

# MESSAGE OF ATTORNEY GENERAL AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE THE HON. DOROTHY LIGHTBOURNE ON THE OBSERVANCE OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, MARCH 8, 2009.

The United Nations began observing International Women's Day on March 8, 1975. Since then, much has been done to advance women's issues, particularly in the areas of gender equity and social and economic empowerment. However, much more remains to be done if women are to receive the respect and rewards they deserve. Women globally continue to be abused, mutilated, violated, impoverished, severely injured and killed.

This year the United Nations observes International Women's Day under the theme: ***Women and men united to end violence against women and girls.*** The Government of Jamaica and the Ministry of Justice are pleased to recognize the event and reassure the public in general and women in particular of our commitment to protecting the most vulnerable in our society among them our women and girls.

The Government has implemented a number of initiatives aimed at securing the human rights of women and children. Among them are the Sexual Offences Bill and Sex Offender Register and Registry which is at present being debated in the House of Representatives and the Child Pornography Bill which is before the Legislation Committee for consideration. Another measure, under the auspices of the Bureau of Women's Affairs, is a cabinet submission on a proposed sexual harassment policy which seeks to address violence against women in the workplace, and in educational and other institutions. It also addresses issues of gender equity and equality, occupational health and safety for women and girls.

In 2008, statistics revealed that, 2501 cases of domestic violence were heard in four Family Courts across the island. Yet many of the incidents of domestic violence are neither reported nor brought before the courts. We appeal to our men and women to join together to end abuse and violence against women, girls, men and our boys.

The observance of International Women's Day also allows us to stand in solidarity with women worldwide and celebrate their achievements, their courage and their struggles. I want to recognize at this time our own Lady Bustamante O.J., JP, widow of our National Hero, Sir Alexander Bustamante, Jamaica's first Prime Minister as she celebrates her 97<sup>th</sup> birthday, March 8. Congratulations "Lady B".

As we observe International Women's Day we must also recognize the sterling achievements of the Bureau of Women's Affairs as it celebrates 35 years of advocacy for the advancement of Jamaican women. In being true to its mandate, the Bureau has been a catalyst in ensuring that successive administrations improve the condition of our women through legislation, strategy and funding. It has been tireless in enabling women to recognize and achieve their full potential.

Women and men let us all unite to end violence against women and girls.