

Debate Forum
Campaign against Youth Violence
L'Institut Français, Rue Moka, Rose-Hill
12 August 2010
Speech of the Hon. Attorney General

Hon. Satya Prakash Reetoo, Minister of Youth & Sports

Mrs. Shireen Aumeeraudy Cziffra, Ombudsperson for Children and former Attorney-General

Miss Nirmala Rewa, President of the Junior Chamber International

Mr. Yogesh Bappoo, The Project Director, Junior Chamber International

Mr. Ajay Takoor, Representative from Ministry of Education & Human Resources

Mr. Radegonde, CSR Manager, ENL Foundation

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here this morning for the debate forum on 'campaign against youth violence' on the occasion of the International Youth Day celebration.

I seize this opportunity to congratulate the members of the Junior Chamber International of Quatre Bornes for organizing this forum.

I have to say that I am pleased to see the presence of governmental and non governmental organizations as well as youngsters and stakeholders. This is a topic which is the common event in today's society. Recent reports state youth violence is a high visibility and priority concern in every sector of the society, whether affluent or poor, urban or rural, is immune from its devastative effects.

Youth violence may be defined as the intentional use of force whether threatened or real against a person, group or community that results in high likelihood of injury, death psychological harm or deprivation by persons aged between 10 to 24. Youth violence takes many specific

forms of violent behavior such as assault, rape, homicide or other delinquent behaviours such as drug abuse, truancy and vandalism.

Of all stages in the human life cycle, adolescence is the period of most striking change. It is during this time that the individual makes the transition from childhood to adult life. The success with which he copes with this period of his life will, to a large extent, determine the type of person he will be as an adult.

For many adolescents, the transition between childhood and adult life proceeds smoothly, for others, it is a period of insecurity and emotional upheaval. It is during this period, that there is a gradual loosening of the bonds with parents.

The function of the parent of an adolescent is to help him to grow up, not to hold him back as many tend to do. Study show that parents who allow a child a reasonable degree of independence and decision making produce more self-reliant, well adjusted adults than those who exercise strict control, allow the adolescent no independence or responsibility and resort to physical punishment.

A rigid attitude by parents may create many problems, leading to adolescents becoming rebels and defying parental authority.

The generation gap is not a recent phenomenon. It is usually caused by a difference in outlook and a general lack of communication between parents and adolescents. It is more common where parents with entrenched attitudes refuse to accept the changes occurring in society. In times of rapid social change, values alter so rapidly that adolescents find it impossible to accept the values of the older generation. Their protest manifests itself in unconventional dress and hairstyles, rejection of traditional attitudes, revolt against establishment, dropping out or experimenting with psychic experiences through drugs.

Indeed this sentiment of being anti-establishment is manifested in a number of ways.

Much of the criminal tendencies of young people are planted in their childhood. Abused children who grow up with violent behaviours of their parents often become violent themselves later in their lives.

Moreover, a large range of crimes committed by young people are copied from what they see in movies and on television. Seeing crimes committed on television and violent behavior by parents, make the young person think that this is acceptable behavior.

The following are some possible reasons for youth violence;

- (1) Alienation from society is particularly common in the lower income groups.
- (2) Young people may be affected by unemployment. Those with no skills or qualifications are most severely affected as the low grade jobs formerly held by unskilled labour are now taken by those with qualifications or performed by machines.
- (3) Poor environment, broken homes and rejection by parents have all been found to be influential factors in the background of juvenile offenders.
- (4) Lack of parental leadership and discipline, problem parents create problem children.

Children in conflict with the law can be defined as those children who are engaged in criminal behavior ranging from minor to serious offences. The term juvenile violence is a legal term and it refers to illegal acts committed by individuals under the age of 16, 17 or 18 (depending on state law).

Juvenile violence develops and manifests with a complex constellation of factors. We should inter alia, target preschool and primary grade children because the researches suggest that the early interventions can nip the problem in the bud most effectively.

The juvenile justice system was created because it was recognized that youthful offenders are needed to be managed differently from adults. They should rather receive habilitation services instead of punishment.

A well adjusted family can stem the tide of delinquency. In my opinion, the improvement of financial conditions, stability of families and the fight against alcoholism can be the means to achieve this goal of reduction in crime amongst youngsters.

In my opinion, the networking between the “Brigade pour la Protection des Mineurs” and the Child Development Unit must be reinforced by exchanging information and new approaches for a synergistic modus operandi should be adopted.

In line with three-pronged strategic pillars which are Prevention, Protection and Prosecution police are also having recourse to Intelligence-led Policing and Community Policing so as to circumscribe cases of indiscipline particularly with reference to truancy and loitering in

public places. Moreover, to curtail unexcused absences and risks of truancy, an SMS service is currently being put in place in schools to instantly apprise parents of the absences of their wards.

As is mentioned in the Presidential address elaborating the Government Programme 2010 -2015, the Government seeks to amend Juvenile Offenders Act to reflect new realities and bring up new ideas. The main object is to make provision for a mediation between the interested parties to determine whether or not, in the case of an offence other than a serious one, a diversionary measure is not a satisfactory alternative to prosecution.

In my opinion, the amendment will also require a Court before which a juvenile is convicted to call for a pre-sentence report from a probation officer and to make better provision for dealing with uncontrollable juveniles.

The presentence report shall be in writing and shall contain information as to the age, characters, attitude, antecedents, home surroundings, school attendance and performance record, any employment history, medical history and any other information deemed necessary by the Court.

Over and above the Correctional Youth Centre and Rehabilitation Youth Centre, created under the provisions of the Reforms Institution Act, there are Governmental and Non Governmental Organisations which receive juveniles detained as a result of a Court Order.

In order to give the juveniles a real chance, they should have access to remedial education to catch up on their schooling and a minimum vocational education level which will at a later stage help them in finding a good job and live a decent life.

In my opinion the following administrative measures can be considered;

- Drawing up of Juvenile reports
- Ensure that a bio-psycho-social report is done as soon as a minor enters the judicial system.
- Contact with the family or relatives in cases of abuse or neglect.
- Make provision for social workers in schools.
- Setting up of parenting classes.

- Use of the mass media to disseminate information on services, facilities and opportunities for juveniles as well as on the international standards of juveniles' rights.
- Introduction of new modules like Morality and Human values both in primary and secondary schools.
- Developing restorative justice options versus custodial sentencing.

As can be gleaned from the arguments I mentioned earlier, it is obvious that this Government under the Primeministership of Dr. the Hon. Navin Ramgoolam shows much concern to the illegal and immoral behaviour by the young people.

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests, I believe that it is time that I conclude my intervention. I wish you all the very best and fruitful deliberations.

I thank you for your kind attention.