

Jamaicans Urged to Support 2011 Census

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Deputy Director, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Sub-Regional Office for the Caribbean, Dr. Hernando Agudelo (second right), in discussion with Director General of the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN), Sonia Jackson (right), at a World Population Day Expo, at Devon House, Kingston, on July 13. Others (from left) are: Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Psychology and Social Work at the University of the West Indies, Mona, Dr. Heather Ricketts and Deputy Director of the Planning Institute of Jamaica, Dr. Pauline Knight.

Jamaicans have been urged to give their full co-operation to the 2011 census exercise, when it begins April 5, by Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Psychology and Social Work at the University of the West Indies, Mona, Dr. Heather Ricketts.

"Our call is for every resident in Jamaica to treat the census-taking exercise with respect and seriousness. Let us welcome the census takers in our homes and commit to providing them with accurate and honest answers," she said.

"What might be considered as sensitive information, for example, our age, number of pregnancies and live birth and income all have a purpose and must not be seen as out of order for the census taker to ask. These are pieces of information with a much larger agenda and are what will be used to compare how well or not Jamaica is performing relative to other countries with similar profiles," Dr. Ricketts added.

The lecturer was addressing some 200 participants at a World Population Day exposition, held at Devon House in St. Andrew, on July 13.

She pointed out that citizen apathy in the census process threatens to derail the potentially powerful benefits to be gained from the exercise.

"While the census exudes the potential to transform Jamaica through the rich data and the analyses that are possible, a general lack of interest on the part of some citizens is proving problematic," she noted.

"Justified or not, increased numbers of citizens are becoming skeptical of government and less and less interested in the government process," the Lecturer added.

Pointing to the importance of the census exercise, Dr. Ricketts said that its value extended well beyond what might be a simple count of the population and gathering of demographic characteristics.

"It helps to determine the development strengths and gaps of the country and provide a complete picture for effective development planning, policy and programme intervention," she explained.

The census data, she added, is important in poverty mapping, infrastructure development, environmental planning, social policy and monitoring, for example, Jamaica's Vision 2030 National Development Plan, which aims to make Jamaica a place to "live, work, raise families and do business."

The 2011 Population and Housing Census will be significant in monitoring Vision 2030 goals, which include tracking human development indicators, estimating required social support services, measuring the social and private returns to education, tracking the growth of the business sector and particularly the self employed sector and their potential for expansion, Dr. Ricketts argued.

"When we embarked on the Jamaica 2030 vision exercise it was Census 2001 to which we referred; so Census 2011 will be very critical, perhaps as the baseline or benchmark for tracking progress," she explained.

In addition, Dr. Ricketts said that Census 2011 would be the last available census for tracking Jamaica's progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These are eight international development goals that all United Nations member states and at least 23 international organizations have agreed to achieve by the year 2015.

They include reducing extreme poverty, reducing child mortality rates, fighting disease epidemics, such as AIDS, and developing a global partnership for development.

Under the theme - 'Everyone Counts: You, Me, all A Wi' - the World Population Day exposition was jointly hosted by the Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN), the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). Exhibitors included the National Family Planning Board, the Jamaica Foundation for Lifelong Learning (JFLL) and CLARO Jamaica Limited.