



**PRESS RELEASE
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**MNS TECHNICAL WORKING GROUP CONVENES TO ADDRESS RIO COBRE
INDECOM REPORT**

The Ministry of National Security today convened its first Correctional Services Technical Working Group (CSTWG) meeting to address the findings of an investigation into the Rio Cobre Juvenile Correctional Centre by the Independent Commission of Investigation (INDECOM) in July 2020.

While the general findings of the investigation highlighted positive aspects of the juvenile facility, INDECOM alleged several incidents of inappropriate treatment of wards in contravention to best practices of state care.

In a statement to the Honourable Senate on February 12, 2021, Minister without Portfolio, Senator the Hon. Matthew Samuda, committed to the establishment of a ‘Working Group’ to address issues raised in the report. The CSTWG will focus on strategies to improve the care of the wards in the areas of psychosocial interventions, education, and behavioural management.

During this morning’s virtual meeting, Minister Samuda charged the working group to work assiduously to recommend a sustainable action plan for the care and rehabilitation of wards in juvenile facilities across the island. **“It is my sincere hope that this process will address some of the significant issues covered in the INDECOM Special Investigation Report into the Rio Cobre Juvenile Correctional Centre,”** said Minister Samuda.

“Unfortunately, society does not view those in custody as a vulnerable group, whether they are juveniles or adults. To my mind, this has affected policymaking for decades. It has led to questionable procedures, unnecessary pain and suffering, and weak security outcomes by way of our high recidivism rate. It is our collective responsibility to pay particular attention to ‘duty of care’ offered to wards, who are indeed members of a vulnerable group,” the Minister outlined.

Minister Samuda added that while the working group moves toward finalizing a long-term Juvenile Care Strategy, some key areas for improvement at the Rio Cobre Facility have been addressed, including but not limited to – the retrofitting of the ‘J’ Block to ensure that each holding area has a bathroom, cessation of preventing wards to use bathroom facilities as a means of punishment and the use of solitary cells to hold wards on suicide watch.



Meanwhile, Chairman of the Correctional Services Technical Working Group and Chief Technical Director in the Ministry, Ms. Shauna Trowers said the working group includes experts in child care, medical care and representatives from government and non-government agencies. She pointed out that this joint approach will provide a cohesive way forward for the benefit of wards.

Ms. Trowers explained, **“the Correctional Services Technical Working Group will map several steps and actions to provide for the required changes to treat with the care and rehabilitation of the wards. The Working Group is therefore expected to provide for the expected outcomes, key strategic actions and target dates for implementation.”**

The Correctional Services Technical Working Group (CSTWG) will be convened for an initial ninety (90) day period and will meet bi-monthly on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month. Emergency meetings may also be convened as needed.

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