

**ZONE OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS (MOUNT SALEM)
Statement to Parliament**

Context

Mr. Speaker, during my Budget presentation for this Fiscal Year, I informed the Parliament that the Government is developing Plan Secure Jamaica. It is a comprehensive, whole of government plan to build a national security architecture that is robust, resilient and adaptable, capable of responses that address immediate problems that yield long-lasting, transformational results. The plan is being actively pursued and elements of the Plan Secure Jamaica are already operational.

Mr. Speaker, during that budget presentation in March 2017, I tabled legislation to address one element of Plan Secure Jamaica, that is the area of Community Safety, Public Order, Crime and Violence. **The Act to provide for special measures for upholding and preserving the Rule of Law, public order, citizen security and public safety within certain geographically-defined areas of Jamaica;** and for connected matters." or concisely the **Zones of Special Operations, Special Security and Community Development Measures Act, 2017**, is only one of a suite of measures that will be employed to address the national security issues generally, but community safety and crime and violence particularly.

Mr. Speaker, analysis of crime statistics particularly violent crimes, and especially murders and shootings, reveal a pattern of geographic concentration, and within those areas are clearly defined epi-centres or hotspots. There are certain communities, where the level of crime and violence is elevated beyond the level of normal law enforcement. These areas of elevated criminal activities do not represent the majority of communities in Jamaica. In fact, most communities in Jamaica are peaceful and law abiding. Areas with elevated levels of crime and violence map

closely with high unemployment, low incomes, poor infrastructure, unplanned settlements, and generally a lack of access to state amenities and services. Criminals operate freely in these communities, taking life, taking your daughters, taking property, and extorting tax to protect you from them.

Mr Speaker, the history of intervention by the state shows that an over-reliance on policing measures may attenuate the situation in the short-term but does not bring long term stability and normalization. Any strategy to address these areas must be comprehensive, sustained, inclusive and respectful of human rights and the dignity of the people.

Mr. Speaker, **Zones of Special Operations, Special Security and Community Development Measures Act, 2017** now establishes the legal framework in which the Prime Minister, acting on the advice of the National Security Council (NSC) may declare any high crime area of Jamaica a zone for special security operations and community development measures. The legislation is designed to give effect to a well-established and practised security and community building strategy termed "Clear, Hold, Build":

- **Clear** - Law Enforcement goes into selected community and saturates the community with their presence and displaces the criminal element, and removes their freedom to operate while at the same time reassuring law-abiding citizens.
- **Hold** - Law Enforcement maintains a sustainable level of presence and control over the area, creating the space and support for a multi-sectoral intervention into the community to address outstanding and critical human needs and basic infrastructure.
- **Build** - Psycho-cultural, social capital, and leadership and organization building and support. At this stage, the community is able to manage and sustain their own peace.

Mr. Speaker, the Zone of Special Operations is not designed to be a reflex, short term, conventional response to a flare up in crime. Instead we are creating a tool for the whole of government response to be strategically applied to reduce crime while preserving life and respecting citizens' rights wherever it is declared. This administration has taken a policy position that recognizes the interconnected and complex nature of crime and violence and has developed and integrated strategy involving 'whole of government' approaches to treat with root causes and social issues while at the same time directly dealing with gangs and producers of violence.

The Zone of Special Operations is first and foremost a mandate to secure the right to life of all citizens. While the preservation of life in the Zones is of utmost priority, it is likewise critical that success be measured by this strategy's ability to build confidence in legitimate state structures and re-establish an overwhelming sense of citizenship in place of fear. This will ensure the sovereignty of the state across all communities and will safeguard against the return of criminals and the unlawful control of communities through exploitation and intimidation.

P R O V I S I O N S

To ensure its success, several important and enabling provisions were included within the Act. Consideration regarding these provisions were deliberate, systematic and thorough to ensure that the measures would be meaningful and impactful. In addition to supporting the security forces in the execution of their duties, the Act was therefore, by design, equally strong in its provisions to safeguard the human rights of residents and promote community development through social intervention initiatives.

