



STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT

by

**Dr. the Most Honourable Andrew Holness, ON, PC, MP,
Prime Minister**

on the Aftermath of Hurricane Melissa

**On Tuesday, January 28, 2025
At 2:00 pm**

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable House,

On Tuesday, October 28, Jamaica endured one of the most punishing natural disasters in our modern history. Hurricane Melissa made landfall near New Hope in Westmoreland as a Category 5 hurricane with sustained winds of 185 mph and a minimum central pressure of 892 millibars.

Madam Speaker, experts have described Melissa as being “at the very edge of what is physically possible” in the Atlantic Ocean — a storm powered by record sea temperatures and near-perfect atmospheric conditions. Its force was so immense that seismographs hundreds of miles away registered its passage.

Melissa is the first ever Category 5 hurricane to make a direct hit on Jamaica, surpassing the previous benchmark set by Hurricane Gilbert in 1988, which made landfall as a Category 3.

Melissa crossed the island with catastrophic winds and torrential rain, inflicting widespread damage—most severely across St. Elizabeth, Westmoreland, Hanover, Manchester, St. James, Trelawny, and St. Ann. We mourn lives lost, and we stand with the thousands of Jamaicans who have lost homes, farms, businesses, and livelihoods. I extend condolences to the bereaved, and I salute our first responders, public servants, local authorities, community leaders, and volunteers who have worked around the clock to protect life and begin the recovery.

In keeping with the Disaster Risk Management Act, on October 29 the Government formally declared the entire island a disaster area, giving the Government the powers needed to prioritise life-saving actions, open emergency funding channels, and coordinate an all-of-government response. We also issued mandatory evacuation orders for specified high-risk communities in the immediate lead-up to landfall. These decisions were taken on the advice of the Meteorological Service and ODPEM to save lives and expedite the restoration phases now under way.

On October 30, following updated guidance from the Met Service and ODPEM, the Government issued the national “all clear” to commence full restoration and damage assessment activities. Non-essential government offices reopened the following day with special provisions for impacted public-sector employees, and ministries activated sector-specific recovery plans.

Preparation Measures Undertaken Before the Storm

Madam Speaker, it is important for the Jamaican people to know that long before Hurricane Melissa made landfall, the Government had moved decisively to prepare the nation for its arrival. From the moment the Meteorological Service signalled the potential for rapid intensification and a direct strike, we activated all national response protocols and placed the country on high alert.

Early warnings were issued by ODPEM and the Met Service; emergency communication channels were engaged to deliver timely, accurate updates; and as forecasts worsened, we escalated our preparedness posture and public advisories.

To ensure legal authority for swift national action, the Government issued an Order under the Disaster Risk Management Act declaring Jamaica a “threatened area,” and a complementary Order under the Trade Act to prevent price gouging and protect consumers during the state of emergency preparedness.

Madam Speaker, the Government had also allocated \$1.5 million to each constituency prior to the passage of the hurricane.

Hundreds of designated shelters—schools, churches, and community centres—were opened and manned by trained personnel, with relief supplies pre-positioned in the most vulnerable parishes.

Evacuation guidance was issued for high-risk coastal, riverine, and landslide-prone communities, supported by social workers, local disaster coordinators, and security forces to assist relocation where needed.

Critical systems were secured: airports, seaports, and utilities activated disaster response teams; ministries established command posts. The National Works Agency undertook urgent drain clearing, bridge inspections, and slope assessments in known hazard areas, while the National Water Commission worked to protect treatment infrastructure and urged citizens to store water safely. The Jamaica Public Service, telecommunications providers, and health facilities implemented emergency protocols and prepared backup generation and response crews.

The security forces—JDF and JCF—were placed on heightened readiness to support rescues, maintain order, and assist local authorities.

Simultaneously, the Government engaged the food, fuel, and transport sectors to safeguard supply chains, while the Fair Trading Commission and consumer agencies monitored markets to uphold the zero-tolerance stance against exploitation.

Public communication remained constant and transparent, with frequent press briefings and emergency bulletins emphasising vigilance, community support, and protection of the vulnerable.

Madam Speaker, the Government approached this storm with seriousness, urgency, and unity of purpose—to protect life, preserve order, and prepare our people for the fury of a Category Five hurricane. Though the damage was immense, our proactive measures ensured Jamaica faced

Hurricane Melissa with the greatest possible state of readiness to safeguard our people and enable a rapid transition into relief and recovery.

Phases of Response

Madam Speaker, as we move forward from the initial shock of Hurricane Melissa, the Government's response is being guided by a clear, structured, and disciplined framework. We are pursuing recovery through four overlapping phases: immediate relief, emergency relief, stabilisation and recovery, and long-term reconstruction and rebuilding. Each phase carries distinct priorities, but all share a single purpose—protecting the lives and dignity of our people and restoring our nation with greater resilience than before.

The immediate relief phase began even before the hurricane had fully passed. In those critical hours, our priority was to safeguard life and maintain essential order. Search-and-rescue operations were initiated in affected communities as soon as it was safe for teams to deploy. Emergency shelters continued to operate at scale, ensuring food, potable water, and medical services for displaced families. Our uniformed services secured critical infrastructure, while ODPPEM, municipal disaster teams, and volunteers coordinated life-saving interventions.

This phase focused on urgent humanitarian needs, clearing access routes for emergency response personnel, and stabilising high-risk areas to prevent secondary loss of life.

