



**CONTRIBUTION TO THE SECTORAL DEBATE
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By

**Hon. Desmond Anthony Augustus McKenzie
Minister of Local Government and Community Development**

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'NATIONAL PROSPERITY BEGINS WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT'

Mr. Speaker...

I thank the Most Honourable Prime Minister for his confidence in me, and the confidence of the Administration in the value of Local Government. I recall his words when the Cabinet was being sworn in on the 7th of March...that national growth and development “start at the root. We intend... not just to reform the structure of local government, but to improve its efficiency and business processes.”

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has set the tone for our Administration by stating the importance of **Partnership**. This Ministry continues to benefit from crucial partnerships within Jamaica, as well as from bilateral and multilateral relationships. We are grateful to all our partners, including the Governments of Japan and the United States, and the city Government of Hagen in Germany.

- I must specially mention the gratitude of this Ministry to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), with whom we are working to implement a special Project named: Jamaica Rural Economy and Ecosystems Adapting to Climate Change 2, otherwise called **JaReeach 2**.

Through this 4-year Project, the Local Authorities will benefit from the strengthening of their strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation processes, to make them better equipped to deal with disaster risk reduction, and all the realities of climate change.

I wish to publicly say thanks, and to give our very best wishes to USAID’s Mission Director to Jamaica, Ms. Denise Herbol, who will be leaving us very shortly to take up her new assignment in Pakistan. Local Government has been enriched by your work here.

OUR MISSION – TO TRANSFORM LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- Mr. Speaker, let me state categorically, that *we are on a mission to transform local government to the benefit of the public, and nothing else*. Emerging from the recently published findings surrounding the Hanover Parish Council in particular, I have taken note of opinions by some commentators that the Local Authorities, generally speaking, should be shut down. That is not the policy of this Administration.

I am a son of Local Government. I have served as Councillor and Mayor, and I know first-hand, the positive impact that good representation can have on people's lives at the community level.

Local Government touches lives in a real way, every day, whether it is well or badly run. I will use my talents, experience, and the collective talents of the partners within Jamaica and internationally, to make local government an efficient, accountable organ of service to every Jamaican.

Let me admit however, that the image of Local Government and that of the Local Authorities in particular, has been shaken and battered by the very serious revelations in the Special Reports of the Contractor-General, which have been tabled in this Honourable House.

The public is aware of the actions I have taken in relation to the Hanover Parish Council. They are a clear signal, Mr. Speaker, that this Administration, and this Minister, will not stand aside and allow breaches of the public trust to occur, under the banner of "autonomy". The Local Authorities are accountable to the Minister under law, and I intend to lift the standard of accountability and of service that they are to provide.

- We intend, Mr. Speaker, to audit all the Local Authorities, and to ensure that appropriate systems are implemented to make them significantly more efficient and accountable. We intend to restore the true meaning of the word “Authority” to Local Government, so that the system of local governance can regain *credibility* in the eyes of our people. It is not an easy objective to meet. It requires time and resources. But it must be done, and I am committed to achieving it.
- Accordingly Mr. Speaker, I am advising this Honourable House that, in our drive to increase accountability, we have established a Land Divestment Committee, which is responsible for ensuring that the sale or leasing of lands held by the Local Authorities, is conducted in full compliance with existing policies, laws and regulations.
- We will in short order, be establishing Audit Committees in the Local Authorities, and we will also begin the process of developing Standard Operating Procedures to ensure seamlessness and accountability in the management of their public responsibilities.
- At the same time, we will be improving institutional capacity in the Local Authorities, by introducing training in Risk-based Auditing. The curriculum has already been developed Mr. Speaker, and beginning this August, the Auditors in the Local Authorities will experience training on a regional basis. This will also facilitate the more robust system of Quarterly Reporting that will be required of the Local Authorities as of this August.
- We will be approaching the Office of the Contractor-General to assist us to develop a highly efficient system of Procurement Committees for the Local

Authorities. We are serious about enforcing the existing procurement and other financial rules, and we are tying the payment of monies to the Local Authorities, to their strict compliance. In other words, if the laws or rules are broken, a Local Authority will not receive funding.

Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that there are challenges in the Local Authorities that we need to overcome. To do this, we will need leadership at the political level and at the administrative level. That is why our people always say “one hand cyaan clap”.

In this regard, I am publicly inviting the General Secretary of the Jamaica Association of Local Government Officers (JALGO), Mrs. Helene Davis-Whyte, and the President of the Association of Local Government Authorities of Jamaica (ALGAJ) Councillor Scean Barnswell, to meet with the Ministry’s team and myself to discuss the issues, and to resolve them in a spirit of partnership.

I will be issuing a formal invitation shortly, and I will also be seeking audience with the Contractor-General in this regard. Local Government needs good systems, and good people giving good service throughout those systems, to satisfy public needs and raise its public image.

National awareness is critical to the fight against corruption, Mr. Speaker, and so the Ministry will be implementing a public education campaign to let people know, for example, that there are clearly designated places for paying Property Taxes, Building and Trade Licence fees so that they are not fooled into handing over their money to individuals, whether inside or outside of the Local Government system.

- Mr. Speaker, we all know that a certain event is coming...people are talking about it...the Prime Minister has been asked about it in the public domain...the Opposition has been talking about it. What I am prepared to say, is that we need at least ten years to carry out the vision for the transformation of local government.

At the level of central government, we are working smartly and diligently, to bring prosperity to the Jamaican people. At the local government level, we are already showing our seriousness about shaking things up for positive results. Whenever that widely anticipated event is announced by the Prime Minister, I am ready to make the case, that the confidence expressed by the electorate in us to manage central government, should be invested in us to complete the circle, and properly take care of the peoples' business at the local level.

OFFICE OF DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

We are all aware, Mr. Speaker, that the Atlantic Hurricane Season has begun. The Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) is ready for the challenges that may emerge, even as we hope that none will come. This readiness is due not only to the hard work of the Agency's staff, but also the strong culture of inter-Agency collaboration, and partnerships maintained here and overseas.

The other partnership I am keen to encourage Mr. Speaker, is one involving the people who occupy vulnerable areas.

Rather than risk their health and lives, I urge them to embrace personal responsibility as a necessary part of the disaster management. I say again, that people in these areas must comply with Evacuation Orders if they are issued, and all applicable laws will be enforced to ensure full compliance.

I am concerned however, about the quality of some of the shelters we use when weather systems occur. We will be reviewing the Shelter stock across the island, especially in areas that are most easily ravaged by the slightest weather system. We are trying to establish a proper shelter management system, rather than resorting to schools and community centres as prevails now. We are developing an infrastructure programme in this regard Mr. Speaker, which of course requires money.

- This leads me to the concerns I have about an arrangement in which both Administrations have been involved – the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF). It is an Insurance Scheme involving CARICOM member countries and some other Caribbean territories, which is supposed to provide cover to countries hit by natural disasters. However, the requirements for assistance are so stringent, that in order to benefit, an affected country would apparently have to be suffering the ten plagues brought upon Egypt, as recorded in the Book of Exodus. Jamaica has not received a payout from the CCRIF since its inception in 2007...not even the damage inflicted by Hurricane Sandy in 2012 was sufficient to trigger an insurance payment.

Jamaica, Mr. Speaker, is paying the CCRIF a premium of US \$3.7 million, or over J\$462 million per year.

There is a clear provision for a National Disaster Fund in the Disaster Risk Management Act, Mr. Speaker. In addition to the allocations that are to be made to it from the Ministry of Finance, the obvious question is whether the people of Jamaica will be better served, if the over J\$460 million being paid yearly as an insurance premium, is instead placed in the Fund.

Accordingly, I have asked that when the Honourable Bruce Golding, former Prime Minister of Jamaica, leads the review of CARICOM as announced by the Most Honourable Prime Minister, this is one of the issues for examination and recommendation.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Mr. Speaker, I must commend the executive leadership of the Social Development Commission (SDC), for the serious work it has been putting into community development through personal and joint business empowerment, along with sport. Having come to this Ministry, and having discovered that the SDC has been operating without a budget for the last 6 years, I must say that I have been impressed by what the Agency has been doing.

