

# **“Facing Violence in Jamaica”**

**Hon. Dr Peter Phillips, Minister of National Security**

## **Keynote Address**

**International Conference on Violence Prevention**

Kingston, Jamaica October 8, 2003

### **1. Introduction**

#### Salutations

Chairman, may I first of all extend a warm welcome to delegates and other participants, especially those visiting Jamaica for the first time. On behalf of the Government and people of Jamaica I also wish to express thanks and appreciation to the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Pan-American Health Organisation for choosing Jamaica as the venue for this important and timely “International Conference on Violence Prevention”.

We not only expect that you will enjoy our world famous hospitality but that the setting here at the Jamaica Conference Centre will provide a conducive atmosphere for the deliberations on your agenda.

The papers and agenda prepared for this conference underscore the harsh reality of violence and insecurity for millions of people around the world.

Few of us would disagree with the conclusion of Dr. Mirta Roses Periago, director of the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO) who told a recent media briefing in Washington, "Violence is going to be a leading health problem in the 21<sup>st</sup> century".

But by your presence in such large numbers here today, under the umbrella of multilateral cooperation, you are demonstrating that if we can collectively summon the will, the intelligence, the courage and the resources the future need not be as bleak as the prediction. And it is to this task that I welcome you most wholeheartedly.

Given the mandate of the WHO and PAHO within the United Nations system it is appropriate that much of the focus of this conference is on the health approach to violence reduction and prevention. But I see from your agenda that you will also address other approaches including the justice system, conflict resolution, victim support and the role of the mass media.

I noted in particular, that the agenda includes extensive focus on approaches to reducing homicide as well as the very troubling issue of the effects of violence on children, whether as witnesses, victims or perpetrators. These are major concerns for us here in Jamaica.

From the background data prepared for this conference, delegates would already be aware that Jamaica—with a homicide rate of 44 per 100,000 population—is among several countries of the Americas with rates classified as high. Colombia 65, Honduras 55, Guatemala 5, El Salvador 45, Venezuela 35 and Brazil 28 are also on the list.

Homicide has become the fifth leading cause of death in Jamaica (after malignant neoplasms, heart disease, cerebrovascular disease and diabetes mellitus).

Given this clearly unacceptable situation and the other serious challenges of crime and violence that we confront here in Jamaica this international conference provides an excellent and timely opportunity to exchange best practices on violence prevention.

Out of this process, I fully expect that all us—policy makers and professionals in both the health sector and the criminal justice system—will come away with new strategies to deal with this monster that is tearing at the very foundation of our society,

As a former Minister of Health and current Minister of National Security I feel uniquely privileged to share with you today my own perceptions on violence both as a public health as well as a criminal justice and human rights issue. I have seen how both are inextricably linked.

As part of the law enforcement response to the crisis we face our security forces currently target specific communities where criminal violence had reached intolerable levels. We also are implementing strategies to restore order in public spaces, including on our roads. And we are dismantling known criminal gangs and bringing their members to justice

But we also know that law enforcement is only part of the response to crime and violence. We have to understand the root causes behind violent and criminal behaviour and seek to change individual and social circumstances that give rise to such behaviour.

Furthermore, national efforts must be supported by international cooperation. This is particularly true where violence stems from the actions of criminal networks trading in guns and narcotics. What they do in Kingston reverberates in Bogota, Brooklyn or Brixton. Against this background I will start to address the issue of “Facing Violence in Jamaica” today by looking first at the global context.

## **2. The Global Context**

Here, Mister Chairman, I must pause to commend Dr. Etienne Krug, Director of the WHO Programme on Violence and Health and editor of the *World Report on Violence and Health 2002* which, I understand, will be presented later in this conference. Dr. Krug and all the experts who contributed to the rigorous research and analysis that has produced this insightful document deserve the gratitude of the policy makers and professionals in health and criminal justice whose work will benefit from the data and insights in the report.

One of the first things that struck me in the Report was the universality of the problem. Violence, it concludes, “is a universal scourge that tears at the fabric of communities and threatens the life, health and happiness of all of us”. The numbers speak for themselves.