Then, we entered the emergency relief phase, in which we are now. This phase includes clearing and reopening primary road corridors, accelerating the restoration of power and water systems, and expanding mobile and community-level distribution of relief supplies. We have also mobilised medical outreach to shelters and affected districts, while ensuring psychosocial support for children, elderly persons, and vulnerable families. International humanitarian assistance, including airlifted supplies and technical teams, began to arrive and integrate with Jamaica's national response system during this stage. The central aim of this phase is to relieve suffering, re-establish safe access to communities, and stabilise essential services across the island.

The next phase will be the stabilisation and recovery phase, which focuses on helping families and businesses regain a sense of normalcy and restoring the foundations of daily life.

This includes bringing schools back into operation as quickly as safety permits, providing targeted support to small businesses and farmers, restoring public transportation routes, and accelerating the repair of government buildings and community facilities. Households whose homes are habitable will begin returning from shelters, while those whose properties were destroyed or severely damaged will receive temporary housing assistance and construction support. Utilities will complete permanent repairs, and municipal authorities will operationalise debris removal and

rehabilitation programmes. This stage is about rebuilding confidence, re-establishing livelihoods, and supporting Jamaicans as they resume work, school, and community life.

Finally, Madam Speaker, the reconstruction and rebuilding phase will ensure that Jamaica emerges stronger than before. This phase will see major capital works begin to rebuild and climate-proof critical infrastructure, including roads, bridges, water treatment plants, health facilities, and power and telecommunications networks. Housing reconstruction will prioritise stronger building standards, improved drainage, land-use guidance, and support for formal construction.

We will partner with international development institutions, private-sector actors, and regional allies to secure financing and technical expertise. Throughout this phase, we will apply the principle of “building forward better,” ensuring that public investments not only replace what was lost, but reduce risk and improve resilience against future climate-related events. This is the phase where we overcome the adversity caused by this shock and come out ahead, with modernised frameworks and long-term planning for better resilience against the future shocks that will inevitably come.

Building for Resilience in the face of Climate Change

Madam Speaker, Hurricane Melissa was not only a national tragedy — it was a warning. The storm’s 13-foot storm surge on our western coastline and up to 30 inches of rain in the central highlands revealed the devastating power of a new climate reality. The era of “once-in-a-generation” hurricanes is over. Climate science confirms that storms are now intensifying faster, moving slower, and carrying more rain than ever before — emerging from warmer oceans and testing the limits of our infrastructure and preparedness.

The combination of wind, storm surge, and rain as we saw with Melissa, creates cascading failures of infrastructure that storm scientists call “*a glimpse into the Caribbean’s future.*”

At the same time, Jamaica’s vulnerability is not limited to hurricanes. We are an island in a seismically active region, and our communities remain at risk of earthquakes and associated hazards such as tsunamis. The multi-hazard risk profile means that our investment in resilience must span across sectors and hazards, rather than being narrowly focused.

But Madam Speaker, nature’s power does not have to determine our fate. Resilience is not beyond us — it is within our control. Regional experience from the not-too-distant past is illustrative. Consider the contrast between two earthquakes that occurred in 2010: in Haiti on January 12 (magnitude 7.0) and in Chile on February 27 (magnitude 8.8). The earthquake in Chile was more powerful, yet it resulted in fewer than 800 deaths, whereas Haiti’s quake caused well over 300,000 fatalities and the near collapse of its infrastructure.

What this difference reveals is not simply geography or tectonic power: it is the presence or absence of resilient infrastructure, building standards, institutional preparedness and resource capacity.

That is the lesson for Jamaica. Every repaired bridge, re-roofed home, and rebuilt road must be designed for the storms of tomorrow, not the storms of yesterday. Our hospitals, water systems, and power grids must be restored and upgraded to higher standards; our coastlines strengthened through mangrove, reef, and natural defences; our agriculture diversified and climate-smart.

Investing in resilience is a strategic necessity. For a country whose GDP is closely tied to tourism, agriculture, and natural resources, a single large-scale disaster can wipe out years of progress and impose long-term fiscal and social costs. By building better now, we reduce future repair bills, shorten economic downtime, protect lives, and preserve our national development trajectory.

Also, Madam Speaker, let me remind all Jamaicans that resilience is not solely the job of government—it is a national project that requires every community member, every business, every agency and every parish to participate. Because in a world where storms will become stronger, quicker and more unpredictable, our greatest defence is preparedness.

Economic and Fiscal Impact

Madam Speaker, it is clear that Hurricane Melissa will have a profound economic impact on our country. The storm struck the heart of Jamaica's productive belt. It tore through our breadbasket parish of St. Elizabeth; it disrupted our tourism corridor stretching from Westmoreland through St. James and into Trelawny and St. Ann; and it inflicted heavy damage on housing, community infrastructure, commercial operations, and public utilities across multiple parishes. Thousands of households now face the loss of homes, crops, equipment, and small enterprises. This is not only a humanitarian crisis—it is a shock to livelihoods, incomes, and local economies.

Madam Speaker, detailed damage assessments are still underway, but I wish to share very preliminary, high-level estimates only to illustrate the scale of the devastation. Based on benchmarks from comparable regional disasters, physical damage to housing, commercial buildings, roads, electricity, water, and telecommunications infrastructure is estimated between US \$6 and 7 billion—equivalent to roughly 28 to 32 percent of Fiscal Year 2024/2025 GDP.¹

We anticipate a temporary slowdown in economic activity, particularly in the most affected parishes. Agricultural output will decline in the short term as farmers replant and livestock operations recover. The tourism sector, while resilient and working swiftly to reopen, will require targeted support to restore capacity and confidence. Small and medium-sized enterprises—especially those in retail, manufacturing, services, and the creative industries—have sustained

¹ Roughly JMD 3.5 trillion (3.495) or USD 21.7 billion

significant losses and will need liquidity and recovery support to rebuild inventories, repair facilities, and restart operations.

