

Lack of trust in police is unacceptable

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- Officers need to clean up their act – Pres. Ramotar

President Donald Ramotar is not too happy with a recently published survey which showed that the Guyana Police Force is the least trusted among law enforcement agencies in the Region, and he has ordered the local



President Donald Ramotar inspects a Guard of Honour prior to the opening of the Annual Police Officers' conference yesterday.

lawmen to clean up their act to remove the perception.

Delivering the feature address at the opening of the Annual Police Officers' Conference, the Guyanese leader said that while many may have a particular view of the survey, in terms of its methodology and analysis, the reality is that the findings were widely disseminated and therefore it must be addressed objectively.

The survey which was conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), showed that on a scale of zero to 100, trust in the Guyana Police Force decreased by 10 points between 2012 and 2014.

The president said that this is a worrying finding and he urged the Police Officers to discuss during their deliberations at the three-day conference, the perceived decrease in trust; what may have fueled those views and what can be done to turn this decrease in trust to an increase in confidence by the citizens.

"Let me be clear on this point, this perception is not acceptable to me or any Guyanese and should not be acceptable to any of you here today and we must take steps to change these perceptions," the President told the police officers.

He noted however, that before these steps can occur, there must be a desire to move forward, and he challenged the officers to find that desire. He urged the leadership of the Guyana Police Force to lead by example and show all the other members the path forward.

The President's remarks come days after a few senior officers pointed to political considerations as the main cause of the decrease in public trust in the organization. One officer had told this newspaper that political interference has over the years resulted in declining trust and respect that officers have for each other. He reasoned that some officers are so bent on pleasing the political masters that professionalism is being thrown on the sacrificial altar.

"Let's start from inside first. The trust and respect is eroding daily and that is a direct result of the interference, and the situation is not getting better," the officer had stated.

Yesterday, President Ramotar stressed that every officer has national responsibilities that have to be executed with a high degree of efficiency, professionalism and effectiveness within the ambit of the law and due process.

He told the officers that their mission requires that the Guyana Police Force has its fingers on the pulse in all areas of Guyana where citizens reside, have their businesses; where investors, local and foreign, have their assets; where vehicles, aircraft and boats operate and where persons enter and leave Guyana's borders and are expected to satisfy all requirements of the country's laws and regulations.

He stated that every Police Officer should bear, visibly, an identification number, to ensure accountability for his or her actions. Whether the police are effective or not is not measured in the number of arrests, but on the lack of crime.

The Guyanese leader identified professionalism, knowledge, people skills, firmness and fairness as the hallmarks of officers and ranks of the Guyana Police Force in the discharge of its duties.

"In so doing, you will inspire public confidence and trust and (will) be looked upon as role models who are career-oriented and patriotic," he observed.

President Ramotar said that his government has made provisions for the realization of these objectives by incrementally providing the necessary resources, noting that to whom much is given, much is expected.

He lashed out at those few "rotten oranges", who are bent on tarnishing the image of the police force and urged the officers to identify and get rid of them.

He said that it is particularly galling when women, children and innocent citizens are the victims of crimes, but equally unacceptable are instances where members of the Police Force or the Joint Services, are either perpetrators or are perceived to be in league with the perpetrators.

"The population and those elected to lead, whether in government or in opposition, will hold you, the leadership of the force, accountable for the indiscretions of those among you," the President said.

"I expect you to exercise zero tolerance in identifying the corrupt, the social deviants, the misfits who have infiltrated your ranks, and then take appropriate action. ...A Police Officer cannot be a walking contradiction; on the one hand, pretending to be a paragon of virtue but on the other, clandestinely lining his or her pockets," the president emphasised.

The Guyanese leader nevertheless, expressed optimism that the officers can address the perceived lack of trust but warned, "make no mistake, if you fail to perform your duties and fail to honour the oath you took to protect and to serve the Guyanese people, then I will do what I have to do to ensure that the Guyanese people have proper service by the Police Force."

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