



MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY

31-33 Abercromby Street, Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
Telephone: (868) 623 7579, 625 6100 Facsimile (868) 625 2820

Feature Address by

The Hon Jack Warner

Minister of National Security

At the

Breakfast Meeting

of the

Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce

Columbus Circular

West Moorings

Wednesday, July 18, 2012

Greetings

- **Mr Andrew Sabga, President**
- **Other Executive Members and floor members**
- **CEO, Ms Catherine Kumar**
- **Distinguished Guests**
- **Members of the Media**

Introduction

First of all I want to thank the T&T Chamber of Commerce for the invitation to be the feature guest at this morning's One-on-One Breakfast meeting. It is a privilege to address an august gathering such as this.

It is just about three weeks since I assumed the portfolio of Minister of National Security. I am sure everyone here will agree that public safety is one of the most critical issues facing the nation alongside that of the state of the economy.

Concern over crime is justified

It is a hot topic. Moreso because the consequences of crime involve unjust losses, hardship, trauma, violence, suffering, injury, grief and loss of life. The victims can be innocent targets and innocent by-standers as easily as they can be persons whose illicit activities have simply caught up with them.

As social beings we have all right to be concerned because crime can touch the things and people who matter to us. Crime can cost businesses money. It can bring harm to our employees, colleagues, friends, spouses, children; even we ourselves can become victims. And what is scary is that the victims rarely have a clue as to when their number will call.

Too often we hear on the news or read in the newspapers of persons who were going about their ordinary, legitimate business – doing their daily chores and activities – when criminals struck.

We have seen killers strike without compassion, remorse... without discrimination. Neither babies nor grannies are spared. They do not care if it is day or night; or if they are in the middle of Port of Spain.

My friends, crime is a serious matter and ALL concerns from all quarters are justified. You have a right to be concerned and a right to demand a solution to this scourge.

Trinidad and Tobago is our home and something would be wrong with us if we did not worry over the state of our society. This is where we live and where we have to raise our children and grandchildren.

And that is why crime IS everybody's business.

And it requires a hands-on response from each and every one of us.

Stop waiting for Superman

There is no hope in waiting for a Superman. There is no demi-God who will utter a few words and take our problems away. There is no miracle man who will come walking out of the desert like Moses to wave his staff and zap everything right.

Eradicating crime and restoring order and safety to our society requires rolling up our sleeves and doing some serious, hard work.

Everyone has a part to play. And we must embrace our roles...

My first month in office

Since my appointment as Minister of National Security three weeks ago I have been working to get a lot of the critical things done so that we can get on the track to results.

As I said, there is a notion out there that you look for a man who has some sheets of paper in a folder that he calls a plan and you make him National Security Minister, and that's the end of it. But that approach is one of fantasy.

Regardless of what ministry you are dealing with, government does not work that way. In fact, it does not work so even in the private sector.

As I am sure any of the sterling managers in this room would have done, I spent the last three weeks meeting with the heads of all units and divisions. I have met with them individually and as a group. I have also met with divisional teams.

The objective of these meetings is to evaluate "what I have to work with". We have looked at the human resources, equipment, technology and other resource issues. We have also discussed the problems and strategies. We have evaluated old strategies to see what we can learn from them; whether they just need tweaking for them to work. We discussed new interventions.

We are looking at what resources are in hand and what needs to be procured. And you can understand that if part of the medium-to-longterm strategy involves hiring 5,000 SRP's and acquiring 3,000 vehicles, that cannot happen in 26 days!

Hard and soft strategies have been identified and these have to move to the implementation stage.

And for the benefit of some of the critics in the media, let me point out that naming an initiative does not equate to implementation and therefore you cannot expect that when you announce a strategy you wake up the next morning with a 50 percent cut in crime.

As I had indicated previously, I had targeted to have the comprehensive strategy finalized within about six weeks of assuming office as Minister of National Security. We are trying our best to complete this task sooner, but I must say that what I do not want to do is to compromise the quality or integrity of the strategy by rushing through it. And therefore if we have to be deliberate and careful to get it right then that is what we will have to do.

This does not mean that everything is at a standstill. Because as we go along there are things that become relevant in the day-to-day operations and such matters are dealt with as they emerge.

