

CLOSING REMARKS

BY

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NATIONAL CONSULTATION ON VALUES AND ATTITUDES

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1994- JAMAICA CONFERENCE CENTRE

It is not my intention to delay you for long, after the feast of the 12 presentations which you have so well enjoyed. But I will be failing in my duty if I did not commend, most sincerely on my own behalf, and on behalf of all of us who have benefitted from the excellent presentations that were made to us reflecting the high quality of the discussions in the 12 workshops.

I was particularly pleased to hear of the high level of contribution that came from our young people who were by no means awed by the presence of their elders, but presented their views forcibly and eloquently. That is as it should be.

If we had time, I think we could have spent one day on each workshop without exhausting all the facets that were included; and indeed, I wish we had time for me to respond here and now to many of the things which were raised.

It was in a sense, not surprising that we covered the whole gamut of national concerns, because the workshops were designed to bring us face to face with the heart of the problem. Indeed, at first, we had conceived of ten, and then some suggestions came in. One said, "How could you possibly not include the whole question of corporate ethics and the role of the private sector?" Another one said, "Surely, you must have something that discusses the accountability of the State".

And indeed, other suggestions came in, but unfortunately, the Conference Centre accommodation did not permit us to have more workshops as I said this morning.

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I believe I speak on behalf of all the Parliamentarians when we said we showed good judgement in deciding to defer the regular meeting of Parliament today to meet in a forum that would permit wider and more democratic participation.

Out of each workshop, clear priorities have been established, and we are going to need to establish the priorities which arise from those.

From the give and take, both of the discussions and the presentations, it is clear that there was no room for dogmatism. I am pleased at this. Because some people now- a- days make complaints about the absence of what they call strong leadership, and I think we must always distinguish strong leadership from authoritarian leadership. The slave master could wield the whip, not because of strength, but because of the abuse of power and the fear which he imposed on our fore-fathers. That's not the way to build Jamaica today. So this is an important step in that process by which we work towards developing a model of persuasion and to achieve national consensus.

I think one also would have to single out those who were able to produce these reports from the Workshops in record time. It only serves to show we can do it when we try, and to all of those who have made it possible I say "nuff respect!"

The presentations have been separated between analyses and observations and positive recommendations; they are all inter-related, and time and time again we saw that in discussing the report from one Workshop there was an obvious linkage with that of another Workshop. One of the things that we therefore will have to

do is to integrate the recommendations, bearing in mind that they are all inter-related but we have to always guard against the danger of accepting one that might be contrary to a central current that runs throughout another set of recommendations. This exercise must commence immediately.

I think we have to accept, as this Consultation comes to a close, that we have to work with what we have, and we have to begin with the people of Jamaica in the present state in which we find them.

At the present time, some are pursuing divergent parts, each with their own cultural validity

One of the things we have to decide as we leave here, is how to take this exercise the next step forward.

Until now, we have had an ad hoc Steering Committee. I think we will have to look at what expansions are necessary to achieve the broadest level of participation. It is said, "One good job deserves another". And I think our Chairman has done such an excellent job, that I am very pleased to volunteer him as the Chairman of the Commission which we are about to constitute. We also, would certainly like to ask that Steering Group with the benefit of the contributions that have been made to see what expansion to its ranks are necessary. I certainly would feel the need for a somewhat broader participation including, particularly some of our younger people, and some people who bring the voice of rural Jamaica to the deliberations.

For the time being, between UNESCO and the Office of the Prime Minister with the support of the relevant agencies, we will try to provide the necessary administrative anchoring. We have a habit in Jamaica everytime we are starting a new activity we create some new body without dismantling the old one. I don't intend to add to the plethora of organizations. We have to use what we have to the greatest advantage.

I intimated in my opening, that this is the national launch. We intend to decentralize this process of consultation, and I propose that we are going to have five regional meetings that we have to complete by the end of May. And those of you who are here from the various regions will have to constitute the nucleus that can help replicate what we had here today, but, of course, relating it to the concerns and the peculiarities of the particular region.

I envisage a meeting in Western Jamaica. I suspect that the second city is going to assert its right to host that. One in the northern section of the island, possibly in Ocho Rios; one in the South, perhaps in the Mandeville area; another in the Central portion of Jamaica - we are thinking of something like the G.C. Foster College- and one in the East, in Port Antonio. The Secretariat will be in touch with the various regions to make the appropriate breakdowns and to ensure that we have fuller participation. Indeed, there are a number of NGOs and community organizations that are known to us that we could not invite today, because space did not permit, but we expect to see them getting involved at the regional level.

We have to now channel our concerns and energies to positive ends, because what we want are concrete results, so that the regional meetings must be completed by May. The sector groups now need to be informed what is expected of them. The media, the entertainment group, the private sector, the community organizations, each of them must be given a specific mission, a programme of action and a time table in which this is to be done.

I expect that the Steering Committee will meet, probably within the next seven days at most, with the rapporteurs to prepare a full report of this Consultation which we will send out to all participants who are registered, so that you have not only a record of what transpired here, but some blue - print with which you can work when it comes to the regional meetings and activities in your own communities.

I expect the Commission will convene sector meetings to prepare the sector agenda for implementation. Much of what was reported parallels the recommendations that came from the Ocho Rios Round Table about which I spoke earlier. We already have a process in train to permit the further discussion and the implementation of those recommendations. We will not stop that, but we will now add to that the concrete and new suggestions which arise here.

I am going to be asking the Cabinet Secretariat to prepare one comprehensive document that lists those things which require governmental action, so that they can be transmitted to the relevant Ministries and Agencies. When that report has been drawn up, I would be inviting a representative group from the Steering Committee to be in attendance at the Cabinet so that we can look at the process of implementation.

I just want to make it clear once again, that the Government knows it has to play its part and we are prepared to do what we can to fulfil our responsibility. It cannot all be done at one time, but it has to be done in accordance with the priorities that you have established.

I hope that as we leave here for our respective homes, we will remember that the process of creating new social attitudes and cultural values to which we have committed ourselves, is one that must be inclusive and not exclusive. I therefore think that we need to put ourselves in a position to accept the recommendations and the views of other groups and individuals who were not involved in this particular exercise.

One of things which struck me as I listened to most of the presentations is the need for an increased flow of information between the Government and the people.

I may just use one simple non controversial example. Something was said about the need to distinguish deportees, those who have

overstayed their welcome in a particular country, and those who have committed an offence. The fact is the Bill doesn't deal with the former at all. I mean, not only are those people no threat to the Jamaican society, but certainly, if we ever tried to invigilate those people, we would spend so much time dealing with them that we really wouldn't be able to deal effectively with those people who are the real problem. And I just mention that, not in a controversial sense, because it just shows that information is lacking.

The fact that we have discussed something in the House, and passed a law, doesn't really mean that everybody in the wider community is informed and is really aware of exactly what we have done. We certainly need a better process of communication.

Let me say, as we draw to an end, that I leave here greatly enthused and inspired. I believe that we have fulfilled the purposes for which we were gathered and one can truly say, "It was good for us to be here".

Let us take with us the message wherever we go - to the hills and the valleys, to the towns and their suburbs, in our Parliament, our churches, our schools, our courtrooms, our factories, our farms, our work place, our play fields, our street corners, our verandahs, our recreational centres, our bars, and our dancehalls; that we will always listen to the better angels of our nature, and work together to build a nation where freedom, equity, justice, love and peace will forever prevail.