

Statement to the House of Representatives by
Hon. Olivia Grange CD., MP
Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport
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Our children, our women our girls have a right to feel safe and be safe in this country and I am appalled and shocked by the recent turn of events. The tragic and horrific slaying of 3 year old Nevalesia Campbell in Brown's Town St Ann last weekend, has only strengthened the resolve of the Government and in particular, The Ministries of Justice, Education Youth and Information, National Security and the MCGES to move swiftly to take all the necessary steps to ensure that we complete the work of the Joint Select Committee in the shortest possible time. Mr Speaker when you harm the innocent, the weak and the vulnerable you must feel the full brunt of the national law enforcement apparatus.

Mr. Speaker, from the vantage point of my Ministry, the focus will be on ensuring that the range of offences and the concomitant penalties included in these laws are in keeping with what our crime statistics, child protection data as well as epidemiological data are telling us about the kinds of abuse and violence being meted out to these groups. We will also be focusing on how we can facilitate and support those who are

negatively affected to come forward and report abuse and maltreatment. Statistics from the JCF indicate that of the number of victims of gender-based violence who seek help, only 28 per cent go to the police, seven per cent to a health-care provider, and three per cent to the church. This needs to change and change quickly.

Mr. Speaker our words are important but at the end of the day only our action counts. Minister Reid and his portfolio agencies including the Child Development Agency have also rallied around the community and in particular are seeing to the psycho-social care and welfare of the twin brother who Nevalesia left behind.

I wish to commend the St. Ann police for their swift action in getting to the bottom of this terrible situation. If the allegations are correct then we can see how a failure in judgement, a failure to exercise responsibility and misplaced values went horribly wrong – ending in the loss of one of our precious gems. Honourable Member,s we must confront our constituents and have open and honest conversations with them about their responsibilities as adults and as parents.

Mr Speaker, in February 2013 then Opposition Senator Kamina Johnson Smith tabled a motion in the Upper House calling for a Joint Select Committee to be convened to consider reforms to several laws. I read directly from her text;

“Be it resolved that a Joint Select Committee be convened to consider amendments to the Offences Against the Persons Act, the Sexual Offences Act and the Childcare and Protection Act, with a view specifically to redefining or augmenting, as appropriate, offences and punishments to be applied to: the murder of pregnant women; the murder of children; sexual offences against children; the abduction of children; and such other violent crimes perpetrated against women, children and the elderly as may be deemed by the Committee to be relevant to such a review.”

This Joint Select Committee was put on hold in December 2014 and despite many interventions by this side, we were not able to convince the then government that it was important to restart the Joint Select Committee to deal with this matter.

Mr Speaker, at the time we recognised that the nation was having a crisis and that our women and children were being targeted by criminals.

I must commend Senator Johnson Smith for being a voice that was constant in calling for change.

Mr Speaker with over seventeen hundred (1700) children murdered over the last 14 years and the continued assault on our pregnant women and other females, my Ministry will do its part in the fight against crime that is being waged by this administration.

No action in this fight is an individual effort by one Minister or Ministry - this is a united and focussed approach. We are strategically looking at areas of law that need to be reformed. We are not afraid to take on the awesome task of effecting change.

Mr. Speaker, the time is now for this Parliament to make its voice heard by prescribing appropriate consequences in the Offences Against the Person Act, the Sexual Offences Act, the Domestic Violence Act and The Child Care and Protection Act. Those who act with impunity and

seek to destroy our future by attacking our most vulnerable citizens should be dealt with accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, the statistics continue to tell a sad story about the disregard for the safety of our children by some in the society. Enhancing laws that deal with the issue of violence against the most vulnerable, will not be a panacea, but a key aspect of an overall approach towards building a proper framework for their protection.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry commits to the people of Jamaica that our efforts will be for the children and women of Jamaica so that the death of women and children like Nevalesia will not be in vain but a motivating force that spurs us to continued action.

Mr Speaker, I have had consultations with the Minister of Justice and he has confirmed to me that the Joint Select Committee in question will resume in the next quarter.

Mr. Speaker our resolve is constant and sure. Our commitment to the women and children of Jamaica is strong and our efforts will see results.

We will not shirk from our responsibility of providing leadership. As we had strenuously advocated in the interest of women and children whilst in opposition, so too will our advocacy continue, but also now be punctuated by forthright action.

Mr Speaker I call on the entire Parliament to join with the Government in partnership to protect our women and children, to protect all our citizens.

Thank you.