
Admiral jumps ship - Top cop Lewin quits

Posted by Knuckles - 2008/06/04 06:19

Rear Admiral Hardley Lewin has reportedly tendered his resignation as commissioner of police after just 168 days in the job, a senior government official confirmed last night.

The official said the resignation was on "general terms".

Last night, Lewin would not confirm whether he had stepped down.

"Be careful what you hear," was all Lewin was prepared to say when The Gleaner confronted him last night at the Police Officers' Club, St Andrew.

Later, he told The Gleaner by telephone, "I am not getting into any discussion about anything."

Last night, the chairman of the Police Service Commission, Noel Hylton, said he would not comment on the issue before a meeting with other members of the commission today.

On Sunday, Prime Minister Bruce Golding hinted that there were significant challenges in the police force. He told supporters at a Jamaica Labour Party Area Council One meeting in Pembroke Hall, St Andrew, that some members of the force were not performing optimally because they were not happy with the new commissioner and some of his initiatives.

Increasing pressure

The Golding administration has been under increasing pressure to present a crime plan to arrest the spiralling murder rate.

The latest demand was made by the Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica last week.

Since taking office on December 17, Lewin has faced a runaway crime rate, with more than 800 Jamaicans killed.

The month of May was particularly punishing, as more than 190 persons were murdered.

This is worse than any month in the record-breaking year of 2005 where 1,674 persons were killed.

In his first press conference after assuming the post of top cop, Lewin said he would embark on a shutdown of stations seen as inadequate and ineffective.

Over 25 cops arrested

Lewin also talked tough on reining in corruption in the force. One of his main intentions was to raise the fear of detection in the force in his first year. This aspect saw some success with more than 25 policemen arrested on corruption charges.

Meanwhile, the Opposition last night expressed its willingness to participate in a resumption of the Vale Royal talks, which the Government requested be convened as a matter of urgency.

It also recommended that the Government place priority on curbing crime.

"The forthcoming talks should be solely dedicated to finding some common ground on this issue and that every effort be made to harness the goodwill of all Jamaicans in attacking this monster," chairman of the People's National Party, Robert Pickersgill said.

Real Admiral Hardley Lewin has never been short of words on the subject of crime fighting.

The Gleaner shares some of the most famous comments made by the Rear Admiral as chief of staff of the Jamaica Defence Force and as commissioner of police.

As chief of staff of the Jamaica Defence Force (October 2005)

"Tivoli Gardens represents the mother of all garrisons. The garrison machinery is well oiled, super effective and must be the envy of all others.

"Garrisons of whatsoever persuasion, JLP, PNP or no P, were little monsters that were created, possibly for reasons of political survival and defence of the faith. Little monsters grow into big monsters and spawn many little monsters which

too grow up to become big monsters. In time, we can be overwhelmed and consumed by the consequences of our own creations.

As commissioner of police

On whether he feels pressured by the Government's pronouncements that it intends to reduce crime by 40 per cent over five years:

"Absolutely not! Part of the problem we have in this country is that we set low targets for ourselves and then fail to achieve them. I don't have a problem with the bar being raised. We can always look, at the end of the period, and then make a proper assessment of why we did not make a particular target. I'm not afraid of it!"

On guns over brains

"Whether it's a civilian with a licensed firearm or whatever, you give a man a gun and his brain stops functioning because he now has that power."

On closing police stations

"You have police stations all over the place and most of them don't make one good station. We're going to shut some down."

On cleaning up the JCF

"When one mentions the word 'police', I am sure that one of the first things that comes to mind is the word 'corruption'. My first act on my first day was to sign and promulgate the anti-corruption plan for the Jamaica Constabulary Force."

On crime

"We have to accept some truths. If we could just manage that, I think we are well on our way. Let me make it clear, it is going to get somewhat worse before it starts to get better."

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Back on board - Lewin withdraws resignation

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Police Commissioner Rear Admiral Hardley Lewin yesterday withdrew his resignation as Jamaica's top cop.

Lewin stepped down as the nation's chief constable on Monday but rescinded yesterday after discussions with members of the Police Service Commission.

"We did not go into why he resigned because we did not believe it was the right thing to do at the moment," said Noel Hylton, chairman of the commission. "When things have settled down, we will try to find out from him what are the most pressing issues," he told The Gleaner last night.

There have been mounting demands for the reasons leading to the resignation of Lewin to be made public.

But Hylton said any disclosure would be dependent on the extent of the issues that led to the resignation.

He also said the withdrawal of Lewin's resignation was unconditional and that the commissioner was convinced by members of the commission to put his country first.

Full backing

In announcing that the commissioner had withdrawn his resignation, Prime Minister Bruce Golding yesterday told Parliament that Lewin had his full support.

"The commissioner has been reassured that he has the full backing of the Government and the Police Service Commission," Golding said. "He needs to be reassured as well that he has the full support of the men and women of the police force as well as the support of all the well-thinking people of Jamaica."

Yvonne McCalla Sobers, convenor of Families Against State Terrorism, yesterday called for a public revelation of the reasons for the resignation of the commissioner.

"There must have been serious issues which caused the commissioner to adopt such a position," she said. "We don't want it swept under the carpet."

Maria Carla Gulotta of the Jamaican chapter of Amnesty International agreed with McCalla-Sobers.

Yesterday, the commissioner was coy on the withdrawal or the reasons for his quitting.

"No comment, I will speak to you when I speak to you," he told reporters.

Minister of National Security Colonel Trevor MacMillan was in a similar mood. "I can't speak to you on the matter," he told The Gleaner.

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