



OFFICE OF THE CONTRACTOR GENERAL OF JAMAICA

GUEST SPEAKER PRESENTATION BY

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“Overcoming the Problem of Corruption in Jamaica”

26th Annual Installation of the President and Officers
Rotary Club of St. Andrew North

The Jade Garden Restaurant, Sovereign Centre, St. Andrew, Jamaica

6:30 pm, Monday, June 25, 2012

Mr. Master of Ceremonies, the President and Officers of the Rotary Club of St. Andrew North, the incoming President and Officers-Elect of the Club, Members of the Club, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Evening to you all.

I feel extremely privileged and humbled to be here tonight as we honour the incoming President and Officers of your distinguished Club.

Indeed, I am particularly honoured to be your Guest Speaker, for it was through the instrument of Rotary that my long held friendship with your incoming President began, some 22 years ago, in 1990.

During that year, President-Elect, Greg Hugh-Sam, and I were both admitted as members of the Rotary Club of St. Andrew and, thereafter, served, for many years, in varying capacities, as officers of the Club, while our friendship deepened.

I, therefore, feel very proud to be here tonight to celebrate his elevation to the esteemed position of the President of the Rotary Club of St. Andrew North.

I can assure you that he will serve you and the interests of Rotary well, and that his stewardship of the affairs of this august institution, over the next twelve months, will be outstanding and exemplary.

The Rotary Clubs of Jamaica, together, constitute an extremely powerful and influential institution in our country. Their combined membership cuts across the entire professional and business spectrum of the society.

But there is something else that is special and unique about Rotary. As Rotarians, you occupy a position not only of privilege but, more importantly, you occupy a position of leadership, a position of responsibility and a position of trust.

This, in turn, demands that you must be practitioners and role models of that which is right in our society and, consequently, it is in this context that I would like to share a few thoughts with you tonight about the problem of corruption in Jamaica, and to appeal to you to give serious consideration to what, if anything, you can do about it.

Much has been said about this deadly scourge of corruption that has now invaded and adulterated our once pristine shores.

While corruption is by no means a phenomenon that is confined to Jamaica alone, it is, nevertheless, considered by many to be the largest single impediment to our country's attainment of sustained economic growth and development.

Defined generally as the abuse of public office for private gain, corruption, which is often driven by individual greed and dishonesty, is now a major global concern if only because there is abundant evidence that it has the capacity to undermine democracy, and the rule of law, as well as to drive fragile and developing countries, like Jamaica, towards State capture or State failure.

Given the magnitude of its potential impact, and its alarming and corrosive effects, the issue of corruption, is, therefore, something which should not be treated lightly by the populace or, for that matter, by the Government of any country.

Corruption erodes the quality of life of the society. It denies the poor access to basic entitlements, such as water, electricity, roads, health care, housing and education. Corruption leads to human rights violations, hijacks political elections and reduces investor confidence in the country. And corruption also undermines critical public institutions and enables organized crime and other threats to human security to flourish.

Unfortunately, however, the view that corruption is perceived as a major problem in Jamaica is not one that is confined to our borders. It is a view which is shared globally, for Jamaica has been long considered to be one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

Transparency International (TI), the global anti-corruption watchdog, for example, for the past five (5) consecutive years, has never scored Jamaica higher than 3.3 on its Corruption Perception Index, where a score of 10 is perceived to be 'clean', and 1 as 'corrupt'.

Obviously, this is not a good thing for the country. Because if Jamaica is to pull itself out of its deep macro-economic and debt burden quagmires, it will have to succeed in attracting substantial quantities of 'clean', foreign private direct investments to its shores.

The point that I am making must not be under-estimated, particularly since the widely published and consulted TI rankings are based upon a variety of business opinion surveys that are carried out, globally, by reputable and independent international institutions.

These surveys and assessments include, for example, questions which relate to the bribery of a country's public officials, kickbacks in public procurement, embezzlement of public funds, as well as questions that are designed to probe the strength and the effectiveness of a country's public-sector anti-corruption efforts.

Consequently, and as an example, in awarding multi-billion dollar Government contracts, great care should be exercised by the Jamaican State to ensure that such awards are subjected to independent scrutiny, and are executed in accordance with internationally accepted standards of good governance and best practices in procurement, failing which we will run the risk of concretizing the already widely held perception that the country is indeed corrupt.

