

Presentation to the Jamaica Association of DADE Educators on the occasion of their Annual Banquet and Awards Dinner

**By The Honourable Maxine Henry-Wilson
Minister of Education, Youth and Culture**

I am very pleased to be participating in this your annual awards banquet being observed in the year of your 10th anniversary. I commend the awardees on their achievements and I am even more proud that among the awardees, are three students whom I can claim as Jamaicans. I commend you wholeheartedly and hope that you continue to blaze a path of excellence.

I wish to share with you just a few of the events that have been having a significant impact on the education system in Jamaica and to outline the Government's approach to some significant changes.

Over the past year, there has been increased awareness and sensitivity to the outputs of the education system in Jamaica. This has been distilled into the passing of a historic resolution in Parliament, which commits the Government to place priority on quality, access and equity at all levels of the system, but with special emphasis on the early childhood level.

Following closely on the heels of this resolution was the establishment of a 10-man Education Review Task Force mandated by the Honourable P J Patterson, Prime Minister of Jamaica, to develop a strategic action plan for the system. The task force will present its recommendations of strategic interventions required to give our education system the capability to be the driving force of our country's social and economic development.

In addition, I have sought to promote dialogue among the Jamaican people through a series of islandwide round-table talks in order to arrive at a shared national vision for the education system.

These talks culminated with 12 clear vision statements — representing the Jamaican people's vision of education — and a specific definition of who an educated Jamaican is. The vision statements underscore the potential of each child in the education system and emphasize quality, equitable and accessible education for all; competent and effective teachers; accountability, transparency and performance.

We have also established an Early Childhood Commission, which has assumed responsibility for the continued development of the entry point in the education sector. It will advance the creation of an early childhood system that gives our children an early, solid and sustainable start.

Seamless transition from the primary level through the Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT) guarantees every child a place in a secondary institution. However, this has led to the challenge of providing additional places through upgrading and construction of several new schools. This has given rise to increased access as we strive towards universal secondary education.

Meanwhile, access to tertiary level education has increased through the expansion of programmes at community colleges; the influx of offshore universities — albeit those come with new set of challenges — and the collaborative efforts of several teacher training colleges and international institutions to offer degree programmes in a range of disciplines.

With the advent of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME), and the implications of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), decisions about education and training in the Caribbean are strongly influenced by international and global forces. Consequently, our priorities and approaches for education in the Jamaica of the future are inextricably connected with the economic competitiveness and social development of each of our nation states and the countries in the Caribbean region as a whole.

There is also the continued rapid explosion of knowledge and information, driven by rapid technological advances, facilitating cutting-edge research and development.

The challenge for us is to employ education in a manner that will allow us to leverage our human resources to achieve economic competitiveness and growth, while achieving social development and social cohesiveness.

So, I will raise two poignant questions, one of which has implications for the capabilities of the Jamaican education system in a global environment and the other, for the capabilities of products of the education system in a global context.

- Can developing countries, such as Jamaica, compete in the knowledge economy, or do we face a future of increasing exclusion, unable to develop skills required for the 21st century?

- What kind of graduates will function effectively in a turbulent global environment?

In addressing the first question, I believe that the capacity for Jamaica to adopt, disseminate, and maximise rapid technological advances depends on adequate education systems. Similarly, I believe that improved and accessible education and effective national innovations systems can help a developing country, such as ours, to make progress toward sustainable achievements.

While not downplaying financial resources — for that is a stark reality — the challenges we face in education cannot be confined to financing only. There are gaps in the system in terms of equity, access and performance. However, I believe the most critical of all is curriculum development and implementation.

I say this because job creation and employment are two of the most critical problems facing countries worldwide, and education and training must be part of the solution to this problem.

This has signalled the need for educators everywhere to join the dots between the job market in a globalised community and the deliverables of their education system.

In Jamaica, we are developing and structuring programmes to build the type of human resources needed for the Jamaican economy and to pay attention to the free movement of people and labour migration. We aim to develop an education system that will produce knowledge workers who are analytical, innovative and even sometimes revolutionary in their thinking. They must be at the same time problem solvers and excellent communicators, possessing the requisite technical skills to meet the changing demands of the job market

We have been making a conscious effort to fashion new attitudes towards the educational process, its purposes and possible benefits. There is a concerted effort to help both parents and children to understand that the world in which we live do not just require lawyers, doctors and other such traditional careers only, but also entrepreneurial skills and numerous non-traditional careers.

The quality education we provide at the early childhood right through to secondary levels seeks to engender a spirit of confidence, self-esteem, love and patriotism in

our children so that the psychological foundation for social cohesiveness may be laid.

We are also training our young ones to accept the spirit of co-operation as the foundation for national success and achievement. To engender a spirit of co-operation in our young ones; the early childhood curriculum, like the revised primary curriculum, will provide for group tasks, which need to be tackled together and which call for co-operation for their successful implementation.

Moreover, the education system will seek to train our children to be capable of self-evaluation for “it is only through the awareness of the self in its relationship to the social group and, hence, of the social group in relation to its total environment that one can hope to create the psychological climate within which self-confidence, a spirit of co-operation and the acceptance of work as a creative aspect of experience are possible for a people” (Manley 1974)

We have developed a national cultural policy and have translated this into a plan of action. The philosophy underpinning this plan is that of creating a people who have a clear national identity and national pride. The plan will aim at allowing Jamaica to carve out its niche of cultural industries in the global marketplace. A comprehensive programme of culture in education has also been introduced in some schools with plans for its expansion this year. This is being used as vehicle for transmitting positive values and attitudes.