- Each year, some 1.6 million people around the world die from violence. One half of these deaths result from self-directed violence, namely, suicide; one-third result from homicide; and one-fifth are caused by collective violence, mostly war-related.
- Countless others are injured, both physically and mentally and families are shattered.
- Violence is particularly destructive of youth, being the leading cause of death for the age group 15-44.
- The majority of violence-related deaths occur in low-to middle-income countries. Indeed, in the year 2000, more than 91 percent occurred in the developing world.
- Rates of violent death in the low-to middle-income countries are more than twice as high (31.1 per 100,000 people) as those in high-income countries (14.4 per 100,000).
- About 10-14 percent of world GDP is consumed by destruction caused by violence and protecting people and goods from violence.

One is immediately struck by the disproportionate incidence of violence between developed and developing countries, In part, this is a reflection of the inadequacies in the infrastructure of law enforcement in developing countries.

It is also a manifestation of the reality of global economic inequality as well as a consequence of the poverty and human frustrations that derive from that inequality.

In addition, where the violence is directly associated with criminal networks, it is a major cause of underdevelopment:

- Societies with high levels of violence cannot attract sufficient investment for sustained growth and development;
- They have difficulty recruiting and retaining highly skilled people;
- They are forced to spend disproportionately high amounts of the national budget on security and crime fighting;
- The high transaction costs for doing business make these societies globally uncompetitive.

Accordingly, while we approach violence prevention from a public health standpoint, we also have to face the challenges brought on by criminal networks and the internationalisation of organised crime which often engages in the most brutal forms of violence to enforce its rules.

Driven in large measure by illicit financial rewards from drug trafficking, organised crime has the means and the motive to use violence as a tool of enforcement.

Then there are the peculiar challenges posed by the ability of organised crime to use its vast financial resources to inflict a corrupting influence on public officials and whole communities in many parts of the world, including here in Jamaica.

One measure of the problem we face is that some 100-120 metric tons of cocaine are transshipped through Jamaica annually, that is, 20 % of US demand and 10 percent of the Columbian trade. So, for us the tap-root of the problem is the illegal drug trade, which spawns and sustains the criminal gangs and the violence.

### **3. The Epidemic of Violence in Jamaica**

Beneath this manifestation of “collective violence” spawned by organised crime, some of which operate through terrorist networks, we also have a huge problem of inter-personal violence. Now, I’d like to share some thoughts with you on the socio-cultural roots of this problem, some of its most serious consequences and, finally some approaches to tackling it.

I begin with the sound conclusion in the *World Report on Violence and Health* that violence, in general terms, is an “extremely complex phenomenon that has its roots in the interaction of many factors—biological, social, cultural, economic and political”. The conclusion is also valid for Jamaican.

We know from our socio-cultural history that violence was systematically used to secure obedience in slave society and long afterwards. And we also know that rebellion—sometimes violent—was used in the systematic resistance to violence, social exclusion and economic deprivation.

One result, which is manifested today in the fractured relationship between the police and the community, was the failure to develop a culture of law-abidingness, based on mutual respect of the citizen and those making and enforcing the law. These socio-cultural factors have now been exacerbated by the rise of violent criminality, especially over the last 30 years.

We also have to confront one of the most negative and divisive features of our style of political competition, namely political tribalism, that has bred a dependency syndrome in many of the nation’s citizens and divided communities along party lines.

We have also seen the breakdown of traditional community leadership and the emergence of a new type of non-traditional community leadership that has its roots in tribal politics and the drug culture.

Then there been protracted economic hardships over the last 30 years or so which have denied many citizens the opportunity to earn a livelihood or to have a meaningful existence.

These circumstances, plus the corrosive influence of the diet of violence in much of mass media entertainment and the absence of strong civic and communitarian values in the education system have all contributed to propagating a culture of violence. The most harmful and potentially explosive effects are on the young people, especially those in poor, urban communities.

*Chairman*, a recent report, ***Aggressive Youth and Youth Experiences of Violence: Who is at Risk in Jamaica?*** by Dr Julie Meeks Gardner and Dr Christine Powell of the Epidemiology Research Unit, Tropical Medicine Research Institute University of the West Indies, Mona makes the point with great force and clarity.

