

Crime in jamaica essay



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Introduction VIOLENT CRIMES CONSTITUTE one of the greatest social problems facing Jamaica at this time. Over the past two decades, Jamaica has experienced an unparalleled increased in homicides and violent assaults. Many attempts made throughout the years to reduce the number of violent crimes occurring in the island have mainly been short-term measures, aimed predominantly at increasing Police mobility and firepower and have ultimately proved to be unsustainable.

EARLY IN THE present academic year the Faculty of Social Sciences, with the encouragement and support of PVC Professor Kenneth Hall, principal of the Mona Campus, U. W. I. , spearheaded an initiative by the University to assemble its various scholars from across the faculties, to propose long term strategies, which could effectively lead to a reduction in violent crimes and the overall levels of aggression in the country.

This document represents a consultative approach to the problem of crime fighting and violence reduction and is intended to provide a more comprehensive and sustained response to this grave problem plaguing our nation. THE CONSULTATIVE PROCESS included scholars, from the three campuses of the University of the West Indies, scholars from Northern Caribbean University, from the University of Technology, from our community colleges, theological colleges and seminaries, our teachers colleges, as well as from the other tertiary level institutions across the island.

To guide and focus the deliberations, a team of scholars, namely, Professor Freddie Hickling, from the Faculty of Medical Sciences; Dr Wilma Bailey from the Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences, and Professor Bernard Headley and

Dr Anthony Harriott from the Faculty of Social Sciences, all from the Mona Campus, U. W. I. , prepared a working paper around which the discussions were centred. The first of these discussions were held on October 28, 2000, after which the original working document was extensively updated and revised, in keeping with the input and suggestions of the more than 50 participants present.

The newly revised document was once again presented, at a second meeting held December 3, 2000, after which further revisions were once again made. THE DOCUMENT PRESENTED here reflects the body of research and experiences of a wide range of scholars and academics and is intended to form a platform on which further discussions can be held, and other additions made to the document by various other stakeholders in the society. One of the main features of this document is that the proposals contained herein, advocates a transformative approach to how we view and respond to our dilemma.

If the solutions are to be thorough, far-reaching, and effective, then our structures, procedures and relations have to be fundamentally transformed so that the necessary results can be obtained. Another major feature of this document is that, everyone has a role to play. Criminal violence is not a problem only for the police, nor is it one only for the Government. It is a problem for all of us and therefore has to be addressed by all the stakeholders and sectors in our country.

FINALLY, THE DOCUMENT is not cast in stone, but is, in a real sense a work in progress, that must be added to and perfected by all sectors of the society.

We believe, that once expanded, this document can be an effective policy guide for a comprehensive effort at crime reduction, crime management and the general reduction of violence and aggression in the Jamaican society.

Professor Barry Chevannes Dean - Faculty of Social Sciences, U. W. I. , Mona.
January 2001. Preamble

LIKE ANY NUMBER of other Caribbean nations, Jamaica has in recent times been struggling with the problem of serious crime and violence. At the end of 1999 the number of murders in this nation of 2.5 million stood at 849, more than twice the number two decades ago, for an estimated homicide rate of close to 30 per 100,000 people-more than twice that for certain large metropolitan cities. In a 17-day period from June 21, to July 7, 1999, 66 people were killed violently across the island, 22 of them having died in less than a week (The Jamaica Gleaner, July 8, 1999).

And these figures do not include an excessive number of police killings, which have also been on the rise. ALTHOUGH THE NUMBERS of serious crimes are at all time highs, the national debate and concern about crime is not new. Since the mid-1970s successive governments have, in response to "crime waves" and subsequent massive outcries, set up numerous civilian crime commissions and task forces. They have also sought, more often than not, to institute special police-military operations to deal with crime "outbreaks. This latter, dominant tendency, we believe, represents an integral part of the country's persistent high-crime dilemma. It demonstrates pervasive reliance on traditional and generally non-productive measures; such as: • new legislation • further centralization of law enforcement operations • more intimidating policing (which, ironically, often comes down

hardest on the law-abiding members of the society). WE DO NOT want, nor is it our intention, to negate or undermine previous efforts.

On the contrary, we endorse and are in firm agreement with the yet to be fully implemented recommendations submitted in the 1993 “ Report of the National Task Force on Crime,” the oft-referred to “ Wolfe Report. ” BUT, GOOD INTENTIONS aside, serious crimes have risen steadily since the early 1970s. The present generation of Jamaicans cannot recall, in their lifetimes, a time when Jamaica was not troubled by and not preoccupied with the problem of high crime and violence. Violent crime is, in the year 2000, among the top most worrying concerns among the nation’s citizens.

