

Prime Minister Rowley's remarks at the Besson Street Police Station Handover Ceremony

Thank you very much Master of Ceremonies, the Mayor of Port of Spain, Alderman Joel Martinez, my cabinet colleague, the Minister of National Security, Brigadier Retired Mr Edmund Dillon, my other cabinet colleague, the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, Minister Randall Mitchell, my parliamentary colleagues, Mrs Glenda Jennings Smith of the Ministry of National Security Parliamentary Secretary, my parliamentary Members of Parliament for Port of Spain South, Ms Marlene McDonald, the Acting Commissioner of Police, Mr Stephen Williams and his executive officers, other members of the police service present this morning, members of the business community, members of the staff at UDeCoTT head by Chairman Noel Garcia, members of the media, members of the protective services looking after us this morning.

It is with great pleasure I accept this assignment this morning once again to open another modern facility for the accommodation and operations of the police service. About 2 or 3 weeks ago we opened a similar, possibly larger, facility in St Joseph for the St Joseph Police district and today we open this Besson Street Station and in the not too distant future we will have a similar function where we open the Maracas Police Station and as I mentioned construction would begin some time in 2017 of the Carenage Police Station and we are currently downsizing the Matelot Police Station because somebody designed the Police Station for Matelot that was a little too big and Matelot doesn't need a station like St Joseph so we've had to spend a bit of time but very soon Matelot would have appropriate facility for those officers who are looking after the North Coast in that area.

I want to speak about two things this morning for the purpose of clarification of the Government's position and the first thing I want to talk about is the whole question of a Crime Plan because very frequently those members of the media who are called upon to report progress or lack of progress or activities savoury as they take place in our community, they make reference to the presence or absence of a Crime Plan. When one looks at that concern, one gets the impression that what is expected is a document of some kind outlining a series of actions that ought to be taken by this administration which would somehow distinguish it from previous administrations.

One must have a plan if one is to succeed in an organized way but the crime plan for Trinidad and Tobago does not necessarily have to be a new document. Different approaches might be welcomed and documented. This government's approach if one calls it a Crime Plan is simple, the crime plan is this; that we acknowledge that it is the quality and effectiveness of the police service that will give us the kinds of results that we are looking for as a response to unacceptable violent crime in many districts in Trinidad and Tobago. If that plan is not acceptable then we will have to revisit it but at the level of the Cabinet we are not of the view that that position has

expired. We have a fairly well-resourced police service in Trinidad and Tobago and what we as citizens expect particularly those of us who are to be held accountable for the safety and security of the nation is that the effort of the police service would bring the kinds of results that would give us the comfort that we are being properly policed, properly secured and that policing has two facets; enforcing the law particularly against citizens who operate on the basis that the law does not matter or that wrong doing will go undetected and unpunished, secondly, enforce the law so that law abiding citizens could feel a sense of safety and security that the community is being policed and protected from those who would break the law to the detriment to the rest of the national community.

This morning we heard some statistics from the Minister of National Security and those statistics are meaningful because if you are managing against a plan you would want to know what is happening and the statistics tell us what the results are in terms of comparing last year with this year. There is one bit of scientific expression that has to be put in there and that is on what basis are you taking credit for the statistics as a result of police action or inaction or is it just happenstance on the part elsewhere because if we look only at the statistics we'll get the impression that there's really some significant and progress being made but one can ask if one is civic; Is that 14% decline simply because 14% of the criminals just took a day off or is it that there is something that the police is doing specifically that has caused a 14% decline against a situation which could have easily been a lot worse but there is something that the police is doing that prevented that from happening.

One has to examine in that detail but it is not the statistics of last year number versus this year's number that will give us the comfort that we are looking for because I have not heard a statistic that puts the element of fear of crime in any numerical way and until we bring down the element of fear of crime and criminality in all our communities, the society will not accept that we are in fact making the kind of progress that they expect. This is where the police comes in and this is where Ms McDonald's comment to the police this morning that you really have to pay some attention to the effect of the police on the law abiding citizens because it is the law abiding citizens who are really saying to you that we want to feel that sense of safety and security and then we will know that we are being properly policed and properly protected. It is not to say that the police is not working, it is not to say that they are not getting some results but it is the results overall that will bring back that sense to the national community that we are winning the fight against the criminal element.

