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Trevor Munroe

Ricardo Makyn

In a very thorough presentation opening the debate on campaign finance reform (November 24, 2015), the leader of government business in the House of Representatives, Minister Phillip Paulwell, 'accused' me of "pulling, pushing and tugging" to get the campaign finance bill passed in Parliament.

To this "accusation", I plead "guilty with explanation". The explanation is that "pulling, pushing and tugging" by civil society is essential in the process of strengthening Jamaica's democratic governance. That process requires partnership between enlightened members in the Government, enlightened members in the Opposition, the private sector, civil society and international development partners against the corrupt entrenched in high places. No one of these elements can bring change without collaboration among all.

The role of international partners in getting campaign finance reform to the table of Jamaica's Parliament is often forgotten and needs to be recalled. In 2003, the Carter Centre Conference on Financing Democracy in the Americas impacted the Jamaica delegation of Oliver Clarke, Earl Jarrett, Bruce Golding, Peter Phillips and myself. The Organisation of American States similarly sponsored conferences in 2005 and developed model legislation for the region.

The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Foundation sponsored the Jamaican delegation to Germany to observe their system and provided experts, as did the Canadians, to discuss this matter with Jamaica's Electoral Advisory Committee and later the Electoral Commission.

While Jamaica is customising its own governance reforms, such partnerships with international bodies shall be invaluable in achieving future reforms in our governance. 14 free article views left 3 per cent of Jamaicans believe that international development pa link aid to Jamaica's success in comb: ng corruption.

And such reforms there shall have to be. Number one on the agenda is the rationalisation of Jamaica's three anti-corruption agencies, the unification into one Integrity Commission and the establishment in this body of a directorate for corruption prosecution with safeguards.

EASY TAMPERING

Number two on the agenda is to entrench the Electoral Commission of Jamaica in the Constitution as was anticipated and promised in 2006 so as to remove the commission from easy tampering by any government so minded.

Number three is to embody in law the Code of Political Conduct agreed on between political parties and to attach severe penalties to breaches of its more important provisions. For example: there is now no penalty attached to the breach of the Codes Provision for "non-violence and non-intimidation".

In particular, the agreed Code of Political Conduct states "no person should engage in, adopt or otherwise encourage any form of violence or intimidation in their political activities ... no threats of violence or intimidation whatsoever, whether expressed or implied, should be made against one or any group of persons because of their political affiliation".

Yet everybody knows that intimidation "expressed and implied" is the order of the day in PNP and JLP garrison communities. In this regard, these breaches of the Political Code that also amount to violation of Jamaica's Constitution should be criminalised and severely punished.

Criminalising these offences, as was proposed under the Golding administration, remains an urgent priority which, I dare say, shall be accomplished only by continued advocacy by the partnership which has brought campaign finance reform to the eve of being embodied in law.

Beyond legislation, robust enforcement shall be critical to raising Jamaican people's level of trust in to the justice system which (on a scale of 0 to 100) has fallen from 52.6 to 41.1; in Parliament, from 45.9 to 31.9; in elections, 49.6 to 37.2; and in political parties, from 40.1 to 28.1, between 2012 and 2014 (LAPOP 2014).

Equally, only such enforcement shall raise public trust in politicians so that Jamaica will improve from a rank of 106 out of 144 countries in the Global Competitiveness Report 2015-2016.

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