



**WINSTON DOOKERAN
LEADER, CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE
COMMENTS
AT LANGE PARK RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION
ANTI CRIME SYMPOSIUM
Saturday January 6, 2007**

Residents of Lange Park;

Brothers and sisters;

We are together today in grief.

We mourn for Vindra Naipaul Coolman. We mourn with her family.

To the families of Vindra Naipaul and Lloyd Harricharan, my prayers are with you. To the families of Ophelia de Peiza and Bert Allette, you have my deepest sympathy.

Sorrow and sadness are not only the emotions we share at this moment. We share a sense of outrage at the

Government's continuing failure to protect us from kidnapping and murder.

The most sobering thing about this symposium is that all over Trinidad and Tobago communities are suffering the same dangers, the same traumas that have brought the residents of Lange Park together this afternoon.

We are all vulnerable!

Wherever we are in this country, we are in the same boat; we live with the same fear of crime and violence.

More among us are becoming victims of crime; and relatives and friends of victims of crime.

I share the pain of those who have been the direct victims of crime, and the relatives of those victims of crime.

I want to help in every way I can.

I want you to be safe.

I want your children to be safe.

I want your families to be safe.

Every day, more among us are losing hope that the government is capable of fulfilling its first function, which is to protect its citizens.

Our nation is in crisis, and on all the evidence, the criminals appear to be winning the war against our society.

The criminals appear to be getting increasingly contemptuous of our law enforcement agencies and of our legal and judicial systems.

The official claim that crime is declining because last year's murder rate was marginally lower than the rate in 2005 is a very sick joke.

Last year's murder rate was getting close to 400 percent of what it was in 2002.

Very disturbing about all of this is that the arrest rate has now dropped to a dismal 20 percent of reported crimes.

We have no idea of the actual incidence of crime.

This dramatically underscores the crisis we face.

Four out every five reported crimes remain unsolved.

When arrests are followed by prosecution, a high percentage of accused persons at large on bail commit other crimes.

The Bail Bills were meant to prevent that. The Bail Bills meant that persons accused of kidnapping would not be entitled to bail.

That is why I supported the government's petition for an extension to the Bail Bills.

Had the CONGRESS done otherwise, the persons on remand on serious charges last month could have been at large in the society today.

My agreement to the government's appeal for cooperation in this vital issue was tied to clearly defined stipulations:

One, that within sixty days, the Government would act on the mandate from CONGRESS members of Parliament in implementing the full package of Police Reform Bills, within the 90 day period.

When I spoke in Parliament last December, and I allowed conditional support to the Government on a 90-day extension, I did so on the basis of three basic stipulations:

- (i) That the Government would immediately move to stop and eliminate any direct or indirect funding of criminal activity,
- (ii) That the Government would respect and preserve civil liberties,
- (iii) That the Government would account for its plans and the effectiveness of those plans.

That was the week before Christmas.

I am now demanding that the Prime Minister live up to this commitment and reaffirm these principles upon which he was allowed support.

The second stipulation for the CONGRESS support of the extension to the Bail Bill was that the government would account to Parliament on the impact of the strengthened Bail Bill on the incidence of such crimes as murder and kidnapping, and on violent crimes, generally.

I am now demanding that the Prime Minister honour the commitment to report to Parliament on the impact of the strengthened Bail Bill on the incidence of crime.

The third stipulation to the CONGRESS support of the extension of the Bail Bill is that the Government brings the Equal Opportunities Act, the DNA Act, the Justice Protection Act and the full package of Police Reform legislation.

I am now demanding that that the Prime Minister provides evidence that the Government is ready with the agreed legislation.

The CONGRESS supported the extension to the Bail Bill on these stipulations.

The government has **seventy-one days** to go.

I am also serving notice to the government, that starting next week, in a daily countdown in the print and electronic media, and in public meetings across the country, the Congress of the People will be dramatizing the obligations of the government in these issues.

We start counting down from today.

Meanwhile, by the end of January, the Congress of the People will launch a programme of **COMMUNITY SAFETY CIRCLES**.

