



## THRONE SPEECH 2023

# A STRONGER JAMAICA:

Consolidating our Recovery,  
Reigniting our Decade  
of Growth

**TUESDAY**

**FEBRUARY 14,  
2023**

Houses of Parliament  
Gordon House  
Kingston, Jamaica



*Delivered by:*

**His Excellency the Most Hon.  
Sir Patrick Allen, ON, GCMG, CD, KSt.J**  
Governor-General



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## **A STRONGER JAMAICA:**

Consolidating our Recovery, Reigniting our Decade of Growth

### **Honourable Members,**

*We* give God thanks for His grace and blessing on our nation over the past three years. We have:

- Weathered the COVID-19 pandemic
- Experienced the worst global health crisis in our lifetime, and,
- Seen the difficulties caused by supply chain challenges.

These events have been compounded by:

- The war in the Ukraine, and,
- Global inflation.

In spite of these overlapping crises, Jamaica stands strong.

- Our economic output has recovered to pre-COVID levels.
- Our unemployment rate is below pre-COVID levels and is now at the lowest level ever recorded.
- Our debt levels are below pre-COVID levels.

There are few countries in the world that can claim these three achievements simultaneously. This remarkable economic recovery has been achieved by steadfastly pursuing a path of fiscal prudence and sound monetary management.

During the pandemic, the Government pursued a policy of saving lives, while also preserving livelihoods. We kept our focus on ensuring that when the pandemic ended, Jamaica would be well-positioned to rebound strongly.

The robust economic recovery that we are experiencing is one which we have collectively earned and of which every Jamaican can be proud. It is the result of Jamaicans from all sectors of the society coming together – healthcare workers, members of the security forces, frontline workers, teachers, businessmen, unions and workers in the public and private sectors.

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In early 2020, we were well-positioned to make this **Jamaica's Decade of Growth, Peace and Prosperity**. Then the COVID-19 pandemic hit and dealt a severe economic blow to all countries, including Jamaica.

“As a result of sound economic management and a social partnership, we have rebounded strongly. The global shocks of the past three years may have delayed, but they have not derailed our plans.”

As a result of sound economic management and a social partnership, we have rebounded strongly. The global shocks of the past three years may have delayed, but they have not derailed our plans.

My fellow Jamaicans, now is the time to **Consolidate our Strong Recovery and Reignite our Decade of Growth, Peace and Prosperity**.

### OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

**Honourable Members**, the Government is now in the pilot phase of the full roll out of the **National Identification System**, and is on track to operationalise the **National Identification and Registration Authority** (NIRA).

In **Building Our Stronger Jamaica**, we must ensure that human capital is not a constraint to our growth. The HEART/NSTA Trust will continue to focus on expanding access to demand-driven training, certification, and job placement by strengthening industry partnerships and increased Technical and Vocational Education Training integration.

**Honourable Members**, housing is key to inclusive growth and steady progress is being made towards Government's stated target of 70,000 new housing solutions by the end of 2025/2026. The Greater Bernard Lodge Development slated for 15,000 housing solutions has seen strong interest from developers and continues its buildout.

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During the 2023/2024 financial year, the National Housing Trust will introduce a new financing model which will entail partner arrangements with regulated mortgage-lending institutions. This framework is intended to significantly increase the supply of mortgages while at the same time release funds to focus on the development of affordable housing.

The Legislative priorities for the Office of the Prime Minister in 2023/2024 will be the **Registration (Births and Deaths) (Amendment) Act**, the **Access to Information (Amendment) Act (2002)**, and the **National Archives and Records Management Bill**.

## MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND THE PUBLIC SERVICE

**Honourable Members**, as the Government continues its thrust to transform our public sector, implementation of the new compensation system, which commenced in December 2022, will continue through to fiscal year 2024/25.

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In 2022, Jamaica became the first country to provide Central Bank digital currency as legal tender.

The new compensation system reduces and simplifies the unwieldy 325 salary scales and 185 allowances.

In 2022, Jamaica became the first country to provide Central Bank digital currency as legal tender. **JAM-DEX** enables an affordable and convenient means of efficient and secure payments and is especially beneficial to those who do not have a bank account.

