



PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT

National Identification System

Delivered by The Most Honourable Andrew Holness, ON, MP

Prime Minister

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Madam Speaker, according to the World Bank (2020), the massive shock of the coronavirus pandemic and the associated containment measures have severely contracted the global economy - the worst since World War II. Madam Speaker, industries have been disrupted, and businesses that require face-to-face interaction are struggling to keep afloat. The traditional way of doing commerce has proven to be a herculean task during this pandemic.

As I drive around, I have observed long lines at Tax Offices, banks, and other public and private institutions. Madam Speaker, this signals the urgent need for more services to be made available online, and our people sensitised on the importance of accessing them.

Madam Speaker, this Administration has always recognised that the transition to a digital society is a crucial prerequisite to the realisation of Jamaica's growth and development ambitions. The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically accelerated the adoption of digital technologies globally, and our recovery from the pandemic is critically dependent on how quickly we reengineer and innovate. This applies to all areas of the public and private sectors - healthcare, education, manufacturing, financial services, to name a few.

As policymakers and citizens, we must fast track the legislation and infrastructure necessary to succeed in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. There are two big hurdles that we need to overcome to become a digital society.

The first is what is referred to as the "digital divide". The pandemic has forced schools and workplaces to close and people to practice social distancing. The internet has become our public square to meet and access critical information. However, approximately half of the world's population is still not connected to the internet.

In Jamaica, the percentage of persons not connected has been estimated to be approximately 45%. With school, work, healthcare, commerce and religious worship going online, persons without access to a reliable internet connection may become marginalised and disconnected entirely from the world. We are committed, Madam Speaker, to building out broadband internet infrastructure so that every Jamaican has the opportunity to be connected.

The second key hurdle to becoming a digital society is Digital Identification, or “Digital ID,” for every citizen of Jamaica through which the citizen can be authenticated unambiguously through a digital channel. Madam Speaker, many Jamaicans lack any form of legally recognised identification. Many others have some type of legally recognised identification but have limited ability to use it in the digital world. A Digital ID will foster increased financial and economic inclusion for these persons.

A proper Digital ID must have the following four attributes:

1. It must be **verified and provide a high degree of assurance about authenticity**. It must meet both government and private-sector standards for a variety of civic and economic uses, such as gaining access to education, opening a bank account, and establishing credentials for a job.
2. It must be **unique**. With a unique digital ID, every individual has only one identity within a system, and every system identity corresponds to only one individual.
3. It must be **established with individual consent**. Consent means that individuals knowingly register for and use the Digital ID with knowledge of what personal data will be captured and how it will be used.
4. It must **protect user privacy and ensure control over personal data**. There must be proper safeguards to ensure privacy and security while also giving users access to their personal data, decision rights over who has access to that data, with transparency into who has accessed it.

The Government must provide a national identification solution to simplify the Know Your Customer (KYC) and Anti-Money Laundering (AML) requirements. Many Jamaicans are locked out of the formal financial system, and now is the time to be formalised and begin building wealth seamlessly, safely, securely, and in keeping with international KYC and AML regulations.

Madam Speaker, real wealth cannot be created in an environment where there is a high level of informality. Every Jamaican, irrespective of age or class, ought to have a bank account.

Madam Speaker, during the recent distributions under the COVID Allocation of Resources for Employees (CARE) Programme, we witnessed the severity of the problem. If we had active bank accounts for our citizens, it would have made the process significantly easier. The process of making pension payments would be much easier with a National Identification System that is connected to our civil registry - a significant opportunity to identify payees who are still alive and ensure that all who should, are benefitting seamlessly.

The duplication of social benefit payments would have been significantly minimised, and in some cases, eliminated without human errors.

That is why this Administration, Madam Speaker, is moving with speed and alacrity to establish the National Identification System (NIDS).

By implementing a voluntary system to manage the lifecycle of citizens' and residents' digital identities, NIDS will address two (2) significant challenges that we currently face:

- 1) how to verify and authenticate users securely in a digital society; and
- 2) how to sign documents digitally.

NIDS will create immense economic value for both individuals and institutions.

For individuals, it will enable increased use of financial services, improved access to employment and time and cost savings. For

institutions in both government and the private sector, it will provide cost savings, reduced fraud, increased sales of goods and services and improved labour productivity. For the country as a whole, NIDS will create economic value by enabling greater formalisation of economic flows, promoting higher inclusion of individuals in a range of services, and allowing incremental digitisation of sensitive interactions that require high levels of trust. McKinsey Global Institute estimates that countries implementing digital ID programs could unlock economic value of up to 13 percent of GDP by 2030; making it a potential force for inclusive growth.