Over the last three weeks I have held meetings with social partners such as Chambers of Commerce, community organizations and even individuals. I have met with the associations in the protective services and the response has been good. There is renewed commitment and energy as we try to forge a new collaborative environment.

Old Strategies/New Strategies

Friends, recently some statements were made with regard to what the government will be doing to improve the justice system.

I have been meeting with the Chief Justice and others to assist the process for introducing a gun court for prosecution of fire arm offences and also exploring the possibility of a gun amnesty.

Up jumps the Opposition, which has nothing productive to contribute; and all they can say is that those were ideas stolen from the PNM.

What is wrong will always be wrong – regardless of who is in Government or Opposition. The facts are that the criminal justice system needs an overhaul in certain areas.

There are thousands of cases clogging the system and the delay in justice is causing a denial of justice.

Criminal elements are getting more time to intimidate and execute witnesses. They are getting more time to be out on bail where they can commit more crimes and terrorize citizens. This delay and often-times subversion of justice is giving credibility to the notion that criminals are above the law; they will never be punished; that crime pays! More than that is keeps the terror on the streets.

So, my friends, I do not think anyone can claim parentage of the inevitable conclusion that the justice system needs an overhaul. Although a gun court was discussed in the 1995-2001 period.

The real question though, is why did the former government not establish a gun court?

Similarly, they said the gun amnesty was their idea. Even though the former Prime Minister and former National Security Minister are both on record saying they do not want to pursue that strategy.

Ladies and Gentlemen, after a decade of political posturing and gum-flapping, I think it is time we move the discussion to a higher level.

That is why every possible strategy that has been offered up I am willing to take a look at.

No single idea by itself is a panacea. There is no magic pill. What we need is a combination of strategies.

Looking at the problem

At a quick glance, we have a situation where there is urban warfare connected to gun and drug activity – fights for turf. Many of these individuals are also involved in other gun crimes such as armed robberies, car thefts and kidnappings, out of which murders can arise. There is also spillage where innocent persons get caught in the cross fire or stray fire.

Then, there are elements who are not as deeply involved in the gang culture or not involved at all who also engage in robberies – sometimes armed with guns, knives, cutlasses and other weapons. And this too can result in loss of life and other violence and loss.

There are crimes of a domestic nature. Household and family disagreements that boil over and result in woundings and deaths; two neighbours or two spouses end up in an argument and it gets out of hand.

The first two categories are crimes of opportunity. So too are crimes such as petty larceny, break-ins, rape, car thefts and small-scale drug trafficking. Those are the crimes that the government and law enforcement have a stronger role to play in preventing. And it starts with adequate patrols. Timely and effective responses and interception. Gathering justiciable evidence to facilitate prosecution.

Law enforcement and public safety needs to be brought to the level where we minimize the opportunity for persons to engage in criminal activity. It must be brought to the point where the tools, personnel and resources are available to prevent a crime at the earliest instant, and failing to do so, to apprehend the suspect so that he/she does not escape the law.

And this is just as relevant for serious and not-so-serious crimes. It is very relevant for dealing with issues such as the incidence of road accidents and reckless driving.

21st Century Policing

And on this subject, let me state that 21st Century Policing in its current form does not seem workable to me.

Police stations and hospitals should be open 24 hours a day. These are places people turn to in times of emergency.

And therefore the strategy has to be re-hashed. We have to look at the objectives and the measures within the overall strategy, and see if the initiative has to be scrapped completely or if adjustments can be made to bring it more in line with what is needed.

Hard and Soft Approaches

It is my view that hard and soft approaches are required and these must work in tandem with each other.

The soft approach is the social approach.

We cannot ignore the fact that failures in the education system – and other systems in the society - have led to a large number of persons being unemployed and unemployable. We cannot ignore the fact that there are hundreds of thousands of persons living below the poverty line who can easily find themselves at a precipice wondering how to feed their hungry children.

Guns and drugs have engulfed some of our communities. Children are growing up without positive role models and without options. In some places circumstances are set against them so that they are disadvantaged in the academic race. Sometimes the gangsters lure them away from school or decree that they must become drug mules.

The softer approach involves going into those communities and demonstrating that positive options do exist. It involves mentoring and socialization to help these persons appreciate the good things in life and to see that they are attainable. It is about bringing hope and support.

