



CSC Evaluation and Monitoring Programme

## Improving Access, Inclusion and Opportunities for Socially Excluded Groups in the Caribbean Region

*Dr Dacia Latoya Leslie*



**Jamaica, a paradisaical Caribbean island nation with a small population of just under 3 million, is tragically plagued by high levels of violent crime, including murder, gender-based violence and rape, as well as drug-related crime and corruption.**

According to the United Nations, Jamaica has been classified as one of the countries with very high murder rate in the world for several years, with the Jamaica Constabulary Force reporting distressingly high numbers of murder cases, totalling 1683 in 2009, and remaining as high as 1463 in 2021. According to the government of Jamaica report on Violence Prevention, Peace and Sustainable Development Programme, insecurity and armed violence have become some of the primary obstacles to sustainable development in the country. This crippling violence is concentrated amongst the most marginalised groups within Jamaican society and is made worse by high levels of unemployment and widespread poverty. While the government and other stakeholders are making efforts to prevent crime, correctional policies and practices are largely punitive and less focused on safeguarding the welfare and effective re-integration of ex-offenders. Dr Dacia Latoya Leslie, a 2011 Commonwealth Scholar who completed a PhD in Criminology is a distinguished researcher, whose work concentrates on the lived experiences of inmates,

ex-prisoners, removed migrants and their child dependents to the intersection of her teaching focus, which is

Development Studies, with specialisation in Monitoring and Evaluation. Findings from her innovative research have informed and challenged the justice system to consider the social inclusion of ex-offenders and improve access to justice for victims and other witnesses in Jamaica. In addition, she has supported the development of a new framework for the Caribbean Development Bank to assess the effectiveness of existing approaches to poverty reduction.



**Dr Dacia Latoya Leslie** is a Commonwealth Alumnus who attained a PhD in Criminology in 2016 from Cardiff University. She is currently working as a Research Fellow at the University of the West Indies (UWI), Mona, Jamaica. Her current research focuses on investigating gender violence and identifying mechanisms for the re-integration of ex-prisoners and support for their child dependents, to better inform the justice system in Jamaica. In 2020 she developed the Witness Care Integrated Strategic Plan and supported the finalisation of the Child Justice Protocols for Jamaica. She is also responsible for designing the monitoring and evaluation framework for the Social Inclusion and Social Protection Strategy for the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) that will inter alia support the evaluation of regional efforts to improve access to justice for victims and other witnesses in OECS countries. Dacia also chairs the Crime Prevention and Offender Management (CPOM) research cluster hosted by the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES) at UWI. In addition to her research activities, she trains students studying for a Master's Degree in Monitoring and Evaluation.

## Distinguished Researcher and Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist

Upon completing her PhD studies in 2016, Dacia joined the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES) at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica as a Research Fellow. Her research work is focused on understanding the lived experiences of inmates, ex-prisoners, involuntary removed migrants, and their child dependents, and how these experiences intersect with Development Studies, with a focus on Monitoring and Evaluation. Since 2016 she has trained more than 100 postgraduate students in monitoring and evaluation.



Picture of students at the Information Sharing and Sensitization Workshop Entitled-Understanding Monitoring and Evaluation: A Case Study of Vision 2030 Jamaica National Development Plan, June 2017.

‘I did criminology, and while I was doing criminology, Cardiff University had opportunities for postgraduates to do complementary courses with what at the time was known as the University Graduate College. And there were courses in relation to consultancies, those that were monitoring and evaluation related. That is how I ended up in my current teaching post. I would not be teaching postgraduate students [without a PhD] because you need to have a PhD and specialisation in the area that you are teaching, all of which I did at Cardiff University.’

One of Dacia’s proudest achievements from her research work is the publication of her recent book (among other publications) entitled: *Recidivism in the Caribbean-Improving the Reintegration of Jamaican Ex-prisoners*. It explores and examines various methods and factors that might help ex-prisoners successfully transition from a prison environment to life within the community. The contribution of knowledge through this book serves as evidence to support policymakers in devising effective correctional policies and practices for crime prevention as well as the social re-integration of ex-prisoners.

