

**Address by Hon. Douglas Orane, Chairman & CEO of
GraceKennedy Limited at the Annual Forum for International
Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (IDEVAW)
Thursday, November 25, 2010.**

Thank you for inviting me to share with you at this forum to mark International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

It is significant for me, as a man, to be asked to address you on this important day which pushes to the forefront of our consciousness the rights of women to be treated with dignity and respect. I think it is only fitting, because the elimination of violence against women must be a shared responsibility. For women to be spared the violence which concerns us all here today, men must understand and appreciate women's rights.

There are conscious men, I can assure you, who totally abhor the brutality practised against women all over the world and it is our duty to speak out and make our views known.

I am therefore grateful that I have the opportunity to speak with you on this very important issue which needs to be brought more sharply into public consciousness .

The matter of violence against women is of universal concern. This is evidenced by the fact that the United Nations General Assembly has seen it fit to designate, November 25 as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and has invited governments, international organizations and NGOs to organize activities to raise public awareness of the problem.

Women around the world are subject daily to violence in the form of rape, domestic violence and other forms of physical and emotional abuse, and the true scale and true nature of the issue is often hidden or denied. This is so in Cairo as it is in Colorado as it is in Kingston, Jamaica.

I note also that The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has launched a Trust Fund dedicated to eliminating violence against women, on the understanding that violence obliterates women's self-esteem, destroys their health, denies their human rights and undermines their full involvement in society .

I particularly applaud the approach of focusing on how to educate men on their role in solving the problem, not only in our society but

worldwide. I personally feel deeply emotional about this particular issue as I hold a strong belief that we men the physically stronger of the sexes, were placed on this earth to protect the vulnerable. When I reflect on the reality that the practice of violence against women is so universally widespread, it leads one to wonder why it happens.

In our “polite society”, men who beat their wives and girlfriends senseless are viewed as out-of-control barbarians, violent and virulent. Yet, until recently, polite society turned a blind eye to the plight of the beaten women and often continued to treat their attackers as though nothing was amiss.

As a man I ask myself ‘how could society, and in particular men, accept this type of behaviour against the people who bring our children into this world?’

But coming closer to home, we live in a society that in many ways accepts violence against women as the norm.

We see this in the physical and psychological abuse of women in relationships, and on any given day you will find such reports

carried in the media. We see this in the prevalence of rape and in particular gang rapes, particularly among our very young men, and this is a most troubling trend.

We see this in the now exposed accounts of men who have power and influence in inner city communities demanding that parents send their underage daughters to have sex with them.

We see this in our corporate offices and various workplaces, where women are harassed unless or until they accede to request for “favours”. We see this in the abuse of our underage girls in their homes, on the streets, on their way to and from school. We can no longer pretend that this violence against women is not practised at all levels of society.

We know of stories where boys in certain sectors of our society are initiated into “manhood” through the domestic helper, and she is expected to be a willing victim. In fact, this is a disgraceful practice of which our society has remained silent for far too long.

There are women who live in terror as they fear being put out of their homes and away from their children if they resist the violence.

So, this living in abuse is an economic choice as they are dependent. So resisting abuse is compounded by the economic consequences.

So this really becomes an economic issue, for the uptown woman and the downtown woman.

Sadly, this is witnessed by the children of these situations who often repeat the behaviour.

I say that one way to empower women to resist being abused is to ensure their economic independence. When a woman is financially independent and a man beats her or tries to make her feel that she is worth nothing, she is more likely to pick up her handbag and leave. When she has nothing of her own, she feels she has to suffer.

Unless women are provided all the facilities to gain economic independence, they can always be subject to someone who has more power, knows it and who will wield it whenever it suits him to exercise control over her.

It is with great distress that I note that according to a Jamaica Reproductive Health Survey released by the Ministry of Health in 2009, approximately 20.4 percent of young women 15-19 years old report having been forced to have sexual intercourse at some point during their life. Overall, it says, 2 in every 10 Jamaican women have experienced forced sexual intercourse.

This is incredible that a society now advised of this fact would accept this as the norm. There are women who have shared with me personal experiences that were traumatic to them as children but they had nobody with whom they could share that trauma. Often when they tried, they were not given a sympathetic ear. This response has gone on to affect them in their adult dealings with persons in society.

Of course one of the issues is that it is fathers and stepfathers who are perpetrating this violence when the homes. So who does a young 12 or 13 year old turn to? This really is a complex issue with which many have grappled. Our society needs to be educated on how this act of violence on a young female affects her ability to respond when faced with violence as an adult.

We know it is happening, but how do we solve it? We know men in high places are battering their women, but we pretend that it is a lower socio-economic phenomenon. I ask you this, in all seriousness: Are we in a state of self-delusion? Or, is it that we do not know where to start to solve this problem?