Especially worrisome have been reliable reports of increase in police and official corruption (from top to bottom), the seeming intensification of bits and pieces of the illegal drug trade on the island, and of alarming trends in contract killings related to Jamaica’s integration into global narcotics trafficking. AS TEACHERS, ACADEMICS and academic administrators, representing a wide cross-section of disciplines, we respectfully offer to the nation a perspective on crime that is inspired by our tradition of learning and debate.

We firmly believe that the time is right for what we are calling transformative thinking and a transformative approach to the problem of serious crime in Jamaica. Transformation is about change; it begins, importantly, with having the will and the courage to change. CRIME AND THE destruction it brings raise for us fundamental questions about the nature of personal

responsibility, community, family, and the nature of the society we've been trying to create for the almost 40 years of national independence.

The goal we seek from individual and collective engagement in the transformation process is sustainable peace. This will involve processes of profound change as communities and the political directorate seek to transform situations characterized by fear and conflict into environments in which reconciliation, social justice and genuine participative democracy can take root. To that end, we are calling here for establishment of a Peace Institute (elaborated on later in this document).

Among a number of other necessary things the Peace Institute would:

- facilitate dialogue at different levels and sectors of the society that are in conflict
- help develop and enhance indigenous peacemaking capacities
- facilitate peace-oriented development work amongst grassroots organizations.

A TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH, by insisting on the linkage between social structures and crime, envisions transformational change in these structures-be they economic, political, family, environmental, educational, or cultural-as fundamental ways to prevent crime.

We approach this topic, however, with caution and modesty. The ways to overcome crime and violence are not simple. IN KEEPING WITH OUR vision we offer the following proposals to both the nation's political directorate and civil society as steps in the transformative process. Some of the steps can be taken immediately; others will take a while. 1. Intensify efforts toward social and economic justice while finding ways to grow the economy. OUR LEADING ASSERTION is that in order to effectively reduce over the long haul violent

predatory crime, the political directorate as well as sectors within civil society (e. . , employers) will have to substantively demonstrate, perhaps as never before, dedicated commitment to reducing the nation's glaring social and economic inequalities. Specifically we call attention to the following: i. the steady rise in the nation's violent crime rate is highly correlated, over time, with standard indicators of economic disparity, with high unemployment rates among well-defined populations being only one variable in a lengthy causal chain i. high levels of serious crime is also strongly associated with the high proportion of the population that does not (or is unable to) participate meaningfully in the society, and which consequently shares a disproportionately tiny fraction of the nation's wealth iii. it is this structural condition of mass social and economic disfranchisement that is the major source of much serious crime - from formation of warring urban gangs, to acts of wanton violence iv. iserable social and economic conditions make for miserable family life and, consequently, for neglectful parenting, which is the closest link to crime and delinquency in a sequence of other factors. Government and solidarity organizations must therefore seek to develop new means and methods for not only promoting traditional family values but for building and supporting strong families. WE CITE THIS while acknowledging that a significant portion of the crime committed in the society-so called " white collar" crimes-demonstrate no visible connection to poverty, deprived economic circumstance or " weak" family structure. . Transform garrison political culture and praxis. WE MAKE AN unequivocal call for change from the present political practice of the two major political parties doing little to discourage (perhaps even encouraging) warring inner-city factions fighting and killing each other over spoils and " scarce benefits.

" All political parties should instead encourage the building of alliances and coalitions among people who are commonly oppressed.

The Wolf Report admonishes: " Politicians must not only pay lip service to, but must also become actively involved in the eradication of a political arena where gun slingers establish and operate tribal boundaries. " 3. Legal justice must be made real in practice and in appearance. TIME AND AGAIN, in surveys, studies and media reports, the urban poor have said that it is entirely at them that police have trained their guns; and that they are the objects of tougher enforcement measures whenever there's heightened concern over crime.

