

INTRODUCTION

Mr Speaker, let me begin by expressing gratitude to the Prime Minister and to my colleagues on both sides of the House for the tremendous support and encouragement provided to me over the past two years, and in particular during the last financial year.

The success of this Ministry Mr. Speaker, owes a great deal to the dedicated and committed staff at the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. I must thank the team who have carried out their task with diligence and purpose, knowing very well that their work forms part of a much greater effort in ***"Bolting the foundation for lasting prosperity through dignity and respect"*** for the people of Jamaica.

Mr Speaker, I sit in this House because of the privilege granted to me by the people of North East St. Ann, and the tremendous work of the Councillors, and the executive members of the constituency. I would also like to thank our various partners – the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Labour Organisation, the US Department of Labour, the Jamaica Employers' Federation, the Jamaica Confederation of Trade Unions and other private sector and civil society groupings for their support in making our work possible.

Mr Speaker, since my last Sectoral Presentation, a member of our dedicated team, Mr. Gresford Smith, who served as Chief Technical Director and later as an Adviser in the Ministry, was laid to rest. His contribution to the development of labour relations in Jamaica has been indelibly etched in our minds, and for that we owe him a debt of gratitude.

Mr. Speaker, this year is of great significance for all Jamaicans, as it marks the 180th anniversary since Emancipation and the 80th anniversary of the 1938 labour uprising which resulted in the establishment of the Labour Department which later became the Ministry of Labour and Social Security.

Mr. Speaker, the policies and programmes of the Ministry have consistently sought to contribute to national development through the provision of efficient and effective Labour and Social Security services. ***This year we are moving to bolt the foundation we have laid over the last two years so that the prosperity that we all desire can be achieved with dignity and respect for all Jamaicans.***

STRATEGIC FOCUS

Mr Speaker, we have completed our Strategic Business Plan for 2018/19 through to 2020/21 and have paid careful attention to the implementation of policies, programmes, projects and initiatives that will enable us to achieve our mandate. Greater emphasis will be placed on positioning the Ministry of Labour and Social Security so that it plays a more integral role in increasing employment prospects for job seekers and providing social protection for vulnerable groups in the society.

This means that our priorities will be centred around:

- a) Increasing workplace productivity
- b) Increasing employment within the context of the decent work agenda
- c) Enabling a more efficient labour market

- d) Maintaining a harmonious industrial relations climate
- e) Providing a safe and healthy work environment
- f) Protecting the most vulnerable groups

Mr. Speaker, public sector transformation is an imperative that I endorse. As a Ministry, we must be moved to put greater scrutiny on our public officials to ensure that the connection between the effective management of our public accounts and fiscal affairs are maintained. Let me pause here to comment on the reported instances of financial irregularities within the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. We are cognizant of the Reports of the Auditor General. It is my responsibility as Minister to ensure that public funds are used for the purpose for which they are intended. We are working with the relevant state agencies responsible for investigating these matters and I wish to assure the public that measures have been introduced to improve internal accountability, ensure fiscal prudence, and transparency.

CONTRIBUTION TO ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY

One area in which we will be focusing a great deal of attention over the next three years is the business of productivity. Mr. Speaker, increase in productivity is necessary for sustainable economic development, competitiveness, job creation and prosperity. The nation's understanding and awareness of the importance of productivity improvements, and its

contribution to economic growth, is not fully appreciated, and hence the Ministry will be stepping up its game to enhance the awareness over time.

The Ministry through the Jamaica Productivity Centre (JPC) will therefore be ramping up our public awareness campaign so that every employer, every employee, in fact, every Jamaican will appreciate the connection between productivity and economic growth. The JPC will also be assisting individuals, firms and organizations to become more productive through training and technical support. A strong emphasis will be placed on the adoption or adaptation of innovation as a driver of productivity.

Mr Speaker, for the first time two private sector organizations - the Gleaner Company and Lasco Distributors have joined forces with the JPC to promote productivity in schools along with the formation of Productivity Clubs in high schools. This is a very important development as it recognizes that if we inculcate a strong productivity culture in our students, it will grow with them through life.

Mr. Speaker, I am also pleased to inform this Honourable House that the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has provided the JPC with an expert on quality and productivity for the next two years. This is a welcome development, as it will allow the Centre to add **quality** to its productivity portfolio.

Mr. Speaker, on 17th May 2018 the JPC launched the first of four Productivity Fora planned for this fiscal year. The first forum was held as part of the

workers week activities under the theme ***"Ramping Up Productivity Through Innovation."*** I invite members, our MDAs and the business community to participate in future productivity fora as this is an excellent way to build prosperity through productivity.

