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Columns

Together in the fight against corruption

Trevor Munroe

Thursday, March 10, 2016

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The fight against corruption must not waver.

The following is an open letter to the Prime Minister of Jamaica Andrew Holness, ON, MP

Dear Prime Minister,

May I once again, along with all well-thinking Jamaicans, congratulate you on becoming head of our Government. As our Parliament reconvenes I am particularly supportive of your inaugural presentation in which you said, among other things, "Jamaican people now want to see action in building trust." This reminded me of a similar injunction of your predecessor, Portia Simpson Miller, at her inauguration on January 5, 2012, "The mandate which Jamaicans gave...is a call to action... we, the Government, must earn their trust." Whatever was done to fulfil this mandate clearly needed to have been more all-encompassing. The low turnout on February 25, in part, confirmed declining trust and confidence in political parties between 2012 and

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2014 (from 40.1 per cent to 28.1 per cent) and in Parliament (from 41.9 per cent to 31.9 per cent) [LAPOP 2014]. Jamaica cannot afford any further slippage. In this regard you have said, and we agree, "Trust requires the actualisation of our commitments."

Many of these relate commitments to ensuring good governance and more effective measures to combat of corruption. This appears to be a point of consensus — at least in words. Jamaica's National Security Policy, laid in Parliament in April 2014, declares that corruption of elected and public officials is a "Tier 1, clear and present danger" to Jamaica's national security and economic prosperity. Your predecessor declared that her Government "would be vigilant in combating corruption". The international community has now accepted that "sustainable development" cannot be achieved without advancing more effective strategies to combat corruption. Your 2016 Manifesto states that: "Corruption impedes economic growth, undermines rule of law, and tears down the fabric of society." Our people agree, in the

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RJR/ TVJ Don Anderson Poll of December 2014, more Jamaicans saw corruption as the reason for continuing economic hardship than the International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreement, People's National Party Government mismanagement or Jamaica Labour Party Government mismanagement.

Truthfully, some progress is being achieved through the combined efforts of lawmakers, civil society organisations like National Integrity Action (NIA), the Office of the Contractor General, the Anti-Corruption Commissions, Major Organised Crime and Anti-Corruption Agency, etc. According to the most reliable data, the paying of bribes by Jamaicans declined from 36 per cent — well above the global average in 2006 — to 10 per cent in 2014, well below the averages for the international community and for the Americas. No doubt this has had to do with commendable increases in efficiency, thereby reducing the incentive to pay a bribe for a service in many public sector entities. Additionally, it has had to do with punishment of bribe-takers, particularly the bad eggs in the police force. Most recently Jamaica, as you know, made a big advance, after many years of stagnation, on the 2105 Corruption Perception Index.

But to ensure that these advances do not slip away, and to build on this progress, requires that you and we, the citizens, ensure decisive action follows on commendable words. In that regard, may I suggest that you and we, the citizens, must ensure action within the first 100 days of the Parliament convening on a number of areas on which consensus either exists or can be rapidly built:

1. Designate an early "appointed day" for the amendments, passed by the previous Parliament, to the Representation of the People's Act requiring party registration and campaign finance regulation to be gazetted and come into effect;
2. Re-table the Joint Select Committee report on the Integrity Commission Act 2014, debate and pass the Bill into law. As you know, this Act, despite shortcomings, is a step forward, particularly in so far as it provides for a director of corruption prosecution, an issue that has been before the Parliament since 2008;
3. Re-table the Impeachment Bill which has been drafted during the Bruce Golding Administration. As you are aware, this Bill lays down a process whereby public officials may be brought to book for abuse of public trust;

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4. In keeping with your manifesto commitment, direct that amendments be drafted to the Parliament Integrity of Members Act to ensure "disclosure of integrity reports by the Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition and Minister of Finance".

Of course, there are many other commitments to which you and we, the citizens, shall hold you and your team to account. Fulfilment of the above, however, shall be an early signal of good faith, cost no money, and disturb no IMF agreement. Needless to say, you may rely on NIA and other citizens of goodwill to support you in your resolve declared at the swearing-in of ministers that, "...corruption will not be tolerated in this Government".

All the very best,

Professor Trevor Munroe, CD, DPhil (oxon) is executive director of National Integrity Action. Send comments to the Observer or

info@niajamaica.org.

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You are calling on the wrong person to fix the corruption problems, laws can be made which is the easy part, the hard part is fine and put these people behind bars. The KEY IN FIGHTING corruption and other crimes are the prosecuting office and JCF. If we cannot identify where the problem lies it will never solve.

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