

Remarks by Ambassador D. Brent Hardt
Opening Session of
Technical Working Group meeting on Crime Prevention
Focusing on At Risk Youth and Vulnerable Populations
16-17 July, 2013

Good morning. On behalf of the United States Embassy in Georgetown, I am pleased to welcome all of you this morning and to be able to offer some perspectives on behalf of the United States Government on the progress of our shared Caribbean Basin Security Initiative partnership.

It is now almost four years since President Obama outlined his interest in working more closely with the countries of the Caribbean to strengthen regional security and help build safer, more productive communities for all our citizens. At the 2009 Summit of the Americas he announced the United States' initial investment to what he called the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative. Since 2009, the U.S. government has committed \$203 million to support our security partnership. Four years in, we remain firmly committed to working with Caribbean governments and civil society to address the ever-shifting challenges posed by transnational crime, to strengthen public safety, and to promote social justice.

But to be successful, we must constantly adjust our tactics, build upon successful experience, and develop new ways of operating in which communities play a central role. That is why we have come together today. Over the past two years, we have held a number of Technical Working Groups on the full range of CBSI issues. These meetings have allowed us to evaluate our progress, generate new ideas, and identify concrete outcomes that have spurred new programs.

For example, as a result of the Prison Reform TWG held in 2012, prison assessments in the Eastern Caribbean were conducted and training programs on prison management and emergency response have been scheduled for this fall. We have also provided capacity building to guards on how to find cell phones in prisons.

A TWG on Regional Law Enforcement training led St. Kitts and Nevis and Antigua and Barbuda to sign an MOU to share AFIS (Automated Fingerprint Identification System) information and encouraged other countries to do the same to ensure that this valuable law enforcement information can be widely shared. TWG's have also led to support for port security programs in a number of countries and to the establishment of interagency task forces at sea ports.

The 2012 Maritime TWG brought together CBSI partners to agree on developing formal coordination mechanisms for maritime interdiction efforts – including the establishment of SOPs and protocols – with a particular emphasis on furthering the Regional Maritime Agreement and increasing coordination between the RSS and other non-RSS member states. It also led us to prioritize funding to support the Cooperative Sensor Information Integration (CSII) agreement, a regional domain awareness initiative to share air, sea, and land tracks of illicit trafficking across the region.

And, of course, this Technical Working Group on Crime Prevention has contributed to the development and expansion of a range of successful programs to address the root causes of crime throughout the region.

So, CBSI Technical Working Groups have led to results, and I am confident that this gathering will be no exception. While other TWG's have focused on more traditional security and law enforcement efforts to combat illicit trafficking and to boost public safety and security, today we will focus on the vital issues of social justice and economic opportunity, which we have all come to recognize are indispensable to any effort to build safe and prosperous societies.

In its 2012 Caribbean Human Development report, the UNDP observed that “Caribbean countries need to focus on a model of security based on the human development approach.” They pointed out that “social inclusion to help prevent crime and violence -- and efficient and effective law enforcement are by no means incompatible or mutually exclusive.” The United States could not agree more, which is why we have from the outset of the CBSI partnership devoted so much attention and resources to social justice and crime prevention. Since 2009, we have partnered with you -- host governments, regional institutions such as CARICOM and the OECS, the private sector, civil society, law enforcement and the judiciary -- throughout the region on both highly technical and profoundly simple initiatives to make and keep the Caribbean region safe and crime free.

If we are to succeed in reducing crime and increasing overall citizen security in the Caribbean, we must address the high rate of unemployment and lack of economic opportunities for Caribbean youth. Youth who believe they are unable to make a living on the legal economy are more likely to resort to crime as a source of income and personal status. To meet this challenge, we have worked together through previous crime prevention TWG's to develop a multifaceted program to engage at risk-youth. With CBSI support, we now have an array of successful programs across the Caribbean addressing crucial issues of youth empowerment

such as: continuing education for youth who did not complete formal schooling; life skills training, workplace competencies, vocational and technical skills, career counseling and assistance in job placement, and entrepreneurship support for young people who are seeking to start their own businesses. We are working with the private sector to tailor these crime prevention programs to meet market needs and inspire matching pledges and engagement from Caribbean governments.