The high numbers of extra-judicial killings (at an estimated rate of 100 to 150 per year for the past three or so years), and reliable stories of police abuse and excessive use of force in urban ghetto areas, support this contention. IF LAW ENFORCEMENT is to receive the full, sustained support of all segments of the society, justice in the courts and on the streets will not only have to be real; it will also have to appear real. This will require extensive reform in key sectors of law enforcement and the judiciary, where what are needed over the long term are: i. a major redefinition in the relationship between police and citizen, so that all citizens will receive greater respect from the police ii. greater accountability of police agencies to the communities they serve, which will require among other things concentrated movement toward relevant models of community policing iii. increase in number of police officers, especially in light of credible threats to national security due to heavy narcotics trafficking-doing so, though, while educating new recruits in matters of human relations and acceptable police

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conduct iv. easures for bringing the court system closer to the people.

ALONG THESE LINES, we also hold that if the system of justice is to remain consistently credible, all classes of criminal wrongdoers will have to be held responsible for their wrongdoing. This goes especially for white-collar offenders and corrupt public officials, whose misdeeds are often several times more costly to the nation than that of the average street-comer or gully thug. We cannot continue with the appearance of a dual system of laws and justice: one for the poor, and another for the well heeled and the well connected. . Develop creative ways to transform the pent-up energies of our people from destructive manifestations into productive activities. OUR PEOPLE HAVE few available means through which to express, for example, their much-vilified aggressiveness-a normative trait that can lead to excellence in sports but also to violence on the road, in public places and in the home. Thoughtful attention ought therefore to be given to establishing, on national scale, ongoing programs of cultural therapy, practiced in safe and nonthreatening places.

These would function as non-sectarian, non-partisan “ therapeutic communities”: alternately as places of excellence, centers of healing and sites of engagement, where people may express freely and constructively ideas and energy. 5. Transform education and role of educational system. A MAJOR SHORTCOMING of the educational system that we see having a direct bearing on the extent of serious crime is that concepts intrinsic to nation-building, and vociferously propagated at the national civic level-such as tolerance for diversity, cultivation of civic ethic and communitarian values-are not apparent in the behaviors of most school leavers.

Needed over the long haul is serious, contemplative revision of educational curricula (to ask in effect, “ What are we really teaching our children? “) at all levels, to ensure that students are as equipped at responsible communitarian practice as they are with essential academic skills. OVER AND BEYOND that, the broad masses of the Jamaican people are in need of educated ways to deal effectively with deep-rooted problems of self-hate, lack of self-worth, depression and identity.

Problems associated with low self-esteem and under valuing of self (frequently because of race), among young males in particular, often have pushed youngsters into acts of brutality against others and increasingly into suicide. 6. Local media, especially television, must change the way it reports and presents crime stories. CHEAP SENSATIONALISM CHARACTERIZES much of what passes for TV news reporting on incidents of violent crime. Exploitative reportage of crime stories further dehumanizes victims. It has the tendency to inflame without really informing.

And, more dangerously, it provokes unwarranted fear in the citizenry at large. We call upon all local media to engage in more responsible journalism on the matter of crime. 7. Support localized efforts at peacekeeping, peacemaking and community justice. GOVERNMENT DOES NOT have all the answers to crime, neither should it have the final say-so on what to do about crime. Grassroots initiatives directed at fostering long-term peace between rival gangs and at restoring, through community and restorative justice, bonds sundered by crime should be endorsed, encouraged and facilitated.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE SEEKS to redefine the roles and goals of criminal justice agencies to include a broader mission: to prevent crime, address local social problems and conflicts, and to involve neighborhood residents in planning and decision-making. Both restorative and community justice are based on the premise that communities will be strengthened if local citizens participate in responding sensibly to crime; and both envision responses tailored to the preferences and needs of victims, communities and offenders.

THE PRACTICE OF restorative justice, aspects of which are already in place in areas around the country, holds that criminal justice systems should actively engage the parties touched by crime in repairing the injustices caused by crime. This means that individual offenders should indeed be held accountable for having hurt real people and real communities; and that they should be required to help make their victims (or the families of victims) whole again.

Making restitution (or reparation) to crime victims is essential to individual rehabilitation, healing and reconciliation, and to restoring a community that had been sundered by a crime or crimes. 8. Increase efforts at rehabilitation within prisons. WHILE INCARCERATION MAY demonstrate individual failure, prison can be an environment in which change in patterns of conduct can occur. For this reason, any system of penal justice must provide those necessities that enable inmates to live in dignity: food, clothing, shelter, personal safety, timely medical care, education, and meaningful work adequate to the conditions of human dignity.

