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PRESS RELEASE

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CLOSE SCHOOLS - OPEN DIALOGUE: HTCC SUPPORTS SCHOOL CLOSURES - BUT WITHOUT CHILD PANIC

- *Hear The Children's Cry supports the PM's decision to close schools, calls for an immediate multi-media outreach specifically targeting children*
- *It should feature safety and prevention tips, and be geared to preventing fear and panic among children*
- *Parents need to ensure urgent safety measures at home, as many children go missing when they are out of school*
- *Calling on private sector and other employers to be lenient with parents' work schedules and calls to monitor children at home.*

Hear The Children's Cry supports the Prime Minister's decision to close schools for 14 days in light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, but is urging him to launch an immediate, urgent dialogue with the nation's young. The leading child advocacy organization points out that although children are not among the demographic most at serious risk of the new virus, children need to be reassured and urged not to panic, they need to be accurately informed of the known facts related to the pandemic, and they need to be guided as to how they can keep safe and act responsibly.

"Children are part of our community," Hear The Children's Cry Founder Betty Ann Blaine points out, "they see and hear what is going on around them, they can feel the panic that some of their relatives and neighbours are exhibiting. They need to be addressed simply and clearly, so

they can understand what is happening around them, and know how to keep themselves and others as safe as possible.

“Ensuring that our youngsters are informed, aware and encouraged to be calm and responsible is also important because although children do not seem to be affected by the virus in the same way as adults, they can carry it, and can easily spread it through coughing, sneezing, etc.

“We are urging the Prime Minister and the Minister of Health to immediately provide a high profile programme of Safety & Prevention Tips for children, utilizing television, radio print and social media messages. This would include:

- Talking to the children about coronavirus, telling them the facts as we know them, without causing fear
- Teaching them the recommended hygiene methods
- Talking with them about their feelings
- Explaining why special attention is being paid to older persons in the home, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles
- Encouraging them to continue with their schoolwork while schools are closed, so they do not fall behind in their education
- Urging them to keep safe while out of school, not letting strangers into the home,

Mrs Blaine continues:

“ We are also urging that parents take heightened safety precautions for their children during the out of school period. Through our Missing Children’s Support Programme which uses statistics provided by the Police, we are aware that many of the reports of children going missing occur during the school holidays. This points to the fact that children are at a higher risk of being lured or otherwise encouraged to leave home when they are not attending school.

“We also recognise that some parents have to go to work, and we are urging them to ensure that a trusted adult will be looking after their youngsters while the schools are closed. We also advise them to keep in touch with these adults as well as with their children during the days, to make

sure they are safe. Parents should also monitor their children's health carefully, and report any problems to the nearest health facility or health professional.

"Hear The Children's Cry is asking the Police if a special police number can be made available during this time, for children who may need help.

"We are also asking that private sector and other employers be understanding about parents' work schedules and calls to ensure their children at home are safe."

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