



Address Senator the Hon Parnell Charles
Minister of State in the Ministry of National Security
At the
Area Two Awards Function
Saturday April 30, 2016

Salutations:

I am honoured to be representing the Ministry of National Security at this special function and to be able to address you on behalf of the Ministry.

Fighting crime is a difficult, demanding and dangerous undertaking, one that takes a severe toll on the well-being of those who are on the frontline of this fight.

The leadership of Area Two and the partners who have come together to host this evening's function are doing something that is not only commendable, but necessary. It is in keeping with the belief that 'encouragement sweetens labor.'

We are here this evening to encourage the brave and hardworking men and women of the Area Two Police Division; who are working in a challenging environment ensuring that seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, the residents of St Ann, St Mary and Portland are being protected.

This is no easy task, because Area Two is a large geographic division, some of it with very difficult terrain and widely dispersed communities. Although it is an area with a long tradition of strong communities and traditionally low levels of crime, it is not insulated from the declining values and lawlessness that have been plaguing the country.

The ~~vast~~ majority of our citizens are decent law-abiding persons who are committed to creating a better life for themselves and their families, they are committed to working together to build better communities.

This is especially so across the parishes and communities in Area Two. It was vividly displayed in the recent TVJ School's Challenge Quiz Competition that saw the residents of the town of Port Antonio taking to the streets, not to block roads or protest, but to support and celebrate with their school and youngsters an important achievement.

These students and their teachers demonstrated a commitment to excellence that has been at the heart of so much of what we have achieved as individual Jamaicans and as a country.

It is the excellence we see in our athletes and sportsmen who defy the odds and excel on the world stage bringing honour and glory to Jamaica. It is the excellence we see in our artistes and musicians as they take our music and culture across the globe. It is the excellence we see in our students whose discipline, hard work and talent have enabled them to excel at the regional and international levels.

It is also the excellence we see in many ordinary Jamaicans who through discipline and hard work have made a decent living for themselves and their families under trying circumstances. It is the excellence that we continue to see demonstrated in officers, like Sergeant Ava Lindo, who serve above self in their communities and to a greater extent, the entire nation of Jamaica. It is this excellence that is on display tonight. The theme 'Celebrating Excellence' is therefore a most timely one. It is a call to recognize and affirm that which is best among us and an encouragement to all of us to passionately pursue excellence in our various fields of endeavor.

We cannot allow a minority of cold-hearted criminals to rob us of our freedoms and dreams, we cannot allow them to destroy our peaceful communities and imprison our citizens in fear.

We must work in partnership with the police and other members of the security services to protect our communities from these predators and to change the culture of silence that allows them to hide in plain sight.

There is no debating the point that we have a very serious crime problem in Jamaica, the levels of violent crimes and murder in Jamaica have been at intolerably high levels for a long time, but we must also acknowledge the progress that is being made.

We continue to witness a downward trend in the number of major crimes being committed across all police divisions in the country. Homicides continue to be a source of major concern, and we all grieve the loss of innocent lives at the hands of violent criminals, but the level of homicides are also trending down.

In spite of the economic challenges we face at this time, the government is fully committed to providing the police and the other arms of the security services with the resources and support they need to ensure the continued reduction in the levels of crime and violence in the country.

We must salute the police for the work they are doing and the contribution that they continue to make in reducing the level of major crimes in the country. We must also commend them on the improvements being made in the clear-up rate for homicides, our clear-up rates are now comparable and even better than that of many police jurisdictions with significantly more resources than ours. For 2015, our clear-up rate was 54 per cent, and so far for 2016, we are at 41 per cent.

I want to acknowledge and congratulate the awardees in whose honour we are gathered tonight. Your dedication to duty and professionalism is a beacon of hope to all of us, a reminder that the pursuit of excellence can enable us to accomplish greater things than we think we are capable of, and to have positive and even life changing impacts on others.

We can all draw inspiration from the words of the late American civil rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr. *“If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.”*

I believe that our awardees would qualify to be called great because in the eyes of their peers and the people they serve, they have done their job well.

Let us emulate them, and work with excellence to build a peaceful and prosperous Jamaica, of which we can all be proud.