At the same time, supply chains for food, construction materials, and consumer goods are being actively restored, though some market disruptions may occur in the immediate weeks ahead. A very preliminary estimate suggests that short-term economic output could decline by 8 to 13 percent.

Madam Speaker, this means that revenues will decline as economic activity slows, even as expenditures must increase to finance emergency relief, recovery, and reconstruction. This will place pressure on our fiscal targets.

As we did during the COVID-19 pandemic, my Administration will act responsibly, transparently, and with foresight to protect lives and livelihoods while preserving Jamaica's hard-won macroeconomic stability. In this regard, it will become necessary to activate the lawful provisions under Section 48C of the Financial Administration and Audit Act, which allow for the temporary suspension of the fiscal rules in circumstances of national emergency or extraordinary economic disruption.

We anticipate a rise in the debt-to-GDP ratio in the short to medium term as resources are channelled into rebuilding for resilience.

Yet Jamaica's record of disciplined fiscal management provides the credibility and space to respond decisively.

Our focus remains clear—to restore livelihoods, protect the vulnerable, and ensure that Jamaica emerges from this crisis stronger, more resilient, and more competitive than before. However, Madam Speaker, it is also important to state that restoring economic activity must proceed alongside relief and restoration efforts. This is not insensitivity—it is a necessity. Reviving production, reopening tourism, and restarting commerce are essential to restore incomes, rebuild confidence, and mitigate the wider economic shock. Recovery is not just about clearing debris—it is about getting Jamaicans back to work and our economy back on its feet.

We are already activating the fiscal and financial instruments available to us and engaging our international development partners to support the recovery effort. Cash-flow support to households, emergency social programmes, concessional financing, and targeted industry assistance will form part of a responsible and disciplined economic response.

The Ministry of Finance and the Public Service will bring further details to this Honourable House as assessments are completed and funding packages finalised with our multilateral and bilateral partners.

Situation Update by Sector

Road Infrastructure and National Works

Madam Speaker, Melissa dealt a severe blow to our national road network and public infrastructure. The National Works Agency reports that 151 roads were impacted island-wide, with landslides, fallen trees, flooded corridors, scoured pavements, and breakaways rendering many communities temporarily inaccessible. At peak, 134 roads were blocked, particularly across the western parishes most directly in the storm's path.

I am pleased to report that, through urgent mobilisation of national and private resources, more than one-third of affected corridors have already been cleared or reopened to at least single-lane access.

Priority has been given to corridors serving hospitals, airports, seaports, water treatment plants, and emergency shelters, ensuring that life-saving assistance and relief supplies can reach communities swiftly.

This recovery effort is a testament to the determination and discipline of our technical teams and the spirit of Jamaican partnership. The NWA has deployed 14 parish-level technical field teams, supported by engineers and administrative staff, and working hand-in-glove with the Jamaica Public Service, National Water Commission, ODPEM, and the security forces. We have also activated the full capacity of Jamaica's contracting ecosystem. Major contractors—including our SPARK project partners, CHEC and local road-maintenance firms—are assisting with heavy equipment. The private sector has stepped up: bauxite companies, housing developers, and other equipment owners have volunteered machinery and operating time. Community members armed with chainsaws and hand tools have joined the effort, and we express our gratitude for the assisting with clearance in some locations. This is the Jamaican spirit at work.

Simultaneously, technical teams are assessing bridges, river-training structures, retaining walls, coastal revetments, gully systems—including Sandy Gully and the north- and south-coast gullies—and the national traffic-signal network. Once access is restored across all affected communities, we will transition from emergency access to full road rehabilitation, including surface reconstruction where roads have been washed out or undermined. Restoring drivability on major corridors and designing long-term resilient solutions will form a core part of our national reconstruction plan.

Housing and Shelter

Madam Speaker, Melissa has caused extensive damage to the nation's housing stock, particularly in the western parishes. Leveraging our national geospatial intelligence capacity, the Government has, for the first time in our history, executed a rapid, high-resolution national housing damage assessment. This effort, coordinated through the National Spatial Data Management Branch and

supported by international technology partners, analysed more than 428,000 buildings across Jamaica.

Satellite data and drone verification indicate that approximately 116,000 structures sustained severe or catastrophic damage, concentrated in Westmoreland, St. Elizabeth, and Manchester. These findings are now guiding targeted relief and reconstruction planning across affected communities.

Madam Speaker, we are now transitioning from emergency sheltering to stabilisation and repair. The Ministry is conducting field verification in priority communities, with housing support teams working alongside the JDF, ODPEM, and local authorities. As access is restored to additional communities in the west, we will complete our beneficiary verification, accelerate roofing support, and deploy building materials, tarpaulins, and rapid-repair crews to ensure safety and habitability. The data now being integrated into the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment will shape a resilient housing and building recovery programme. Minister Montague has already convened a Technical Working Group to spearhead that programme.

With regard to immediate housing recovery efforts, Madam Speaker, I will deliver further announcements later on in my statement.

Electricity (Power)

Restoration of power is proceeding in phases, prioritising hospitals, water plants, communications backbones, and dense residential zones. The “all clear for restoration of utility services” enabled JPS and independent contractors to enter the field at scale, while the Ministry with responsibility for Energy is coordinating grid stabilisation and resolving localised issues such as low voltage on restored feeders.

Yesterday, JPS would have given an update on the status of electricity restoration. The government has given them strategic direction to prioritise restoration of large commercial and urban centres in addition to the critical public facilities. Moreover, they have been asked, in their grid restoration efforts, to explore relocating the grid underground wherever feasible.

We will continue to update the country on parish-by-parish re-energisation percentages as the network is repaired and rebuilt.

