

# Prison Service Passing Out Ceremony for Intake 343

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ADDRESS

by

THE HONOURABLE FITZGERALD HINDS

MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

at

THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO PRISON SERVICE  
PASSING OUT PARADE

PLACE: Prison Service Golden Grove Square,  
Arouca

DATE: Friday 14th September 2007

TIME: 3:30 p.m.

I am especially delighted to be here and to participate in this passing-out ceremony of the latest addition to the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service. Let me formally welcome all 101 of you to the ranks of this great institution! I congratulate every one of you on this significant achievement and commend you for choosing the Prison Service as a career. You have taken on an arduous responsibility and the nation is grateful. On behalf of all of us, "thank you!"

May I also commend your instructors, who lectured and tutored you and who taught you drill, physical education and attempted to pass on the culture of the Prison Service. They prepared you, even for this ceremonial parade and more generally, they prepared you to take up your role as proud members of the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service.

As I look upon you with pride and admiration, I remember my own experiences as a Police Recruit and later as an Instructor. Great job instructors, well done!

In addition, may I also pay tribute and thank all your families and friends, those present and elsewhere, for the support and encouragement which they must have shown. I am certain that it has been an important contributory factor to your success thus far.

Gentleman and ladies, you have joined the Prison Service at a time when our country is undergoing rapid development. Government is working in accordance with its development blue-print, which we call Vision 2020. In this, plans are designed to enable our country to achieve developed-nation status on or before year 2020.

The fundamental objective of this vision is the improvement of the quality of life and the standard of living of all of our citizens. This Government intends that every member of our society, regardless of socioeconomic standing, race, religion or gender, will experience a standard of living that is comparable to the highest anywhere in the world.

In moving towards this “end state”, five development priorities have been identified. These are:

- Nurturing a caring Society
- Developing innovative people
- Governing effectively
- Investing in sound infrastructure and environment
- Facilitating competitive business

The development priority to which the Ministry of National Security has primary responsibility, is “Governing Effectively”. Here,, four components are identified. These are:

- Administration of Justice
- Governance and Institutional Structures for Development
- Law Administration and Legal Affairs
- National Security and Public Safety.

It must already be self-evident that every one of you, indeed every worker in Trinidad and Tobago, has some responsibility in all of this.

The major challenge that faces our society today is the management of crime and anti-social behavior. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago sees this as its number one priority and intends to keep this fight at the forefront of our agenda. As such, law enforcement agencies, including the Prison Service, has also to achieve international standards. This process is clearly reflected in the substantial investment in the transformation initiatives, which are taking place within all the agencies of the Ministry of National Security.

We propose to continue to put the pieces of the puzzle painstakingly together to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago returns to being a relatively crime free society. To do this, we have implemented an extensive Social Sector Programme and instituted significant legislative changes, to assist the Law Enforcement Agencies.

As you are no doubt aware, the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service is specifically charged with the responsibility to reduce recidivism through the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders. This is a crucial element in Government’s strategy to reduce crime and the fear that it generates. A snap-shot of recidivism taken a few years ago showed a 56% rate. Recent trends reveal a modest reduction.

To ensure that the Prison Service is able to deliver on its mandate, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago appointed a Task Force to review our Penal System and to provide recommendations for its transformation. The report of the Task Force included among other things, a recommendation for a change in the philosophical direction of Correction Administration – that is, from a retributive to a restorative mode of operation.

Restorative justice is not a new idea. The concept has been accepted for some time by governments, community organizations, and even the courts. In recent years there has been a growing interest in the concept of restorative justice, perhaps because its main goal is to repair the damage caused by crime and to restore harmony and stability, which, taken together is more likely to prevent further crime.

To transform an institution, which has its history rooted in the retributive approach, to a new restorative justice philosophy is not always easy. It represents a fundamental paradigm shift for its many stakeholders. Yet, if we are to achieve this vision, we have no choice! We must press on.

It is very pleasing to report that since 2003, when we began this transformation initiative, there has been steady progress. We are creating a more modern and more professional penal system, one that will be built to last.