This includes the 182 Local Economic Development initiatives valued at over J\$615 million, supported by the Local Economic Development Support Programme, which has created 1,072 jobs. Additionally, 87 community projects were implemented, at a value of J\$368 million. They say that good work only begets more work, but, Mr. Speaker, this Administration has now provided the SDC with a Programmes budget, from which it can reasonably plan its activities.

- In this Financial Year Mr. Speaker, the SDC will repair six of its offices.

These include St. Ann, which is scheduled for completion this September, Kingston and St. Andrew, St. Thomas, Clarendon and St. James. The emphases on Local Economic Development (LED), Community sports and well-being will continue.

- Youth empowerment is important to community development, Mr. Speaker. As we work to create more opportunities for positive social interaction, we will be building three new Community Parks this financial year. The Parks will be located in St. Andrew, St. Catherine and Trelawny.

The SDC will create 8 new active and functioning umbrella community groups, and strengthen at least 300 community groups.

- Crucially Mr. Speaker, **the SDC will be implementing 500 viable LED initiatives, with a target of providing employment for 4,500 people.**

We are bringing prosperity to the Jamaican people in their communities, Mr. Speaker.

SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME

As we work to make prosperity a Jamaican reality, we are also ensuring that our most vulnerable citizens are taken care of. We are especially concerned about the general condition of our Infirmaries.

Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, the Infirmaries in Lucea and in Santa Cruz are the outstanding exceptions to the norm, and I must offer commendations in this regard.

We intend to address the serious challenges to Infirmary care, by focusing on Infrastructural development.

- To this end, J\$135 million will be spent to build new Wards at the Manchester and Portland Infirmaries, commencing this financial year. These funds will be sourced from Property Taxes and the Equalization Fund, and will not be a charge on the central Budget.
- The Male and Female Wards at the Portland Infirmary will be designed to house 55 residents in a private home setting, which will also feature a Nurses' Station and an Examination Room.
- Grab bars and ramps will be placed in all appropriate locations, to ensure access to all mobility aids, while energy efficiency will be promoted by the use of solar power and LED Lighting.
- Mr. Speaker, this facility will cost approximately J\$80 million. With this state of the art facility, the optimizing of residents' privacy and dignity will be assured.
- The Female Ward at the Manchester Infirmary will have the same features Mr. Speaker, will house 43 residents, and will be constructed at a cost of J\$55 million.

- We will also be doing improvements to the administrative offices at the Santa Cruz Infirmary, at a cost of J\$25 million.

We are committed to the development of all our Infirmaries, as places where our people can live in and be cared for, with dignity. Many of the occupants of these facilities have served this country, in the private and public sectors, for many years. They have worked for us, Mr. Speaker. Now, we will work for them.

Mr. Speaker, we will shortly be implementing improvement works at the Portmore Municipal Building, with approval having been obtained from the National Contracts Commission.

I wish to report to the House that the works being carried out on the new Westmoreland Parish Council building are now 50% complete.

We are well aware, Mr. Speaker, that many of our Parish Council buildings are in dire need of attention. I am very concerned about conditions at the St. Ann and St. Thomas buildings, and we will be moving to address them as soon as resources allow.

Attention will also be paid to Routine Maintenance Mr. Speaker, and J\$28 million will be spent in this regard.

Mr. Speaker, we have long been concerned about the welfare of people who have been treated at public hospitals and discharged, but who can be seen occupying hospital premises, because they have nowhere to go. This Ministry

is working with the Ministry of Health, to have these vulnerable people placed in the Infirmaries.

In this regard, let me also express thanks to partners such as Food for the Poor, who are working with us to construct two Drop-In Centres in Hanover and St. Ann, at a cost of J\$24 million.

Partnership will also be critical Mr. Speaker, as we continue discussions with the Ministry of Education, to get the approximately 2,074 children in the poor relief system, to benefit from the national school feeding programme.

