

***BUILDING COMMUNITIES, IMPROVING LIVES***

**SECTORAL DEBATE PRESENTATION  
2009/2010**

**Presented by  
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Minister of Water and Housing  
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## **OPENING REMARKS**

Mr. Speaker, the global economic crisis which began in 2007, will go down in history as one of the defining moments of our time. I will not attempt to engage this honourable house on matters best addressed by my colleague Minister of Finance, but I am constrained to mention the global economic crisis for two reasons. Its impact on the entire economic framework of Jamaica and because of what I regard as the great irony of that meltdown.

Many will recall that certain practices within the housing industry in the United States played a significant role in the economic meltdown. What is now true, certainly within the Jamaican context, is that the housing sector has the potential to be a major player in putting us on the road to recovery.

Mr. Speaker, this statement should come as no surprise. The housing industry has been proven to be an engine for economic growth worldwide. There are numerous industries and services that are dependent on this sector, either directly or indirectly. These forward and backward linkages as well as the opportunities for significant job creation, can certainly serve as a catalyst for economic recovery, if properly planned and implemented.

The water sector also has a significant role to play in any attempts to achieve economic renewal. We certainly cannot hope to attract the levels of investment that are required to ensure economic growth or take advantage of improved economic conditions in the future, if our physical infrastructure key among which are water and sewerage, is not adequate.

In addition, the implementation phase of these infrastructure works has the potential to provide large scale employment opportunities.

It is within this context therefore, that I make my contribution this afternoon, fully aware that the performance of the two sectors for which I have responsibility, could well be among the factors that determine how the country weathers this period of economic hardship.

I will begin by highlighting the steps that the core Ministry and our agencies have taken to reposition ourselves to effectively respond to and capitalize on the challenges. I will then provide an outline of what we plan to achieve during the 2009/2010 financial year with our goal of ***BUILDING COMMUNITIES AND IMPROVING LIVES***

# **REPOSITIONING OF THE HOUSING SECTOR**

## **Housing Agency of Jamaica**

Mr. Speaker, by now most persons will be aware that the Housing Agency of Jamaica Limited is the new name assumed by the former National Housing Development Corporation Limited.

Shortly after the new Administration took office, it was determined that a symbolic break from the past, as well as strategic and operational changes, were necessary to reposition the organization and transform its image. In addition to its name, a number of other changes were also undertaken or are in progress.

- A new managing director was appointed, filling a vacancy that had existed for nearly 3 years
- the management team was reorganized and strengthened
- The organization underwent significant restructuring which resulted in 27 administrative positions being eliminated
- the technical units were strengthened and merged into a single division, to provide a more focused and specialized approach to project planning and implementation

- a Corporate Governance Policy was formulated and adopted to ensure accountability and transparency in its operations
- the Internal Audit Department has been strengthened
- the Auditor General, at the invitation of the Board, has completed an inspection of the Agency. That report is awaited.

Financially, the Agency is also making strides. All their financial obligations have been made current and they have reached an agreement with the National Housing Trust for a revolving loan of \$120M.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to announce that the Agency is expected to break-even in the fiscal year 2008/2009 and, for the first time in its history, should return a profit in 2009/2010. This is due in part to the fact that the Agency now has a more sustainable mix of projects, with greater emphasis being placed on viable greenfield projects.



## **Jamaica Mortgage Bank**

The Jamaica Mortgage Bank, in an effort to streamline its operations and increase its efficiency and effectiveness, implemented a new organizational structure in July 2008. All the critical positions have since been filled. In addition, PriceWaterhouseCoopers has been engaged to prepare policies and manuals for the various functional areas within the organization.

The bad debt portfolio cost to the bank has been very significant. As at March 31, 2009 the provision for doubtful debt was over \$872 million and non-accrual interest on the loan portfolio stood at \$751 million. An experienced Debt Recovery Manager was employed and this has led to the resolution of some of these bad debts.