Digital ID can also unlock noneconomic value, potentially furthering progress in areas such as protection of rights, and transparency. Digital ID can promote increased and more inclusive access to education, healthcare, and labour markets; and can contribute to greater levels of civic participation.

For example, in Estonia, over 30 percent of individuals vote online, of which, surveys indicate that 20 percent would not vote at a physical polling station.

Digital ID can also help enforce rights enshrined in law. For example, in India, the right of residents to claim subsidised food through ration shops is protected because their claim and identity are authenticated through a remote digital ID system, rather than at the discretion of local officials. Transparency is another benefit of digital ID. An accurate, up-to-date death registration system can help curb social protection fraud, and a reliable, authentic voter registry is essential to reduce voter fraud and ensure the overall integrity of the electoral process.

Madam Speaker, I want to update this Honourable House on advances being made towards getting Jamaica ready for the adoption of full digital services.

In November 2019, I announced Cabinet's approval of the first amendment to the contract for the NIDS solution to focus on the ICT upgrade activities until a new National Identification and Registration Bill is tabled.

Madam Speaker, in April of this year, a significant landmark was achieved when Cabinet approved the new voluntary **National Identification and Registration Policy**. Substantial changes, as reflected in the new Policy, include the **voluntary** enrollment under the NIDS and the use of **minimum biometrics** which are fingerprints, a facial image and manual signature only.

The new **National Identification and Registration Bill**, Madam Speaker, is completed, and the NIDS Policy Committee, along with the Legislation Committee (a Sub-Committee of Cabinet), will review the Bill.

Madam Speaker, the Government is fully cognizant of and sensitive to the legitimate concerns that persons have regarding data protection and privacy.

We are committed to putting in place the legislative, technological, and independent oversight mechanisms to ensure that the rights of persons are respected and protected.

This Government intends to embrace a collaborative approach through the traditional process of getting the legislation passed. **The Government will also provide an online forum on NIDSFACTS.COM for all Jamaicans to comment on the Bill.**

Madam Speaker, once the Bill is tabled in Parliament, a Joint Select Committee will be put in place to navigate the deliberations to arrive at a satisfactory National Identification and Registration Bill. Madam Speaker, stakeholders from the public and private sectors, including civil society groups, will be able to comment and provide insights during the Joint Select Committee deliberations.

Madam Speaker, in January 2020, under Phase 1 of the ICT infrastructure upgrade activities, the Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) Project was launched.

The PKI is a trusted security framework used worldwide to manage the policies concerning the creation, distribution, use, storage and revocation of digital certificates that are critical to security in a digital society.

Madam Speaker, the PKI Project is scheduled to be completed in this calendar year, **paving the way for the introduction of e-passports and digital identities.**

The NIDS Project has been upgrading the Government's data centre, the Registrar General's Department (RGD) and investing, in part, in the development of processes and requirements for the Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency (PICA) to implement e-passport. These upgrades include servers, firewalls, switches, load balancing and the general enhancing of power and cooling infrastructure.

Madam Speaker, work is ongoing to improve the RGD's operations, thereby improving the overall delivery of services to customers.

The development of a **new Electronic Birth Certificate solution** is a major initiative being funded by the NIDS Project at the RGD. The project has already commenced, with a pilot soon to be rolled out.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to report that, upon completion, Jamaicans will have the opportunity to request, print and verify their birth

certificates without face-to-face interactions, from anywhere in the world. Secure online verification and authentication of birth certificates will be key features of the process.

The digitisation of records, Madam Speaker, is another significant component that will substantially improve the RGD's operations. Once completed, it will allow the agency to be more responsive. To date, the RGD has benefitted from over J\$25M invested in the procurement of new hardware and software infrastructure, including improvements in power distribution.

Madam Speaker, with more persons using mobile devices to conduct transactions, the Government has put in place a plan to roll out an application to facilitate easy payments and retrieval of signed documents. This can be best described as a **One-Stop Single Digital Wallet or e-Wallet.**

Upon completion, Madam Speaker, Jamaicans will be able to use the e-Wallet to authenticate themselves, pay for various services and retrieve stored signed documents whenever they choose to.

Madam Speaker, as we advance into the digital revolution, we must not be afraid to take bold steps and embrace the future. We are developing the framework and human capacity for innovations in the creation and adoption of secure and safe digital space. The Government remains steadfast in transforming our country into a digital economy as it is a powerful catalyst and driver of value creation and inclusiveness.

Let us work towards this one common goal. *Together we are 'Stronger' and Stronger we are 'Together'.*

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

References

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