COMMUNITY SAFETY CIRCLES is a neighbourhood self protection programme.

Accompanied by seasoned professionals whom you will all recognise, I will be going into vulnerable communities from the coming weekend, to talk with residents about how the Congress of the People can work with them in developing customized neighbourhood safety and security strategies that they will implement in their own communities.

Since the relevant authorities continue to fail dismally in their obligation to protect the residents of Lange Parke and other communities, the Congress of the People will be working with residents in neighbourhood groups in establishing **COMMUNITY SAFETY CIRCLES** across Trinidad and Tobago.

Obviously, the CONGRESS does not have access to the virtually unlimited resources of the Government or of those individuals who can easily afford to hire \$5-Million men to

tell us how it's done in other countries and tell us what we already know!

Fortunately, however, the Congress of the People has succeeded in mobilising a cadre of security professionals of vast experience and recognised competence in providing protection to citizens and to our communities here in Trinidad and Tobago.

This cadre includes former Ministers of National Security; former Commanders of the Defence Force and other Army officials; and Former Commissioners of Police.

Through the Congress of the People, these public spirited citizens have volunteered to work with you in designing neighbourhood self protection strategies that you will implement in your own **COMMUNITY SAFETY CIRCLES**.

They have agreed to work with you, as service to you and your community, on an entirely voluntary basis.

These people will be working with you and with other neighbourhood groups in establishing **COMMUNITY SAFETY CIRCLES** across the nation, because like you, they want to get our country right.

And getting our country right starts with getting our communities right; by making sure that we have strong, integrated, secure neighbourhoods.

With all of this, I will remain focused on the Government's obligation to meet my stipulations for my support of the extension of the Bail Bill.

Those stipulations include the passage of the Equal Opportunities Act, the DNA Act, the Justice Protection Act and the full package of Police Reform legislation.

But more than that, there must also be full account on the operational effectiveness of the protective services.

Moreover, it is my intention to table a motion for the introduction of a **VICTIMS OF CRIME BILL OF RIGHTS** as part of the package that will go with the renewal of the Bail Bill.

While we perhaps ought not to expect any immediate and meaningful improvement in crime prevention, detection, prosecution and convictions, there is absolutely no reason

why the government should not at least show some concern for the victims of crime and those close to such victims.

It is not just a matter of activating the Victims of Crime Compensation, which the government might, belatedly, be giving some attention.

A VICTIMS OF CRIME BILL OF RIGHTS would, among other things, provide victims of crimes, and their relatives, with ongoing information on investigations, counseling, care and compensation; whether or not perpetrators are captured, prosecuted and convicted.

A VICTIMS OF CRIME BILL OF RIGHTS would place the police under obligation to keep victims of crime and those close to victims informed about the progress of investigations.

This simple act would be of immense comfort and a source of some hope for victims of crime.

I honestly do not think that government is anywhere the solution to the crime pandemic that has blighted the society since 2002.

The country's experience does not suggest that they are.

In addition to measures that I have already identified, I will also attach to the CONGRESS support for renewal of the Bail Bill, **immediate removal of VAT and customs tariffs from security equipment for domestic use by individuals and neighbourhood groups such as the Lange Park Residents Association.**

I urge you to make your voices heard in support of my proposal for the removal of Vat and Customs tariffs from security equipment for domestic use by individuals and neighbourhood groups such as the Lange Park Residents Association.

I also urge you to make your voices heard in support of the **Victims of Crime Bill of Rights.**

The residents of Chatham and Cap-de-Ville have shown us what people power can achieve.

Organised, and acting in unison, they have stopped one smelter.

The smelter threat to the lives of those people has been averted.

We hope that that threat is not to be redirected to Oropouche, or anywhere else in this country.

However, the threat of crime, with the inherent threat to property, to life, and to the quality of our lives, continues as a clear and present danger.

But together we can bring change. Together, we can bring back safety and security to everyone.

Let us work together in Community Safety Circles, and in every other possible way, to make Lange Park safer for all who live here; and to make every community in Trinidad and Tobago safer for all who live here.

Thank you.