

**Message from Senator the Hon. Dorothy C. Lightbourne, Q.C.,
Attorney-General and Minister of Justice**

This year, we observe the second annual “Restorative Justice Week”, from February 2 to 8, under the theme “Restorative Justice: Towards Forgiveness, Healing and Reconciliation.” The success of the conference, the church services, and national youth focus activities in Portland, St. Catherine and Westmoreland will certainly continue to sensitise our citizens to a system that will help to transform Jamaica from the fractious, violent nation it has seemingly become into the land of peace and harmony it was so famous for in the not- too-distant past.

The concept of Restorative Justice has been firmly established in Jamaica and, indeed, has been working well to stem violence in some hitherto volatile urban communities. The purpose of this international conference, is to build on experiences, such as that gained from the very successful inaugural International Conference on Restorative Justice which was staged from February 7-8, last year, at Northern Caribbean University, Mandeville campus

This International Conference on Restorative Justice, which is being put on by the Ministry of Justice, and its Restorative Justice partners, at the Kingston Hilton Hotel, New Kingston, from February 7-8, underscores with its timeliness, the efforts of the Ministry of Justice, through its public education programme, to get the population at large to embrace the undoubted benefits of the system of Restorative Justice. It is the centre piece of the activities and will feature international and local experts and practitioners.

Restorative Justice has to do with repairing the harm. It seeks to bring about the psychological healing of the victim in such a way that he or she can move on and find closure from that usually painful and humiliating experience. At the same time, the offender, the guilty party, is restored to his or her law-abiding community, having through meetings with the victim or other restorative process, better understood the damage caused, and his or her responsibility for that hurt and damage. Simultaneously, the community and the State are stakeholders who may experience restoration also for the damage caused to it or its members.

The traditional justice system, retributive in its orientation, is largely about pinpointing blame and imposing punishment according to the laws of the land, Restorative Justice is about the individual's involved -- victim and offender -- in a spirit of healing, taking responsibility for their own actions and finding their own independent or collaborative solutions to repair the damage and hurt.

The expansion of Restorative Justice, along with the work of the Dispute Resolution Foundation, and Mediation, which have been showing increasing success, along with all the other steps being taken to reform and improve the traditional justice system in Jamaica, is clearly the way forward.

Whatever the definition of choice, all are agreed that Restorative Justice will play a major role in getting Jamaica back on the path to justice, peace and prosperity by helping to reduce quietly, the high level of crime and violence that has been dogging the Jamaican society by implementing the appropriate policy and legal framework and engaging our key stakeholders.

Date: January 31, 2008.