I can tell you some aspects of the criminal element are of the view that they are winning the fight and we cannot allow that to prevail or to become a reality. It has to be that the vast majority of citizens and the police infrastructure and all the security agencies working together and that is what is winning the fight. Therefore we as citizens are looking for results. So Commissioner and members of the Police Service is men and women, it is the results that will tell us how far along

we are and it is the results that will make us feel in the streets and in the homes that a sense of safety and security which is not measurable by a number but you would feel it. If you see things happening, and it is happening right now, that the population would be seeing certain crimes committed, certain kinds of information would be in the public domain and the population would think that given this crime, given what we know, given what we think has happened, we really expect to see a result in persons being held accountable and not just being held accountable but eventually down the road by 10 or 15 years, but in a quick time frame as possible, because justice has to be swift, it has to be seen to be swift.

As Head of the Government I can tell you, I cannot say that in Trinidad and Tobago that there is swift justice. Even when we are fortunate to have some detection of crime and the perpetrators are known to us, there is no swift justice in Trinidad and Tobago and this here we cross beyond the police responsibility to another area because let's face it, a crime is committed, the police does the work, an individual or individuals are apprehended they are taken to another part of the State. The process is that those persons are processed and they are back out on the street. For how long nobody knows. While they are on the street, they are immortal fear of losing their freedom somewhere along the road and they will do everything possible to preserve their freedom because the same way the rest of the national community wants to be protected and wants to feel safe, those perpetrators of crime, they want to be free, even free to commit more crime. Some of them in this interlude being apprehended and having their matter concluded and facing the conviction that will come, they have to afford the cost of their freedom and the cost of that freedom is paying their lawyers. They have no assets to start with but now they have a serious liability which is to pay significant sums of money and in some instances, always in cash to lawyers to ensure that they preserve their freedom and they're out there rampaging, committing more crime to raise cash, to pay their lawyers to ensure that their processes are delayed in the Court or that they escape unharmed and unpunished for the crime that they committed. That thesis might sound very unpleasant to a number of people but that is the fact in Trinidad and Tobago today and we better face up to that fact.

So a person that has committed a crime in the first instance and then the circumstances of an absence of swift justice creates an environment of perpetual crime and the police service with all the resources directed by the taxpayer, is permanently overwhelmed by the situation. I tell you this this morning so that all of us could think about it whether in fact the Police Service of Trinidad and Tobago is overwhelmed by criminal conduct in the society.

We are talking about adding 100 municipal police to our various districts. We expect that what this would do is improve the policing, the patrolling, information gathering, interaction at the personal level, at the street level, at the household level and that's the kind of police we want the municipal police to be. If we do that and nothing else changes in the criminal industry I just mentioned, question is can we look forward to the kinds of results that we are anticipating?

This building ought to provide for those officers who are stationed here and who would interact with the station, the best possible facilities that any police officer could want in Trinidad and Tobago from a physical standpoint. It falls to the officers who use this building, particularly the managing officers, to ensure that this facility is used to its fullest effect in the fight against crime. I know if the toilet seat is broken or the air condition breaks down, we will hear that the Minister of National Security is not acting properly but it is those who use the building will determine how effective it is.

Therefore today I call on the managers who would be in this building to ensure that you manage this place properly and manage the occupants properly so that the taxpayer gets the full benefit of this investment in the fight against crime.

The second point I want to make is the question of urban development because we in this government see this building and other activities that will come in this area as part of our effort of urban development. A few years ago when I was Minister of Housing, we embarked on an urban development initiative in East Port of Spain and unfortunately some members of the community and others thought that that initiative was simply something that could be disbursed and should be opposed and so on. Part of that initiative involved comprehensive slum clearing in East Port of Spain and rebuilding of the physical environment in which the citizens lived. Some of the housing arrangements in this area are substandard, outlived their usefulness and today by their very existence create the environment of human misbehaviour of one kind or another.

It is the intention of this government to address that issue and to address it very frontally. That is why when the Cabinet was named a Minister of Housing and Urban Development represented by Minister Randall Mitchell this morning, is a part of this Cabinet. This modern Police Station we see as part of a drastically improved physical environment in East Port of Spain and sometime in 2017 after we have made the relevant contact with the sectional communities and those who will bring their skills to bear and the UDeCoTT and other agencies and the private sector. It is our intention to begin to make some very significant improvement in the physical, mainly the housing and commercial aspects of East POS. Against that background this station will be the police station of the new East Port of Spain district which we expect to be a pride in the city of Port of Spain. That is the plan of this government. Policing of such a district is an important part of any success that will flow.