In **Building Our Stronger Jamaica**, the Government recognises the importance of institutions to preserve and maintain our macroeconomic stability. During 2023/24, the Government will appoint the **Fiscal Commissioner** and operationalise the independent **Fiscal Commission** as the guardian of Jamaica's fiscal rules.

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It is also the intention to strengthen the regulations of the financial sector by unifying prudential supervision and regulation under the Bank of Jamaica, while pursuing the establishment of a separate regulator for market conduct and consumer protection.

The **Regulations for the Nomination, Selection and Appointment to Boards of Public Bodies** will come into effect in 2023/24 to provide a transparent mechanism for persons to serve on boards of public bodies.

### **MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND JOB CREATION**

**Honourable Members**, the **New Social Housing Programme**, which was established in 2018 to improve the housing condition of the country's poor by providing affordable housing, has, to date, delivered 134 houses in all parishes across 48 constituencies.

The Government continues to demonstrate its focus on the protection and preservation of Jamaica's environment for future generations, through tangible actions. The **Pedro Cays and Surrounding Waters** has been designated as a protected area under the **Natural Resources Conservation Act**.

In the new financial year, the Government will table an **Overarching Policy for Jamaica's Protected Areas System**, the **Watersheds Policy for Jamaica**, the updated **Climate Change Policy Framework** and the **Emissions Policy Framework**.

In **Building Our Stronger Jamaica**, transformative infrastructure that provides lasting social and economic value is being given priority. Jamaicans will soon have seamless mobility around our island with highway connectivity to the north, south, east and west. The May Pen to Williamsfield portion of the Southern Coastal Highway Improvement Project is scheduled to be completed in August 2023.

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Work on the **Harbour View to Port Antonio Highway** is progressing and, despite the dislocation and inconvenience, residents are looking forward to the increased investment that will open up our eastern parishes as the new frontier for growth and development. The **Montego Bay Perimeter Road** and the upgrade and expansion of the **North Coast Highway** will be transformational for that section of the island.

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In 2023/2024, the Government will continue to advance a number of flagship projects, including, the new **Parliament Building**, the **Government Campus**, the **Portmore Resilience Park**; and the **Kingston Harbour Walk**.

In addition, the Government will implement a multi-billion Jamaican dollar **Special Capital Expenditure Programme** during 2023/2024 which will see the development of major corridors in the Corporate Area.

In 2023/2024, the Government will continue to advance a number of flagship projects, including, the new **Parliament Building**, the **Government Campus**, the **Portmore Resilience Park**; and the **Kingston Harbour Walk**.

The 2023/2024 legislative agenda will continue the review of Amendments to the **Rent Restriction Act**, the **Professional Engineers Registration Act**, the **Port Authority Act** and the **Harbours Act**.

## MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

**Honourable Members**, in building a secure, cohesive and just Jamaica, Government remains relentless in executing the strategies paramount to safeguarding citizen security.

The recent passage of the **Firearms (Prohibition, Restriction and Regulation) Act, 2022**, is demonstrative of the Government's commitment to save lives by addressing the issue of illegal



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guns. This legislative reform reflects international best practices and updates fines and custodial sentences for offences.

In 2023/2024, the Government will continue the modernisation of law enforcement, with:

- The expansion of the JamaicaEye Network
- The inclusion of additional sites to the Radio and Microwave Networks, which are operated by the Jamaica Constabulary Force, and,
- Continue the construction and renovation of police stations and other facilities.

At the same time, the Government will continue to partner with critical stakeholders, on ongoing initiatives to intensify social investment in identified vulnerable communities.

Jamaica is now in the best position since our Independence to secure our land and marine space through the Jamaica Defence Force. The Government will continue to strengthen our coastal protection infrastructure by acquiring additional marine vessels during 2023/2024. Already we are seeing the results of greater interdiction of narcotics, illegal and irregular fishing, and a reduction of the flow of guns.

