



**PERMANENT MISSION OF JAMAICA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

PRESENTATION BY

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ON

**"EFFORTS TO IMPROVE CHILD PROTECTION AND
THE WELFARE OF CHILDREN IN JAMAICA"**

AT THE SIDE EVENT

**WORKING TOGETHER TO ELIMINATE ABUSE AND PROMOTE THE
PROTECTION OF CHILDREN**

ON THE OCCASION OF

**THE 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

**20TH NOVEMBER 2014
UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to be participating in this side event on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Jamaica has always been an ardent supporter of the Convention and a staunch advocate for children. I thank Ambassador Al-Mouallimi of Saudi Arabia for taking this initiative and welcome the partnership with Italy and Family Watch International for this event.

I will focus today, primarily on efforts that Jamaica has undertaken in recent years to improve child protection and the welfare of children. We have long been taking steps to ensure compliance with obligations under the Convention and do recognize that in time past, there were a number of shortcomings. The Government of Jamaica has, however, stepped up efforts to uphold and promote the rights of children, with a special focus on bettering their development outcomes through enhancing protection from violence, improving early childhood education, and promoting good health and social wellbeing.

Time does not permit a thorough recounting of these measures and their outcomes so allow me to focus on a few, in hopes that sharing these examples and experiences will be of benefit to us in our discussions.

Institutions Established

Jamaica has established a number of child focused institutions to guide and implement the policies related to children. These include:

The Child Development Agency which is an Executive Agency under the Ministry of Youth and Culture with a mandate to provide a safe and nurturing living environment for children who are in need of care and protection;

The Office of the Children's Advocate – an independent office established by Parliament to protect and enforce the rights of all children in Jamaica. The Children's Advocate, *inter alia*:

- Issues guidance on best practice in relation to any matter concerning the rights or best interests of children;
- Conducts investigations against anyone or any entity that is alleged to have breached a child's rights, or operated in a manner that is harmful or not in keeping with a child's best interest. This includes, but is not limited to relevant (government) authorities and may even result in the OCA having concurrent jurisdiction with the police;

- Monitors and regulates the quality and the standard of care that is provided to children by agents of the State and holds them accountable where appropriate; and
- provides legal representation for children who are in need of such assistance in any situation necessary – for example, in the criminal or civil court(s), at disciplining proceedings in educational institutions or other tribunals, and custody proceedings.

The Office of the Children’s Registry (OCR) – has been established as the repository for all statistical information related to incidents of child abuse; the OCR’s main role is to receive reports of children who have been, are being or are likely to be abandoned, neglected, physically or sexually ill-treated, or are otherwise in need of care and protection. It is the office which oversees Jamaica’s missing children alert system called Ananda Alert.

The Early Childhood Commission (ECC) – the ECC is the lead entity for developing and monitoring the implementation of early childhood development plans and programmes. The ECC also serves as the regulator for all early childhood institutions.

The list goes on. The point I am illustrating is that Jamaica has placed a great emphasis on institutional infrastructure to enable the promotion and protection of the welfare of children. Without an adequate infrastructure dedicated to this, there is a great risk that obligations may fall through the cracks, to the detriment of children.

Policy Updates

Another area where we have sought to make advances for the promotion and protection of the rights of children is in the development and updating of policies and legislation. Some of the updates and revisions sought to bring Jamaica into compliance with its obligations under the CRC. A few of note are:

- The Child Care and Protection Act (2004) – this was a landmark piece of legislation that sets universal standards for the care and treatment of all children; the Act while a signal piece of legislation, is under review to address issues such as corporal punishment, the label of ‘uncontrollable’ behaviour, and the role and responsibility of parents;
- The Child Pornography Prevention Act (2009) – creates strict guidelines to address sexual exploitation of children;
- The National Youth Policy – addressing education, healthcare, empowerment and participation of youth;
- The National Plan of Action on Child Justice, and the National Diversion Policy – are geared at dealing with children who come into conflict with the law;

- The National Policy for Reintegration of School-Aged Mothers into the Formal School System – promulgated in 2013, it is geared at mandatory reintegration of school-aged mothers into the formal school system to ensure that girls are not denied opportunities of empowerment and self-sufficiency; thus minimizing the risk of possibly falling victim to other vulnerabilities such as trafficking, prostitution, or sexual abuse.

These important measures are among the many that have been taken, some in very recent years, to ensure that Jamaica is advancing and protecting the interests of children.

Challenges

We have not completed the journey but we have made strides. The issue of children in state care and addressing the phenomenon of street and missing children continue to occupy the attention of my country. A number of the challenges that remain are related to cultural norms and practices, weakened family structures and the attendant problems associated with parenting skills, exposure to violence and challenging socio-economic conditions.

Statistics show, for example, that between 2009 and 2011, 73% of persons reported missing were children; over the same period, 29% of the reports of child abuse were in relation to sexual violence against a child, while 13.4% of children reported having worked on the streets.

Jamaica is implementing strategies and policies in an effort to address and surmount these challenges, including through partnerships with relevant agencies and other stakeholders.

Collaboration

Jamaica, therefore, values opportunities for exchange of views and experiences and knowledge sharing. We have engaged in dialogue with the Committee on the Rights of the Child and have recently submitted our Third and Fourth Periodic Reports to the Committee in preparation for its upcoming consideration of Jamaica's reports at its 68th Session next year.

Jamaica was also pleased to host the UN Sub-regional meeting on Violence Against Children in 2012 which sought to explore the progress being made by CARICOM Members States against the recommendations outlined in the 2006 study on Violence against Children. This year, in collaboration with the SRSB on Violence Against Children, Jamaica hosted the first *Cross-regional meeting on the prevention and elimination of violence against children* which saw the participation of representatives of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), MERCOSUR, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, the Council of Europe, the European Union, the

Council of the Baltic Sea States, the League of Arab States and the Latin-American and Caribbean Movement for Children (MMILAC).

I am convinced that our discussions on this auspicious occasion will likewise contribute to the building of knowledge and partnerships in the area of children's rights. My delegation, indeed Jamaica, emphatically reiterates its commitment to be an ardent defender and promoter of the rights of the child.

Thank you.