The Act details clearly and transparently:

- the procedures that guide the declaration and revocation of the order, which is guided by consideration of the National Security Council and written agreements by the Commissioner of Police and

Chief of Defence Staff;

- the strict accountability framework that must be adhered to, in order to ensure that the human rights of citizens are protected and that the security forces account for their actions within the Zones.
- the responsibilities of the Joint Command, which comprises leadership from the Jamaica Constabulary Force and the Jamaica Defence Force;
- the procedures for detainment and arrests, cordons and curfews, and searches and seizures.

Importantly, the Act also emphasizes the mandatory establishment of a Social Intervention Committee within five working days of the declaration of a Zone. The Committee is charged to ensure, as far as is possible, the carrying-out of community development measures as outlined in the Act, that will “promote social and economic development in a Zone through the efforts of various government agencies and civil society; and provide for the establishment of the Committee to, among other things, develop a sustainable development plan for the Zone.”

To achieve this, the Committee will be required to:

- Assess conditions within the Zones, including the state of the physical infrastructure, health, environment, land tenure, housing and settlements;
- Identify the threats to sustainable development of the communities within the Zone;
- Develop a sustainable development plan to address the conditions and possible threats
- Recommend social interventions strategy identifying priorities and sequence of actions within the Zone; and
- Coordinate the implementation of social intervention agencies and private sector partners

These activities will be underscored by the Committee's mandate to account

for the basic needs of the communities within the Zone, paying special attention to vulnerable persons who live, work and attend school in the Zone, especially children, the elderly and persons with disabilities. Additionally, with respect to the children, officers have been given truancy powers, necessary to enforce compulsory school attendance.

For these reasons, all government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) have been engaged for their contributions. All stakeholders were asked to consider their respective mandates against the requirements and the criteria outlined for success. Beyond rhetoric, the approach is therefore inclusive and comprehensive, and is expected to yield results that address public order, citizen security and socio-economic development in the short, medium and long term.

It is in this context that I am making my first report to Parliament in accordance with Section 6 of the Act which requires a report within fourteen (14) days of the declaration of a Zone.

Firstly, let me confirm that the legal processes as laid down in the Act along with the timelines have been scrupulously followed. I declared the first Zone of Special Operations in Mount Salem on Friday the first of September 2017 (01 Sep 2017) with the written agreement of the Chief of Defence Staff and the Commissioner of Police, and in accordance with the other provisions of Section 4 of the Act.

The community of Mount Salem has experienced more than its fair share of violent crimes over the past three plus years with a growing number of incidents year on year. The Mount Salem Police area, which covers an area larger than the Zone itself has had the number of murders and shootings increase annually since 2014.

Violent Incident Table/ Mount Salem Police District / Mount Salem ZOSOp												
Year	2014			2015			2016			2017		
Area	District	Zone	%	District	Zone	%	District	Zone	%	District	Zone	%
Murder	20	4	20%	35	4	11%	39	9	23%	27	7	26%
Shooting	26	9	35%	35	11	31%	46	10	22%	27	8	30%
	46	13	28%	70	15	21%	85	19	22%	54	15	28%

Mount Salem lives matter as do those in any area likely to be designated a Zone. The discussion as to whether the Zone should be there or elsewhere should not arise once it is clear that the criteria laid down in the Act are satisfied. Several communities would meet the threshold of elevated violence above the capacity of normal law enforcement measures; however they all cannot be treated with at once, so other operational and strategic considerations must factor in making the choice as to where to go first. The Zone declared in Mount Salem captures what is deemed to be the epicentre of violence within the police area with four (4) major gangs operating from there, even though there are other communities contributing to the violence.

FIRST ZONE OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS

Given the aforementioned, on Friday 1 September 2017, Jamaica's first Zone of Special Operations was declared in the Mount Salem Community and its environs in the parish of St. James. The circumstances referred to in the Act, more specifically Section 4, provided the foundation upon which this declaration was made. This Section provides that a geographically defined area within a single continuous boundary in Jamaica, may be declared as a Zone of Special Operations for a period not exceeding sixty-days, if there are reasonable grounds to believe that due to rampant criminality, gang warfare, escalating violence and murder and the threat to the rule of law and public order, it is necessary to do so.

