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PRESS RELEASE

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**GOVERNMENT INTRODUCES BILL TO PROTECT WITNESSES FROM HARDENED
CRIMINALS**

The Government will this week publish in the Gazette a copy of the Crimes (Vulnerable Witnesses) Bill 2009.

The Bill has a twofold aim.

At one level it seeks to protect vulnerable witnesses and victims of crime from situations that might make them reluctant to testify or might negatively affect the quality of their evidence. These include over-intrusive cross examination of child witnesses by or on behalf of a defendant; unsettling and intimidating encounters by victims of attacks with their alleged attackers; and inappropriate exposure to the media of details of certain offences which might lead the public for instance to identify the victim or any children.

On another level the Bill empowers the Court to make a witness anonymity order in order protect the identity of a witnesses (including from the defendant) in cases where it is necessary for the protection of the safety of the witness or another person or to prevent real harm to the public interest provided and it is consistent with the defendant receiving a fair trial. This type of order will be restricted to very serious cases where it is important that a witness should testify and the witness would not testify if such an order were not made because of genuine concerns over his or her safety.

Commenting on the Bill Justice Minister Daniel said “we are determined to balance the continued protection of the right to a fair trial of defendants with the protection of vulnerable witnesses and victims of crime and the protection of witnesses against hardened criminals where there are genuine concerns for their safety. This is the first of a number of reforms we will be introducing to criminal laws and procedures which, as we have already announced, will overhaul the criminal justice system”.