

Mr. Speaker, I stand to update you on a number of issues pertaining to National Security.

Crime Situation

It is a fact that during the year 2017, 1616 persons were murdered in Jamaica and there were 1469 shootings. However, it is also true that we had significant reductions in the other five major crime categories and collected 859 illegal firearms and 21,764 rounds of ammunition. While we continue to be concerned and rightly so about the level of murders, we should not allow that to cause us not to recognize the combined efforts of all the stakeholders in the security sector that have resulted in substantial declines in five of the seven major categories of crime. Notwithstanding the gains, as Minister, I am the first to admit that while we are heartened, we are still not satisfied.

State of Emergency in St. James

Mr. Speaker, since the start of the year we have continued to see an unacceptable trend in the country's murder rate. Naturally, some have become fearful and frightened. This is not lost on the Government and as such, we have declared a State of Emergency in St. James to treat with the situation.

The security operations, which are in their very early stage, are going very well. So far the State of Emergency has resulted in the detention of 197 persons and the seizure of 4 firearms and approximately 30 rounds of ammunition. Among the 197 persons detained are 10 men wanted for serious crimes including murder and shooting. The security forces have also advised that 83 of the 197 persons detained are strongly believed to be connected to gangs in St. James.

There are currently 178 persons in custody. Some of these persons are the subject of further investigations. We asked for and are getting unprecedented support from the public. We ask that members of the public continue to flood us with information. Tell us where the guns are! Tell us where the gunmen, lotto scammers and criminals are!

Let me hasten to point out that the declaration of a State of Emergency is not a panacea. It is not a cure all to our problems. It is meant to cauterize the situation while providing the space for other sustainable interventions. Let me remind this honourable house that it took us decades to get here and it will not be addressed overnight. In addition to the efforts of the security forces, it will require

significant inputs from all facets of our society to sustainably address the problem. There is a significant level of consensus that sustainable crime reduction will require fundamental changes along with significant investments in our social and educational systems. As a Government, we are committed to providing these inputs overtime.

Operations in support of the SOE

Mr. Speaker, we are aware that criminal elements will attempt to flee St. James to neighbouring parishes. As such, a number of operations are being conducted across the island in support of the State of Emergency in St. James. These operations are in an effort to apprehend wanted men who may have eluded the main area of operation:

- Divisions within area 5 conducted a 24 hour blitz which saw increased visibility and intensified operational activities to include VCPs, Raids, Searches and visits to persons on curfew orders inter alia. 18 persons were detained in St. Catherine North and one in St. Catherine South
- Operations have been launched in St. Ann, St. Mary and Westmoreland
- Portmore St. Catherine has been identified as a likely area where displaced criminals are likely to be housed. As such a joint team from CTOC Central, the Fugitive Apprehension Team and Mobile Reserve conducted targeted raids on several premises. No one was apprehended.
- The Mobile Reserve and the St. Andrew Central Police picked up two persons of interest in the August Town area this morning (Jan 23, 2018) relative to a shooting in the community last night. The men are identified as Tafari Dell and Ragiet Cole.
- Continued operations by CTOC and the FAT resulted in the apprehension of two men wanted in the United States. Mr. Davy Scott, 48 years old, who is wanted in New Jersey for assault against police and several assault offences, was held in Portmore, St. Catherine. Mr. Peter Marley, 51 years old, who is wanted in Florida for the multiple sexual offences involving minors, was held in Cherry Gardens. Both will be extradited to the United States.

Palisadoes Strip 2018

Mr. Speaker, we can all agree that the well publicized Palisadoes matter represents an unfortunate series of events which must never recur. As a result, the country suffered reputational damage and there were whispers of legal action against the country by some individuals and entities alike.

Many have offered their opinion on the tone of a particular public statement that was I had issued. Mr Speaker, in retrospect and after reviewing the Press Release and the totality of the circumstances, I have concluded that the whole matter could have been handled differently.

Ministerial Interference in the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF)

Mr Speaker, I note the recent concerns expressed in relation to ministerial interference in operational matters of the JCF particularly following the Palisadoes matter. However, I must use this opportunity to strenuously point out that my sole reason for demanding answers on behalf of the public in that matter is to foster a culture of accountability within the security portfolio that I have the privilege of leading. Amid the chatter, the real lesson that must be learnt is that people in positions of responsibility must be held to account. The JCF is a command and control organization. Accountability is one of the standards of the Force. The Public expects it and the rules governing the institution demand it.

