

**ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS,  
HON. CLEMENT, J. ROHEE,  
AT THE ANNUAL RETREAT WITH THE GUYANA PRISON SERVICE  
OCTOBER 20, 2012  
GRAND COASTAL HOTEL, LE RESSOUVENIR, EAST COAST DEMARARA  
*“Moving From Retribution to Correction”***

I am pleased that we can once again gather as a team here today, away from our various offices and locations, to discuss matters of mutual interest, and arrive at workable solutions to issues, all aimed at advancing the important responsibility of the Guyana Prison Service.

Some may be questioning the presence of certain categories of ranks, at this particular meeting.

Let me assure you that the selection of the invitees to this meeting was deliberate. The Ministry of Home Affairs recognized that since we are now operating in a ‘reform’ mode – that is, reform of the organization, as a whole, and reform of prisoners – there is need for our Officers and ranks to be re-oriented to embrace this new dispensation. We would like to be a part of that re-orientation process.

It is our expectation that at the conclusion of this meeting you all will have a better appreciation of your role and function, in the Guyana Prison Service.

**Government Policy – Prisoners’ Reform and Rehabilitation**

We now have a Guyana Prison Service that is tasked with the responsibility of preparing our inmate population for reintegration into society. No longer are we interested in locking away prisoners, subjecting them to maltreatment by virtue of their status, and at the conclusion of their sentences restore their freedom, without having subjected them to any programme of rehabilitation or reform. Such an approach will not serve anyone’s best interest – not the individual; not the Prison Service; not the society.

This is why a decision was taken by the Administration to adopt a policy of **prisoners' reform**, through the provision of training opportunities, so that prisoners could improve themselves while serving their sentences, by acquiring income generating skills, improving their literacy skills, or acquire academic qualifications. Emphasis is also placed on behaviour change programmes.

The Government has consistently allocated resources for prisoners' training and rehabilitation. Just to give you an idea, here are the amounts allocated over the past four (4) years for prisoners and Officers training:

<b>2009:</b>	<b>\$14,407,000</b>
<b>2010:</b>	<b>\$16,054,000</b>
<b>2011:</b>	<b>\$21,000,000</b>
<b>2012:</b>	<b>\$22,680,000</b>

Resources are also provided for recruitment of additional staff in both the custodial and corrections or specialist fields.

### **Hard Work**

The Ministry of Home Affairs wishes to place on record its appreciation for the progress that has been made, so far, as a result of the hard work by the Directorate, Officers and ranks of the Guyana Prison Service, in fulfillment of this policy. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the significant contribution by the various Boards and Committees of the Guyana Prison Service, particularly the civilian membership, whose perspectives on issues create the balance that is needed to progress.

I am aware that the Sentence Management Board, in particular, in collaboration with the Prisons Directorate, is pursuing a number of initiatives that are aimed at bringing about systemic changes, and producing certain tangible benefits for prisoners.

As a result of the work of this Board, there is now, for the first time, the Entry and Exit Polls. These are important tools to aid in the management of prisoners' sentences.

Notwithstanding, much work remains to be done, which will require a redoubling of our effort.

## **Prison Reform**

The need for reform of the organization, as a whole, has not escaped our attention. At a workshop organized in June 2012 by the Ministry of Home Affairs, on the subject of prison reform, and in which many of you participated, I stated that prison reform, which is the attempt to improve conditions inside prisons, aiming at a more effective system - has always been advanced by the Ministry of Home Affairs, and, by extension the Government of Guyana.

Over the years, attention has been paid to the maintenance and rehabilitation of the physical infrastructure of the prisons, there has been increased use of technology, greater attention has been paid to the welfare of staff and inmates, and there has been greater access to medical care by inmates. We now have a newly constructed dormitory at the Georgetown Prison. All of these are part and parcel of prison reform.

Of significance, is an ongoing project that is aimed at reviewing and compiling the Prison Standing Orders. The Committee that is tasked with this assignment is headed by Mr. Cecil Kilkenny, the immediate past Director of Prisons. Without getting into the details, which I will leave to Mr. Kilkenny, I see this project as an important component of prison reform, as it targets systems, policies and practices.

Ladies and gentlemen, we need to make adjustments; we need to reform. And this is not restricted to physicality or systems, policies and practices. We need to adjust the way we think, as well. We need to think corrections, training, and rehabilitation, and embrace these concepts.

For us at the Ministry of Home Affairs, these functions are just as important as the custodial function, of the organization. That is the level of importance we attach to the new dispensation we are now in. We must keep the prisoners secure, but we must also correct, train, and rehabilitate them in preparation for reintegration into society.

### *Recommendations – Prison Reform Workshop*

The Ministry has not shelved the report and recommendations that emanated from the workshop on Prison Reform. We intend to, together with the Prisons Directorate, examine these recommendations in the months ahead to identify those for implementation in the short, medium and long term.

We also intend to circulate the report for information and guidance.

### **Cooperation**

It is our hope that each of you realize that you have an important role to play in the reform process of the Guyana Prison Service, and, more importantly, in the day to day activities at the prison locations, which requires a high level of cooperation and respect for each other and the organization that you serve.

### **Discipline/Corrupt Practices**

The Guyana Prison Service is a discipline organization.

But when we at the Ministry receive certain reports, we become very concerned – reports such as on the high level of absenteeism, particularly among junior ranks, who, ostensibly, abuse the sick leave concession; reports about pilfering of prisoner’ dietary supplies; reports about trafficking of prohibited articles by Officers, including cell phones; reports on female ranks who deviate from the official dress code, inflation of accounts, just to mention a few.

I wish to state categorically that indiscipline and corrupt practices in the Guyana Prison Service will not be condoned. Especially at this time, when we are seeking to bring about reform in the organization.

### **'Guyana Correctional Services'**

At our retreat in 2010, at this very venue, I had challenged the Guyana Prison Service to move toward becoming a full-fledged correctional service. I am happy to say that with the progress that has been made, we are at a stage where a change in the name of the Guyana Prison Service to that of the 'Guyana Correctional Services' may be appropriate.

In the spirit of democracy, I would wish to hear your views on this matter, so that we at the Ministry of Home Affairs could be guided.

### **Conclusion**

The Guyana Prison Service is close to the heart of the Ministry of Home Affairs. We want to see you excel in your work. We want to see you grow in your profile and impact in society, including as an arm of the Criminal Justice System.

I take this opportunity to urge all of you to embrace the new Guyana Prison Service that is emerging. There is a place for each of you.

I look forward to hearing the various presentations; your views, and, of course, your concerns, which we will seek to address.

Thank you.