



PERMANENT MISSION OF
JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Statement

by

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Permanent Representative of Jamaica**

At the

**Commemorative High-Level Plenary Meeting Devoted
to the Follow-up to the Outcome of the Special Session on Children**

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Final Text

Mr. President,

We wish to align ourselves with the statement by the distinguished representative of the Bahamas on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and in so doing, Jamaica joins our sister countries in reaffirming the region's commitment to implementing the *World Fit For Children* (WFFC) Declaration and Plan of Action adopted five years ago at the United Nations Special Session on Children. As a CARICOM State, Jamaica must play her part in advancing the welfare of the children of the region by continuing on the path to creating a protective environment for them.

Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child by the Jamaican Government in 1991 was a first major step that signalled this resolve. The Government of Jamaica (GOJ) stands firm by our commitment to improve the lives of the nation's children, who account for over thirty-seven percent (37.1%) of the population.

Today, sixteen years after becoming a signatory to the Convention and five years after accepting the WFFC, our Government remains steadfast in our mission to vastly improve the situation of the children of Jamaica.

We have committed ourselves to continue building on the ground work laid in such areas as education transformation, early childhood development, child protection, health care and child justice.

Mr. President,

The Government of Jamaica understands that childhood means more than just a time between birth and the attainment of adulthood. It refers to the state and condition of life and the quality of those years. To this end, the Government has not reneged on its commitment to deliver free education up to the secondary level and there is certainly no intention to reverse the previous commitment to provide free health care for all children.

We recognize that sustained change and the creation of an environment fit for children must be driven by strong political will and competent social actors. Indeed, even as we struggle with the virulent challenges of crime and violence, HIV/AIDS and decay in family values, the Government of Jamaica has not wavered in our commitment to be the lead agent of change. At the same time, our Government has no reservations about actively pursuing and forging strategic partnerships which have not only facilitated broad based consultation with the citizenry, including children, but have also been critical to human resources capacity building, improving service delivery and data collection as well as advocacy. Our international development partners, including those within the United Nations system in particular UNICEF, are critical stakeholders

in this regard and we take this opportunity to once again thank them sincerely for their unwavering support.

Mr. President,

So intertwined are the issues affecting our children that they cannot be tackled in isolation from each other. Recognition of this fact, has led us to developing initiatives that employ a multi-faceted and multi-sectoral approach. The Education Transformation initiative in Jamaica, for example, employs more than one strategy. In order to effectively raise the standard of education and the quality of examination passes, the Safe Schools Programme, was introduced to combat the issue of violence in the classroom through the dispatch of specially trained lawmen as school resource officers in institutions identified as being at risk.

Again, improving education comes with institutional strengthening and capacity building. Therefore, the Government of Jamaica is implementing initiatives to enhance key areas such as curriculum development and use, reading skills, as well as education leadership and school management, particularly at the early childhood level. Indeed, we are justly proud that the Early Childhood Commission in Jamaica was chosen as the lead partner by the Bernard Van Leer Foundation of the Netherlands to execute a project focussed on the dissemination and full implementation of the Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment 7 - Implementing child rights in early childhood. Lessons learned from this initiative will be utilized worldwide to ensure that our very young children are not left behind.

Mr. President,

The success of our education transformation initiative also hinges on a crucial factor further upstream - that is, effective parenting. Currently, our Government is moving swiftly to establish the country's first parenting commission, the executor of a National Parenting Policy being developed by a multi-agency committee, spearheaded by the Ministry of Education.

At the same time, the Early Childhood Commission is making significant progress, with the roll-out of a critical phase in the regulation of early childhood institutions. The Commission is now registering these institutions, which must be in compliance with the standards and regulations of the Early Childhood Act.

Mr President,

The inter-play of factors is such that no meaningful discussion on child development can preclude the matter of child protection. Children, after all,

become at risk when one or more of their rights are being violated or are being eroded by some of the very factors that we are seeking to correct. When a child becomes at risk, the Government of Jamaica must be in a position to ensure that the programmes and services offered to that child counter the effects of abuse, neglect, abandonment and exploitation.

A major priority of this Government is to ensure the transformation of child care and protection services in Jamaica. This entails, *inter alia* transformation from a system characterized by reliance on the old and traditional "child rescue" model, to a new approach built on the family support model, with primary prevention taking centre stage.

The Child Development Agency, the arm of Government that has responsibility for providing a stable and nurturing living environment for children in need of care and is forging ahead with this new approach, which is aimed at preventing children from entering the traditional residential child care system by maintaining them in families or in a family-oriented environment.

The Agency's programming is geared toward family life and the application of a child-centric approach to addressing their issues. Child participation, therefore, ranks high on the Government's list of priorities, featuring prominently in the Jamaican Justice System Reform, a process which relies heavily on civil participation.

The Government of Jamaica is also embarking on early intervention and preventive work with families and communities upon whom such factors as illness, social exclusion, poverty and violence have had a negative impact on their ability to sustain healthy families.

Considering the relatively high exposure of children to violence in their communities and the link between such exposure and later aggressive behaviour, our government considers it imperative for swift action to be undertaken to strengthen supportive environments in the home, at school and in communities that can build resilience and promote better outcomes for them.

Mr President,

When we consider those under the age of 18, two other very special cohorts come to mind. These are our adolescents and our youth. By virtue of developmental factors alone these age groups are amongst the most vulnerable of our population. We are tackling their unique challenges on several fronts, all of which are dedicated to enhancing life chances through improving knowledge, skills and attitudes. Flagship initiatives in this regard include our Youth Information Centres, the National Youth Service, Child and Youth Justice

Reform Programme and a healthy lifestyles project - JA-Style being implemented in partnership with US A.I.D. Integral to all these endeavours is the active and direct participation of children and youth themselves at every level and stage of programme development - design, implementation and evaluation.

Mr. President,

Important groundwork has already been laid, but we are well aware that a long road leading to the final destination - a Jamaica truly fit for children, remains to be traversed. The Government of Jamaica is intent on arriving at an overarching, integrated and coherent framework for achievement of Millennium Development Goals and WFFC obligations through the building of an inclusive and accessible social protection/welfare system; formal training for families that need assistance in building their capacity and skills in communication and coping strategies; quality alternative care services; and social investment for children.

We remain unequivocal and steadfast in our commitment to complete this journey, within the time frames agreed upon. As a country, we are blessed with many talents and resources that render us well known and highly sought after internationally. It is only fitting that our greatest treasure - our children, should have their rightful share of this bounty.

Thank you.