



Feature Address

Given at the

***Intercessional Meeting of the Association of Caribbean
Commissioners of Police (ACCP)***

By

***K Dwight Venner
Governor
ECCB***

on Wednesday, 01 December 2010

at the Amaryllis Hotel in Barbados

Mr Chairman

I must first of all express my appreciation to your organisation for inviting me to speak at your Convention.

That you think I may have something useful to say is not only an honour, but also a source of great encouragement to me. The encouragement is your obvious commitment to having views from outside of your own profession. This is good for all professions but sends a particular message on behalf of the police because of the way popular opinion and sometimes the international press has characterised and caricatured our Caribbean police forces.

For instances, I quote extensively from an article in the world wide and notable journal, the Economist of 17 July 2010:

“Along with league tables for sun and sand, English-speaking Caribbean countries dominate the world’s violence rankings. Jamaica suffers the planets second highest murder rate and St Kitts and Nevis ranks third. Safety concerns have driven the middle classes into gated communities and tourists into all-inclusive resorts. Crime fighters compete with rappers for

celebrity; most people can name half a dozen lawyers, judges or police chiefs.

Facing growing demands for law and order, the islands' leaders are now looking abroad for help. This month Trinidad and Tobago tapped Dwayne Gibbs, who hails from Edmonton in frigid North Western Canada as its new police chief. Antigua and Barbuda has also turned to Canada, hiring a team from the country to head its police.

The Jamaican force has three British Assistant Commissioners.

There is good reason to import foreign managers. Caribbean police forces were set up in colonial times to catch mango thieves and quell native unrest. They are being overwhelmed by well armed gangs, international drug traffickers and systemic corruption.”

Another quotation from the article also states:

“Recruiting outsiders is something of a last-ditch attempt to shake up the islands’ inward-looking policing culture.”

All citizens of the Caribbean should be shaken to the core when they read this article.

First of all it exhibits great disrespect to a group of people who have with very scarce resources and limited public support tried to stem the tide in a new international environment which has shaken up most societies in both developed and developing countries.

Secondly, it simply glosses over the fact that escalation in crime has a very significant external component, drug trafficking which even highly advanced countries are having great difficulty in controlling.

Thirdly, the increase in criminality is also a result of stagnating economies and the disintegration of social and community structures.

We have a very complex situation on our hands which is why your reaching out to other sectors is so encouraging and critical as we look to the future.

The complexity of the issue encompasses such issues as:

- The role of the State;
- The impact of crime on Development; and

- The changing International Economic and Security Environment.

The responses in the Caribbean to crime and violence have to take into consideration such issues as:

- Our approaches to development in the new post crisis environment;
- The role of Justice, Law and Order in our development;
- Are regional, as apposed to national solutions more sustainable?;
- and
- What is the scope for regional cooperation?

The role of the state is paramount in matters of law and order. The origins and evolution of the state as a primary instrument of government and governance originates from the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 which recognised the sovereignty of distinct groups of citizens over a geographically defined area.

The group held sway over this territory because of its capacity to impose its will on the inhabitants, either voluntarily or through coercion.

Violence is the fact which determines the creation and the development of states. There is outright violence and coercion which is the threat of violence.

Max Weber characterised the state as that organisation which has a monopoly of the legitimate use of force.

Mancur Olson describes the formation of states by referring to the role of stationary bandits, who instead of plundering a group of people, provide protection against outsiders and taxes them for providing the service.

This is in comparison to roving bandits who rob the community of everything. Growth cannot take place in this latter case but in the case of the stationary bandit, if the tax is reasonable, then people are encouraged to produce and trade.

In modern times, we have cases where the whole state apparatus has broken down and rival warlords pillage the society. The most famous case is Somalia, where acts of piracy cannot be contained by the government, or for that matter international forces.

In other countries, the state, while functioning, may find that its writ does not hold in some communities which come under the control of terrorists or criminals.