In December 2008 the Bank received formal approval from the Minister of Finance and the Public Service to issue \$1 Billion worth of Tax-free Bonds. As soon this amount is committed, approval will be sought to issue an additional \$1 Billion worth of shelter bonds. If approved, this will satisfy the Bank's funding needs at a competitive price.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Mortgage Bank is now positioned as the financier of choice for developers of lower priced units, those under \$15 Million, as is evidenced by the increase in expressions of interest and loan applications that the Bank is now receiving.

### **Squatter Management Unit**

Mr. Speaker, earlier this year I created a stir when I stated that a study spearheaded by the Squatter Management Unit revealed that approximately a quarter of the population is squatting. It should not be surprising therefore, that the existing Squatter Management Unit which comprises three persons, does not have the capacity to address this chronic problem in a meaningful way.

The Ministry, while cognizant of the present economic realities and the implications for the size of the public service, is taking steps to restructure the Unit. The staff complement will be increased and an operational arm established to deal with enforcement and containment.

Some of the monies received from the Tourism Enhancement Fund will be used to facilitate the restructuring exercise which should be completed within this quarter.

Even with the restructuring of the Unit Mr. Speaker, given the magnitude of the problem, a collective approach will have to be adopted. The Squatter Management Unit has over the past months been laying the foundation for this approach, targeting Parishes Councils and other key government agencies.

### **Policy Framework**

Mr. Speaker, you will recall that in my last sectoral address I advised the House that the Ministry had entered into contract with a team of persons drawn from the University of Technology, Jamaica and the University of the West Indies, for the preparation of a National Housing Policy and Implementation Plan.

The process has unfortunately, not been as smooth as anticipated. The Ministry has received an initial paper from the policy development team and we will be receiving the first draft of the policy shortly. Over the ensuing months consultation on the document will take place in various communities across the island.

# **REPOSITIONING OF THE WATER SECTOR**

## **The National Water Commission**

The National Water Commission has in the past operated with a number of serious challenges that affected its ability to achieve its mandate. These included operating on an inadequate tariff structure, a shaky financial base, limited investments for badly needed improvements and uncertain future undertakings.

Over the past year the Commission has worked to address these issues and notwithstanding the very challenging economic times, they are now in a much better position. A new tariff is in place and the current financial base and investment portfolio, while not yet perfect, offers much hope for the future.

## **The Water Resources Authority**

The Water Resources Authority which is the Agency entrusted to regulate, allocate and otherwise manage our water resources, has revised its strategic direction to ensure that the government's policy imperatives are achieved.

It has established a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Health, the National Environment and Planning Agency and the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management, to improve the island's water quality. The Memorandum of Understanding developed between the four agencies has led to improved monitoring and control of water quality. It has also reduced the costs and overlaps of programmes and jurisdictions

The WRA has embarked on a programme of collaboration with the Crawford Karst Laboratory at the Western Kentucky University. The programme which began in April will allow for capacity building in managing water resources in our Karst Limestone. This will provide significant benefits in respect of the management of our water resources. Eighty percent of our present water supply is taken from limestone aquifers and over ninety percent of our reserves are tied up in Karst Limestone aquifers.

## **The Rapid Response Programme**

During the last financial year, the Ministry took steps to bring the Rapid Response Programme to a close. I know concerns were raised in some quarters as to how we would deal with those critical needs that the programme addressed, as well as the job loss that would ensue.

I am happy to report that we have taken the decision to go the route of an Employee Share Ownership Programme. This has lengthened the time taken to wind up the operations of the entity but what is important is that the service will continue and the employees will retain their jobs.

# PLANS FOR THE 2009/2010 FINANCIAL YEAR

## Improvements to the Water Supply Systems

During this financial year the National Water Commission will be involved in approximately 40 discrete water supply projects. The most important is the Jamaica Water Supply Improvement Project, or what we may simply call “**JAMAICA SIP**”. In fact, this project will be the single most significant undertaking in Jamaica’s water sector history. It also represents the largest project of its kind in the region.

The “**JAMAICA SIP**” project will be implemented over the next two years with a further one year maintenance period. There are many parts to this mega-project but most importantly, it will address the perennial water supply problems which for decades have plagued large sections of the Kingston Metropolitan Area.

