

July 27, 2012

For Immediate Release

National Integrity Action support Office of Political Ombudsman
....Urges House Committee & Human Resource Committee to reconsider making the office redundant..

The National Integrity Action (NIA) is calling for the House Sessional Select Committee on Human Resources and Social Development to extend its deliberations in reviewing the Office of the Political Ombudsman (OPO) and reject any recommendation that the Office of the Political Ombudsman be declared redundant. Such a recommendation would go in the very opposite direction intended in the law establishing the Office.

In making the call, Professor Trevor Munroe, Executive Director of the anti-corruption lobby movement is reminding the members of the Select Committee that, **“The Political Ombudsman (Interim) Act of 2002**, itself the outcome of the most careful deliberations, explicitly contemplated and provided in the Act itself that the Office should “Continue in force until provision is made in the Constitution for the establishment of a Political Ombudsman in terms which preclude the alteration of that provision otherwise than in accordance with the procedures described” **(Section3) Political Ombudsman (Interim) Act 2002”**.

Continuing Professor Munroe said, “Members of the Select Committee should be reminded that this Code does not, as is sometimes erroneously believed, apply to Elections only nor exclusively to the associated campaign periods. The Code of

Board of Directors: Professor Anthony Harriott (Chairman), Professor Trevor Munroe
Mr Joseph Matalon, Mr Martin Henry, Ms Eurica Douglas,
Mr Donald Roberts, Ms Kayanne Taylor Anderson

Political Conduct is intended to ensure behavior in accordance with its provisions on a continuing basis”.

“One such provision is worthy of full quotation: **“Political Tribalism – The parties eschew the practice of political tribalism rooted in coercion intimidation or violence of any kind and the parties commit themselves to removing any structures and resisting the development of any behavioural, cultural, social or organizational practices, which reinforce political tribalism.”**”

A critical function of the OPO is to investigate actions that perpetuate “the practice of political tribalism” during as well as out of election time. Political tribalism in Jamaica may arguably have been reduced and not manifest itself as much in extreme forms of violence. However, anyone who believes that political tribalism is a thing of the past and no longer continues to influence the allocation of ‘scarce benefits’ including jobs, positions and contracts would be blinding themselves to this continuing, regrettable reality of contemporary Jamaica. Hence, to investigate breaches of the clauses eschewing political tribalism and other aspects of the Code of Political Conduct is undoubtedly a function that still needs to be discharged”, stressed Professor Munroe.

In a report to the Partnership For Transformation Council – inclusive of representatives of the Trade Unions, Private Sector, Civil Society and the Government, the previous Administration, and as late as September 2011, reported that,

- a) A draft bill was before the Legislation Committee to give constitutional status to the Office of the Political Ombudsman; and

- b) A Cabinet submission had been drafted to legislate offences and penalties for breaches of the Code of Political Conduct.

The Council of the Partnership was supportive of these two measures to enhance the strictly investigative role of the Political Ombudsman.

It is against this background that the National Integrity Action is urging the House Select Committee to give due weight to the bases for the earlier determination to institutionalize the Office and to legislate the code of political conduct and to resist any recommendation to dismantle the Office. A Parliamentary review can and should examine any deficiencies in the current operation of the Office and contemplate ways in which the functions of the Office may be discharged more effectively, both in terms of “value for money” as well as in terms of the enhancement of political behavior in accordance with the Code of Political Conduct. Towards achieving that purpose we anticipate making a fulsome submission. To facilitate this, we request that the Committee extend the period for receiving public representations and in any event reject any recommendation that the Office be declared redundant.

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