For 2023/2024, the Government will pursue key legislative reforms to advance efforts toward realising: **Improved Public Order, Improved Public Safety** and **Reduction in Crime and Violence** by prioritizing the following:

1. **Amendment to the Finger Prints Act**
2. **Amendment to the Immigration Restriction (Commonwealth Citizens) Act and Aliens Act**
3. **Review of the Corrections Act**
4. **Amendments to the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA)** (to include Unexplained Wealth)

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### MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS

**Honourable Members**, the challenges of the pandemic emphasized the need to build resilience in our public health system. **Project Code Care** was initiated to reduce the backlog of surgeries and to date, approximately 270 surgeries have been completed through partnership with the private sector and the support of health professionals in the diaspora. The Government will continue this drive to improve service delivery and an additional 1,000 persons, waiting for more than three years, will have their surgeries completed.

“Project Code Care was initiated to reduce the backlog of surgeries and to date, approximately 270 surgeries have been completed through partnership with the Private Sector and the support of health professionals in the diaspora.”

Studies have shown that the pandemic triggered an increase in anxiety and depression. In putting measures in place to address mental health challenges, the Government launched the **School Mental Health Literacy Programme** to train school professionals and students. So far, 531 school personnel have been trained, including Health & Family Life Education teachers, school nurses and guidance counsellors.

In 2022/2023, progress was made under the jointly funded European Union and Inter-American Development Bank Infrastructure Development Plan.

In financial year 2023/24 the Government will continue this work with the commencement of construction on the expanded **Spanish Town Hospital**, as well as the continued rehabilitation of the **Cornwall Regional Hospital**, the construction of the new **Western Child and Adolescent Hospital** and the upgrade of the **University Hospital of the West Indies**; with a total investment of some J\$6 billion.

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The legislative programme for 2023/24 will focus on the **Tobacco Control Bill**, the **Food and Drugs (Amendment Bill)**, the **National Family Planning Board Act** and the **National Council on Drug Abuse Act**.

### MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND YOUTH

**Honourable Members**, the Government continues to make significant progress in the recovery of our education system from the COVID-19 pandemic. School attendance is returning to pre-COVID levels.

The initiative to eliminate the digital divide continues. Three hundred and eighty-four (384) schools now have adequate broadband connectivity and work continues to provide information and communications technology access to all 1,010 primary and secondary schools. We have started the work to have all ICT labs at high schools upgraded in preparation for e-testing.

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Our technology drive to ensure that all students and teachers have a device continues. Over 12,000 teachers and over 33,000 parents were issued e-vouchers for redemption of laptops.

Our technology drive to ensure that all students and teachers have a device continues. Over 12,000 teachers and over 33,000 parents were issued e-vouchers for redemption of laptops.

The recommendations of the **Jamaica Education Transformation Commission** are being implemented with appreciable work carried out on five of the seven thematic areas. Priority focus is placed on providing our students skills in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM). Preparatory work to build six STEM-focused schools and one performing arts school has started.

The Government continues to provide additional educational and certification opportunities through the **Sixth Form Path-**

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**ways Programme.** For the 2022/2023 academic year, 24,245 students are enrolled in the programme, the highest number since its inception in 2020.

For 2023/24, the legislative programme will focus on the **Jamaica Teaching Council Bill** (which is currently before the Joint Select Committee), the **Amendments to the Education Act and Regulations** and **The Child Care and Protection (Amendment) Bill**.

## **MINISTRY OF TOURISM**

**Honourable Members,** 2022 was a record year for Jamaica's tourism industry. Despite troubling predictions, the tourism sector rebounded strongly from the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, with arrivals and earnings for several months surpassing the 2019 record figures. We closed 2022 with some 3.3 million visitors and earnings of US\$3.6 billion. Tourism's rapid recovery was supported by an aggressive airlift strategy out of gateways in Canada, the United States and Europe, as well as out of regional and non-traditional markets.

The Government continues to lead efforts to build the resilience of the tourism sector against natural and man-made disruptions and crises. To this end, Disaster Risk Management tools were provided to key tourism stakeholders in June 2022, including a template and guidelines, as well as a **Business Continuity Plan Guidebook**.