Significant strides have been made in developing a framework for the empowerment of our youth. And so we have revised a national youth policy that strengthens participation of our youth in addressing their own, as well as wider social issues.

While we are on the one hand making great strides, on the other we wrestle with a virus, which is seemingly hell-bent on destroying our children by using the schools as battlegrounds. This virus has raised its ugly head not just in Jamaica, but in the teaching and learning environment around the world. I believe you, too, have had to contend with this worm: The escalation in the incidents of violence in schools is a growing concern and a threat to our survival in a global village.

Not only does this interrupt the learning process, but it undermines the salient values and attitudes which we have been trying to inculcate in our children through the curriculum. The development and introduction of a new curriculum for the Primary level has integrated the themes of citizenship, rights and responsibilities,

co-operation and conflict resolution represent one systematic approach to contending with this challenge.

Research undertaken by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture (MOEYC), has led to the development of a strategic response to the violence. This includes a planned increase in the number of guidance counsellors in primary schools and the strengthening of trauma response teams, which have been established across the island.

The MOEYC is working to encourage better-quality outcomes from the education systems and promote more efficient institutions that innovate and respond positively to meaningful performance-based allocation of resources and accountability systems.

To achieve this, we need to forge productive partnerships with the private sector, trade unions, international funding agencies and international and regional educational institutions to plan and implement a range of education and training efforts.

The Government is committed to pursuing policy thinking that advances purposeful strategies to shape partnerships and networks. We envisage, therefore, that strong partnerships will assist in building cutting-edge research and development expertise and capability. This will enable us to compete globally, through the effective use of our intellectual capital.

Willing partners will help us to realise our goal of a first-class system, producing graduates whose employability is not in question; graduates who can assert themselves anywhere in the global village and compete with their counterparts anywhere in the world.

Partnerships between institutions and with industry should also help to harness national expertise, achieve international excellence and deliver world-class value at home and overseas.

I'd like to focus now on our awardees and other students or graduates participating in this ceremony. What is your challenge as products of the education system? Graduates of any education system, in this changing environment must be equipped to become change masters and change agents. It is no cliché when I say, the future of your country — whether it be Jamaica or a DADE country — rests

primarily in your hands especially you who have benefited tremendously from the education system.

In whatever capacity you serve and as responsible citizens, you are challenged to contribute positively to the development of your country. When you leave the system we expect that you will do so armed with a clear vision of how you can help others to benefit from what you have learnt. We expect that you will be armed with a vision of how you can make your part of the world more tolerable for others, especially those less fortunate than you are. We expect that you will transform your vision into positive action.

When you act, you must take responsibility for your actions. It was one of your American poets who penned the line, “In dreams begins responsibility,” for he understood that no lasting achievement is possible without a vision, and no dream can become real without action and responsibility.

Your action should include gainful employment in an organisation of your choice. You will be required to add value to the organisation and subsequently to your country. As change masters, therefore, you must have the imagination to innovate.

To encourage innovation, effective change masters will help to develop new concepts, the ideas, models and applications of technology that will help set your country apart and make you relevant and viable in a competitive global market place.

As change masters you must have the professionalism to perform: On the job, you will be required to provide personal and organisational competence, supported by further training and development, to execute flawlessness and deliver value to even more demanding customers. Those who will remain viable are those who demonstrate a high degree of integrity and honesty, which are the hallmarks of a true professional.

Professionals must display unimpaired moral principles, determine the difference between right and wrong, be honest and attempt to be fair and reasoned in all their dealings. There are few things worse than hearing of a so-called professional whose integrity is not generally considered to be irreproachable and whose honesty has, on even one occasion, been brought into question, or who is reputed to be biased and unfair.

Persons capable of such behaviour are an embarrassment to their profession and are ultimately likely to find that, in addition to damaging the reputation of his professional body, they wind up tainting themselves for life. We cannot be effective change masters, if we compromise our integrity.

You must also have the openness to collaborate: Change masters make connection with partners, who can extend the organisation's reach, enhance its offering or energise its practice. You have been given a push start that many have not had, seek out and seize the opportunities to grow and develop professionally. You will be required to function effectively on teams and to work collaboratively and co-operatively with others for the greater good.

One of your change masters, Rosabeth Moss Kanter says, "The future will belong to those who embrace the potential of wider opportunities, but recognising the realities of more constrained resources, and find new solutions that permit doing more with less."

And so on behalf of the Government of Jamaica and the MOEYC, I want to thank DADE for supporting the efforts of the Jamaican Government to promote excellence in education.

You have provided scholarships that allow our students to be exposed to varied cultural experiences, while obtaining a broad-based education. Several of our schools back home have benefited tremendously from your benevolence in books, instructional materials and audio-visual materials.

Your mentorship programme has also guided many a Jamaican student into broadened career choices and away from the dangers and the lures of the big metropolitan.

Truly, yours is an organisation where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free. (*Peter Senge, 2000*)

Indeed you have been a willing and worthy partner in the quest for quality, equitable and accessible education in Jamaica.

In concluding, let me just reiterate that the Government is striving towards an education system that is outwardly focused on the world; one that is able to meet

the developmental needs of our country and subsequently our Caribbean nations and one that remains distinctively Jamaican in style, content, tone and character.

This can only be achieved when willing partners work collaboratively and cooperatively; sharing one clear vision and striving towards one common goal; producing a strong nation. Help us build Jamaica!

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