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Low rating of police force irks President; proposes 15-point plan

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President Donald Ramotar, Home Affairs Minister Clement Rohee and Commissioner of Police Seelall Persaud at the opening of the 2015 Police Officers' Conference.

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President Donald Ramotar on Thursday urged the Guyana Police Force to take seriously a United States (US) research that recently found that the local law enforcement agency recorded the lowest level of trust in the Caribbean.

A survey conducted in June and July, 2014 by the Latin American Opinion Poll (LAPOP) project at the Vanderbilt University found that the trust in the police force has decreased from 45.8 percent in 2012 to 35.4 percent in 2014. "This is a worrying finding," he told the opening of the annual police officers' conference. He urged the officers to examine what might have fuelled such views and "what can be done to turn this decrease in trust to an increase in confidence by citizens in their police force.

Ramotar said that while there might be views about the survey, its methodology and analysis, he said the reality is that the findings must be addressed objectively. "Let me be clear on this point: This perception is not acceptable to me not any Guyanese and should not be acceptable by any of you here today and we must take steps to change this perception," he said.

Lamenting the poor response time by the Guyana Police Force as the "worst" in the Caribbean, he reasoned that obviously the police travel time from receiving notice of an incident to the scene, the more likely perpetrators could be arrested before they flee.

The President challenged the police force to implement a 15-point plan in 2015 that is designed to restore confidence in the Guyana Police Force. It includes the establishment of a neighbourhood watch programme to increase surveillance by residents; introduce a problem-oriented policing approach that would see police identify; understand and respond to problems rather than just incidents; increase police presence; make the 911 system a "true rapid response system." "Too often, we have heard about the length of time or about the fact that people don't answer 911 calls when they are made; this must stop," he said.

He explained that the rapid response system would reduce harm to victims while crimes are in progress, greatly deter would-be criminals, ultimately imprison perpetrators and launch more precise anti-crime operations in crime prone areas.

The 15-point plan, the Guyanese leader said, could increase more covert patrols to catch criminals with evidence, establish more aggressive road policing and traffic law enforcement system to reduce criminals on public transportation, ensure police work closely with schools to reduce violence and drug use at schools and establish drugs and weapons free zones, and reopen cold to clear up the backlog of murders, shootings, robberies, break-ins, larceny and sexual offences. "If criminals don't think that they will be caught, they will continue to commit crimes," he said.

Focus, according to the President, should also be on combating noise nuisance, expanding intelligence to target drug trafficking syndicates, groups at risk and crime hotspots.

Ramotar suggested that public trust and accountability could be partly improved if each member of the police force wears his or her identification number and gauge his or her success by the prevention of crime rather than by the number of arrests.

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