Petrojam has maintained fuel supply continuity despite severe flooding at its Montego Bay terminal. Cleanup is complete, and structural and electrical assessments are underway before resuming western loading. In the interim, all tanker loading is being conducted through Kingston, with extended operating hours to ensure uninterrupted national fuel availability.

Water and Wastewater System Status and Recovery

Madam Speaker, Hurricane Melissa has significantly disrupted water supply across the country, with the operational capacity of the National Water Commission deeply affected by power outages, blocked intakes, turbidity, landslides, and damage to electro-mechanical systems.

Several key NWC offices—including those in Mandeville, Santa Cruz, Bogue, Falmouth, and Morant Bay—have been forced to close due to flooding, structural damage, and loss of access, while others continue to operate under constrained conditions. In total, more than 631 water systems were initially affected island-wide, with western parishes experiencing the most severe disruption as electricity supply remains limited.

Supply restoration has been heavily reliant on generator power where grid access remains unavailable, which means intermittent service in some areas. Even so, progress continues. Approximately 66% of NWC customers now have supply restored, with St. Catherine and St. Thomas achieving restoration rates above 87% and 84%, respectively. The NWC has deployed around 40 generators to potable water facilities and 8 to wastewater plants, and has supplemented this capacity through private rental arrangements to stabilise service delivery. Trucked water is being used to support critical institutions, including hospitals, security installations, and shelters. In the Western Division, generator deployment has restored service to key population centres and critical facilities. In Trelawny, communities including Falmouth, Stonebrook, Florence Hall, and Coral Spring are receiving water. In Hanover, supply has been restored to Noel Holmes Hospital and nearby communities including Negril's Norman Manley Boulevard and West End. In Westmoreland, emergency supply now reaches Savanna-la-Mar Hospital and communities such as Petersfield, Frome, and Darliston. In St. Elizabeth, systems supporting Black River, Middle Quarters, and adjoining areas are operating, and the Loading Bay is active to facilitate water trucking. In St. James, repairs are underway on a critical pipeline at the Great River intake that was washed away, and temporary supply has been restored through generator support at Catherine Mount and Reading Spring.

In Kingston and St. Andrew, power has been restored to the Constant Spring and Mona Water Treatment Plants, restoring supply to most Corporate Area communities.

In Portland, systems such as Grants Level, Fruitful Vale, Packy River, Turtle Crawle, and Hope Bay have begun distribution, though turbidity remains a challenge. In Manchester, key wells and pumping stations have resumed operation, with temporary trucking ensuring supply to the Mandeville Regional Hospital.

Supporting agencies are actively engaged. The Rural Water Supply Limited is conducting assessments in rural systems and working to clear groundwater recharge systems. The Water Resources Authority is monitoring flood-warning stations and prioritising phased restoration. At

Soapberry, the primary wastewater treatment facility continues operations with generator support while repairs advance in collaboration with the electricity utility.

TRUCKING OF WATER

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to inform this Honourable House and the people of Jamaica that all Members of Parliament will be allocated the following sums for the trucking of water:

- \$2 Million to the following constituencies most affected by the hurricane:

- a) Westmoreland
- b) Hanover
- c) St. James
- d) St. Elizabeth
- e) Manchester
- f) Trelawny

- \$1.5 Million to selected constituencies in the following parishes:

- a) St. Catherine
- b) St. Andrew
- c) Clarendon
- d) St. Ann

Funds to be allocated as follows:

- (i) West Central St. Catherine
- (ii) North Central St. Catherine
- (iii) North Eastern St. Catherine
- (iv) North Western St. Catherine
- (v) East Rural St. Andrew
- (vi) West Rural St. Andrew
- (vii) North Central Clarendon
- (viii) North Clarendon
- (ix) North Western Clarendon
- (x) South Eastern St. Ann
- (xi) South Western St. Ann

- \$1 Million to constituencies in the following parishes:

- a) Clarendon (excluding North, North Central, and North Western Clarendon)
- b) St. Ann (excluding South Eastern and South Western St. Ann)

- c) St. Catherine (excluding West Central, North Central, North Eastern, and North Western St. Catherine)
- d) Kingston and St. Andrew (excluding East and West Rural St. Andrew)
- e) St. Thomas
- f) Portland
- g) St. Mary

We are also going to be distributing between four and five thousand water tanks in the most affected communities. There will be special attention to schools, families with young children, and the elderly.

Telecommunications

After the “all clear” utility crews mounted full field activities with cross-sector coordination, to restore poles, repair fibre, and power cell sites. Public Wi-Fi nodes and critical government communications are being prioritised in affected town centres.

To restore nationwide connectivity, 600 Starlink terminals are being deployed to first responders, government facilities, NGOs, MPs, and Councillors in hardest-hit communities. Restoration of community Wi-Fi is being prioritized across western parishes. Flow and Digicel continue rapid recovery, with up to 86% service restoration reported in some categories. Additional spectrum was allocated to carriers to accelerate repairs.

The Government will also deploy roving mobile teams with starlink connectivity and charging stations to affected communities and urban spaces to allow residents to make contact with loved ones or make short urgent calls.

Transportation

The Jamaica Urban Transit Company infrastructure and fleet remain mostly intact, with only minor structural damage and limited operational disruption reported. The Portmore Depot experienced minor damage to the perimeter wall and electrical systems; Spanish Town saw minimal impact, and Rockfort had minor ceiling damage.

The Montego-bay depot had significant infrastructure damage, with 4 buses sustaining severe damage. Fuel dispensing has been halted, as electric pumps are inoperable; and the depot has no generator. 10 buses from the Montego-bay fleet can be mobilized once minimal power is restored to the facility. Additionally, some drivers are marooned in their communities due to blocked access roads and poor communication.

