



Any reply or subsequent reference to this communication should be addressed to the **Contractor-General** and the following reference quoted:-

No. :

TELEPHONE No.:876-929-8560/6466

FAX No. : 876-929-2476

E-mail: communications@ocg.gov.jm

**OFFICE OF THE CONTRACTOR-GENERAL**

**PIOJ Building**

**16 Oxford Road**

**P.O. BOX 540**

**KINGSTON 5**

**JAMAICA, W.I**

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**OCG Believes that Political Parties Should Publicly Debate Corruption and Governance Deficits and Commit to Corrective Actions to Deal with the Problem**

**Kingston; November 21, 2011** – The Office of the Contractor General (OCG) is concerned that in spite of the persistent and grave governance challenges that continue to plague Jamaica, and the pervasive corruption that the country is perceived to be mired in, the issue of corruption does not appear to be important enough to warrant being placed on the proposed Jamaica Debates Commission (JDC) agenda as a primary and substantive item for debate between the two main political parties.

Recent media reports have indicated that under the JDC's preferred arrangements, the governing Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and the Opposition People's National Party (PNP) will take part in three or four debates, namely, a leadership debate, a finance debate which will focus upon accelerating economic growth, a debate on social issues, and/or a youth agenda debate.

The OCG, however, respectfully believes that the two major political parties should be required to openly debate the problem of corruption in Jamaica, together with the country's severe governance deficits, and to publicly commit to specific, detailed, measurable and time based remedial actions that they are prepared to take to deal with the problem in an aggressive, comprehensive and effective manner.

Although the OCG welcomes the recent actions of the incumbent Prime Minister, the Hon. Andrew Holness, in the JDIP matter as a first step only, it is undeniable that for too long successive Administrations have been allowed to pay what appears to be mere lip service to the issue of corruption in Jamaica. Time and time again, seemingly sincere commitments are made by our Leaders, but the expected remedial actions, and the promised bold new leadership to genuinely tackle the issue, have not emerged.

Corruption continues to be the one single issue which lies at the root of most, if not all, of the major socio-economic challenges that are facing Jamaica today. Without doubt, it also stands as the largest obstacle in Jamaica's path towards achieving sustained economic growth and development.

Systemic corruption, which, over-time, gradually erodes the general quality of life of the populace and widens the void between the privileged and the under-privileged, leads to persistent poverty; low standards of health care, education, roads, housing, water and electricity; organized crime; threats to human and national security; reduced investor and bi-lateral partner confidence in the country; artificial increases in the prices of goods and services; the loss of confidence in and the undermining of critical public institutions; human rights violations; and the adulteration of ethical standards in the society.



Generally described as the abuse of public office for private gain, and fueled primarily by greedy and dishonest public officials who oftentimes act in criminal collusion with unscrupulous elements in the private-sector, corruption is insidious in the way that it operates.

Bribery; kickbacks; the award of lucrative Government contracts, inclusive of the divestment of State-owned assets, to families, friends and supporters of politicians; influence peddling; graft; nepotism; cronyism; links between politicians and criminal elements; and the abuse of one's public office for political gain, or to pervert the course of justice, are but a few of its manifestations.

Added to this is the fact that for years there has been the spectre, in Jamaica, of the recurring decimal of the not infrequent proverbial scandals in public office, in which Ministers of Government, Parliamentarians, politicians and senior public officials are implicated in blatant acts of malfeasance, breach of trust or abuse of office, many of which have been associated with Government contracts.

However, in almost all of these instances, and despite the preponderance of the evidence and the grave harm that the incident poses to the national well-being, the immediate public outcry is typically followed by obfuscations, denials, politicization of the issue, and then inaction. Invariably, no one is held accountable, no tough sanctions are imposed, and no root-cause remedial action is taken, in consequence of which the *status quo* is preserved and public apathy becomes the order of the day.

Clearly then, the problem of corruption, and the lack of leadership in governance, which is defined by what is right for Jamaica, is one that continues to transcend all others. It must, therefore, be dealt with openly and forthrightly by giving it the prominence that it deserves in any debate that is to be held between the two major political parties.

The OCG has already played its part by recently furnishing the Prime Minister and the Opposition Leader with several of the remedial Recommendations that it has previously directed to the Executive and Legislative arms of the State, and looks forward to hearing what are their positions regarding same.

The Recommendations were crafted to address, among other things, the perennial issues of the lack of transparency, competition, accountability and the enforcement of sanctions in public contracting in Jamaica; the persistent waste and inefficiency in the award and implementation of Government contracts; the prevention of fraud and corruption in Government contracting; the deficiencies in the effectiveness and independence of the OCG and, generally how to win the battle against corruption in Jamaica.

Although most of the Recommendations have been made repeatedly, no concrete steps have been taken by successive Administrations to effectively implement them.

This glaring exhibition of cultural inaction, which has ran across the gamut of governance deficit and corruption related issues in Jamaica, and which is suggestive of the lack of a genuine Political Will to proactively fight some of the most fundamental problems that are facing our country today, must be vigorously resisted and should no longer be countenanced by well-thinking Jamaicans.

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Contact: The Communications Department, Office of the Contractor General of Jamaica  
C/o Craig Beresford, Senior Director of Monitoring Operations, Corporate Communications and Special Projects  
E-mail: [communications@ocg.gov.jm](mailto:communications@ocg.gov.jm). Tel: 876-929-8560; Direct: 876-926-0034; Mobile: 876-564-1806