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PRESS RELEASE

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**HEAR CHILDREN'S CRY CALLS FOR MORE VIGILANCE RE: CHILD SAFETY
FOLLOWING MONTEGO BAY HORROR STORY**

- *HTCC calls for more Government vigilance re: child safety in light of media reports of alleged cult activities*
- *Urges citizens to speak out quickly about things obviously not right concerning children*
- *When did the main children's agency and police learn about children in the alleged cult premises?*
- *Suggests schools operate a child alert system when children have prolonged absences*

The alarm and outrage of many concerned Jamaicans are reflected tonight in the burning questions being asked by the leading child advocacy group Hear The Children's Cry. This follows the reported and videotaped forcible removal by police of several children from the premises of a seemingly well established alleged cult in Montego Bay, as revealed in several press and internet reports on Wednesday, November 6.

“We are deeply concerned, not only with the fact that children have had to be removed from an environment in which it is reported they were being ill treated and their rights violated,” says Hear The Children's Cry Founder Betty Ann Blaine, adding, “We are also alarmed to see what is being reported to be a well established cult organization, seemingly flourishing in one of our major cities. Yet most of us citizens are hearing of this for the first time, and wondering how the authorities allowed this kind of organization to take root and apparently flourish!

“This seems to be a first in Jamaica, and it causes us understandable alarm in the wake of murders, forced suicides and rampant violations of children’s rights in other, similar cases worldwide, in recent years. We at Hear The Children’s Cry have many critically important questions we would like answered, on behalf of the children of Jamaica:

1. How could this alleged cult have been established and allowed to take root, in a major city, not a deep rural hideaway, without Government intervention?
2. Who is the leader of this entity, and what exactly is its mission?
3. How long did it take for the community members to report the activities of the alleged cult, and for the police to act?
4. Apart from what was reported about forced marriages of young teenaged girls to alleged cult elders, and these children being taken out of the formal school system, what other infringements have been perpetrated on these young people’s rights?

“This situation really speaks to the breakdown of family life in our country, as well as a lack of proper monitoring of the whereabouts of children by the authorities” Mrs. Blaine laments.

“We are calling for an immediate and thorough investigation of the activities of this alleged cult,” the leading Child Advocate declares, “In addition, we are encouraging our schools to take special note when a child stops attending classes, and to treat this as a red flag to be followed up and reported with alacrity.

“We believe also that parents who put their children in harm’s way must be held accountable.

“Finally, we are urging the Government to effectively monitor any new and unfamiliar organization(s) which can threaten our citizens, especially our innocent children.”

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