



BUDGET DEBATE

2015-2016

Moving Forward: **Jobs, Growth &** **Development**

Prime Minister
The Most Honourable
Portia Simpson Miller, ON, MP



TUESDAY MARCH 24, 2015

GORDON HOUSE

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SECTION 1

Introduction

1.1. Acknowledgments

Mr. Speaker,

I thank my Maker and Master for His direction and guidance along this journey.

As I stand in this House today, I can truly say the words of the Psalmist, *“The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in Him, and He helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise Him.”*

There are persons, Mr. Speaker, without whom my journey would have been impossible. I would like to thank:

- My husband Errald for his love and support.
- Marva, my housekeeper, for her support and dedication.
- My Councillors (Audrey Smith-Facey, Eugene Kelly and Karl Blake)
- The people of South West St Andrew
- The Members of the Cabinet
- The Cabinet Secretary in the Cabinet Office
- The Permanent Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister
- The leadership, members and supporters of the People’s National Party
- The Members of my personal support staff
- All government workers and members of the Public Sector
- All the people of Jamaica

Mr. Speaker,

I am honoured to have the opportunity to once again outline the Government’s strategy for the management of the affairs of our nation.

Before doing so, however, there are three current issues that I wish to address.

- First, the care and protection of our children
- Second, the fire at the Riverton City Disposal Site, and
- Third, our health sector

1.2 Protecting our Children

Mr. Speaker,

The abuse of our nation’s children weighs heavily on my heart and, I know, on the heart of every well-thinking Jamaican.

This is an ugly subject, a shameful matter – it is unacceptable and unworthy of us as a nation.

The Leader of the Opposition made reference to this matter, last Thursday. I am certain our views and convictions are quite similar.

Mr. Speaker, we must stand against the horrific violence being waged against our children, some not yet 1 year old.

The worst forms of violence are being perpetrated against our children--sexual, physical and emotional abuse. Our children are being raped, murdered, stabbed, scarred and shamed!

Research has shown that one girl in every 5, 15-19 years old and sexually active, has reported being forced to have sex.

Research by the Office of the Children's Registry indicates that only 1 in 10 adult Jamaicans, despite knowing, comes forward with information to the Police about cases of abuse against children, including sexual abuse.

This is unacceptable! We cannot remain silent!

Cases of incest and sexual abuse in the family setting are also very unsettling.

It is a crime. It is evil. It must be condemned.

Big men and women, fathers and mothers, stepfathers, uncles and cousins, who prey on children, must leave our little children alone!

Mr. Speaker, these statistics reveal a disturbing and chronic pattern of deviant behaviour and cruelty.

Too many of our children are not being allowed to live their childhood years in peace.

We must speak with one voice: It is wrong! It must stop!

Let us begin by having an honest conversation about this cancer in our Nation!

We must inform and mobilise every citizen to recognize, report and reject the violation of our children.

- We cannot afford to be weak or ambivalent in our response.
- We must step up.
- We must get involved.
- We must bring this hidden horror into the light of day.

Let our collective voice be heard loud and clear, in every nook and cranny of this country! No more indifference, no more silence!!!!

Mr. Speaker,

The Government has established the Office of the Children's Registry (OCR), the Child Development Agency (CDA), and the Centre for the Investigation of Sexual Offences and Child Abuse (CISOCA).

Government alone cannot do it. Citizens have a responsibility!

The children of Jamaica belong to all of us!

The African proverb tells us, “It takes a village to raise a child.”

We must all make a concerted effort to bring new life to this proverb.

Mr. Speaker, we must intensify our efforts to bring to book perpetrators of these heinous crimes against our children – to hold them accountable!

I wish to commend all:

- Parents who are making sacrifices every day to protect and nurture their children;
- Teachers who are mentoring and guiding our children;
- Social workers and counsellors who are working with families to heal the hurt and keep families together; and
- Citizens and neighbours who are taking action to report crimes against our children

Continue to be vigilant and protect the wellbeing of our children.

Mr. Speaker,

We know most of our people love our children and will do everything to protect them; but the evil minority must be stopped in its tracks.

I wish to announce, today, that the law is to be amended to allow for stiffer penalties where a girl is murdered and the perpetrator knew that she was pregnant.

This is to be treated as an aggravating feature in determining the sentence imposed by the court, so that the murderer receives significantly harsher punishment in the form of a longer sentence.