To date, more than 23,000 young people have participated in CBSI programs in education and workforce development across the Caribbean, while more than \$30 million has thus far been allocated to support these programs.

In Guyana, through the Skills and Knowledge for Youth Employment or SKYE program, we have been working with a range of Guyanese authorities to help reduce the number of young people imprisoned in the Juvenile Justice system by giving them opportunities for a better transition back to their communities and to a productive life. So far, over twenty at-risk youth have been diverted from prison sentences. In addition, nearly three-hundred disadvantaged young Guyanese have graduated from SKYE's work readiness skills training program to help them transition to employment or open their own business. After receiving such training, over ninety youth have been placed into full-time employment. As

Alston, age 17, said: *“I think I can speak on behalf of everyone, this program has made a positive impact on our lives.”* We have also provided training and placement for 21 Employment Coaches throughout four regions in Guyana to assist 605 at-risk youth in obtaining and keeping employment. Magistrates and judges are now routinely calling SKYE to request that young people be diverted to SKYE.

In Jamaica, CBSI is supporting juvenile justice reform efforts, assisting 176 youths housed in Kingston’s Metcalfe Street Juvenile Detention Facility. CBSI has also funded training for over forty groups across the island through the Rural and Urban Youth Empowerment (RUYE) program, which complements current Jamaican efforts to reduce youth unemployment by developing their capacity to access income generation opportunities. So far, eleven of those groups have demonstrated capacity, commitment and a likelihood of success.

In St. Lucia, a young man had been serving time in a correctional facility for selling drugs when he heard about the Caribbean Youth Empowerment Program (CYEP). He took life skills training and ultimately chose to take up culinary arts for his vocational training. While the young man was serving his sentence, CYEP was able to arrange an internship for him outside of the prison, and ultimately he

was offered a job as a cook at an upscale restaurant upon his release. In his own words: "It was the greatest thing that happened to me in my life in a long time."

In The Bahamas, the Department of Homeland Security's National Gang Unit Officers assisted the Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPF) to review the practices and procedures in place for countering gangs. The assessment laid the ground work for the formation of an anti-gang unit in the RBPF. CBSI also supported exchange programs that brought the RBPF to Colorado to meet with the Denver Anti-Gang Task Force, where they learned about using an integrated approach (merging personnel, expertise, and funding) to investigating and prosecuting gangs. The RBPF told us that these exchanges and training contributed to a reduction in the number of murders in 2012.

In Dominica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname, CBSI supports "A Ganar," a sports-based workforce development youth program. I have seen the success of this program first hand in St. Kitts.

All of this makes clear that, working together on behalf of young people, we are making a difference. But there is still much more work to do. Some of it is highly technical, some is less complex, but still requires sustained investments of

time and effort.

But we are here because we all recognize that social justice is a critical element of an effective and comprehensive crime prevention strategy. Your work at this Technical Working Group meeting will help us chart our way forward, building on our many successes, while being open to new opportunities. This meeting also presents a chance to honestly examine and address the shortcomings of our efforts to date. I hope you will participate actively in an open dialogue so we can emerge from here with new inspiration and concrete actions to reinforce and replicate successes, while identifying solutions to gaps that remain. Our long-term goal should be to ensure that the partnerships, systems and practices established through these collective efforts can be sustained into the future to the benefit of our societies.

In closing, I would like to emphasize what have been the cornerstones of success for the CBSI from its inception in 2009: partnership and shared responsibility. On behalf of President Obama, I am pleased to reiterate his pledge at the 5th Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago that we seek an equal partnership and that “there is no senior partner and junior partner in our relations; there is simply engagement based on mutual respect and common interests and

shared values.” This equal partnership means shared responsibility. Our partnership must continue to be defined by the strong desire by all partner countries to collectively participate in an improved and sustainable future. Only in this way can we achieve the positive results that we seek in strengthening security, fostering economic growth, and creating prosperity for all of our citizens.

Thank you again for the opportunity to welcome you today. I look forward to seeing the recommendations and actions that result from your deliberations.