Dacia explained the focus of her research, and its important contribution towards influencing the inclusion of socially excluded groups, such as ex-prisoners, in Jamaica and beyond, as well as the relevance of her work to sustainable development more broadly as follows:

‘Underlying the crime and murder issues that we face here in Jamaica are matters of social exclusion. We need to shift from thinking that persons who are ex-prisoners are undeserving of any social protection and understand the connection between marginalised and excluded persons and their re-integration into society. They’ve [ex-prisoners] already served their sentences, what are their needs? How do we prevent them from re-entering the cycle of crime?’ And what happens to the child left behind when they, the parents are imprisoned? That child might not be on welfare or might not be receiving any form of benefits from the state. It is important to understand the intersections of this prominent issue and how it weighs on development.’

Dacia described the impact of her work to policy as follows:

‘Improvements to the policy direction of the Department of Correctional Services are evidenced in the state’s attempt to develop minimum standards for correctional practice in Jamaica and involve academic researchers like myself at the design phase. I currently serve as a representative of The UWI on the Bureau of Standard Jamaica’s Correctional Services Technical Committee.’

Dacia added that progress on reconciling ex-offenders with survivors of violence has been made through restorative justice practices such as circles of support and accountability now underway in Jamaica. These interventions tend to target minor offenders (that is, persons who do not receive a prison sentence) and are implemented by the Restorative Justice Unit within the Ministry of Justice in Jamaica. Moreover, the introduction of restorative justice in maximum-security correctional centres in Jamaica is also gaining traction, however more research and follow-ups are still required in this area.

Dacia’s research on promoting reintegration of ex-prisoners has also featured in a report produced by CARICOM- Caribbean Community, an intergovernmental organisation that consists of 15 Caribbean countries, with the aim to promote economic integration and cooperation among its members, and to coordinate foreign policy.

The report, published in 2019, was entitled: *Creating a culture of peace: The Caribbean Youth Advocacy and Action Plan Agenda on Violence Prevention*. It was informed by research conducted with youth in the Caribbean and called for urgent action to prevent and reduce crime, foster social inclusion and promote reintegration.

‘The Commonwealth Scholarship received in 2011 has increased my visibility as an established researcher in the field of correctional reform as evidenced by the receipt of the 2020 UWI Principal’s Award for the best Faculty of Social Sciences Publication and mention of my research work in the recently published report [Creating a culture of peace: The Caribbean Youth Advocacy and Action Plan Agenda on Violence Prevention].’





Public forum entitled-Human Trafficking and the Murder of Youths in Jamaica- organised by the SALISES CPOM Research Cluster and held at the Regional Headquarters of the UWI in 2017.

Within the last decade, Dacia has been involved in several development projects as a researcher or as a consultant. Presently, she is involved in two main consultancies, including one with the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) with the aim of creating a social inclusion and social protection strategy for the Eastern Caribbean region. She has also been engaged as a monitoring and evaluation specialist on a Caribbean Development Bank-commissioned project, which focuses on identifying practical solutions to accelerate the pace of poverty reduction and expand opportunities to promote inclusive prosperity.

**Revisiting Jamaica's Crime Plan**

Panelists Include:

- Hon. Dr. Horace Chang, MP**  
Minister of National Security
- Peter Bunting, MP**  
Former Opposition Spokesperson on National Security
- Paula Llewellyn**  
Director of Public Prosecutions, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions
- Anthony Clayton**  
Alcan Professor, Institute of Sustainable Development, UWI
- Dacia Leslie**  
Research Fellow & CPOM Chair, SALISES, UWI, Mona
- Terrence Williams**  
Commissioner, Independent Commission of Investigations (INDECOM)
- Herbert Gayle**  
Anthropologist, Department of Sociology, Psychology and Social Work, UWI

Moderator: **Arlene Bailey**, Senior Research Fellow, SALISES, Mona

**THURSDAY FEBRUARY 7, 2019 AT 2:00PM, THE UNDERCROFT, UWI, MONA**  
To reserve a place at this event, email [salises@uwimona.edu.jm](mailto:salises@uwimona.edu.jm) or register online at <https://crimeplandiscussion.eventbrite.com>

Web: <http://www.uwi.edu/salises> Tel: (876) 927-1020 / 927-1234 @SALISESMona

Public forum on Jamaica's crime prevention strategy, organised by CPOM to strengthen partnerships and raise public awareness about crime and criminal justice issues that impact on inclusive sustainable development and cross-border relations.

