

Address by the
Honourable Douglas Orane, CD
at the
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I am happy to be able to join you this evening and to have been asked to address your membership. The Rotary movement in Jamaica has always been on the forefront of providing leadership in community development and demonstrating good citizenship and you are to be congratulated for this unerring display of caring and sharing.

In recent times, our country has been shaken by events that are unprecedented in our history...events which must force every well thinking Jamaican to take stock of where we are as a country and what road we must take if we are to turn our back on dark times.

I wish to share with you my thoughts on these troubling events, and to offer some ideas on how we can seize the moment to rebuild our country into a place in which we will be happy to live and raise our families.

I was actually away from Jamaica on May 24 when I got the news that armed thugs had openly challenged the authority of the State and were burning police stations and attacking the police. Like Jamaicans everywhere I watched

helplessly as the events unfolded on the television screen, praying that our security forces were equipped and able to beat back this challenge.

One social and political analyst has described the events of the past few weeks as unparalleled in the history of our country. In fact, his take was that the closest parallel he would draw was with the social upheavals of the 1930s.

Yet, we did not get to May 24 by accident. All the ingredients were in place: a country of just under 3 million persons with the second highest murder rate in the world, a corruption ranking that is among the highest in the region, and a highly sophisticated criminal network that is known and feared at home and abroad. Yet, up until recent months, we were prepared to carry on as if it were business as usual.

For over four decades we have flirted with a social experiment which has resulted in the marginalisation of entire communities whose residents have truly come to believe that their existence depends on the largesse of a politician or a don. We, the rest of the society, have given tacit approval of this experiment and so, on May 24, when our country, the laboratory for this experiment, exploded, very few ought to have been particularly surprised.

However another, more optimistic, take on our situation is that in recent months we have also proven to ourselves that all is not lost and that, as members of civil society, we have the power to effect the changes that we want to see in our country.

A broad based coalition of civil society - groups and individuals - has coalesced to strengthen non-partisan civic participation in the country's affairs and I am very heartened by this united and passionate approach. We must move

forward in identifying concrete ways in which civil society can continue to impact the required process of change. To attempt to go back to business as usual would mean ceding whatever ground has been gained and, believe me, we would then be in an even worse position in retreat. You can be sure that the forces of corruption in our country are surreptitiously working overtime, as we speak, to reverse the recent gains we have made.

I sense that we, in our society, are at a defining moment where we have the opportunity to change Jamaica to what we want it to be - a very different and much better place. However, I believe all well thinking Jamaicans will agree that, in order to begin retaking our country, we must break the link between politicians and organised crime which is at the root of the issue. How are we going to do that? I would like to point to three critical things that need to happen as a matter of urgency.

The first is, we have to stop the flow of money to corrupt entities and individuals through the award of state contracts. We now need to bring a level of probity to the process to require that persons who receive state contracts, and sub contracts are subjected to a fit and proper test. This would be done in much the same way that persons associated with financial institutions are vetted by the Bank of Jamaica or the Financial Services Commission.

In this regard, we need to increase support for the Office of the Contractor General to give that office more power to prosecute breaches of contract award guidelines. In fact the Contractor General himself has made specific recommendations for amendment of the Constitution to establish a National Independent Anti-Corruption State Agency. These recommendations need to be reviewed and decisions taken on how to proceed going forward.

The second critical issue is that of political party financing. We need to insist on the passage of the draft legislation on campaign funding that has been on the table since 2006. This would require our political parties to make clear and transparent the source of their financial support. I support the call by the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica for both major political parties to turn over their list of contributors to the Political Ombudsman on an annual basis. My personal position is that we need to go further and have full transparency, whereby all donations and donors are made public. In addition, it is essential that upper limits be set as to the maximum that any one donor can give to a political party, and as to the maximum that any party may spend in the course of an election campaign.

Certainly, from the perspective of the private sector we ought to take a decision individually not to make donations to political parties until there is demonstrated a tangibly greater level of accountability and transparency.

The third issue we need to address is the establishment of a system of integrity testing for persons who offer themselves for political office.