The report summarises the findings and conclusions from several surveys, among 9-17 year olds in strife-torn and violence-plagued communities in the Kingston metropolitan region. The aim was to ascertain the experiences and perceptions of violence among urban adolescents. Some of the key findings:

- There was a high level of experience with violence with 33% having been victims of violence and over 60% had a family member who was a victim of violence.

- 47.5 % of children had seen a dead body resulting from murder and 38% had seen fighting with knives or guns.
- There was a strong association between neighbourhood violence and school aggression, “which suggests that the role of schools in moulding behaviours may be minimal in this environment”.
- The more aggressive children came from “poorer homes with more marijuana use, less parental affection and supervision and more family discord”.

The more aggressive youngsters were less exposed to religious instruction and their parents had lower occupational levels and were more likely to be in common law unions than married.

The main conclusions from the survey are worth quoting extensively because they point to some of the kind of interventions that we will have to make whether we are policy makers, social workers, teachers or parents.

- “Although, neighbourhood violence was pervasive in these communities and was a risk factor for child aggression, family functioning was also important. Parents being married, practising religion as a family and the children having adequate school uniforms were associated with reduced risk, whereas domestic violence and a high level of physical punishment were associated with increased risk.

- “We identified an alarming level of physical punishment. It is apparent that intervention programmes aimed at reducing aggression among school children will have to address school and parental discipline practices. School level interventions, though necessary, are unlikely to solve the problem, and urgent comprehensive action needs to be taken at the child, family, and society levels.”

#### **4. Impact of Violence on Health and the Economy**

To give you a sense of the impact of inter-personal violence on the health sector, I would now like to refer briefly to a study of the patterns of violence-related injuries treated in our major hospitals.

Here I am grateful to Dr. Elizabeth Ward, Director of Disease Prevention and Control in the Ministry of Health and other officers in the Division of Health Promotion and Protection for their collection and analysis of data from seven hospitals in 2002.

One of the most revealing findings was that in the overwhelming majority of cases of violence treated in our major hospitals. there was a close relationship between the victim and perpetrator of the violence.

- In 50% of the cases they were acquainted;
- In 15% they were intimate partners;
- In 11% they were relatives and 5% were friends.

- Among the other instances, 17% of the cases involved total strangers and in 4% these involved were mostly official or legal use of violence.

The circumstances under which the acts of violence were committed also revealed an interesting pattern:

- A fight or argument was involved in 82% of the cases.
- Another 6% were cases of child and/or sexual abuse.
- 5% were related to robbery/burglary,
- 5% were related to mob/riot/police shooting incidents,
- Two percent were drug or gang related.

In terms of the method or choice of weapons,

- 42% of the injuries were inflicted by sharp objects;
- 32% by blunt objects;
- 15% by bodily force;
- 4% by gun shot and a similar 4% in sexual abuse cases
- The remaining 3% fell in the 'other' category.

The inescapable conclusion from the data is that the overwhelming majority, perhaps 90%, of the injuries treated in our major hospitals can be prevented by resorting to non-violent means of dispute resolution.

Data compiled by the Division of Health Promotion and Protection in the Ministry of Health from Jamaican hospitals for the year 2001 confirm that, as a country, we are paying a very high price for violence:

- The cost of treating injuries in hospitals was \$971 million, making it the highest single item of health care cost.
- Obstetrics and gynaecology was next with \$698 million.
- Cardiovascular diseases ranked third at \$501 million.
- Violence accounted for 11% of the budget at our major trauma hospital, the Kingston Public Hospital.
- Violence forced the cancellation of one in three elective surgeries each week.

## **5. Facing the Future**

Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is clear that we face great challenges in responding to the threats posed both by national and international criminal networks and the social and cultural forces that are fundamentally altering individual societies and the wider world. But they are not insurmountable as long as we all recognise that the search for solutions must involve all stakeholders within each society as well as the global community. Let me now outline some of the steps we are taking in Jamaica and then end by inviting you to help mobilize international will and resources to deal more effectively with crime and violence.