Active engagements include chairing the Crime Prevention and Offender Management (CPOM) research cluster at the University of the West Indies and participation [as conference rapporteur] in the first Witness Care<sup>1</sup> Conference held in Jamaica in 2019, which advanced plans of action for improving the treatment of witnesses in Jamaica.

Other appointments have included leading [as Principal Investigator] a technical team of four researchers to further investigate how access to justice for victims and other witnesses in Jamaica can be improved.

**'Many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have a high violent crime rate, particularly Jamaica. It is an area that needs a lot of research to create and increase awareness about the discrimination experienced by ex-offenders and the implications of this for inclusive sustainable development.'**

## Promoting Social Inclusion of Ex-prisoners in the Eastern Caribbean Region

As noted, Dacia has been instrumental in supporting and contributing to the development of a social inclusion and social protection strategy for the Eastern Caribbean region, as part of a research project commissioned by the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean states (OECS), and led by the University Director of the Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies (SALISES).

The strategy gives guidance on how to support the most disadvantaged groups within the OECS region and those at risk of exclusion and identifies the necessary resources and support services required to empower these groups and enable them to actively participate and make a meaningful contribution to society.

**'This is significant because no such strategy [social inclusion and social protection strategy] existed in the Caribbean region. It takes it up a notch from just poverty reduction to moving towards a multi-dimensional index of inclusion. And included in those socially excluded are persons deprived of liberty, which is my area of research. And all of this could not be possible because, without the added knowledge gained through pursuing a PhD, I doubt I would be approached or asked about my specialist knowledge or expert advice on a particular area. In its absence, considering the counterfactual, I doubt I would be engaged in all these interventions.'**

1. Witness care refers to interventions (laws, policies, processes, programmes or plans of action) that seek to address the unique needs of witnesses identified as persons requiring special consideration during their engagement with the criminal justice process.

As part of this research project, Dacia is responsible for creating a monitoring and evaluation framework for the social inclusion and social protection strategy. This framework is expected to become a central repository that plays a pivotal role in promoting the sharing of information, data, and ideas between international development agencies and other partners involved in the project. The tool is also key in supporting performance-based management in a regional context.

Being tasked to develop this monitoring and evaluation tool gave Dacia an opportunity to incorporate the concerns of persons deprived of liberty into the Strategy's design not excluding involuntary removed migrants.

**'Social inclusion is represented by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and is something that's very important, yet ex-prisoners are pretty much eliminated from our conversation because of a culture of retribution that we tend to have in relation to punishment. Therefore, in creating a monitoring, and evaluation framework for the Eastern Caribbean region, I am going to put this group of individuals, their considerations into the framework so that every government moving forward would then take into consideration their social protection needs.'**



**Advancing The Vision: Access To Justice For All. Sectoral Debate, Gordon House, May 2021.**

As part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this strategy for social inclusion and protection in the OECS feeds into both Sustainable Development Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere, and Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries. Backing up the Social Inclusion and Social Protection Strategy is the monitoring and evaluation framework developed by Dacia. This identifies the core indicators and appropriate methods for measuring the targets of the strategy which strives to keep up with the transformative 'No one Left Behind' promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## Introducing Innovative ways to Assess and Reduce Poverty in the Caribbean Region

While working with SALISES, the Commonwealth Alumnus contributed to a Caribbean Development Bank-commissioned project that investigated the existing approaches to poverty reduction, with the aim of understanding their effectiveness and identifying gaps. It also explored new and emerging issues in relation to reducing persistent poverty and inequalities in the Caribbean and offered practical solutions to accelerate the pace of poverty reduction and expand opportunities to promote inclusive prosperity. As a monitoring and evaluation specialist, [a skill honed while studying for her PhD] Dacia was tasked with developing the evaluation framework for this project.

