

# The ACHCPS Opening Final

---

ADDRESS

BY

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE MARTIN JOSEPH  
MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY

at the

TRAINING SYMPOSIUM AND BUSINESS MEETING OF THE  
ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN HEADS OF CORRECTION  
AND PRISON SERVICES (ACHCPS)

PLACE: Hyatt Regency,  
Wrightson Road, Port of Spain

DATE: Monday 22nd June 2009

TIME: 8:00 a.m.

It is with great honour that I address this very distinguished gathering, at the Formal Opening of the Training Symposium and Business Meeting of the Association of Caribbean Heads of Correction and Prison Services (ACHCPS).

I do so in two capacities: as Minister of National Security of Trinidad and Tobago, and as the current Chair of the CARICOM Council of Ministers responsible for National Security and Law Enforcement (CONSLE).

As the Minister of National Security of this country, I wish to extend a special Trinidad and Tobago welcome to all you and hope that your discussions over the next few days would be fruitful.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago as host to this Symposium has openly demonstrated its support of the initiative that was launched in June 2008, which realized the formation of the Association of Caribbean Heads of Corrections and Prisons Services (ACHCPS).

Ladies and gentlemen, as Chair of CONSLE, I wish to indicate that the REgion has also endorsed the establishment of this Association.

On August 20, 2008, the Secretary of the Association wrote to the Chair with a request for the ACHPS to be a formal component in the crime and security architecture of CARICOM. This request was considered by CONSLE at its Seventh Regular Meeting in November 2008. The CONSLE recognised the value that such an association can bring to the management of crime and security in the Region.

It was decided that, "the Association be facilitated according to the agreement of the Twenty-Fifth Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government, that is to say, in a manners similar to organizations

such as Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police (ACCP); Caribbean Customs Law Enforcement Council (CCLEC), and Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF) and other such entities, which may be represented as Observers on approval but not as of right to address the Security Policy Advisory Committee (SEPAC) or the CONSLE."

Ladies and gentlemen, the Regional Framework for the Management of Crime and Security has agreed upon by Heads of Government is constituted of the following:

- The Conference of Heads of Government
- The Lead Prime Minister for Crime and Security
- The Council of Ministers with responsibility for National Security and Law Enforcement
- The Security Policy Advisory Committee
- Five Standing committees of Operational Heads; i.e Heads of Intelligence, Military Chiefs, Commissioners of Police, Comptrollers of Customs and Chiefs of Immigration.

While the framework does not incorporate in a direct manner the Heads of Corrections and Prisons Services, there is recognition of the role that you all must play in stemming the tide of violence and in ensuring the overall security of our individual States and Region as a whole.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am asked to speak on the theme "From Retribution to Corrections: Unlocking Excellence". This theme is indeed of particular significance. It highlights the inherent need for a shift in paradigms in order to ensure the implementation of best policies and practices in Prison Services throughout the Caribbean region. Such policies would promote the proper rehabilitation and reintegration of the offender and the overall enhancement of our society.

It is no secret that small states in the Caribbean are all being challenged by escalating crime, violence and immorality, particularly as it involves our youth. We are experiencing a horrific crime wave, involving the most grievous offences. Our typical responses have been arrest, trial and incarceration. As a consequence, our prison populations are on the increase.

In a population of 1.3 million in Trinidad and Tobago, there are approximately 4,000 inmates. These very high and growing prison populations are worrisome and simply not sustainable.

Trinidad and Tobago, like many countries in the Region, inherited the old and timeworn philosophy of retributive justice, from our former colonial system of governance. Realizing the need for change, Cabinet, in the year 2000, appointed a Committee or Task Force to study the Prison environment and the penal system and to make recommendations for reform to the Government. This Task Force submitted a report and its recommendations in 2002.

The recommendations reflected a bold change in philosophical direction, a paradigm shift, from the Retributive model to the Restorative model. Cabinet accepted the challenge, and adopted the recommendations as Government's policy. The policy was also accepted by the main opposition party and as such it enjoys bi-partisan support. It is significant to note that no change of Government therefore, will threaten its implementation.

The dominant Philosophy that now guides our renewed efforts at Prison Reform in Trinidad and Tobago is therefore that of Restorative Justice. The rehabilitation of the offender is the key driver in the adoption of this approach.

Given that a substantial number of crimes are committed by repeat offenders, it is critical that the prison services and penal systems focus on rehabilitation and reintegration. Such an approach would not only

reduce the degree of recidivism, but also in effective crime-management and would counteract "the revolving door syndrome".

In Trinidad and Tobago, we have set about building the structure for successful re-integration and re-entry into society of those who offend and were incarcerated. The draft National Strategic Framework recognizes the critical role that the Prison Service has to play in our overall efforts at crime reduction.

The framework sets out the overall Goal of "Ensuring the efficient operations of the Corrections Administration" with the main objectives being, to improve the effectiveness of the Prison Service and secondly to improve our capacity for the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of offenders.

Taken together, this framework and the 2002 Cabinet Appointed Taskforce Report on Prison Reform provide the direction, or a virtual road map as to the way forward in the area of Corrections.

Having clearly defined the National agenda in respect of Penal Reform, the Government provides the necessary financial resources to the Prison Service to implement this agenda. We will continue to do so. We understand the general need to unify the Criminal Justice System in order to improve its efficiency along with that of the Prison Service. The ultimate objectives are: (i) to protect the innocent (ii) to deter criminals and (iii) to rehabilitate offenders.

In the past, according to the retributive philosophy - the successful Prison System was judged by the extent to which the System could keep the individual offender hidden away from the society, for the duration of his sentence.

Ladies and gentlemen, this has since changed globally. A successful Prison System is now characterized not simply by institutions of punishment, but by institutions which could bring about the desired attitudinal shift in the inmates. Such correctional institutions ensure that upon release, inmates can return to the society, willing and able to make a meaningful and productive contribution.

Most inmates do return to the society. It is only a very small percentage that would get old and die in prison. It therefore makes good sense to invest in re-directing and re-tooling the mind and hands of the inmate in preparation for his eventual release and re-entry.

I am convinced that rehabilitation is the key to unlocking excellence. We must move from retribution to corrections and this move must be guided by the principle of "Shared Responsibility". In this regard, all of the Caribbean Community must collaborate in the adoption and implementation of best approaches to Corrections. These must be pursued within a Re-integrative Penal Policy Framework.

It is in this context one sees the vital importance of a Symposium of this nature. Let me therefore encourage you to participate fully and to engage in open and frank dialogue on the issues.

I am certain that out of these sessions, you would realize a clearer insight as to what needs to be done in the context of building a viable Corrections framework both nationally and regionally. Trinidad and Tobago stands ready to collaborate with its Caribbean partners in forging ahead in this direction.

I thank you.