Regional Justice Protection Improvement Program

Witness protection programs are designed to provide protection for and instil confidence in threatened witnesses to give testimonial evidence in court proceedings involving serious organized crimes or where it is recognised that there is a related threat to their lives, safety or property. To encourage cooperation with law enforcement investigations, witnesses must feel removed from intimidation, danger or fear of reprisal.

Approval

Recognising the importance of witness protection for the administration of justice and the challenges facing Member States in this regard, the Agreement Establishing the Regional Justice Protection Programme was developed and commended for signature at the Twentieth Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government in July 1999. To date eight (8) Member States have signed the Agreement: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago.

At the Third meeting of the Forensic Science Interest Group held in Barbados (April 2009), it was recommended that CARICOM IMPACS consider the development of a Regional Justice Protection Improvement Program to incorporate three pillars including video evidencing, forensic capacity and justice protection for presentation to and buy-in from the CONSLE. The program is aimed at developing traditional regional justice protection by creating a link between target hardening, which incorporates witness protection measures with the utilization of forensic evidence and modern methods of procedural protection.

The Program is also aimed at reducing instances of missed evidential opportunities, minimizing human error through the use of scientific evidence and improving confidence and cooperation of witnesses in high risk cases. By combining relocation procedures contained in the existing Regional Justice Protection Programme with the utilization of forensic evidence and modern methods of protection, including Video ID Parades and witness video evidence in high risk cases, the Improvement Program seeks to offer a variety of alternatives for the protection of witnesses.

The main objectives are:-

- Use of remote video evidencing by high risk witnesses in major cases (murder, shootings, rapes, kidnappings);
- Greater use of video identification (ID) parades which utilizes a video recording of suspects shown to the witness rather than the suspects having to be physically present during the process;
• Enactment and harmonization of legislation and use of remote video evidence in criminal proceedings; inclusive of video ID parades
• Improved utilization of forensics including DNA and comprehensive crime scene management