

**coalition of concerned Rastafari**

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August 30, 2021

Most Hon. Andrew Holness, ON, PC, MP  
Prime Minister  
Office of the Prime Minister, Jamaica House  
Kingston

Dear Hon. Prime Minister Holness,

**Re: Request for Public Prime Minister Statement of Commitment for Establishment of Legally Entrenched Permanent Rastafari Commission to Ensure Rastafari Constitutional, Indigenous and Human Rights**

The Rastafari community has been subject to on-going and regular harassment and persecution by the police and infringement of constitutional, human and indigenous rights which has not ceased despite the apology by the Government of Jamaica for the Coral Gardens atrocities, the Amendment of the Dangerous Drugs Act and promises of legislative protection of rights for the Rastafari community.

The recent case of the forcible cutting of young Nzinga King's locks by police at the Four Paths police station has yet again brought to light the continuing violations of human rights of the Rastafari community in Jamaica. For any police officer in 21<sup>st</sup> century Jamaica to think there can be entitlement to cut the locks of any member of the Rastafari community under any circumstances, betrays the unfortunate reality that very little has changed in relation of the status of Rastafari within Jamaican society. Despite all efforts and promises, the Jamaican government and general public till today still continues to treat Rastafari peoples as second-class citizens, without constitutional, human or indigenous rights protections of the state.

Rastafari continue to be harassed, threatened, marginalized, denied access to employment and victimized, in relation to our freedom of religion and livity, including the wearing of locks which is our symbol of African identity, rejection of colonial ideals of identity, one of our central religious covenants and expression of self-determination and Black liberation. As demonstrated by the 2020 decision of the Supreme Court, this discrimination continues to be authorized by the State in relation to the permission of schools to deny access to education to Rastafari and other children who have locks and similar African-oriented hairstyles. The continued belief within government and the wider Jamaican society that it is acceptable to differentiate and discriminate against Rastafari and Jamaica's children on the basis of colonial ideals of identity, is an issue that requires all voices of justice to be raised both locally and internationally. We are concerned that this denial of human rights will continue at the start of this and every school year, until this norm is eradicated in keeping with international human rights standards. Similarly within the Ganja industry, which has been built on the original foundation of Rastafari and in spite of legislated decriminalization of the herb, there continues to be raiding of homes and farms, mercenary seizing/stealing of sacramental ganja and related equipment, extortion through resale of sacramental ganja seized, illegal detention of members of the community with no charge, disruption and sabotage of Nyabingi and other Rastafari ceremonies, as well as regular physical and verbal abuse meted out by the police. These are issues which have plagued Rastafari in Jamaica for generations and which the Government must be now be brought to a higher level of accountability to eliminate.

We do acknowledge that there have been ongoing discussions with the community and the government over many years, including with the Ministry of Culture in relation to Coral Gardens, Pinnacle, Rastafari elder care, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and the establishment of a Rastafari secretariat within the Government structure. We also acknowledge the historic Rastafari Advisory Committee and ongoing development and discussions with the Ministry of Justice in relation to ganja and Rastafari operations. However, while some progress has been made to varying degrees on the multiple issues, greater acceleration, more serious and sustained attention and more substantive progress needs to be afforded to the issue of ensuring Rastafari basic rights. At this time, the Rastafari community is fatigued and incensed at the lack of and/or protracted formal government response and irresolution and discontinuity of

mechanisms established in relation to the continuing violations and atrocities which the community has repeatedly brought to your government's attention. In relation to the Nzinga King case, for example, we note the Statements from the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) on August 2, 2021, Minister of National Security and your own statement as Prime Minister, acknowledging the serious nature of the allegation related to the Nzinga case and informing of the initiation of an investigation by the Inspectorate and Professional Standards Oversight Bureau (IPROB) and the JCF High Command. Yet it has been over a month and there has been no public update on the status of the investigation.