**'The impact of my PhD and the monitoring and evaluation courses studied is now taking place through training, through providing policy advice to international development agencies and governments and through my research.'**

As part of this project, an e-book entitled: The Changing Nature of Poverty and Inequality in the Caribbean: New Issues, New Solutions was published in 2016. Dacia contributed a chapter to the book outlining the Framework for Evaluating Traditional Approaches to Poverty Reduction Strategies in the Caribbean. Overall, the book offered innovative solutions to address poverty and promote shared prosperity in the Caribbean, while also providing fresh thinking on the transformative shifts in policies, approaches, strategies, and institutions to speed up poverty reduction in the Caribbean and expand opportunities for the most vulnerable groups in society. Moreover, it proposed a new framework for assessing the effectiveness of existing approaches to poverty reduction in the Caribbean, which has since been adopted by the Caribbean Development Bank.

Dacia also serves as an instrumental member of the technical working team at the Planning Institute of Jamaica that is developing a monitoring and evaluation framework for the country's poverty reduction strategy. She has used this opportunity to include persons deprived of liberty for consideration.

**'The concerns of persons deprived of liberty hardly make it onto the policy agenda. But being a part of a process [of supporting the review and finalisation of the M&E framework for the country's poverty reduction strategy] I have had the rare opportunity to include the concerns of persons deprived of liberty for consideration in the framework. We were able to identify specific, measurable, accurate, attainable, and relevant (SMART) indicators to monitor progress made with this group of individuals. And that document [the monitoring and evaluation framework] is being finalised and will guide the government on how to monitor and evaluate poverty and poverty reduction efforts in the country.'**



In addition, Dacia's research work has contributed to the Caribbean Human Development Report (CHDR) on 'Multidimensional progress: human resilience beyond income', which offers a large-scale shift in mindset, away from an income-focused measurement of development towards multidimensional progress, and an overview of harmonised and coordinated developmental efforts within Latin America and the Caribbean. The report has been adopted by several Caribbean governments, who have committed to use the CHDR as a base document to complement the finalisation of various growth strategies.

'We [The Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies] are often engaged by international development partners and various governments across the region to provide them with recommendations based on research evidence as to how a policy, programme or project can be improved, whether it be at a macro, micro or community level.'

## Establishing Research Collaborations Through the Crime Prevention and Offender Management (CPOM) Research Cluster

Dacia chairs the Crime Prevention and Offender Management (CPOM) research cluster at the University of the West Indies, which was established in 2017. This group brings together academics and practitioners to share expertise, ideas, and good practices on developing effective ways to prevent crime, enforce laws and promote criminal justice reform through research collaborations, consultancies, and creating awareness around these issues and their impact on development. To ensure the wider impact of the cluster's research initiatives, it is working on establishing strategic partnerships to encourage active collaboration towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16 which advocates for promoting just, peaceful and inclusive societies.

'Certainly, I would say that I left Cardiff with sharpened coordination skills, because for the entire period that I was in the UK, I was a regional coordinator for the Wales and Northern Ireland Commonwealth Scholarship Regional Networks. I remember one of the last events I organised was a regional conference, where all the scholars came together to share their work. It involved so many aspects of coordination, negotiating, forging of partnerships, and engaging various stakeholders. And all of that is serving me well in my capacity as chair of the Crime Prevention Offender Management research cluster, and coordinator of the Sustainable Futures Policy Brief Series here at SALISES.'

Membership of the CPOM cluster includes academic researchers, criminologists, lawyers, psychologists, and policymakers based in Barbados, Jamaica, the United Kingdom, United States of America and Japan. One of the

most recent projects conducted by this cluster is an edited book collection that aims at presenting and promoting the use of research evidence to address gender-based violence.

'We have a few persons in that edited book collection who are Commonwealth Scholars who are part of the CPOM research cluster. This project brings together a group of experts, including Commonwealth Alumni to showcase what they are doing in this area of gender-based violence in various jurisdictions. And putting it together in a collection so that students who are inclined to undertake research in this area have a reader to refer to and understand the idiosyncrasies of various cultures as it relates to addressing gender-based violence in the Caribbean region and beyond. We are hoping once the volumes are published, we can follow that up with some training.'

