



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

**OPENING REMARKS BY**

**HIS EXCELLENCY E. COURTENAY RATTRAY  
AMBASSADOR/PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE  
OF JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

**in Observance of World Interfaith Harmony Week  
Building Bridges Across Boundaries  
6th February 2019  
Conference Room 4, UNHQ, New York**

Mr. Chairman  
Excellencies  
Colleagues  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be here today at this important event to mark the 2019 World Interfaith Harmony Week. The Permanent Mission of Jamaica is pleased to participate in this commemorative event and congratulates the organizers on their commitment to including religious and faith-based groups in the sustainable development process.

World Interfaith Harmony Week is more than a celebration; it is a manifestation of the shared values of coexistence, fraternity and human understanding. The recognition of interfaith dialogue is an important condition for sustainable peace and development. As such, it is our duty and responsibility to ensure that interfaith harmony is mainstreamed in the implementation of each and every goal of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Every religion, every country, and every culture has something positive to contribute to the promotion of social harmony and human values, and to the achievement of the 17 SDGs.

As such, I anticipate that the discussions will facilitate the sharing of knowledge on the practical application of the teachings of the respective faiths in addressing specific SDGs, including those related to good health and well-being (SDG 3), gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls (SDG5), reduced inequalities (SDG 10) and sustainable, inclusive, safe and resilient cities and communities (SDG 11).

We are all acutely aware of the critical role that faith and religion play in safeguarding peace, security and stability. These are necessary factors in fostering sustainable societies. The founding document of UNESCO highlights the fact that *“since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”*.

I cannot overstate, therefore, the significance of the role played by religious leaders in fostering, within the communities they serve, the principles, values and morals that are the vital underpinnings for creating sustainable societies. Their activities seek to safeguard the minds and souls of men, women boys and girls, not only by addressing their physical needs, but also ensuring they find spiritual fulfilment. In this respect, I commend the efforts of all religious leaders who are with us this evening and wish you continued success.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is an interrelated link between spiritual fulfilment and physical fulfilment. In a context of increasing competition over scarce resources in some parts of the world, a worrisome slowdown in the decline of global extreme poverty, increased inequality almost everywhere across the world, and growing conflicts, it is critical to ensure that faith and religion do not themselves become tools for division, exclusion and the promotion of extremist views, ideologies and discrimination. Therefore, I am pleased to note that this evening’s event seeks to address the ways in which interfaith collaboration can achieve the ambitious 2030 Agenda, as well as ensure peaceful and harmonious societies.

The 2030 Agenda is an occasion to reinforce a stronger sense of commitment between religious leaders, NGOS, and the United Nations. Finding common ground to implement sustainable development goals will allow us to move towards a greater sense of engagement for all and by all.

I encourage you to continue your good work, which compliments efforts being led by other critical stakeholders such as the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), and to maintain your commitment to securing a future of peace, harmony and sustainable development for all humanity.

It is my hope also that following these discussions you will be inspired by the Call to Action that will be issued at the end of this, “***Empowered by Faith, Stronger Together***”.

I thank you and wish you an informative, stimulating and successful evening of discussion and musical entertainment.

*February 2019*