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I Have A Dream For An Inclusive Jamaica

I remember vividly that Friday afternoon when I entered a business establishment to change a cheque which had been given to me. As is customary, I presented my identification card to the supervisor who then realized that I was from the volatile community of Hendon Norwood situated in St. James. He immediately without question, blurted out *“Yuh Come from Norwood, gun man place?! Get out of my office!”*

I was now left in a quandary-not knowing whether if he was joking or not. His resolve seemingly strengthened as his face grew sterner. In a timorous voice, I wished him a good day. My title then became Sujae Boswell, victim of social injustice. The occurrence was a mere drop in the bucket as to the general situation which currently exists within our Jamaican society. *“...stigmatized for low quality because of locality”-Kevaughn Ellis.*

It was Martin Luther King Jr., who poignantly posited that we often hate each other because we don't know each other. It is germane to the efficient running and proper functioning of any society that the concept of social justice prevails.

In an effort to discern what an inclusive Jamaica would entail, it must first be clarified what is an inclusive society. An inclusive society is a society that over-rides differences of race, gender, class, generation, and geography, and ensures inclusion, equality of opportunity. (Expert Group Meeting on Promoting Social Integration, Helsinki, July 2008) However social injustice proves counter-productive in achieving the ideal inclusive Jamaica, 'the place of choice to live, work, raise families, and do business.' This ideal vision for Jamaica is only such unless the chronic illness of social injustice is diagnosed. For the purpose of this piece, an inclusive Jamaica rests on four pillars and they are: inclusion of the disabled, end to police brutality and the mobilization of our youth. All will be elaborated chronologically.

“Teach us true respect for all”, is the instruction of our national anthem. It evokes a resonating effect- for us to love and treat each other fairly. It affirms passionately that one may be disabled but not disqualified. It is my firm conviction that if an inclusive Jamaica is to be possible the disabled ought to receive greater support. According to World Health Organization (WHO), 15% of the world's total population has disabilities. This is

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approximately 600 million people wherein three out of every four are living in developing countries and half are of working age. The disabled stand the daily test of verbal abuse which often ostracizes them from society. This action is clearly antithetical to our motto of "Out of many, one people".

I have a dream for a Jamaica wherein persons who are of the disabled community will not be labeled or seen as persona non grata! I dream of a Jamaica where the lives of people with disabilities are improved, allowing them to have a better interaction in society by widening their scope of activities. Information Communications Technology (ICT) is a medium which presents the disabled community with a powerful tool in their battle to gain employment; it, among others, increases the skills of those who are disabled, and by extension allows for integration of disabled individuals socially and economically into their communities. I have a dream that this will reduce the functional barriers and will enlarge the scope of activities available to disabled persons.

"If a man escapes the hands of thugs, he must be mindful that the police still exist. This statement proves to be provocative and frightening; the reality we must face. Such a statement was evident in the death of Mario Deane, who allegedly died at the hands of police officers while in custody. His death fell on the evening of Jamaica's 52nd anniversary of Independence as a nation. This incident is nothing foreign to us as Jamaicans, as many families have suffered immensely at the hands of police brutality. It has been mounting year after year, decades upon decades however it is time for the decades of brutality, indignity, disrespect, injustice and inhumane treatment meted out to our citizens to stop! It must stop now! According to Amnesty International, "More than 1,400 people have been shot dead by police over the past 10 years in Jamaica, a country whose population is only 2.6 million. The rate of lethal police shootings is one of the highest in the world." Such information appears folly as the Jamaica Constabulary Force's motto reads "We serve, we protect, we reassure with courtesy, integrity and proper respect for the rights of all." But by the hands of police officers many lives have been lost, many individuals left in agony. It has laid blows that have broken down family structures, creating erudite individuals in the field of suffering but I have a broad dream for humanity, for a new a day, a new Jamaica, one of inclusion. I have a dream at this moment!

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It has been posited by William Somerset Maugham, British playwright, that “it is an illusion that youth is happy, an illusion of those who have lost it; but the young know they are wretched for they are full of the truthless ideals which have been instilled into them...” Youth are not problems but as pointed out in the CARICOM Commission on Youth Development, January 2010 report, they are valuable assets that should be developed. However it must be acknowledged that young people often face immense challenges in the basic transition from the educational setting to the working world.

Evidence of the challenge to make the transition is usually identified by the high unemployment rate among Youth. The World Bank posits that, the unemployment rate in Jamaica is at about 13.4% (March 2014), trending down from 15.2% at the end of 2013. Jamaica possesses what many consider to be a fairly young population; it is also shown that youth unemployment is more than twice the national rate.

The problems associated with obtaining work and productive employment is compounded by a host of other problems which the youth have to face, such as insufficient training and at times illiteracy. Unemployment creates a wide range of social ills and young people are particularly susceptible to its damaging effects: low self-esteem, marginalization, impoverishment and social exclusion. (The World Programme of Action for Youth on Employment, 1995)

Let us now discard those tattered paint brushes and be ready to begin anew. I have a dream of a Jamaica wherein no-one is considered a minority or majority however a society which epitomizes our motto “Out of many, one people”, regardless of age, origin, or disabilities there is a future ahead for one Jamaica. Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream!