

Laws With Teeth Needed For Child Protection - PMI's Jackson ... We Need To Recapture The Spirit Of Community

The Gleaner

The Reverend Everton Jackson: We need to recapture the spirit of community in our quest to keep our children safe.

Western Bureau:

The Reverend Everton Jackson, chairman of the western Jamaica arm of the Peace Management Initiative (PMI), says keeping the nation's children safe is not only a divine imperative, but a national responsibility, which should be enforced through legislation and protective policies.

"We have a responsibility through legislature and policies to see to it that the young and vulnerable are safe, and should their safety be undermined, there is appropriate sanction," said Jackson, while addressing a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) event at the Montego Bay Cultural Centre on Tuesday night.

Jackson, who was speaking on the theme 'Preventing and Interrupting Violence in Volatile Communities', said that while laws are being passed nationally and internationally to protect children and ensure their safety, children are being abused without recourse.

"... The concern I have is, too often, we pass laws without teeth. It is full time for the [Child Care and Protection Act] to bite more," said Jackson.

"The act is in place, but still, our children are being abused without recourse. Child labour is still prevalent, especially on Fridays, in some rural communities. Underage children are still having babies and no one is held accountable. Tell me, how so? This is a see and blind, hear and deaf society."

In looking at some of the other ills plaguing the nation's children, Jackson pointed to the number of children who go missing annually, the numerous instances of children being raped and murdered, those dragged into child prostitution, and those who have become victims of human trafficking.

"We cannot, as a responsible nation, turn a blind eye to these atrocities meted out to those who are considered the future of our nation," said Jackson.

"The onus is on us to explore these challenges and offer solutions as together, we seek to prevent and interrupt violence, not only in volatile communities, but in all communities in Jamaica."

Abuse Has NO BOUNDARIES

While the theme spoke to 'volatile communities', Jackson was careful to point out that the abuse of children crossed the society's socio-economic lines as children in "upscale and enriched communities" also have their challenges.

"They have to contend with the devastating impact of separation and divorce; the stress of unreasonable expectations re academic performance; the pressure that comes from social class competition among neighbours and friends; and the deception of false values," said Jackson.

"The fact of the matter is that whether children come from deprived environments or enriched environments, they are exposed and, therefore, stand in need of protection from vicious abusers, unscrupulous predators, irresponsible and uncaring parents and guardians, unprofessional caregivers, and all persons of a warped mind under whose tutelage the young fall."

Jackson went on to bemoan the fact that the 'it takes a village to raise a child' African principle has been replaced by European-style individualism.

"We need to recapture the spirit of community in our quest to keep our children safe. There is much we can learn from the African culture and philosophy that is strong on the view that it takes a village to raise a child. For the African, it is the community that gives meaning, purpose, and identity to an individual," said Jackson.

"In order for the community to play a more active role in the protection of our children, of necessity, there have got to be shared communal values. Together, we must agree on the core values needed for the formation and development of our children. There cannot be any compromise when it comes on to honesty, respect, decency, hard work, good manners, proper etiquette, discipline, and conflict resolution. A conflicting value system is posing a serious threat to the safety and security of our children."

In addition to UNICEF, the initiative has the support and endorsement of the Children's Advocate, Do Good Jamaica, The Gleaner Online, and Television Jamaica.

Abolition Of Prelims Can Speed Up Court Cases, Say Attorneys

The Gleaner

Western Bureau:

Although there is a general perception that the courts dispense justice too slowly, immediate past president of the Cornwall Bar Association Michael Erskine believes there have been improvements in court management, particularly following the activation of a new law abolishing the preliminary enquiry system.

"The chief justice has been cognisant of the problem and has been trying to put in place court management strategies that will improve the situation, and there is a new law that is passed to eliminate criminal enquiries that is aimed at moving the process along faster," said Erskine, making reference to the abolition of preliminary examination proceedings by the Committal Proceedings Act of 2013, which came into effect in January this year.

Evidence Not Necessary

One result of the passage of the act is that the prosecution in serious cases such as murder and sexual offences, at the parish court level, no longer needs to present the evidence of the prosecution's witnesses and have them cross-examined by the accused individual just to determine if the case is able to be tried in the Circuit Court.

Speaking to the pace at which court proceedings are currently going, Erskine heaped praises on the judges at the parish level, who, he said, have been putting systems in place to speed up the resolution of cases.

"Things have been picking up in terms of the pace of how things have been moving. From my viewpoint, the judges are trying their best, and they have put in place certain systems that will make the process move a little faster," said Erskine, though he did not elaborate on what specific measures have been taken.

"I have noticed improvements in the delivery of justice from the time the case comes before the court to the time the case is tried."

Speaking to the potential effectiveness of the recently activated act abolishing preliminary enquires, western Jamaica-based attorney-at-law Lambert Johnson lauded the move for its potential to expedite cases quickly but cautioned that it could lead to a backlog in the Circuit Court.

St Ann man arrested for illegal firearm

The Observer



ST ANN, Jamaica — A man was arrested and charged with illegal possession of firearm and ammunition in Blackstonedged district, St Ann on Thursday.

He is 26-year-old Lamar Bish, otherwise called

'Lammie', of Middlesex district in St. Ann.

Reports from the St Ann's Bay Police are that about 11:30 pm, lawmen were on patrol in the area when they observed Bish acting in a manner which aroused their suspicion. He was accosted, searched and a 9mm pistol with five 9mm cartridges taken from him.

Bish is to appear before the St Ann's Bay Resident Magistrate's Court on Tuesday, April 12.

The End