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STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

By the Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport

The Honourable Olivia Grange, CD, MP

Tuesday, 30 March 2021

Ananda Dean, 11 years old, student, abducted and killed in 2008.

Khanice Jackson, 20 years old, accounting clerk of Portmore, St. Catherine, only daughter of her mother, body found in bushes in 2021.

Jasmine Dean, visually impaired UWI student, missing since February 2020.

Sharon Cole, 61 years old of McDonald District, Crooked River, murdered on February 15.

Imani Green, 8 years old, British girl from Balham, South London, killed in Duncans, Trelawny on January 2013.

Icilyn McFarlane, mother, and Mishane McFarlane and Christina McFarlane, daughters, killed in November 2020.

Colleen Walker, 53 years old, Vice Principal of Excelsior High School, killed in August 2020.

Many others not named today...

Madam Speaker, it is on a somber note and with pain in my heart that I stand to give voice to the now suppressed voices of our sisters who have been brutally killed in the epidemic of domestic violence in our country. Killed because some man felt he had the right to decide whom she should love or that she should continue in an abusive relationship, regardless. Killed because she did not have the physical strength to fight back, as, intimidated and threatened, she kept silence unto the moment of her death.

Madam Speaker, we say a special prayer for the soul and for the family of Killed, Khanice Jackson. In this case that we are still reeling from, we note that the police has taken into custody a person of interest and support the national call for justice.

I call out the names of victims. I speak each name in this Honourable House so that we can all collectively mourn with their families the loss of their loved one - a mother, wife, partner, sister, daughter, friend, co-worker – all Jamaican women and girls born with a dream. Their life snuffed out in an untimely fashion. We comfort their families today as they mourn the empty space at the dining table, their noted absence at the family gathering this Easter.

The spirits of these persons, restless and weary, hover in this place as we remember them as part of our Jamaican family who should not have lost their lives in this fashion. I hope I speak for them as their spirits beckon to us, not for revenge, but for justice and, ultimately, for an end to these senseless acts of violence and hostility against our women and girls. In their silence, I speak now to the men of this country, those in this House and in the wider society, as we seek solutions to these baseless acts of violence against our women and girls.

How can we as a society remain unmoved by these horrible deaths of our women and girls? To what extent does the continuation of this hostility speak to collective failure on our part in this House and on the part of the whole society? If we all cannot protect our women and girls, our most vulnerable, from such horrible acts of violence, how do we even see ourselves as a civilised society? At what point do we say enough is enough?

Madam Speaker, I want to use this opportunity to call on every organisation in our country to get involved in activities to stem the bloodletting against our women and girls in our communities. I want to ask our faith-based leadership to use their pulpit and their respected status to sustain a dialogue within communities in the face of this violence against our women and girls. I ask that they engage our men in dialogue as part of our collective effort to deal with these heinous acts. I beg to see influential men engaging weaker-minded men in conversation so that we can create communities of harmony and peace where our women and girls can live free from fear for their lives.

Faith-based institutions are disproportionately supported by our women.

Women are at the forefront of church attendance, church ministry and church fellowship. For their faith, trust and commitment, today those who have lost

their lives beckon to faith-based leaders and congregations to get involved, to be more vigilant, to speak out in situations of domestic conflict. It is no longer enough to declare it is not our business as our sisters cry in horrible silence in death. We must be our sisters' keepers.

We must be sisters for sisters; brothers for sisters; and brothers and sisters for each other.

In some cases our men who do not attend these faith-based institutions, often decide to stay home expecting wives to return home to prepare dinner. And when church goes on longer than usual and they return home late, they are often met with hostility and violence. This cannot be allowed to continue and those who know must speak out before it is too late. Our women must no longer be told to suffer in silence or to expect that their reward will come after they die.

Madam Speaker, sadly, some of our men view compassion as a sign of weakness and unmanliness. This speaks to another factor that impacts women and girls negatively, often leading to violence. I refer to this as the cultural definition of maleness. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, many of our boys and men develop a toxic masculinity that often defines itself in violence

and aggression against women and girls. Young men who are courteous and gentle with women are often harassed and vilified in favour of those who would push aggression in defining their maleness.

To this end, I want to appeal to members of the music and entertainment fraternity and media whose voices are keenly respected by our boys and young men to join us in this campaign to rid our country of this scourge of violence against women and girls. It used to be that one action that would almost always cause aggressive response in men would be to insult or vilify their mothers, daughters or wives. To the men of Jamaica, I ask, when did this change to the point that so many of our women are now suffering from violence at the hands of our men?