It was assessed in Council, that Mount Salem Community and its environs constituted such an area and upon the written agreements by the Commissioner of Police and the Chief of Defence Staff, in accordance with

Section 4 (6) of the Act, the declaration was made and the order gazetted on 1 September 2017.

The area of the Zone of Special Operations is approximately 0.4 kilometres squared, has a population of about 3500 residents with a murder rate of 190 per 100,000. This is 4 times the national average. Further to this, the Mount Salem Community, defined by the boundaries of the Declaration Order, has been assessed as a significant contributor to the level of violence in the Mount Salem Police Area and for some time now has been designated a hotspot within this Police Area.

The presence of four (4) major gangs in the Mount Salem community, as well as a number of other less organized gangs, has over the years, contributed to the fear felt by residents as a result of their involvement in murders, contract killings, shootings, robberies, lottery scamming, extortion, drug/firearms trafficking, among other illegal activities. Additionally, the criminal activities of these gangs are not only restricted to the geographical boundaries of the community but have negatively affected other areas of the St James Division and Area One.

The decision to declare Mount Salem as the first Zone of Special Operations (ZOSO) was therefore justified based on the relevant legal criteria, intelligence, as well as strategic and operational considerations of the Joint Command. The Zone will operate for a period of sixty (60) days, that is, from Friday 1 September 2017 to Monday 30 October 2017 and its boundaries have been detailed in the Schedule to the Gazette¹. Thus far, in addition to the current operational efforts by the Joint Forces, the first meeting of Social Intervention Committee has been convened. The Committee was gazetted on 7 September 2017 pursuant to Section 23 of the Act and constitutes

¹ North along Mount Salem Main Road; West along Barnett View Drive and Catherine Drive; South along Mount Salem Gully, and; East along Catherine Drive, Catherine Mount.

twenty-six members, inclusive of representatives from various MDAs and at the community level.

OPERATIONAL REVIEW

In accordance with Section 9 (1) of the Act, the Joint Command have provided their first '10-Day' report of activities in the Zone. This has been reviewed by the NSC and was found to be satisfactory, with respect to operational outcomes, as well as the accountability procedures of the members of the Joint Forces.

This level of professionalism displayed by the Joint Force has been welcomed by the residents of Mount Salem. Residents have been both receptive and accommodating towards the initiative and have acknowledged the requirement for intervention to address the issue of crime and violence. In fact, after only 10 days, the residents of Mount Salem are now able to express a level of relief, as they now feel free to venture throughout the community without fear.

While the outlook has been promising, building trust between all parties is a process and will only be realised over time. The partnership between the citizens and the Security Forces is, however, gradually changing with the protracted presence of the Joint Force within the Zone and has already yielded positive results.

Following thirty- two (32) Special Operations conducted by the Joint Force in the first ten (10) days, five (5) illegal firearms were recovered, two (2) wanted men were taken into custody, and number of Lead Sheets were also recovered. The next ten (10) days will see the continuation of Internal Security Operations to rid the Zone of illegal weapons, ammunition and contraband.

It is important to mention that the declaration of the first Zone in September, did not adversely affect the 'back-to-school' routine for the affected communities and the children therein. In fact, students were assured of their safety and were made to feel comfortable during their interaction with the Joint Force. Additionally, in cases where students were unavoidably delayed, provisions were made to bus them to their schools. This also allowed for members of the Joint Force to interact with school administrators in order to ascertain enrolment if necessary, where students had no form of identification.

S O C I A L I N T E R V E N T I O N R E V I E W

Though the measures being enforced by the Joint Force have taken primacy at this stage of the strategy, social intervention has already commenced in the Zone.

The Joint Force has included community engagements as an integral feature of their operations. One such engagement has been a community meeting with residents of Crawford Street. Matters discussed included proposals for community development and social intervention, as well as employment opportunities. Likewise, the responsibility of the community and the Security Forces in crime prevention were also discussed.

The Joint Force has also engaged the Mount Salem Community Development Council and the Social Development Commission to discuss the existing community and development plan which involves both infrastructural development and capacity building programmes. Discussions also included proposals to develop programmes focussed on parenting and after school programmes.