The state has evolved to carry out more functions over time but the maintenance of law and order has remained its principal responsibility.

Most countries in current times have become open access societies in which democracy and the rule of law are accepted as a minimal condition for achieving the standards of a civilised society. The state must therefore have control over violence. For this there needs to be:

1. The consolidated organisation of military and police forces which are subject to the control of the political system.
2. The political system must be constrained by a set of institutions which limit the illegitimate use of violence.
3. For a political faction or party to remain in power it must enjoy the support of economic and social interests broadly defined.

Since the late 1940s and early 1950s Caribbean States have enjoyed Adult Suffrage followed by independence in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and have fashioned states based on liberal democracy, the constitutional protections of rights and freedoms such as freedom of

speech, worship, association and assembly; and respect for the rule of law.

They have long established political systems with competitive political parties and regular elections.

The Caribbean State has had the challenges of restructuring our economies and societies in the post colonial era in domestic and external environments which have been extremely difficult.

The decline of agricultural export commodities and the difficulty of establishing new economic sectors have exacerbated an already high level of unemployment and poverty. The distribution of income in some countries has become even more unequal and social services have been under stress, and social tensions in many cases have risen.

The population is a young and growing one with the demographic prevalence of youth; the section most prone to criminal activities being a particular challenge to social peace.

There is no doubt that crime is having a negative impact on economic growth in the Caribbean. Various reports from both national and

international agencies, and research done by regional and international academics have highlighted the problem in recent times.

A study by Francis et al in 2003 found that the total costs of crime in Jamaica in 2001 came to J\$12.4 billion or 3.7 per cent of GDP.

A study by Harriott, Kirton, Francis and Gibbison (2009) took a comprehensive look at the impact of crime in that country.

It reveals the evolution of a system of criminality which has protruded into every facet of society, particularly politics and the economy.

The maturation of this system is frightening as it poses a significant challenge to the state system which we saw played out earlier this year as the government sought to extradite a criminal gang leader to the United States.

A point which has become clearer and clearer to Caribbean policy makers over the last two decades has been the increasing external vulnerability of our economies.

This has been clearly illustrated by the transition from an agricultural export economy to a tourism economy.

The feature of seasonality still remains as does the susceptibility to external shocks. A major problem arises, however, because of the impact of crime on such a high profile industry as tourism.

Just two weeks ago cruise ships pulled out of St Kitts because of the robbery of a bus load of tourists at one of the country's premier historical sites, Brimstone Hill. It was only quick police work, assisted by the public in apprehending the perpetrators which led to the reinstatement of the schedule of visits.

Incidents like these reach the international press and lead to advisories, warning visitors from the source countries that they visit at their own risk.

In the area of finance which is another modern sector, the threat of money laundering and terrorist financing has our countries under constant scrutiny with increasing costs of putting in place regulatory and supervisory systems.

Domestic agriculture suffers from praedial larceny which has grown significantly in recent times. This is one of the major deterrents to the development of agriculture at this time.

Manufacturing for export faces the challenge of ensuring that illicit drugs are not smuggled out which can result in the loss of consignments and the subsequent loss of business. This adds to the cost of production and affects our competitiveness in the export market.

Ordinary businesses face losses by theft which affects not only their normal profits but also their willingness to reinvest and employ more workers.

The intimidation of workers by criminal gangs in vulnerable areas has an impact on production and productivity.

The costs to society of persistent and chronic crime have been divided into two categories; Direct and Indirect.

The direct costs encompass:

1. Medical
2. Legal
3. Policing
4. Prisons

5. Foster Care
6. Private Security

The indirect costs include:

1. Cost, Earnings and Time
2. Lower Human Capital
3. Lower Productivity
4. Lower Investment
5. Psychological Cost

The World Bank has catalogued the cost in the Caribbean as follows:

1. Arrest, Prosecution and Detention of Criminals
2. Property Cost and Damage
3. Medical Costs
4. Intangible Costs
5. Security
6. Lower Tourist Receipts
7. Loss of Income
8. Lost Capital

The changing international economic and security environment is bound to have an impact on our economies and societies.

