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Push for better approach to domestic violence

Co-director of the Caribbean Safety Agency, Antonio Leacock. (FR)



The Caribbean Safety Agency is continuing its push to help strengthen local law enforcement, targeting improvements in responses to sexual assault, child protective laws and counter-terrorism.

It is a continuation of the intensive training which the agency has provided to the Regional Security System since October 2024, according to co-director of the agency, Anthony Leacock.

A retired member of the London Metropolitan Police (MET Police), Barbadian-born Leacock stressed on the need to improve upon law enforcement's approach to domestic violence in its many forms.

"We're looking to deal with domestic violence which is now a public interest crime. And when I say public interest, I mean it affects the social morality of the country, it affects the health service. One domestic violence murder a year is one too many, especially when the individual, complainant, or the victim might have had previous contact with police," he said.

Leacock draws on his experience as criminal investigator with more than 20 years of experience in managing investigations on anti-corruption, counter-terrorism, terrorism security, organised crime, sexual offences, child abuse and online sexual exploitation.

The veteran lawman explained that their training will look at sensitivity surrounding cases of domestic violence as well as stalking and harassment.

"One of the things we're looking at doing, especially around dealing with violence against women and girls, is how law enforcement interacts

with people who've been sexually assaulted. So we're looking at that... sensitivity and re-victimisation... looking to rectify all that and we're looking to take that [seriously].

"We're looking at teaching the officers here how to deal with stalking and harassment, which is a huge issue again, and it's gone unnoticed and it's an issue where, before I retired in the UK, we were under pressure for the way they were dealing with stalking and harassment," he said.

Leacock said the lack of care given to gender-based crimes involving women was not exclusive to the Caribbean and was often tied to normalised culture, policy and procedures that organisations would need to reform.

Another point of focus the training agency will look at is child protection and handling sensitive cases, including online sexual abuse which involves the uploading, downloading or sharing of indecent images of children.

Counter-terrorism and training responses for front-line workers is another area where they will look to provide training. He explained that while it may seem unlikely, Barbados

was not immune to terrorism, especially as it boast the status of a first world Caribbean country.

"We're not immune to it and I won't say that we are on anybody's radar, because I don't know that for sure. But I'm just going to say anything can happen at any time. It's not to say that somebody wouldn't come and plant an explosive device in a bag and leave it in a public space.

"So, it's all about teaching front-line officers and getting people to the point where they see an unaccompanied bag and it raises suspicion. Or you walk in the street through a public space and you see someone just deliberately

place a bag somewhere and walk away. What would you do if you saw that?

We're not immune, so it's teaching officers and getting the public to that stage where they see it, think it and they act on it," he added.

In the future, the agency will look to develop a digital forensic hub, training in the use of technology to correctly seize devices for information without tampering with the product and teaching officers techniques to be proficient in dealing with conflict resolution.

Leacock also heaped praise on Barbados' law enforcement, hailing it as one of the best in the region. (JRN)