This would require greater transparency in selection of candidates in a way that would satisfy the electorate of the suitability of these candidates. Also, once elected, political representatives must be held to the requirement to publicly declare their assets as required by law, and prompt action to be taken where there are breaches.

The current situation in Jamaica presents a unique opportunity for each party to choose people who have no connection to organized crime, to lead each party forward with a clean slate of leadership for the future. I think that is what

all law-abiding Jamaicans truly want and we must continue to push for a clear timetable on this approach.

Every just and well ordered society is built on the ability of the government to pass the laws required to ensure stability, in a timely manner; on the ability of the police to monitor public behaviour and apprehend those who break the laws; and on the judiciary to award swift and equitable justice to those who come before the courts. It is distressing to say that in Jamaica we cannot claim to have gotten even one out of the above three to the level that we can be proud of.

There is a raft of bills awaiting passage which would speak to reform in all the areas I have outlined, and yet we have a Parliament that meets on an average of 35 times per year. Compare this with data for 2007 from the Society of Clerks which shows that the UK House of Commons met 151 times, the Canadian House of Commons met 115 times, the Australian House of Representatives met 68 times for the year, the Kenyan house of Parliament 86 times and the Indian parliament 74 times.

Can you recognise a link between the time that elected parliamentarians spend on their nation's business and the level of order in their society?

One Member of our Parliament recently complained that he has had 23 motions before the House since 2008 and still has not been able to get a date to present them. Is there a message here?

All of us Jamaicans are paying more taxes as of this year and our taxes are paying the salaries of our elected representatives. We need our members of

Parliament and senators to meet more often to debate and pass the laws that we need to govern our society. That is what they are being paid to do.

I submit also that we, the taxpayers of Jamaica have a right to hear, whether on a weekly or monthly basis, what laws have been passed, what is in the pipeline, and at what rate we are moving to have these laws passed.

Like most concerned Jamaicans, I have given some thought to where we go from here, because to dwell on the problems without offering some solutions would be a classic case of navel gazing. I wish to share some of these thoughts with you, as we ponder on what we need to do to restore our communities that have become so polarized over the years.

The garrison phenomenon emerged and became entrenched because of widespread urban poverty and the lack of social support for the most economically disadvantaged.

This created a situation where the loyalty of entire communities could be bought by anyone prepared to provide basic welfare services that should rightly come from the central state which is the repository of our tax dollars.

This situation has been exploited over the years by politicians who were then able to deliver 'safe' seats for their party, and later on by enterprising young men who emerged as community dons. Quite often these young men are highly intelligent, but have been deprived of the opportunity to develop their intellect and channel it in positive directions.

Even as we call for the government and security forces to move decisively into the garrisons we must be equally aware of the urgency of filling the very real

void left by the exit of the dons, and if we allow politicians to simply continue with more of the same, we are doomed to recreate the very scenario we now seek to change.

As the justice system goes after the dons that have established themselves in these communities we need to move with urgency on the legislation concerning seizure of assets. The laws already exist in Jamaica through which the Financial Investigations Division, or FID, as it is popularly known - has the power to confiscate the assets of individuals who have illegally enriched themselves through organized crime by putting what is know as 'civil recovery orders' before the court. So we need to examine why this is not moving forward at a quicker pace and to demand that whatever additional resources that are necessary to facilitate the FID in this regard be provided.

Community restoration must also include strategies to rescue young people at risk. Our young men between ages 14 and 20 are the ones most at risk of being drafted into criminal activity, and dying as a result. Our educational system has largely failed these young men, many of whom never manage to finish school, or even if they graduate they do so without passing a single subject or acquiring a meaningful skill. One of my colleagues told me of interviewing a group of Fourth and Fifth Form students at one of our most prominent high schools – asking them what were their plans for the future, and being told by most that they would be seeking to find work the minute they left school after fifth form because they had to look after the rest of the family. Under a third entertained the thought of proceeding to University.

