

REMARKS BY DOUGLAS ORANE
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Greetings

All of you children are looking very beautiful this morning, with your shining faces and immaculate uniforms. You look well-cared for, bright and intelligent.

Who gets you ready for school in the mornings? Who prepares your clothes for school? Who gets you breakfast and takes you to school? When you get to school how do you learn your lessons? How do you learn new things every day?

Of course, your parents and guardians, perhaps an aunt or older sister or brother, help you to get ready for school. They see to it that you have breakfast and either take you on the bus, walk or drive you to school. They make sure you have lunch or money to buy lunch and after school somebody will pick up the younger ones of you from school.

At school your teachers take over and they teach you to read and write and guide you in acquiring the knowledge you need, in keeping with your age and interests.

This is exactly the way it should be; adults taking care of children. It is the responsibility of the adults in society to protect and nurture the young in society so that they will grow up to be positive, well educated, healthy citizens capable of taking their place in society.

Children require a great deal of care from their parents before they are ready to fend for themselves and that is what we mean by the theme of 2011 Child month ***Our World, Their Future, Our Responsibility***.

While the love and protection of one's family should be the norm, unfortunately, it is not and there are millions of children all over the world who, this morning, are sick, hungry, unclothed, unschooled, at work on the streets and in the fields, some are even fighting in wars.

But, there is no need to go beyond the shores of Jamaica to find children who are in need of care and protection or whose futures are in jeopardy. We see them on our streets every day. Many, instead of being in school, are at stoplights trying to earn a few dollars by cleaning windshields. Some are begging. Many have to take care of

their younger brothers and sisters and so cannot go to school. Many young boys are involved in gangs.

Since the beginning of this year we have heard of the tragic deaths of several young children - twin girls burnt to death, a two-year-old mauled by dogs. These tragedies demonstrate a lack of parenting skills and due care. What it shows, overall, is that as a nation we are not taking care of our children as we should.

Jamaica is one of the countries that signed a document called the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This document spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere should have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life. It sets standards in health care; education; and legal, civil and social services.

Jamaica, in keeping with its participation in this Convention updated laws that related to the protection of the nation's children and in 2004 passed the Child Care and Protection Act. The government has also entrusted various agencies with the care of those children whose parents are unable to care for them. The Child Development Agency, the Children's Advocate and other such officers and public sector organisations make a valiant effort, but cannot do it by themselves.

The traditional stalwarts, such as the church, voluntary organisations and the community at large must continue to do what they can.

This year the GraceKennedy Foundation Lecture shared with Jamaica the strategies that our company has pursued for the last three decades in our attempts to build a bridge of care and understanding with the inner city communities that adjoin our major locations. We are particularly proud of the work we have done in downtown Kingston by assisting hundreds of young people to build outstanding lives, through financial assistance but, more importantly, through the mentorship and guidance that staff members provide. We invite representatives of Corporate Jamaica to speak with our Grace & Staff Community Development Foundation for advice on how they can do the same.

When a child is abused in any way, is hungry or discriminated against, dies as a result of neglect, all Jamaicans are to be held accountable. As a nation we must become more vigilant about the circumstances of our children, not only those in our homes but those in our community.

We must return to those days when all children were regarded as the wards of all members of a community and we took care of each others' children; the times when those who could afford to ensured that the less well off had food and clothing. We must return to taking care of children on the streets. We must be aware of our neighbours' emotional well being and find creative ways of helping them to get through the rough times. When the situation warrants it, we must step in and take swift action for the protection of our children.

Every generation stands on the shoulders of the previous generation. Each generation benefits from the advances of the one before and also suffers as a result of any neglect.

We must ensure that our generation lays the foundation for a better future for Jamaica's children. We must protect our environment so they, too, can enjoy the beauty of the island. We must provide opportunities for education so that they can realise their full potential. We must provide the nutrition, health care and medical services they need to grow up into strong, healthy citizens. We must encourage a social environment that will promote positive moral standards.

I will share with you something that has been a great concern of mine and many other well-thinking Jamaicans and that is the vulgarity and lewdness to which our children are exposed in the public sphere. One such area is the inappropriate music played on some of the buses on which our children travel.

A recent telephone call from a member of Jamaicans for Justice, Joy Fraser, in Montego Bay brought this issue again to my attention. She complained passionately and bitterly of the music that regularly assaulted the ears of the children of Montego Bay in some of the buses on which they travel.

Many demands have been made to deal with this situation and in response the Transport Authority has instituted measures by which members of the public can assist them to manage this problem. This is what you can do. There is a toll free number that you can call to lodge your complaint. That number is in the telephone directory but I will share it with you now, it is 1-888-991-5687. When you call, you will need to provide the vehicle's registration number, any markings on the vehicle that makes it easily identifiable, if possible, the badge numbers for the conductor and the driver, the route the vehicle plies and the time and date on which you experienced this situation. If you can get the names of the driver and conductor, that would also help. It is also possible to share this information by emailing customerservice@ta.org.ja.

The Transport Authority has been making a valiant effort to keep public transportation safe and clean for our children. But they need the public's assistance to be able to do an effective job.

In addition, I want to congratulate radio personality Barry G who has decided to champion this cause and to do his part in stemming this unsuitable influence. We must protect and shield our children in every aspect of their lives.

Famous seventeenth-century English poet, essayist, historian and scholar, John Milton, stated, "The child shows the man, as the morning the day." It is our responsibility to ensure that Jamaica's children have the quality of childhood that will allow them to grow up to be adults who will make Jamaica proud and who will contribute to its continued development

It is my pleasure to launch Child Month 2011. I congratulate the members of the National Child Month Committee for the outstanding work they have done in implementing the programmes of Child Month and wish them God's blessings as they embark on Child Month 2011.