



Jamaican Justice System Reform

Together for Justice with Civil Participation

**SPEAKING NOTES FOR
THE ATTORNEY GENERAL & MINISTER OF JUSTICE
THE HON. A.J. NICHOLSON, Q.C.
JAMAICAN JUSTICE SYSTEM REFORM (JJSR) PRESS BRIEFING
THURSDAY, MAY 3, 2007 AT THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE**

Salutations.

You would surely conclude that what has been outlined to you by the Permanent Secretary and the Chairman of Jamaican Justice System Reform National Task Force, underscores the comprehensive and multi-faceted nature of the transformation programme to be carried out in the system of the administration of justice in our country.

It would unreasonable to expect that all aspects of the recommendations could be implemented simultaneously; instead, implementation will be determined by the scope of any project and the commitment of the government, pushed by the insistence of the Jamaican family.

While there has been a sizeable increase in the budgetary allocation for fiscal 2007-08, we cannot expect overnight introduction of all the recommendations.

Furthermore, the implementation of the recommended solutions, which are yet to be finalised, will be influenced by the Report of the National Task Force itself, AND driven by the aim of satisfying our people and all the immediate stakeholders in our justice system. That is a guarantee which the Ministry of Justice gives, and commits to, at the outset.

What is equally important from the start of the implementation phase is the co-operation and patience of the members of the public and the commitment of the key stakeholders. In some instances, for example, there will be some level of dislocation; for example, where physical improvements include technological upgrades for computer systems are to be carried out. Any such inconveniences will be temporary, and kept to a minimum. We must embrace the fact that such upgrading works are intended to provide long-term benefit to all who use the facilities.

But beyond that, Jamaicans will be kept fully abreast of the progress of the implementation phase, as this is one way of engendering their

continued support for the transformation programme. Indeed, the challenge is that some amount of community discussion will need to be organized by the Ministry of Justice to ensure continued public awareness and support.

Criticism is part of any democratic society. The Ministry has never denied that there are deficiencies in the justice system, and on every occasion that has been provided to us, we have given our word to our people that there is an unwavering commitment to making improvements. That is obviously what has led to this transformation exercise.

It may be that the sensationalizing and serializing of the drawbacks in the Jamaican justice system, without providing balance, is the “commercially astute” thing to do. But, the questions are: Is it fair? Is it balanced? For those principles constitute the watchword of the purveyors of information to our citizens.

You will note that, throughout the Document produced by the Task Force, it does not dwell merely on the weaknesses in the system. It seeks to present solutions for modernization of the system.

From the programmes and projects coming out of the Ministry, in line with Government policy, you will see that the Ministry will not squander its energies on bemoaning the defects in the justice system. The Ministry will continue to sharpen its focus on utilizing all its resources to strengthen the system of the administration of justice.

Today, we are obliged to be even more focused as the public is waiting to see what will be provided by way of better courthouses, accommodating facilities and a more discernable customer-oriented service delivery.

I once again invite the media to give their dedicated, yet critical, support to the Justice Ministry's effort to create and sustain awareness among our citizens when the implementation phase gets underway. One main reason why it is only fair that the people be made fully aware of the developments under this programme is the fact that they were asked to make their input by way of a series of public sessions. I am satisfied that they would want to know which of their suggestions and recommendations have been accepted and operationalized to help to ease the tensions within the Jamaican family.

Next Thursday, May 10 and Friday, May 11, at the National Conference, interested parties will once again have a chance to contribute in a meaningful way to this historic leap forward. We expect the discussions to be intense and the atmosphere to be filled with a high sense of responsibility, and rightly so, because this document will chart the way for the renewal of the country's justice system for generations to come. It will be part of the legacy of all those well-meaning citizens who will be participating in the workshops.

We know we can achieve what we set out to do. At the same time, we know that the transformation of the justice system will require committed and sustained partnerships in several areas. We are also determined that the rebuilding programme will not be implemented to appease any set of special interest groups.

The Jamaican Justice System Reform Programme, with its theme: "Together For Justice With Civil Participation", is intended for the people of Jamaica. It is a continuing process; but it must be developed for whom it was intended: all the people of the Jamaican family.

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