

Jamaica – 1995

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UN Youth Delegate Programme

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Ms. Gordon (Jamaica): Ten years ago the United Nations, recognizing the need for international attention to be focused on the situation of the world's youth, particularly their increasing problems, designated 1985 as International Youth Year, with "Participation, Development, Peace" as its theme. The objectives of that special Year were to enhance awareness of the needs and aspirations of youth; to make youth activities an integral part of social and economic development; to enhance youth participation in society; and to promote among youth the ideals of peace, mutual respect and understanding among people.

In accordance with these objectives, an International Youth Conference and World Youth Festival was convened in 1985 in Kingston, Jamaica, and was attended by over 1,000 youth leaders from some 100 countries. Adopted at that Conference was the Kingston Declaration of Principles, in which the youth leaders reaffirmed their adherence to freedom, justice and the democratic way of [*15*] life. It is significant that in the era of the cold war, when ideology split the nations of the world into hostile camps, the youth of this same world made their voices heard in support of world peace, in keeping with the United Nations theme for 1985.

Another highlight of the Year was the General Assembly's endorsement of guidelines for further planning and suitable follow-up in the field of youth. These guidelines contained suggestions on how countries could develop and implement youth policies and programmes according to the needs and situation of each country.

Ten years later, many of the youths of 1985 have grown up. Ten years later, the cold war, thankfully, is over, and so the peoples of the world are no longer divided to such a large extent by ideology. This creates a wonderful opportunity for young people from different parts of the world to have greater interaction with one another, sharing experiences and solutions to common problems. And the world's youths, ever alert, are taking advantage of this opportunity.

The end of the cold war has also redirected global attention to the issue of social development. The link between peace and development has been recognized by the United Nations, which has convened six global conferences since 1990 on themes related to human rights and economic and social development. This concept was recently underscored by the Prime Minister of Jamaica, the Right Honourable P. J. Patterson. Speaking earlier this year at the World Summit for Social Development, in Copenhagen, he stated,

“there can be no lasting and universal peace until we forge that new global partnership that eradicates the scourge of poverty, provides adequate shelter, combats illiteracy, malnutrition and drug addiction, affords adequate health security and halts human exploitation”.

These problems, which besiege humanity in general, affect youth to an even greater extent. Many of the problems and interests that had been identified as urgent have multiplied in size, scope and intensity. A new “mid-generation” of youth calls for our attention to the same problems and concerns as beset its predecessors. Jamaica is therefore very pleased that the General Assembly has devoted its attention at this year’s historic session to stirring the international community to renewed action in order to ensure that the problems and concerns affecting our youth are properly addressed.

Jamaica has always been actively involved in youth activities at the regional and international levels. In 1985 we were honoured to be one of 24 countries selected to come up with a document directed towards proposing solutions for some of the problems of the world’s youth. That document was the forerunner of the current draft World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and beyond, which Jamaica hopes will be adopted during these plenary meetings. At the national level, our youth, like that of other countries, has been the agent and catalyst of social and political change, notably, but not solely, through artistic expression. Jamaican youth delegates participated extensively in two of the Preparatory Committee meetings for the World Summit for Social Development and in a number of activities held earlier this year in honour of the tenth anniversary of International Youth Year. Jamaica fully endorsed General Assembly resolution 49/152, of December 1994, and in keeping with this commitment, has included representatives from eight governmental and non-governmental organizations in its official delegation to take part in this historic session of the General Assembly. Jamaica’s active participation in youth discussions at the international level has born fruit: we were among the first countries to implement a national youth policy, which mirrors the draft World Programme of Action for Youth in many respects.

The draft Programme of Action outlines the issues confronting today’s youth, which include education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, recreation and leisure and rights and responsibilities. These concerns are similarly reflected in Jamaica’s National Youth Policy, which identifies eight major issues facing our youth. These include the effects of cultural penetration and rising materialism, alienation and lack of recognition and health-related problems.

The draft document also suggests strategies for addressing these issues. With respect to education, the draft Programme proposes to address deficiencies in the education of youth through, for example, improvements in vocational and professional training and access to apprenticeship programmes. In addition, Governments should establish or strengthen programmes to educate young people about the cultural heritage of their societies.

Similar measures contained in Jamaica's National Youth Policy include an increased emphasis, within educational programmes, on Jamaican culture and heritage, an expansion of our apprenticeship programme [*16*] and a review of school curricula to ensure that subjects taught are relevant to the requirements of the job market.

Most importantly, Jamaica has this year reintroduced its National Youth Service, which will have very strong components of leadership training and remedial education. The draft Programme also suggests the promotion of self-employment schemes for youth with funding and technical support from Governments and private-sector bodies. Also suggested are cooperative schemes in which young people could be involved in the production and marketing of goods and services. In accordance with our National Youth Policy, Jamaica will be developing model youth-run cooperatives that will include guidelines for management training in entrepreneurial techniques. Similar programmes already exist within the secondary school system.

In the area of agriculture, the draft Programme states that Governments should provide land grants to youth and youth organizations. In line with this renewed focus on agriculture, the Jamaican Government will embark on a major promotion scheme to encourage young people to take up agricultural careers, and to facilitate their doing so, by providing special access to land, capital and technical assistance.

