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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**HOLIDAYS HAVE BECOME 'DANGEROUS TIMES' FOR CHILDREN  
PARENTS, COMMUNITIES, MUST BE EXTRA VIGILANT – BETTY ANN BLAINE**

- *Hear The Children's Cry Founder terms school holidays dangerous for children, especially the long summer vacation, when criminals targeting them are more active*
- *Parents urged to be extra vigilant, warned, 'Know where your children are, at all times'; practical safety tips provided*
- *Churches, communities encouraged to help protect young ones*
- *Economic challenges significant, and need to be addressed in child safety efforts*

In the wake of yet another heart-breaking report of murdered children, Hear The Children's Cry Founder Betty Ann Blaine is calling for extra vigilance to keep youngsters safe during the long summer holidays and other vacation periods.

Expressing shock and outrage at the violent murders of St. James students 10 year old Mallica Mitchell and 13 year old Omari Sterling, Mrs. Blaine stresses that children are at increased risk during school holidays – and that the long summer vacation is especially dangerous. In addition to sending sympathy to the families of the children, whose bodies were found on Tuesday morning in a pond in an isolated Trelawny location, the devoted Children's Advocate is offering vital practical advice to families, and urging communities and churches to get involved in keeping Jamaica's children safe.

“Summer is becoming a very dangerous time for children,” she points out, “in fact all school vacations are high-risk periods for youngsters, but summer most of all because of the long stretch of holiday time involved. Children are out of school, they are at home all day, and there is less supervision, sometimes none. Many parents have to work and are not at home during the days. Unfortunately, the pedophiles and other criminals know this, and are even more active during vacations. Sadly, there is a higher level of incidents against children during school holidays.

“There is also a significant economic challenge involved: many parents cannot afford summer school, summer camps or other supervised holiday activities for the youngsters. In many families, children who would normally get a meal provided at school, are now at home and hungry not only for meals but for snacks. In thousands of homes across Jamaica, parents, many of them single mothers, just cannot afford to provide enough food. The government, civil society and the private sector need to make a serious effort to alleviate this situation.

“This economic challenge makes innocent children even more susceptible to being lured into danger by the vicious criminals who prey upon them. It is significant that the group of children at the popular Montego Bay beach from which Mallica and Omari were abducted were offered money for food just before the youngsters were abducted.

“Parents and family members need to be especially vigilant during vacation times. You need to know where your child is at all times, and to keep checking on him or her regularly. Be very careful about who you allow to supervise your children, do checks, and do not take chances when you are not sure.”

Mrs. Blaine is also calling for support from community members in the protection of children – neighbours can alert the police when strangers are seen on their streets, or observed interacting with children. Community patrols need to be set up and maintained, to watch out for the risks that can affect children. She is also asking churches to help:

“Many churches run Vacation Bible School programmes,” she points out, “We need the church community to be vigilant also, ensuring that their young wards get home safely. They should raise the alarm about anything unusual that could signify that a child is at risk of being lured into danger, or that family or economic stresses could be encouraging a child to run away from home. They should call the police, or warn the family that urgent action needs to be taken.”

The Hear The Children’s Cry Founder is encouraging all civic groups to join this organization in its ongoing drive to educate the public on the dangers facing children, to alert parents to the need for additional safety measures, and to train the children themselves on safety measures such as distrusting strangers offering money, food or other gifts to them.

Mrs. Blaine and Hear The Children’s Cry offer the following practical tips for keeping children safe:

### **SAFETY TIPS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

1. Take 5 minutes every morning and every night to pray with your child/children, hug them every day and say ‘I love you.
2. Know where your child is at all times.
3. Know who your child’s friends are and encourage them to ‘hang out’ at places you know are safe.
4. Encourage your child to walk in a group and not alone.
5. Accompany your child to and from school if possible.
6. Tell your child not to stop for conversations with strangers.
7. Tell your child not to allow any stranger to touch him/her.
8. Tell your child not to resist a robber or gunman. Your child’s life is worth more than money or goods.
9. Keep an eye out for the children in your community.
10. Put Police Emergency #119 as a ‘one-touch’ on your cell phone.

## **SAFETY TIPS FOR CHILDREN & TEENS - *Don't let a trafficker lure or capture you.***

**Young people should be very careful when strangers, or even people they know, come to them with unusually attractive sounding propositions.** The following are all signs that a human trafficker may be trying to lure you into a life of exploitation, prostitution, forced labour, and maybe even death.

- Does a job offer or some other opportunity seem too good to be true?
- Are you being promised lots of money, a great life, and lots of material goods?
- Are you being chosen because you are young, good looking, or of a particular gender?
- Are you being told that it does not matter that you have no skills or qualifications?
- Is somebody offering to pay your travel expenses, saying you can repay them once you start working?
- Will someone get travel and/or identification documents for you?
- Are these documents legal or fake (illegal)?
- If you have a passport, have you been told to give it to somebody who will “keep it safe” for you?
- If you are to go abroad, will you be illegal in the other country?
- Are you unable to give your family and friends exact information about who is taking you, where you will be working and how to get in touch with you?
- Are you being told what to say to officials at airports or sea ports?
- Are you being urged to lie?
- Will the journey be dangerous? Will you have to hide or travel only at night?
- Is there fear of the police?

**If the answer to any of these questions is “YES”, get away from the person making you such offers, stay far from them, and report your suspicions to the police.** Remember, you CAN get ahead in life, but it takes hard work. Don't trust offers that sound too good.

**- end -**