



AN OPEN LETTER: TURN FATHER HARVEY'S ORDEAL INTO AN OPPORTUNITY

June 14, 2017

In a society saturated with news of brutal crimes, a crime without the level of vicious physical assault that has become all too commonplace, jolted the citizenry. The location of the crime, a church, accounted for some of the emotional impact. But violations by robbers of places associated with sanctity have long ago led to iron bars and electronics to protect many of them.

The shock and anger provoked by this crime had to do with the society's measure of the man who was tied and robbed. He was a priest, but not just any priest. It was Father Clyde Harvey known not only for words but for deeds which bear witness to the sincerity of this nationally treasured human being. His words and deeds have communicated so deeply to many young men who were trapped in the state of mind of his attackers that some have changed their lives fundamentally. Many others who have heard his appeals and witnessed his caring but have not transformed their own lives (or not yet), for various reasons, would not even think of harming him. In fact, if in a position to prevent it, they would not allow anyone else to do so either. While they still have to overcome the psychological and material pressures they feel from stigma, from social and economic marginalization in the society, they hold Father Harvey in high esteem because he speaks to their humanity, presents them with the hope of uplift.

The Emancipation Support Committee of Trinidad & Tobago is deeply saddened that a brother with so much love and compassion, one with whom we feel a close kinship, had to undergo such an ordeal . At the same time we know that his faith, his inner strength and commitment will ensure that he continues on the path of reforming lives that need to be touched by such a caring spirit.

There are those who would see in his pain the justification for collective punishment of the community which they instinctively blame and similar communities they see in the same light. We suggest they consult with Farther Harvey about what may work without being led by guns and a spirit of revenge. This may just be the moment for a broader consultation, which includes voices from the smouldering communities, to find a way forward, a path out of the downward spiral of violence destroying so many of our communities and potentially escalating into far more bloody confrontations between the armed forces of the state and armed gangs and individuals.

Let us choose this moment to examine and find ways to overcome not only the internal sources of increasing violence, but the ways in which the wider society contributes to the despair and the low self-esteem underlying the tragic situations. This examination must include the criminal behaviour of the enablers of the gangs - those for whom they sell the drugs, those who import and supply the guns, those who pay for "hits".

While we cannot speak for Farther Clyde Harvey we firmly believe that he would welcome a coming together of State and non-State actors with a commitment driven by a sense of humanity to resolve the escalating crisis .

Khafra Kambon
Chairman