PROPERTY TAX AND MARKET DEVELOPMENT

PROGRAMME

Mr. Speaker, Property Taxes are the largest contributor to the Local Authorities' budgets. Property owners are required under law to pay their Taxes, and I am encouraging them to comply. The Government is required to make the methods of payment as efficient as possible, and to give maximum value for every dollar collected. In this regard, we will be introducing two collection motor vehicles, or Tax Mobiles, to make life a little more convenient for our citizens.

- We will not be increasing Property Tax rates this year Mr. Speaker. We are focusing, in partnership with Tax Administration Jamaica, on ensuring total collection island-wide.

TRADE LICENCES

In the same vein, we are encouraging widespread compliance with regard to the payment of fees for Trade Licences. The Trade Licence fee is an important revenue source for the Local Authorities, and as we encourage business operators to pay their taxes, we will also ensure that the value of their money is returned to them, in the form of improved service delivery from their respective Local Authorities.

This means among other things, better administration of public order in town centres by the Municipal Police, who will also be assisting in the collection drive.

Mr. Speaker, 33 Municipal Police Officers have just experienced training through an upgraded programme, and another 50 will be entering training shortly.

- The Municipal Police have expanded powers, Mr. Speaker, and its members will have a critical role to play in the campaign against littering. They will have the backing of new Regulations to the National Solid Waste Act, which I intend to bring to the House shortly.

MARKET DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Speaker, markets are important points of social and economic integration. Millions of dollars change hands in our markets, as buyers and sellers interact. The Coronation Market and Oxford Mall, which are in my constituency, are vibrant examples of this.

- We will be continuing the work of infrastructural improvement of our markets, Mr. Speaker, and in this financial year, we will be refurbishing the market in Buff Bay, Portland, and completing the works at Clarks Town market in Trelawny.

Currently, the Buff Bay Market is in a deplorable state, and the estimated 40 vendors who sell within the town of Buff Bay do not use it. This is a challenge to public order, as well as a revenue pitfall for the Portland Parish Council.

When completed Mr. Speaker, the new Buff Bay Market will provide accommodation for one hundred vendors, and they in turn will serve the needs of the various communities, from Buff Bay to Shirley Castle to Hope Bay.

This project will feature:

- Modern stalls for vendors, and proper colour coding and zoning of the market areas.
- Low and renewable energy technologies such as LED lights, solar panels and solar water heaters.
- Water harvesting systems, modern bathroom and showering facilities for vendors.
- Customers and vendors will also have access to bathrooms with special access for the physically challenged.

- There will be spaces for commercial offices or stores. This will make the market more attractive and suitable to other types of businesses and customers.
- We will also be doing work at the Port Maria Market, at an estimated cost of J\$40 million. This two-storey facility will be built at the location of the present market site, opposite the Parish Council building. It will house approximately seventy vendors on the ground floor, while the first floor will facilitate business spaces for entrepreneurs.
- This modern building will have two external staircases, an elevator, and access aids for the physically challenged, in keeping with the Building Code.
- There will also be proper parking, so that traffic congestion will be avoided.
- The Port Maria market will have water harvesting, solar power and LED lighting, among the features, to ensure that businesspeople and customers will enjoy a truly green building.

In the near future Mr. Speaker, we will be looking at the Papine, Ocho Rios and Santa Cruz markets for development.

NATIONAL SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

(NSWMA)

Mr. Speaker, the challenges at this crucial Agency are well known, and this Administration is resolved to bring about transformation in two vital areas: Governance and Service Delivery.

On the strength of the improvements made by the Board appointed after the Riverton fires in March last year, we decided on a course of continuity, and accordingly, asked Mr. Dennis Chung to lead the Government's Agenda as Chairman.

Even as we await the findings of the Office of the Contractor-General's investigation of the Agency, I have asked the Board to carry out a forensic audit, and the country will be advised of the findings at its completion.

