

Keynote Remarks – Gregory A. Thomas – National President, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) – National Police College of Jamaica Passing Out Parade for Batch 111, April 29, 2016

Let me say good morning and greetings to the Honorable Robert Montague, Minister of National Security, to His Excellency, Mr. Louis G. Moreno, United States Ambassador to Jamaica and other US Embassy Officials who are present here today, to Dr. Carl Williams, Commissioner of Police of the Jamaican Constabulary Force, and to Deputy Commissioners Grant, Blake and Quallo, Assistant Commissioner Norman Heywood, Director National Police College of Jamaica, other senior officers, graduating constables, family and friends.

I am honored to have been asked to address the 2016 graduating class of constable trainees from the Jamaican Police College. With me here today is my wife, Kim, who is a two star, Assistant Chief in the New York City Police Department, and as such is the highest ranking uniformed African-American woman in the 170-year history of the NYPD.

As National President of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, commonly referred to as NOBLE, I bring you greetings to you from our Executive Board, and the over 3,000 members in over 60 chapters who we represent internationally, whom are primarily African-American chief executive officers of law enforcement agencies at the federal, state, county and municipal levels.

I am particularly proud that our executive board has recently approved a charter that will allow us to have a chapter in Montreal, Canada and that we are working with JCF Deputy Commissioner Novelette Grant and other officials here in Kingston to begin a NOBLE chapter in Jamaica.

On background, in 1976, the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives arose from conversations about a pressing need to improve community-police relations in the context of race. Nearly forty years later, as we celebrate our 40th anniversary, the nation again is at a seminal point in policing.

In the United States, over the past few years, there have been several instances where a life was lost during seemingly routine police encounters, encounters that called into question the character of policing. As a result of these events, a deep divide was created between law enforcement and the communities that they serve. And for some who reside in our more diverse communities in the United States, this divide was arguably expanded.

All of these encounters, whether they occurred in a large urban city or in a small suburban town, had one thing in common – they all caused government officials in the United States to reexamine and rethink the way that police engage with our communities.

NOBLE is proud to have played a central role in our nation’s efforts to improve the level of respect between police and citizens. Whether by serving as a key member of President Barack Obama’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing or working closely with the United States Department of Justice on the ground in various communities, we have been an important part of the discourse that sought to bring a fresh look to the manner in which police *professionally* engage with the communities that they serve and in the manner that communities *respectfully* engage with the police that serve them.

As noted, in the United States recently, some of our police officers have not been caught in their proudest of moments. Constables, as you take on the important task of providing a critical service to the citizens of Jamaica in the 21st century, lessons learned from the challenges that we have faced and continue to face in the United States dictate that you should prepare to do your jobs as a “guardians” and not as a “warriors”.

A guardian is best defined as a person who protects or defends something, whereas a warrior is defined as a person who is engaged in warfare and war like tactics.

While you and your colleagues will undoubtedly come across some persons who will choose to engage in violence against you, your co-workers or against some citizens of your proud country, thankfully the vast majority of the citizens that you will encounter will be hard working people who are raising families and doing all that they can to make ends meet.

The challenge for you is to be prepared to provide professional policing and guardian services to the many, while properly separating out those who might choose to engage in criminal behavior. In every case however, whether it be your interaction with a hard working citizen or the citizen who chose a path of criminality, both citizens must be treated with dignity.

In other words, in the performance of your duties, all of your duties, you should strive to respect and protect human dignity and maintain and uphold the human rights of all the persons you might encounter. To do otherwise has the potential to put your lives in jeopardy and can also jeopardize the gains made by police here in Jamaica and across the world.

Treating the public that you serve with dignity will also increase the respect and trust that they will have for you and the important work that you do. Trust is absolutely essential – a bedrock – to keeping both communities and the officers who serve them safe.

Trust will also help you solve crimes, because if citizens can come to trust you, they will come to you not only in times of danger, but also in times of safety, to give you information that you need when you are trying to prevent danger.

Perhaps internationally recognized bestselling author and educator, the late Dr. Stephen Covey said it best when he said “It has always been my firm belief that policing is one of America's most noble professions”. Dr. Covey goes on to say: “The actions of any police officer, in an instant, can impact an individual for life.

Given this realization, every police officer must be centered on the foundational principles of service, justice and fundamental fairness.”

He closes by saying, “The nobility of policing demands the noblest of character.”

While he is most famously known as the author of the bestselling book, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, I firmly believe that Dr. Covey was at his best when he said these words.

While his words were said about his thoughts on what policing meant to him in America, for me his words ring true all across the world, particularly here in Jamaica, as you prepare to take on the task of touching lives and protecting the foundation of society.

As you begin your careers, I urge you to keep the single word nobility in mind. Nobility in the work that you do and in the manner that you carry out your work.

Nobility in the way that your family and friends will see you and in the work that they see you do, work that will have you running into a given situation, when the natural human instinct of others is to run the other way.

The words of Dr. Covey, indeed ring true - policing demands the noblest of character.”

In closing, the biblical passage found in Matthew 22:14 says: Many are called, but few are chosen. You have been chosen to serve in a respected profession. You are a part of a diverse class, and have been trained properly - now go out and make your country and your families proud.

God Bless You, God Bless Jamaica and thank you again for giving me the honor of addressing you this morning.