For those who want to walk the straight and narrow the protective services and the government – and I hope civil society too – will be there.

But for those who cannot hear, they must feel. And therefore there will be the hard approach which will involve raids, intercepts and pursuit.

I am sorry to say it but those who choose to live by the gun will have to make up their minds that they will most likely die by it as well.

But for those who want change, there can be a new beginning.

Hoop of Life and other programmes

It is with this in mind that the government recently launched the Hoop of Life initiative with Dr Shaquille O'Neal.

It is an outreach programme designed to give our young people something positive and enriching to focus on and to aspire towards.

It sets standards of conduct for the individuals, the teams, the supporters and the communities, and is an avenue through which positive influences can be filtered into the communities. It can also aid in getting information within the community into the hands of the police.

Similarly, there is the Cadet programme which I would like to see active in every secondary school. Other outreach programmes include the Fatherhood programme, Concert of Hope initiative, the pan-yard programme, the National Mentoring Programme, the National Adopt a School programme and the Police Youth Clubs that are active throughout the country.

There is a suggestion that the Hoop of Life concept could be extended to the sports of Cricket and Football. It is worth some thought.

My question to you this morning as law-abiding, civic-minded citizens, is how can you get involved? How can you help? We need everyone on board.

Perhaps you can sponsor a team. You don't have to give the money to the Ministry of National Security. But you can choose a team and sponsor them some uniforms and equipment. Sponsor them some basketballs.

Make a contribution to improving the ball court where they practice in their community.

You can place your branding on it if you wish.

I don't even mind if you put your brand on their uniform either. Because it is my hope that eventually the Hoop of Life is something that would take on a life of its own and which would be driven by the community and corporate community.

Perhaps you can do some flags or t-shirts for their supporters.

· If you don't like the Hoop of Life idea, then why not sponsor a cricket or football team in your area?

Perhaps the Chamber could sponsor a tournament. The Ministry of National Security or the Ministry of Sport could assist in the administrative functions.

In fact, in each area that there is a Chamber or Business Association, perhaps each business organization can sponsor a tournament for their community.

- If you're not passionate about sports, sponsor a reading programme, an essay on positive life values, an art competition; anything to get the youths focused. It can be a national competition or one focused in a zone or a single school.
- If you cannot adopt a school then adopt a class or a student. Sponsor a school garden project with a class. Or select a student who needs help and pay for him to get extra lessons.
- The point is that there are so many initiatives and programmes out there, some running on shoe-string budgets scraped together from handouts.

I remember that prior to 2010, 17 business organizations came together to demand performance from the last government on the issue of crime.

I am just saying, those organizations with hundreds of members could do a lot of good.

Cost of Crime

I make these suggestions because I note the comments in last week Friday's Guardian by Ms Luana Boyack, the head of your Crime and Justice Committee, regarding the high cost of security – vis-a-vis, the cost of crime; and the fact that crime is a matter of concern to the Chamber and indeed a focal issue for this year.

Permit me to share some dollar figures with you.

It costs:

- \$312 to incarcerate a person for ONE DAY;
- \$113,880 to incarcerate a person for ONE YEAR;
- \$569,400 to incarcerate a person for FIVE YEARS; and
- \$2.28 million to incarcerate a person for 20 YEARS.

And these figures do not include the cost of the court process. It does not include the legal cost of prosecution and of defending against appeals up to the Privy Council. It

does not include the cost of investigating the crime and pursuing the accused up to apprehension.

It also does not include the cost of the crime itself – often costs that cannot be measured in money terms.

By the time a murderer spends 20 years on death row, the State would have spent over \$2.28 million to feed, clothe and hold him and as much as a few hundred thousand dollars more to keep him in there through the courts. And that is just for ONE inmate.

We have choices. We can spend a smaller sum up front and bend the tree while it can still be bent and spare everyone the pain. We can be pro-active!

We can take a positive approach and make an intervention!

We can take a fraction of our security budget – both yours and mine – and we can invest it in building and enriching lives. Instead of using that money to lock away those who have fallen through the cracks in society, we can build safety nets. We can create productive members in society.

Or we can let them come and take the money with a gun, and spend a fortune to mind them in jail.

I prefer the first option!

I thank you and I will now accept your questions.