The major components of the Project include:

- Replacement of the Rio Cobre Pipeline. This will save some 1.5 to 2 million gallons of water per day;
- Rehabilitation of the Constant Spring and Seaview Water Treatment Plants;



- The Construction of new wells at Halls Green;
- The Installation of approximately 70,000 customer meters in Ocho Rios, Kingston and St. Andrew;
- A new Ferry to Red Hills Pipeline and improvements to the Forest Hills supply network;
- A new 15 mgd water treatment plant in Spanish Town
- Allowance for the construction of irrigation facilities.

The rural area will also benefit under this project. The areas that will be addressed are:

- Kitson Town (St. Catherine)
- Albert Town (Trelawny)
- Higgin Town (St. Ann)
- Agualta Vale (St. Mary)
- Mason Hall / Carron Hall (St. Mary)

Approval and contracting details are being finalized, but the project is expected to be completed and commissioned into service within 24 months after finalization of the contracting agreement.

Mr. Speaker, as I pointed out earlier in my presentation, the immediate benefits of this project is that it will result in the wide scale employment of skilled and unskilled labour in the project communities island-wide.

The overall benefits of the project once completed are numerous and I will only highlight a few.

- An additional 20 million gallons of potable water will be provided to the KMA. This will eliminate major water lock offs in the area due to supply shortage.
- There will be an increase in the supply of potable water to rural areas.
- The operating efficiencies and financial viability of the NWC will see improvements
- Housing developments which would otherwise not be possible will be facilitated. These include planned developments for the Caymanas and Hellshire areas.

The overall cost of the Project is US\$195 million or J\$17 billion and is being financed through loan funds being negotiated from a combination of local and overseas commercial bank loans, contractor loan contribution and NWC revenue allocation.

It is worthy of mention that the commercial banks involved in this venture are the Bank of Nova Scotia Jamaica limited and BNP Paribas/Societe General, considered two of the best run banks in the world. They are renowned for being both conservative and risk averse therefore the fact that we were able to access loans at extremely competitive rates, is a testament to both Jamaica's credit worthiness and the status of the National Water Commission.

Other major capital projects that are currently being undertaken by the NWC are the Port Antonio Water, Sewerage and Drainage Project, the Kingston Water and Sanitation Project and the Kingston Metropolitan Area Water Supply Project.

Engineering designs, Environmental Impact Assessments and other preparatory works are already completed for the J\$3 billion Port Antonio Water, Sewerage and Drainage Project. This year the NWC will spend J\$1.2 billion on its continued implementation. Work amounting to J\$417 million will taken place under the Kingston Water and Sanitation Project

The first contract for major rehabilitation under the Kingston Metropolitan Area Water Supply Rehabilitation Project was successfully completed and commissioned. This was done in September last year and is already providing some level of benefit to many persons in sections of Greater Spanish Town and Portmore.

Another contract for the development of new water sources in the Spanish Town area has been awarded to Hazamah Corporation and is now being implemented with major works to begin in earnest during this financial year. The project is funded by the Japanese government.

A similar contract for the development of new water sources in the Portmore segment of the project is now pending. Artificial groundwater recharge, engineering consulting and institutional strengthening activities are being done. A total of J\$2 billion will be spent on KMA Water Supply Rehabilitation Project this financial year.

The final projects that I wish to highlight are what we collectively refer to as the K-Factor projects. Mr. Speaker, in April 2008 the Office of Utilities Regulation granted a tariff increase of twenty three percent to the NWC. They also approved the application of a five percent 'K-Factor' and the funds generated from this will be used to finance specific capital projects. These projects will be aimed at increasing the operational efficiency of the Commission by reducing the level of non-revenue water, rehabilitating or retiring selected waste water treatment plants, and expanding the sewer collection network in Kingston and St. Andrew.

I will not go into the details of the projects here except to say that twenty two water projects will be done under this programme at an estimated cost of J\$1.7 billion.

Mr. Speaker I have spent some time speaking to improvements to the urban water supply but let me assure residents of our rural communities that they are not being left out.