INCREASING EMPLOYMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DECENT WORK AGENDA

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce to this House, that this year marks the 75th Anniversary of the US Overseas Employment Programme. This relationship represents one of the finest examples of US – Jamaica co-operation. I wish on behalf of the Government and people of Jamaica to commend our partners for their sterling contribution to the programme. The US Overseas Employment Programme has over the years been beneficial to both Employers and Jamaicans alike. I can safely say that through this programme, the social and economic conditions of our Jamaican workers and their families have been significantly enhanced. The country has also benefitted significantly from the remittances and through the transfer of knowledge and work ethics. Mr. Speaker, we intend to celebrate this Anniversary, whilst at the same time exploring opportunities for growing the programme.

For the 2017/18 FY, 15,914 Jamaicans were placed in employment overseas in the United States and Canada. Mr. Speaker, of these persons, 9,366 were placed in the Canadian Labour Market and 6,548 in the US Agriculture and Hospitality sectors. The Canadian programme continues to grow steadily and for the first time last year, 69 women were recruited for the US Agricultural

Programme. I must report that the ladies did exceedingly well and will be returning this year. After more than 20 years, 150 cane cutters were placed in jobs in Florida. Mr Speaker, through our liaison service in the United States and Canada, we are working to secure more jobs and importantly the welfare of our workers.

We are also in discussion with Dalhousie University, who has offered to assist us in the training of farm workers to ensure that they are better equipped to work on Canadian Farms.

Mr. Speaker we continue to improve our facilities to serve our farm workers with dignity and respect. In the last financial year, approximately J\$15M was spent renovating the dorms and processing facilities at East Street. This year, we are committed to improving the medical and other office areas at the location.

The Ministry will be further strengthening its capacity to provide local employment and related services to job seekers, employers and the general public. This will be undertaken through the Electronic Labour Exchange (ELE) Unit. Since April 2017, approximately 1,092 persons have been placed in local employment by the Unit. This represents an increase of 20.5 percent over the previous year.

The feedback obtained through the 2017 Labour Market Survey conducted by the Ministry, indicated that there is a lack of soft skills among the youth entering the labour market. This has encouraged us to conduct employability skill sessions for young persons to prepare them for the world of work. A total of sixty-six (66) such sessions were conducted during 2017/18 FY, and the

commitment is to conduct at least 75 sessions before the end of this financial year.

Mr. Speaker, there are some areas in which I would like to make a few comments in response to the misguided position of Member Dalley in his presentation to this Honourable House a few weeks ago.

Let me however remind this house of the progress realized under a JLP administration since we took office in 2016. The records have shown Mr. Speaker, that the Construction industry has grown, the BPO sector has grown; we have experienced increased in growth in GDP and we have created thousands of jobs.. In addition to that Mr. Speaker, the rate of unemployment has fallen to 9.6% the lowest in decades, and the rate of poverty has fallen by over 4%.

Mr. Speaker, the impression given by Member Dalley is that the Ministry is giving preference to foreign nationals over Jamaicans with regard to the allocation of jobs. I want to make it clear Mr. Speaker, that this administration does not see workers as a commodity, and hence we value our Jamaican workers and hold them in high esteem. It was the Jamaica Labour Party under the H.E. the late Sir Alexander Bustamante, which sought to give relevance to the Jamaican workers, and which ultimately led to the labour riots of 1938. This Mr. Speaker, was to see the beginning of a buoyant labour movement. *It did not happen in a vacuum, it came with a price.... it is a part of our legacy and we intend to protect it... and we will do so through the protection of the rights of our Jamaican workers.*

Mr. Speaker, let us look at the figures against the background of what was said by my colleague Member Dalley. **There were no significant increases in Work Permits granted between 2014 to present. Between 2014 and 2016 there was an average of 4,600 Work Permits being granted. In 2017 a total of 5,721 (biggest increase) Work Permits were granted. This figure represents new Permits and renewals.** Mr. Speaker, we are all aware that in 2017, the Alpart plant was reopened, construction of the LNG plant and the port expansion significantly impacted the overall numbers of permits issued.– Many of the permits issued were for short periods ranging from 3-6 months.

Mr. Speaker, The signs of prosperity are all around – the projection is that there will be 15,000 new rooms (hotel) by 2021. With several projects well under way, significantly more projects than when the other side was over here, road construction is happening on a scale and at a pace never before experienced by Jamaican citizens ---> yet Mr. Speaker, there has been no significant increases in the number of permits granted to these companies, in fact, the highest number of permits granted in the area of construction during the period was in 2015 when 1,127 permits were granted compared to the periods average of 956.

