

National Children's Day 2021

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For the second consecutive year, the annual National Children's Day celebrations slated for Friday May 21, 2021, will be held virtually due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. These yearly celebrations, which form part of May's Child Month activities, are spearheaded by the Ministry of Youth Education and Information (MOEYI) along with the National Child Month Committee (NCMC) in partnership with the Institute of Jamaica and supported by the Sagicor Foundation amongst other corporate organisations. The day was first instituted in 2012 by His Excellency, the Most Hon. Sir Patrick Allen, Governor General of Jamaica who proclaimed the third Friday in May as National Children's Day, with Jamaicans asked to wear sunshine yellow, symbolising happiness and hope.

National Children's Day is also used to reiterate the fundamental rights of every Jamaican child and highlight the resources available to ensure the care and protection of our nation's children. This year, Jamaica's Child Protection and Family Services Agency (CPFSA) said it will be unveiling its child protection mascot, called 'Mr. Protector' at a school. In 2019, the agency hosted a child protection mascot competition, challenging students from schools across the island to design and name a child protection friendly character. The winning entry, a rabbit named 'Mr. Protector', was submitted by an eight-year-old student from Bamboo Primary and Junior High School in St Ann.

A global day celebrating the world's children initially began with the establishment as International Children's Day in 1925, following a proclamation at the World Conference on Child Welfare in Geneva, Switzerland. On November 4, 1949, the International Day for Protection of Children was established as June 1 by the Women's International Democratic Federation in Moscow and since 1950, the day has been celebrated in several communist and post-communist countries on that date. Universal Children's Day was then established by the United Nations in 1954 to celebrate and promote international togetherness, awareness among children worldwide, and improving children's welfare.

Following a name change to World Children's Day, the date November 20 gained more significance as it is the date that the UN General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1959 and in 1989 they adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Since 1990, therefore, World Children's Day also marks the anniversary of the date that the UNGA adopted both the Declaration and the Convention on children's rights. This meant that by resolution the UNGA recommended all countries to institute a Universal (World) Children's Day, to be observed as a day of worldwide fraternity and understanding between children. It also recommended that the day be observed as one of activities devoted to promoting the ideals and objectives of the UN Charter and the welfare of the children.

As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child since January 26, 1990, which was ratified on May 4, 1991, Jamaica is committed to ensuring the rights of its children which are reflected in the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedom and the Child Care and Protection Act. Through its agency United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations has also suggested that governments worldwide adopt a six-point plan, in light of

Covid-19, that can help to protect children as follows:

- Ensure all children learn, including by closing the digital divide.
- Guarantee access to health and nutrition services, and make vaccines affordable and available to every child.
- Support and protect the mental health of children and young people and bring an end to abuse, gender-based violence, and neglect in childhood.
- Increase access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene and address environmental degradation and climate change.
- Reverse the rise in child poverty and ensure an inclusive recovery for all.
- Redouble efforts to protect and support children and their families living through conflict, disaster and displacement.

National Children's Day in Jamaica allows Jamaicans to advocate, promote and celebrate children's rights, translating into dialogues and actions that will build a better community, country and world for children. Adults are also being encouraged to use this day to treat the children, boost their spirits, give tangible gifts, reaffirm their worth and help them to soar.

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