The NSWMA is working to improve the infrastructure of the Disposal Sites across the island. The access road works being facilitated by the Government of Mexico and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) are proceeding within time and budget. I wish to thank them for the work done to date, as well as the people of Riverton Meadows, who have co-operated with the construction exercise.

- We are evaluating the possibility of executing similar works at the Myersville, Retirement and Haddon Disposal Sites. In keeping with this effort to build Disposal Site capacity, to protect human health and the environment, the NSWMA is carrying out works at the Haddon and Retirement Sites, with a view to obtaining environmental certification from the National Environment and Planning Agency (NEPA). NEPA certification is a critical part of the operational aspect of Disposal Site management, and you will recall Mr. Speaker, that its absence was strongly criticised by the Office of the Public Defender, in its Report after the Riverton fires last March.

The Government is exploring all the options for privatization Mr. Speaker. However, until we are able to fully privatize the collection and disposal of waste, the NSWMA will still be involved in the procurement of garbage trucks.

The previous Administration had commenced steps to procure 17 garbage trucks, but, due to various issues involving documentation, these units are not in place. This Administration has committed J\$250 million this year to procure additional trucks.

There is still some distance to go before the country will have all the disposal units it needs, but I dare say Mr. Speaker, that this is a positive start.

- I must say a few words about the National Clean Up Programme, which has been progressing exceptionally well, both in terms of public cleansing, and the elevation of public awareness.

The Most Honourable Prime Minister established a National Task Force spearheaded by this Ministry, to urgently address Jamaica's state of cleanliness, particularly with regard to the imminent threat of the Zika virus. The three components of the Programme are:

1. The removal of Bulk Waste
2. Community mobilization through house to house surveys, search for and destruction of mosquito breeding sites, and;
3. Public Education and Behaviour Change Communication.

Our partners, the Ministry of Health, National Works Agency, Jamaica Constabulary Force and the Jamaica Defence Force, have been actively engaged in the supervision and removal of household and bulk waste, and the public education aspect of the Programme.

I must also commend the great work done by our own Agencies; the Social Development Commission, Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management and Jamaica Fire Brigade.

We started in St. James on April 23, proceeded to Portland early this month, and more recently, on June 10, the Programme moved to the Constituency of the Most Honourable Prime Minister.

In very short order, Mr. Speaker, I will be having consultations with the Leader of the Opposition, to arrange for the Programme to be implemented in her Constituency.

The National Clean-Up Programme is working Mr. Speaker.

We are clearing the spaces and changing the face of the country. People are coming out and learning and participating, and I am very pleased and highly encouraged by what I am seeing. I am seeing the stirrings of greater civic pride, and we will be doing everything possible to nurture and develop it.

JAMAICA FIRE BRIGADE

This government places on record, its gratitude to the men and women of the Jamaica Fire Brigade. They provide building inspection services and community education programmes. They are called out to accident scenes. And, of course, they have to deal with fires.

Arising from that unfortunate incident last August, in which three firemen were injured in a house fire at Olympic Gardens, I am heartened to know that Lance Corporal Andre Jones, Fire Fighter Tennyson McFarlane and District Officer Sigmond Sutherland continue to recover from that ordeal.

Between January and May of this year, the Fire Brigade was called out on 4,871 occasions. Of these calls, 3,526 were genuine fire calls, and 759 were special service calls, such as for assistance at a motor vehicle accident scene, or the removal of oil spills.

The Brigade therefore needs an expansion of its capacity to respond to fire calls, through additional fire trucks. The intention is to meet the target of 60 trucks to serve the demands on existing fire stations.

- The Administration will continue to equip the Fire Brigade, so that service delivery can be assured, while its members are protected. In this financial year, the JFB will obtain among other things:
 - 2 fire trucks (pumpers)
 - 2 water tankers
 - 50 full face respirators
 - 90 sets of head-to-toe bunker gears
 - 26 Breathing Apparatus sets
 - 600 pairs of gloves and fire-fighting hoses.