Mr. Speaker, even with the addition of several hundred new hotel rooms there has been a roughly 1% increase in the number of permits granted within the tourism sector – the opposition is disingenuous in its innuendos that this government has been facilitating the entry of droves of foreign workers into the local hotel industry - **not so** – and could **never** happen under my watch →

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the exchange of labour, skill, and knowledge is not going anywhere, just as Jamaicans seek to go overseas and work, persons will seek to come to Jamaica, while we can't promise to never issue another work permit – we at the MLSS are committed to ensuring that priority is given to Jamaicans within the local labour force.

ENABLING A MORE EFFICIENT LABOUR MARKET

Mr Speaker, this Government remains steadfast in its commitment to transforming the labour market. We acknowledge that labour market reforms have been the most widely used policy intervention by countries to bring about job creation and economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, today I table the Labour Market Reform Agenda Report submitted by the Labour Market Reform Commission. I want to publicly acknowledge the Government's deep appreciation for the work of the members of the Commission, led by Dr Marshall Hall, and assure them that we have already begun implementing a number of the recommendations. Some of these recommendations, have far-reaching implications, and will require further analysis to determine the most appropriate strategy for implementation. I wish to assure the Parliament and people of Jamaica that the Government is committed to ramping up our efforts to make Labour Market Reform a reality.

The 2017 National Labour Market Survey conducted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, demonstrates the Government's effort to provide evidence-based research from industry level about the quantity and quality of

human capital in the Jamaican labour market. It is also intended to provide training and educational institutions with data to inform their programmes and curricula. Our task at the Ministry, Mr. Speaker, is to work closely with training institutions to provide a better match between the skills demanded by the workplace and the supply of graduates with these skills.

Today, we are tabling two (2) very important studies,

- the Ministry's second report on "Labour Market Trend and Prospects for Employment in Jamaica", and the
- "Employment Opportunities for Low Skilled Workers in Jamaica."

The Trend Report looks at the performance of key labour market indicators as well as the availability of employment in growth sectors such as the Business Process Outsourcing, Tourism, the Creative Industries – Animation and Film, Construction, Manufacturing and Energy and Mining.

The 'Low Skills Report' shows that globally low skilled workers are needed to give office and administrative support to companies, and to perform in other areas such as production, fast food preparation, sales, building and ground maintenance and transportation.

Mr Speaker, these Reports are available on the Ministry's Website. I hope that everyone would have had the opportunity to visit the Ministry's new and improved Website. In keeping with the technological age and to meet the changing needs of our clients, we intend to launch a Labour Market Information System (LMIS) App by the end of 2018. This initiative will allow employers to register their vacancies and for job seekers to register their resumes. I want to say special thanks to the 135 employers who registered on

our system at the recently held Jamaica Expo. This is an indication of the confidence that our stakeholders have in the Ministry and the steps we are taking to improve our services to them.

Mr Speaker, we are encouraged by the increase in the number of persons with Disabilities who are now being employed by organisations across Jamaica. Data from the National Labour Market Study revealed that about 10 percent of firms surveyed employed persons with disabilities.

The Ministry is playing its part in preparing persons with disabilities for the labour market. During 2017/18 FY, 76 students with disabilities were enrolled in various programmes offered by the Abilities Foundation. Seventy-nine (79) graduates were placed in six-week paid work apprenticeship and six-month work solutions. This was made possible through the Social and Economic Inclusion for Persons with Disabilities Project, funded by the IDB as well as assistance received through the HEART Trust/NTA and the private sector. Mr speaker with the help of our partners we are ***“Bolting the foundation for lasting prosperity through dignity and respect”*** for persons with disabilities.

MAINTAINING A HARMONIOUS INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS CLIMATE

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security occupies a very unique place in Government. In addition to our “line” function to develop and implement labour policies, we also have a “horizontal” function to ensure industrial harmony. The Industrial Relations Department of the Ministry continues to monitor the industrial relations climate in Jamaica and oftentimes, works behind the scene with employers and workers, seeking

consensus and mutual agreement, between disputing parties, in order to ensure that there is industrial harmony and industrial peace.

The 2010 amendment to the Labour Relations and Industrial Disputes Act has resulted in a significant increase in the number of cases that have been reported to the Ministry. A large number of these disputes are brought by individuals resulting from a failure to follow due process.

I am pleased to report that during the 2017/18 FY, the Ministry was able to resolve seventy (70) per cent of the reported industrial disputes. We will be further strengthening the industrial relations machinery through a series of seminars and workshops for Labour Officers to expand and improve the Ministry's capacity to respond to issues affecting workers and employers alike.

