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PRESS RELEASE

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HEAR THE CHILDREN CALLS FOR SCHOOLING,
JUSTICE, FOR CHILDREN IN LOCK UPS/DETENTION
AS NEW SCHOOL YEAR APPROACHES

- *Supports outcry by Jamaicans for Justice*
- *Decries production of reports, studies, promises, without action*

Hear the Children's Cry (HTCC) has joined Jamaicans for Justice in calling on the Government of Jamaica to ensure that children in conflict with the law receive appropriate educational instruction, to which they are entitled and which is an indispensable component of their rehabilitative process.

This was announced on August 29 by Gillian Rowlands, Chairman of Hear the Children's Cry. Mrs. Rowlands called specifically on four Government Ministers to respond immediately to this and a number of other critical issues. These Ministers are:

- The Minister of National Security, who has responsibility for the Correctional Services
- The Minister of Youth and Culture, who has responsibility for children
- The Minister of Education, who is responsible for education of all Jamaican children
- The Children's Advocate, who has responsibility to advocate on behalf of children, and
- The Child Development Agency, which has responsibility for all children in Jamaica.

The HTCC Chairman pointed to the following critical issues, in her statement supporting positions also taken by Jamaicans for Justice:

- The uncertainty surrounding the status of children at Metcalf Street Juvenile Remand Centre, which has been placed on lockdown with suspension of educational and outdoor activities, must be addressed. Also, a statement must be issued on how the Government plans to deal with these concerns at the start of the academic year.

- The practice of holding children in police lock ups, with scant regard for their education or well-being is one of national shame and an abrogation of the Government's responsibility to uphold the rights of children. We therefore call on the Government to lead the necessary changes and act in accordance with the laws enshrined under the Child Protection Act.
- The issue of what is to happen to the children at the soon to be closed Fort Augusta, particularly the girls who are currently being held in this adult women's prison, is one which must receive serious attention and decisive action. To keep juveniles in an adult correctional facility is both a shame and a blight on our justice system and demonstrates a lack of resolve in finding solutions.

Mrs. Rowlands stressed: "Jamaica cannot continue to produce report after report and promise after promise without action. We will simply condemn our children to more intergenerational poverty, crime and despair, if we do not move from a system which is inherently punitive and oppressive to one which offers real rehabilitative results, justice and hope.

"We have the Armada Report prepared in 2010 which led former Prime Minister Bruce Golding to present a plan to Parliament to address the situation in lockups and correctional facilities. The plan included the establishment of a juvenile remand centre for girls and an additional correctional facility. What has happened to this plan? Where is the political will and action to stop the illegal, immoral and unacceptable practice of housing children in an adult facility?

"We also have a comprehensive study on Women in Prison and the Impact of the Incarceration of Jamaican Women on Themselves and their Families, which was undertaken by the Planning Institute of Jamaica in 2005. These and other studies provide concrete facts and posit solutions. But WHEN are we going to move from paper to plan and from talk to action?"

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