Policing in Trinidad and Tobago today is not an easy job but it is a job that has to be done. It has to be done against the background that the citizens have to be encouraged to see the police as part of their own quality of life and that is why we like to appeal to the police to walk the streets. Walk the streets of your district and talk to the people who you police and give them that human contact. Let them know that you are on the same side. If you do that many people will have a

different view of the police service. The one thing that will guarantee perpetual failure in a district like this is if the sentiment in the community is that the police is the enemy and that the uniform that the police wears is a symbol of oppression or lack of caring. It is for the officers, particularly those who work in the district, to come down on the street and talk to those and meet those who you police and try and remove that sentiment that the police is against or that the community is a war zone.

I travel with my detail from time to time and I get the impression that there are certain districts, particularly in the city area, which are viewed in a particular way and I would like to think that as Prime Minister that I'm free to walk with a certain amount of reasonable safety in any district in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly the city of Port of Spain. That is not to say that one ought not to be cognisant of the need for security considerations and that one does not take unnecessary risks. The one thing we cannot do is to allow impse to believe that they have control of any street or any quarter in this country and that the State recognises that. The police cannot accept that and the government will not accept it.

Officers present themselves in a variety of ways: in uniform, in your ceremonial uniform, outside of uniform. But at the end of the day the officers of the police service are the only citizens who are authorised under law to carry out the effects of policing in the way that we expect policing to be carried out. We at the level of the government will give the police service all that is affordable by the people of Trinidad and Tobago because it is not a cheap thing. Minister Dillon spoke about two vessels coming in yesterday. We've just paid for those vessels a few months ago, a lot of millions of dollars. Question is, what kind of results are their presence going to give us. We hope that the results will be further tightening of our borders, further removal from the equation of unauthorised entry in our community of fire arms and trafficking of one kind or another which feeds the drug trade and the human trafficking trade and the crime trade. Those are the kinds of results we expect to get from that expenditure. It will be quite unacceptable to be making these kinds of expenditure month after month year after year and not seeing the results of the expenditure. That's why I'm appealing to those officers whose job it is to use these facilities to focus on trying to get the results that the population expects.

The police service is a service of rank and respect and sometimes you have to enforce those relationships to ensure that those who are under your charge and command live up to the standards of the handbook and also to the expectation of those who hire them and rely on them. When a family member in full public view can walk in front of another family member and gun down a junior that is not something that the police can prevent. It is now only a tragedy for the police to prosecute and I say this to emphasize that the work of the police can only get easier if the society's behaviour improves along the way.

Let it not be said with reason and evidence that those who we rely on fail us because of poor management, poor attitudes, and lack of respect for their oath of office and so on. I want to emphasize once again to the Commissioner of Police that the biggest job that the police has today is to restore the trust of the national community in believing and understanding that the police needs the cooperation of the national community to effectively carry out their duties In the absence of that trust the job will become virtually impossible.

I have confidence that the Government's plan of relying on the police service to police us and to return us to a level of safety and security that is acceptable, is attainable and that is why the Crime Plan of this government is to work with the police from the level of the National Security Council to the level of the Commissioner's office to the level of the divisional commanders and right down to the Municipal Police to work with the police to ensure that they're there, to ensure that only the best gets into the service, to ensure that those who are in there who are unfit to be there get out of the service, to ensure that what the police needs to carry out their job is available and that those items are used for that purpose. We believe if all of these strands are pulled together on a sustained basis with a will to succeed, strengthened along the way by infusion of new talent at the base, at the middle and at the top, if we stay on the job we believe that we can win this fight against the criminal element and that is our plan.

It is with great pleasure and satisfaction that we accept this structure from UDeCoTT and we pass it over to the Commissioner of Police and we expect to hear that the Commissioner of Police and his men are reporting to us improved and successful policing in East Port of Spain an area that is air-marked for urban development in the not too distant future. I thank you all and I wish you all a very Merry Christmas to you and your family and a safe and prosperous new year.