

**ICHS, JAMAICA CAUSE, LCF**

**INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS CONFERENCE**

**December 6, 2014**

**PANEL DISCUSSION:** *Healing Jamaica. Practical Strategies to building a culture of Family.*

Presentation by Dr Michael Coombs © 2014

The importance of family to national development – restating the case and establishing the context for this panel discussion.

EXTRACT FROM VISION 2030 : “The New Paradigm.

Vision 2030 Jamaica introduces a new paradigm which redefines the strategic direction for Jamaica and puts us on a different path – a path that will lead to sustainable prosperity. The new paradigm will move from dependence on the lower forms of capital – our sun and sand tourism and exporting sub-soil assets and basic agricultural commodities, to development of the country’s higher forms of capital – our cultural, human, knowledge and institutional capital stocks that will move us into higher stages of development.”

FROM RESEARCH, NO OTHER INSTITUTION, STATE OR OTHERWISE, IMPACTS THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NATION’S HUMAN CAPITAL AS THE INSTITUTION OF THE FAMILY. WE ARE ESSENTIALLY THE PRODUCT OF OUR FAMILY ENVIRONMENT, PARTICULARLY THAT DURING THE FORMATIVE YEARS.

THROUGH THIS IMPACT OF THE FAMILY ON HUMAN CAPITAL, THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ALL FOUR GOALS OF VISION 2030 (INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT, SECURITY, ECONOMIC PROSPERITY AND A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT) WILL DEPEND DIRECTLY ON THE HEALTH OF JAMAICA’S FAMILIES. THERE IS NO WAY AROUND THIS FACT.

IN OTHER WORDS, HEALTHY FAMILIES ARE A PRE-REQUISITE FOR JAMAICA TO BECOME A 'PLACE TO RAISE FAMILIES'.

THIS IS MORE CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD WHEN WE CONSIDER THE FACT THAT DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES HAVE BEEN CLEARLY LINKED THROUGH RESEARCH TO ALMOST EVERY SOCIAL AND PUBLIC HEALTH MALADY BEING FACED BY JAMAICA AND OTHER CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES. THESE MALADIES INCLUDE CRIME AND VIOLENCE, YOUTH INCARCERATION, GANG MEMBERSHIP, MENTAL ILLNESS, SUBSTANCE ABUSE, POOR PERFORMANCE IN SCHOOL, TEEN SUICIDE, YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT, AMONG OTHERS.

FURTHER, IN SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR THIS DISCUSSION, TWO OTHER CRITICAL RESEARCH-LINKED POINTS MUST ALSO BE MADE (USA, UK AND THE CARIBBEAN).

- 1) THE NUCLEAR FAMILY OF MOTHER AND FATHER IN A STABLE MARITAL RELATIONSHIP, IS THE FAMILY STRUCTURE WITH THE GREATEST LIKELYHOOD OF POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR BOTH CHILDREN AND PARENTS. THEREFORE IN PROMOTING A CULTURE OF FAMILY, WHILE WE MUST RECOGNISE AND SUPPORT ALL FAMILY TYPES, THE NUCLEAR FAMILY MUST BE HELD UP AS THE IDEAL, ESPECIALLY IN GUIDING OUR YOUTH.
- 2) SECONDLY, A PLETHORA OF RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM RESEARCH CONDUCTED OVER THE PAST 2-3 DECADES, HAS ESTABLISHED FATHERLESSNESS OR PATERNAL DEPRIVATION AS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT VARIABLE IMPLICATED IN FAMILY DYSFUNCTION IN BOTH DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES.

AND SO LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, IN THIS CONTEXT, THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIES/RECOMMENDATIONS ARE BEING PUT FORWARD FOR REBUILDING A CULTURE OF FAMILY.

STRATEGIES/RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REBUILDING A CULTURE OF FAMILY.

- 1) ELEVATE THE DIALOGUE ON FAMILY TO THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF NATIONAL LEADERSHIP. A LESSON FROM THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC OF HIV/AIDS. NATIONAL PROGRAM OUTCOMES SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER WITH NATIONAL LEADERS CONSISTENTLY INVOLVED IN THE DIALOGUE EG UGANDA.

- 2) STRENGTHEN/ESTABLISH FAMILY LIFE INTERVENTIONS TARGETING THE CHURCH, SCHOOLS (EXPAND HFLE MODULE), COLLEGES, HEALTH SERVICES AND OTHER COMMUNITY GROUPS RECOGNISING THOSE ALREADY IN EXISTENCE. ALL COMPONENTS OF THE FAMILY MUST BE INCLUDED IE MARRIAGE (RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS), PARENTING, CHILD AND ADOLESCENT HEALTH AND WELLBEING ETC. THE NUCLEAR FAMILY STRUCTURE OF MOTHER AND FATHER IN A MARITAL UNION MUST BE HELD UP AS THE IDEAL PARTICULARLY IN GUIDING OUR YOUTH. IN LIGHT OF EXISTING RESEARCH EVIDENCE, THIS CAN ONLY BE VIEWED AS A NATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY/PRIORITY IN THE INTEREST OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.
  
