

Welcome Remarks by Mr. Douglas Orane  
Chairman/CEO, Gracekennedy Group  
Western Union I-PLEDGE Launch  
Friday, May 1, 2009 at the Hilton Kingston Hotel, 10:30 a.m.

Thank you.

I am very excited about the prospects of the Western Union I-Pledge programme, especially the focus on reading. The partnership between Western Union, the USAID and the NGO community to establish learning centres in select schools focusing on technology, numeracy and literacy, is also a wonderful initiative.

Ladies and gentlemen, all of this is happening at a time when we are facing challenges both at home and abroad. Instead of complaining we have to search for answers, and I believe that this I-Pledge programme is a step in the right direction.

Minister, I am glad you took the time to be here with us today because it is this type of private-public sector partnership which will help us to clear some of the many hurdles which face us.

This launch comes on the eve of Education Week and the celebration of Teachers' Day and Read Across Jamaica Day. Western Union, and Grace Kennedy are elated to be joining with the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders in the education sector to help in the improvement of our children at the primary school level.

In our Group, we make no apology for focusing on youth and community development, education and sports. We have invested significant sums in promoting excellence in sports at the annual ISSA boys and girls athletics championships because we believe in the potential of our young people.

Just imagine - all our individual gold medalists at the Beijing Olympics – Usain Bolt, Shelly-Ann Fraser, Melaine Walker, and Veronica Campbell-Brown, were all athletes at our local high school championships and they are now world beaters.

The potential of our youth is unlimited, given the right mix of circumstances and opportunities.

It is in this context that I see the viability of this I-Pledge Programme – an opportunity to give another group of young people a chance to excel and to maximize their potential.

Now is not the time to retreat in the face of the challenges. We must instead make a decided effort to think outside box in order to make the difference that is necessary.

I am pleased that we have expanded the scope of this programme from last year. It is essential that we place a premium on bringing our young people into a realm of excellence in education.

The focus of the education system must not only be on the basics – reading, writing and arithmetic, but there must be a similar emphasis on the softer skills of attitude, discipline, honesty, and integrity. We have to embrace these values in a much more fulsome way, if we are to make the kind of strides necessary to improve our competitiveness on the world stage.

Ladies and gentlemen, each day we are bombarded with new challenges, many of which are outside our scope of control. The global recession may be exacerbated by the concerns now emerging about the spread of the swine flu virus. This could have serious effects on global trade and commerce, and the travel and leisure industries. We have to be prepared to respond to emerging situations and keep our heads above the water.

Our pledge today is to stay committed to the youth of Jamaica, through this I pledge programme and many other initiatives. Our young people will have to develop the right suite of skills to stay afloat even in rocky times. And these times are indeed very rocky.

I want to wish all the schools, teachers, principals and students all the best for education week and all the celebrations and hope that it will provide us with a platform on which we can move forward with renewed hope.

Thank you.