Route clearances continue in partnership with the NWA, and the reactivation of CNG supply in collaboration with Excelerate Energy was completed on October 31, 2025. JUTC has been actively supporting national disaster operations, transporting security forces, health workers, and

vulnerable groups free of cost. An impact assessment of Rural School Bus Service is underway, in consultation with the Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth and Information.

Most Transport Authority offices in Kingston and across the island remain operational with limited damage; however, western facilities—including Freeport and Savanna-la-Mar depots—suffered extensive damage and remain offline. Flooding, roof loss, and damaged fleet vehicles pose security risks, and restoration work is underway.

The Island Traffic Authority has seen major damage to hubs in Hanover, Trelawny, St. Elizabeth, and Westmoreland, including collapsed roofs, structural failure, and impassable access roads. Temporary containerized offices will be deployed where buildings are unsafe, and repairs—including reinforced concrete roofing—will be initiated.

Motorists in severely impacted parishes will receive accommodation for fitness compliance.

Railway facilities sustained minimal structural damage. The Corporation is conducting internal assessments of rolling stock and railway infrastructure. If the Bog Walk Gorge remains impassable, railway assets may be mobilized to support passenger and goods movement along impacted corridors.

Despite infrastructure damage, air navigation services have been fully restored nationwide. Radar and air-to-ground communication have been re-established with support from Aerotel. A 24/7 landing-permit operation is in effect for humanitarian flights, and monitoring of unmanned aircraft (drones) is being strengthened to protect aviation safety.

All airports reopened within 48 hours of the storm. Relief flights began on October 29 and commercial passenger services resumed by October 30. From October 29 to November 2, airports processed 350 flights, including 162 commercial passenger flights and 117 relief and military missions. Domestic aerodromes, including Negril and Tinson Pen, are also operational.

Public and Mental Health Response and Restoration

Madam Speaker, the health system has been tested in an extraordinary way by Hurricane Melissa. Even before landfall, the Ministry of Health and Wellness activated its Health Emergency Operations Centre and deployed response teams across all regions. Hospitals transitioned to emergency-only services, and health centres remained open to support communities until safety conditions required closure. This early preparedness allowed the health sector to move quickly into its emergency response posture once the storm passed.

The hurricane has caused severe damage to several major health facilities, particularly across the western end of the island. The Black River Hospital in St. Elizabeth—our only Type C hospital in

that parish—suffered catastrophic roof loss, structural failure, and complete utility disruption, requiring the evacuation of 71 patients to Mandeville and May Pen.

Falmouth Hospital in Trelawny lost most of its roofing and suffered extensive flooding, compromising electrical systems and diagnostic and clinical equipment. Cornwall Regional Hospital, our key Type A facility in Western Jamaica, lost more than half of its effective capacity, including severe damage to temporary wards and the Accident and Emergency Department. Noel Holmes Hospital and Savanna-la-Mar Hospital similarly sustained serious roof and water damage, with power and water outages affecting patient services. These facilities are currently providing limited emergency services while staff continue rapid discharge where clinically safe and assess equipment integrity for restoration.

In primary care, the picture reflects the scale of national disruption. Southeast Jamaica and approximately two-thirds of facilities in the northeast and southern regions are expected to have full operation of health centres within days, the western region—where impact was most severe—will require a longer recovery window.

Several health centres have suffered significant structural damage, and temporary clinical spaces are being arranged to ensure continuity of care, especially for maternal health, chronic disease management, and child-health services.

To stabilise service delivery, the Ministry will establish temporary field hospitals in the hardest-hit parishes. These will provide emergency, inpatient, and outpatient capacity while permanent facilities are repaired. The Ministry is also mobilising medical supplies, pharmaceuticals, oxygen, and essential equipment to critical sites, while conducting urgent testing and certification of hospital equipment to ensure safe reuse.

Beyond clinical services, we are aggressively addressing post-disaster public-health risks. Flooding, stagnant water, and sanitation disruption create favourable conditions for mosquito breeding and the spread of water-borne and vector-borne diseases.

Public health teams are deploying enhanced vector-control operations, including larvicide distribution to 120,000 households, fogging campaigns supported by private pest-control contractors, and expanded field staff. Water-quality monitoring is being intensified at all treatment plants, with chlorination and turbidity testing to protect the population from gastroenteritis, hepatitis A, and other water-related illnesses. Food-safety teams are inspecting facilities and supervising safe disposal of spoiled food and livestock carcasses. Sanitation and excreta-management operations are being strengthened to protect communities and reduce disease transmission.

Madam Speaker, beyond the physical destruction and the economic disruption, the toll of Hurricane Melissa on the hearts and minds of our people has been profound. Families huddled together as winds howled and floodwaters rose. Parents worked desperately to shield their children from fear. Elderly Jamaicans, some recalling storms of decades past, relived deep anxieties as they once again faced nature's fury.

Many of our brothers and sisters have endured the unimaginable: the loss of loved ones, the loss of homes built over a lifetime, and the loss of livelihoods that sustained entire families. There are thousands who, even now, are sleeping in shelters or with relatives, searching for stability in a world abruptly turned upside down.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, the state must also address the emotional and psychological burden of this disaster. The Ministry has activated mental-health and psychosocial support programmes across affected parishes. Mental-health clinicians are being deployed into communities and shelters, a dedicated helpline is operational, and international partners are supporting additional specialist capacity. Churches, schools, community groups, and social-service organisations will also be embraced as partners in this mission of care and recovery.