Jamaica played a leading role in advocating for tourism resilience globally. In his address to the 77th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2022, the Honourable Prime Minister called for the official designation of **Global Tourism Resilience Day** to be acknowledged annually on **February 17**.

This call was officially ratified by the United Nations on February 6, 2023, with 94 countries co-sponsoring the Resolution. This is a signal honour for Jamaica and highlights our significant influence on the international stage.

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Recognising the importance of human capital development in accelerating the growth of the tourism industry and the wider economy, the Government will be conducting a **Labour Market Study** to address current and future labour issues in tourism, assess the labour market arrangements for different aspects of the sector as well as outline the hiring arrangements, salaries, benefits, skill set and training requirements.

### **MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES**

**Honourable Members**, despite having faced numerous challenges, the Government has been able to implement more strategic, innovative, inclusive, and resilient programmes and initiatives that have directly contributed to the 17.5% growth of the agricultural sector in the third quarter of 2022. These strategies culminated in six consecutive quarters of growth.

For 2022/2023, the agro-parks and production zones have seen a 230% increase in production when compared to 2021/2022. This was made possible through the infusion of over \$1 billion to expand production and infra-structure in eight (8) agro-parks and nine (9) agro-economic production zones.

Under the **Youth Agriculture and Entrepreneurship Development Programme**, the Jamaica 4-H Clubs continue to manage the **Rural Youth Empowerment Programme** that has over 650 youth participants. Since December 31, 2022, four hundred and forty nine (449) school gardens have been established as teaching-learning tools, and the produce has contributed to meal inputs for breakfast/lunch programmes.

Further initiatives are in the pipeline which will empower our youth and unlock the potential for agribusiness.

The Government provided \$50 million in direct support for small poultry operations benefiting over 1,000 farmers. Additionally, to aid crop production, 24,000 bags of fertilizer valued at \$122 million and other supplies were distributed to over 11,000 farmers.

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In the fisheries sector, the **Blue-Justice Initiative** was launched and the multi-agency mechanism to respond to organized crime. Other significant developments include a 15% growth in tilapia production to support aquaculture and a national multimedia campaign to promote the production and consumption of tilapia.

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The manufacturing sector remains a key driver of development and the Government will continue to make the necessary interventions to support innovation, growth and continued investment.

Current legislative developments include: **The Proposed Repeal of the Plants (Quarantine) Act** to be replaced by ‘**The Plants Health Act**’ and the **proposed amendments to the Agricultural Produce Act**.

## MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY, INVESTMENT AND COMMERCE

**Honourable Members**, driving business and promoting investments are critical to **Building Our Stronger Jamaica**.

One key sector is **Global Services**. The **National Global Digital Services (GDS) Strategy 2021-2025** outlines the Government’s commitment to grow a more skilled labour force for the industry, market business opportunities and create a legislative environment that can attract and expand local businesses.

To date, over 2,000 persons have been trained in the **Global Services Sector Apprenticeship Programme** to meet the supervisory level requirements and 1,700 apprentices have been enrolled to commence training in 2023.

The manufacturing sector remains a key driver of development and the Government will continue to make the necessary interventions to support innovation, growth and continued investment.

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The **National Investment Policy**, which was tabled as a White Paper in December 2022, envisions positioning Jamaica as a major player in the global investment community and seeks to drive economic growth and sustainable development.

Over the next three years, the policy will facilitate both local and foreign private investments and will result in increased clarity, certainty, predictability, and investor confidence.

The **Jamaica National Agency for Accreditation (JANAAC)** was recognized in June 2022, as an accreditation body under the United States Food and Drug Administration Accredited Third-Party Certification Program (TPP), which enables JANAAC to accredit food certification bodies to conduct FDA audits and certify food facilities.

Local and regional manufacturers and producers can now benefit from expedited entry of food exports to the United States. JANAAC is the only internationally recognized accreditation body in the English-speaking Caribbean, operating in ten CARICOM states.

During the 2023/2024, work will continue on amendments to the **Companies Act**, and the **Insolvency (Amendment) Bill**.