The global crisis has led to a marked fall in output, employment and government revenues. The situation in our main trading partners, the United States of America and Europe, remains difficult. This will continue to have an impact on our economies with our governments having limited fiscal space to stimulate our economies and provide social safety nets. We also face the issue of the deportation of criminals from metropolitan countries to the region.

The security situation with respect to terrorism is still a major issue and impoverished populations provide fertile ground for alien ideologies.

They also provide the environment for the strong to prey on the weak, and for the violent to take advantage of the meek.

We are going to be very challenged in the immediate future.

We will have to come up with new approaches to socioeconomic development in the post crisis era.

Here is neither the place nor the occasion to go into the new approaches to economic and social development. However, it is clear that a significant restructuring of our domestic economies is necessary. This will have to take place at the national and regional levels so that we can then re-engineer our relationships with the international economy.

In the social sphere we will have to re-examine, with some urgency, the role of Justice, Law and Order in our region.

We are at the tipping point where a very strategic and decisive approach to the issue of Law and Order will have to be undertaken. There is great awareness of this judging by the sentiments of the public and the regional meetings and task forces established to address the problem.

There are clearly two complementary approaches. One is to address the problem directly, that is, the Law and Order approach. However, since this is merely the symptom, the broader approach lies in the new socio-economic development thrust which is of equal importance.

Justice, Law and Order must be seen in a logical progression if we are to assess its effectiveness and impact on a society. It runs from Police, to Courts, to Prisons.

All three elements must converge in their efficiency and effectiveness or the system will be dysfunctional.

The police are, so to speak, the first leg in the process, and I will place more emphasis on them, but their work is not complete until the other two sectors have also done their work.

Policing is a civilian activity as opposed to a military one.

This has great significance for the new development paradigm.

It is clear that we have serious social problems, which in many cases stem from economic circumstances which challenge the state.

This places policing in a very unique, but uncomfortable position of having to hold the line.

Order has to be maintained while society sorts out its problems and this cannot be successfully achieved in a state of anarchy.

Violence, either of an organised or informal nature can be directed against the state and/or individuals in periods of flux and transition.

We need to think clearly of what kind of police force and what kind of policemen we require, both now and in the future.

Police, Nurses and Teachers, form that backbone of our society which caters for all classes and by extrapolation have the ability and potential to make a major contribution to our societies. This is on the basis of:

1. Universal coverage of society;
2. Weight of numbers; and
3. Their potential to influence individuals and communities.

This was the situation two generations ago but this has been significantly eroded. We have not yet assessed the cost of this retrogression.

We now have to concentrate on the highest professionalisation of these three sectors which should be complementary agents in the new system.

The Police Force, as an institution, must see itself as a developmental institution and be seen by the governing authority and the society as such.

It must bring to the table two attitudes, firstly, that of discipline and decorum in societies whose development is constrained by the absence of these critical virtues.

Secondly, the professional approach to crime prevention and detection which will mark the force out as a successful institution in the society.

The recruitment, education, training, and orientation of our police forces must take very high priority.

A policeman in uniform is the ever present face of the state and must have the education, knowledge and maturity to play that role.

The rise in the use of technology, both in terms of computers and firearms is a challenge for the police as is the increase of white collar crime and fraud. This again requires standards of education and expertise of the highest order if we are to resolve these issues.

The rise of community policing which is now in vogue and the so-called harder aspects of policing must be judiciously mixed.

The next, and very important question is our ability to achieve these higher levels of training, professionalism and orientation at the national or the regional levels? The answer has to do with the costs and the openness to collaboration and cooperation.

The existence of this organisation clearly indicates the willingness to collaborate and cooperate. The issue is how deep and sustainable is this tendency.

