

REMARKS BY
PRIME MINISTER HON. PHILIP DAVIS, QC, MP
TO THE
BAHAMAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
AT THE OPENING OF THE EMPOWERMENT SEMINAR
ORGANISED UNDER THE THEME OF
'A NEW MANDATE: RESET, RESTORE AND RECALIBRATE'

TUESDAY 12TH APRIL 2022

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Good Afternoon.

I am pleased to be able to join you briefly for this Empowerment Seminar today. Education in all its forms, and at all stages of life, is the most powerful tool we have to help each of us in this country to fulfil our potential. And by extension, Continuing Professional Development Programmes such as this, help to support you in operating at the highest standards of your profession.

At The Bahamas Department of Corrections, the communities over which you have charge are highly untypical of the ways in which communities usually evolve. Most of the members of your communities don't want to be here. Being here is punishment for some wrong they have committed against society. It is also punishment in that they are deprived of their fundamental right of liberty: to go about whatever business they choose, to associate with whomever they choose, and to engage in whatever activities they choose, in their pursuit of their individual happiness.

That said, once those people are here, your job - which you carry out in the name of the state, and with the full force and powers of the state - your job is not to punish them further.

Instead, your job, is to ensure that, once they are held securely, their time here is well spent, so that they may be successfully re-integrated into society at the end of their sentence.

While the idea of 'successful re-integration' may differ from person to person, certain generalisations hold true.

We want our inmates to leave here with a clear moral sense: to be certain of the difference between right and wrong, and to be certain of the advantages of behaving lawfully as opposed to unlawfully.

We want our inmates to leave better educated than when they arrived, because, as I said at the beginning, we know that education is the most powerful tool available to help them achieve their full potential.

We also want them to develop the values and behaviours that contribute to what we understand as 'good character': a commitment to being honest and truthful; the ability to work hard and accept fair reward; to be able to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence; and suffused with the desire to pursue healthy, caring, mutually beneficial relationships with all those around them.

Ladies and Gentlemen, these are attributes to which we should all aspire.

But for those who are in our custody and care, some of them may have never been exposed to such behaviours in their day-to-day life.

As officers and members of staff, you therefore have an opportunity to affect another person's life, in the profound ways in which only parents generally have influence over very young children.

You can mentor someone along a better path!

You can inspire someone to greatness!

You can model the kind of decency, compassion, discipline and skill which can change someone's life for the better - forever!

This is our vision for who you can be.

And this is our vision for what the Department of Corrections can become.

After years of neglect, we know that there is much to do.

And so we are starting with you: by investing in your training, investing in your continuing professional development, whether conducted here or abroad.

And we will continue by investing in your environment.

Plans are already underway to improve your working conditions, and the surroundings of this institution.

Not one single person in this community, whether officer, staff or inmate, is uplifted by being required to live or work in conditions which do not have regard to your fundamental humanity.

We want to create spaces which conform to the best international practice for incarceration, rather than be counted among the worst.

As my Minister of National Security recently announced, our government is working on plans to build a new High Medium Security Prison, to reduce the over-crowding in the inmate population.

Soon, we will also be hiring 100 men and women to reduce the burden of the workload upon each of you.

Taken together, we believe that this improvement in the environment and the enhancement in rehabilitation services, will better support our inmates when they re-join society.

When we have more people who are better able to contribute to the wider community, the evidence is clear: the levels of recidivism go down.

And as a result, the level of crime goes down, as we have less repeat offending.

This has to be the right way forward, the best way forward for a modern, progressive society in the 21st century.

We know it won't be easy, but we believe that with an outstanding team of officers and staff, it is more than possible.

But we are not so naïve as to be ignorant of some of the short-term temptations along the way.

As officers in charge of upholding and enforcing the laws and rules of this institution, I would have thought it unnecessary to remind you of the need to ensure that your own behaviour also falls within the laws and rules which you impose on others.

Sadly this is not the case.

I understand that some among you are still tempted to facilitate the prohibited use of cell phones, and continue to collude in the smuggling and use of illegal drugs within the institution.

You should be in no doubt that my Administration's policy is hold any lawbreakers among you to the highest account, and prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Apart from the obvious legal offence, engaging in such behaviour completely undermines the moral authority of everything that we seek to do here.

How can we ask inmates not to break laws, when they know that some officers do?

And how can we claim that personal self-discipline, and adherence to law and order, is a better way for all of us to live, if the very people charged with upholding that lesson behave in ways which go completely against it?

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We live in a time of almost unprecedented change, not only in The Bahamas, but around the world.

My government was elected on the promise to introduce big, bold, transformative change, in order to make our country safer and better for everyone.

But we cannot do it alone.

Whatever we achieve will only have happened because of the effort and commitment of the Bahamian people.

We need you to play your part.

We need you to help us deliver upon this new mandate for change.

We need you to help us 'Reset, Restore and Recalibrate' the way we do things, so that The Bahamas Department of Corrections is considered amongst the best in the world.

Thank you.

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