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## **NIA statement: Manchester Municipal Corporation corruption convictions**

Let Manchester convictions mark a new beginning in Jamaica's combat of corruption-NIA

On behalf of the NIA , I would like to commend all those involved in the historic Manchester Municipal Corporation corruption trial—the court staff, the Defence attorneys , the outstanding investigators from the MOCA , FID and other agencies, the special prosecutors assigned to the case by the DPP , the courageous witnesses who came forward and the trial judge who had to assess complex material , and, on that basis, discharge or convict the accused as the evidence required.

The live-streaming of the verdict was a fitting culmination of the case, demonstrating the Jamaican judiciary leadership's sense of its accountability to the public even as it exercises its independence in accordance with Jamaica's constitution.

NIA commits itself and urges the authorities as well as all Jamaicans to make this trial and the conviction of the corrupt in this case mark a new beginning in the struggle of the Jamaican people to combat corruption struggle of the Jamaican people to combat corruption which each year sucks the country's production and robs the public of an estimated J\$100 billion on an annual basis.

### **For the trial to mark this new beginning, we urge that:**

- 1) Those found guilty of robbing the Manchester Municipal Corporation's public purse must be given as stiff sentences as Jamaica's sentencing guidelines allow and the ill-gotten assets seized by the authorities to send a much needed signal; that 'in Jamaica corruption does not pay'.
- 2) The independence and professionalism of investigative agencies on whom so much rests must be strengthened. In particular, the passage of the first component of the MOCA regulations by Parliament must be speedily followed by the long pending completion and adoption of the remaining two components to establish the Agency's full autonomy.
- 3) Where long completed and submitted investigations of high level officials— including of MPs— recommend prosecutions, these must be pursued without further delay or the fullest explanation provided to the public for Inaction, Transparency and accountability require no less.

In this regard, the Director of Corruption Prosecution and/or the Integrity Commission need to act without further delay on the investigation Report into the hundreds of Millions of dollars lost at Petrojam . This report was completed and submitted in July 2019, following a damning

report from the Auditor General, published in December 2018, exposing nepotism and breaches of procurement law , stretching across political administrations.

- 4) The Protected Disclosure Act ( or 'Whistleblower' legislation ) must be strengthened to give a greater incentive for public spirited citizens to come forward and give evidence before the courts.

All sections of our people are now facing unprecedented levels of severe hardship arising from the economic contraction induced by the Covid-19 emergency. Now more than ever we cannot afford and must come together to arrest further losses to the public purse due to corruption.

Towards this end, we must now redouble our efforts to ensure that the corrupt who would steal funds, even in this crisis, needed for alleviating increasing suffering, restoring and restructuring economy are brought before the courts and jailed when found guilty. This would not only help us to weather the storm in these tough times but also assist in rebuilding confidence amongst our people as well as in the international community that Jamaica is getting serious about corruption.

Let the Manchester corruption convictions initiate a new stage in our struggle for integrity in public and private life.

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