

P.J. Patterson: Jamaica suffering from severe decline in moral values

Written by Tony Best, Special to the NNPA from the New York Carib News
Tuesday, 17 June 2014 16:11



Two decades after he launched a national 'Values and Attitude' campaign to arrest Jamaica's moral declines, a former Prime Minister believes conditions have gotten worse instead of improving.

P.J. Patterson, who headed the government for 14 years, longer than anyone else in the past half century since independence in 1962 warned that the sharp decline in Jamaica's moral fiber had pushed the country very close to the edge of the precipice.

And he has called for a renewed national effort to reverse the current disastrous trend.

"I spoke then of the growing incivility, discipline, disorder, disrespect for each other, the fight against corruption in all its forms and the critical need to promote integrity in every facet of endeavor," he told the Rotary club at a meeting in Spanish Town a few days ago. "Every speaker at the launch of that original campaign emphasized the need to arrest the moral decline in our country and enunciated compelling reasons to stem the growing tide.

"Twenty years later, even those who doubted the validity of the (1994) plea or contended that the call was driven by partisan political motives, now openly admit its national urgency as our condition has deteriorated beyond belief," said the former Prime Minister who served from 1992-2006.

"In spite of the efforts that began at that time, we have seen a massive increase in crime and violence, drug warfare is more rampant, the urban ghettos have spread across the countryside and elsewhere, our ethical standards have fallen," he lamented. "Today, there is a growing sense of alienation and greater distrust of leadership in politics, in our legal system, our national

P.J. Patterson: Jamaica suffering from severe decline in moral values

Written by Tony Best, Special to the NNPA from the New York Carib News
Tuesday, 17 June 2014 16:11

institutions, corporate business, even in the church. This means, ladies and gentlemen, we are at the extreme edge of the precipice."

He listed a catalogue of other ills, disturbing trends that ranged from the theft of electricity, the fire-bombing of the Tacky High School and the attacks on buses to the "purveyors of vulgarity and obscenities" in the entertainment industry. Even the new technology, he charged, was being used to undermine the country's values and moral fiber. Just look at the lottery scamming and the situation would become clear, Patterson charged.

But none of that should be interpreted to mean the original campaign was so deeply flawed that it had borne no fruit, Patterson argued. For instance, he listed the establishment of the Jamaica Social Development Fund; the kick start of the National Youth Service; the introduction of the Program of Advancement through Health and Education, a social welfare system; the National Contracts Commission; and the distribution of scarce benefits, such as land and housing as evidence of some measure of progress.

"What we need now is ... a new trajectory that spans the political, religious and social divide that avoids the mistrust and risk averse character of some in our society and the tensions which exist," he insisted.

But Patterson didn't stop there.

The former Prime Minister told the Rotarians assembled at Police Officers Club that there was an urgent need to pay more attention to transparency, especially during a time of tough economic conditions.

"The absence of criminal charges or the acquittal from a crime of moral turpitude cannot be a yardstick to which political parties and the electorate measure the suitability of those who seek public office," he went.

Patterson also zeroed in on the contentious debate over proposed reforms to Jamaica's buggery laws, which make anal sex between consulting adult males a crime. He said discussion on the hot button issue should be framed within a context of international trends and what he called the realities of different lifestyles.

"It is an issue, I know, where people have very strong positions, but we have to find a way of moving away from polarized positions into one that accepts differences of race or color, differences of class, differences even in terms of sexual preferences may have to be addressed in conformity with the prevailing global environment in which we live," was the way he put it.