

Searching for solutions to crime and violence

- Post authorBy [Web administrator](#)
- Post date[February 8, 2021](#)
 - Sticky post



PRESS RELEASE

MEDIA RELEASE FROM: The Catholic Commission for Social Justice & The Greater Caribbean for Life

Once again, the Catholic Commission for Social Justice (CCSJ) and the Greater Caribbean for Life (GCL) 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 entity, established on 2 October 2013 by activists and organisations from twelve Greater Caribbean countries following an International Conference held in Port of Spain, TT. The ultimate goal of the GCL is to achieve the permanent abolition of the death penalty in each and every country of the Greater Caribbean and the creation of a culture of respect for the right to life and the inherent dignity of all human beings.

CCSJ & GCL are aware that passions are running high in TT because of the recent brutal murder of 23-year-old Andrea Bharatt, barely two months after 18-year-old Ashanti Riley was also murdered. However, the call by some to resume hanging is not going to fix the many problems that has led us to this juncture where our women and girls, indeed, citizens in general, are unable to go about their daily lives in peace.

While our organisations condemn the rise of violent crime in our region and express solidarity with victims, members reject the notion that capital punishment will act as a deterrent or foster respect for life in our communities.

We agree with the sentiments expressed in the front-page Editorial of Sunday's Guardian (7 Feb), that "experience elsewhere shows the death penalty does not reduce crime." We agree also with well-renowned Criminologist, Renee Cummings, who stated in a post on social media on Sunday (7 Feb) that "no self respecting criminologist would ever present the death penalty as a deterrent to crime."

In 2018 Pope Francis revised the Catholic Church's teaching on the Death Penalty. The revised text, in para 2267, "centers principally on the clearer awareness of the Church for the respect due to every human life" (Cardinal Luis Ladaria, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith). Inter alia, the revised text states: "...the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that 'the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person', and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide."

It is time to stop the "blame game" in TT and use our collective human ingenuity to devise strategies to address the root causes of crime in our country. Why is it taking so long to create a Transportation

system that will serve our people effectively? Sir Dennis Byron, former President of the Caribbean Court of Justice was right when he said: “Crime flourishes when the environment is conducive to people behaving in a certain way.” To some extent, crime flourishes in TT because we are not nurturing in our people moral and ethical values – at home or in schools. Many have no moral compass. Conscience formation is critical if we are to build a just society. And each of us must step up to the plate to play our role. Often domestic violence is fueled by the silence of many who see/know something and say nothing. We are our brothers’ and sisters’ keepers.

Baying for blood will not fix, for example, our dysfunctional families so that men and women will develop mutual respect for each other; it will not address the gross deficiencies in our criminal justice system. There is no swift justice in TT. Six-year-old Sean Luke was brutally murdered in March, 2006. At a virtual status hearing last Thursday, the public learned that the State is still to get Sean Luke’s DNA results **15 years** after his murder.

Such lengthy delays defeat justice. We recall the statement made by TT’s Honourable the Chief Justice, Mr. Justice Ivor Archie, who said at the opening of the Law Term in 2010: “I am yet to see any persuasive empirical evidence that executions significantly reduce murder or crime rates generally... social scientists...suggest(s) that the certainty of conviction, and within a reasonably quick time, is a more potent factor.”

Inadequacies in law enforcement and a lack of effective preventive measures hinder progress. We call for those in authority to strengthen our criminal justice system, for example, by:

- spending more money on crime prevention – thus implementing some of the recommendations in the 2012 UNDP report: Human Development and the shift to better citizen security. The report recommended, inter alia, that TT, and other countries in the study, should seek to achieve a better balance between legitimate law enforcement and preventive measures, with an emphasis on prevention;
- improving our law enforcement agencies – ensuring that they are “fair, accountable and more respectful of human rights” (UNDP), 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.

143 countries in the world have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. The global trend is towards abolition. If we work together in TT, we WILL find solutions to the many social ills that confront us, without having to resort to lethal means.

CONTACT LEELA RAMDEEN, CHAIR OF GCL AND CCSJ ON: 299-8945