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the cluster has been engaging in discussions with influential government ministries across the region to discuss good practices in managing COVID-19 in prisons across the Caribbean region. As part of this work, Dacia was a panellist in a presentation entitled: Successfully Managing the COVID-19 Pandemic in Prison: The Experiences of Caribbean SIDS, an event hosted by the CPOM SALISES research cluster in collaboration with the Institute of Island Studies at University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI). The event featured speakers from eight Caribbean countries and two regional organisations.

The poster is for an event titled "Successfully Managing the COVID-19 Pandemic in Prison: The Experiences of Caribbean SIDS". It is presented by the Crime Prevention and Offender Management (CPOM) SALISES Research Cluster in collaboration with the Institute of Island Studies (IIS), The University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI). The event is on Wednesday, 31 March 2021, at 5:00pm (EST) via Zoom. Registration is online at <http://bit.ly/SALISES-Reg>. The poster lists several speakers and panelists, including Jim Randall, Alejandro Rossi, Gabriel M. Gonzalez-Escobar, MD, PhD, and Senator the Hon. Matthew Samuda as the keynote speaker. It also mentions a moderator, Corin Bailey, PhD, and a panelist, Dacia Leslie, PhD.

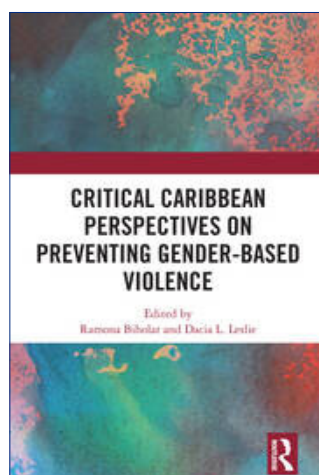
**SALISES, The University of the West Indies CPOM Research Cluster raising public awareness through research and strengthened partnerships.**

At this event, Dacia advocated for the role of effective monitoring and evaluation considerations in developing sustainable correctional reform. She also shared findings from her research study conducted in 2020 that investigated the early effects of the pandemic on prison overcrowding, recommending non-custodial alternatives to detention and alternative arrangements for vulnerable groups such as children in need of supervision and people with mental health issues. She also recommended the scaling up of restorative justice services which focuses on behavioural change of offenders, reconciliation with victims and affected communities, and improved access to justice.

In line with her innovative research on improving the conditions of imprisonment in Jamaica, in 2020 Dacia published a scholarly article entitled: Reassessing the conditions of 'Prison' in Jamaica. This article attracted an award received by Dacia under the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (CSC) Research Impact Awards – research output stream, which is targeted at rewarding Scholars and Alumni that have published research that has real-world relevance and addresses global challenges. In her article, she made important recommendations on how serious offenders can be reintegrated more effectively upon completion of their prison sentence.

Other engagements include participation in the first Witness Care Conference, as a lead rapporteur representing SALISES. Held in Jamaica in 2019, this event was organised as part of the Justice Undertakings for Social Transformation (JUST) project implemented by the Jamaican Ministry of Justice, with support from the Canadian Department of Justice and the UNDP.

The conference brought together local and international experts, practitioners, policy makers, and advocates to reflect, share perspectives, as well as challenges, best practices, and lessons-learned regarding witness care in Jamaica and beyond. As part of this conference, a workshop was held for practitioners which focused on identifying and defining clear methodologies and strategies to improve witness care in Jamaica. It also identified and recommended practical approaches that can be used to improve and integrate citizen access to and experiences of the justice system. It intended to support the design, rationalisation, and ownership of an Integrated Strategic Plan, informed by stakeholder engagement, to guide coordinated national action towards improving the treatment of victims and other witnesses in the justice system.



'The strategy itself highlighted the gaps to be addressed in the case of Jamaica and highlighted possible solutions or pathways to transformation. And that strategic plan was presented to the government and handed over to the Ministry of Justice. It is at the stage where we are awaiting policy take-up of the document and its implementation in all related justice and national security institutions. Policy and practice take-up of the recently finalised Child Justice Protocols for Jamaica and the Witness Care Integrated Strategic Plan will improve the treatment of witnesses and victims in Jamaica.'

