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PRESS RELEASE

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HEAR CHILDREN'S CRY ON STIFFER PENALTIES:

COMMENDATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Kudos to Government's good intentions re: penalties for errant parents, child abusers*
- *Stiffer penalties need to go hand in hand with positive incentives to good parents*
- *Government must police itself also, where it stands in **loco parentis** and is errant*
- *Improved child protection laws meaningless without effective enforcement*

Hear The Children's Cry is commending the Government on its announced approval of long needed amendments to the Child Care and Protection Act and the Criminal Justice Administration Act. According to its Founder Betty Ann Blaine, the vocal children's advocacy organization is happy to hear that the authorities are moving to legalise stiffer penalties for those who neglect, abuse and perpetrate violence on our children – something that Hear The Children's Cry has long been calling for.

“We are certainly happy to hear that new offences are being inserted into the Child Care and Protection Act to deal with parental neglect, for instance,” Mrs. Blaine notes, “however we want to stress that holding people to account needs to go hand in hand with meaningful incentives to those who are good parents – many of whom are grappling with extremely challenging circumstances.

“New regulations to deal with adults who fail to report suspected exposure of a child to sexual or other abuse will also be very welcome. We hope this will be backed up by an effective public education campaign. We also hope that the planned mandatory training and counselling of parents will be implemented at the earliest possible time. We wonder if the Government would not like to join forces with the many struggling charitable organizations already on the ground

with programmes in place for instructions in positive parenting – we could use the support, and this would avoid the ‘re-invention of the wheel’ so to speak.

“I am sure that all of Jamaica, including our children and families, are hoping that the Prime Minister and all the Government ministries involved have not forgotten that the Government must also police itself, most scrupulously, where it is serving in the place of a child’s parents. We are calling for cases of “parental neglect” on the part of Government agencies such as children’s homes, places of safety, and those monitoring the welfare of youngsters in foster care, to be policed as severely as those cases involving a child’s biological parents.”

Mrs. Blaine also made the point that the Government needs to prioritise the training and deployment of an adequate cadre of important child care professionals such as school guidance counsellors and children’s officers. This is a continuing challenge in Jamaica to the point where the welfare of the children being served by overburdened professionals is being negatively affected.

However, she concluded:

“None of this is of any significance, though, without effective enforcement of our laws, new or old. As such, Hear The Children’s Cry continues to call for swift and effective enforcement of all laws protecting our children. There are too many sexual predators, child rapists, child murderers, and we suspect also child traffickers walking free in our land, putting our children at risk by their very freedom. They continue to carry out their own brutal public education campaign, which says ‘You can harm a child and get away scot free’.

“So please, Prime Minister, Minister of Justice, and other responsible persons, make sure these laws are enforced.”

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