

Preserving the rights of citizens

In the quest to reduce the horrific murder toll in Jamaica, every caution should be taken to ensure law enforcement operates within the constraints of the law, lest these very efforts take a toll on other aspects of life in an already unstable environment. The public outrage voiced in the wake of the Tivoli incursion and the killing of five young men by the security forces signals the germination of increased hatred and distrust for the authorities, with the lack of any explanation on the part of the government pouring muddy waters on what appears to be an indifferent attitude towards police brutality and justice for all citizens. Jamaicans must continue to challenge the government when the security forces carry out violence and crime against citizens, as they should when the unlicensed gunmen launch attacks against citizens or the security forces. There still seems to be an obvious willingness to bypass those in the criminal power center, and target the marginalised who are used as evidence to quell the thirst for solutions and decisive action. A few questions remain: If those youth cut down were deemed suspects involved in criminal activity, were efforts made to apprehend them alive for questioning and to stand trial? Did these not deserve their day in court? Could they not have provided valuable information as to the identity of others involved? Where are the strategies being envisioned to tackle this hydra-headed crime monster by getting to the heart of the problem?

The Jamaican public wants answers, and fast. It is troubling that the newly-appointed Police Commissioner, Rear Admiral Hardley Lewin, has kept his silence regarding the incident, and that the feeble remonstrations on the part of Prime Minister Bruce Golding has not served to shed any light on the traumatic and terrible events still shrouded in rumour and conjecture. For if indeed the enforcers of the law chose to circumvent it, in what they claim to be the execution of their duties on that fateful day, then the continued silence will sound a knell that announces a nation past the point of no return.

Jamaica will not be successful in its crime-fighting by merely trampling on the rights of its citizens.