Madam Speaker, this moment is about healing the spirit of a nation. Recovery will not be measured in bricks and mortar, but in the confidence and emotional well-being of our people as well.

And I say this to the population: No Jamaican must face this burden alone, and no one should feel ashamed to ask for help. In this period of recovery, we ask every Jamaican to look out not only for physical needs, but for emotional ones—to check on neighbours, comfort the elderly, speak with our youth, and extend kindness wherever it is needed.

Importantly, we are mindful that those who care for our people must themselves be supported. Over 7,000 health-care workers have been directly impacted—many losing homes and personal possessions. The Government has therefore prioritised a welfare and support package for health personnel to ensure they can continue to serve even as they rebuild their own lives. Additional staffing hours, emergency transportation, and surge personnel for field duties are also being mobilised to meet increased demand in affected parishes.

Education Impact

Madam Speaker, I now turn to the education system. Assessments are still underway, but we already know that many schools, especially in the western parishes, have been severely damaged or destroyed, and others across the island have also been affected. At present, 446 schools serving nearly 150,000 students face major disruption. We have all seen the images: roofs lost, classrooms flooded, learning tools destroyed. Many schools also face extended outages of electricity, water and internet.

The situation in Western Jamaica is particularly grave and poses a real risk of significant learning loss. Our children need their classrooms and the structure they provide. Every day out of school is a day of lost opportunity. Yet, Madam Speaker, we must also be pragmatic. The doors of many schools cannot reopen immediately. So, while we move with urgency to repair and rebuild, we must act now to resume learning through innovative and flexible arrangements so that no child is left behind.

After Hurricane Beryl, we responded swiftly, aided by the timing of the summer break. This time, we must move even faster, as Hurricane Melissa offers no such reprieve. Our focus will therefore be on three clear priorities:

1. Safe reopening where facilities permit;
2. Continuity of learning through blended, remote, and alternative sites where needed; and
3. Accelerated reconstruction to return students to permanent classrooms as soon as possible.

Madam Speaker, we successfully navigated the education system through the global pandemic and the aftermath of Hurricane Beryl. We will do so again. We will get our children learning—safely, swiftly, and in stronger, smarter schools than before.

Relief Operations and Social Support

At the peak of the emergency, approximately 15,000 Jamaicans were accommodated in official shelters. Shelters will remain open as long as needed, with food, water, medical support, and psychosocial services provided through the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MLSS), ODPED, and partners. MLSS has mobilised relief distribution and damage assessments in accessible areas; additional teams are being surged into cut-off communities as roads reopen.

Marooned Communities

Madam Speaker, specifically in relation to marooned communities, of which there are likely in excess of 30, the JDF is in the process of establishing 22 humanitarian assistance and disaster relief outposts in the following areas:

Saint Elizabeth

1. Burnt Savannah
2. New Market
3. Springfield
4. Savanna La - Mar

Westmoreland

5. Darliston

6. Lennox Bigwood
7. Bluefields
8. Bethel Town
9. Amity
10. Beeston Spring/ Thatch Valley
11. Frome
12. Roaring River
13. Content/ Glenbrook
14. Reno
15. Catadupa
Trelawny
16. Cambridge
17. Adelphi
18. Maroon Town
19. Wire fence
20. Jackson Town
21. Falmouth
22. Perth

These will serve as humanitarian bases in a “hub-and-spoke” model from which to reach other surrounding communities.

Security and Public Order Response

Madam Speaker, the national security architecture of our country has been fully mobilised in the aftermath of Hurricane Melissa. From the earliest moments of this disaster, the Jamaica Defence Force and the Jamaica Constabulary Force have stood at the front line of our national response, upholding order, saving lives, and ensuring that essential relief reaches our people. Their efforts have been heroic, and the nation owes them its deepest gratitude.

The Jamaica Defence Force moved with urgency immediately after the storm’s passage. Within hours, troops established a forward disaster-relief site at the Luana Community Centre near Black River and began clearing blocked routes—many on foot—to ensure ambulances, utility crews, and relief agencies could reach our most vulnerable communities.

The JDF has been operating continuously across affected parishes, providing search-and-rescue support, conducting aerial and ground damage assessments, and coordinating humanitarian missions by land, sea, and air.

Our soldiers themselves have suffered significant hardship. Several bases in Western Command—including Frome, Paradise Park, Montpelier, and the Black River Coast Guard Station—were

severely damaged or rendered structurally unsafe. Burke Barracks in Montego Bay sustained major damage, while facilities in Central and Eastern Commands experienced flooding, roof failures, and access challenges, including landslides cutting off Newcastle. Despite these losses, the JDF has prioritised national duty above its own recovery needs, maintaining operational tempo and supporting communities while beginning a phased plan to rebuild and strengthen its own infrastructure.

The JDF has also been central in national logistics coordination.

Working with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the Force established a major relief hub at Up Park Camp, producing and distributing more than 11,000 family care packages, delivered by both ground convoys and helicopter missions, including support from U.S. Chinook aircraft. This operation represents the highest standard of joint civil-military coordination and underscores the discipline and capacity of our armed forces.

We also recognise and appreciate the international cooperation that has strengthened our security response. Support has come from the United States Southern Command, the Government of El Salvador with 287 personnel deployed, Canada through its Operational Support Hub, the United Kingdom with an offshore patrol vessel, and regional partners including Belize, Bermuda, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Cayman Islands, which provided helicopter support. This international solidarity has significantly boosted our humanitarian and security operations.

