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PRESS RELEASE

June 17, 2014

“WE NEED TO FIX OUR SOCIETY” – MAXINE TAYLOR-COOPER: HEAR THE CHILDREN’S CRY HEAD CALLS FOR POSITIVE MOVES FOR CHILD SAFETY AS SHE PRESENTS TROUBLING CHILD WATCH 5 STATISTICS

- 783 children reported missing January-May 2014: 204 still missing, 1 dead
- 18 children murdered January-April 2014, 131 reported raped, 230 in custody
- Hear The Children’s Cry calling for:
 - Effective, all island, home-to-school & back, school bus system
 - Children to attend schools in their home neighbourhoods to avoid long commutes
 - Education Ministry to provide equal access to quality education in all schools

With police statistics showing nearly 800 children reported missing during the first five months of this year, 204 of them still missing and one known to have died, Maxine Taylor-Cooper is calling for positive moves to provide better protection for Jamaica’s children. The Acting Executive Director of Hear The Children’s Cry, which operates the Jamaica Yellow Pages Sponsored Missing Children’s Support Programme, was presenting the fifth set of **CHILD WATCH** statistics.

A total of 783 children, 612 girls and 171 boys, were reported missing between January and May 2014. Of these, 578 are known to have returned home, 445 girls and 133 boys. One girl is known to have died. The whereabouts of 204 of these missing children, 166 girls and 38 boys, are still unknown. Other alarming figures supplied by the police show that between January and April 2014, 18 children were murdered, 26 were affected by shooting incidents, and 131 were reported to have been raped. Twenty-two children were perpetrators of robberies, two died in traffic accidents and one was killed in a robbery. During this four month period, a total of 230 children were in police custody.

“We need to fix our society” declares Mrs. Taylor-Cooper, “Much more needs to be done in protecting our children and catering to their needs. We are saddened and appalled by the atrocities being perpetrated on our children – murder, abuse from adults, young ones killing each other, and children committing suicide. In St. James during Child Month, four children died tragically during a four day period. It is almost as if we have abandoned our children. Some of us are still working on their behalf, but it is not enough. We need to find solutions, and we need to implement them now.

“Regardless of economic constraints, we need to do much better in the way we prioritise the allocation of our resources. Jamaica does not have an effective safety net, and that is a significant part of the challenge. For a start, we need to establish an effective school bus system, like the ones that exist in many other countries. Children should be collected from their homes and driven to and from school on a daily basis. In addition, children need to attend schools in their own geographic area. Some children are travelling from as far as Ocho Rios to Kingston, from St. Catherine to Kingston, on a daily basis.

“We are calling on the Ministry of Education to ensure an equal quality of education in all schools. Also, we need homework centres for the children who would be returning to an empty house with parents at work.”

Noting that Hear The Children’s Cry carries out extensive parenting education and child safety outreaches across the island, the Acting Executive Director points out that such efforts need to be expanded. She calls on parents and other adults to be more vigilant in looking out for the welfare of Jamaica’s children. Mrs. Taylor-Cooper continues:

“We understand that many parents are facing economic challenges, they have to go out to work, but parents and guardians have to be more careful about whom they allow to supervise their youngsters. They need to remember that it is often people close to our children who are harming them. We are also calling on community members to watch out for the welfare of the children in their neighbourhoods, reporting unusual or disturbing activities and helping children when they are in distress.”

CHILD WATCH is a response of Hear The Children’s Cry to the worsening situation affecting Jamaica’s children. Launched in June 2013, it carries out the following on a regular basis:

- Researching and reporting important statistics to the public
- Serving as a monitoring system
- Tracking and documenting trends affecting children
- Serving as a corrective and preventive measure by highlighting facts and figures and pressing for vital corrective and preventive actions.

Hear the Children’s Cry is grateful to the Statistics & Information Management Unit and the Missing Persons Call Centre, both of the Jamaica Constabulary Force; the Registrar General’s Department and the National Family Planning Board for providing information on crimes against children and other statistics. **CHILD WATCH 5** figures are shown in the two charts below, and attached.

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CHILDREN REPORTED MISSING JANUARY - MAY 2014									
Months	Total		Returned		Dead		Still Missing		Grand Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Jan	28	103	22	70	0	0	6	33	131
Feb	39	119	26	79	0	1	13	39	158
Mar	45	136	39	108	0	0	6	28	181
Apr	25	125	17	102	0	0	8	23	150
May	34	129	29	86	0	0	5	43	163
Total	171	612	133	445	0	1	38	166	783
SOURCE: Jamaica Constabulary Force & Hear The Children’s Cry									

2014	JAN	FEB	MAR	APRIL	TOTALS
SELECTED OFFENCES AGAINST CHILDREN					
MURDER	5	4	5	4	18
SHOOTING	2	8	8	8	26
RAPE	29	31	28	43	131
SEXUAL INTERCOURSE/ UNDER 16	28	46	33	41	148
INCEST	1	1	1		3
SEXUAL GROOMING	1	2	3		6
SEXUAL TOUCHING	21	13	5		39
INCIDENTS RELATING TO CHILDREN					
ROBBERY PERPETRATORS	6	10	1	5	22
CHILDREN IN POLICE CUSTODY	62	74	52	42	230
TRAFFIC ACCIDENT FATALITIES	0	0	0	2	2
CHILDREN KILLED IN ROBBERIES	0	0	0	1	1