

“I have a dream for an inclusive Jamaica”

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word ‘democracy’ is defined as the following: the absence of hereditary or arbitrary class distinctions or privileges. The late Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., had a dream for an inclusive America as black people were discriminated against. He desired for black people not to be an anomaly anymore at that time. Blacks were treated in a vituperative manner and he wanted that to stop. Democracy was handed down to everyone, “a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir”. I share common dreams with this honourable man. The only difference is that I want to see an inclusive Jamaica, a country free of political segregation, racism, class discrimination, sexuality discrimination, religious discrimination and even HIV/AIDS discrimination. I wish to see all this come to an end.

Jamaica has seen political segregation at its worst. At election time, the country is torn in two. Supporters for the People’s National Party and the opposing Jamaica Labour Party are in warfare. People die, people suffer, and roads cannot be fixed because of simple differences in political views. There are a lot of consequences in having a different political view from another person. This should not be. It pains the hearts of many Jamaicans to see this being played out on our streets, in our homes, in our communities and other places of interaction. I have a dream that all Jamaicans, whether ‘PNP’ or ‘JLP’, will not be discriminated against because of their political views.

Racism in Jamaica has seen a decline in many years but it is still prevalent. Jamaicans of a lighter shade are sometimes given preference over those of a darker shade. Jobs, relationships, school situations are where all of these problems are happening. Also it is a two way street. Jamaicans of a darker shade hold a grudge against those of a lighter shade. This is absolutely wrong. Some Jamaicans even go to the point of skin-bleaching to get the lighter shade. This is a mindset that has to be removed from our society. Regardless of whatever shade of skin a person is, no privilege or right should be withheld from them. Every person is an equal. I have a dream that every Jamaican will be equally treated regardless of the colour of their skin.

The term Class Discrimination has been heavily integrated into our society that it seems like the ‘norm’. In this country, there are the upper class, middle class and lower class. There is discrimination based on the amount of money you earn, the car you drive, whether you drive a car or not, your level of education, where you live and your job. Money sets this country apart and this should come to an end. Etana, Jamaican singer and songwriter, clearly defines class discrimination based on where you live. She sings about a young lady who goes for an interview in a top-rated company and is rejected because of her address. For many years, Jamaicans who live in the inner city are not even considered for certain positions based on their address, regardless of being qualified. This is a sad situation. I have a dream that there will be no more class discrimination and no classes of segregation.

The issue of discriminating against people of a different sexual orientation in Jamaica has been a taboo for the longest time. Most Jamaicans are against homosexuality and react violently to

homosexuals. This was seen recently after the ISSA/Grace Boys and Girls Championships, held in March 2014. Some patrons of the event were throwing stones at the residents of the 'Shoemaker Gully'. These young men, because of their sexual orientation, were forced to live under the gully located in New Kingston. The society does not accept them. Homosexuals are often beaten and killed in Jamaica. This is topic is one of great sensitivity in this island but what is needed from the country is tolerance. People need to see that they are also human beings and Jamaican citizens, which under the Jamaican Constitution have a right to freedom of speech, movement and the right life. In order for an inclusive Jamaica to exist, tolerance to the greatest extent must be exercised. Despite sexual orientation, a person should be treated with respect. I have dream that all Jamaicans whether gay or straight will co-exist as one.

The main religion of this country is Christianity. Some Jamaicans are not opened to accept another person of different religion as they are not sensitized to it and find the person an anomaly. This should end. In the Christian religion, there is further discrimination because of whether a person worships on a Saturday or Sunday. I have a dream that this will end and persons of different religious views will come to accept and respect each other.

HIV/AIDS discrimination is also a topic which is considered a taboo. This disease came to our shores many years ago and since then many have been infected with it. They are shunned because people have the notion that the disease is spread by touching the person and other myths. This is not so. There should not be any discrimination against these people in any aspect of life.

Democracy was handed down to everyone. The motto of this great nation is "Out of Many, One People. These words need to be echoed over the Cockpit Country, repeated over the Vere Plains, repeated in schools and places of contact. Let freedom ring from all corners of Jamaica. When we allow freedom to ring from every parish, every community, every home, then we will be able to speed up that when all children of Jamaica, of every background, will be able to sing the words of our great anthem, "Jamaica, land we love".