- 3) RECOGNISING THE CURRENT DOWNWARD TREND OF THE NUMBER OF MARRIAGES TAKING PLACE ANNUALLY (RGD), AND THE FACT THAT HEALTHY MARRIAGES, AS DESIGNED BY GOD, FORM THE FOUNDATION OF HEALTHY FAMILIES INCLUDING EFFECTIVE PARENTING, A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO PROMOTE MARRIAGE AMONG YOUNG ADULTS AND ASPIRING PARENTS MUST BE VIEWED AS A KEY, URGENT STRATEGY IN CREATING A CULTURE OF FAMILY. THIS WOULD ESSENTIALLY REQUIRE THE COORDINATION AND STRENGTHENING OF EXISTING INTERVENTIONS INVOLVING ALL STAKEHOLDERS (FBO'S ETC.) EG VIA A NATIONAL BODY WITH REPS FROM PRO FAMILY ENTITIES SUCH AS FLM, NAF, FBO'S, VMBS ETC.
  
- 4) RECOGNISING THE EVIDENCE-BASED DEVASTATING IMPACT OF FATHERLESSNESS ON THE FAMILY, AND RELATED MALE DEVELOPMENT ISSUES WITH THE CYCLICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BOTH (EXPLAIN), MALE DEVELOPMENT/FATHERHOOD INTERVENTIONS MUST BE INCLUDED AS AN URGENT AND CRITICAL STRATEGY IN CREATING A CULTURE OF FAMILY. AGAIN THIS COULD BUILD ON EXISTING ACTIVITIES TARGETING MALES /FATHERS EG NAF, MOGAVA, FATHERS INC ETC.
  
- 5) CREATE A LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY ENVIRONMENT FACILITATIVE TO HEALTHY FAMILY LIFE INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING; EXPEDITE PASSING OF PATERNITY LEAVE LEGISLATION, ESTABLISH WORKPLACE POLICIES THAT SPEAK TO, AMONG OTHER THINGS, DEPLOYMENT (EG JCF), OVERTIME AND TIME OFF INVOLVING YOUNG PARENTS ESPECIALLY, PRO FAMILY/PARENTING INCENTIVES/DISINCENTIVES ETC.

- 6) PROVIDE ADEQUATE RESOURCES FOR PRO FAMILY PROGRAMMES EG FOR THE NPSC. THE 'PENNY WISE AND POUND FOOLISH' APPROACH IS NOT IN THE INTEREST OF CREATING A CULTURE OF FAMILY, AN INDESPENSABLE PREREQUISITE FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT. EG FINANCIAL COSTS OF CRIME AND VIOLENCE, TEENAGE PREGNANCIES, SUBSTANCE ABUSE, MENTAL ILLNESS, NCD'S VS COST OF PREVENTION THROUGH EFFECTIVE PARENTING AND HEALTHY FAMILIES.
- 7) A SUSTAINED NATIONAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN TO EDUCATE AND BUILD AWARENESS RE THE IMPORTANCE OF FAMILY AND ALL ITS COMPONENTS, WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON PARENTING IN GENERAL AND FATHERING IN PARTICULAR, USING THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY APPROACH (EXPLAIN). GEOGRAPHIC AND INSTITUTIONAL BASED INTERVENTIONS WHILE NECESSARY, WILL NOT HAVE THE NEEDED SCOPE OF IMPACT AFFORDED WITH THE USE OF ELECTRONIC AND SOCIAL MEDIA.

**CLOSING COMMENT.**

THE FOLLOWING QUOTE FROM CHARLES SWINDOLL SAYS IT WELL IN COMMENTING ON MOSES' FAREWELL MESSAGES TO THE ISRAELITES BEFORE HANDING OVER LEADERSHIP TO JOSHUA IN DEUTERONOMY 6.

“STOP AND THINK. BEFORE GOD SAID MUCH ABOUT WORK OR ANYTHING AT ALL ABOUT CIVIL GOVERNMENT, THE CHURCH, SCHOOL, THE LAW, THE RACES OR MAINTAINING OUR HEALTH, HE SPELLED OUT THE PRIMARY PRINCIPLES FOR HEALTHY AND HAPPY FAMILIES.”

THANK YOU LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

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