## **MINISTRY OF SCIENCE, ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY**

**Honourable Members**, as we Build a **Stronger Jamaica**, we recognise the value of energy security and technology adoption. The Government is updating the **National Energy Policy (2009 – 2030)** to ensure that it reflects global and local changes and positions the energy sector to become a more secure, sustainable, clean and reliable sector over the next thirty (30) years.

The updated **policy** will also provide guidance towards achieving the target of 50% renewables within the electricity sector.

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Access to technology is an imperative to our inclusive growth. The **National Broadband Initiative (NBI)** is a major activity for the Government and is geared towards deepening the penetration of affordable high-capacity networks island-wide. The initiative will establish an emergency fibre backbone and connect public educational institutions and places of safety to a Government Wide Area Network.

During the year, through a mixed use of Government and private sector fibre, the emergency fibre backbone achieved 80% completion. To date, all Municipal Corporation buildings and Parish Courts have been connected via fibre; with the exception of the Court at Duncans, Trelawny. In addition, all parish courts are connected via microwave.

The Cabinet has approved the establishment of the **National Broadband Network** as a National Development Project, the second of its kind. The implementation of this project will allow access to technology island-wide.

With the assistance of the Inter-American Development Bank, the Government developed a **Strategic Framework** to guide the introduction of electric mobility in Jamaica, which was approved by Cabinet in March 2022, along with fiscal incentives in June 2022. The **Electric Vehicle Policy** is scheduled for completion by June 2023. The Government will also be pursuing the development of the **Energy Efficiency & Conservation Guidelines** for Government buildings.

Building trust is critical as we move towards becoming a digital society. In this regard, the Regulations under the **Data Protection Act 2020** are being finalized.

Another critical pillar in building trust is strengthening cybersecurity capabilities. With funding support from United States Agency for International Development and the Inter-American Development Bank, the Government will be establishing a new **National Cybersecurity Authority** that will develop national cybersecurity policies, monitor cyber threats, provide skills training and develop human capital.



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In order to improve the regulatory framework of the petroleum sector, Legislative priorities include the **Petroleum (Amendment) Bill** and the **Petroleum (Downstream Activities) Bill**.

### MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND FOREIGN TRADE

**Honourable Members**, during 2022/2023, the Government facilitated Royal, State and Official visits, as well as other bilateral encounters, resulting in the strengthening of relations with the relevant countries, among them the United Kingdom, and the Republics of India, Rwanda, and Namibia.

The Government continues to facilitate grants and in-kind assistance to Jamaica, particularly in the priority areas of climate change, security, cyber security, gender equality, energy, trade and social investment.

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Later this year, Jamaica will also assume the Chairmanship of the CARICOM Council on Foreign and Community Relations for the period May 2023 to May 2024.

In 2023/2024, the Government will complete the **Action Plan** to implement the **National Diaspora Policy**, review the **Foreign Trade Policy Action Plan** and complete legislative support of the **Work Plan for Anti-Money Laundering, Countering the Financing of Terrorism and Countering the Financing of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction**.

We will also continue to focus on leveraging Jamaica's international relationships at the bilateral, regional, and multi-

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lateral levels, to secure support for Jamaica's social and economic development objectives.

### **MINISTRY OF JUSTICE**

**Honourable Members**, the Government, will continue to focus on alternative justice services through the recently established **Social Justice Division**.

The Government will continue to deliver services in the areas of Legal Aid, Expungement of Criminal Records, Minister's Marriage Licences, and the processing of applications for persons to be appointed as Justices of the Peace.

During 2022/2023, the Legal Aid Council provided legal representation for more than three thousand (3,000) marginalised persons islandwide, and, six hundred and forty (640) persons benefited from legal advice via the Council's Mobile Justice Units.

In 2022/2023 the **Restorative Justice Programme** facilitated two thousand five hundred and twenty-eight (2,528) referrals, which resulted in most being successfully completed. The projection is to sensitise 50% of High Schools and up to 20% of the over 4,000 churches across the island in 2023/2024.