The magnitude of cases being handled by the Montego Bay Regional Office has encouraged us to further the establishment of a Division of the Industrial Disputes Tribunal in Montego Bay, St James. We have recently found a location and should have the IDT Montego Bay Division up and running by the end of this Financial Year. I would like to acknowledge that the IDT West was conceptualized from 2005, by the Minister of Labour at the time, Mr Horace Dalley.

In the 2018/2019 FY we will be working to complete amendments to the Minimum Wage Act, National Minimum Wage Order and the Employment Agencies Regulations Act to incorporate provisions related to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention No. 189 on Domestic

Workers. Mr Speaker, we are ***“bolting the foundation for lasting prosperity through dignity and respect for domestic workers.”***

On the matter of Employment Agencies, if you will allow me Mr. Speaker to just divert a little and to comment on what has been taking place by unscrupulous Employment Agencies. The reports about poor people being scammed of their last dollar with the hope of getting jobs overseas have not gone unnoticed. We intend to increase our monitoring of Employment Agencies; our website is now updated regularly, so clients can view those Agencies that are licensed and every Sunday there is an ad in the classified section warning persons not to pay monies to people purporting to be able to place them in jobs overseas.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry will be initiating a sensitization programme, to increase the knowledge and awareness of the Agencies and their clients on the issue of human trafficking. We are also taking steps to amend the Employment Agencies Act to expand the range of breaches covered by the legislation and to allow for the application of stiffer penalty measures.

Mr Speaker, the National Minimum Wage Commission has completed its public consultation and submitted its recommendation to the Ministry. We have reviewed the recommendations; we have taken into account the stability of the Jamaican economy; the rate of inflation and the economic circumstance of the workers as well as the ability of the employers to absorb an increase. After careful consideration the Cabinet has agreed to grant an increase in the national minimum wage, and minimum wages for security guards.

I am pleased to announce Mr Speaker that effective August 1, 2018 the National Minimum Wage will be increased moving from \$6,200 to **\$7,000.00 per week**. The minimum wage for security guards will also be increased from \$ 8,854.00 to **\$9,700.00 per week** or **\$242.50 per hour**. These increases represent an increase of approximately **12.9%** and **9.6%** respectively.

SECURITY GUARDS

Mr Speaker, I have just announced an increase in the minimum wage for security guards, but I must point out that numerous concerns have been raised and we must therefore take a serious look as what is happening in the industry. The issue of Security Guards continues, to be a current issue and has been making the news pretty often and it has been so for the last 30 years Mr. Speaker. I certainly, do not expect the Opposition at this stage to use the issue of Security Guards as a political football, or for mere political expediency. I would like to make it clear also Mr. Speaker that I have reviewed the Sectoral Presentations made by the previous Minister of Labour and Social Security and between 2013-2015, and on not one occasion was any mention made of Security Guards. Member Dalley I took the liberty also to peruse your Sectoral Presentation in 2007 and I did not see anything in relation to Security Guards. I find it strange therefore that it is only when this government is in power the Opposition has seen it fit, to raise the issue of Security Guards.

In my 2016-2017 Sectoral presentation Mr. Speaker, I indicated to this Honourable House that I have initiated dialogue with the various stakeholders

in the Security issue Guard Industry, with a view to finding an amicable solution to the ongoing concerns raised . Mr. Speaker, my resolve **was/is** to adopt a “win-win” approach rather than resort to a confrontational one, which could be prejudicial to social dialogue, and the relationship we now enjoy through the Labour Advisory Council. Mr. Speaker, the Opposition PNP has eyes for “Security Guards” only when it is in Opposition, and you will notice in recent times that it has step up its game.

Mr. Speaker, I have in my possession copies of Sectoral Presentations by my former colleague on the other side... (2006-2007, 2014-2015, 2015-2016), nothing on Security Guards, nothing on Work Permits, nothing on Joint Industrial Council, nothing on Fixed Term Contract.

We are about consensus not confrontation, we believe in fairness and equity, we believe in partnership and we have confidence in the systems we have in place. Today Mr. Speaker in an effort to examine the issues raised having to do with Security Guards, I am recommending that a **Joint Select Committee of Parliament be constituted b this Honourable House, in an effort to once and for all deal with a matter which has been hanging for almost 40 years.... With the involvement of all the stakeholders, including my colleagues on the other side.**

JOINT INDUSTRIAL COUNCIL

Mr. Speaker, there has been much talk about the JIC, and the discussions are centered on the Construction sector. The Joint Industrial Council is not confined to any one sector. In years gone by, JIC was active in a number of

sectors in Jamaica. As speak, there is the Port Workers JIC which was established in 1952. There was one in the Bauxite Sector, due to the downturn in that industry, it is no longer functional. The Sugar Industry also has one in place.

