**CARICOM Forum on Youth Crime and Violence**
*Youth Crime and Violence - Breaking the Cycle:*
*Exploring New Platforms for Transformation*

**Concept Note**

*The CARICOM Secretariat proposes to host, in collaboration with its partners, a Forum on Crime and Violence with specific focus on Youth and Children.*
*The main Objectives of the Forum are to:*

- sensitise policy makers, the private sector, civil society, including the media, individuals and institutions, to the major elements of the challenge of crime and violence and the response required to break the cycle of youth violence and crime.

- forge a regional vision around crime prevention and transforming of the public's concern about youth crime and violence into a shared commitment to investing in a multi-sectoral , 'whole of society' response to the challenge.

- examine examples of good practice which have the potential for replication across the Region.

- explore mechanisms for greater collaboration among relevant institutions and development partners to provide technical and financial support for coordinating, sustaining and evaluating regional efforts to address crime prevention

## 1.    Background and Context

During the last two (2) decades, Caribbean nations have experienced higher levels of crime and violence associated in the main, with the illicit drug trade, transnational organised crime and gender issues.  Increasingly, concerns have been raised with respect to corruption, the trafficking in illegal arms, human trafficking and the exploitation of women and children, cyber crime and money laundering.  International terrorism has also emerged as a major security threat and has been posited as a catalyst for other criminal activities, specifically trafficking in narcotics and firearms. These new threats have been aggravated by other social aspects of trans-border crime such as the emergence of violent posses and gangs and deportation, from the metropoles, of criminals who might have no psychological or familiar links with or in the countries to which they have been repatriated.  These and other recent trends have been highlighted in several reports, produced over the past five (5) years, which underline the fact that **Crime and Violence must be treated as a development issue.**

Highlighted below are some instructive findings from major reports which examine youth crime and violence in the Region.

1. ***"Crime, Violence and Development: Trends, Costs and Policy Options in the Caribbean"*** (*World Bank –UNODC, 2007*)

The **"Crime, Violence, and Development: Trends, Costs and Policy Options in the Caribbean" UNODC-World Bank** Report highlights the high incidence of crime and violence in the Region and identifies illicit drugs and narcotics trafficking as the main underlying cause, forecasting the implications for development.  Further, the Report draws attention to the tendency of States to rely overly on the criminal justice approach to crime reduction, while neglecting other complementary and more effective preventative approaches in reducing certain types of crime and violence. It examines and provides insights on the central role the Governments of Member States of the Caribbean Community must play in the prevention and reduction of crime and violence. Specifically, the Report recommends that in addressing issues of youth violence, 'policy makers in the short run should borrow from the toolkit of evidence-based programs from other regions, such as early childhood development and mentoring programs, interventions to increase retention of high-risk youth in secondary schools, and opening schools after-hours and on weekends to offer youth attractive activities to occupy their free time'.

2. ***UNDP Caribbean Human Development Report (HDR) 2012***

The UNDP Caribbean Human Development Report (HDR) 2012 - ***'Human Development and the Shift to better Citizen Security',*** which was launched in Trinidad and Tobago on 8 February 2012, is the first ever UNDP HDR on the Caribbean and presents data which highlight the changing crime and security situation in the Caribbean.  The report voices particular concern about the increasing incidence of youth violence in a region where over six per cent (60%) of the population is under the age of 30, and in national contexts where at least 1/5 of the citizenry is between the ages of 15-24; and points out the negative impact this violence has in terms of direct and indirect economic, social and political costs to society and to the Governments of CARICOM.

Furthermore, the 2010 Citizen Security survey revealed six (6) patterns in the incidence of youth violence in the Caribbean as follows:

(i)      It has a gender dimension - violent acts are mainly carried out by young males against other young males; females are the main victims in situations of domestic abuse or sexual assault;

(ii)     There has been an increase in violence among pre-adolescents;

(iii)    There has also been an increase in school violence;

(iv)    Violence was mainly used out of fear or in response to a perceived threat;

(v)     Youth violence is closely associated with violence in the community; and

(vi)    Victimisation of youth by peers and adults often leads to more violence.

Finally, The Report highlights the inter-dependence among citizen security, human development and human rights. It emphasises that the transition to a more secure environment will necessitate change to ensure more well integrated societies; the social, economic and political empowerment of excluded and vulnerable groups to counter the decades of deprivation caused by poverty, social, cultural, political and institutional practices; respect for human rights; and more effective and responsive institutions.

**3.      Eye on the Future: Investing in Youth now for tomorrow's Community' The Report of the Caribbean Commission on Youth and Development (2010)**

The Report, in articulating the voices of youth, noted that crime and violence was the number one concern among adolescents and youth in the Caribbean Community. It was seen as associated with poverty, unemployment, politics and social inequities. Constant exposure to crime and violence leads to emotional blunting, high stress, grief and a sense of loss.  Young people across the Region spoke of fear, perceptions of lack of safety and concern for their general well-being as a result of the increased crime and violence; of self-imposed curfews, diminished participation in community activities, restriction of night-time activities and changes in social practices as a consequence. Altogether, they wondered about the quality of life facing them.

**4.      The Paramaribo Declaration on the Future of Youth in the Caribbean Community**

Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community met in a Summit on Youth Development in Paramaribo in January 2010. The Summit received and endorsed the recommendations of the **CARICOM Commission on Youth Development (CCYD)** which highlighted Crime and Violence as the Number one concern of Youth in the Community and demonstrated the high cost, to our development, of inattention to Youth Crime and Violence.

In the **Declaration of Paramaribo** issued at the conclusion of the Summit, Heads of Government acknowledged the corrosive impact of crime and violence, poverty, social inequalities and marginalisation on adolescent and youth health and well being, the impact of globalisation on traditional values and attitudes, and the dual impact of global streams of information and culture on youth dreams, aspirations, risks and vulnerabilities.