- Under the Jamaica Disaster Vulnerability Reduction Project, (DVRP) the Brigade will acquire 5 Water Tankers and 4 Pumpers. Moreover, the Agency will receive:
 - 300 Bunker Gear Head-to-toe suits
 - 300 Breathing Apparatus Sets
 - 300 lengths of Fire Hoses and
 - 5 Gas detection meters

We appreciate the assistance being received through the DVRP, and also thank the Jamaica Social Investment Fund for its critical role in enabling the process.

CONSTRUCTION OF FIRE STATIONS

- Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that the Fire Brigade will begin the construction of two new fire stations in this financial year, to be located in Port

Port Maria in St. Mary, and the second City, Montego Bay. In the next financial year, we intend to focus on building a new facility in Yallahs in St. Thomas.

The commencement and completion of these projects is vital Mr. Speaker, as both the Port Maria and Montego Bay Fire Stations have been closed for over 7 years.

It is also the case that the building at Port Royal Street, which now houses the Headquarters of the Brigade, is no longer fit for purpose. We are committed Mr. Speaker, to constructing new Headquarters in another location. I have already mandated the Board, led by the Hon. Russell Hadeed, to proceed in this direction.

RECRUITMENT

The Brigade recently graduated one hundred and five (105) new firefighters, and another one hundred (100) are to be trained in this financial year, beginning in August.

When this cohort of fire-fighters commences service, the personnel shortage being experienced will be greatly reduced, with only 60 positions left to be filled, by the next financial year.

STREETLIGHTS PROGRAMME

Mr. Speaker, we all know that inadequate street lighting continues to be a source of distress to many communities across the island. The implications for

social interaction between and within communities after dark, and for safety and security are obvious.

This Administration is not happy about the inconsistent patterns of street-lighting across the country. It is also the case that the Jamaica Public Service Company is owed billions of dollars in electricity bills.

In this regard, Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Local Government has over the last two-and-a-half years, been making payments to Jamaica Public Service Company (JPSCo). Over J\$2 billion has been paid to the company. Outside of this, we have paid over HALF-A-BILLION dollars to JPS since I assumed Office, and the intention is to liquidate the debt.

However, there are still areas of concern, which have implications for the computation of the streetlight electricity bill, and for service delivery to business and residential communities.

We have been meeting with the Company to resolve these issues, Mr. Speaker, and the Parliament and the country can be assured that I will report on the progress of these discussions.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Speaker, this Ministry has been confronted with a wide range of challenges. We are facing those challenges with confidence, with good sense, with creativity and with integrity.

We are doing so not merely to put out fires here and there. We are doing it in furtherance of the better life that every Jamaican desires. In other words, we are working diligently, through the Local Government system, to aggressively tilt the balance of life towards PROSPERITY.

That is why we have restored the Budget of the Social Development Commission, as it works to generate over 4,500 jobs this financial year.

That is why we are not just cleaning public spaces through the NSWMA, and providing new garbage trucks, but also using the National Clean Up Programme to rekindle public pride, and to help to give our people an attitude of prosperity.

That is why we are investing in the building and refurbishing of Markets, so they can take their rightful place as critical hubs of economic expansion, development and public order.

That is why we are working night and day to transform the functioning and image of the Local Authorities. Prosperity requires an environment of order and professionalism in order to thrive.

We have done these things in 107 days, and there is much more to come.

My pledge, Mr. Speaker, is that my mind and my energy will be devoted to national development through Local Government and Community Development.

When I look at my fellow citizens, from the very young to the very old, my mission is clear. It is to encourage community development through social activities and entrepreneurship. It is to ensure that we all live in a clean,

garbage-free environment. It is to contribute to public safety by having functioning streetlights. It is to ensure that our vulnerable people are treated with dignity and sensitivity.

Mr. Speaker, I have been truly lifted up by the warmth and encouragement I have received from the Jamaican people, as I traverse the country to make Local Government real to them.

With their support, the support of the total Ministry and the blessings of the Almighty, I am confident that together, we will bring about prosperity, not only for our children, but in our lifetime.

Thank You.

Desmond McKenzie MP
Minister of Local Government and Community Development
June 22, 2016