But Mr. Speaker the JIC is a workplace partnership for employers and employees. It serves as a forum for management and unions representing workers to meet and decide on labour matters. As Minister of Labour and Social Security I see it as a model for good industrial relations. However its formation and continuity is voluntary, the MLSS cannot enforce a JIC Agreement on companies, these Agreements are arrived at between members of the Council and companies are free to join or not to join the Council. Mr. Speaker, God help us if we were to seek to legislate JIC or JIC rates in Jamaica.

Fixed Term Contract

This brings us to matter having to deal with “fixed term contact”, Mr. Speaker. To be speaking about workers working without the enjoyment of any retirement benefit, is rather disingenuous of the Opposition. The public sector in Jamaica is the only employment body which guarantees a pension after retirement, providing the worker is vested.

This administration Mr. Speaker, has sought to protect the workers from exploitation, recently we ratified Convention 189 which will guarantee Household Helpers with rights like any other worker. In 2010 we amended the Labour Relations and Industrial Disputes Act. Now workers can have their individual disputes heard at the Tribunal, previously if a worker wasn't a

member of a Trade Union his matter could not be sent to the Tribunal. The credit goes to the Speaker Hon. Pearnel Charles for that "landmark" amendment to the LRIDA.

Mr. Speaker, in 1962 we ratified Conventions 87 and 98. Convention 87 speaks to Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize and Convention 98, speaks to the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining. This Mr. Speaker is a testament of our commitment to protect the rights of our workers for over 56 years. Mr. Speaker, this government does not encourage the exploitation of workers and Trade Unions are free to organize workers, and the Ministry continues to facilitate the process of Trade Union representation and Collective Bargaining

The issue of Fixed Term Contracts has been going on from the 70s. Notwithstanding that Mr. Speaker, I have noted the concerns, and as is customary for me I will have consultation with the Labour Advisor Council on the matter.

In relation to the matter having to do with the Joint Industrial Council, I will seek to have dialogue with the other Tripartite members.

Finally Mr. Speaker, I urge Member Dalley to get his facts right and not to mislead the public with utterances such as what he has presented in his contribution to this Honourable House.

Jamaica is a signatory to the ILO Convention No. 94 which speaks to Labour Clauses in Public contracts. Mr Speaker, whilst we have been signatories since 1962, we have not taken the appropriate steps to implement this convention. I

am pleased to report that through dialogue with the Ministry of Finance and Planning, the Governments' Procurement Guidelines, which are currently being revised, will ensure that labour clauses are included in government procurement contracts. I would like to acknowledge the work of the Unions who made representation and had dialogue with us on this matter.

PROVIDING A SAFE AND HEALTHY WORK ENVIRONMENT

Mr Speaker, the Government's strategic priority of creating an environment that is characterised by inclusive and sustainable economic growth, job creation and prosperity will be void if it excludes the promotion of decent work for our labour force. In keeping with this objective, a key outcome of the Government's Medium Term Socio-Economic Policy Framework includes the passage of the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act. The proposed Act is aimed at securing the safety and health of all workers. The Bill was tabled in Parliament during the 2017-2018 fiscal year; for the 2018 2019 legislative year, it will be given top priority.

Mr. Speaker, the promulgation of the OSH Bill into law will require us a Ministry and a country to have measures in place to ensure the smooth implementation of the provisions of the Act. We are well aware of the significance of the requirements of our tripartite stakeholders - government, employers and employees, under the proposed law. Consequently, as a Ministry, we are taking proactive steps and our focus for the future will be on the following:

1. Capacity Building.

It is projected Mr. Speaker, that the OSHA, will require a significant increase in our administrative and technical resources to monitor and enforce the requirements of the Act. This is extremely important, as it is projected that the Act, when promulgated, will result in an increase in the scope for the inspection and audit of approximately 130,000 small, medium and large enterprises.

Already we are in consultation with the ILO to provide training for our Inspectors. The Ministry will also be embarking on a series of discussions with our training institutions to determine how best we can, on a consistent basis, fulfill the training needs for the human capital required.