It is my very firm view that any efforts at community restoration must include plans for making our young men less vulnerable to recruitment into criminal activities. We also need to encourage our young women to stay in school and

to provide them with positive female role models so they can see other alternatives besides early pregnancy and a lifetime of dependency.

I know that parents – by and large – want the best for their children. I do believe that, for the most part, a lot of parents are not happy with the direction in which their children seem to be drifting – as we adopt “foreign values” and a lack of respect for authority.

But it seems to me that we all have to look to ourselves to make sure that through our own behaviour we do not set bad examples. It’s not all about how “they behave” . It’s about how we behave as well. If we see ourselves as leaders of our society, then we should behave as leaders and not espouse objectionable behaviour.

As a corporate entity, my company, GraceKennedy, clings to the belief that we have a responsibility to strengthen Jamaica, not only financially, but also by investing in our young people. Since 1979 GraceKennedy has been involved in community outreach through our Grace & Staff Community Development Foundation. This Foundation is supported jointly by the company and our GraceKennedy employees. Our educational programmes target students at the secondary level with the aim of encouraging them to finish school. We support their performance through assistance with basic needs such as lunch money, transportation and other school-related expenses, as well as through our homework centres which provide them with a quiet place to study, and help with the various subject areas. This type of intervention demands a consistent commitment in funds and time which is provided by our staff volunteers, as well as a supporting programme of working with community members to encourage them to support their children’s education.

The result is that more students are completing high school each year. But the even better news is that more of them are qualifying to go on to tertiary studies. Our experience has been that young people who see a future for themselves, who are involved in educational and other activities, are less likely to be available for recruitment for criminal activity.

More of these and other types of social intervention will be necessary to combat the ills of our inner city communities across the island, and I submit that government, while it must lead the process of planning appropriate interventions and defining the priority of needs, will not be in a position to fund the level of financial resources required to be successful in the effort; nor perhaps will they be in a position to field the human resources required to man the effort. What this effort will require is the mobilisation of civil society as a whole. The private sector, including foundations and NGOs, service clubs like your own, and individual Jamaicans from all walks of life, must demonstrate that we care about our brothers and sisters living in depressed communities and will no longer abide their marginalisation at any level.

For, as I mentioned earlier, I believe the citizens of Jamaica have been largely complicit in the events that have brought us to this point because we have, in many cases, abdicated our responsibility. Responsible citizenry requires involvement and personal courage. Many years ago I made the personal decision that this is the country in which I want to live and work. I therefore made a conscious effort to become involved in the areas of the society in which I thought I could make a contribution to development. It is true that we get the society and governance that we are willing to accept and so if we are unhappy with the society in which we live it means that we need to examine what we are doing to help or hinder the development of that society.

We cannot complain about having a corrupt police force when we are willing to pay our way out of a traffic ticket, or we expect 'a bligh' because of who we are or who we know. We cannot complain about ineffective public services if we evade our taxes, and we cannot complain about poor government when we do not take the time to inform ourselves about the relevant issues, or when we don't even bother to vote.

The issues of crime and corruption run deep through our society and many of us know where the bones are buried, figuratively, and in some cases literally. Yet, we say nothing and do nothing out of fear for our personal safety. However, the irony is that years of doing and saying nothing have made us less safe and we are now faced with a situation where all of us live behind burglar bars in fear for our lives. At what point do we decide that enough is enough?

We need to do more than talk about the kind of Jamaica we want for our children. We need to demonstrate personal courage. One of the ways each of us can demonstrate personal courage, in the future is to be very explicit about who are the people with whom we will associate. For example, each of you in this room needs to ask yourself, "Am I, from this day going forward, unwilling to associate with people who, on the balance of probability, are involved with organized crime?" Will you invite them as guest speakers or panellists at functions? Will you invite them to your home for dinner and entertainment?

Part of our individual responsibility is to set a clear example of what behaviour we are unwilling to sanction by disassociating ourselves from persons involved in corruption.

If we look into the history of the major social movements, we will realise that they were triggered or inspired by individual acts of courage. I do maintain that if a thing is worth having, it's worth fighting for. Jamaica is our gem, and it is worth fighting for.