Jamaica's leaders must also come to recognize that foreign private investors are being held to a significantly higher standard of corporate governance, responsibility and accountability.

More and more, foreign investors are seeking to do business only in localities that are perceived to be 'clean', and to ensure that their affairs are conducted in a manner which will avoid the ever-widening jurisdictional reach of American and European anti-corruption laws.

It goes without saying, therefore, that unless Jamaica cleans up its act fast, and visibly goes overboard to do so, you will find that, among other things, it will be increasingly bypassed by the foreign direct investment community, while being frowned upon by its strategic bi-lateral and multi-lateral partners.

The phenomenon of systemic corruption is significantly related to poor standards of governance, accountability and transparency in government, and a cursory review of Jamaica's governance landscape, over the past several years, will provide abundant evidentiary circumstances of a country that is pervasively corrupt.

Deficiencies in institutional checks and balances on entrusted power; governmental decisions that are shrouded in secrecy; a system which does not hold its public officers accountable for their actions; and a country in which the rule of law is neither fully enforced nor respected; are all typical governance features that are associated with systemically corrupt countries.

So too, where there is a general lack of confidence in a country's anti-corruption, law enforcement and justice institutions; where the said institutions are inadequately resourced, or are perceived to be ineffective; or where anti-corruption laws are inadequate, or are not backed up by significant criminal sanctions; corruption will, no doubt, run rampant.

The situation is obviously even further aggravated where there is, as is the case with Jamaica, a seeming systemic failure, on the part of law enforcement and prosecutorial authorities, to dispassionately investigate and prosecute allegations of corruption in high places.

In all of these instances, the mistake must never be made to relax the regulatory system, for corruption that is driven primarily by a deep rooted culture of greed and dishonesty, cannot be effectively addressed until and unless a country's anti-corruption institutional framework, and its public good governance systems, are significantly strengthened.

But it is also important to recognize that the causative and influencing factors of systemic corruption are not confined to poor standards of 'public sector governance' alone.

The influencing factors are much broader in scope, since systemic corruption is a phenomenon that is also closely associated with certain societal considerations, such as low social, moral and ethical values, as well as poor integrity and governance standards in the private sector.

To make the point, and to do so succinctly, one only has to consider that most forms of corruption require two parties – a corrupt public official, and a dishonest civilian or private sector entity.

This is the case, for example, in all instances of public sector bribery, kickbacks, graft, nepotism, cronyism and influence peddling.

Consequently, where a society places little or no importance on considerations, such as values, attitudes, morality, principles or ethics in one's personal or business dealings, there will always be a ready and abundant market for the crooked public official who is bent on abusing his public office for his private gain, or for the illicit gain of others.

In such circumstances, the fight against systemic corruption cannot, therefore, be a fight that is confined to the strengthening of a state's anti-corruption laws or its institutions. Nor can it be confined to just improving the standards of governance in the public sector alone.

The behavioral and attitudinal patterns of private sector entities, as well as that of the individual citizen, must also, as a matter of necessity, be similarly and contemporaneously addressed.

Accordingly, and in so far as the Jamaica private sector is concerned, one possible way of assisting with the resolution of the problem of corruption in Jamaica is for institutions such as the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica (PSOJ), the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce (JCC), and the Jamaica Manufacturers Association (JMA), to insist upon the implementation, and effective enforcement, of stringent corporate governance, anti-corruption and corporate social responsibility (CSR) compliance policies, on the part of their members.

You and I, ladies and gentlemen, will also need to undergo significant self-introspection, and soul-searching, in respect of how we conduct our personal and business affairs.

Getting a close friend, for example, who is a public officer to abuse his position by giving your daughter a summer holiday job at his work-place, or making a false customs declaration at the airport with the intent to conceal dutiable commercial items that are in your possession, are not the simple matters that you may think they are.

They are blatant criminal acts, and we should refrain from doing them.

In similar fashion, when supposedly upstanding Jamaican professionals, such as doctors, lawyers and accountants, illegally avoid paying their fair share of taxes, this, too, constitutes an unconscionable criminal fraud which is perpetuated upon the public purse to the detriment of one's country.