REHABILITATION WILL NOT occur however, under the island's present prison conditions. Currently, we have a rehabilitation-oriented Commissioner and rehabilitation efforts have genuinely increased; yet, at the same time, there is a bloodbath going on inside the nation's maximum-security prisons. In this year alone there have been 20 murders and 35 stabbings, an increase of approximately 400 percent for similar incidents reported last year. Beatings are the prime method for behavior modification in our prisons.

WE BELIEVE THAT the root of the problem are high levels of official corruption; politicization of labor disputes; deterioration of the physical plant; severe lack of security for all parties; and that rehabilitation, such as it is, occurs only on a preferential basis. WE URGE THAT, in order to establish minimum conditions for the slightest possibility of rehabilitation, the authorities should immediately: i. seek the skills of knowledgeable teams of experts to solve the prisons' ongoing labor-relations problem, including return of warders to the prison system i. conduct a thoroughly independent external audit of the prisons' operations (the last internal audit was done three years ago; no one is sure the last time an independent, outside audit was done) iii. move ahead with plans for building new detention centers and to replace ancient, dilapidated maximum-security buildings with new facilities- though, importantly, we strongly urge against any movement toward massive prison construction a la the United States, not when we should be seriously developing alternative intermediate and community-based means for dealing with crime and criminality. 9. Generate targeted mass employment projects. THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN unemployment and crime needs no elaboration here. However, we do want to call attention to

findings showing that it is the most blighted areas in the Kingston Metropolitan Area and in places like Montego Bay that have the highest rates of homicide. These areas are responsible for a disproportionate share of the nation's violent crime problem.

We see, therefore, a need for Government and the private sector to immediately develop, inside targeted ghetto areas: i. more programs for comprehensive education, training and skills-building ii. means for mass employment, primarily work projects that are not tied to any sort of political patronage. 10. Invest in employment opportunities (including mass projects) that will in the long term generate sustainable jobs.

WHILE A SIGNIFICANT percentage of the nation's youths is in need of immediate employment to, among other things, deter them from a life of crime, mere employment will not be enough. They will need good, viable jobs if they are to become stakeholders in the society. 11. Do more to enable small-scale entrepreneurship. GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE financial institutions should do a lot more than they are currently doing to make it easier for enterprising youths to access capital in order for them to start, in this nation of entrepreneurs, their own mini ventures and enterprises.

IN ADDITION, IN order for many of the country's poor to be able to successfully access credit, they will need legal assistance in converting their informal assets into collateral. The lack of legal proof of ownership has meant that people cannot use houses (which many of them probably built on squatter land) as collateral for loans, sell stakes in their businesses, buy

insurance to minimize risk or do other things that people in developed nations can do to turn a little money into a lot of money. 12.

Establish on the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies a Peace Institute. THE PEACE INSTITUTE, as we envision it, would serve first and foremost to operationally define and put in practice essential elements of the type of transformative approach to issues of crime and social justice articulated in this document. The Institute would be inter-faculty, cutting across academic and professional disciplines- particularly social and applied sciences, medicine, social work, law, humanities, theology and education.

ITS SPECIFIC MISSION would be to: i. provide scholars, activists and other community leaders a common place to engage in research (including development of relevant methodologies), disseminate knowledge, and develop pedagogies around issues of community and communal peace ii. ground and connect itself with indigenous organizations around the country, in the region and internationally that are working “ on the ground” settling disputes and developing programs of community-centered rehabilitation, peacemaking and restorative justice iii. bserve, monitor and report, through mass information outlets, on national and regional achievement, or movement towards, goals of transformative justice iv. facilitate and/or offer its resources (physical space, staff, funding, communications technology) to groups enjoined in combat, yet desiring peace v. sponsor public workshops, forums, colloquia and seminars on and dramatizations of topics relating to peace, justice, responsibility and civil society vi. publish its own peacemaking journal, which would attract submissions from the region and the wider world vii. ncourage and promote the work of its scholars. THE

ULTIMATE SIGNIFICANCE we see in the Peace Institute, though, is that it will enable the University of the West Indies, specifically the Mona campus, another way to connect institutionally with the society-more directly so with its surrounding neighborhoods. Signs are that, in the 21st Century, the university will be obligated to fulfill new and more challenging roles. It is being challenged to develop new collaborative, community-based integrated-service systems and to define its role as a partner in community building.

Jamaican and Caribbean society will need a new generation of inter-professionally oriented university leaders who have the ability to convince the public and policy makers that knowledge and scholarship are as critical to the moral and social development of a nation as they are to scientific progress and economic growth. We must reinvent the university to respond to the needs of a society in transition. A SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHIC

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