**The apparent disregard and lack of structured accountability from the government in the face of recent horrific events that have hurt us, is an insult to the Rastafari community that continues to feel refused, used and abused.** From domestic political campaign slogans such as "Jah Works" to international tourism marketing, numerous public and private entities have proactively and conspicuously co-opted Rastafarian images, lingo, symbols and livity, including reggae music, marketing Rastafari assets as a central part of Jamaica's grass roots identity and tourism product, which is the nation's leading foreign exchange earner. These are clear indicators that the Jamaican government and society fully understands that the Rastafarian Movement and its indigenous attributes and products are substantive political and economic assets to Jamaica. However, it must be equally understood that positive brand narratives must exist if they are to remain credible and competitive in the local and global marketplace. The Government and the wider Jamaican society needs to acknowledge that continuing disrespectful and inhumane treatment of Rastafari is an indictment on the Jamaican government and Brand Jamaica and that there needs to be a shift from trivialization of Rastafari to genuine and tangible respect, cooperation and facilitation of progress for the Rastafari community itself. The international community is keenly watching the government's response to the cry for justice for Rastafari in the home that birthed the movement.

We are convinced that the wide range, pervasive nature and inter-relatedness of issues cannot be handled by single Ministries alone and requires resolution by the highest office of Government. **In light of the above, what we demand now is your personal directive and oversight for the establishment of a legally-entrenched multi-ministerial, multi-agency Rastafari Commission within Government**, with designation of an interim focal point **within the Office of the Prime Minister** with immediate effect for **(a) the continuous and regular consultation with the Rastafari community; (b) resolution of the continued pervasive human rights issues facing the Rastafari community and (c) the advancement of reparatory justice for the Rastafari community.** Towards this end, we have articulated a set of 10 Demandments that we are putting forward as the top priorities for attention and oversight of the Office of the Prime Minister and the proposed cross-ministerial Rastafari Commission in the immediate, medium and long term. These Demandments have been endorsed by thousands of signatories of the Rastafari community and human rights defenders in Jamaica and across the world.

To publicize our demands, we will be hosting a **local and international Press Conference on Wednesday 8 September** at Kaya Herb House, 82 Lady Musgrave Road, Kingston 6. We invite you to make a public statement committing to the establishment of the requested inter-ministerial Rastafari Commission under the Office of the Prime Minister. We have also invited government entities including Minister of Justice, Chief Justice of Jamaica, Minister of National Security, the Commissioner of Police and the Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport to the event and are requesting them to make brief statements of solidarity and support for progress on items related to the Respect Rastafari agenda outlined in the 10 Demandments. Please see the attached communique and draft programme for the Press Conference. We look forward to receiving confirmation of your participation at [irespectrastafari@gmail.com](mailto:irespectrastafari@gmail.com) or the phone contacts above.

We look forward to working with you and all relevant government entities to ensure a mutually respectful and sustainable relationship of the Rastafari community with the government to facilitate resolution of the long standing issues that still plague the survival, protection and advancement of Rastafari in Jamaica today.

Yours Faithfully,

The undersigned representatives of the coalition of concerned Rastafari

Cc:

Mr. Delroy Chuck, Minister of Justice

Mr. Bryan Sykes, Chief Justice of Jamaica;

Ms. Olivia Grange, Minister of Culture,

Gender, Entertainment and Sport;

Dr. Horace Chang, Minister of National Security;

Mr. Anthony Anderson, Commissioner of Jamaica Constabulary Force;

Mr. Bert Samuels and Mrs. Laleta Davis-Mattis, National Reparations Committee;