From a wider perspective the reality is that we live in a society which is predisposed to violent behaviour because live under extra-ordinary stress and are not personally adept at resolving conflict . We feel we have to fight and maim...and we see this in our schools, on the streets, at intersections, at some sporting events.

The solution to this is not only about getting men to behave differently but for the entire society to address the epidemic of violent behaviour. This is a public health problem that needs to be solved because it goes deeply into our collective psyche and the way our society has acculturated us.

When we speak about violence against women, we often think of physical abuse, battering, raping and mutilating.

But there is a most insidious form of abuse about which very little is spoken, and that is psychological abuse, the type of abuse that make women believe that they are “less than”, where they doubt themselves and fail to live up to their true potential. This is a very serious issue in Jamaica, of which little is spoken.

If we are to develop as a country, we must question why –women make up roughly half of our population yet , they are vastly underrepresented in positions of leadership in this country.

We must question why, when the majority of our university graduates are women, they are vastly under-represented in positions of power in this country.

We must question why, among our 60 elected representatives in Parliament , there are only eight women. In a small, developing country such as Jamaica, under-representation of a significant portion of our talented and educated and powerful people is a luxury that we cannot afford.

We must question why jobs that are predominantly done by women; mothers, caregivers, teachers are not treated with appropriate respect.

A start to this is to shine the spotlight on this gender issue, which is the root of what we are discussing today, and you are doing so through activities such as this international day for elimination of violence against women. I commend you for this effort.

But what are the next steps? How do we develop practical programmes to create the actions necessary to change behaviour of the men who inflict violence and the women who bear it? I believe that a good point to start in tackling violence against women is to work through already established institutions such as the schools, the church and the courts.

In the school setting we need to teach students how to resolve conflicts peacefully. One of the programmes I have been associated with is PALS which is an initiative focused in this regard. In its schools programme, PALS focuses on teaching conflict-resolution skills to students and their caregivers, helping the teachers to promote alternatives to violence and allowing the

students to participate in age-appropriate activities to sensitize them to these alternatives.

PALS has been struggling to achieve its objectives, and I must truly commend the leaders of this programme for their valiant efforts. They need our full support, and I urge the business community to understand the fundamental objectives of PALS

The name PALS might suggest that it is about fun, but this is serious business. It is about rescuing our country from the violence that appears to be creeping into our country and finding lodgings in a most receptive environment. Quite unfortunately, while many of our citizens are victims, women seem to be the easiest target.

The result of these efforts will be to acculturate our male children so that the next generation will behave differently... and this is very doable. One of the changes I have noticed in my lifetime is how much more open young fathers today are about demonstrating affection for their children.

Nowadays it is commonplace to see young men walking their babies in the early morning which is something that Jamaican women have traditionally done. We see them cuddling, taking them to school, bonding with them.

These are all very positive developments which gives us more than a little hope that we are bringing out, more and more, the gentler side of our men.

We are hoping to end up with a man who could never entertain the thought of beating a woman.

This is a trend which we should recognise and celebrate because this business of violence against women...by men...must speak to men, about their attitudes to women who could be their mothers and their daughters.

Next, we must turn to the role of another critical institution ... the church. Churches have a critical role in framing our society. We must ask ourselves.. what role does it play in creating that environment of practical solutions for addressing violence against women.

This is a challenge for our churches in many ways as we acknowledge that violence against women occurs across all sectors of our society, including our church congregations.

As the institutions that are often the closest to the family situation by virtue of their counselling and pastoral ministries our churches are ideally placed to promote among the society, our responsibility to treat others as we would wish to be treated. The churches can help to support those victims of violence who have come forward and who need spiritual, moral and practical support at a very vulnerable time in their lives. Also, it can use its moral authority to induce those who commit violence to seek the help necessary to acknowledge their wrong and change their ways.

At this point there are still very few resources available to a woman who makes a decision to leave an abusive relationship.

And, while we understand the desire to preserve the family structure, this cannot be at the cost of the physical or emotional safety of any family member.

Our churches have traditionally taken the lead in establishing places of safety for orphaned or abandoned children. I submit that we also need to provide shelters or host families willing to assist a woman or young girl who finds she cannot remain in an untenable home situation. I understand that there is currently only one women's shelter operating in the island, so this is an area where there is much room for improvement.

We also need to focus on how we change individual behaviour and the media is another institution with an important role to play in this regard, by communicating what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour. Our media houses are generally willing to participate in public education campaigns in this regard. However they must also be vigilant against perpetuating negative stereotypes in their news and entertainment programmes.

The next area would be in terms of legislation in our country. Does our legislation have the necessary teeth and is it applied impartially and fearlessly to protect the most vulnerable?

To what extent are the persons who work in the justice system trained to deal with situations or crimes that arise out of domestic

violence. Is it appropriate to have abusers and victims together in the same court room, while an act is prosecuted or defended, without a experienced judge or court to understand the syndrome of violence? How often are persons charged for murder themselves the abused at some prior vulnerable time in their own lives?

