

Members Statement re Marco Archer

Dr. B. J. Nottage MP.

5th October 2011

Mr. Speaker,

I wish to bring to the attention of this Honorable House of Assembly, the tragic death of a young male student, Marco Archer, a student at Columbus Primary School and a resident of the Bain and Grants Town constituency.

Marco is the son of Mrs. Tryphemia Meadows of Brougham Street.

In doing so I wish to express condolences on behalf of the entire Bain and Grants Town communities, especially the residents of the immediate neighbourhood and I am satisfied, from the outcry of the public, that I do so on behalf of an entire aggrieved nation.

Young Marco I September left home on the afternoon of Friday September 23rd, having run two errands for his mother, to buy candy at a neighbourhood store, which was not unusual.

When he did not return, Mrs. Meadows called out for him but got no response. The family started to look for him, first in the surrounding neighbourhood and contacted neighbours to determine if he was anywhere around. Becoming concerned, as Marco was not known to stray away from home without permission, then they tried to contact members of the family to see if they had seen him and to inform him of their plight. They were, by then, very concerned and some neighbours joined the search.

By this time the family members were convinced that he had been taken against his will by some person unknown.

After six hours had elapsed without success they went to the Quakoo Street Police Station at 11 pm and reported the matter to the officer at the desk, who, I have been informed, told them that the police do not act on missing persons reports or take statements until persons have been missing for 24 to 48 hours. They pointed out to the officer that they were talking about an 11 year old boy but they were told to come back in the morning to make a report if the Marco did not return.

Family members then continued calling relatives to see if they had heard from him or seen him. They also went to the A&E department at the PMH and were permitted to look at all the patients who were there to see if he was one of them. He was not.

At 2 am September Saturday 24th, they returned to the Quakoo Street police station and met a different officer on duty. He was very cooperative and took a statement from them. He also asked them to bring a photo and indicated that he would forward the complaint to the CDU who would take over the investigation.

At 6 am the family went back to the station seeking further information as to whether Marco had been found. They found that the original statement had not yet been sent to the CDU HQ.

They report that when the matter did reach CDU, the officers there reassured the family that they would do the investigation and keep them informed. One of the P.R, officers asked for a photo of Marco, which was displayed on television on Sunday 25th.

The family informed the police that the gas station on Blue Hill Road had surveillance cameras and suggested that if they viewed the footage for the relevant period, they might discover pictures of Marco and might be able to determine what happened to him. It is their claim that the police never retrieved the footage until Tuesday 27th.

They also informed me that after the matter was taken over by the CDU, they had a meeting with a number of senior officers who promised quick action and to keep them updated on the progress of their investigation. However, they claim that they had some difficulty getting information on a regular basis, that their calls were often not taken or returned and that they were constantly ignorant of the status of the case.

The family members followed up several other leads which they received in their search for Marco.

They had been told, by residents of the neighbourhood, about certain men in the area who were known as child predators and this led to the arrest of two persons by the police. They also learned later that the police had complaints from two male youths who reported that they had been sexually assaulted by a person in the area recently.

They are concerned that the police did not pursue any lead arising from that information to target the person who was arrested in those matters. That person is also now being held in respect of the assault and murder of Marco.

When Marco's body was found, on Wednesday September 28th, the police took them to CDU and they were told by the Commissioner of Police that Marco's body had been found. The mother, Mrs. Meadows and Tancia a sister were taken to PMH to identify the body. This was uncertain due to the stage of decomposition.

However, when they were taken back to CDU and shown the clothing which the police found in proximity of the body, they were Marco's clothing down to his slippers, khaki pants and Bob Marley t-shirt.

On Thursday September 29th, Mrs. Meadows was asked and did give a sample for DNA testing, the results of which are awaited.

The family is most distressed at the quality of the investigation and with how they have been handled by the investigation team.

They feel that the initial officer to whom the matter was reported was most insensitive and that the approach throughout was too cavalier. They feel that no one really cared too much about how they felt. They feel they did not receive the urgent attention that a missing child investigation should attract.

Residents of the area are concerned about the effect that sexual abuse has on children, and particularly upon young boys who are abused by older men.

Over the past several days, the family of Marco has been visited by several parents of young boys who were sexually assaulted and in one case killed by older men in pursuit of sexual abuse. Too often these men are known to the victims and their families but go unreported or known to the public because the young boys are being shielded from what is regarded as shameful publicity that would cause them great distress.

However, the larger problem is that these young boys have to live forever with the experience, a situation which is replete with guilt, shame, confusion, anger, self incrimination insecurity etc.

Mr. Speaker,

I am certain that if the missing child was my child or yours, an investigation would have been initiated immediately. Did the delay occur because the child was from Bain Town? Is it a matter of class or location? The sad irony is that children in working class communities are at greater risk than children who live in suburban areas!

I propose the following for our consideration in the short term:

- That an Inquiry be held into the police investigation of the disappearance of Marco Archer. We must learn why the safety institution did not respond more effectively and in a timelier manner.
- If such a policy exists, requiring a 24 to 48 hour lapse between the reporting of a missing child and the taking of a statement and beginning a search, it should be withdrawn immediately and replaced by an effective immediate search and find policy, at least for children under the age of 16 years.
- **A National Sex Offenders Registry** should be compiled immediately and should be available to members of the public. This is especially necessary in the case of paedophiles that prey upon innocent unsuspecting, defenseless children. The community must be apprised of the presence among them of persons with a record of sexual offences such as rape and child molestation. The arguments that in a small society, persons listed may be the targets of attacks have been made. However, there is also sufficient evidence that child molesters often re-offend. This must be avoided if at all possible. We must balance the rights of the individual against the rights of the entire society, especially our children.
- There may be a public consultation on the matter and, if necessary this matter could be debated by the Parliament. Ultimately the law (Child Protection Act or a new law) must be amended to reflect this initiative.

If the law is not changed to allow it, the social media will do it anyway!

- Persons convicted of child molestation must have psychological evaluation while incarcerated and must receive appropriate treatment. If they refuse or if they are considered a threat to society, they should be held in a mental institution or be very closely monitored after release. Treatment and monitoring should include such agencies as Public Health, Mental Health, Penal Institutions, Police, and Social Services etc.
- Additionally, the length of sentencing for child molestation should be reviewed with the intent of increasing the term of imprisonment. Such persons should serve sentence passed and should not be eligible for early release under any circumstances.
- Where a child is murdered in the course of a sexual assault, they should receive the sentence reserved for the most heinous crimes.

Mr. Speaker, the most sacred responsibility which we as parliamentarians have is to secure and protect the safety of our citizens. Our children are the most vulnerable amongst us and they are our future. It is incumbent that we treat Marco's death and the challenges created by policies as teaching moments. We must do all that we can to ensure that such a dastardly crime never happens again.