For the smaller states of the region, the OECS countries, I have declared my views publicly. My view is that there should be a single OECS Police Service.

This is based on the issues of cost and effectiveness and the urgent and pressing issues which confront us. The Eastern Caribbean islands are in the middle of the chain between North and South America, one of the main transshipment routes for drug trafficking. Both to the North - Jamaica and the South - Trinidad and Tobago, the levels of crime and violence have reached to higher and more sophisticated levels.

The tourism industry is by far the largest contributor to growth, employment and foreign exchange reserves and therefore the control and management of crime and violence is critical for our economic development.

The police services are small and not well resourced. The avenues for advancement are limited.

The arithmetic is very daunting in applying solutions to the problems in the single state environment. The opportunity cost between spending more on police, courts and prisons is the deficit on expenditure for education, health and infrastructure. The lack of expenditure in these areas leads to lack of economic growth, higher unemployment and more social distress which will require more police, courts and prisons.

This is indeed a vicious circle.

Since all the islands have the same problem, the argument for regionalisation is a very strong one.

The arguments raised against it are:

1. Constitutional Requirements;
2. Sovereignty;
3. Parochialism; and
4. Cost of Financing.

The issue however boils down to the needs of the citizens and the will of the authorities to fulfill them.

In the face of the correct assessment of the negative impact of crime on the society and economy, the matter could be put before the people in a referendum in which they can decide how they see their security needs being best met.

The issue of sovereignty is a practical one. It requires an assessment of what constitutes effective sovereignty. If countries are hard pressed to meet their ordinary state functions and development needs from their own financial resources, effective sovereignty is somewhat diminished.

If criminal elements control the streets and communities and citizens feel unsafe in their homes and places of work or business then the state

has not satisfied its primary function, that is, providing Law and Order.

If it also has to access the leadership of the police services from outside of the region, a fundamental issue is then exposed, which requires deep reflection for states which have experienced three decades of independence.

If you do not mind my frankness, I would like to put it in reciprocal terms. If a Vincentian were the Commissioner of Police in Saint Lucia and a Saint Lucian was his counterpart in St Vincent and the Grenadines and they were both excellent leaders and managers only misguided and insanely parochial people could or would complain.

Parochialism is an issue which we must also treat with in an open minded and objective way as we attempt to make progress in a globalised and interdependent world.

The matter of finance and its resolution can be handled in the following way.

The nature of the regionalisation must be such that there is no duplication of responsibilities and therefore of costs.

The financing also cannot be on a voluntary basis as this never works in this region. The funds which are budgeted at the national level must be the funds assigned for policing.

The other issue has to do again with the dangers of dividing jurisdictions between national and regional agencies.

This will not work in our circumstances as collaboration is not our natural tendency at this time. It is clearly something that we must cultivate with some urgency.

In conclusion, we have to look at the issue of policing from where each of us sits in our respective places.

Politicians may have a view of the matter which is conditioned by the needs of their citizens and their control over the system.

In the case of the second, there must be civilian control over the police in either a regional or national context.

The question must be answered in the case of regional or national control as to which reflects best the needs of the citizens.

In the case of the police establishment, the question would be whether it would contribute to the increase in professionalism and career prospects and the incentive to provide for the needs of the society.

In my personal capacity as Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) I would like to see an OECS Regional Police Service which serves as a complement to the Bank. We provide economic and financial security, particularly with respect to the currency.

The Regional Police Service would provide Law and Order and Security for our society; both people and property.

It would provide enhanced career opportunities for our youngsters who would have new vistas in an emerging society.

As a citizen, I want to live in a place which is safe and secure and in which all citizens can take advantage of the opportunities in the society and live a good and satisfying life. A good police service can make a major contribution to this ideal and as a citizen of the region I am prepared to make my contribution towards this worthy goal.

K Dwight Venner

Governor

30 November 2010