



Message of



Senator the Honourable Mark
Golding
Minister of Justice

***National Council on Drug Abuse (NCDA) Drug
Awareness Month Church Service***

**Sunday, 4 November 2012
(Venue not confirmed)**

The illegal trade in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, along with the related illegal trade in arms, are the leading transnational crimes, and comprise a multi-billion dollar global business. Drug and substance abuse is a worldwide pandemic, affecting every ethnicity. Worldwide, the United Nations estimates there are more than 50 million regular users of heroin, cocaine and synthetic drugs. In many countries, the illegal drug trade is directly linked to criminal gangs who commit numerous murders and other violent crimes. Societies are faced with the challenge of not only combating this illegal trade, but also tackling the effects of substance abuse on individual addicts and other users, their families, health systems, the economy and the Courts.

Jamaica has joined with many other nations in the fight to stem this plague. In 1995 Jamaica ratified the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, and in 2003 we ratified the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. November has been formally declared Drug Awareness Month by the Governor General, His Excellency the Most Honourable Sir Patrick Allen.

The Dangerous Drugs Act, 1948, provides the legal framework under which offences related to drug abuse, trafficking and trade may be prosecuted. However, in recognition of the need for a more holistic approach to the social effects of illegal drug abuse, the Drug Court (Treatment and Rehabilitation of Offenders) Act was passed in 2001. This Act allowed the Ministry of Justice to establish Drug Courts, presided over by a Resident Magistrate and two Justices of the Peace. Two such courts have been established, in the Corporate Area and in St. James respectively.

The Ministry of Justice with the Ministry of Health have also collaborated to establish a Treatment and Rehabilitation Programme to complement the work of the Drug Courts. The Programme was established to help offenders overcome drug addiction and decrease the likelihood of recidivism. In 2011, 49 persons were referred to the Programme, with a 30% success rate. However, entry to the programme is presently restricted to those who come in conflict with the law. We recognising that the problem of drug abuse goes well beyond this, and endorse the activities of the NCDA, whose reach and network span the entire island.

The current criminal justice treatment of ganja abuse is having a long term negative social effect on many Jamaicans, especially among the youth, by retarding their future employment and travel prospects. This engenders bitterness and resentment, and is inimical to the goals of reformed behaviour. We are therefore presently finalizing the policy to support the transfer of cases of small quantity possession and smoking from the Resident Magistrates Court to the Petty Sessions Court, without the imposition of a criminal record. This initiative, along with the Drug Court, is diversionary in principle, and seeks to protect youths from the devastating effects of drug abuse upon their future opportunities. Similar initiatives are now being pursued in many other jurisdictions around the world.

In National Drug Awareness Month 2012, the Ministry of Justice commends the National Council on Drug Abuse and the Drug Abuse Secretariat for the commitment they have displayed in combating drug abuse in Jamaica since their establishment in 1983. The Theme for 2012, "*Mek wi protect the yutes from Substance Abuse*", is endorsed by the Ministry of Justice, and I urge Jamaicans to participate in the activities that have been planned, and thereby increase our national awareness of the issues and dangers relating to drug abuse.