

Focus on human development, not hanging

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MEDIA RELEASE FROM THE GREATER CARIBBEAN FOR LIFE AND THE CATHOLIC COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Greater Caribbean for Life (GCL) and the Catholic Commission for Social Justice urge TT's Government to focus on human development and crime prevention rather than expend time and energy in seeking to resume hanging.

GCL is an independent, not-for-profit civil society organization, incorporated under the laws of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. GCL was established on 2 October 2013 by activists and organizations from twelve Greater Caribbean countries following an International Conference held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. CCSJ is a Department of the Catholic Archdiocese of Port of Spain, TT.

While GCL & CCSJ condemn the rise of violent crime in our region and expresses solidarity with victims, members reject the notion that capital punishment will act as a deterrent or foster respect for life in our communities. GCL & CCSJ are committed to promoting peace, respect for life, and good neighbourliness as appropriate methods of reducing crime in the Greater Caribbean region. This provides a more durable and effective solution than the taking of life.

Frank Friel, former Head of Organized Crime Homicide Task Force, Philadelphia, USA, rightly said: "The death penalty does little to prevent crime. It's the fear of apprehension and the likely prospect of swift and certain punishment that provides the largest deterrent to crime." With thousands of cases clogging up our system in TT, and with a detection rate of less than 10% for homicide, the push to resume hanging fails to address the root causes of crime in our beloved country.

What are we doing to strengthen family life; to get rid of the drugs and guns in our land; to eliminate violence in our schools; to promote restorative justice and a culture of nonviolence, respect for self and others, character development, good neighbourliness; to speed up prison reform and rehabilitation processes?

Read the findings of Prof Michael Radelet, Chair, Department of Sociology, University of Colorado-Boulder and Traci Lacock in their study: *Do Executions Lower Homicide Rates? The Views of Leading Criminologists*. 90% of the criminologists polled said

that the death penalty had little effect overall on the committing of murder. Inter alia, Radelet and Lacock state that “death penalty states (in the USA) have consistently higher homicide rates than non-death-penalty states. In 2007, for example, the homicide rate in states with active death penalty statutes was 42% higher than that of non-death-penalty states.”

And read what the presiding judge, President Arthur Chaskaison, and Justice Kerigler said in the landmark decision in the 1995 South African Case of *The State v Makwanyane and Mchunu* when South Africa abolished the death penalty. Inter alia, Judge Chaskaison said: “We would be deluding ourselves if we were to believe that the execution of the few persons sentenced to death...will provide the solution to the unacceptably high rate of crime.”

The Deputy Chair of GCL, Carmelo Campos Cruz, and I made a presentation at a hearing of the Inter American Commission on Human Rights in Washington in March 2015. The recommendations we outlined for countries in our region are still appropriate today. We said:

“While the crime rate remains high in many of the countries in the region, inadequacies in law enforcement and preventive measures hinder progress. There is a need for all countries in the region to strengthen their criminal justice systems, for example, by: improving their law enforcement agencies, their detection and conviction rates, their Forensic capabilities, and Court facilities which may serve to improve efficiency and processing of cases; dealing with inordinate delays in the system due, for example, to Court backlogs and high case load; developing and implementing effective witness protection programmes; and dealing with incompetence and corruption, for example, in some Police Forces.”

Let’s not let our emotions on this issue cloud our judgment as to the best way forward. Years ago the late Lloyd Best stated that TT is in a state of pre-collapse. I know that he would hope that we would use our human ingenuity to meet the challenges that we face today. GCL & CCSJ agree with Archbishop Desmond Tutu who said at the 5th World Congress against the Death Penalty: “There is no justice in killing in the name of justice, and no godliness in exacting vengeance.”

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