

Food for the Poor frees 29 prisoners for Christmas

Food For The Poor has paid the fines of 29 nonviolent prisoners in Jamaica, who committed nonviolent offenses in time to spend Christmas with their families.

The nonviolent prisoners were incarcerated due to their inability to pay required fines.

The first 17 inmates were released at the St. Catherine Adult Correctional Centre on World Human Rights Day, which is commemorated on December 10. The other prison releases occurred December 11-18 at Central and Half-Way-Tree Police Stations, and the Tower Street and Fort Augusta Adult Correctional Centres. Prior to these releases, assessments were conducted of inmates at the facilities. Some with fines paid for the nonviolent offenses, included traffic offenses and larceny.

According to Mr. David Mair, Executive Director, FFP Jamaica, the mandate of FFP is not only to serve the poor with food, houses and other material gifts, but to reunite families and promote peace and prosperity, especially during the seasons of Christmas and Easter. "This is an annual event that Food For The Poor prides itself on doing," said Mr. Mair. "Each year, we give non-violent offenders, who are sometimes unable to pay simple fines, a second chance to be reunited with their families and loved ones for Christmas. "Releasing prisoners to be with their families during the season of Christmas is a life-changing aspect of what we do," said Mr. Mair. Mr. Mair further stated that the inmates should be thankful to FFP's donors whose contributions made their release possible, in addition to FFP's prison ministry team. In response to FFP's gesture towards the inmates, Mrs. Ina Fairweather, Commissioner of Corrections in Jamaica, said "This is a golden opportunity for the inmates. This occasion is in keeping with the Christmas season – the season of giving." She further stated, "On behalf of the Department of Corrections, we thank Food For The Poor for this kind gesture and pray that the team will be strengthened daily in transforming lives and restoring hope to the less fortunate." Present at the St. Catherine Adult Correctional Centre during the first prison release was Mr. Matondo Mukulu, Acting Public Defender, who said in his address that FFP could not have chosen a better day than World Human Rights Day, to start their prison release programme for the festive season. During his address he told the inmates that they should show kindness, be respectful toward others and grant favours in accordance with what FFP has done for them. "Beyond going through these gates, remember that this country belongs to you and demands that you respect the person next to you. Respect the next person's views. Food For The Poor did not judge you based on your offenses. Instead, they looked and said you deserved to be with your family. It is now your duty to extend that same respect to others," Mukulu said. FFP conducts prison releases twice each year, once during the season of Easter and the other at Christmas. In addition to paying their fines, FFP provides the inmates with lunch for the day, cash for transportation to go home and a gift package containing toiletries. The programme is sustained through continued financial support from donors located in the United States.