

WANTED: Confessions by the Dozen

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It was the morning of January 03, 2002. News had just broken about the slaughter of seven persons in Hundred Lane, Kingston. As the eight of us sought shelter from the rain following early morning tennis, we shared ideas about what each could do to reverse the seemingly hopeless slide which is attempting to destroy our country and our people. Membership of the concerned group ranged from medical doctor to building contractor; from auto parts dealer to restaurant owner; from chemical engineer to banker and from cultural artisan to university administrator. The discussion ranged from calm to heated and from comical to sober. Everyone wanted to know how it was that we had become such a barbaric and cold-blooded nation.

We were mindful of the fact that the time for casting blame and passing the buck had long gone and that it was the responsibility of each person in that group to come up with one or two suggestions about how we could repair the breach and re-ignite hope in a nation gone mad. In addition, we were ready to confess that we had all contributed to the downward slide, if even in some small way.

Yes, we did spend some time asking questions about the ineffectiveness of elected

representatives and the irresponsible behaviour of some persons in high places. But we were determined to be more introspective and personal even as we were still trembling at the ghastly nature of the news which we had just heard. We parted company with the feeling that the following twelve things needed to be examined:

1. For every child who walks the street without a father to give guidance and provide food, shelter and love, our country has been made worse. Additionally, the society is now paying dearly as the “barrel children” have decided to avenge years of loneliness and neglect.

2. For all the times we paid customs officers under the table so that we could avoid paying taxes and waiting our turn in the line, Jamaica has slipped a notch downward.

3. On those occasions when we paid police officers to avoid being ticketed after we violated the road codes, we helped to fashion the monster which now destroys us.

4. When we refused to pay our workers according to the terms of contract and underpaid our helpers (while invoking the minimum wage clause), though we were mindful of the number of their hungry children, we added to the sting of hunger and the crude spin-off of robbery and theft in the society.

5. For every time we remained quiet while the weak in the society were being abused and ill-treated, claiming that we did not want to get into other people’s business, we contributed to the breakdown of order in the society.

6. When we refused to speak out while Jamaicans were blocking roads in contravention of the laws of the land, claiming that it was “the only thing they could do to get the attention of the Government.....”, we contributed to this slide into lawlessness.

7. Those of us who have turned up at schools to “teach the teacher a lesson for putting his/her hand on my child..” are now reaping the fruits of our crude and barefaced outbursts and have added to the disrespect and rudeness so rampant in the society.

There were even some of us who felt that our children should not be suspended or expelled from schools even after they had committed serious offences. We did not care what principles were being sacrificed.

8. Promoters, artistes, show organizers and patrons who jump up, dance, give gun salutes and go wild when half-literate DJ’s hurl insults at leaders of state, government and the security forces while chanting their endless, half-baked, long-winded ‘chunes’, help to worsen the slide into barbarism.

9. The holders of high office and the privileged with their captive audiences who encourage unsuspecting, ordinary Jamaicans to berate, malign, belittle, insult and even physically harm other Jamaicans, continue to fuel the breakdown of order in civil society.

10. Those in the society who have abdicated their responsibilities and who have sold out to drug lords, area dons, political henchmen, gang leaders and goons with bigger

guns, must never think that the blood of the massacred and the cry of the defenseless will not come back to haunt them in a society now numbed by murder and mayhem. And if middle class people continue to just sit by and watch the destruction of the society, then Jamaica will soon be like Haiti, Liberia, Iraq and Afghanistan, and the middle class will soon cease to exist.

11. Some people who live far from the rat race of the inner city might be under the illusion that they cannot be touched by the infirmities of the sufferers who wail at the loss of their loved ones in front of TV cameras on the Evening News. But this is a small country and as Martin Luther King once said, “The denial of justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere ..”. Let us stop fooling ourselves. We must all rise up and fight this two-headed beast of crime and violence, or we and our loved ones will all perish.

12. Some people hand out guns. Other people kill if the price is right. Some are made foolish by drug money while their ‘mules’ are dying in jail. Some let in guns in food barrels while others shed crocodile tears at the funerals of those they helped to kill. Some mothers shield their gun-toting sons, but tie their bellies and bawl when the bad men are killed with the guns of the state. Whether we be reckless drivers who kill the innocent on the streets or we be criminals who rob and maim, it is time to stop the madness. It is time for confession and restoration.