

**Address by the Honourable the Chief Justice of the Republic of
Trinidad and Tobago,
Mr. Justice Ivor Archie, ORTT
To the 2nd Graduation of the Drug Treatment Court Programme
Wednesday June 17th, 2015**

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my distinct pleasure to address you this morning on the 2nd Graduation of the Drug Treatment Court Pilot Project in Trinidad and Tobago.

Just about a year ago, in July 2014, we had the first graduation of this programme, and today I am proud to acknowledge the accomplishments of this new group of participants who are with us today for graduation.

When I charged the Steering Committee with developing and implementing this pilot court, it was my intention that they should undertake a comprehensive approach to this exercise. They certainly exceeded my expectations and delivered on every target they were set, culminating in the first graduation in 2014. I am very proud that since his assumption in early 2014, Justice Malcolm Holdip, ably supported by Her Worship Mrs. Marcia Ayers-Caesar, has continued to lead this Committee with the same dedication as the first chair.

I know that the Committee has encountered a number of challenges over the past year, with the increased demands on its members, retirement of some representatives, and other issues related to its operations. I raise these matters to recognize that in spite of the challenges the work of the Committee continues unabated and while things may not be “perfect” members have continued to demonstrate resolve and devotion because they all believe in this project.

The Steering Committee has strategic responsibility for the project, but the magistrates and the DTC Teams which meet consistently with the participants truly deliver the

services required to transform the lives of those who undertake the Programme. Magistrate Ramsumair-Hinds and the Team in San Fernando, and Magistrate Stroude and the team in Tunapuna, have truly led the charge in bringing the graduates to this day, while continuing to support the other participants who are working toward Graduation. I congratulate you both and applaud the work of the teams who work in the two courts.

The Tunapuna Court was launched in July 2014, and with the leadership of Magistrate Stroude has made significant strides in its operations. The team has had varied experiences over the past 11 months, with changes to its composition, and also the need to streamline the treatment services offered by the court.

Magistrate Stroude reports on varied participants who could not be helped by the Court due to mental health issues and general unwillingness to adhere to the programme. Notwithstanding, they now have a group of participants who are working hard at not just maintaining their sobriety, but also making strides in other areas of their lives. I am especially pleased that the joint valedictorian today is a graduate from that court. This is a clear manifestation of the investment made by this team, to have prepared this young man in approximately 11 months to take charge of his life in a positive way.

In recognising this achievement, I find the following statement from Magistrate Stroude's report on the Tunapuna DTC particularly sobering: *"We have learnt also that not everyone can be saved or wants to be saved and we must choose our battles more wisely. Those that are too young may lack the capacity to commit to the programme and the seasoned and hardened offender may more benefit from an in house program rather than one that is open and trust based. We also learned that the person whose mind is so addled by the drug that they lack the mental capacity to make basic decisions is also not a good fit. In the end what DTC's must seek and find are the participants who possess willingness to change and a desire to commit"*

This represents the growth and maturity of the team, as they continue to learn and understand the very dynamic population we serve, and appreciate the individuality of each person that presents in the court.

Magistrate Ramsumair-Hinds has had longer experience, having been the first DTC magistrate since 2012. She and her team nurtured the first group of graduates from this pilot and the achievements of that group were a source of major pride for all who are associated with this programme. I know that we feel collective gratification in those persons who continue to do well. However, we also share the communal sadness of this team, as they lost one of their graduates to illness during the month of May.

Over the past year, this team has experienced both highs and lows, but in my view this has caused the members of the team to grow stronger and seek both inner and external resources to support the participants and stay true to the goals of the court. Magistrate Ramsumair –Hinds noted the importance of supporting the team in a recent report and stated: *“On Wednesday 25 March, 2015, the SFDTC Magistrate surprised the Team with a Team-Building and Appreciation Exercise. The Team played a game which required them to each assemble a puzzle. The puzzle pieces had been scrambled earlier and therefore each depended on their fellow Team members to complete their own puzzle. Small tokens of appreciation and modest gift baskets were given, which included a fridge magnet bearing a photo of Mr. Michael Forde, who still inspires the work that we do.”*