Madam Speaker, even as the JDF has worked tirelessly in the field, the Jamaica Constabulary Force has executed its mandate to maintain public order and protect infrastructure. More than 12,000 police officers were mobilised across all divisions before the storm's arrival, with incident command centres activated and integrated into national and parish emergency operations. Following landfall, the JCF immediately transitioned to securing communities, protecting hospitals, water facilities, Petrojam, and our airports, and escorting relief supplies into affected zones. I am pleased to report that, due to early planning, strong community cooperation, and visible police presence, we have had no major looting or disorder incidents to date.

The JCF itself has endured widespread damage, with 125 police facilities affected island-wide, including 74 with severe structural impacts. Communication infrastructure was also disrupted, including two major communication sites, though restoration is well advanced, supported by generators and Starlink units deployed to critical nodes.

Despite this damage, the Force remains fully operational, executing 24-hour deployments in the hardest-hit parishes, conducting joint search-and-recovery missions with the JDF and Fire Brigade, and providing security escorts for essential utility and relief personnel.

We recognise that our security forces are carrying a heavy burden. Many members of the JDF and JCF are themselves impacted by this storm—having experienced personal loss of homes and property—yet they continue to serve the nation with unwavering dedication. The Government will ensure that the welfare needs of our security personnel are met, including temporary housing, medical support, protective gear, and essential supplies, so they can continue to protect the Jamaican people as recovery progresses.

As we move forward, the security forces will remain central to the stabilisation and rebuilding mission—clearing access routes, supporting infrastructure repairs, maintaining order, and assisting communities.

This disaster has reinforced the importance of resilient security infrastructure, and as part of the reconstruction plan, we will prioritise strengthening bases, police stations, communication systems, and mobility assets to ensure readiness for future threats. Jamaica's security forces have proven once again that they are pillars of national stability and guardians of our democracy and safety.

International Support and Cooperation

Madam Speaker, the eyes of the world have been on Jamaica as we confronted this ordeal, and the outpouring of solidarity has been extraordinary and deeply moving. The generosity shown to us reflects Jamaica's high standing and goodwill on the global stage.

Even before Hurricane Melissa's landfall, messages of support and offers of assistance came from every region of the world. Since then, our relief efforts have been fortified by early and tangible aid from bilateral partners, regional and international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and the Jamaican Diaspora.

We are especially grateful for the outreach of His Majesty The King, the United Nations Secretary-General, and many Heads of Government who conveyed their solidarity with Jamaica.

We extend heartfelt thanks to our CARICOM brothers and sisters and regional agencies such as CDEMA, CARPHA, and the Caribbean Development Bank for their immediate engagement. Our bilateral partners from Belgium, Canada, Colombia, El Salvador, European Union, Dominican Republic, France, Germany, India, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, Peru, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States, who have all contributed significant assistance at the individual country level, as well as working through agencies such as CDEMA, the United Nations and regional organizations. Other critical partners such as China and Japan have committed support, guided by our critical needs and their capacity and expertise, and many other bilateral partners have signalled that they are finalizing their internal arrangements to support Jamaica.

We also acknowledge the invaluable contributions of international and local NGOs, including World Central Kitchen, Doctors Without Borders, Direct Relief, and Samaritan's Purse, whose teams are already on the ground in affected communities.

Madam Speaker, you will appreciate that the Government and people of Jamaica reserve a special measure of gratitude to our Diaspora worldwide. We know that you remain concerned over the situation at home and are going through this experience with us. We thank you for the abiding interest and assistance – human, technical and financial – and look forward to your continued support in the rebuilding of the affected areas.

Madam Speaker, I must also commend the Amber Group for developing and donating the SupportJamaica.gov.jm platform, which has become the Government's central hub for mobilising relief and donations. To date, the platform has recorded over [insert total] in contributions — a powerful symbol of unity in action.

As we receive this support, I reaffirm the Government's commitment to transparency and accountability. Donor resources will be managed responsibly, through official channels, with full public oversight.

Finally, I thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade and our diplomatic and consular missions for their tireless work in coordinating this international response on behalf of the people of Jamaica.

Announcements

ODPEM moved to OPM

Madam Speaker, the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) is the central agency of the Government's disaster response. They work with all the critical agencies across government, the private sector, international aid agencies, and multiple governments. It is, however, clear that the response to Hurricane Melissa will require significant logistics experience.

The Jamaica Defence Force is currently assisting with the logistics support to both ODPEM and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, especially given the fact that many communities are situated in difficult terrain and several have been marooned.

Given the nature of the response needed for the current relief effort and the coming reconstruction efforts, it is important that ODPEM and the JDF have even greater levels of collaboration. As such, effective immediately, the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) is reassigned to the Office of the Prime Minister to strengthen logistical collaboration with the Jamaica Defence Force.

This realignment establishes virtually a single point for emergency logistics and further tightens coordination with relief partners. This is about speed, Madam Speaker. The new arrangement will accelerate the distribution of relief supplies in the aftermath of Hurricane Melissa, better serve the most affected communities and restore normalcy as quickly as possible.

National Clean Up Week

Madam Speaker, the passage of Hurricane Melissa has left debris, disruption, and dislocation in communities across our island. To accelerate recovery and restore order, the Government will launch a National Clean-Up Week — a coordinated, country-wide effort to renew our environment, restore our communities, and rekindle civic pride.

This national mobilisation will be led by the National Solid Waste Management Authority (NSWMA), in partnership with a wide range of Ministries, Departments and Agencies, local authorities, and, most importantly, community groups and volunteers across Jamaica. The Minister of Local Government and Community Development, who has lead responsibility, will announce the full programme details later this week.

I call on every Jamaican — from the corporate sector to the classroom, from faith-based groups to service clubs and neighbourhood associations — to join in this national movement.

Let us roll up our sleeves, clean up our surroundings, and help restore beauty, order, and hope to our communities.

