

**Speaking Notes for the Honourable Robert Nesta Morgan
Minister of State
Ministry of Education, Youth and Information**

Keynote Address

**At the High-Level Community Session
Group of Friends (GoF) on Children and Sustainable Development Goals
Global Forum for Children and Youth (CY21)**

December 8, 2021 — 7 AM

Salutations

- Henrietta H. Fore, Executive Director, UNICEF
- His Excellency Mr. Xavier Bettel, Prime Minister of Luxembourg and Co-chair
- Her Excellency Ms. Eleonora Lilova, Chairperson of the State Agency for Child Protection of Bulgaria and Co-chair
- All Group of Friends (GoF) Members
- Moderators — Solomei from the USA and Yassin from the UAE
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning.

I am pleased to participate in today's High Level Community Session in the capacity of co-chair of the Group of Friends (GoF) on Jamaica's behalf and I join my fellow co-chairs, His Excellency Xavier Bettel — Prime Minister of Luxembourg and Her Excellency Eleonora Lilova — Chairperson of the State Agency for Child Protection of Bulgaria, in welcoming to this meeting the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), member states of the Group of Friends (GoF), non-member states and other stakeholders — who, alike, support the mission to meet the urgent needs of children and advance their rights.

I would like to express my appreciation to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and in particular, the Executive Director — Henrietta Fore and her team as well as the Governments of Botswana and Sweden, for the convening of the inaugural Global Forum for Children and Youth (CY21) and for making it possible for the Group of Friends (GoF) on Children and Sustainable Development Goals to host its first High-Level Community Session.

This extraordinary meeting is a testament to the growing commitment of the Group of Friends (GoF) to ensure that the needs and rights of children are promoted in tandem with each of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and toward realizing Agenda 2030.

I am here before you today to highlight Jamaica's key commitments in the interest of promoting and protecting the rights of children commensurate with the Sustainable Development Goals defined by '*The World of the Child*', '*The World Around the Child*' and '*The World at Large*'.

The World of the Child — Ending Violence Against Children, Child Rights in the Digital Age, Child and Youth Participation

Ending Violence Against Children

The severity and frequency of violence against children in Jamaica, and the rest of the world, is alarming. The National Plan of Action for an Integrated Response to Children and Violence (NPACV) was established in commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and International Child Abuse Prevention Day.

A total of 12 laws and 5 policy instruments are outlined in the plan to undergo reform.

The reform of the Child Care and Protection Act is one such initiative. Established in 2004, it is intended to promote the best interests, safety and well-being of Jamaican children. However, in its current state, it fails to address new and emerging issues. As such, the Legislative Committee for the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information in collaboration with other stakeholders have made substantial efforts for the review of the act.

Section 24 will be repealed, This speaks to the authority of the Judiciary to arbitrarily place children in correctional facilities.

Another initiative is the review of the Sexual Offences Act. The recommendations provide for the creation of the offence of predatory sexual assault and its incorporation into relevant and existing legislation for increased protection of Jamaica's most vulnerable people

The launch and activation of the 211 Helpline is a significant step in the right direction. First of its kind in Jamaica, it is a 24 hour hotline manned by adequately trained agents, for the confidential and anonymous reporting of child abuse and neglect at no cost to citizens. With an easy to remember number, children are also equipped to make reports on their own.

Government of Jamaica intends to introduce legislation to prohibit the use of corporal punishment in all settings — and its ineffectiveness as a means of discipline is a stance we are resolute in. In fact, within its residential state care framework,

Child Rights in the Digital Age

The establishment of a National Child Online Protection Committee (NCOPC) that is tasked to create a National Child Online Protection Strategy (NCOPS), and monitor the implementation of the strategy, is intended to mitigate that. The committee will commence its work following Cabinet of Jamaica's approval regarding its establishment and is expected to produce the National Child Online Protection Strategy (NCOPS) in 9 months and thereafter monitor the implementation of the strategy.

Child and Youth Participation

The inclusion of children, and youth at large, in the framework for governance is valued by the Government of Jamaica. Our children account for over 33% of the total population and our youth represent the largest subset of our population in Jamaica. A number of youth organizations, such as the National Youth Advisory Council of Jamaica (NYACJ), the Jamaica Youth Ambassadors Programme (JAYAP), the National Youth Council of Jamaica (NYCJ), the Jamaica Union of Tertiary Students (JUTS), the National Secondary Students' Council (NSSC) and the Jamaica Prefects' Association (JPA), are representative of the Government of Jamaica's commitment to ensure that our young people are integrated in governance. Each of these organizations are student-led and or youth-led, each with their own distinct function, but all with the goal of ensuring their voices are heard and taken into consideration for what really matters.

The World Around the Child — Education (Remediating Pandemic Learning Loss), COVID-19

One of the foremost priorities of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information is Bridging the Digital Divide within the education sector. We are aware that the transition to a predominantly virtual learning environment is difficult for a great many considering the uneven playing field.

Through various efforts such as the 'One Laptop per Child' initiative, the 'Own Your Own Device' programme and multiple donations by public and private entities and individuals, in excess of 125,000 tablets and laptops have been distributed to both students and teachers as well as other equipment such as projectors, screens with tripods and mobile charging stations.

To supplement the Community Mobile Intervention, we will train and deploy Intervention Officers to work with schools to go 'Yard-to-Yard' in every community, to identify those students we have not been able to reach.

The face-to-face modality remains the ultimate means of combating the learning loss taking place as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the phased resumption of face-to-face classes has started, beginning with a total of 376 out of 759 primary schools being opened, as of November 8, 2021.

To date, almost 100,000 students aged 12 years and older have received, at least, the 1st dose of the Pfizer vaccine.

The World at Large — Climate Change

Jamaica is located in the region that comprises the second most disaster prone region in the world. We, and the Caribbean at large, continue to be hard hit by natural hazards such as droughts, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes and volcanoes that will only grow more frequent and intense, last longer and affect more people due to human-induced climate change. This reality is commonplace and is something we must now accept as characteristic to us.

Some of the achievements include:

- 14 forestry orders.
- The declaration of the proposed Cockpit Country boundaries and the declaration of the Black River Morass area that now moves Jamaica's protected areas to exceed 30% of the land mass which, interestingly enough, doubles the target of 15% set by the United Nations.
- The ban on some single use plastic items.
- Completion of the Parish Development Orders.
- The significant increases in capacity and connection to proper sewage systems.
- The tabling and enacting of a Modern Biodiversity policy.
- Converting Goat Island to a Nature Reserve.
- The ongoing project to plant in excess of 3 million trees and restore damaged mangrove forests.

The progress has been significant in Jamaica for the promotion and protection of the rights of children and youth over the years with linkages to the sustainable development goals (SDGs), such as goals 3, 4, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17, among others — and the realization of Agenda 2030. However, there is still a great deal of work to be done to ensure our children's most urgent needs are met and their most basic rights are advanced. I welcome the commitments and good practices

disseminated here today by my fellow participants and I look forward to the possible synergies to be born out of this extraordinary meeting.

Thank you.