Sir, I have been accused of interfering in the distribution of cars meant for the JCF. Sir, I took to the Office of the Commissioner, a list of vehicles compiled by the Ministry and asked if they could be accommodated. On the list were five vehicles for St. Elizabeth which reflects requests from Members of Parliament: Floyd Green; JC Hutchinson; Frank Witter and Evon Redman. This list was compiled based calls received from Custodes, MP's, Organizations and citizens themselves, including me. The list was also compiled following an appeal for more vehicles at a meeting in St. Elizabeth by Superintendent Catherine Lord, Commanding Officer and Chairman of the Police Officers Association (POA). I informed Miss Lord that I do not assign a vehicle as that is the job of the Commissioner.

Mr Speaker, in 2017 rape was down overall nationally. However, certain divisions showed increases. These were Trelawny, St Mary and Manchester. On my vehicle request list to the Commissioner were three cars for the Centre for Investigation of Sexual Offences & Child Abuse (CISOCA) in each of these parishes. The

Commissioner felt that the car listed for St. Mary would be better used in Westmoreland in their policing programme. I did not object.

If I was assigning cars, would I not assign to my own parish?

Crime & the Occult in Jamaica

Mr Speaker, over the last couple of months, we have discovered a most disturbing trend of which you must be aware. We have been discovering “ALTARS” to facilitate devil worship in many places where raids have been conducted by the security forces. This is a most dangerous trend and the clergy is also disturbed by it.

Sir, the savagery, the brutality and horrific nature of some crimes point to sacrifices to these evil forces. Sir, almost a year ago I made a flippant comment suggesting that my uncle was an obeah man. It was meant to be a joke, but many persons were not amused. They were offended and rightly so. I want to apologize for the remark and the offensiveness it has caused and to give the assurance and publicly state that I am not into devil or evil worship in no way shape or form!

I worship one God! The one and only true God that reigns, forgives and sustains! I am not into devil worship. Some people are playing with things they know nothing about and open gates they cannot close. Sir, the trend is disturbing and must be stopped.

Mr. Speaker, we are closely monitoring another situation in which juveniles are figuring prominently across Jamaica as either the perpetrators or victims of crime. According to data compiled by the Jamaica Constabulary Force Statistics and Information Management Unit and published by the Gleaner, “78 teenagers were arrested for shooting, 148 were arrested for illegal possession of firearm, and 63 for robbery with aggravation last year”.

A Culture of Silence

Mr. Speaker, another challenge we face is the culture of silence that resides among some of us as leaders and citizens of this beloved country. We must pass information to the police! We must create and drive a “wedge” between us and the criminals! This moment we face as a nation demands a fundamental change, a break with the past!

Good people can no longer remain silent. We must come together for Jamaica! We must become patriots not only informants! We must tell what we know! We must support a change.

Five Pillar Crime Reduction Strategy

This Administration has laid out an all of Government approach to crime reduction. We have clearly articulated our road map in the **Five Pillar Crime Reduction Strategy** namely:

1. Effective Policing
2. Swift and Sure Justice
3. Reducing re-offending
4. Situational Prevention
5. Social Development

Mr. Speaker, time will not allow me to describe in detail all the gains associated with each Strategic Pillar at this time but please allow me to speak a little on the Effective Policing Strategy.

Significant work is already under way in support of the “Effective Policing” Strategy. A new Police Service Act is being drafted to replace the JCF Act. The e-policing Project has already seen significant work done on a number of software solutions meant to support the operations of the security forces and boost the intelligence led policing. These include the Jamaica Eye, the QR Patrol Code, JamPolStat and the Station Records Management System. Jamaica Eye is an integrated CCTV System which will receive feeds from both publicly and privately owned cameras. All of the feeds will be monitored from a National Monitoring Centre and provide real time information to support field operations and even investigations.

Governance and Accountability within Security Architecture

Mr Speaker, from an accountability perspective I have to say that the legislative framework governing the national security architecture needs strengthening as it is not sustainable in its current formation.

Mr Speaker, you cannot have a Board that does not report to you as Minister nor can you name it, but as Minister you are held responsible for its actions and the results of its actions. So it is with the Police Services Commission (PSC). The PSC

is responsible for promotion, discipline, good order and employing a Commissioner of Police. Yet the public holds the Minister accountable for the outcomes of the security forces.

Mr Speaker, in 1993, Parliament amended the Jamaica Constabulary Force Act and gave full supervision of the Force to the Commissioner. It was the right thing at the time. I am not advocating for it to be reversed but it is my considered view that the people's representative must have a clearly defined role if he/she is to be properly held accountable by the citizenry for the safety and security of the country. The police's role is to serve, protect and to reassure. Shouldn't the people's representative have a role?

Sir, let me inform you that 20 years before the change, the average annual murder rate in Jamaica was 22 per 100,000. After 1993, the average annual murder rate is 45 per 100,000. I am not suggesting that this is the only variable which explains the variance between 22 per 100,000 and 45 per 100,000. However, Mr Speaker, it is clear that the policy change has not yielded the type of results that were expected back in 1993.