Housing Support

Madam Speaker, across the island, our first priority has been to deliver food, water, and medical support to every affected community. But we know that beyond these essentials, the greatest need now is shelter.

Too many of our brothers and sisters have lost the very roofs over their heads. To address this urgent need, I am announcing a building support programme for households in the most affected parishes as follows:

- For St. Elizabeth, Westmoreland, Manchester, Hanover, St. James and Trelawny, \$10 million will be allocated to each constituency.
- For St. Ann, Manchester and Clarendon, \$5 million will be allocated to each constituency, and
- For other parishes, \$3 million per constituency.

We will also be announcing a building grant programme similar to the one announced after Hurricane Beryl. The details of this are currently being finalized.

Madam Speaker, in addition to this, the National Housing Trust (NHT) has activated a comprehensive package of support measures to help its contributors and mortgagors recover from the devastation caused by Hurricane Melissa.

First, I wish to remind the public that all NHT mortgagors are insured under the Trust's House Owners' Comprehensive Policy, which covers damage from hurricanes, storms, floods, fire, and other perils. The NHT has already mobilised its branches islandwide to help mortgagors prepare and process their insurance claims quickly and efficiently.

Second, recognising that many families will need time to prioritise home repairs, the NHT will grant an automatic six-month moratorium on mortgage payments for mortgagors in the worst-affected parishes — St. Elizabeth, Westmoreland, Hanover, Trelawny, St. James, Manchester, and St. Ann. This measure will assist more than 20,000 homeowners.

For all other parishes, the NHT will continue to consider individual moratorium applications for those who have lost income or face special hardship.

Third, the Trust will introduce a special home-improvement loan of up to J\$3.5 million at an interest rate of 2 percent, available to both existing mortgagors and contributors who need to repair or rebuild their homes.

Finally, to further ease the burden, the NHT will provide a special grant of up to \$500,000 to help contributors repair damage to their homes or those of immediate family members. Grants will be awarded based on demonstrated need and the level of impact.

Madam Speaker, we are also working with our international partners and the private-sector to identify housing solutions that can be rapidly deployed at scale across the most affected parishes—whether container homes, pre-fabricated units, or tent-style shelters. We want every family to have a place to call home again as soon as possible.

Additional Constituency-Level Allocation

Madam Speaker, in addition to the \$1.5 million that had already been allocated to each constituency before the hurricane, I am announcing an additional allocation of \$1.5 million. However, this allocation will only be made available after the previous allocation has been fully utilised.

However, we have to target the support where the need is greatest - that is St Elizabeth, Westmoreland, Hanover, St. James and Trelawny, For these parishes, I am announcing an additional allocation of \$5 million per constituency. Madam Speaker, Manchester, St. Ann and Clarendon have also suffered significant damage while not as severe as the other five parishes. For these three parishes, I am announcing an additional allocation of \$2.5 million per constituency.

Customs Duty and GCT Relief

Madam Speaker, to speed the flow of humanitarian goods, the Government had approved customs duty and GCT exemption for the importation of relief supplies for a one-month period expiring November 28.

Recognising that recovery efforts are ongoing and will extend beyond this one-month period, we will extend this relief period by a further month, to the end of December 2025. This measure will ensure that every shipment of relief supplies can reach our people quickly, efficiently, and without additional financial burden.

In addition, to the eligible items already announced by Jamaica Customs, and in consideration of the extent of the damage to the electricity grid in the most affected parishes and projected timelines for complete restoration, I am announcing that persons will be allowed to import Starlink equipment and solar power equipment (including panels and batteries) free of customs duty and GCT.

Madam Speaker, while the needs across our nation are indeed great, we must also remain judicious and disciplined in the use of public funds. We are operating in a new global reality—one marked by frequent, multiple, and overlapping crises: weather-related shocks driven by the climate crisis, as well as geopolitical and economic disruptions beyond our control.

In just the past few years, Jamaica has faced the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and associated supply chain shocks and global inflation, Hurricane Beryl, and now Hurricane Melissa.

Members will recall that during COVID-19, there were calls for the Government to reduce the payment of debt and spend far more than we did. Had we done so, Madam Speaker, we would not have been able to respond effectively to the crises that followed. This is why we must continue to act wisely, strategically, and with fiscal prudence—helping those in need today, while preserving the buffers that allow us to respond to the next crisis, which could be just around the corner.

Closing

Madam Speaker, this Government recognises both the gravity of what our people have endured and the resilience that defines Jamaica. We grieve with families who have lost loved ones.

We understand the pain of those whose homes are uninhabitable, whose farms are submerged, and whose small businesses are shuttered. We will not leave anyone behind.

Madam Speaker, I have heard the calls from various quarters for the establishment of a national oversight structure to guide and monitor the distribution of relief and recovery resources. This

morning, I held discussions with His Excellency the Governor-General, Former Prime Ministers Patterson and Golding, as well as private sector leaders and civil society, to consider ideas for such a framework. While the need for such an oversight structure is clear, we need to determine whether any of the existing mechanisms — such as the National Partnership Council and other coordinating bodies — can be leveraged to ensure transparency, accountability, and effectiveness. The goal is not to create bureaucracy, but to strengthen coordination, oversight, and public trust as we move through this critical phase of national recovery.

I will return to this House with regular updates on restoration milestones and on the reconstruction agenda. For now, I ask every Member to continue mobilising in your constituencies; work with your local authorities and feed information into ODPEM so we can prioritise quickly and fairly.

May God bless and protect the people of Jamaica. As difficult as the situation looks today, I want the country to know: together, with faith, discipline, and unity of purpose, we will recover, we will rebuild, and we will emerge stronger and better than ever before.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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