Between September 2007 and now, the Rural Water Supply Limited completed eighteen projects. These projects cost approximately J\$2.2 billion and benefited some 123,000 persons. They are currently undertaking nineteen projects at a cost of J\$412 million. These projects will be completed within this financial year providing potable water to an additional 44,000 persons.

Upon completion of these projects, Mr. Speaker access to potable water in the rural areas will increase to fifty one percent. We are not content to rest on our laurels however and the Rural Water Supply limited is actively seeking funding for an additional eighteen projects that have already been planned. When these projects are realized, universal access in the rural areas will increase to sixty percent.

## **Improvements to the Sewerage Systems**

The sewerage side of the NWC's operation has not always received adequate attention and funding. Nevertheless, during this financial year the Commission plans to complete nineteen major projects that will either expand the sewerage network or eliminate existing problems. Of note is that the Harbour View Sewage Treatment Plant which has over the years contributed significantly to the pollution of the Kingston Harbour, will be refurbished.

Mr. Speaker, the OUR in granting approval for the K-factor which I spoke to previously, indicated that it can also be used to fund capital rehabilitation projects that will not yield any significant increase in revenues but are required to comply with a specific regulatory direction. In this regard, the NWC plans to spend some \$1 billion to address its inadequate sewage infrastructure to meet, as far as possible, the environmental regulatory requirements of the National Environmental and Planning Agency. The expansion of the sewer network in the Kingston and St. Andrew area will also be funded by the K-factor.

## **Management of Our Water Resources**

Mr. Speaker, Jamaica was once dubbed the land of wood and water but as our experience has shown, we can only be guaranteed continued access to these resources if we take steps to manage how they are used.

The Water Resources Authority will seek to implement eight projects during the 2009/2010 financial year. Three of these are Capital B projects which will be undertaken with funding from UNESCO, the EU and CIDA. In addition, J\$10.8 million in counterpart funds has been allocated in the current budget.

The Caribbean Hydrological Cycle Observation System project costing J\$9.5 million is aimed at upgrading six gauging stations over a period of three years. This will enable to provide real-time reporting. These stations will become part of a regional hydrological observation system for providing early warning of extreme events such as floods and droughts. They will also improve our capacity to monitor and respond to the impacts of climate change.



The Water Programme for Environment Sustainability will cost J\$6.3 million in this year and will seek to increase the WRA's capability to model the impacts of climate change on water resources. This is a regional project with input from the Climate Change Centre in Belize and the Water and Sewerage Authority in Trinidad.

The third project is the Caribbean Water Initiative Project which will be implemented at a cost of J\$8.9 million over 3 years. It is aimed at building capacity in Integrated Water Resources Management. The project will facilitate the construction of a Hydromet station in the pilot area of Warwick Castle/Mile Gully in St Mary and will build capacity among the stakeholders to manage their water supply.

The other five projects to be undertaken by the WRA in this financial year will be funded under its capital A budget and I will briefly speak on two. In an effort to support the government's thrust for a more efficient and effective Development Approval Process, the WRA has developed what it calls a Development Tools project.

This will result in the production of an automated system of maps and guidelines to allow for timely decision making in relation to the approval of low cost but environmentally safe on-site, sewage systems. These tools will be made available to the parish councils to enhance their capabilities in the approval process and in protecting our water resources.

The other project is aimed at increasing storage and sustainable water supplies to meet the demand during drought periods. It will seek to assess the potential for rainwater harvesting in the island. The project will build on work done by the Texas Rainwater Harvesting Group and the International Rainwater Harvesting Organization.

Water is life and more water means a better life. We are committed to and will implement the programme to improve the quality of life while expanding opportunities for development, creating jobs and enhancing the environment. The Ministry of Water and Housing remains steadfast in our commitment to ***BUILDING COMMUNITIES AND IMPROVING LIVES.***

## **The National Housing Programme**

The Ministry is spearheading a national housing programme to accelerate the delivery of housing solutions over the next three years. This programme will be undertaken through an interagency collaboration and cooperation involving the Ministry of Water and Housing, the Housing Agency of Jamaica and the National Housing Trust.