I want the Steering Committee, Magistrates, DTC Teams and participants to understand that the work that we are doing in this area is not being undertaken in a vacuum. I recently had the opportunity to speak in support of alternatives to incarceration at the Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, the premier international decision making forum for drug control. At this meeting, it was clear that the international community continues to seek innovative approaches to addressing the drug problem, and while no one condones the use of substances which are harmful to your health, we must explore options which do not criminalise those persons who are suffering from the disease of addiction. We look forward to continuing to contribute to these discussions as the UN

undertakes the United Nations Special General Assembly which is scheduled for 2016. This Special Assembly will develop policies which will inform international practice and the results of programmes such as the DTC provides empirical evidence both quantitatively and qualitatively, that solution focused interventions work.

Understanding this international context, I am aware that CICAD is developing the 2016-2020 Plan of Action for the Hemispheric Drug Strategy. The intention is that this document will include specific focus on treating with the issues of drug addiction from a public health approach and we fully endorse this direction. CICAD's commitment to this thrust is evident as it continues the expansion of programmes such as the DTC's across the hemisphere. Through this programme, we now have 3 member states of the Caribbean, with DTCs – Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago, with new courts anticipated in Belize, and the Bahamas within the next few months. It is hoped that more countries will join and we will have our first member states from the OECS within the next two years.

The Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago is committed to supporting the implementation of these courts both locally and regionally, and I plan to approach the CARICOM Secretariat with the view of garnering support for a Caribbean Drug Treatment Court Association to further the establishment and maintenance of these courts, thereby extending their reach and impact for our people across the region. We also plan to go beyond the adult courts and incorporate into our development of the Juvenile Justice Programme a Juvenile Drug Treatment Court. We have made significant strides in the area, and the Sub-Committee which is chaired by the Chief Magistrate has produced and submitted the first draft of the Juvenile Policy and Operational Plan for my review and input. I know that this will be supported by training in Adolescent Drug Treatment and we must express our gratitude to OAS/CICAD for their ongoing support in these areas.

I have often expressed my deep concern for the number of cases which come before the court for minor drug related offences. In supporting the establishment of this solution focused court the Judiciary is committed to ensuring two primary outcomes:

- A reduction in the number of repeat offenders on minor drug related charges, including crimes of acquisition; and
- The opportunity to return greater numbers of individuals to health and overall wellbeing.

I therefore urge all magistrates to use this project as a critical resource to help those vulnerable persons who appear before you. This pilot **IS** working and we are already seeing transformed lives because of the structured intervention offered through the programme.

Ladies and gentlemen and graduates I have taken the time to expand on these issues from an international, hemispheric, regional and national perspective so that you can see that your achievement today is not in isolation. Your graduation signifies another step in validating the work of all who advocate for changing the status quo for persons with the disease of addiction and feeds into a greater regional, Hemispheric and international thrust.

I take this opportunity to remind you, that as the song to which you walked in says “The Journey now start”, and we remain committed to supporting you. In fulfillment of this undertaking we are working on what will become a comprehensive Alumni Association within the next six months. In the interim, you will be offered support to continue development of your life skills. I urge you to stay connected to the team and to access the services recommended.

Ladies and gentlemen this is a GREAT day, I was recently reminded that when we launched the DTC the Guardian newspaper editorial noted that the programme, and I paraphrase “shot an arrow of promise into the air, and it’s up to the judiciary and supporting agencies to deliver on that promise”. I stand here proudly as head of the Judiciary to tell you that we have again delivered on that promise with the support of

OAS/CICAD, through the work of our multi-sectorial Steering Committee, the magistrates in the San Fernando and Tunapuna Courts, the DTC teams and all who continue to contribute to the success of these graduates. We look forward to continued growth and expansion of the Court.

Graduates, be proud of your achievements but more importantly commit to working continuously at ongoing growth, positive decision making and maintaining your health and sobriety so that we know that what has been delivered through this programme has worked for you and the good of our society.

I thank you for your attention.