

UNICEF concerned with Jamaica's child labour figure

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THE UNITED Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) remains concerned that a significant number of Jamaican children are involved in child labour and living in poverty.

The 2006 'Situation Analysis on Excluded Children In Jamaica', released yesterday, has indicated that 16,240 children aged five to 17 were involved in "economic activities" in 2004.

The report, launched at the St. Andrew Settlement Community Centre, Majesty Gardens, St. Andrew noted that the working child is most likely to be a male teenager, between ages 15 and 17, working an average 22 hours each week.

In addition, the report estimated that approximately 2,000 children live or work on the street.

The UNICEF report also noted that, of the 977,000 children under the age of 18, one in every two lives in poverty. Children in rural areas are reportedly most affected.

SEVERAL DISABILITIES

The document further indicated that more than 37,000 children live with one or several disabilities, but only 10 per cent are enrolled in a formal school-based programme.

While acknowledging that Jamaica has made significant strides in providing children with access to health, nutrition, education, among other things, UNICEF Representative, Bertrand Bainvel, told **The Gleaner** that a number of children have not benefited and have been excluded from the society. He described the situation as "serious" and noted that, if the problem is not addressed, children will continue to be excluded when they become adults.

Children's Advocate Mary Clarke said parents contribute to the exclusion of children when they send them to work instead of to school.

Speaking against the background of the number of children who have been murdered recently, Health Minister John Junor said the killing of children should be made a capital offence.

"We must send a message that the society frowns on the extreme wanton killing of our children," the Health Minister said.

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