

THE PROBLEM

Violence at Home

- Violence begins in the earliest years of a child's life – Jamaican children between ages two and five are commonly subjected to punishment using all forms of violence (87.2% of children); boys are punished more frequently and with more severity.
- Girls are routinely victims of sexual violence. In 2006, girls under 16 accounted for 32% of all sexual offences in Jamaica. These girls suffer silently – in the same year, only 20% of rape cases were reported to the police.
- In a recent study, 60% of 9 to 17 year old children reported that a family member had been a victim of violence and 37% had a family member who had been killed. Only 28% of children thought their home neighbourhood was very safe.
- A 2005 survey shows that only 11% of Jamaican parents practice positive forms of discipline.

Violence at School

- Children have had their right to education and leisure activities disrupted because of violence in their communities and school closures due to civil disturbances.
- Boys continue to underachieve with implications for their involvement in informal and illegal sectors, making them more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and gangs.
- Corporal punishment has been banned from early childhood institutions, but is still tolerated in other educational institutions.

Violence in Institutions

- In 2005, close to 2,500 children lived in residential institutions. Over 270 children live in correctional institutions, many of whom grow and develop without family care, love and support and are often more vulnerable to abuse.

THE CALL TO ACTION

Reducing violence against children and mitigating its damage is a critical first step in addressing the scourge of violence affecting Jamaica. Key priorities include:

- **Ban the Use of Corporal Punishment:** As part of a wider effort to strengthen good parenting skills, promote positive forms of discipline and create high-quality, child-friendly schools where children can thrive, corporal punishment should be outlawed in all schools. Contrary to what many families believe, the use of corporal punishment actually fuels violence, teaching children from an early age that violence is acceptable.
- **Stamp out Sexual Abuse:** Laws that hold perpetrators of violence against children accountable must be strictly enforced, including the imposition of harsh penalties for adults who sexually abuse girls and boys.
- **Do Not Imprison Children:** Children who come into conflict with the law do not belong behind bars; they need more sensitive and appropriate forms of justice including diversion and community-based rehabilitation programmes.