

**Wednesday, October 19<sup>TH</sup> 2011, OECS Secretariat Castries**– The OECS Secretariat says a recent agreement with the United States to enhance juvenile justice reform systems builds on regional efforts that help youth further contribute to national development. These efforts include programmes that: Engage children as right holders and civic participants; Enable review and expansion of family support services; Strengthen drug detoxification and rehabilitation centres; Retool police, judges, prosecutors, probation officers and other key personnel in the justice system with transformative strategies and Approaches to youth interventions through wide scale training.

On Wednesday October 12<sup>th</sup> 2011 the OECS Secretariat and the US Agency for International Development USAID entered an agreement to strengthen the juvenile justice systems in the six independent Member States. The agreement is to be supported with funding from the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI). The CBSI represents the new paradigm for the US Government's cooperation with the Caribbean on matters related to citizen safety and security. The agreement, which is valued at US\$7.4 million of which us \$5.8 million is to be contributed by USAID, will run between 2011 and 2014.

The four principal areas of support are:

1. Improving the legal and regulatory framework of the juvenile justice system
2. Capacity building for effective administration of juvenile justice
3. Modernization of diversion, detention and rehabilitation processes of the juvenile justice system
4. Support for enhanced juvenile justice approaches through increased linkages with civil society is working on ways of enhancing the juvenile justice system in the sub-region.

Senior Director at the OECS Secretariat Randy Cato who signed the agreement on behalf of the OECS Member States pointed to what he regarded as a very important activity within the scope of the agreement, which is designed to address the likely void that the non productive behavior of juveniles can impose on economic development. The activity is the conduct of cost benefit studies and social investment analyses on the importance of juvenile justice as an economic and social issue: "This is extremely important because very often we sometimes miss the economic loss that occurs through the juvenile behaviour that might be non-productive and might in fact be damaging their own opportunity to create benefits through their youthful lifestyles for themselves as well as for the wider society."

USAID representative for Barbados and the OECS, James Goggin suggested measures that could help the juvenile justice system rehabilitate young persons and make a positive contribution to society. He said with many young people across the Eastern Caribbean States struggling for one reason or another and some of them having moved into criminality, it is important for adults, parents and community members to help find a way to bring these young people back. He also shared the need of moving from a punitive model to a restorative model of justice for young persons..

Goggin said the intention of the juvenile justice reform programme is to build on ongoing initiatives, to preserve young people and restore the vulnerable youth to their communities, their families and to themselves: "This is the moment to work together, and as we have successfully done in other projects to do something which I think will improve life across the region and the future of all these young people and those who follow them. We must put in place systems that allow them to stay within the bonds of good behaviour and become good citizens and good residents. So today could not have been a happier day and a happier time; as I know sometimes from visiting the remand centres, visiting the prisoners, talking to the young people, you see in their eyes, you hear in their voice: "I want to do it over, I want that second chance. I know what I did wrong. I want to back and do it right." and this is our opportunity to do that with them. So again we are delighted to be a partner with the OECS on this."-James Goggin

The revised treaty of Basseterre mandates the OECS Secretariat to work with member states to provide an enabling legislative, policy and administrative environment that supports social relations and cohesion for inter-alia children and youth in the region. Head of the OECS Secretariat's Social Policy Unit, Darrel Montrope says given the current challenges confronting youth, there is urgent need to address issues impacting juveniles, and one area of deficiency that impacts youth is the juvenile justice system.