To further build on the gains made from the 2019 Witness Care Conference, a social media campaign entitled: 'Effectively Caring for Witnesses' was launched. It seeks to build awareness of witness care best practices and initiatives, and to promote innovative ideas and approaches to be developed to improve victim support and witness care services. This includes the consistent use of psychometric testing to match service providers with clients' personality and student-led witness care societies that have been started at Higher Education Institutions across the island.

This campaign is backed by various resources including: Swift, Sure and Inclusive Justice through Caring for Witnesses – An Integrated Strategic Plan for which Dacia was the principal investigator, the Protocol for Strengthening Multi-Agency Interaction within Jamaica's Child Justice System, and the Witness Care Information Sheet. Overall, the CPOM research cluster played a pivotal role in contributing to these outputs as one of the key stakeholders.

A total of **341** physical copies of the Child Justice Protocols, **200** physical copies of the Integrated Strategic Plan and **650** Information Sheets were disseminated by SALISES to **83** justice partners across the island of Jamaica including the Ministry of Justice.

Dacia also highlighted some challenges she has come across that have at times impeded her progress in her developmental work. These include limited financial resources to conduct research, lack of transparency and accountability in the monitoring and evaluation industry, and lack of appreciation and uptake of research evidence to guide decision-making.

'There is a prevailing culture of suspicion, what that means is persons will withhold information. Meanwhile, at the centre of transparency and accountability is strong monitoring and evaluation systems. I am going around trying to strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems. But if there is not a culture that appreciates evidence-based decision making, then it means that I may not be able to proceed with the high-quality data needed to get the task done.'

Despite these challenges, Dacia has successfully led and participated in innovative research and discussions, from which she has produced influential publications, and undeniably stimulated a paradigm shift regarding access, inclusion, and opportunity for socially excluded groups in society.

Moreover, she spoke proudly of how she has drawn from some of the skills honed during her PhD studies to break boundaries and realise development outcomes in her community.

‘I would say some of the soft skills developed during my PhD studies would be coordinating, negotiating, and forging partnerships for sustainable development. Much of what I do involves being able to negotiate with different persons at various levels and being able to identify opportunities and seizing those opportunities. The Commonwealth Scholarship has significantly fostered and supported these positive interactions.’

Outside her research activities, Dacia has established the Mayeltha and Gwendolyn Dwyer Foundation, which aims to increase access to secondary education for children in difficult circumstances, including orphans, children living in troubled communities and children of deported migrants.

‘A PhD is a milestone that I could not have achieved at a fairly young age without financial support. The scholarship has enabled me to contribute to realisation of the United Nations 2030 agenda and the CSC Development theme of access, inclusion, and opportunity through developing my monitoring and evaluation skills which are now used to support the measurement of sustainable development results in the Eastern Caribbean region and beyond. This is one of the most significant impacts of the intervention of the CSC in my life.’

She also continues to be an engaged and active member of her local Commonwealth Alumni group, and she explained the value of establishing networks while on Scholarship and upon returning home as follows:

‘One of the things that will help to offset the negative effects of what might seem to be a cultural shock [while on scholarship] is to surround yourself with other Commonwealth Scholars in your community who can provide you with some support. Ensure that you join the networks and benefit from the knowledge sharing within those various networks. It is also helpful to surround yourself with persons of like minds [directly related to your field of study] upon returning home, because they can provide the mentorship needed.’

Through her teaching, research and advocacy work, the Commonwealth Alumnus, Dacia is undoubtedly making a huge contribution towards realising the developmental goals of her country, and the Caribbean region.

#### More About Dr Dacia Leslie's work

<https://uwi.edu/salises-mona/proj/witness-care-project>

<https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20201102/jcan-justice-system-inching-closer-first-world-standards>

<https://caricom.org/documents/creating-a-culture-of-peace-the-caribbean-youth-advocacy-action-plan-agenda-on-violence-prevention/>

<https://www.caribbeanstudiesassociation.org/gender-dimensions-of-violence-prevention/>

<http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/commentary/20201215/dacia-leslie-correctional-reform-beyond-coronavirus-pandemic>

<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007%2F978-3-030-12907-1>

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