

# NIA

## National Integrity Action

### **PRESENTATION AT THE CONVENT OF MERCY ACADEMY (ALPHA) AT A MEETING OF THE PARENT-TEACHERS'S ASSOCIATION**

**SEPTEMBER 24, 2014**

### **KEYNOTE PRESENTATION BY PROFESSOR TREVOR MUNROE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL INTEGRITY ACTION; HONOURARY VISITING PROFESSOR, SIR ARTHUR LEWIS INSTITUTE (SALISES), UWI**

---

May I thank you first of all for your kind invitation especially since it is a repeat request as I let you down last year, for one reason and one reason only, because of an immovable prior engagement. Please understand that no other explanation could have kept me from being with you for a number of reasons.

From a very personal point of view I cherish very pleasant memories of this hall, McAuley Hall, going back to my days at St. George's College when George's and Alpha's debating teams had many encounters right here. And I am not ashamed to say that if my memory serves me right, the George's team, constituted by the now Minister Thwaites and myself, were soundly whipped by our Alpha girls.

More importantly I wanted to be here to express my great admiration for the graduates of this institution, so many of them outstanding achievers making exceptional contributions to Jamaica. It can't be an accident that two of the Alpha Academy Alumni Women of Excellence Awardees (Hermine Metcalf, 2014 and Elizabeth Stair, 2005) will this year be receiving National Awards. But even when not recognized nationally, the Alpha student and graduate invariably strives to

live up to the school's motto: **Ad Verum et Bonum** – “to the true and the good”, to seek always to talk the truth, without fear or favour, and to do good, even when there is no reward, to show concern and compassion for the disadvantaged, seeking neither prominence nor public acclaim. I have to say and I am eternally grateful to be the personal beneficiary of these qualities of an Alpha graduate in my dear wife, Ingrid, an outstanding Alpha graduate- sometimes a mixed blessing when from time to time she will tell me I am talking foolishness and, on reflection, she is often right!!!

Most of all, however, I am glad to be here this afternoon to congratulate you the Parent-Teachers' Association and through you the entire school community on the remarkable progress that this institution is making on a foundation of past excellence. Let's just take two indicators: athletics and academics. In years gone by, not too long ago, Alpha was nowhere to be mentioned in the world of tracks and champs, not so today- you are I believe in the top 10, ahead of your brother school and my alma mater, St Georges. Just a couple months ago in Mexico at the 20<sup>th</sup> Central America and Caribbean Junior Championships, Alpha girls made outstanding contributions to Jamaica's performance, particularly Krista- Gaye Taylor who won the high jump for the under twenty girls.

Second, academics on which I am sure you got a report earlier in this meeting. In the just released 2014 CXC results two hundred and thirty seven (237) fifth form students wrote the exam, two hundred and twenty four (224) or ninety four point five percent passed 5 or more subjects. In the CAPE 2014 results equally outstanding performances were evident: computer science unit 1 and 2, one hundred percent passes in each; communication studies unit 1, one hundred percent. Of course, there is much room for improvement particularly in Math and

Languages. But even with that Alpha has steadily moved up the annual rankings published by **Education Jamaica**. This year I believe that you are ranked number 5 up from number fourteen in CSEC and number 3 in CAPE of a hundred and sixty add schools. Warmest congratulations, first of all if I may so to the outstanding work of the school leadership, particularly, Principal Mack Singh.

But as well we have to big up the students. After all it is they, very often in difficult financial situations, who ultimately put pen to paper and produce the results.

As well we must appreciate the teachers. As one myself, for many years though at the tertiary level, I appreciate the feeling of many teachers that, very often, no matter how much you put out, the appreciation, particularly, in the pay check, is not what it ought to be. In that context I support the call of the JTA President yesterday for the government to pay up remaining retroactive salaries and I urge the Minister of Education to live up to his assurance that this shall be done in short order.

At the same time I have to ask fellow teachers to be realistic in their expectations given the current situation in Jamaica and the need for all of us to pull together to move the country forward. In that regard I mention one matter, the issue of vacation leave with pay . In years gone by, for example when I was at St. George's College Jamaica's economy was among the fastest growing in the world and could afford then many things that are not possible now. One such is teachers taking vacation leave with pay during the school term, in addition to school holidays. This cost the country hundreds of millions of dollars. Is it not appropriate for the regulation to be more scrupulously followed "**teachers in public education institutions shall not normally**

**be eligible for vacation leave with pay in addition to school holidays”?** (s.64, p.1, **Education Regulation, 1980**).

Most of all on this occasion, however, I wish to congratulate parents and the Alpha PTA which must rank a one of the best Jamaica. It is not conceivable that the school could be performing so well without the impact of your association, input in terms of meetings with parents and teachers to share information on the academic programme, guidance and counselling discipline and school rules and of course, parenting skills.

