



Prime Minister, the Most. Hon. Portia Simpson Miller, on Tuesday, March 5, met with over 100 church leaders across varying denominations to discuss the country's Economic Reform Programme and to seek their input.

The Prime Minister told the leaders, at the meeting held at the Jamaica Conference Centre in downtown Kingston, "throughout our history, in times of crisis, we have always called on the church as keepers of the faith. This is such a time."

Mrs. Simpson Miller, who was accompanied by Cabinet Ministers, including Minister of Finance and Planning, Dr. the Hon. Peter Phillips, outlined the difficult choices facing the country and called for unity in addressing the problems.

She said the Government recognises the church's strong influence and its role in championing the cause of the people.

"This is why we have deemed it necessary to meet with you, to share our decisions and to entertain your thoughts, ideas and concerns, with the hope that it will further the cause of growth and development," she said.

She indicated that she will be calling on them again after the budget presentation in April.



"Today, we recognise that the church still represents the largest constituent body in the nation, with organised leadership and representation of people from every strata of the society and spanning every city, town and village and neighbourhood across the country," the Prime Minister said, as she asked the leaders for their support.

In the meantime, Dr. Phillips used the occasion to outline the stark choices the country faces and the steps that Government is pursuing to reduce the debt to 95 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by 2020.

He heaped praises on the civil servants for agreeing to further wage restraint, noting that the country is grateful to the Jamaica Civil Service Association (JCA) for having voted to accept the Government's offer.

"Proportionately, civil servants, who voted yesterday to make a commitment, which would amount to five years of wage restraint, are making as great, if not a greater sacrifice than anyone else, and they are really to be applauded," Dr. Phillips said.