Police Corruption

Corruption in the police force remains a significant challenge. Sir, let me hasten to say that the vast majority of the members of the Force are law abiding patriotic Jamaicans who work diligently in the service of their fellow citizens. But, there is a minority that is corrupt or will not do their jobs and are not being held accountable to the extent that they should be. As we have seen time and time again, the actions of a corrupt few often casts a long shadow over the good work of the majority of the hardworking men and women of the Force.

Mr. Speaker, there is an inherent desire from citizens of the country to support the police in their efforts. That same citizenry in addition to various civil society groups have been very vocal in their call for the Force to be rid of corrupt elements! As a Government, we have been responsive to the demands made by the public and other groups. As such, last year we provided a mechanism in the form of a revamped Early Retirement Scheme for Police Officers that would help achieve this objective.

The new policy is with the Commissioner. He fully understands the issue of corruption and the overall impact that it has on the reputation of the organization and has committed to begin utilization of that important tool to hasten the

transition of members of the force at all levels who are tainted by corruption or otherwise ineffective. The Ministry of National Security has identified the funds necessary to underwrite this activity and we are prepared to ask the Ministry of Finance for more.

Criminal Justice & Educational Systems

Mr Speaker, the criminal justice system is not yet at the level that we would wish to see it. The system needs significant strengthening! The system is overburdened and under staffed. Our judges are of the highest order, calibre and standards! We fully support Minister Delroy Chuck who is leading reforms meant to overhaul the system.

Mr. Speaker, we as legislators must quickly pass the relevant laws to ensure that although bail is a right, the circumstances under which it is dispensed must be clearly defined. When someone is released on bail and commits multiple serious crimes including murder and shooting with intent, it points to the need to re-examine the system. It is my considered view that bail should not be considered in certain circumstances i.e. Murder, Gun Crimes, lottery scamming and extortion.

We must be bold enough (even temporarily) to pass legislation that will allow sentences to be appealed by the Director of Public Prosecutions as well as to have sentences run consecutively and not concurrently for certain heinous crimes.

Mr. Speaker, we fully recognize that sustainable crime reduction requires improvements in our educational system. As such, we fully support Minister Ruel Reid in his efforts to transform the educational sector. The gradual removal of schools from the shift system, curriculums review and provision of additional school spaces are steps in the right direction.

Legislative Changes

Mr. Speaker, the Government is moving towards completing the establishment of the Major Organized and Anti-Corruption Agency (MOCA) as an independent law enforcement entity. The MOCA Bill has already been table by the Most Hon. PM and has been scheduled for debate next Tuesday.

Mr. Speaker, the Fire Arm Act is being reviewed and will be before Parliament in 3 months. The amended legislation will feature new penalties and harsher

mandatory minimum sentences. This is the way to go considering that the gun features in 80% of all murders in Jamaica.

Mr. Speaker, in the near future we will take to Parliament a bill to merge the Police Services Commission (PSC) with the Police Civilian Oversight Authority (PCOA). This was one of the recommendations arising from the Strategic Review of the Jamaica Constabulary Force in 2007. We have set ourselves 6 months to do so. The revamp and realignment of these two institutions will establish a more robust oversight body which will help to drive accountability within the JCF.

Sir, we intend to table within 6 months a Police Service Act which will replace the 150 year old Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) Act which will be subsequently repealed. The goal is to break with the past and create a modern Police Service befitting our times and to better protect the members and serve the public.

The amendments to the Finger Print Act will be completed within 8 months.

Sir, the Anti Gang Act is being amended to allow for a Watch List to be established as well as the implementation of Control Orders against suspected criminals. We are also pursuing amendments to the Proceeds of Crime Act that seek to have persons explain sudden wealth. These two pieces of legislation should be ready in 10 months.

Mr. Speaker, we are pursuing immediately a joint programme against tax cheats who are suspected of funding criminal activities. More information will follow.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, I close by saying that the crime monster that confronts us did not start overnight; neither can it be solved overnight. A murder does not start with the pointing of a gun and firing. It starts long before! It is preceded by the failure to get a good education. It's preceded by the failure to get a good moral grounding reflecting respect for the sacredness of life. It's reflective of the selfishness and evil that reside deep in the minds of some who live among us.

Mr Speaker, be assured that fundamental and far reaching changes are coming as we step up our efforts to secure this nation. The support, cooperation and patience of all Jamaicans is needed. The issue of accountability can never be overemphasized!

We welcome the very positive move of the Opposition in agreeing for the Ministry to give a crime update briefing to their local government representatives.

We thank them for the cooperation and look forward to their help and assistance in other areas as we go forward in creating a safer and more prosperous Jamaica.

Mr. Speaker, united as a people we can overcome any challenge as Jamaicans. More than ever, the time for unity is now! Let us put aside petty differences and work in Jamaica's interest.