In this last regard much is being done by you parents but more is needed from you and from parents all across Jamaica despite the harsh economic climate. May I be bold enough to suggest that circumstances give you no alternative but to try even harder to cope: cutting even further unnecessary expenses (I won't mention the hair extensions and the acrylic nails – Minister Thwaites has already done so in his own imitable style) but what about the backyard/kitchen garden, the rearing of small animals – I remember my grandfather rearing goats on Lacey Avenue off Mountain View; what about more buying bulk to reduce cost? Can we parents do more of this to cope better? Most of all are we doing as much as we need to improve our own education – to take opportunities to sharpen our reading and writing and computer skills? To get A certificate in a trade or skill appropriate to the rapidly changing job market.

**Even as we try to cope more, given today's realities we have to strengthen our parenting skills. Teaching the child responsibility:**

- **How to care for his school bag and books and not ‘dash’ them down, particularly, as boys are too often accustomed to do.**
- **How to care for the environment, placing garbage in bins and bags, planting flowers and trees and taking care of them.**
- **How to make certain they are not ‘inappropriately touched’. You should know that the latest information from the *Office of the Children’s Registry* on sexual abuse indicates almost three thousand four hundred reports of sexual abuse in 2013 up twenty three percent from 2012.**
- **Most of all teaching your child how to behave, proper manners, being respectful to everyone, not to fight and quarrel over every little thing and the value of honesty. Let me remind you of what the *National Education Task Force Report on Education Transformation* called for 10 years ago “the reinforcement of social and civic values...conflict resolution skills ...awareness of cultural and national identities and respect for other citizens and the environment”. Fast forward to 2013 and while we have made some progress, particularly in schools like Alpha, take a look at the report from the **Safe School Programme** covering one hundred and fifty four schools just a little over 15% of public schools. In searches conducted in the one hundred and fifty four schools “a number of weapons were seized, of which one hundred and twenty eight (128) were knives, one hundred and twenty two (122) pairs of scissors, 6 ice picks, 2 machetes, and forty four (44) other weapons...two hundred and ninety eight (298) incidence were reported including 4 murders, one hundred and sixty eight (168) fights, sixty four (64) cases of theft, twenty five (25) cases of wounding, 8 instances of sexual offence ...(leading to) forty (40) arrests. (**Economic and Social Survey Jamaica, 2013**) And this is from only one hundred and fifty four schools of the thousand schools,**

**clearly far more is required from all of us – teachers, students, parents, the surrounding communities, especially, the churches and private sector foundations to teach “true respect for all”, to bring about behaviour change and extremely important to impart the values of integrity.**

We in NIA are trying to do our part. As you know NIA places much emphasis on building public awareness and enhancing integrity at the national level by advocating legislation to more effectively combat corruption, such as Campaign Finance Reform to regulate money control over politics and an Integrity Commission with special powers to prosecute the corrupt. However, we fully recognize that while this is necessary, it is not sufficient, that, in addition, there is an urgent need for new measures to build integrity amongst our youth in and out of school. Hence, last year we sponsored an essay competition relating to these matters amongst eleventh graders. More significantly, in collaboration with the JCSC we developed a pilot programme for developing Integrity Ambassadors in three schools – Holy Trinity, St. Hugh’s and St. George’s College. This NIA Integrity Ambassador’s programme enjoyed significant success; out of it came the Integrity Dub, the base of our current TV ad “It Haffi Stop” and also a manual for use in schools. NIA would wish to pursue discussions with associations such as yours and most of all the Ministry of Education towards incorporating the Integrity Ambassador Programme information in our educational institutions. Just imagine if out of a programme such as this Integrity Ambassadors’ could be developed among students in schools across this country with the support of parents, teachers, school administrators and the funding input of private sector foundations. Would this not make a big contribution to making our schools less troubled by disorderly conduct, dishonest behaviour and negative values? Would this not be an important input into character building among the younger generation? We certainly believe it

would and hence we invite you, along with other PTAs to consider partnering with us as NIA seeks to move the Integrity mbassadors programme beyond the pilot stage.

Ultimately our goal and all those who wish to see Jamaica progress must be to teach and learn true respect for all, to build movement for honesty and for integrity, linking the like-minded in a network of PTAs, citizen association, youth clubs, student bodies, in businesses, in political parties etc., a movement against corrupt and inappropriate conduct wherever it is found and by whomsoever it is practiced.

I commend this idea for your consideration and for your support as I wish you every success and all the very best in your endeavours to make Alpha an even more outstanding success, a centre of excellence in Jamaica's educational system.