In the area of health, Jamaica's National Policy is geared towards the promotion of health education to encourage positive values and attitudes among our youth. This includes a focus on preventive action as well as programmes designed to instruct youth in parenting skills and responsibilities, health education and family-life education. Teenage fathers and mothers will be specially targeted. Already operating in Jamaica there are programmes designed to assist teenage girls whose education has been interrupted by pregnancy. Many of these programmes also provide counselling for teenage fathers and the parents of teenage mothers.

In the area of drug abuse, Jamaica will target youth organizations as key players in designing and implementing programmes to help reintegrate young people into the community, which we consider to be the best protection against potential drug abuse. Treatment and rehabilitation programmes for young substance abusers will also make use of peer group pressure in a positive way, as young people can participate in therapy sessions for substance abusers.

In line with International Youth Year's theme of participation, Jamaica's youth-leadership programme will also be expanded to enable young people to be effectively represented in decision-making and implementation activities taking place in society. Young people are especially concerned about the preservation of the environment and the increasing use of violence to resolve conflicts.

If I have focused overwhelmingly on problems affecting young people in my country, it is precisely because these are the issues that Jamaican youths have themselves repeatedly emphasized as their major concerns and that they need to see properly addressed. Although various national programmes have been implemented in the past — aimed at skills, training and self-help, among other things — these

have had only a limited impact. The truth is that the institutional framework for addressing youth-related problems and issues in Jamaica has been inadequate, with limited coordination and interaction between the various youth organizations, both governmental and non-governmental. This has led to duplication of services, a waste of resources and piecemeal solutions. In addition, there was no officially approved policy on youth to guide agencies so that they would act in accordance with a common set of strategies or towards common goals.

Jamaica's national youth policy was therefore designed to redress all these deficiencies, but first of all to bring an integrated approach to the activities of youth organizations nation wide and to equip all youth with the necessary academic, technical and life-coping skills to foster their personal development. The policy is the product of extensive consultation, participation and discussion involving a wide cross-section of youth-related organizations and groups across Jamaica, both governmental and non-governmental.

We have also strengthened our Youth Division, located in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture, to be the focal point for the implementation of our youth policy, coordinating the various youth programmes through collaboration with Government and non-governmental youth organizations. The policy is not intended to be either static or cast in stone. Consultations towards improving and updating its strategies and their effective implementation will continue to be sought.

As is clear, the policy I have just outlined is, certainly from the point of view of my own country, an extremely ambitious one. It not only comprises new and creative measures to address the needs and aspirations of our youth, but also seeks to reintroduce and reinvigorate [*17*] traditional and past programmes and practices of previous generations.

Aside from the already present political will and commitment on the part of Governments, financial and technical assistance, as well as advice, are needed if programmes such as those I have outlined are to succeed and to remain on track. In the specific case of Jamaica, the Government has identified, for necessary international assistance, priority measures concerning the establishment of the appropriate institutional structure, the establishment of a database on youth in Jamaica, and the expansion of our National Youth Service. In this respect, United Nations help will be sought to provide technical assistance for consultants, training, attachments, study, visits, equipment, and funds for feasibility studies and pilot projects. More creative means of assistance could be devised to assist youth, which would involve more funds being made available by Governments on a voluntary basis, but which could also involve the provision of non-monetary assistance, such as technical assistance and advice. We as Governments have to remember that youth are not patient. Their concerns and solutions to the problems that affect them cannot be put on hold, pending discussion and bureaucratic red tape, as these concerns and problems often develop and explode at a remarkable pace.

Although the situation of youth differs from one country to another, we believe that young people worldwide would benefit from an increased exchange of ideas among

themselves and among Governments and Government agencies responsible for youth, on similar questions relating to their young people.

Jamaica, as one of the countries intimately involved in the formulation of the document before the Assembly, fully endorses it and urges fellow Member States to do the same. Of course all the measures contained in the draft Programme of Action will not be fully applicable to all our countries; that is illogical. During the negotiations on the final draft these past three weeks, differences in culture and style again made it obvious that the document could not adopt a blanket approach to concerns facing the world's youth. But then, that was never the intention.

The intention of elaborating this draft Programme of Action was to provide a basic — I repeat, basic — guideline for Governments to consult when designing their youth policies or programmes. This was also in the hope that the attention of the world community would be refocused on the question of youth. Jamaica has designed its youth policy to suit the needs and aspirations of Jamaica's youth, and even these will change in time. Other countries have also formulated, either recently or long ago, youth policies or their equivalents, without feeling constrained by United Nations formulation.

We need to ensure that the cries of our young people are heard and, more importantly, are acted upon at the national, regional and international levels. As we live in an increasingly interdependent world, our youth, more than ever before, are cosmopolitan creatures, and it is only logical that we should follow their example in our approach to the question of international youth policy.

At present, there is national, regional and international consensus on the need for youth to be at the top of national priorities, as other problems and issues that concern Governments now will be left to future Governments to sort out. And since the nations of the future will be inhabited by the youth of today, what better way to ensure their future than to lay the proper foundations — with our youth, for our youth.