I would also like to comment on the level of support that the National Environment and Planning Agency and the National Contracts Commission are providing to ensure speed without compromising transparency, integrity and sustainability.

There will be island wide implementation of the programme and a target of 8,000 housing starts, which comprises 5,600 service lots and 2,400 housing units, has been set for the 2009/2010 financial year. The actual number of solutions could however reach 10,050.

Mr. Speaker, time will not permit me to provide an exhaustive list of the projects at this time but I will identify some of the major ones.

Housing Agency

Rhyne Park in St. James	600 service lots & 300 houses
Luana in St. Elizabeth	800 houses
White Hall in Westmoreland	800 service lots
Shooters Hill in St. Catherine	450 service lots and 250 houses
Mt. Edgecombe in St. Ann	575 service lots
Green Pond in St. James	300 service lots and 150 houses
Boscobel in St. Mary	55 service lots and 235 houses

National Housing Trust

Longville in Clarendon	150 service lots and 650 houses
Perth in Manchester	400 service lots and 253 houses
Hampden in Trelawny	188 service lots and 100 houses

Mr. Speaker, the programme is targeting the low end of the market. It is designed to offer a viable alternative to informal settlements, while providing jobs and stimulating economic activity.

The first set of units to be completed under this programme, will be at Luana in St. Elizabeth and will cost \$2.5 million. The service lots will be less and the NHT is examining the possibility of providing cash loans to the service lot owners to enable them to build.

Mr. Speaker the effort must succeed and will succeed. We have the talent, the capacity and the political will. It has never been done before but I am confident that it will be done on this occasion. We can and we will.

### **Informal Settlements**

During the year plans will be put in place to undertake upgrading works in certain informal settlements. The approach that we will take is to put in basic infrastructure to include roads, water and drains. We will work with the National Environment and Planning Agency and the local planning authorities to develop an agreed minimum standard for approval. In this way once we put in the basic infrastructure and titles are available, persons can access loans to improve their solutions.

A team from the Ministry is now looking at ways to access funding from entities such as the International Development Bank and UN-HABITAT to assist in this venture.

The Squatter Management Unit will also continue its work on the policy aspects of the programme. This will include the completion of review now being undertaken of the existing Guidelines for Dealing with Informal Settlements as well as a review of the Trespass Act in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice.

Capital works at Mammee Bay and Providence will continue. Work will commence at Shaw Park in St. Ann and Lilliput and Norwood in St. James, with monies that will be provided from the Tourism Enhancement Fund. We are now in the planning phase for areas such as Retirement, Roaring River and Buckshaven.

## **Urban Decay and Renewal**

Mr. Speaker, those individuals who have been following my utterances over the years will realize that one of the issues that I am very passionate about is that of urban decay. Our attempts to address the shortcomings of the housing sector cannot be achieved merely through the construction of new solutions. We have to find a way to halt and reverse the scourge of decay and decadence that has blighted many of our once affluent neighbourhoods. Too many of our people live in subhuman conditions that sap their pride, erode their sense of purpose and give rise to many of the antisocial behaviours exhibited in our inner city communities.

The Housing Agency of Jamaica and the National Housing Trust are examining various approaches to urban renewal but we are yet to come up with a viable option. We are hoping that by the third quarter of this financial year we will have devised a suitable plan of action.

Mr. Speaker in my previous sectoral address I identified two pilot projects that were to be undertaken as part of an urban renewal programme. The Albion project was beset by numerous obstacles and is still in the planning mode but by September it should be well advanced.

I want to highlight our accomplishment on the Olympic Gardens project. One year ago eleven families in a section of that community were living in what can only be described as abject squalor. Without the means to access adequate shelter, these families were forced to construct their dwelling with whatever scrap material they could find and the level of overcrowding was intolerable. Today the transformation is something of which we can be proud.

Eleven housing units were erected for the families. To ensure the sustainability of the community three commercial units were also erected to provide the recipients with a means of earning an income. Each unit has access to electricity and water and is connected to a sewerage system.