Years of consuming Hollywood movies have led us to believe that the hero is the person who barges fearlessly into dangerous situations and always manages to look calm and cool. However, in real life the truth is less glamorous. There is a saying, "Personal courage isn't the absence of fear; rather, it's the ability to put fear aside and do what's necessary".

The good news is that even if we believe we weren't born with personal courage, psychologists assure us that it is a trait that can be learnt. They say an individual can develop personal courage by modelling that behaviour from others, and that it develops as people begin to believe in themselves. I don't believe that we Jamaicans lack personal courage; what I believe is that we lack clear goals for ourselves as a nation and as a result we have become apathetic.

Not only do we need to have a vision of what we want Jamaica to be, but we need to defend it as citizens of this country. I talked about modelling courage...we could model the type of citizen activism that we see increasingly manifesting around the world. We may not necessarily agree with the political views of these offshore initiatives, but their participants have had the courage to make a difference. Examples include Thailand and Myanmar where there have been broad based alliances formed to agitate for a greater say by ordinary people in the running of their respective governments.

In the USA, recent citizen activism through the Tea Party movement is triggering the emergence of new and previously unknown political candidates, combined with lobbying pressure on lawmakers. In the UK, in May of this year Caroline Lucas was elected the first ever Green Party Member of Parliament in the constituency of Brighton.

After over three decades of retreating in fear, it is time for us as Jamaicans to do what is necessary to secure our country and the future of our children. We need to become involved in our communities and we need to become involved as citizens. I would like to leave you with some specific examples of how we can become more responsible citizens.

We can become involved through:

- denouncing the 'informer fi dead' culture; this culture is anathema to the tenets of a modern democracy with justice for all
- refusing to bribe the police and other public officials
- making our views known to our respective MPs
- going to the visitors' gallery in Parliament to observe the MPs that we are paying to manage the country's affairs
- turning up for jury duty
- paying our taxes
- volunteering to help guide young people
- becoming active in the school PTA
- serving on the boards of our alma maters, or any school that could use our help
- getting to know our neighbours better, and joining the local Neighbourhood Watch
- Observing and complying with our laws and encouraging others to do the same

And I could go on.

Developments in Jamaica over the past few months have demonstrated that it is doable for us to achieve results we never imagined possible. A year ago, one could only mention the name Dudus publicly in hushed tones, if at all. Today, Dudus is in custody, and others wanted for questioning are quietly turning themselves in to the police.

But these are still baby steps. Much more needs to change in our society before we can declare ourselves out of the woods. However the payoffs for perseverance are great.

Besides the obvious improvement in quality of life if we are able to conduct business and enjoy leisure activities without being in constant fear, there is a definite economic payoff from a reduction in crime. A 2007 World Bank study concluded that if Jamaica were to contain its homicide rate to 8.1/100,000 instead of our current rate of above 60/100,000 we would be able to grow our economy by an additional 5.8% per year. However, at the same time, we understand from Professor Anthony Harriott, of the UWI that he believes that it will take us some 25 years to return to a “normal rate” of violent crime. He describes a ‘normal rate’ as a situation where the number of violent crimes does not exceed the number of property crimes. So, as I said before, the payoffs are great but there is a lot of work to be done.

It is very clear to me, as it probably is to a majority of Jamaicans, that our political representatives will not spontaneously start attacking a problem that they have largely helped to create without sustained prodding from the rest of us. We must therefore move forward in identifying concrete ways in which civil society can continue to impact the required process of change. The impetus

for change that has recently manifested itself in individual and collective activism on the part of a broad coalition of civil society must not be permitted to falter lest we be again lulled into that sense of blind complacency that has brought us to this critical juncture in our history.

It is up to all of us as Jamaicans to determine how history will record our response to the opportunities presented by the turmoil which now confronts us. Change will come when each one of us in this room resolves that “enough is enough”. Change will come when we have the personal and collective courage to do the right things to make this period a defining moment for the transformation of our country.

Thank you.