## ***Modernising the Infrastructure of Law Enforcement***

In the area of law enforcement, our highest priority is to step-up our reforms and modernization of the infrastructure of law enforcement, including the judiciary. There are several things we have to do:

- Increase the numbers in the security forces as well as other material resources required for greater operational efficiency and effectiveness. The current plan is to increase the numbers in the police force from ? to ? over the next ? years. ||
- Continuous training: We have to improve the policing skills and respect for human rights during the formal training of new recruits. But beyond the academy —perhaps more critically—the training has to continue at all levels on the job.
- Building relationships with the community, especially those torn by violence. My position on this matter is very clear. Unless there are strong bonds of respect between the citizens of the country and the security forces, it will not be possible to isolate and defeat the criminals.
- Seek the full, sustained support of all segments of the society through specific measures like establishing an independent police public complaints authority and strengthening the civilian consultative machinery already in place to monitor the operational activities of the security forces.

- Create an appropriate legislative framework for more effective law enforcement, including the judicial system. Legislation under consideration include a new plea bargaining law, an anti-terrorism act and a proceeds of crime act that would enable us to go after cases of illicit enrichment.

But law enforcement is expensive. We now spend about 7-billion dollars a year for the police force plus another 4-billion dollars for the Ministry of National Security. It would require as much as another 2-billion a year for the next four or five years to meet the requirements for capital development in the security forces.

In the country's present economic and financial circumstances it is not likely that we will be able to generate all these resources from the national budget so implementation will have to be on a phased basis.

### ***Economic and Social Intervention***

In addition to modernizing the infrastructure of law enforcement we, as a government, are committed to strengthen social intervention programmes especially in communities that are most at-risk.

We also have to grow the economy faster and create more opportunities for more people to move out of poverty faster and reduce the nation's glaring social and economic inequalities.

- We have to reform the educational system to include civic and communitarian values. Concepts like tolerance for diversity and non-violent techniques for dispute resolution.

### ***Regional and International Cooperation***

- Regionally, we are working with our CARICOM partners to share information and develop strategies to respond to the drug menace which affects all of us. To this end, we have established a standing committee of Attorneys General and Ministers of National Security to co-ordinate efforts.
- At the international level, we are encouraged that the United Nations has taken on trafficking in small arms as an area requiring international cooperation if we are to reduce substantially the flow.
- We are also very pleased that the United States has become more sensitive and active in efforts to stem the flow of guns to our region.
- And we acknowledge, with much appreciation, the support from governments like the US and the United Kingdom in helping us with equipment and training and intelligence sharing. This latter is especially crucial to dismantling paramilitary groups of organised criminals in communities.

But a lot more needs to be done and this international conference can and must be important part of a new thrust.

For starters, Jamaica will sign the Declaration from this conference signalling our commitment to implementing violence prevention plans and projects.

But this conference should also send out a clear message that our collective efforts at violence prevention will be slow and frustrating unless there is a more robust response from the international community to the issues that developing countries have placed on the development agenda.

Jamaica, like many other developing countries lack the means and expertise to gather population data and violence statistics, maintain proper injury surveillance programmes, sustain dispute resolution and public education programmes, and pay for sustained social intervention programmes. All of these are fundamental aspects of approaching violence as a public health issue. This conference must not only adopt recommendations but be a source of international pressure to secure the technical co-operation for their effective implementation.

The truth is that crime and violence in one country affects people in another—failure to deal with the development issues in a country like Jamaica will reverberate in Brixton or Brooklyn

In this context, I must draw your attention to the address of our Prime Minister, the Most Hon. P.J. Patterson to the UN General Assembly in New York last week when he proposed the creation of a new international mechanism to focus on trade, finance, technology and development policy in an integrated manner.

“In order to promote the interests of small states, the United Nations and the multilateral institutions must facilitate the creation of new opportunities for economic development through the expansion of trade and investment flows as well as technical cooperation," he said.

### ***Conclusion***

Because violence is such a part of the human condition some of us may want to regard it as something inevitable that cannot be prevented. We must embrace the conclusion of the *World Report on Violence and Health* that “violent behaviour and its consequences can be prevented”.

But, as Nelson Mandela, Africa’s great contribution to humanity remarked in the foreword to report: “Safety and security don’t just happen; they are the result of collective consensus and public investment”.

I thank you.