



INTEGRITY COMMISSION

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Executive Director's 2022 International Anti-Corruption Day Message

Today, the Integrity Commission of Jamaica is pleased to join hundreds of international, state and civil society organizations around the world, in commemorating International Anti-Corruption Day 2022, under the theme "UNCAC at 20: Uniting the World Against Corruption."

International Anti-Corruption Day has been observed, on December 9, every year since the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) was formally adopted on October 31, 2003. As at November 2021, 181 countries were parties to the Convention.

On the occasion of UNCAC's adoption in 2003, the then Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, said that "UNCAC sends a clear message that the international community is determined to prevent and control corruption. It warns the corrupt that betrayal of the public trust will no longer be tolerated."

Sadly, however, and almost 20 years after, the world continues to grapple with the scourge of this deadly cancer.

Here, at home, and despite ratifying UNCAC on March 5, 2008, and the 1996 Inter-American Convention Against Corruption on March 16, 2001, Jamaica is still being obstructed by this malady that some have characterized as a crime against humanity.

Three recent Statements of Concern, from three authoritative sources, about the magnitude of Jamaica's corruption problem, are instructive. They underscore the suggestion that Jamaica may have already descended into the far end of the abyss and risks going beyond the point from which there may be no return, should we fail to take prompt and effective corrective action.

The First Statement of Concern

On December 1, 2022, the President of Jamaica's Private Sector Organization (PSOJ), Mr. Keith Duncan, said that "Jamaica has a serious corruption problem," and that "more than 85% of Jamaicans believe that both our political parties are corrupt, and we seem to have normalized" it.

Some of his troubling comments were published the next day, on December 2, 2022, in Jamaica's leading newspaper, the Jamaica Gleaner. In an article that was headlined "PSOJ: Corruption continues to hinder economic progress," this was what was reported:

"PSOJ President Keith Duncan has said that corruption and other crimes continue to be an Achilles heel for the country, preventing it from realizing its true potential." The Gleaner further quoted him as saying that crime and corruption, by some estimates, were costing the Jamaican economy "about \$100 to \$200 billion per year."

Very importantly, the Private Sector Leader also acknowledged that Jamaica's Private Sector was complicit in corruption.

The Second Statement of Concern

The second Statement of Concern, which preceded Mr. Duncan's assessment of Jamaica's corruption problem, was the U.S. State Department's July 28, 2022 Investment Climate Statement on Jamaica. The Statement said that "corruption, and its apparent linkages with organized crime, appear to be one of the root causes of Jamaica's high crime rate and economic stagnation."

The Statement needs no further elaboration except to note that Jamaica recorded the highest murder rate in the entire Americas in both 2020 and 2021, and appears set to exceed its own rates in 2022; and that in 2019 it was ranked as high as #7 in the world, out of 141 countries, on the problem of organized crime.

The Third Statement of Concern

Finally, and in the third Statement of Concern, Transparency International (TI), on January 25, 2022, in its 2021 Global Corruption Perception Index (CPI) Report, singled out Jamaica's "politicians" for their perceived "significant resistance to (anti-corruption) reform."

TI's damning comments about Jamaica, were also cast against the country's 2021 CPI of 44, and a 20-year CPI average of only 37.8, where 0 means highly corrupt and 100, clean. According to TI, Jamaica's current CPI signals prevalent bribery, lack of punishment for corruption, and public institutions that do not respond to citizens' needs.

The international community is not unmindful of the refusal or failure of some sovereign governments, lawmakers and leaders to take decisive action against corruption within their territorial borders.

The community is particularly attuned to the deleterious consequences that this poses for the socio-economic fortunes of citizens, as well as what it portends for the worsening of global issues of concern, such as organized crime, money-laundering and terrorism, should there be no appropriate response. Indeed, these were among the very triggers that gave rise to UNCAC in 2003.

The concerns are now even more far-reaching. As recently as November 28, 2022, for example, the Netherlands, Canada and Ecuador joined an increasing coalition of nations that is backing the call for the creation of an International Anti-Corruption Criminal Court, to bring perceived corrupt government leaders and top public officials around the world to book. The Court would operate along lines that are similar to that of the Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC).

Some countries are also aggressively using their foreign anti-corruption laws, spurred by the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention (ABC), or the imposition of sanctions, and travel bans, to hold to account non-compliant sovereign leaders.

Leaders who are perceived to be enabling or exhibiting corrupt behavior, stealing public money, violating human rights, committing other crimes, or otherwise abusing their public office, but who enjoy impunity in their countries because of ineffective institutions, weak rule of law, or their control over the state apparatus, are being targeted.

Jamaica, which unfortunately has now been classified internationally as a country whose "politicians" are seen to be putting up "significant resistance to (anti-corruption) reform," should take note. We are under the spotlight and should give serious consideration to the growing concerns about the issue of corruption, and dispel the notion of what some may see as paying lip-service to the problem.

Jamaica's leaders, lawmakers, and anti-corruption and law enforcement institutions, must all urgently take a stock of what needs to be done. The Integrity Commission understands the issue, as well as the concerns, and is working assiduously to ensure that it meets the expectations of Jamaicans, despite any challenges that it may face.

Collectively, we must all send, not only to Jamaicans, but also to the global community of nations at large, unmistakable signals that we are serious about tackling and overcoming the scourge of corruption which is now a clear and present danger to the Jamaican state.

Greg Christie