As parents or mentors, we must also ensure that the younger generation does not adopt the mentality of gain by dishonest or corrupt means, or to come to accept this as a norm, or as a way of life.

But the problem of corruption, and the extent to which it can be fought by insisting upon higher ethical and professional standards in the Jamaican society, has other important dimensions.

As an example, because transparency is the direct antithesis of corruption, the media too has a pivotal and indispensable role to play in dispassionately exposing or investigating allegations of corruption on the part of public officials and their accomplices in the private sector.

Consequently, if key segments of Jamaica's mainstream media are not independent, or refuse to be completely ethical and balanced in their approach, or should they allow themselves to be influenced by political or other special interests into slanting or suppressing the truth, then the battle against corruption would have already been halfway lost.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Jamaicans must begin to resist what appears to be another pervasive cultural norm that has taken root in our beloved country.

It is a cultural norm, which is called 'tribal politics', and which seems to require that everyone and everything should be first assessed through a perceived green or orange political prism, and then be treated accordingly, whether via facilitation or via isolation.

Political tribalism has become a destructive vice that is not only seriously dividing and hurting Jamaica, but it also appears to have as some of its siblings, corruption in government contracting, organized crime, and political campaign financing, all of which seem to have been happily working together, in a perfect symphony, for some time.

Besides corruption, political tribalism is, perhaps, the next single largest impediment to the country's attainment of sustained economic growth and social development, and we should put an immediate end to it before it destroys and decimates all of us.

Rotary International's Four Way Test mandates you, as Rotarians, to consider the following questions in everything that you think, you say and you do:

1. Is it the truth?
2. Is it fair to all concerned?
3. Will it build goodwill and better friendships? and
4. Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

Should you take these mandates seriously, then I would daresay that it is self-evident that your obligations to the land of your birth, and the philosophy that underpins your very presence here tonight, demand that you must act courageously and sincerely to ensure that the cancer of corruption, which has now permeated the very life blood of our beloved country, is excised from our midst.

You must act, not only by encouraging your political leaders and the nation's business and media interests into urgent and decisive action in the interest of Jamaica, but you, your family members, your colleagues and your business associates, must also act similarly in the lives that you lead, and in the way in which you conduct your own affairs.

Roughly two years ago, while addressing the Mona School of Business Graduates Awards Ceremony, I was moved to exhort the graduates, as future leaders of our country, to be forthright, courageous, persistent and fearless in not only doing what is right, but also in standing up and speaking out for what is right.

In the same vein, I am now obliged to call upon you, as Rotarians, to act in a similar manner.

You must not only go forth now and lead by example, but, more importantly, you must make your voices heard, for there are too many Jamaicans who are seemingly content to confine their views, about the ills of our society, to the safety of their homes.

Not many of us are prepared to publicly call a spade a spade, and no one, it seems, wants to be perceived as challenging the status quo, out of fear of being ridiculed, marginalized, victimized, branded or isolated.

Indeed, there appears to be too few of us who are prepared to allow principled and ethical considerations to stand in the way of our profits, our personal advancement, or our political allegiance.

And there appears to be even fewer of us who are prepared to publicly insist that the national interest must always prevail above political expedience.

But we cannot blindly, or nonchalantly, continue down this path and expect that Jamaica will be a much better place, 50 years from now, for our children and grandchildren.

We must urgently find a way to move the critical mass of our society away from one that is clearly mired in apathy and self-interest, to one that is prepared to do what is right by country.

Consequently, let us, therefore, tonight commit to be guided by the words of the great American President, John F. Kennedy, who exhorted his fellow citizens to “ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country”.

Let us, in this our fiftieth year of independence, begin to do what is right by Jamaica.

Let us set aside our political differences and insist upon being guided not by individual need, or by individual greed, but by the general need of the many.

And let us, as patriotic Jamaicans, begin to give pride of place to the interest of our country above those of our own.

Should each of us do all of these things, we can not only make Jamaica one of the greatest countries on the face of the earth, but we can, in so doing, ensure that the full socio-economic potential of every single Jamaican will have a reasonable opportunity of being realized.

Thank you and may God bless Jamaica.