



**STATEMENT BY
THE HONOURABLE LISA HANNA, MP
MINISTER OF YOUTH AND CULTURE
IN THE HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT
ON
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 08, 2015**

Mr. Speaker, my statement today to the Parliament and the people of this country is arising from the report tabled by the Children's Advocate which was received in my Ministry on November 23, 2015.

The report from the Children's Advocate Diahann Gordon Harrison outlined a number of breaches that occurred during the removal of 34 children from the Sunshine Child Care Facility, and made recommendations which I accept.

Mr. Speaker, having thoroughly read the report, I was extremely disappointed and concerned by the apparent violation of the principles that are expected, and required to guide how we treat with our children in the care of the state. The report cites violations such as:

- Disruption in the children's education resulting from the removal
- Insensitivity of the officers to the cries of children who were visibly traumatized and a
- Callous and chaotic removal process

Mr. Speaker from what I have seen in this report, it is inexplicable, and unacceptable that officers of the Child Development Agency could have acted in such a callous manner especially to wards of the state. I am particularly aggrieved that given our repeated instructions that every child in state care should be treated as our own, it is unforgivable that an officer of the CDA could have reportedly said in front of the children who were crying, that they [the care givers] should not get too attached to these children [because they are in and out]. Mr. Speaker, we have established guidelines and protocols for the standards of care to deal with the care and protection of our children in residential care, which all officers must adhere to in executing any action, taking into consideration what is in the best interest of the child or children.

I immediately invited the Children's Advocate to a meeting to discuss the report, and indicated my concern about the findings, and my acceptance of, and commitment to the implementation of the recommendations.

Mr. Speaker even as due process must take place and the CDA has been given time to respond to the Children's Advocate, having read the Report, I took it as my responsibility to meet with, and apologise to Ms. Vivlyn Morgan, the manager, and by extension the children of the

Sunshine Child Care Facility, for the distress caused by the reported actions and conduct of the CDA officers. I have also assured her that I would do all that was necessary to afford her the opportunity to continue caring for children entrusted to her care as wards of the state. To this end I gave instructions for a team from the Ministry of Youth and Culture to visit her new premises to ascertain the suitability of the facility. That was done. I also instructed the CDA to immediately take steps to complete the review of her licence application for a decision to be taken, so that if at all possible, the children that were in her care can be relocated to the new location, in time for their usual Christmas celebration with her.

Mr. Speaker, in the midst of this unfortunate situation, I want to commend Ms. Vivelyn Morgan for her devotion to the care of children for over 30 years. We need more people like her in the system.

Mr. Speaker, the matter of the reported conduct of the officers is being addressed forthwith. We have met with the CEO of the CDA Mrs. Rosalee Gage Grey and gave her certain instructions to act within the Agency's framework agreement which speaks to disciplinary procedures with a view to applying the necessary sanctions. Further to my instructions to the CEO, she has convened the required Independent Disciplinary Panel [which includes a retired judge] which will begin their hearings on December 22, 2015.

Mr. Speaker, what has happened is outrageous and goes against all that this Administration stands for as it relates to children and their care and protection. I have confirmed from the report that the information flowing to me on this issue from the CDA had fundamental, and serious inaccuracies from the beginning. Mr. Speaker, I received a letter of concern from Gilgal Holiness Christian Church on March 6th and I immediately caused the Ministry's Children Affairs Division to get the information from the CDA on this matter and report to me. On March 25, the information provided to us from the CDA in writing was that Ms. Morgan went to court for an extension on February 16, 2015 and was denied. The CDA's advice to me was that Ms Morgan was being evicted from the property by court order and that the CDA had to act quickly to ensure the safety and security of the children.

However, the fact was that there was no urgency as the lady had received another court order extending her time to May 5th and this was Consent Order between the plaintiff and Ms. Morgan.

While we were seeking further information from the CDA as things were not clear, the Children's Advocate had started investigating this matter and the Ministry took the decision to await the independent findings of the Advocate which were presented in November to us.

Mr. Speaker as I said the Ministry has acted immediately upon receipt of this report.

The report highlights that certain individuals in the CDA failed to follow the established procedures and policy application such as failure to adequately prepare the children for their removal to other locations. Mr. Speaker, in relation to addressing this, I have convened a

taskforce of three persons to rigorously interrogate the systems that govern the monitoring, protocols and reporting structures as well as the placement and removal of children in the child protection sector. I have asked them to make the necessary recommendations so that our systems and procedures are improved to reinforce the appropriate culture necessary for child protection. The taskforce is chaired by Mrs. Sharon Lake former Chairman of the Women's Leadership Initiative and a part of the XEROX corporate management, and herself a foster parent. I will have this report by the end of February 2016.

Mr. Speaker I have also forwarded the OCA report to the Public Service Commission and the Attorney General for their advice and for any further action that can be taken given the circumstance. The Parliament will be duly updated during the process.

Mr. Speaker, it is people who make up organizations. We can provide systems and regulations but in the end it is people who have to implement them. The conduct of a few individuals in this instance ran contrary to the spirit and intent of the Child Care and Protection Act and the policy of this Government.

Mr. Speaker it is the welfare of our children that must take precedence at all times. It must supersede personal rancour, preferences and biases. Our Children are our present and our future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.