**5.          United Nations Report  on Violence against Children in the Caribbean**

The United Nations Report on Violence against Children in the Caribbean conducted in 2006 by the United Nations, documents the findings of youth violence in sixteen (16) Caribbean countries.  The study, which focused on violence in the workplace, homes and families, schools and institutions, communities and on the streets, reports a high number of children in the Caribbean witnessing violent acts at some point in their lives; high levels of violence in schools and communities; and the negative emotional and psychological impact these have on the children of the Region.  The main message of the Report is that no violence is justifiable and all forms of violence against children are preventable.  To this end, a number of recommendations including enactment of legislation, policy framework, strategies and interventions, for addressing violence against children are proposed.

**Major Regional Initiatives addressing Youth Crime and Violence**

*A.        The CARICOM Crime Prevention and Social Development Action Plan (CPSD Action Plan)*

Following presentations of the findings of the World Bank – UNODC 2007 Report to the Fifth Meeting of the Council for National Security and Law Enforcement (CONSLE, April 2008), and the Twelfth Special Meeting of the COHSOD on Children, the CARICOM Secretariat was mandated to "collaborate with the International Organizations and Third States in developing a regional crime prevention initiative to complement the national and bilateral efforts." The '*CARICOM Crime Prevention and Social Development Action Plan (CPSD Action Plan)*' was subsequently developed as a response to address the dichotomy between the criminal justice approach, and crime prevention approach and to restore a better balance between the two.

The fundamental objective of the CPSD Action Plan, developed in partnership with UNODC, is to prevent and **reduce levels of violence**[1] **and crime** in Member States through a cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary approach focused on**:**

(a)      **groups at risk** of engaging in violent behaviour and criminal activities, already exposed to high levels of violence and victimization, and  groups in conflict with the law, **in particular children and youth,** and

(b)      **institutional responses** to crime and violence from a prevention perspective.

The Action Plan, which has been revised based on consultations with Member States, is based on Five Pillars, *viz*.

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| **Pillar I** | **Prevent and Reduce Violence** |
| **Pillar II** | **Foster Social Inclusion** |
| **Pillar III** | **Promote Reintegration** |
| **Pillar IV** | **Empower Victims** |
| **Pillar V** | **Protect the Environment and Economic Resources** |

The Action Plan aims at promoting the sustainability of Actions through **government leadership and commitment,** and **participatory approaches** involving key stakeholders (e.g., schools,

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[1] The World Health Organization defines violence as: The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation. (WHO Global Consultation on Violence and Health. Violence: a public health priority. Geneva, World Health Organization, 1996 (document WHO/EHA/ SPI.POA.2). http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2002/9241545615_chap1_eng.pdf .)

government and local authorities, police, NGOs, private sector) from programme/project design and implementation to monitoring and evaluation.

To date, two (2) major initiatives emanating from the CPSD Action Plan – 'Youth Gangs and Violence: Partnering for Social Development and Crime Prevention' and 'Reducing Youth on Youth Violence in Schools and Communities in CARICOM Countries' are being piloted in some Member States.

**B.    The Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI)**

The CBSI Initiative is a partnership arrangement among The United States, CARICOM Member States, and the Dominican Republic, intended to address the improvement of citizen safety throughout the Caribbean by working together to:

- ✓ Substantially reduce illicit trafficking;
- ✓ Increase public safety and security;
- ✓ Promote social justice.

The U.S. contribution to CBSI includes assistance in the area of Crime Prevention and targets at risk youth and vulnerable communities.  The focus is on:

- Increasing educational opportunities and providing workforce development and entrepreneurship training for at-risk youth as an alternative to crime and other harmful behaviour. Funding will also support drug demand reduction through the training of treatment and rehabilitation professionals;

- Justice Sector Reform. Reforming and strengthening juvenile justice systems through alternative sentencing and rehabilitation services.

*Overview of the Forum*

Several Reports on the issue of Youth Crime and Violence have emphasised the importance of treating the issue in a holistic manner. The forum will focus on Youth violence and crime, with specific focus on four (4) key aspects within the context of Prevention, *viz,*

- Violence Against Children

- School Violence

- Gender Based Violence

- Other forms of violence and crime involving youth both as perpetrators and victims.

Addressing these elements together will provide an opportunity to make the linkages, causative and otherwise, among them and to facilitate the development, by a wide range of stakeholders, of a holistic regional vision of the challenges and potential solutions.  Several of these solutions have been posited in the CARICOM Crime Prevention Plan as well as other Frameworks developed, and are receiving attention through the roll out of discrete aspects of the Plan and the Work Programme of the CBSI. The major challenge is the sustainability of initiatives in the absence of adequate financing and the tentative commitment of many of the important stakeholders.  The current focus on implementation of initiatives in the region to address gangs and gang-related violence for example, has begun to suffer from lack of continuity which threatens to weaken impact, in the absence of that critical mass of capacity required to take action forward at the national level.

There are several issues which need to be addressed at the Policy level. Important among these are:

- ✓ role of the education system, and schools in particular, in addressing violence against children/youth in all forms;

- ✓ treatment of young offenders in the  Juvenile Justice system;

- ✓ alternatives to incarceration; and

- ✓ reform of legislation.

The Forum will employ a mix of feature presentations, panel discussions and video presentations, with participation from a wide range of stakeholders including policy makers in all sectors, law enforcement, the private sector, labour, development partners, civil society, including academia, faith based and community organisations, youth, reformed non-traditional leaders and special interest groups.

Among the cross-cutting themes to be explored are gender, culture and social determinants.

The Forum will also make provision for participation by virtual means.

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