2. National Sensitization Awareness Programme

Mr. Speaker, we have already started this process and have been engaging the stakeholders in the Private and Public sectors across the country. However, we need to intensify this programme. Starting in September, we are going to ramp it up. We will be going to the nooks and crannies of Jamaica, starting with Town Hall Meetings. This sensitization Mr. Speaker, will not only be confined to OSH, but will embrace other areas of the Ministry, (Child Labour, NIS, Industrial Relations, Disabilities Act, to name a few), as to who we are, what we do and how our citizens can access our resources to advance their awareness and development.

3. Continued Dialogue through the Labour Advisory Council (LAC)

Mr. Speaker we have a vibrant LAC. I must say thanks to the support received from the tripartite members over the last two years, the Jamaica Employers Federation and Jamaica Confederation of Trade Unions. The LAC has provided a platform for us to build consensus and make labour related decisions in the interest of the country in a civil and reciprocated manner. Through the LAC, we will seek to continue to work together to ensure the preparation and smooth implementation of the proposed OSH Act. We invite Civil Society, NGOs and other stakeholders to come on board. The Bill is on our website and we welcome the dialogue and the support needed to make it a success.

The proposed OSH Act Mr Speaker, requires that:-

- a. Employers have trained personnel in Occupational Safety and Health. I encourage all employers to start the process of training of these personnel; this will make the transition much easier for all of us.
- b. All places of work under the new Act will be required to meet certification. In this regard I beseech all employers to review and where necessary to retrofit their establishments, in an effort to meet the requirement of the law.

The OSH Act Mr. Speaker, will be a landmark piece of legislation in the history of Jamaica. It will guarantee safe and healthy places of work, it will enhance productivity, it will put us on par with international standards, it will give us the competitive edge and certainly it will draw investors to our shores. I invite every Jamaican to be a part of this and to make it a success. We are going for it

and with all hands on deck we will achieve our goal of ***"bolting the foundation for lasting prosperity through dignity and respect."***

PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE-NATIONAL POLICY FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

Mr. Speaker, social protection is central to our mission in the Ministry and we are pursuing several initiatives to provide adequate coverage to our citizens. The National Policy for Senior Citizens has been revised, and was tabled in Parliament as a Green Paper in February of this year. The revised policy, outlines the Government commitment to provide protection for our senior citizens and to encourage their continued contribution to national development, whilst at the same time protecting their rights. Mr Speaker, the Green Paper is on the Ministry's and JIS's website, and we invite persons to give their comments and feedback.

NATIONAL INSURANCE SCHEME

Mr. Speaker, the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) provides benefits to over 124,000 persons. This represents a 12.6 percent increase over the previous financial year. As Minister, I am committed to the transformation of the NIS and to improving the level of service offered. Last year, I handed out the new NIS cards to all MP's, we revamped all our application forms to make them more user friendly and all new pensioners now receive their payments via direct deposit into their bank accounts.

The Management Information System of the NIS is being overhauled to introduce cutting-edge technologies. This will result in increased automation, greater accessibility and efficiency in customer service delivery. In the first instance, before the end of this Financial Year, Funeral Grants will be automated to allow online accessibility. Members of the public will be able to apply for this benefit online and receive payments directly into their accounts within two weeks.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry has embarked on a process of digitization of the paper records for the NIS. This will enable the retrieval of records at a faster pace and a resultant increase in the rate at which we respond to queries as well as a reduction in the processing time for benefits. I use this opportunity to remind NIS pensioners that our officers are currently in the field conducting a Re-Verification Exercise. This exercise gives us an opportunity to update the information on our new system and to reconnect with our pensioners.

Mr. Speaker, pensioners will recall that I indicated earlier in this Honourable House, that provision has been made in the budget for an increase in the rate of pension. We have completed the actuarial review of the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) which was commissioned during the financial year 2017/2018. The report highlights the financial performance of the scheme over the period 2013 – 2016. The report specifically points to the fact that the viability of the scheme has improved.

I am therefore pleased to announce that based on the performance of the Fund, and the recommendation of the Actuaries, the old-age benefits payable under the National Insurance Scheme will be increased by 20 percent moving

from \$2,800.00 per week to \$3,400.00 per week. Mr Speaker this increase will be effective from April 1, 2018.