This process is ably led by your Commissioner, Mr. John Rougier and his executive team. He has the benefit and support of the Prison Reform and Transformation Programmes Unit. This Unit was established to implement all of the elements of the transformation process and also functions as the central coordinating unit for those programmes geared towards the re-socialization, re-education, and rehabilitation of all inmates. At the core of the strategy, is the reduction of re-offending and consequently, the reduction of crime and anti-social activity.

Inmates are already benefiting from a number of programmes, all of which seek to correct the repeat offenders' behaviour, as well as to improve their cognitive, moral, and spiritual development. Some of these are:

- Sex offenders Programmes;
- Drug rehabilitation programmes;
- Domestic violence programmes;
- Forensic psychiatry programmes;
- Psychological evaluation and counseling; and
- Expanded pre-release programmes;

Recognizing that there can be no genuine rehabilitation without spiritual growth and consciousness, many inmates are responding positively to the opportunities for rehabilitation available to them. We can now report inmates preparing and moving on to University. Many have acquired skills ranging from basic literacy to passes at the CXC level. Some have acquired CAPE passes! Many have acquired skills in information technology and basic computer literacy.

Others have been trained in a range of vocational skills and some allowed to develop in several aspects of our cultural expressions. The prisoners calypso competition is hard to beat. Ladies and gentlemen, permit me a colloquialism "We are doing the business; the thing is happening!"

We are in the process of doing whatever we can, to make the lives of offenders better, so as to bring about positive changes in their circumstances. This is the objective of a reformed Prison System which the Government envisages and which we are committed to achieving.

Through this transformation process, significant progress has also been made in developing and improving our prison institutions. Over the years, increased focus has been placed on implementing measures to improve protection and security capabilities throughout the system.

These include:

- the establishment of a hard-working and increasingly successful intelligence unit;
- the introduction of modern security technology; (with much more to come!)

- the upgrade of existing facilities and construction of new ones, such as a Main Prison Complex, Golden Grove and a Training College, also at Golden Grove.
- The upgrade of the systems at the Maximum Security Prison to bring it up to full occupancy capacity.

Other maintenance and upgrade works were completed at the Port of Spain Prison. These included refurbishment to various Condemn Divisions, construction of a security netting on the perimeter roofing, refurbishment of the A1,B1,A2 and B2 Divisions, along with electrical, plumbing and telecommunications upgrades.

At the Golden Grove Prison, remedial works were undertaken to both the officers' and inmate's dormitories. An Administrative Complex and various workshops for Inmate's programmes, were constructed and the expansion of the Emergency Response Unit facilities was completed.

Refurbishment works were also undertaken at the Remand Prison and included upgrading the Security and lighting systems, refurbishing the toilets, bathroom and laundry areas, improving the water storage capacity, and creating a Library facility for the Inmates.

At the Women's Prison maintenance work was also carried out and an extension was constructed. At the Youth Training Centre, the plumbing system was upgraded and the Dormitories refurbished. Refurbishment works of the Infirmary, the Inmate's dining shed, and officers' dormitory, were also undertaken at the Carrera Convict Prison.

Government intends to continue upgrading all facilities in the new fiscal year, with the construction of the Correctional Complex in Central Trinidad and the Prison Complex in Tobago. The Complex in Central will create more space and allow for an expansion of all the programmes, including an elaborate Prison Industry, in which inmates can learn, work and earn money.

It will also allow for greater classification of inmates as between high and low risk considerations; also as between first-time offenders and long-term or hard core repeat offenders. It will allow for a juvenile female facility, akin to the male Youth Training Centre and will see the establishment of a hospital at which psychiatric evaluation and treatment can be undertaken.

A Vocational Workshop at the Golden Grove Prison will soon be completed; as will a Visit-Facility at Golden Grove Prison to accommodate more visits by children to incarcerated parents. A nursery at the Women's Prison, to accommodate the stay of newborn infants with their incarcerated mothers, is also on the agenda.

Another major focus for the Prison Service will be the implementation of the Parole System. This is one of the recommendations of the Task Force on Prison Reform.

Cabinet established a committee in July 2004, to prepare a National Policy on the Introduction of Parole as a component of prison reform. This Policy, would inform the preparation of the appropriate draft legislation to establish the Parole Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and the Parole Board of Trinidad and Tobago.

