

Courtney Walsh Foundation Launched

Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture, Hon Olivia Grange, has lauded former Jamaica and West Indies cricketer, Courtney Walsh, for his decision to focus on disadvantaged youths through his Foundation which was launched Friday (November 20).

Launched at the Mona Hockey Field, Kingston, the Courtney Walsh Foundation aims to provide opportunities for youths, to experience meaningful change in their lives and environment through cricket. It takes a three-pronged approach: Street20 Cricket, a fast-moving version of the game to be introduced in 12 inner-city communities; Disability Cricket, which will involve cricket programmes for the visually impaired, limb impaired, the deaf and persons with learning disabilities; and the Young Offenders Project using cricket in correctional institutions to engage young offenders and support their transition from custody to the community. Miss Grange said she was very excited about the areas on which the Foundation was focusing. "It's important for us to emphasize it is not just about the able bodied and the elite athletes, but we must ensure that we, in a meaningful way, demonstrate that it is sports for all," she stated. Also endorsing the Foundation, Minister of National Security, Senator Dwight Nelson, noted that it was heartening that the cricketer and Ambassador-At -Large was giving back in such a meaningful way. He declared that Mr. Walsh was a template for others to emulate. Senator Nelson said he was especially pleased with the Young Offenders Programme, which will begin with boys from the Rio Cobre Juvenile Correctional Centre. The Tower Street Adult Correctional Centre is to be added later. "The Courtney Walsh Foundation must be lauded for not giving up on our youths and, instead, putting programmes in place to give them a second chance," he remarked. He also noted that the Foundation was planning longer term projects, such as the establishment of a cricket centre to further develop the skill base of the various participants in the Foundation's programmes, and the construction of practice facilities in the adopted communities. To deliver its programmes, the Foundation is partnering with several organisations, one of which is Cricket for Change (C4C), founded in London almost 30 years ago in the aftermath of the Brixton riots to help bring harmony back to the streets of that city. A coach, Mike Thompson, has been seconded to the Foundation for 15 months as part of C4C's contribution. Miss. Grange said the Government will offer support to ensure he stays longer. During the launch, The British High Commissioner, His Excellency Jeremy Cresswell, handed over \$7.5 million to the Foundation, while telecommunications company LIME contributed \$3.5 million. Mr. Walsh, the president of the Foundation, thanked the various organisations and the Government for their support, and described the Foundation as a "dream come true". "The part that touches me the most, apart from the Disabilities Cricket, is to give the kids a chance. The correctional centre is where, when I went for the first time it, sort of brought tears to my eyes, and it is something that we have to do to make sure that the kids that go in don't want to go back in, and we try to prevent others from going in," he said.