short self-portrayal that appears on the website of the University of California, Berkeley, Professor Shaiken refers to a recent research trip to Otay Mesa industrial park in Tijuana, Mexico, describing it as a bustling centre of state-of-the-art border export plants, or maquiladoras. He remarks upon the powerful forces that are reshaping the global economy and can be seen at work right there: advanced export production, impoverished communities, new gender roles, economic integration, immigration, environmental degradation, and the struggles of Mexicans to forge a more open and democratic society.

As a Mexican myself and someone who is very familiar with the situation he describes, I can only share the impressions of Professor Shaiken, which inspired him to continue with his studies and research on the links between regional and local development, productivity, employment and quality of life.

That interest is also a reflection of his experiences during his research for his first book “Work Transformed: Automation and Labor in the Computer Age”, when he quickly realized that a more global focus was necessary to fully understand what was taking place in local workplaces and communities. Since many of these plants were being relocated to

Mexico and Brazil, he embarked upon a passionate and ongoing research effort in Latin America, focusing on the process of globalization and its local implications.

In the 1990s he broadened his research focus on economic integration to look at the changing nature of trade with a focus on the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and now the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA).

In his current research he is attempting to move back and forth between local realities and global forces, the ways in which both come together and the alternatives for a more equitable and democratic future.

His research interests are reflected in two courses he teaches: “The Southern Border”, an undergraduate course that looks at the realities of the United States-Mexico border in particular and United States-Latin American relations more generally; and a graduate seminar on “Labor and the Global Economy” that looks at the process of globalization and its social implications.

The author of a select bibliographic output that includes books and many contributions to different media, Professor Shaiken gained a Bachelor of Arts degree from Wayne University in 1977 and has been Chair of the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley for the last three years. The Center has a wide-ranging research and programmatic focus in the humanities and social sciences, with an emphasis on economic integration and democratization in the Americas.

Today’s lecture will undoubtedly generate reflection about employment in one of the world’s greatest economies, that of the United States of America, which was thrown starkly into relief by the crisis and has such powerful implications not only for United States citizens but also for the thousands of Latin American and Caribbean nationals who live and work in that country and sustain so many others further south.

Without further ado, I leave you with Professor Shaiken amid our warm thanks for his visit to this “casa” of Latin America and the Caribbean.