

ADDRESS BY
RT. HON. PJ. PATTERSON, PC, QC, MP
PRIME MINISTER
AT
REGIONAL CONSULTATION ON VALUES AND ATTITUDES
ON WEDNESDAY, JUNE 22, 1994
G.C. FOSTER COLLEGE

I am pleased to be here this morning, at the fourth Consultation on Values and Attitudes, a series of meetings born of the recommendation of the first National Consultation held at the Conference Centre in February last. When I launched the Consultation, I had no idea that support for this campaign to transform the prevailing values and attitudes would be so widespread and so strong. It has indeed been a heartening experience.

I make every effort to be present at all these meetings, as I place them very high on my list of priorities. The presence of such a broad cross section of persons, and in such large numbers, at all the meetings is another welcome demonstration of widespread support for the stated objectives of this crusade.

Indeed, in many countries of the world, including those which have attained high levels of material progress, there is a general acknowledgement of a need for change in social relationships and interaction.

Whatever the case may be elsewhere, it is very clear to me that here in Jamaica, economic progress will not be possible without a radical change in our values and attitudes.

Jamaica is in the process of transition to a new economic model – from one that is low-productivity, import-dependent to one that is high-productivity, export-driven.

As we make the necessary, though sometimes painful transition to a market driven economy, there are many positive signs that Jamaica is attaining some level of growth, albeit at a slower pace than we would have wished.

For the past two years, we have performed well in meeting all the targets set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in our Extended Fund Facility and seem well set to make this Agreement with the Fund our last. There is some stability in our foreign exchange rates; our Net International Reserves continue to grow and presently stand at \$150.5 million; there is a slight reduction in inflation and

in unemployment – the latter mainly a result of the entry into the economy of new, small entrepreneurs.

Admittedly, the most vulnerable in our society have experienced hardship as a result of structural adjustment policies, but we have achieved many gains in the areas of both economic and social development.

But the Government alone cannot do the job. It must play the lead role and its success will be measured by how well it motivate the citizens to respond to its initiatives.

I mention here just a few of our gains in the social arena.

We have:

- established a bi-partisan National Council on Education
- increased availability of loans for students for tertiary education, in collaboration with commercial banks;
- implemented a Youth Empowerment Programme on a pilot basis;
- increased assistance to micro and small business persons, with special programmes for youth and women;
- passed legislation for the protection of women, providing them with equality in matters related to citizenship for their children and spouses;
- improved immunization programmes for young children;
- increased pensions for the aged.

Despite these accomplishments, there is a need to concentrate even more on the social agenda. Commencing this year, it will become our foremost priority.

It is generally accepted that the Government has the basic responsibility to help ensure that a majority of our citizens can reach their full potential. This requires of Government a management culture that pays high regard to public accountability, customer satisfaction, timely implementation, cost effectiveness and social probity.

The delivery of quality service fosters the conditions for promoting good values and attitudes. Specifically, it is the right of every citizen to expect to receive a high level of service and high standards in the production of goods and the delivery of services, no matter whether from the public or private sector.

It is in keeping with this Administration's determination to improve the level of service that eight Government departments have been targeted for priority treatment.

One of these, the Registrar General's Department, located here in Spanish Town, has shown some improvement. Shortage of accommodation there will soon be alleviated with the construction of a new building for which \$423 million has been provided in this year's Budget.

While it has a long way to go in providing efficient service, improvements are quickly being made. For example, a Task Force, which was put in operation last year, has cleared 70,000 of the accumulated 130,000 applications for certified copies of birth, death and marriage certificates. Also cleared was backlog of the examination of 107,000 birth and death registration forms and the numbering of 90,000 marriage records.

Some of the staff worked on weekends and public holidays to reduce the backlog. They should be warmly complimented.

In order to improve the registration system, five public hospitals, namely – May Pen, Mandeville, Cornwall Regional, St. Ann's Bay and Annotto Bay – have been selected for a pilot exercise in registering births and deaths.

Exorbitant prices and unjustified increase reflect poor values and bad attitudes. Government is concerned about the continuing high level of price increases which face the consumer on a daily basis. To afford them protection from these inordinately high prices, the Government has recognized that the best defence is an educated consumer.

It is therefore necessary to raise the consciousness level and provide them access to timely information on goods and services in the marketplace.

We are committed to strengthening the resources available to consumer groups to enable them to provide the information required to educate the public. We will be contributing funds, some \$5 million towards the establishment of a permanent secretariat for a broad-based Consumer Coalition, designed to activate consumer groups in greater efforts towards consumer education.

As an end in itself, as the State reduces its ^{own} anticipation in economic activities, it is imperative that the private sector display a responsible business ethic. For example, there is a responsibility to be vigilant against unacceptable practices at any link in the business chain such as price gouging, the production and sale of shoddy goods and poor customer service.

In this regard, they should ensure that there is greater emphasis on good corporate practices.

It is important, too, to recognize that corruption is not a one-way street: it involves those willing to be corrupted and those willing to corrupt. Therefore, a less corrupt public service, or hopefully, an incorruptible one, is partially dependent on citizens outside of it not being willing to corrupt. Also, it should be said, the moral "high ground" expected of those in political leadership should also be extended to matters such as tax evasion by companies and business people.

Workers also have an important role to play through the attitudes they display towards their work, however unglamorous it may seem, to the promotion and maintenance of better values and attitudes in the society.

They must display pride in ensuring that high quality goods are produced and services are rendered with courtesy and efficiency.

They also have a role to play in maintaining stable prices, not only by the quality of goods produced but the recognition of the relationship between increasing wages and their purchasing power, without the commensurate increase in production and efficiency.

In sum, all parties – Government, NGO's such as consumer groups, the private sector, large and small, the workers – have major roles to play in doing the things which ultimately enhance proper values and attitudes in our society.

Whilst we know that the ideal society does not exist anywhere, we can strive to get as close to it as possible by taking these things into account.

Today, in your workshops you will be covering the areas which most concern the residents of this region. I believe there will be much in common with the conclusions that participants in other Consultations have reached but there are also many conditions that are peculiar to this region that only those of you who live it and feel it can fully understand. It is therefore also you who live it who are best qualified to come up with solutions for these special problems.

That is the challenge you face today. That is the opportunity with which you have been presented today.

I urge you not to waste it.

At the end of the day, you should be convinced that your time has been well spent in helping to develop better values and attitudes among our citizens, a pre-requisite to a better for all Jamaicans.

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