Mr. Mark Golding, Leader of the Opposition, People's National Party

## The 10 Demandments

### for Review and Implementation by the OPM Inter-Ministerial Rastafari Commission

#### Immediate/Short Term (Immediately and by end of 2021)

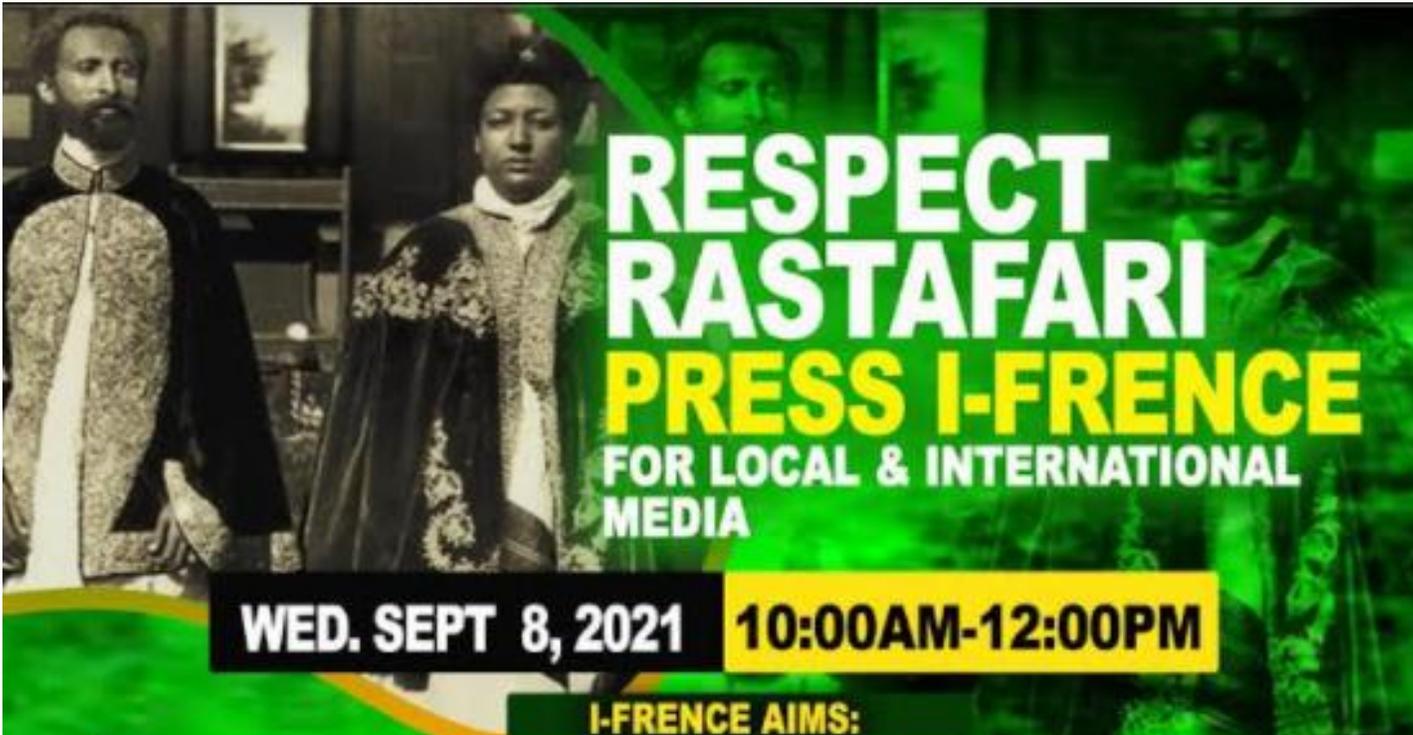
1. Swifter and conclusive criminal investigations, and severe sanctions and penalties for police authorities found to be harassing or persecuting Rastafarians INCLUDING their supervisors that have allowed these violations to go unpunished. This is to begin with the authorities involved in the current cases of young Nzinga King in Four Paths Clarendon, elder Binghi Irie Lion in the Linstead Hospital and others, both to secure justice for the abused and their families and as a precedence for future enforcement in relation to violation of rights of the Rastafari community.
2. Substantive financial compensation from the responsible government departments to the survivors of any violent attacks on Rastafari members and their families (beginning with the cases under investigation), as a deterrent against repeated violation of Rastafari rights starting with the current cases of young Nzinga King and elder Binghi Irie Lion.
3. Immediate amnesty/moratorium to cease the range of infringements of constitutional rights and to ensure members of the Rastafari faith have unmolested freedom to plant, transport, distribute and accept contributions at point of sacramental distribution.
4. Development of a Code of Conduct on Rastafarian Human and Indigenous Rights to be issued and distributed to every Courthouse, Police Station, Educational Institution, Health Service and Government Ministry before the end of 2021.

#### Medium Term (by end of 2022)

5. **Formal recognition of traditional Rastafari regulatory system** by Minister of Justice for individuals, Mansions, organizations and sacred spaces AND special exemption of requirement of licenses for sale of ganja at Rastafari sacred spaces.
6. **Government launch of public education campaign** in collaboration with the Rastafari community with media messaging on respect, protection and promotion of Rastafari as a central part of Jamaica's identity and legacy.
7. **Development and roll out of comprehensive training programme** for the police force and judges, as well as a public awareness campaign for the general public to make explicitly clear the rights and privileges of the Rastafari community under the current provisions of the law, drawing on curriculum modules already developed by representatives of the Rastafari movement.