In the Parish Courts, the overall net criminal case backlog rate has been reduced to below 2%. Overall, the Courts are reducing delays at every level in the delivery of justice.

Infrastructural improvement of the Courts has started and will continue. Through the use of public-private partnerships, new Court Houses will be built within the next three to six years in Manchester, St. Ann, St. James, Trelawny and St. Catherine.

Legislative priorities for 2023/2024 include the Mediation Bill, the Notaries Public Act to be repealed and replaced, and further amendments to the Criminal Records (Rehabilitation of Offenders) Act commonly referred to as the Expungement Act.

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### **MINISTRY OF LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS**

**Honourable Members**, the Government is moving forward to transition Jamaica to a Republic.

The Constitutional Reform work will be assisted by a high-level Constitutional Reform Committee that will play an advisory and oversight role.

The new Bail Bill, which is now being reviewed by a Joint Select Committee of the Houses of Parliament, will provide an improved legislative framework for bail when passed into law, and will assist in the fight against crime.

Legislative teams have been established in all Ministries, to work collaboratively with the Ministry of Legal and Constitutional Affairs, to enhance the quality and pace of legislative reform across Government.

### **MINISTRY OF CULTURE, GENDER, ENTERTAINMENT AND SPORT**

**Honourable Members**, as a nation of innovative and talented people, it is important for us to provide the necessary policy support for our people who are generating increased sustainable value from our creative sector. The Government has, therefore, engaged an actuarial consulting firm to assist with the tender process to provide Group Health and Life Insurance for registered practitioners in the entertainment, cultural and creative industries.

The Government collaborated with the Jamaica Amateur Athletics Association to successfully host the 49th Caribbean Free Trade Association Athletics Championships during April 2022, the first regional meet in the Caribbean since the pandemic. Twenty-six (26) countries participated, with Jamaica finishing at the top of the medal table with 45 gold, 29 silver and 18 bronze - a total of 92 medals.

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The success of our junior athletes at the CARIFTA Games was matched by the performances of our senior athletes at the World Championships in Eugene, Oregon, where Jamaica placed third on the medal table with two gold, seven silver and one bronze medal. This was highlighted by another 1-2-3 sweep by our outstanding female 100m sprinters.

Our Reggae Girls qualified for the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup in Australia/New Zealand.

The Jamaica National Sport Registry will be launched to provide a framework to strategically support the priorities of the National Sport Policy for the coordinated development of sport and to promote opportunities for economic development and prosperity through sport.

“The success of our junior athletes at the CARIFTA Games was matched by the performances of our senior athletes at the World Championships in Eugene, Oregon, where Jamaica placed third on the medal table with two gold, seven silver and one bronze medal.”

The Government continues its focus on addressing gender-based violence. A third Government of Jamaica shelter will be renovated and retrofitted to become fully operational and provide a confidential and safe space for female victims/survivors of gender-based violence in the western region by December 2023.

Consequent on Parliamentary approval of the amendments to the **Firearms Act**, drafting instructions have been issued for further amendments to be made to the **Domestic Violence (Amendment) Act**, based on inputs provided by the Ministry of National Security.

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### **MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Honourable Members**, in collaboration with the **Jamaica Social Investment Fund**, three fire stations were constructed at Barnett Street in St. James, Yallahs in St. Thomas, and Port Maria in St. Mary. Preparatory work continues on construction and upgrade of other fire stations around the island.

The **National Solid Waste Management Authority (NSWMA)** purchased 50 new garbage compactor units and repaired 34 disabled units, thereby increasing its collection capacity. The Government will start the procurement process for another 50 compactors, that will include smaller trucks with the ability to traverse narrow community roads. As we continue to transition to better systems, this year the NSWMA will develop its capacity to transition to monitoring, regulating and enforcing proper waste management. This will include the revision of fines and offences to make them more relevant as deterrents.

Under **Social Protection**, twenty-five (25) indigent housing units were completed in St. Mary, Westmoreland, Hanover, and Kingston. Night shelters in Ocho Rios and Falmouth are close to completion.

