

## Ja urged to become leader in research of marijuana

The founder of a United States-based non-profit organization is urging Jamaica to become a world leader in the scientific research of marijuana, especially as efforts are being made to decriminalise the drug for medicinal purposes.

Josh Stanley of the Strains of Hope organization said 'economic fruits of ganja (marijuana) are ripe for picking' and a delay to decriminalise the use of the weed for personal uses could be detrimental to the country's fight to rebuild its ailing economy.

"Jamaica has an opportunity and must not give it up; if they don't pass the torch they can become the epicentre (as) UWI (The University of the West Indies), UTech (The University of Technology)... can become the epicentre of medical marijuana research. It can revive the nation," he told the Jamaica Observer's weekly Monday Exchange programme for its editors and reporters.

According to the newspaper Stanley cited as an example, Colorado which had been experiencing an economic recession and is now making US\$20 million in profits after decriminalising the drug.

"What Jamaica stands to gain right now? Everything. But you don't just have it from a decriminalisation perspective. This industry has so many gamuts -- industry, economic, social, health and medical. It's an economic stimulator if it's industrial hemp, medicinal hemp or industrial ganja. If you look on the litmus test, Colorado is your petri dish. So, I am here to help Jamaica step out of puddles that Colorado stepped in which were many," he said.

Stanley said there was initial opposition to the move by some sections of the Colorado community. But when people heard the 'miracle stories' of children with severe cases of brain seizures who had no motor skills and doctors had sent them home to die after all conventional treatment had failed, were completely recovering after being treated with medicinal ganja, the mood changed dramatically.

"I want to treat every paediatric epileptic child in Jamaica. That's how it gonna start. You are going to win hearts," he said.

Earlier this week, St. Lucia's Prime Minister Dr. Kenny Anthony said it was important for the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to adopt a regional approach to settling the issue of the legislation of marijuana.

"The movement of citizens within the region makes it difficult to deal with the decriminalisation of marijuana on an individual basis. Therefore, I personally believe that this issue must be dealt with on the regional level," Anthony said.

"If for the sake of argument Jamaica decided for its own purposes that it would move towards legalising marijuana for medical purposes, then you can grasp the enormity of the challenge that will be posed for the rest of the countries of the Caribbean.

"If Jamaicans decided to visit another island carrying marijuana tablets or in other forms allegedly for medical purposes, how do you handle it," he asked, adding that it was because of such issues, there was need to adopt a regional approach on the matter.

CARICOM leaders at their summit in St. Vincent last month agreed to create a regional commission to consider the issue after discussing a preliminary report prepared by the CARICOM Secretariat that indicated decriminalising marijuana for medicinal purposes could help boost the region's economy.

Meanwhile, the Ganja Future Growers and Producers Association was officially launched here over the last weekend.

An estimated 300 people, including a few medical marijuana entrepreneurs from Canada and the United States attended or the launch.

The group said it would lobby for creation of a regulated cannabis industry.

