



MESSAGE
by
Senator the Honourable Kamina Johnson Smith
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade
On
INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DAY
10th December 2018

Today, Jamaica joins the international community in celebrating Human Rights Day, as well as the Seventieth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). In that regard, we fully support the call to *#standup4humanrights*.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948, is a seminal document, enshrining the fundamental rights and freedoms to which all human beings are entitled. Over the last seven decades, its provisions have come to constitute a series of international norms governing the manner in which States treat their citizens and other persons within their national territories. The UDHR has also influenced the development of a number of human rights instruments and institutions vested with safeguarding hard-won rights and freedoms and gave birth to the existing consolidated international human rights architecture, which continues to evolve.

Jamaicans should be proud of the key role that our country played in shaping this architecture. Even before independence, Jamaica was punching far above its weight and was among the first countries to impose trade sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa for its racist policies and practices. As an independent country, Jamaica's first global initiative was to convince a generally reluctant international community to give prominence to human rights issues, particularly in light of pervasive concerns about the treatment of colonial peoples. Former Prime Minister, the Most Honourable Hugh Shearer,

proposed the designation of 1968 as the International Year for Human Rights, as well as for an international conference on human rights, both of which were accepted by the United Nations. Jamaica's credentials as a champion for human rights in multilateral fora were also burnished by our contribution to advancing discussions on the two major international human rights covenants, as well as the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Over the years, Jamaica has stayed true to the legacy of our forbearers in actively supporting multilateral and regional efforts to promote human rights and democracy, cognisant of their inextricable link to the attainment of peace and development. Consequently, Jamaica has ratified the majority of the core international human rights treaties, including those seeking to protect groups such as women, children and persons with disabilities. We have also continued to support initiatives within organisations such as the United Nations, Commonwealth and Organisation of American States to strengthen human rights protections across the globe.

The commemoration of the Seventieth Anniversary of the UDHR presents an opportunity for reflection, for us as a nation, as well as for the international community, particularly in the face of current challenges to multilateralism and the global human rights architecture. The Government of Jamaica remains committed to ensuring that the fundamental rights and freedoms of every single Jamaican are fully protected and continues to make every effort to strengthen human rights protection locally. Among the priority areas for Government action is combating violence against women and children.

In keeping with our designation as a Pathfinder Country for the Global Partnership to end Violence against Children, we will very shortly formally launch the National Plan of Action for an Integrated Response to End Violence against Children (NPACV) and the associated Roadmap. Work also continues apace to amend the Child Care and Protection Act to improve the protection of the rights of children.

The Government also continues to work on the legislative review of the Sexual Offences Act; Offences Against the Person Act; and Domestic Violence Act, and is committed to bringing the sexual harassment bill before Parliament, which will serve to strengthen the legislative framework for combating violence against women, and to better protect our children, women and girls and other vulnerable members of society.

These are but some of the initiatives that are ongoing and that are firmly entrenched in our Vision 2030 National Development Plan and are closely aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As we celebrate International Human Rights Day and the Seventieth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Government renew sits commitment to

promoting and protecting the fundamental rights and freedoms of all its citizens, as enshrined in our Constitution. We invite all Jamaicans to play their part in advocating for and strengthening the freedoms and rights we all hold so dear and to stand up for human rights, not solely today but every day!