

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **JCC Questions Whether Attempts to Hijack the State by Criminal Gangs is contributing to current State of Siege.**

**KINGSTON, January 30, 2018:** At its first Board of Directors meeting for 2018 held on Tuesday, January 30, 2018 Jamaica Chamber of Commerce (JCC) President Larry Watson released a statement that Jamaica is currently under siege by criminal elements and an ever-escalating degree of indiscipline..

The JCC President questioned whether Jamaica's experiences in recent years might not be driven by efforts to hijack the state by criminal gangs. "Let's not dismiss that thought out of hand", he noted, pointing to the fact that such attempts – some successfully – have taken place elsewhere.

He called for an all-hands-on-deck approach, involving Government, Opposition, civil society and other stakeholders to address the problem, indicating that over the years and over successive administrations, law-abiding Jamaicans have sacrificed much with the expectation that over time those sacrifices would pay off. However, rampant criminality, indiscipline, corruption are undermining the scope for realizing those gains.

Mr. Watson noted that external estimates by multilateral partners suggest that were crime to be brought down to manageable levels, the country could be recording GDP growth in excess of 4% annually instead of the average of approximately 1.5% achieved on average since the nation achieved independence. He told the JCC Board and members that currently discussions are afoot to bring key stakeholders – including both government and opposition - together to devise a credible National Strategic Plan in tandem with an agreement on performance indicators that will be monitored in an EPOC-style Public-Private oversight mechanism.

In his other remarks, the JCC President bemoaned the fact that indiscipline on the streets has transformed many of the nation's roads into free-for-all zones of intimidation and danger for law-observing road users and called for citizens not to reward such behaviour by continuing to patronize those who flout the rules, and urged the authorities not only to be more vigilant, but also to ensure that such loopholes that allow lawbreakers to accumulate hundreds of traffic tickets with impunity, are definitively closed. Mr Watson went on to cite examples of indiscipline and corruption and noted that the JCC will support efforts to wipe out these actions.

He concluded the JCC statement by urging stakeholders to "take up the mantle before it is too late".

-30-

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