Today, I call for collective action across our country. We must find solutions to this scourge among us. It must be all hands on deck. It is an issue of national security and justice and we must commend and support the actions of law enforcement in this matter. There is evidence that they are responding more rapidly and purposefully and we encourage them to not relent. We see that they are starting to respond to calls regarding missing women without waiting for the usual 24 hours to pass. We also encourage them to continue to step in whenever there is report of domestic conflict that demands attention

or intervention. Prevention must also be the preferred approach. To support law enforcement, my Ministry through the Bureau of Gender Affairs will continue our consultation with citizens so that they can better recognise the tell-tale signs of broken relationships and domestic conflict before they end in death for the woman.

On another note, there are those who are promoting the need for women to defend themselves by various means within the law. The idea that women should defend their lives by various means is gaining currency. Some have suggested that women arm themselves with pepper spray and other such instruments of defence. However, we are aware that there would need to be greater dialogue with the Ministry of Justice in relation to these matters.

Suffice it to say, that our women must now take very seriously their domestic circumstances and be open to counselling, seeking assistance and finding solutions before things escalate.

In this regard, Madam Speaker, my Ministry and its relevant Division – Bureau of Gender Affairs – will continue our dialogue with the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Justice and other relevant agencies and civil society to find urgent solutions to this crisis. We are also in discussions with

the SDC because they are into community action and development — they have the network across the island.

Additionally, at the Bureau we will continue to promote Male Mentorship programmes in schools so that boys may develop new and more positive approaches in their relationship with girls and women. Our 24 hour helpline is always open. Speak now before another woman or girl dies. We will enhance actions which we are ramping up to tackle this issue. In this regard, I bring to you information on some specific interventions we are making at the Bureau:

- A. The REFOCUS PERPETRATORS PROGRAMME - This aims to provide alternative conflict resolution and rehabilitation techniques as options for men involved in Intimate Partner Violence. This programme starts this April.
- B. KNOW YOUR RIGHTS INFORMATION SESSIONS - The idea here is to increase knowledge and awareness within the community on the Sexual Harassment (Prevention) Act and Domestic Violence Act
- C. STAND UP, TALK UP Information Sessions - The aim is to sensitise men and women to the issues surrounding Intimate Partner Violence, Positive Masculinity, Sexual Harassment at the workplace and Child Abuse

D. INCREASED SENSITISATION ON THE MALE CRISIS HELPLINE - Many persons still see the Bureau as the Bureau of Women's Affairs and so many of our men are not aware of this Helpline. The Bureau will be taking to the streets and communities and hope to get help from the SDC to put this information by way of fliers in barber shops, bars, churches, etc. where men usually converge.

Madam Speaker, as you know, many of our adolescent mothers also suffer from gender-based violence and sexual abuse. The Women's Centre of Jamaica Foundation continues its programme to rehabilitate these mothers and re-position them for success. I wish to announce that the Bank of Nova has donated 2 Million Dollars to the Women's Centre to provide tablets to our adolescent mothers to enhance the academic component of the programme. Academic reinforcement is a positive enhancer of hope for these our women who are prone to violence and abuse by virtue of being marginalised in the workforce and wider community.

Additionally, my Ministry is working to strengthen the staffing and provisions of the Bureau of Gender Affairs so that they can more readily and successfully intervene in the affairs between women and men before the situation reaches crisis proportions. This includes forecasting and evaluation

so that the corrosive circumstances may be discerned early and intervention made to offset impending violence. In this regard we will be creating a position of Legal Counsel at the Bureau who will be able to provide legal advice in relation to domestic violence victims, collaborate with law enforcement in the enforcement of the Domestic Violence Act, and follow up on victims.

The matter is urgent. As such, I call upon all members of this Honourable House to engage with us as we seek to eliminate this scourge within our society. There can be no comfort as long as our women and girls continue to face hostility, aggression and violent death. Our women are the principal caregivers. To harm or destroy them will impact the very fabric of our society. No one among us should feel comfortable while violence is meted out to our women and girls every day. Indeed, all of us should feel responsible for their wellbeing. Ultimately, the quality of any society will be measured by the way in which we treat the most vulnerable among us, our women and girls.

To this end, I call for national action for the elimination of violence against our women and girls, action to counter toxic masculinity that lines up in offence against our women, action to ensure that there is harmony and peaceful co-

habitation within our communities based in respect for the right to life and freedom to be of all citizens, particularly our women.

Madam Speaker, an update on Jody-Ann, the homeless woman and her son brought to our attention. She is no longer homeless. She has received a Compassion Grant of \$100,000 from the Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport to assist with expenses for transportation. We also paid three month's rent at a cost of \$150,000. We have located the father of the child who has expressed interest in sharing responsibility and soon Jody-Ann will be working.