

**Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security –
Hon. Juliet Cuthbert-Flynn**

**Keynote Address to Graduates of the University of the
West Indies Mona Prison Project (UMPP)**

Tuesday August 22, 2023

Acting Commissioner of Corrections Dr. Marc Thomas,

Dean of Faculty, Faculty of Humanities and Education, Professor Silvia Kouwenberg,

Director and Senior Lecturer, Institute of Caribbean Studies (ICS), Dr. David Gosse.

Senior Lecturer, Cultural Studies & Deputy Dean, Marketing & Resource Mobilisation Faculty of Humanities & Education, Dr. Sonjah Stanley Niaah.

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, and most importantly, the graduates of the UWI-Mona Prison Project.

Good morning!

It is with great honour and pride that I stand before you today as the Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security, to celebrate a truly remarkable achievement. Today, we are here to recognize the laudable success of the University of the West Indies-Mona Prison Project, a partnership that exemplifies the transformational power of education, hard work, resilience, and hope.

In a world that constantly demands innovation and adaptability, the collaboration between the University of the West Indies, and the Department of Correctional Services has birthed a groundbreaking initiative here in Jamaica. The UWI-Mona Prison Project, with its curriculum focusing on business within the entertainment sector, signifies not just a commitment to academic excellence, but a dedication to the holistic rehabilitation and reintegration of our incarcerated individuals.

In the face of the unprecedented challenges brought by the pandemic, we witnessed the birth of creative initiatives like this one. This partnership has sprung to life, igniting a spark of transformation for the prison system in Jamaica.

The UWI-Mona Prison Project stands as a beacon of progress, bridging the gap between incarceration and opportunity, between confinement and empowerment.

Today's graduates have not merely completed a programme, they have embarked on a journey of self-discovery, growth, and dare I say, redemption. By gaining foundational knowledge in business and management within the cultural and creative industries, these individuals have fortified their potential for future success. As they step back into the world beyond the prison walls, they do so newly bestowed with skills that will serve as both a shield against adversity and tools with which to carve their own paths.

This pilot project carries a twofold mission that deserves our applause and unwavering support. Firstly, it aims to enhance the earning potential of rehabilitated inmates upon their release. By equipping them with practical insights into the workings of the entertainment business, we are opening doors to employment and entrepreneurship, nurturing self-sufficiency and independence. Secondly, and perhaps just as importantly, the UWI-Mona Prison Project endeavors to foster a shift in mindset—a shift that acknowledges the immense impact that our thoughts and attitudes have on our lives. By empowering inmates to understand the power of their own mindset, we are sowing the seeds of lasting transformation and reintegration.

In the past, the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) has undertaken various educational initiatives which saw inmates earning certifications at both the secondary and tertiary level. In 2020, the Ministry of National Security through DCS, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Stand Up Jamaica and the University of the Commonwealth Caribbean (UCC) which saw inmates benefiting from scholarships to pursue associate degrees in business administration.

As we mark the progress achieved here today, let us not forget the dedicated educators, administrators, and partners who have made this endeavor possible. The Institute of Caribbean Studies & Reggae Studies Unit at The University of the West Indies, Mona, has demonstrated their unwavering commitment to education as a catalyst for creative, positive change. Their dedication has paved the way for these graduates to earn a certificate in Entertainment Business, a testament to their hard work, focus and resilience.

To the graduates, I extend my heartfelt congratulations. Your journey has not been without challenges, but you have emerged as champions of change, proving that the human spirit can triumph over adversity. You are not defined solely by your past, but by the promise of your future. Embrace the knowledge that you have gained, wield it with determination, and let it serve as a foundation for a brighter tomorrow.

As we look ahead, let us stand united in our commitment to creating a society that embraces second chances and nurtures the potential of every individual. The UWI-Mona Prison Project is a testament to the power of unity, education, and the unbreakable human spirit. May this Project continue to flourish, guiding more souls toward a path of transformation and success.

Thank you, and once again hearty congratulations to the graduates of the UWI-Mona Prison Project!