

**Remarks by  
H.E. Courtenay Rattray  
Permanent Representative of Jamaica to the UN  
IPI Seminar: How the Global South Shaped the International Human Rights System  
13 July 2016**

Excellences,  
Colleagues,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I begin with words that resound in the heart and mind of every Jamaican:

*Before God and all mankind,  
I pledge the love and loyalty of my heart, the wisdom and courage of my mind,  
the strength and vigour of my body in the service of my fellow citizens;  
I promise to stand up for justice, brotherhood and peace, to work diligently and  
creatively, to think generously and honestly, so that Jamaica may, under God,  
increase in beauty, fellowship and prosperity, and play her part in advancing the  
welfare of the whole human race.*

These ladies and gentlemen are the words of Jamaica's national pledge. They instill in us a sense of duty to each other and to humanity, an understanding of what is just and right and a belief in the interconnectedness of every human.

At the same time, it reflects that the very concepts that have underpinned Jamaica's foreign policy philosophy and activism, particularly in the multilateral arena here at the United Nations. As a young state in 1962, and a new member of the United Nations, Jamaica was concerned that the world lagged far behind in the field of human rights and that up to that point the promotion of human rights has not been accorded attention and status it deserved within the United Nations system. Jamaica was convinced that, as enshrined in the Charter, the UN could and should serve as the instrument for bringing about the peaceful solution of all human rights problems.

At the time of Jamaica's independence, coming out of our own post-slavery and colonial history, we faced specific challenges of identity, inclusiveness and inequality. At the same time however, we brought a particular perspective about the importance of giving legal and practical effect to the concepts enshrined in the nascent human rights system, in particular those in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the UN Charter. One must recall that while these are now considered non-derogable foundational documents, fifty to sixty years ago universal adherence and the 'reverence' now paid to human rights documents simply did not exist. The world was still struggling to conclude the major international human rights conventions. So it was remarkable that a small, newly independent country like Jamaica would

come on the world stage determined to move the needle, so to speak, in relation to the advancement of international human rights.

Let me thank and congratulate Dr. Steven Jensen on the publication of his eye-opening, well-researched and most compelling book, the thesis of which forms the basis of our discussions this afternoon. It is remarkable how, through dint of detailed research into the backroom processes and documentation of the multiple strands of action that occurred in that era, he has been able to bring a new and enlightening narrative to a story that has too often, as he said, been told solely from a developed country perspective. His book demonstrates that sometimes events we believe may have originated in one locale may in fact have had its origins and growth elsewhere. Who would have thought that the global south, often criticized for taking anti-human rights stances, has in fact played a pivotal role in pressing the developed world to accept universal human rights as a matter deserving of full and proper international treatment and attention?

I am proud of the work my own country did during that time. When our late Prime Minister, Hugh Shearer delivered Jamaica's maiden address to the UN General Assembly in October 1962, weeks after our independence in August and mere days after Jamaica's admission as a member state, he called for the year 1968 to be declared the International Year of Human Rights. The work to make this happen became the committed task of my earliest predecessor Sir Egerton Richardson. By all accounts, including that of Dr. Jensen, Sir Egerton skillfully employed every diplomatic tool in his repertoire to successfully bring about a meaningful Tehran Conference and International Year, which represented a watershed moment in taking forward the international human rights agenda.

At the time, Jamaica was working towards the creation of a Human Rights Council to replace the Commission on Human Rights. This year we celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the HRC. The international human rights conventions were en route to becoming toothless with unaccountable states parties, Sir Egerton pressed for the momentum leading up to the international year to support moves for follow-up and evaluation mechanisms. The human rights treaty body system is now well established and fully involved in safeguarding the enjoyment of human rights. We are now also celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the adoption of the ICCPR and the ICESCR. What a long way we have come. The elaborate and robust international human rights legal and policy framework continues to be strengthened and improved.

At the time, Jamaica was working towards the creation of a Human Rights Council to replace the Commission on Human Rights. This year we celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the HRC. The international human rights conventions were en route to becoming toothless with unaccountable states parties. Sir Egerton therefore made a case for harnessing the momentum surrounding the International Year to secure support for a practical follow-up and evaluation mechanism as a component of the international human rights conventions. The human rights treaty body system is now well established and fully involved in safeguarding the enjoyment of human rights. We are now celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the adoption of the International

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). What a long way we have come. The elaborate and robust international human rights legal and policy framework continues to be strengthened and improved.

At the same time, the effective implementation of human rights obligations at the national level has evolved well. In Jamaica, for example, we pursued the attainment of “equal rights and justice”, as sung about by the late Peter Tosh by pushing for women’s rights passing such legislation as maternity leave with pay and equal pay for equal work at a time when it was not even popular to do so. We have been amended the constitution to eliminate all forms of discrimination and to guarantee equal treatment before the law. We have been advancing policy and legislative initiatives to realize economic and social rights, alongside civil and political rights. We advocate for the rights of children, the elderly and the disabled and to achieve the right to good health, decent employment, education, and to food. We fully defend the right to development with the belief that development is that goal which encapsulates the fulfillment of human dignity.

Achieving sustainable development and the full realization of international human rights therefore go hand in hand; they are part and parcel of the complete package, which we here at the United Nations are charged with promoting and guaranteeing for our peoples. It is a reaffirmation that every Member State has the potential to bring something of value to our joint efforts to do so. As we face our contemporary challenges therefore, it falls to us to pick up the mantle of those who went before, to work past differences, to forge agreement and devise to effective solutions.

In conclusion therefore, let me thank the IPI and Denmark for organizing this timely and inspiring seminar. Thank you to Dr. Jensen for your enlightening research and publication. And thank you ladies and gentlemen for your very kind attention.