#### Longer Term (by end of 2023)

8. **Amendment of the Education Act** to ensure that no student is prevented from admission or attendance at any educational institution on reason of non-conformity with school rules prohibiting any form of hairstyle whether on cultural or religious grounds in contravention of Rastafari Human and Indigenous Rights (by 2023)
9. **Development of Omnibus Human and Indigenous Rights Protection Act** through a Public Bill of the Supreme Court to make it a criminal offence for any violation of the Human and Indigenous rights of groups including RasTafari, Maroons and other African-centered groups and practices in Jamaica.
10. **Restorative Justice:** Tax exemption for Rastafari community-based ganja initiatives that provide substantive employment and livelihood opportunities for poor communities AND legislative allocation of a portion of license fees AND designation of Crown lands across the island as concrete provisions of restorative justice explicitly for the empowerment and development of Rastafari community and community-based initiatives.



# RESPECT RASTAFARI PRESS I-FRENCE

FOR LOCAL & INTERNATIONAL  
MEDIA

**WED. SEPT 8, 2021**

**10:00AM-12:00PM**

## **I-FRENCE AIMS:**

### **1) CALL FOR JUSTICE:**

Handover of RASTAFARI PETITION with 10 Demandments and solidarity messages signed by thousands in Jamaica and across the world.

### **2) LAUNCH OF 'I RESPECT RASTAFARI' CAMPAIGN:**

To shift colonial mindset of Rastafari as third class citizens to prized indigenous group that has sparked a mega international liberation and cultural movement.

### **3) GOVERNMENT PLEDGE FOR RASTAFARI COMMISSION:**

Call for a permanent cross-ministerial platform to ensure on-going communication and accountability for constitutional change and enforcement towards protection and advance of Rastafari Community.

### **PROGRAMME ITEMS:**

- \*Nyahbinghi Drumming and Chanting
- \*Justice Mini Film
- \*Refused, Used and Abused Exhibition
- \*Highlights of issues by Rastafari Attorneys and leaders
- \*Testimonies of Rastafari victims
- \*Official handover of petition and solidarity messages
- \*Requested Statement from OPM and Government Authorities
- \*Q&A with Media

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# DRAFT RESPECT RASTAFARI PRESS CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

- 9: 45- 10: 00 .....Opening Chant and Prayer Nyabinghi Drummers
- 10: 00- 10: 05 .....Welcome and Opening Remarks Sister Mitzie Williams
- 10: 05- 10: 07..... Introductory JUSTICE Video
- 10: 08- 10: 13.....Moderator- Dr. Jahlani Niaah
- 10: 13- 10: 18 ..... Bro. Miguel Lorne (Rastafari and the Justice system)
- 10:18 – 10:23 ..... Ras Iyah V (Rastafari and the Education system)
- 10: 23- 10: 25 ..... Video: Other leader voices &Testimonials
- 10: 25- 10: 35.....Sister Monifa Hope (Rastafari & Health Services
- 10: 35- 10: 37.....Video: Other leader voices & Testimonials
- 10:37 – 10:42 ..... Sister Nanny, Secretary, Rastafari Coral Gardens Benevolent Society
- 10: 42- 10: 47.....Ras First Man, RAGGA (Ganja industry and ICH violations)
- 10: 47- 10: 50 ..... Video: Other leader voices & Testimonials
- 10: 50- 10: 55 .....Ras I vie (brief overview of the TEN DEMANDMENTS)
- 10: 50- 10: 55 .....Highlights of Statements of Solidarity from Rastafari Family overseas
- 10: 55- 11:00.....Handover of Petition to Government Officials
- 11: 00- 11: 20.....Declarative Statements from Invited Ministries
- 11: 20- 11: 50..... Questions to Panelists/ Media Interaction**
- 11:50- 11:53..... Poem “Rastafari so Cool” by Sitota Brisett (13 yrs)
- 11: 54- 12: 00..... Closing and Thanks