Mr Speaker, effective August 1, 2018, funeral grants payable under the National Insurance Scheme will be increased to \$90,000.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITES

Mr. Speaker, it is my duty to reassure the country that the government is committed to the advancement of Persons with Disabilities. We are passionate and committed to the inclusion, integration and empowerment of persons with disabilities in society. If I may quote from a presentation done on behalf of the Most Honourable Andrew Holness at a recent Conference at the UWI Centre for Disabilities Studies, it was reaffirmed that as a Government our aim is **“a Jamaica where all persons with disabilities can identify with the inclusiveness in our Motto “Out of Many One People.”**

This, Mr. Speaker, brings me to the Disabilities Act (2014). I must admit that its implementation is taking longer than anticipated. However, Mr. Speaker, we have not been sitting idly by and work is in progress. The lag can be accounted for, and as I speak I can report on the progress thus far:

1. The Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities (JCPD) is being restructured. A consultancy for the Organizational Management Review and Development started in December 2017. The first draft of the structure is to be submitted for ratification.
2. Deliverables from Codes of Practice consultancy reviewed and feedback provided. The Gap Analyses for both Education and Training as well as

Employment have been completed, and we intend to go on to the next step in the process, in short order.

3. We are working to establish the Disabilities Rights Tribunal. The consultations continue and it is hoped in the near future that the skill sets from the various interest groups will be identified for this Tribunal.

Mr Speaker, earlier in my presentation I spoke to the training and employment of persons with disabilities. During the 2017/18 FY, the Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities (JCPD) continued to reach out in a tangible way to persons with disabilities. For the 2017/18 FY, financial assistance in the amount of \$12.5 million was provided to 696 persons with disabilities. Three hundred and thirty nine (339) females and 357 males received assistance for :

- **Assistive Aids**
- **Education and training**
- **Medical Expenses**
- **Transportation**
- **Income Generating Project** -
- **Employment Support Staff**
- **Compassionate grants**

Additionally, sixty-five (65) clients received assistance amounting to \$7.1 million for Economic Empowerment Grants (EEG). Approximately \$24 million dollars has been allocated in the 2018/19 FY to provide support for Persons with Disabilities. We continue to ensure that persons with disabilities are

protected and can enter the job market with dignity and respect, either as entrepreneurs or employees.

The Ministry encourages all persons with disabilities to register with the JCPD. Registration can be done at any of our Parish Offices island-wide. When registered, the Ministry will be better able to serve the needs of the community.

PROGRAMME OF ADVANCEMENT THROUGH HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Mr. Speaker, in 2018/19 FY, \$8.4 billion has been budgeted to be spent on the PATH Programme. The Programme continues to target 360,000 Jamaicans who are poor and in need of assistance. In June 2017, there was a 30 percent increase in the level of benefits paid to all categories of beneficiaries which include children, pregnant and lactating mothers, the elderly and persons with disabilities.

We recognise, Mr Speaker, that after fifteen (15) years of implementation of the PATH Programme, there is the need to reassess families to determine their progress and the need for continued participation in the programme. That reassessment began in September of 2017 for some 11,000 PATH families who have been beneficiaries since 2002 and 2003.

Mr Speaker, PATH is built on the premise that education and health are key components to breaking the inter-generational cycle of poverty. The success of the Programme in achieving this objective is evidenced by the number of beneficiaries who excel in their educational pursuits and are now part of the labour market. Mr Speaker, we have persons in society today who are Doctors,

Lawyers, Engineers, Teachers, Social Workers, you name it who once benefited from the PATH Programme.

In commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the programme, the Ministry awarded 17 scholarships to students pursuing tertiary level education. Mr Speaker, it was difficult to select the scholarship recipients as we had well over 40 highly qualified applicants.

We are working to empower new families entering the programme to become independent of state assistance. We will achieve this through the Steps to Work Programme and more active case management.

NATURAL AND OTHER MANMADE DISASTERS

Climate change and other weather phenomenon have resulted in increased disasters globally. The financial year 2017/2018 saw devastation wreaked on several of our neighbours by hurricanes Maria, Herma and Harvey and numerous other flooding incidents. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry provided relief supplies and sent personnel to The British Virgin Island and Dominica who were severely impacted by hurricane Maria. Additionally, we were instrumental in the evacuation of over 100 Jamaicans who were stranded in the BVI.

Mr. Speaker while Jamaica has been spared a major natural disaster, during the year the Ministry responded to 5 major flooding incidents locally. In addition, we responded to a significant number of fires, especially in the parishes of Kingston and St Andrew. Through partnership with the ODPEM and various organisations the Ministry of Labour and Social Security provided relief assistance and supplies to over 2,600 affected persons. Approximately

\$75 Million was spent by the Ministry on this activity to support persons in their recovery efforts. I would like to publicly thank Food for the Poor for their assistance and partnership with the Ministry.

Through assistance from the World Bank, we are far advanced in implementing an Adaptive Social Protection curriculum for our disaster personnel. This partnership has also resulted in the review and strengthening of the Post Disaster Damage Assessment tool which we are pleased to announce is now available and accessible in digital format.