In furtherance of the priority placed on children and youths, the Joint Force Commanders have also met with representatives from the Ministry of

Education, including representatives from the programme for Safety and Security in Schools. These discussions have aimed to address the reintegration of unattached youths within the Zone into the education system. Follow-up meetings have also been scheduled with school principals and guidance counsellors in Area 4 to discuss plans in achieving this objective.

The efforts of the Social Intervention Committee have also already commenced in the Zone. The National Works Agency (NWA) has conducted an assessment on the condition of the roads and the thoroughfares in the community and the National Energy Solutions Limited (NESol) has also visited the Zone. NESol, formerly Rural Electrification Programme, an Agency under the Ministry of Science, Energy and Technology, has been mandated to assist with providing electricity to areas within the Zone that do not have adequate lighting facilities, and is required to assist in determining the areas that are at risk, due to the lack of electricity supply.

The first formal intervention on a large scale was the Mount Salem Community Services Fair which took place over the period 9- 10 September 2017. This was hosted by the Social Intervention Committee with the aim to support the delivery of social services related to identification, health and youth development to residents of Mount Salem. More generally, the Community Fair provided an avenue for the broad and transparent engagement of stakeholders, both intended beneficiaries and service providers, by providing an effective way to:

- Disseminate service-based information;
- Facilitate the connection of community residents to service providers;
- Facilitate registration of interest and pre-screening of beneficiaries prior to service delivery;
- Generate feedback from community members and other stakeholders on areas that impact the community, and;

- Open, introduce and broaden the network of stakeholders in the community development process.

At the conclusion of the Fair, a preliminary assessment revealed that approximately 1400 services were delivered; in most instances beneficiaries accessed multiple services.² Services delivered included:

- the provision of Civil Documentation (258 persons applied for Birth Certificates; 72 persons applied for Tax Registration Numbers, and; 41 persons applied for the National Insurance Scheme),
- the provision of Health Services (237 persons were examined by General Practitioners; 470 persons received Dental Services which included General Examinations, Cleaning and Extractions, and; 156 persons received Optical Services such as Eye Screening),
- the provision of Training Services (43 persons were registered for HEART/NTA; 2 persons received Job Placements; 17 persons registered for Training Courses; 11 persons registered for HOPE Apprenticeship programmes, and; 13 persons received Call Centre Placement), and
- the provision of Social Services inclusive of welfare and counselling. Fifty-five (55) persons registered for benefits from the PATH programme and 46 persons registered for food handlers permits.

The activities of the Social Intervention Committee (SIC) will continue to increase as assessments and planning are conducted by its various entities. The Ministries, Departments and Agencies concerned will be facilitated by the Joint Force via reception and onward passage into the zone.

² Initial gender breakdown reflects 67% female and 33% male beneficiaries.

C H A L L E N G E S

Jamaica's greatest asset is her people and the greatest tool of the people is intellectual power. In so far as this power is used to advance positive criticism and suggest meaningful solutions, this is welcomed and encouraged. With that being said, while the legislation is not 'perfect', and the process has not been without its own challenges, this security measure is an ambitious and necessary tool which has been well considered, and has been designed in the best interest of the people.

Like any piece of legislation, there is an approved process for amendments to the Law Reform (Zones of Special Operations) (Special Security and Community Development) Act, where it is assessed that such amendments are required to make it more effective. Such amendments must however be preceded by recommendations that will be duly considered by the National Security Council (NSC) and presented as a Cabinet Submission for approval.

C O N C L U S I O N A N D C A L L T O A C T I O N

The Zone of Special Operations is meant to preserve and improve the quality of life in Jamaica's most vulnerable communities. It is not meant to stigmatize communities, but instead, is meant to help foster the process of engagement and confidence-building between the citizens and the state.

In addition to the benefit to communities, the process has also helped to improve the procedures and protocols of the Security Forces. Albeit, some lessons have been learned through errors made, improvements have been pursued to create a better system of data collection, collation and reporting, and service to the Jamaican public.

All law-abiding citizens of this country are therefore being urged to stand with the Security Forces, embrace this initiative and own their responsibilities as stakeholders in this country. Though it is early in the implementation of the first Zone the signs for peace and transformation of Mount Salem are positive. This

is the first step and it will yield tremendous benefits for Jamaica and all Jamaicans.