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MEDIA RELEASE
Immediate: November 27, 2011

Reckless Suggestions by National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister

The Judiciary of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is constrained once again to express its deepest concern over statements and suggestions by public officials which, unwittingly or otherwise, link the institution with societal negatives, including corruption, directly attributable to the decision in late August by the Executive to declare a State of Emergency.

In the latest instance, the Judiciary takes very serious issue with the National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister, Mr Gary Griffith, who was an interviewee in a half-hour long television programme titled ***Guns, Drugs and Secrets***, dealing with the State of Emergency in Trinidad and Tobago, and embedded on the Worldwide Web by Channel Four on Demand for viewing by the international community. Channel Four is described as a public service broadcaster which commands a five percent share of the British television audience. Accordingly there would have been viewing by millions of persons when the programme was aired by the station. The programme also formed the basis of a story carried in yesterday's edition of the Trinidad Express Newspapers in which Mr Griffith is quoted directly.

In the programme, the reporter, Mr Seyi Rhodes, questions Mr Griffith as follows: *"It's probably no surprise to you to hear that every person I speak to in Trinidad, when I ask them where the drugs and the guns come from, they tell me that the ports, the customs authorities, the coast guard and the police are a hundred per cent involved in the trafficking of drugs and guns. Why are you not focussing on that?"* to which Mr Griffith replies: *"Every country in the world will have corrupt police officers, **will have corrupt persons in the Judiciary**, will have corrupt politicians. That is not an avenue to call a State of Emergency. We needed a State of Emergency to stop law abiding citizens of this country from being killed."*

Mr Rhodes poses an indirect question further to Mr Griffith: *"The State of Emergency is going to be completely ineffective in dealing with that top level crime, but that top level crime is fundamental because once they are in place, and one they stay in place, they can always feed down and there will always be desperate people at the bottom willing to take their money."*

One can only assume that the “top level crime” to which Mr Rhodes is alluding embraces those described in Mr Griffith’s own words involving “corrupt police officers, corrupt persons in the Judiciary and corrupt politicians.”

Mr Griffith nods visibly in agreement to Mr Rhodes’ reference to the “top level crime,” even interrupting the interviewer repeatedly with the word “correct,” adding: *“And it is not...and it is not a State of Emergency before, during, and after, that is going to stop that. That has to do with the criminal justice system, how did you acquire the assets. So that is legislation.”*

Mr Rhodes in a follow-up question, asks: *“So exactly, do you not think that this sort of thing should have been brought in before you go through a State of Emergency?”* And Mr Griffith replies: *“That is legislation. In your country it took years for that to be implemented. You can’t wait years to implement legislation to sop innocent person from being killed on the streets.”*

Any reasonable person can conclude from Mr Griffith’s comments, albeit generalisations, that he believes the Judiciary to be among the establishments, including “the port, the police, and the coast guard” that are corrupt, and tied in with the importation of guns and drugs into Trinidad and Tobago, the subject of the television programme in the context of the need to declare a State of Emergency to deal with the situation. Interestingly, it is not the reporter, but Mr Griffith who, in the interview, introduces the concept of “corrupt persons in the Judiciary” in the same breath with which he speaks of corrupt politicians and police officers to re-inforce his agreement with the State of Emergency.

The Judiciary is forced to question, therefore, whether, as National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister, Mr Griffith is in possession of any evidence on persons in the Judiciary which enables him to so confidently and poignantly link them with the importation of drugs and guns in the country in the current scenario of a State of Emergency in Trinidad and Tobago. If not, then the Judiciary also challenges Mr Griffith to justify his statement to the national community relative to any “person in the Judiciary” being implicated in the gun and drug importation business in the history of the Judiciary of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Since the declaration of the State of Emergency, the Judiciary of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Magistracy, has been handling cases as expeditiously as they have been brought to Court, and, in accordance with the law, has been steadfast in the determination of the matters, either on the basis of evidence or lack thereof, in relation to the persons charged.

In keeping with the requirements of the Emergency provisions, the Honourable the Chief Justice, quite promptly, set up a Tribunal to review the cases of persons detained under the emergency regulations. It should be noted that since the declaration of the State of Emergency, not a single application has been made to that Tribunal.

The Judiciary wishes to state that it will remain rigorous in its role as the guardian of the rights of Citizens, whether under a State of Emergency or not, but it also issues the strongest warning to public officials that it will not tolerate their contempt.

The Judiciary will also do all in its power to avert the erosion of its independence by any unfounded or reckless statements and/or suggestions such as those made by Mr Griffith in the television programme and which was given further currency in the Trinidad Express newspaper yesterday..

The Judiciary continues to assure the citizens of its independence, and that it does not take lightly, nor will it do anything to scuttle, the trust and confidence which they repose in us.

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