

Jamaica developing gun policy

Jamaica's Ministry of National Security has employed the services of a consultant to develop a national policy on small arms, as the Government looks to arrest gun violence.

Portfolio Minister, Senator Hon. Dwight Nelson, who made the disclosure during a forensic technology workshop held today August 9 at the Inter Faculty Lecture Theatre, University of the West Indies, Mona campus, said the consultant will also look at legislation on explosives and all firearms.

He said that the policy, and the Organised Crime Bill, will provide the framework for the collection and use of crime scene evidence using the forensic technology. The bill has been completed and is to be sent to the legislative Committee of Cabinet for approval. The legislation, Minister Nelson informed, will specifically target gang activity, especially gang-related gun violence.

“The combination of our policies and legislative framework should provide both the police and the prosecutors with the ability to garner substantial evidence that would lead to successful arrest and prosecution. We must do everything we can to enable the criminal justice system to work properly, to work faster and to work more effectively,” Senator Nelson said.

The Minister said that there is growing concern regarding the prevalence of gun violence in Jamaica, while noting that in 2010, 76 per cent of the murders committed in Jamaica were carried out by the gun. In addition, 64 per cent of robberies last year were committed with guns.

“It appears as if this trend is continuing in 2011. Between January and the end of July, 69 per cent of persons killed in Jamaica were killed with guns. Similarly, 66 per cent of robberies committed in Jamaica for the same period were committed with guns,” Senator Nelson said.

He added that within the last two decades, there has been a proliferation of guns in the hands of criminals, which most often go undetected and are therefore unprosecuted.

“The number of guns we recover each year is not commensurate, we don’t think, with the number of illegal guns out there. Last year, we recovered 685 illegal guns and we think this is a very small fraction of what currently exists in the hands of criminals, particularly those involved in organised crime, extortion, contract killing, human trafficking and the sale of weapons,” Senator Nelson said.

He expressed the hope that the workshop will provide a blueprint that will assist in “breaking the unacceptable level of immunity that a significant number of gunmen have had over the years”.

The one-day workshop has assembled a wide cross section of personnel involved in all things gun related, from processing crime scenes, furthering investigations to prosecutions.

Based on the book “The 13 Critical Tasks: An Inside Out Approach to Solving More Gun Crime, author/presenter Pete Gagliardi provides an in-depth approach to the investigation of gun-related crimes.

Participants in the workshop will focus on the 13 critical tasks, which include: stakeholder management; programme integration; formalising understanding and enforcing directives; the comprehensive collection of evidence and data; the transfer of data and evidence for forensic processing; and the preliminary assessments and evaluation of evidence to provide information.

Minister urged the participants “to make meaningful note of these 13 tasks and seek ways to apply them in the way you develop cases.