

Speech by

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**Minister Mentor, Minister of Defence & Minister for
Rodrigues**

Passing Out Parade for Trainee Prison Officers

Wednesday 26 April, 2017

1100 hours

Prison Training School

Beau Bassin

The Commissioner of Prisons,

The Senior Chief Executive of my Ministry,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

The Mayor of Beau Bassin – Rose Hill,

Members of Religious Bodies,

Members of the Mauritius Prison Service,

Members of the Press,

Dear Trainees and their family members,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies & Gentlemen

I wish you all a very good day.

It is my pleasure to address you at today's Passing Out Parade which represents a milestone in the life and career of the 63 prison officers present here today.

Dear young officers,

You have demonstrated your physical dexterity and talent in passing through the intensely competitive recruitment process and arduous training programme, whilst the spirited parade shows your pride in joining the Mauritius Prison Service.

I would like to say how much I appreciate your dedication and engagement in successfully bringing your career to the next level.

I have no doubt that after the training and knowledge you have acquired you will add value to the image of the Mauritius Prison Service which is geared towards more professionalism.

Also, I am pleased to see that more women are joining the ranks of the Mauritius Prison Service. This reflects the culture of gender equality we have adopted and also affirms the capability of women in performing the difficult duties of law enforcement in Mauritius.

Dear officers,

After today's passing out ceremony, you will be assigned the task to serve the community in the different prisons of the Republic of Mauritius.

Responsibility will befall on you and you are expected to deliver in challenging situations. But more importantly, always keep in mind that your work philosophy should be tightly wrapped with a “blanket” of honesty and unrelenting integrity. Understand clearly that our society expects a much higher standard of conduct from you.

Courage and fairness represent predominant characteristics of a grounded prison officer.

You are expected to treat detainees --- including their family members, legal counsels, visitors, and others --- with fairness, respect, and dignity while you display courage in the performance of your duty.

One of the universal objectives is to educate the general public that the prison is not just about “locking up people and throwing away the key.”

Sooner or later detainees will be released into society. These individuals should be prepared for their eventual release from prison and their integration into society.

Worldwide, policymakers and prison administrators are increasingly paying attention to the imperatives of keeping detainees in safe, humane custody while assisting them to lead a lawful life upon release.

We will have to follow suit and chart out a mechanism to assess how well our prisons are doing in preparing offenders to live as law-abiding citizens when they get out.

We know that prisoners are less likely to reoffend if they are free from drugs that fuel so much crime, that they have the basic education needed for work and if they have a job. So we will have to set rigorous standards for each prison in these areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are aware, the Government is totally committed to combating all forms of crime, including drug trafficking.

My Ministry is currently assessing the strengths and weaknesses of our police and prison operative frameworks with the view to coming up with a plan of action in the near future. We want to benchmark ourselves with the most successful law and order models internationally. Singapore is such an exemplary model where the crime rate is one of the lowest in the world. We can learn from Singapore which is a small island state like ours where they have gone through most of the problems we are facing today and found appropriate solutions.

Already, in view of enhancing security at our prisons, the Prison Department has recently acquired twelve sensitive mobile phone detectors and two additional sniffer dogs.

Attention is also being given to the replacement of defective surveillance cameras in our prisons and detention centres as well as to continuous monitoring of CCTV camera images to detect movements inside and in the vicinity of the prisons.

With the coming into operation of the Eastern High Security Prison at Melrose, the issue of over-population in our prisons has been addressed.

An open facility for selected women detainees is also operational.

More and more prison staff are having opportunities to international exposure and to benchmark with best correctional practice.

The Prison Training School and the New Wing Prison have already been ISO Certified. Other prisons are geared towards attaining the ISO standards.

In the context of the celebration of the Republic and Independence Day, the President of the Republic, acting in accordance with the advice of the Commission on the Prerogative of Mercy, had been pleased to grant a special remission to all convicted detainees and which had resulted in the immediate release of around 189 detainees.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In order to receive a fair trial, it is important that detainees, particularly those on remand, are able to keep in contact with their respective legal advisers so as to prepare their defence properly and without undue hindrance.

I understand that detainees have adequate opportunity to communicate with their legal representatives.

However, it has been noticed that there have been some cases of abuse as regards access to detainees by lawyers who are not their legal representatives. I have urged the Prisons Authority to enforce rigid control on the access to prisons to ensure secure and safe running of its institutions. Action is being initiated to make available an online application form for legal advisers making requests to visit detainees.

I am well aware that our younger generation is an easy prey for drug dealers and this is causing much harm to many families and the society at large.

While I am making a humble appeal to all stakeholders including the Prisons Department and other Organisations within the Civil Society to initiate actions to counter the drugs problem, I have also set up the Commission of Enquiry on drugs to address this problem in an effective and forceful manner.

This again demonstrates the strong commitment of this Government to fight drug trafficking. I reiterate my pledge that I shall not hesitate a single moment to take firm and bold measures to fight the drug scourge.

It is unfortunate and very sad to note that lately, some Prison Officers have been involved in drug-related cases. Regrettably the acts committed by these Officers have tarnished the reputation of the Prisons Service and undermined the good work carried out by other Officers.

I have, on several occasions, stated that no black sheep will be tolerated.

Dear Officers, ahead of you lie years of service to the people of this great country, which I am confident you will perform with the traditional flair and selfless devotion to duty towards the Mauritius Prison Service.

Last but not least, I wish you all a fulfilling career with a bright future and happiness in your family.

I also seize this opportunity to congratulate the proud parents upon the accomplishment of their children.

In summary, the 63 officers on this parade ground are challenged to do the right thing for the right reasons, many times not in their best interest, but in the best interest in the community they have sworn to protect.

Let me also remind you of the oath of allegiance that you have taken to assume your duties and responsibilities without fear or favour.

This oath is not a mere recitation of words, but it is imbued with values, virtues and principles which must constantly guide you during your career.

You must remain committed to this oath and be always inspired by it in all your actions.

It just remains for me to stress to you how much we all value your great service to us. Each one of you should prove yourself perfectly worthy of wearing the prison uniform.

On this note, I congratulate all of you for forming part of this beautiful parade. I wish you best of luck for a successful career in the Mauritius Prisons Service.

May God bless you all.

I thank you for your kind attention.