Several rural water supply upgrades were completed:

- Penn/Lucky Valley and Watermount, St. Catherine,
- Top Aberdeen, St. Elizabeth,
- Bangor Ridge, Portland and;
- Salt River, Clarendon.

**Honourable Members**, investing in **Disaster Risk Management** saves lives and protects our development gains. The Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management completed several targets to support the **Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management Programme**.

Legislative priorities for 2023/2024 include the **Human Services Bill**, the **National Solid Waste Management (Validation, Indemnification, and Amendment Bill)**, the **Local Governance**

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**(Amendment) Bill and The Counties and Parishes (Amendment) Bill.**

### MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND MINING

**Honourable Members**, effective February 1, 2023, the Government took a major step forward in bringing order to our roads by implementing the new Road Traffic Act and Regulations.

Too many lives are being lost on our roads due to bad driving practices. The purpose of the Amendments is to ensure that persons in charge of vehicles operate in a responsible manner so that all road users can be safe.

As part of the Government's thrust towards becoming a digital society, the **Jamaican Mining Cadastre** was fully operationalized in 2022/2023. Funding was provided by the European Union under the **Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States/European Union Minerals Development Programme** and the project was implemented in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme.

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As part of its thrust towards reducing its energy bill and being good environmental stewards, the Government is incrementally procuring public passenger vehicles which use alternative fuel, and has started testing electric vehicles.

As part of its thrust towards reducing its energy bill and being good environmental stewards, the Government is incrementally procuring public passenger vehicles which use alternative fuel, and has started testing electric vehicles. It is the intention of the Government to rapidly expand its fleet with electric buses.

Priority legislation for 2023/2024 comprises the **Amendment to the Civil Aviation Act**, and the **Shipping (Pollution Prevention, Response, Liability and Compensation) Bill**.

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### MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY

With the coming into effect of the **Disabilities Act** on February 14, 2022, greater strides will be made within our country towards enabling accessibility for persons with disabilities. In that regard, training programmes at the Abilities Foundation were expanded. Further, in 2023/2024, the new **Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities** will be fully staffed, and the **Disabilities Rights Tribunal** will be appointed.

In June 2022, benefits under the **PATH Programme** were increased by 18.3% and in August 2022, school-age children received back-to-school grants of \$13,500 each. In addition, in September 2022, approximately 12,000 social pensioners and 52,303 National Insurance Scheme pensioners received one-off grants of \$10,000.

During 2023/2024, in keeping with the Government's commitment to our senior citizens, a strategic review of the **National Council for Senior Citizens** will be conducted to ensure that the Council is "fit for purpose" and equipped to fulfil its mandate.

The sustainability of the **National Insurance Scheme** continues to be of paramount importance and the actuarial review as at 2019 was completed in December 2022.

The recommendations are being reviewed and will be presented to the Cabinet for tabling in Parliament. The implementation of a series of reform measures that began in 2018, has resulted in a net surplus in the National Insurance Fund's operations and an overall improvement in its long-term sustainability.

As at December 2022, the unaudited Net Asset Value of the Fund stood at approximately \$156 billion representing a year-over-year growth rate of approximately 16%. In 2023/2024 focus will be placed on the reform of the fund with the aim of establishing a more robust organisational structure and investment policy.

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The Legislative priorities for 2023/2024 will include: **The Occupational Safety and Health Bill, Amendments to the Employment Agencies Regulation Act, and The Minimum Wage Act, National Minimum Wage Order and Employment Agencies Regulation Act.**

## **CONCLUSION**

**Honourable Members**, we as a country have done remarkably well navigating the unprecedented global challenges of the past three years. Let us now **consolidate our strong recovery and reignite our decade of growth, peace and prosperity.**

- Let us create a future reflecting our many triumphs;
- Let us create a future celebrating our creative and talented people;
- Let us create a future achieving our goals and aspirations;
- Let us create a future where each and every one of us takes responsibility for our sustainable development;
- Let us create a future deserving of generations to come;
- Let us create a future where ***“Jamaica may, under God, increase in beauty, fellowship and prosperity and play her part in advancing the welfare of the whole human race”.***





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