Government took this action in recognition of the fact that not all persons ought to be incarcerated. In fact, we believe that prison should be revised for the most dangerous and persistent offenders. Others could be managed by various means, outside of the prison walls; giving them the benefit of their liberty,

contact with family, and normal development, while undergoing a process of rehabilitation, for full and final reintegration.

The report of the Cabinet appointed Parole Committee was submitted in August 2007. Among other things, it provided recommendations on the requirements for establishing the Parole Board Panel, outlined the proceedings of the Parole Board Panel, detailed the Process of Review of decisions made by the Parole Board Panel and other such matters.

The Report also emphasized the need to amend the archaic Prison Rules and Regulations by which the Service has operated. A redraft of the rules and regulations has already been completed by the Ministry of National Security. This redraft will be forwarded to the Office of the Attorney General for review and further legislative action.

All of these changes taking place within the Prison Service highlight a clear need to build the human resource capital of the organization and to develop the skills and professionalism of all staff. To this end, Cabinet approved a staffing plan for the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service, which involves the recruitment of 1,668 prison officers, over a five-year period. This phased recruitment process commenced in 2005.

Earlier this year 96 Officers joined the Service. Today another 101 are being inducted. I am told that in less than one week, another 225 recruits will commence Training, and a further 711 applicants have sat the Civil Service Examination for recruitment and are being processed for entry.

Government is seeking to ensure that the officer-to-inmate ratio at the various Prison Institutions is in keeping with International benchmarks, and that our officers are properly trained and managed.

The annual training allocation of the Prison Division was increased from half a million dollars in fiscal 2002 to over 1.5 million dollars as at fiscal 2006- 2007. Prison Officers of all ranks have received training in such disciplines as:

- Behavioral Sciences
- Social Welfare
- Law
- Human Resource Management
- Security and Risk Management
- Mediation Studies and
- Change Management

Substantial effort and resources will continue to be allocated for training. Officers are also exposed to local, regional and international training, including workshops and conferences. These opportunities assist in forging links with international Correctional counterparts and to internalize international best practices, as well as to expose Officers to new and emerging techniques, that are employed. This is precisely what Vision 2020 is all about!

In partnership with the British Government, Officers have also been able to attend Regional Training workshops in such areas as Security Management, Training for Trainers, Caricom Security Sector Management Training, Gender issues in Corrections, Cell Extractions and many other correctional based training courses.

Officers have also received Government-funded training at the Associate Degree Level in Food and Beverage Management, Electrical Engineering, Agriculture, Psychiatric Nursing, Construction and Building Technology and Labor Studies. At the tertiary level, there are currently over fifty (50) Prison Officers, who have completed or are completing, government-funded University Degrees, in such areas of study as outlined earlier.

All this apart, it is heartening to see and know that the personal ambition of many of our officers have propelled them to various areas of private study, through both direct contact tuition and distance learning.

I would be less than honest, if I did not express my own concerns about our proficiency deficit in terms of protecting the public, especially in light of the fact, that there has been a spate of prisoner escapes recently. Clearly, breaches such as these, greatly affect the credibility of the Prison Service. It causes the honest and proficient officer to feel embarrassed and lose confidence in his or her colleagues and the organization; it causes the public to look with distrust on the entire organization and worst still, it lends itself to disrespect by the inmates.

When officers engage in criminal and or unethical conduct, it weakens the organization and puts the security platform and the public at risk.

Yet, I believe that all of this, also presents you with an opportunity to demonstrate your ability to rise above these challenges and to demonstrate the things you would have learnt during your period of training. Do not allow these challenges to overshadow the major gains which this organization has achieved or prevent you from carrying out your duty in an honest efficient and professional manner.

I urge you as new officers of the Prison Service, to allow virtues such as integrity, loyalty, obedience and professional competence to guide your everyday conduct. I urge you to let your commitment to duty and country be manifested in your attitudes and behaviour, both on and off the job. In some ways, they cannot be separated. As members of this distinguished organization, you are morally and legally bound to assist the process of building confidence in our law enforcement institutions, and you do so by practicing and observing the highest standards of personal and organizational discipline.

I thank you for this opportunity to address you and again extend my congratulations on your achievement.

May God Bless you and yours. May God Bless the Prison Service and may God Bless our Nation.

I thank you!