



Ministerial Statement

By

The Hon. Wayne Caines, JP, MP
Minister of National Security

Crime and Violence Reduction

31st January 2020

Good morning **Mr. Speaker**,

Mr. Speaker, the start of 2020 greeted us with the welcome news that 2019 was the first time in over 20 years that no homicides were recorded in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, this is a testament of the hard work of all involved, including the Bermuda Police Service, the Gang Violence Reduction Team, led by Pastor Leroy Bean and our valued community and social partners.

I wish take this opportunity to commend Police Commissioner Stephen Corbishley and the dedicated men and women of the Bermuda Police Service for all of their efforts.

Mr. Speaker, we have made significant progress in 10 years.

Ten years ago, **Mr. Speaker**, Bermuda was facing a dire situation with multiple murders a year and rampant gang activity.

In fact, between 2009 and August 2017, Bermuda had recorded 48 murders – this is inclusive of firearm fatalities.

With Bermuda's population of around 66,000 people and with a size of 21 square miles, that is a considerably high statistic.

Mr. Speaker, during the height of our gun and gang violence era we were facing a crisis.

Our court system was inundated and overwhelmed with criminal cases.

Mr. Speaker, it became common to require personnel from our uniformed services to safeguard and protect our courts during high profile murder and assault cases.

It became common **Mr. Speaker** for our hospital and prison to be placed on lock-down to protect the staff and people inside of these institutions.

Mr. Speaker, it also became common to see increased Police Officers on our streets. In some cases some of these officers were armed.

These were unprecedented times for our Country.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda was facing international reputational risk as a result of ongoing gun and gang crime.

Our neighbourhoods were under siege.

Our people lived in fear.

Mothers were burying their sons.

Children were being left fatherless.

Families were being destroyed.

And Bermuda was losing a generation of young black males because of gun and gang violence.

Mr. Speaker, rightfully so, there was heightened unease and concern in our community.

Violence and anti-social behaviour had to be addressed. And our people demanded action.

So in late 2017, **Mr. Speaker**, the Progressive Labour Party

Government through the Ministry of National Security introduced a

multi-pronged plan to tackle gun and gang violence and anti-social behaviour.

We recognized that strong enforcement was a large part of the solution, but we also knew that we could not police our way out of the crisis.

Mr. Speaker, we had to fundamentally address the root causes of the violence and ongoing gang activity.

Solutions to these problems demanded a cohesive approach in education, in our homes and families, by our churches and in every institution playing a part in Bermudian life.

Mr. Speaker, addressing the impact of poor educational outcomes and income inequality had to form the foundation of our understanding and drive the work to find solutions.

So, we undertook to provide a singular focus on implementing programmes to reduce gang violence and anti-social behaviour.

Mr. Speaker, we undertook to provide opportunities for young people looking for a pathway out of gangs including assistance with resuming educational pursuits or skills training.

Mr. Speaker, we undertook to equip parents, teachers and community leaders with training in identifying at-risk young people and intervening and preventing them from being caught-up in a cycle of violence.

And most importantly, **Mr. Speaker**, we undertook to engage and involve key individuals in our community to aid us in addressing and stemming the multi-generational non-addressed trauma and the violence it causes.

Ultimately, **Mr. Speaker**, we ended up creating a structure around programme development, project management, case management and emergency response to incidents.

This structure included the implementation of the Interagency Gang Enforcement Team which is the operational arm to tackle gang and gun violence.

This group includes the BPS, Corrections, Immigration, Education, Customs, Department of Court Services and the Office of the DPP.

Another critical component of our strategy, **Mr. Speaker**, was the creation of the Gang Violence Reduction Team.

The GVRT has had great success over the last two years, and has been instrumental in addressing the violence and tensions in our community.

Recently **Mr. Speaker**, I shared with the Honourable Members of this House, that there are a number of ongoing tactics and initiatives that the Gang Violence Reduction Team have employed to address our issues with anti-social behaviour.

Now as we focus on 2020, our Ministry remains committed to introducing programmes aimed at reducing violence.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen our most rewarding results among our young people and in our school system, where our GVRT have been hard at work.

Last summer, we launched the Gang Violence Reduction Team's Work Placement and Mentoring Initiative.

The pilot programme saw 15 local companies host 14 student employees for a six-week training programme.

Within our public school system, the Gang Violence Reduction Team relaunched its work with the Administration and Student Services teams at our two senior schools, CedarBridge Academy and Berkeley Institute.

This year, the GVRT will be partnering with the Berkeley MILE Program and launching the My Ambition Program at CedarBridge Academy.

Another initiative that has seen encouraging and positive results is Redemption Farm.

Mr. Speaker, Redemption Farm has been operational for around six months and our trainees include young men who are of an age where they would be most vulnerable to joining gang life.

The programme has ten trainees and each of these participants has expressed their desire to redirect their life towards a pro social and productive path.

The current trainees will stay on the programme for another few weeks with the goal of seeing each of them transition into full-time education and employment opportunities.

So **Mr. Speaker**, it bears repeating. Our Government is making great and substantive strides in curbing crime and anti-social behaviour.

The proven formula of strong policing, engaging community programmes and involved community partners all working together have resulted in a safer Bermuda.

As a Country we must commend the Gang Violence Reduction Team for the outstanding work they have done.

I also wish to thank the Bermuda Police Service for their invaluable partnership and for their enforcement efforts aimed at combatting crime and violence in Bermuda.

And lastly, **Mr. Speaker**, none of our success would be possible without the partnership and support of some of our private sector businesses who believe in the work that we are doing and of course to all of our community and social partners.

We know we still have much work to do. Ultimately, we want a better country, a safer country and a more prosperous country.

So let's continue working together to make Bermuda's neighbourhoods and communities a safe place for all.

Thank you **Mr. Speaker**.