In our bid to improve our ability to respond, recover and adapt the ministry in this financial year will continue to strengthen humanitarian response partnerships, improve disaster management systems, increase training of disaster personnel and maintain the necessary inventory items to effectively counter the impacts of disasters on our citizenry.

CHILDREN AT RISK

Mr Speaker, we continue to strengthen the delivery of services to young children with special needs that are a part of the Early Stimulation Programme. We have established a new Early Intervention Facility at the Hanover Street location. We have just opened an expanded Centre on Ostend Close in East Kingston. Seventy Eight million dollars (\$78M) was spent on constructing additional classrooms and a therapy room. This expanded facility will cater to the educational needs of approximately 160 students with disabilities.

The Child Labour Unit continues to fulfil its work with stakeholders locally and internationally to prevent children from engaging in child labour. Mr.

Speaker, Jamaica is ahead of the rest of the English Speaking Caribbean and I am pleased to report to this Hon. House that we have been **rated Tier one (1)** by the ILO for our efforts in reducing child labour.

In conjunction with the with the US Department of Labour, this morning the Ministry launched the implementation of the **Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labour Project** (CLEAR 11). Through this Project, we will be receiving technical assistance to review existing legislation, finalise the National Policy on Child Labour and to revise the National Action Plan on child labour.

Recently, Mr. Speaker, STATIN launched the Jamaica Youth Activity Survey (JYAS) (2016). I would like to put on record sincere thanks to STATIN and the ILO for the valuable information emanating from this Research. This Survey has provided the Ministry and no doubt the government, with data critical to the issue of children engaged in economic activities and children who have never attended school. The JYAS has revealed that approximately 5.8 percent of children aged 5-17 were involved in child labour and 4.0 percent of children aged 5-17 were engaged in hazardous work

The Survey reported that in 2016, 97.5 percent of our children age 5-17 are in school. Congratulations are in order for the parents and the various state agencies; we have come a far way. Mr. Speaker, I am disheartened however, that the study found that less than 1 percent of children aged 5-17 had never attended school at any point in time for various reasons such as disability or illness, inability to afford schooling, and children being too young to attend school. Mr Speaker, some countries would probably be comforted that the figure is this low but we cannot as a country be happy with this.

Mr Speaker *we must bolt the foundation for lasting prosperity for our children free from child labour.* Our duty as a Government is to close that gap on child labour and to ensure that all our children are in school regardless of their circumstances. In the not too distant future I intend to have dialogue with my counterpart Ministers to determine how we can pool our resources to treat with the issue of children aged 5-17 who have never attended school. At the Ministry, we already have PATH and other social intervention measures that we can use in alleviating this situation, and look forward to the discussion with my ministerial counterparts.

Another initiative aimed at addressing the issue of child labour, is the implementation of the Risk Identification Model. This model which was developed by the ILO and Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) will enable us to identify the areas and sectors with the highest probability of child labour and to create vulnerability maps. Mr Speaker, this will allow us to interrupt the trajectory of child labour, once and for all.

Mr. Speaker, June 12, 2018, was celebrated as **World Day Against Child Labour**. As part of the campaign to eliminate child labour, we are distributing some lapel pins with the child labour logo to all members of this Honourable House I encourage my colleagues and all of Jamaica to join with me in saying **"NO TO CHILD LABOUR."**

CONCLUSION

Mr Speaker, we are confident that the work we have been doing over the past two years is strategically poised to secure a platform for a better Jamaica. We are working to ensure that the policies, programmes, projects and initiatives we adopt reflect the strategic mission of the Government to bring about lasting prosperity for the people of Jamaica.

The Ministry is seized of its role as essential to the development of the country's human capital. We must not only improve the quality of our labour force, but we must make sure that the skills and competencies acquired are in sync with the present and future demands of the globally competitive marketplace. And even as we pursue those objectives we must work to ensure that the vulnerable among us are provided with the minimum protection required to secure their rights. The historical circumstances demand no less of us if we are to represent with pride the legacy of our fore parents.

This year, we mark the 80th anniversary of the labour uprising and the birth of the modern trade union movement in Jamaica. It is a cause for reflection and a cause for celebration, because many of us stand today in position of privilege unaware, and some may even be unconcerned about the human suffering, humiliation and indignity that generations before us had to endure.

The events of 1938 is the wind beneath our wings. So that our efforts at the Ministry is to put all of that in context to ensure that our legacy will be understood as one in which we are ***"Bolting the foundation for lasting prosperity through dignity and respect."***

Thank you.