Our police and judges need to be trained in the syndrome of violence. Our managers need to be trained to deal with gender issues and violence in the workplace.

Does “crime stop” extend to domestic violence? If a woman does not pursue a complaint because she remains dependent or afraid, when will our laws accept independent evidence or initial report, especially if corroborated by medical reports. Many abusers persist because they truly believe that their victims will not have the courage or support to leave.

The Government of Jamaica has acknowledged the need to protect the vulnerable, including women, in its Vision 2020, and I sincerely hope that this is not merely lip service.

I bring your attention to a section of the Vision 2020 National Development Plan which states that the Government pledges to ensure that adequate and appropriate provisions are in place for physical care and safety for the vulnerable, in accordance with global standards.

The promise is to provide care without compromising dignity and place emphasis on support. There is the reality that men are among the vulnerable, but that is another reality which must be discussed at another time and place.

With the enactment of The Domestic Violence Act, and establishment of the Registry of Sexual Offenders, abused women and children have greater protection and remedies under the law.

Some persons believe that what seem to be increased cases of carnal abuse and domestic violence could actually be increased reporting of incidents as persons feel more confident in the system. However, ironically, the consensus among women's advocates and health professionals is that whatever figures we are seeing, incidents of violence against women are still grossly underreported.

And that leads me to the issue of whistle-blowing. If we see wrong being done to a relative, a neighbour, a co-worker, we have a responsibility to make it known, because this is where the rubber hits the road in terms of initiating action to stamp out this type of violence. Many people are afraid to come forward to report situations but there is a saying “Personal courage isn't the absence of fear; rather, it's the ability to put fear aside and do what's right”.

Finally the society needs to examine whom we consider ideal role models in terms of behaviour regarding respect shown to women. Psychologists tell us that to be respectful to others we need to respect ourselves which means we need wholesome, well balanced, self confident people who are centred in themselves so they do not get blown off course by external events that cause them to act out their negative emotions.

There are respected leaders in our society who beat their women. Let us be real about that. I repeat. Woman beating is not a downtown phenomenon.

I am appealing to Jamaican men who are emotionally, psychologically, physically or sexually abusive to women and those who are hurting our underaged girls to break this pattern.

Many studies have been done to try to determine the underlying reasons why men employ violence against women.

Some researchers have offered the theory that men who beat women often feel justified in doing so because they were reared in an environment -- whether a family or neighbourhood -- where violence was accepted as an acceptable method for solving problems, or enforcing the rules, or demonstrating one's strength and authority.

Studies have shown that between 40% and 70% of women beaters in clinical samples were exposed to abuse in childhood, hence this is learnt behaviour and a contribution to the cycle of abuse.

In summary there is a lot to be done. There is a need to engage us men in this campaign which is really about being respectful to our womenfolk.

I am using this opportunity to encourage other fathers, other leaders in our society to support efforts to eliminate violence against women.

Some years ago a prominent police officer referred to carnal abuse and domestic violence as a social issue and he was criticized by some persons who felt he was trivializing a serious matter.

However, the truth is we will not begin to break the back of these heinous crimes against our women purely by enacting laws and locking up people. We need to bring social pressure to bear on the persons who we know are engaging in violence against women. They are our friends and our colleagues and we should let them know that this behaviour is totally unacceptable.

And for those of us who see our friends and colleagues engaging in this type of behaviour, we should not stand silently by. We need to let the person know that this is not how we would want our mothers or sisters or daughters to be treated, and therefore we will not condone disrespect to someone else's mother or sister or daughter.

I fully support efforts by organizations such as the Bureau of Women's Affairs to educate Jamaican men so that, in all our various roles we can begin to factor these issues into the decisions we make. In the United States, for example a bill is now before the Senate called the International Violence Against Women Act. Besides signalling how seriously the US government views the issue of Violence against Women, the legislation, if enacted, will inform all relevant U.S. foreign policy efforts, including its international assistance programmes.

Here in Jamaica, it is not beyond us as decision makers to look carefully at the types of events and personalities to which we lend our sponsorship. Advocates for eliminating violence against women say a woman's level of economic independence greatly reduces her risk of being abused by a partner. It therefore means that we need to look at supporting the kinds of programmes that offer opportunities to our young women to improve their socio-economic status and build self esteem.

Violence against Women is a public health problem because of its effect on the health and well being of women, and the resources that must be earmarked to deal with its consequences. But it is

also a social problem because it is spawned by a culture of violence and intolerance. Addressing it will mean all of us, as Jamaicans, working together to bring about changes in attitude and behaviour in our society.

In closing, I urge the men of this country to put away violence and oppression and cease to be hasty in the laying on of hands.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you.