A lovely sign with the name of the community has been erected at the entrance and a perimeter fence will be built shortly. We are also taking steps to have individual titles prepared to provide the families with security of tenure.

We will meet with the recipients shortly to finalize matters relating to the allocation of the units as well as a payment plan. Mr. Speaker this administration believes in empowering persons to uplift themselves through active participation and will not foster a culture of hand-outs.

This might be a small project but it is a step in the right direction. We are ***BUILDING COMMUNITIES AND IMPROVING LIVES***

## **REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES**

Mr. Speaker, time and time again as a country we show to the world that although we are small we have the capacity and the stature to operate on a global level regardless of the activity.

### **Caribbean Champion Minister for Water**

In June last year I was invited by the Caribbean Environmental Health Institute to be the Champion Minister for Water for the Caribbean sub-region of the Americas. In this capacity I was had responsibility for advancing the cause of the region at the World Water Forum Five which was held in Istanbul Turkey, earlier this year.

The Forum provided the opportunity for discussion with both Government and Private Sector interests from across the globe on:

- the financing of water resources management
- supply development strategies
- actions to minimize the risks from climate change
- avenues for training in water resources management.

These discussions could lead to investments and the provision of grants to countries such as Jamaica, especially in the areas of climate change, environmental and water resources management.

### **Presidency of the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT**

Mr. Speaker, Minister Everaldo Warmington was elected as President of the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-HABITAT) at its twenty-second session held in Nairobi Kenya from March 30 to April 3 this year.

He will serve as President of the UN-HABITAT Governing Council from 2009 to 2011 and in his capacity as President, will have the final say regarding the work to be undertaken by UN-HABITAT. It is anticipated that Jamaica and indeed the region will benefit from Minister Warmington's tenure as he will be in a position to advocate for greater assistance to the region.

It is an important time in the history of UN-HABITAT as they seek to spearhead the improvement in the housing conditions of 100 million of the poorest persons across the world. The government is confident that Minister Warmington will not only represent Jamaica well, but will give critical leadership at this important time as we grapple with the challenge of achieving the millennium development goal relating to shelter and the quality of life of the world's poor.

At present, Jamaica along with three other Caribbean islands stands to benefit significantly from a Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme. This is being implemented by UN-HABITAT in partnership with the European Commission and the ACP Secretariat. Phase 1 of the programme which is a rapid profiling of the urban conditions has commenced in the three towns selected for the programme. These are Montego Bay, May Pen and Old Harbour inclusive of Old Harbour Bay. It is projected that this phase will be completed within five months.

## **Hosting of the XVIII MINURVI**

Mr. Speaker, at the seventeenth meeting of Ministers and High Level Authorities of Housing and Urbanization in Latin America and the Caribbean (MINURVI) held in El Salvador, Jamaica was elected to host the eighteenth MINURVI in 2009. The presidency was therefore transferred to us for the 2008-2009 period.

The conference will be held from July 15 – 17 2009 in Montego Bay under the themes “Financing Social Housing in view of the World Economic Crisis” and “Housing in risky situations”.

Jamaica stands to benefit significantly from this forum especially in the areas of policy development and the sharing of best practices on the development of human settlements. There will also be an opportunity for the strengthening of regional housing networks.

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

Mr. Speaker the difference between success and failure oftentimes resides not in reality but in the attitude to that reality.

There is no disputing the reality that Jamaica like the rest of the world is struggling to cope with the harsh economic climate. Rather than approach it as a scenario of doom and gloom, however, the Ministry of Water and Housing sees the opportunities that are inherent in the situation.

Mr. Speaker, colleagues, the Ministry has set an ambitious target but I give my commitment that my team and I through, dedication, perseverance and hard work, will deliver what we have promised.

The stage has been set, the foundation has been laid. The Ministry and its agencies have been repositioned and refocused and the linkages with other key agencies of government have been redefined and strengthened. Our goal is clear. We will be **BUILDING COMMUNITIES AND IMPROVING LIVES**