

REMARKS  
BY  
DAME JANICE M. PEREIRA, CHIEF JUSTICE  
AT THE OPENING OF  
MAGISTRATE'S CONFERENCE – JUVENILE JUSTICE

I am very pleased both in a personal capacity and as Chief Justice of the ECSC, to add a few words of welcome, to all the participants at this Conference. I extend a special welcome to all the Facilitators. I am grateful to them for their co-operation and willingness to participate in this Conference on juvenile justice; to impart and share their knowledge in this area.

I do not consider that it is in any way by per-adventure that US AID and the OECS Secretariat saw the need and by agreement undertook a program called the Juvenile Justice Reform Program having identified youth and children as a priority group within our region deserving of special consideration and support.

We have often heard the statement that our children are our future, and that tomorrow's leaders, and I would say 'movers and shakers' are our children - our youth of today. How our children 'move and shake' tomorrow and whether their "moving and shaking" impacts positively or negatively on society, is very much dependent on how they are equipped and the many factors being brought to bear on their lives – i.e. the social and economic interaction and the general environment we provide today.

The Diversion project in the context of improving the juvenile justice system is but one part of a much broader area related to juvenile justice. This has been fully recognized as the final report of the US AID commissioned Caribbean Basin Security Initiative Juvenile Justice Assessment. This report emphasized the following areas for action:

- (a) Improvement of the legal and regulatory framework of the juvenile justice system;
- (b) Capacity building for effective administration;
- (c) Modernization of Diversion, Detention and Rehabilitative processes; and
- (d) Improved linkages with civil society and other supporting structures of the Juvenile Justice system.

These areas are all critical and interrelated. The legal framework operating within our socio /economic environment is of great importance. Our body of laws must be laws which address the needs and enhances the positive growth of our societies. It is no coincidence then that the OECS was also engaged in assessing the regime of laws affecting family issues, such as the status of children, child care and protection, adoption, and domestic violence. The OECS drafted Model bills in these areas. Some of our Member States have taken steps with a view to enacting some, if not all of these bills. It is my view that priority should be given to such proposed legislation which would go some way towards enhancing the legal frame work within which juvenile justice is to be administered.

Yet, it is recognized, that the legal and regulatory framework is but a part of what is required in addressing juvenile justice. Our resources and facilities must also be developed and or strengthened where necessary. This brings me to the purpose of this Conference. Our Magistracy in many respects is the first face in respect of juveniles and matters relating to juvenile delinquency. It is therefore essential that our Magistrates become acquainted not only with the tenets of these bills, but also with the modern and new approaches to addressing juvenile delinquency. Magistrates must become intimately familiar with the available programs, sanctions and options provided for within the law.

I was pleased to read in the **St. Kitts- Nevis Observer Newspaper** of 9<sup>th</sup> August 2013 an Article entitled “September date set for New Horizons Juvenile Centre opening. The Director of the Centre is credited with making this statement: ***“It is important that the Magistrates work with the facility’s management with regards to sentencing options that they use...”***”

The purpose of this Conference, among other aims, is therefore to:

1. Create awareness of juvenile issues and reform initiatives, and enhance the capacity of persons working with juveniles;
2. Improve the working knowledge of participants of relevant laws, procedures and standards in the dispensation of justice as it relates to juveniles;
3. Sensitize participants to the effective use and benefits of Diversion techniques and programs as much more suitable alternatives to incarceration, for reducing recidivism and promoting rehabilitation.

We must be part of the proactive steps taken at saving our youths. As we in the sub region move towards and focus on the goal of achieving a single economic social, financial and **judicial** space, we must develop our laws, procedures and strategies in a manner which is harmonious, clear and consistent. It is by so doing that our region's development will be enhanced. It is this harmonized approach which provides the greatest potential for better harnessing the creative and productive energies of our youth populations in a way which will sustain the future generations of our region. To this end the ECSC is pleased to partner with the OECS Secretariat, as we seek to achieve a common purpose – that of improving our juvenile justice systems for the lasting benefit of the peoples of our region.

It is my hope that at the end of this Conference participants will be more enlightened on the issues of juvenile justice and be bettered prepared and able to deal with the challenges presented in administering juvenile justice and its related aspects, in their roles as judicial officers. Given the topics to be covered, coupled with the presenters (excluding myself) I have every reason to believe that this three-day conference will meet its target.

Thank you all.

**Dame Janice M. Pereira**  
**Chief Justice**