



**ARCHDIOCESE OF KINGSTON
CHANCERY OFFICE**

21 Hopefield Avenue, P.O. Box 43 Kingston 6, Jamaica W.I. Tel: (876) 978-6567, 927-9915 Fax: (876) 927-4487
e-mail: rcabkgn@cwjamaica.com, Website: www.archdioceseofkingston.org

GENUINE NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

It is with deep distress that we are witnesses to the recent disturbing events that have traumatized the citizens of West Kingston and surrounding Corporate area, and threatened the moral and civil order of our nation. We commiserate with the bereaved and express solidarity with them during their moment of grief. Obviously, all loss of life in a situation of violence is contrary to a Christian ethic, but current events in Jamaica underscore the degree to which we have embraced and even cultivated a culture of death. We need to dismantle this culture of death and violence by intentionally creating a culture of LIFE and PEACE.

We mourn the loss of members of the security forces who have bravely placed themselves in harm's way at the service of the nation, and we commend them for their protection of social order. We mourn also the other victims of this action of the state for the restoration of stability and order. It is horrifying that we should need to employ such drastic and forceful measures to respond to a situation in which a single segment of society, by terror and violence, threatens the common good with the defiant use of criminal violence.

Like all Jamaicans who desire the good of our nation, we hope that recent events will be the occasion for deep reflection and for steadfast resolve through an agreed time-bound programme of action to avoid similar national crises in the future. There is little benefit in finding scapegoats. While those who instigated the current circumstances must be called to account, every sector of society must to some degree accept responsibility for the political, economic and social environment that has given rise to, and cultivated, the social structures that have created "garrisons," structures that, to some extent, tolerated and nurtured the criminality and violence that support those so-called "communities". They are part of a history – and even a culture – for which we must all accept some culpability.

The formation and development of West Kingston mirrors in varying degrees similar communities, with a long history of violence and social instability. The events of the last two weeks can by no means be considered apart from that history. This is not simply a case of widespread personal moral depravity among a particular population, but rather a social dynamic that includes the politicization of a large, unemployed and impoverished sector of society. Our nation's neglect of this population, and their exclusion from participation in the ordinary benefits of the common good (education, employment, welfare), is a matter of serious social injustice. Worse still, their economic and social disadvantages have been manifested for political ends in a morally abhorrent and reprehensible manner. The present situation, then, is not a mere social aberration, but the product of an intentional social structure.

It is clear that restoring order in West Kingston is at present the highest priority. But we must ask ourselves what "order" we wish to create for ourselves in Jamaica. If we merely restore the old order, then we perpetuate the social structures that will inevitably lead us to similar crises. The manipulation of disadvantaged sectors of society is a serious violation of the dignity of human persons – something into



**ARCHDIOCESE OF KINGSTON
CHANCERY OFFICE**

21 Hopefield Avenue, P.O. Box 43 Kingston 6, Jamaica W.I. Tel: (876) 978-6567, 927-9915 Fax: (876) 927-4487
e-mail: rcabkgn@cwjamaica.com, Website: www.archdioceseofkingston.org

which our history of slavery and colonialism has given us profound insight. Worse still, it is the inevitable path to violence and social anarchy.

The violation of human dignity will only lead to more anarchy. We should try and address the root causes of the mayhem taking place in our country and be proactive with discernment so that we may be released from the bondage of crime and violence.

This old order—the way we conduct politics in Jamaica – must change. Both of our main political parties have established garrison constituencies with armed enforcers, supported not only by the proceeds of illegal activities including extortion and the trade in illicit drugs, but also the awarding of government contracts. These garrisons are all zones of exclusion, allowed to exist by a civil society tolerant of tribal politics. The private sector, some of them good church-going businessmen – have made political contributions which have supported this evil system which is an affront to the human dignity of the citizens in these areas. The culpability of these Christians who blindly support these political parties cannot be understated.

It is imperatively necessary that our strategy for creating order – indeed a new one – goes well beyond the objectives of the present limited security operation. It will require the transformation of our social and political infrastructure. This present crisis is a window of opportunity to put in place a new relationship between politics and civil society. The Church, then, adds its voice to the many other Jamaicans who have called for profound political and social transformation. This includes the transformation of our education system especially with emphasis on educating our male population, who are prone to join gangs. The betrayal of public trust through pervasive corruption must be exposed and treated with the utmost severity. No one in our society, regardless of his/her status or position, can be exempt from this strategy: no one must be allowed to disregard it with impunity.

The drafting of legislation to deal with corruption and to prevent the formation of “gangs” is a single, positive step in this direction. Although it should be constructed and implemented with swiftness, it must follow the due process of our democratic constitution. Even more importantly, new legislation in this regard must be mindful of the rights of our citizens, which ultimately protects their dignity. The violation of rights and the abuse of human dignity will only lead to greater injustices and fail to address the root causes of the criminality and violence that are currently plaguing our nation. This desirable direction must also be accompanied by legislation to reform and provide public scrutiny and accountability for the financing of political campaigns.

The Roman Catholic Church places itself at the service of the nation to begin the process of our national transformation. We pray that this process will discern at every moment the call of our God to greater social justice, so that we might live in peace – reconciled with one another and with our God.

Friday, 28 May 2010

Most Rev. Donald J. Reece, Archbishop of Kingston



**ARCHDIOCESE OF KINGSTON
CHANCERY OFFICE**

21 Hopefield Avenue, P.O. Box 43 Kingston 6, Jamaica W.I. Tel: (876) 978-6567, 927-9915 Fax: (876) 927-4487
e-mail: rcabkgn@cwjamaica.com, Website: www.archdioceseofkingston.org

Most Rev. Charles H. Dufour, Bishop Of Montego Bay
Most Rev. Neil Tiedemann, CP, Bishop of Mandeville
Of the Roman Catholic National Justice and Peace Commission