

The Joint Passing-out of TTFS

ADDRESS

BY

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE DONNA COX
MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

AND

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR LAVENTILLE EAST/ MORVANT

AT THE GRADUATION CEREMONY OF CYCLE 3

REHABILITATING INMATES THROUGH TRAINING AND RETRAINING PROGRAMME

PLACE: Prisons Training College, Tumpuna Road

DATE: 5th August 2009

TIME: 2:30 p.m.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education;
The Honourable Fitzgerald Jeffery

Acting Permanent Secretary, Ministry of National Security,
Mrs. Veronica Belgrave

The Commissioner of the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service,
Mr. John Rougier

Programme Director and Chairperson, Mrs. Donna Scoon Moses

Representatives from the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Commerce

All Training Providers, Life Skills Facilitators, Internal Verifiers of the Rehabilitating Inmates through
Training and Retraining Programme;

Members of Staff of the Ministry of National Security and the Ministry of Science, Technology and
Tertiary Education;

Other Specially Invited Guest;

Members of the Media;

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure to be here today and to address this Graduation Ceremony for Cycle 3 of the “Rehabilitating Inmates through Training & Retraining Programme”.

This event celebrates the achievement of the inmates who participated in the programme, and it demonstrates the importance of the ongoing collaboration and cooperation between the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and the Ministry of National Security.

I want to congratulate the participants for successfully completing the programme. I also want to thank my colleagues, the Honourable Christine Kangaloo, Minister of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education and the Honourable Fitzgerald Jeffrey the Minister of State in the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education for their commitment to this effort.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you are aware, the Government’s goal is to improve the quality of life and the standard of living of all our citizens, including those who for one reason or another find themselves incarcerated in our nation’s prisons.

Prisons, ladies and gentlemen, have an essential place in any society. On the one hand, law-abiding citizens are reassured that hard-core criminals and serious re-offenders will be out of circulation. Our own Prison Service is actively engaged in working towards the rehabilitation and reintegration of inmates.

Ladies and Gentlemen, 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 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 agreed and adopted the recommendations as Government’s policy.

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 be an effective crime-management tool and would counteract “the revolving door syndrome”

Today, inmates are benefiting from a number of programmes, all of which seek to correct the repeat offenders’ behaviour, some of these are:

- Sex offenders Programmes
- Drug rehabilitation programmes
- Domestic violence programmes
- Forensic psychiatry programmes
- Psychological evaluation and counseling

As part of the overall thrust towards restorative justice, the Prison Service continues to seek out and provide opportunities for inmates to learn new skills, which can help them make a fresh start in life.

In this regard, when the Rehabilitating Inmates through Training & Retraining Programme was launched, it brought together the respective strengths and perspectives of the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service of the Ministry of National Security and the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education.

The Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education was identified as the right organization to develop and manage the educational and vocational curricula and provide certification of the programme.

Together this joint venture exemplifies the kind of partnership that enables the Government to deliver on its promise of building a society in which no one is left behind.

Training programmes such as this one, that are aligned to the world of work, offer inmates the chance to re-enter society on a new track - to become constructive and responsible individuals in their respective communities.

The Ministry of National Security through the Prison Service intends to build on the successes in this area. Working partnerships with various institutions and professionals are already in place and a number of programmes, aimed at the cognitive, moral, spiritual, social, spiritual, educational and cultural development of inmates are being implemented.

Ladies and gentlemen, we know that there is no quick fix and there is no single approach to addressing the issues of crime which we now face in Trinidad and Tobago. Our approach to the solutions must therefore be multi-faceted and intensified, encompassing all sectors of society if we are to stem the violence and lawlessness in the land.

Today's graduation is testimony to this principle, because the programme seeks to "expose trainees to useful knowledge that can assist them in gaining employment upon release, so that they can become contributing members of society." Let me again congratulate the 107 inmates who are graduating today after completing 480 training contact hours in Construction Skills, 192 contact hours in Information Technology and 144 contact hours in Life Skills.

I am especially pleased to hear that eight (8) women are also graduating from the programme today. I want to offer these ladies special congratulations on a job well done.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me take this opportunity to emphasize Government's commitment to this initiative and indeed to implementing crime prevention measures within the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service.

The Government continues to focus on improving and developing the physical infrastructure of the Prison Service. We know that this not only affects the quality of our correctional services but also adds to the working environment of our prison officers.

The Ministry of National Security through the Prison Service already has a comprehensive plan that includes developmental works at existing facilities such as the Carrera and the Port of Spain Prison and to build a modern prison facility in Tobago.

We have already upgraded the training facility to the level of facilitating seminars with the development of a conference room. The Prison Service has also increased its fleet of vehicles by acquiring 14 new vehicles for this fiscal year.

Ladies and gentleman, we also have plans for the construction of a state-of-the art Prison Service Training College, one that will cater to all the needs of the Prison Service.

The construction of this facility will allow the Prisons Service to improve the competencies of prison officers at all levels of the organization in disciplines such as Social Welfare, Psychology and Counseling, Mediation, Prison Management, Psychiatric Nursing and Security Management.

Substantial effort and resources will continue to be allocated for training. Officers will continue to be exposed to local, regional and international training, including workshops and conferences. These opportunities not only assist in forging links with international Correctional counterparts and to internalize international best practices, but also to expose our Officers to new and emerging techniques, that are employed elsewhere.

I am therefore very proud to be part of this Programme and indeed a part of the Ministry of National Security at this time of transformation.

From this graduation exercise today, I have every confidence that the rehabilitation and training programmes will prepare inmates for reintegration into society upon release and provide them with the best possible opportunities to make a fresh start in life.

Inmates let me take this opportunity to be forthright with you by saying “lawbreakers do not benefit from their actions.” I urge you to seek out upon release, opportunities to build a greater level of pride within yourselves. Become nation builders, patriotic, law abiding citizens and continue to seek the good of your country. Put your trust in God and do not forget his deeds towards mankind and remember to always keep his commandments. You have received a second chance, take hold of it and make the most of it to better your lives.

I want to commend Commissioner Rougier, and his team of Officers for your continued hard work and commitment. I also applaud my ministerial colleague and the dedicated staff of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. Congratulations to the successful participants.

To all those gather here let me just say, the road ahead is a very challenging one. However, we must remain fully committed to the process of reform within the Prison Service.

I look forward to even greater collaboration and cooperation with all stakeholders so as to bring about significant and lasting change in the lives of the men and women who are incarcerated.

May God continue to bless us and continue to bless our beloved Nation

I thank you.