

**ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS,
HON. CLEMENT, J. ROHEE,
AT WORKSHOP ON PRISON REFORM
JUNE 16, 2012
POLICE TRAINING COMPLEX, CAMP ROAD & YOUNGE STREET,
EVE LEARY, GEORGETOWN**

It is with immense pleasure that I welcome each and every one of you here, today, to which is the temporary location of the Ministry of Home Affairs' secretariat. We hope that you will enjoy the time spent here as we delve into the subject of prison reform.

Background

The Ministry of Home Affairs has had sight of a document on the Dominican Republic's New Model Prison, which we felt reflected what we at the Ministry of Home Affairs is seeking to achieve, strategically, in the reform of our own prison system.

We were prompted to organize this workshop to bring together key stakeholders to examine the model with a view to determining which aspects could be adopted and implemented in Guyana, while arriving at imaginative, creative and innovative ways of translating the reform philosophy into tangible, day-to-day activities in the Guyana Prison Service.

Why Reform?

Prison Reform, simply put, "is the attempt to improve conditions inside prisons, aiming at a more effective system". This concept has always been advanced by the Ministry of Home Affairs and by extension the Government of Guyana.

Reform is not an undertaking by choice, but is of necessity for any organization in response to both internal and external impacts. Any organization that remains static will falter or even collapse and that includes our own prison system.

Prisons must reassess their state of affairs to determine where their system and their Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs) are in need of reform. Their Standard Operational Procedures (SOPs), too, cannot remain static.

It is true that some prisoners have committed heinous crimes; some are on remand, while others have already been tried, convicted and are now serving their respective sentences.

Regardless of the prisoners' status, they ought not to be mistreated by their custodians, notwithstanding their freedom has already been taken away by the court of law.

Responsibilities

While in our custody, we have two responsibilities to prisoners:

1. Implement measures to ensure the safety and security of prisoners, and that of the society.
2. Reform, correct and rehabilitate prisoners in preparation for reintegration into society.

There are many challenges in seeking to achieve these two (2) fundamental objectives, which necessitate the setting of short, medium and long term goals, for their achievement.

It is, nevertheless, our responsibility to ensure that deviant behaviour is corrected and that prisoners are reformed to become law abiding citizens.

Confronting Challenges

In an effort to confront the various challenges that present themselves, the Ministry of Home Affairs, in collaboration with the Guyana Prison Service, established a number of Boards to reinforce and build on what was already in existence.

The Boards of the Guyana Prison Service are:

1. Parole Board
2. Training Board
3. Sentence Management Board
4. Agriculture Development Board
5. Recruitment Board

An Inter-Prison Visiting Committee (IPVC) was also established comprising representatives of each of the five (5) Prison Visiting Committees. This committee was tasked with following up on several recommendations that were made at a meeting of Prison Visiting Committees held in November 2007, some years ago. It is anticipated that our annual Prison Visiting Committees meeting will be convened, shortly.

The intention here is to ultimately help the prison system to be more organized, and the Administrators to be more methodical in their thoughts and actions, and never to create obstructions.

Success

Success has been achieved in the following areas:

1. *Welfare*: the situation is not perfect, but work continues to improve the welfare of staff and inmates.
2. *Meals*: there has been some improvement, but this area must be closely monitored.
3. *Recreation*: recreational activities are organized for both staff and inmates. Efforts are being made to provide more facilities to meet the satisfaction of staff and inmates.
4. *Medical Care*: aggressive efforts are being made to provide a higher quality of medical care for inmates. Cabinet has approved the recruitment of medical doctors for each prison location. We are in the process of recruiting nurses to supplement the services of the prison Medex.
5. *Contact with Relatives*: Inmates now enjoy frequent contact with family and friends with increased access to telephone calls. But this has not deterred smuggling of phones into the prisons. This remains a major challenge.
6. *Skills Training*: increased sums have been provided by Government for the purchase of tools for trade shops for use by inmates in the skills training programmes being offered. The objective here is to provide prisoners with an income earning skill, which they could put into use on their release from prison.
7. *Physical Infrastructure*: large sums of money are being spent to improve conditions and to address overcrowding, in prisons. Buildings are being specially designed to accommodate large numbers of prisoners. It is not Government's intention to construct a new prison. These resources will be used instead to build new schools and provide training opportunities for our young people.
8. *Technology*: it is our intention to do much more in this area to transition from the 'old way' to the 'e-way' in prisons.

Government's Commitment

The Government of Guyana remains committed to ensuring that the custodial and corrections arms of the Guyana Prison Service are strengthened. Recruitment and training will continue to prepare our Officers to serve effectively at their locations.

We have indeed come a far way over the past twenty years to improve conditions for staff and inmates.

Conclusion

We look forward to working with the Guyana Prison Service to achieve prison reform. We will soon commence the implementation of the Prison Service's Strategic Plan, with the establishment of an Implementation Unit.

It is important that the Guyana Prison Service becomes more humane as focus is placed on the safety and security of inmates, as well as their rehabilitation. Thank you.