



www.hearchildrencry.com

26 Haining Road, Kingston 5
822-0483 hearchildrencry@yahoo.com

PRESS RELEASE

December 31, 2013

PROBLEMS AFFECTING JAMAICA'S CHILDREN ARE MOSTLY SOLVABLE - HEAR THE CHILDREN'S CRY

- *Parents, community members, the State need all to do a better job*
- *We need to unite under a common vision for a Jamaica fit for children*
- *Government encouraged to lead the way*

In its New Year 2014 Message, Hear The Children's Cry is calling on Jamaica and Jamaicans to unite around a single vision for the kind of Jamaica that would be fit for children to live in. This, according to the organization's Founder, Child Advocate Betty Ann Blaine, is something that is very, very 'doable'!

At the close of a year that has witnessed some of the most foul and brutal attacks on the country's children, as well as an ongoing complex of major and minor abuses to the young which have become tragically commonplace, Hear The Children's Cry continues its impassioned call for serious action on their behalf.

"Most of the problems affecting the children of Jamaica are problems that can be solved," Mrs. Blaine points out, "Just think about it – children going missing, children who are abused in one way or another, those who die in fires, who are victims of violence, those who lose their lives as a result of road accidents – these are all tragedies that can be prevented by us adults.

"We all have specific roles to play in the welfare of our children, and we need to do much better as we carry out these roles: parents, community members and members of the wider society, and the State. In fact the Government has a vitally important role in protecting and nurturing Jamaica's children as a whole, as well as those youngsters for whom it serves as defacto parents. And we are calling on the Government to lead the way and set the best example by respecting the legal and moral rights of Jamaica's children."

Hear The Children's Cry's Founder notes that in addition to Jamaica's children, there is also a continuous stream of youngsters reaching the age of 18 years, and transitioning to status of adults. "These new adults also need our support," she says, "It is our job to help them with that transition, as we continue to promote and maintain a Jamaica that provides this type of positive guidance and assistance."

"Critical to the process of solving the problems affecting our children," Mrs. Blaine says, "is the declaration of a single vision of a Jamaica that is fit for children to live in. Once we united around this positive goal, we can begin to get results we need. She notes:

- "Every Jamaican child should be loved, and should enjoy a caring and functional family environment
- We want a safe environment, and especially safe communities for our children
- Quality education must be accessible to all Jamaican children, regardless of the social or economic standing of their parents or families
- No Jamaican child should be the victim of poverty
- Each child must have a balanced diet and adequate material provisions
- The justice system must provide effective justice on behalf of children, and no abuser or other perpetrator of crimes against children must escape this justice.
- The practice of placing children in adult lock ups should be immediately discontinued."

Hear The Children's Cry is calling for practical action at every level, she adds, and the child advocacy organization offers the following suggestions for moves that can help to make Jamaica fit for children to live in:

A) URGENT ACTION NEEDED BY GOVERNMENT

- Immediate interagency and multidisciplinary collaboration supported by Government to tackle the problem of child welfare and child rights nationwide.
- Mobilization of more social workers, counselors and child protection officers islandwide.
- Provision of effective, realistic special assistance to families in crisis.

- Strengthening of our main institutions of socialization, the family, the school, the church and our community centres through training, sensitization and support.
- Creation of a police unit specifically dedicated to missing children.
- Expedition of the newly created sex offenders registry, so we will know who the offenders are and be able to prevent them repeating their offences in communities and families, schools and institutions, which should be protecting rather than harming our children.
- Expedition of implementation of Mandatory DNA testing for sex offenders. The acts have been passed in Parliament to start this, but a delay in gazetting has delayed implementation.
- Creation of stop orders at the ports of exit to combat trafficking.
- Launch of a massive public education campaign, not only reporting abuses and atrocities affecting children, but providing instruction on how citizens can tackle and prevent these.
- Mandatory identification cards and photographs for all children, since many who go missing cannot be identified for lack of these.
- Strengthening and providing adequate resources to operate the Ananda Alert for missing children, to increase its effectiveness.

B) TO SAVE CHILDREN'S LIVES ON THE ROADS

- GPS trackers with speed controls, managed by the Transport Authority and the police.
- Use of other technology to apprehend undisciplined drivers, such as speed cameras along key point on the roadways.
- Instituting serious penalties for dangerous driving, such as sending offenders to driving school, suspending their licenses for a period.
- Instituting similar penalties for those in authority who pass defective vehicles, and for those who sell illegal licences.”

C) SAFETY TIPS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

1. Take 5 minutes every morning and every night to pray with your child/children, hug them every day and say ‘I love you.
2. Know where your child is at all times.

3. Know who your child's friends are and encourage them to 'hang out' at places you know are safe.
4. Encourage your child to walk in a group and not alone.
5. Accompany your child ALL THE WAY to and from school, or ask a trusted family member or friend to do so if possible.
6. Tell your child not to stop for conversations with strangers.
7. Tell your child not to allow any stranger to touch him/her.
8. Tell your child not to resist a robber or gunman. Your child's life is worth more than money or goods.
9. Keep an eye out for the children in your community.
10. Put Police Emergency #119 as a 'one-touch' on your cell phone.

Hear the Children's Cry is a voluntary organization providing urgently needed services for children and young people. Established in 2002, it combines vigorous, high profile advocacy with practical programmes for children, families and youth. It established its multi-faceted **Missing Children's Support Programme** in April 2009, with continuing support from Jamaica Yellow Pages.

This is Jamaica's only entity, public or private, providing counseling for the families of missing children, as well as for returned missing children. It works with the security forces to access statistics on missing children, analyzing and publishing these. It also carries out islandwide programmes of Safety Education in Schools and Parenting Education, and networks with other stakeholders serving the welfare of Jamaican children.

- end -