As we move decisively on this matter as a Government, we are inspired by the words of a little girl who penned her thoughts in the Children’s Vision Tree created by the Child Development Agency last November. These are the words of young Aalivahn:

“I would like Jamaica to be a peaceful place where noise is less and happiness is more. I would like for crime and violence to stop!

I would like it to be like the olden days where people used to live like one family and as a nation.

I would like Jamaica to be the best and for all bad man thing and gunman thing to stop! I would like Jamaica to be as one, as a family and as a nation.”

Mr. Speaker,

A single candle can defy the darkness!

Our children are diamonds - precious gems.

They are gifts from God.

They are our future leaders. We will protect them.

1.3 Riverton City

Mr. Speaker,

The last two weeks have been a difficult period for thousands of Jamaicans in Kingston, St. Andrew and St. Catherine, who were affected by the fire at the Riverton City Disposal Site.

I sincerely empathise with all the persons who were impacted in one way or another – whether through health challenges or the disruption of their daily activities.

I would like to make special mention of the students, and their families who have been affected by the postponement of the GSAT examination.

We postponed the exam after consulting with stakeholders, and concluded that this was in the best interest of the students, and the integrity of the exam.

I know that students and parents have been preparing diligently for these exams.

I am encouraging GSAT students to go out and do your very best.

All of us in this House and across the nation are proud of you.

Mr. Speaker,

Through the coordinated efforts of the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management and several public and private sector agencies and partners, we have passed the worst.

My commendations to the

- Office of Disaster Preparedness
- Fire services
- Security forces
- National Solid Waste Management Authority
- Other first responders
- Members of the Private Sector and the community, for being on the front-line during the crisis

Thank you for your dedication and hard work, and may God bless you.

The Ministers of Local Government and Health will provide more information on this issue.

1.4 Health

Mr. Speaker,

I turn now to the Health Sector.

To show this Government's commitment to the health and wellbeing of the nation, **\$7 billion is being added to the allocation for Health in this year's budget.**

The Health sector received **\$41.7 billion**, last year; this year, the allocation is **\$49.1 billion**, reflecting a **17% increase**.

It is the largest increase in the non-debt expenditure in this Budget.

That is real commitment to the wellbeing of the people of Jamaica.

Mr. Speaker,

We are the first to admit that while this is a significant increase, it is still not enough to solve all the challenges the Health Sector faces.

Various arguments have been made about whether or not we should remove hospital user fees.

Mr. Speaker,

There are no easy choices.

This year's budget is built around the continuation of the 'No User Fee Policy'.

Despite financial challenges, we have been looking at how we can address some of the shortcomings in the health system.

We are committed to improving the quality of our customer service and patient care.

Mr. Speaker,

This Government has commenced the preparation of a 10-year development plan for the health sector.

Our response has been to meticulously improve the primary healthcare infrastructure, especially in rural Jamaica.

Since we began the Primary Health Care Infrastructure Renewal Programme in 2012, 128 health centres have been renovated and equipped, at a cost of over \$660 million.

All of these clinics now have much improved facilities.

That is real commitment to the health and wellbeing of our people.

We are balancing people's lives, as we balance the books.

As promised, we have also completed centres of excellence, with one located in each health Region. They can be found in:

- Darliston in Westmoreland
- Claremont in St Ann
- Isaac Barrant in St Thomas, and
- Santa Cruz in St Elizabeth

We expect that these Centres of Excellence will assist in reducing the high levels of lifestyle diseases including diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and some forms of cancer.

Let me remind Jamaica that each of us can improve our health by taking personal responsibility for our eating habits, exercise and lifestyle in general.

It is also very well known that many of our locally grown foods are healthier and more affordable than other options.

Prevention is better than cure. We must eat what we grow, and support our farmers.

Our doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other health professionals, the vast majority of whom were trained right here in Jamaica, are among the best in the world and are highly sought after in the global marketplace.

They continue to have my respect and admiration for their dedication and the long hours they work under trying circumstances, often without praise or public recognition.

I encourage them to:

- Continue their commitment to deliver a quality public health service to their patients;
- Always look out for the most vulnerable in our society who are in dire need of their services

I know that Jamaica can count on your essential support to create the change we all want and which our people deserve.

Mr. Speaker,

The growth and development we seek for our country cannot be achieved without a healthy population.

SECTION 2

Moving Forward with Jobs, Investment and Growth

Mr. Speaker,

This budget presentation, “**Moving Forward: Jobs, Growth and Development**”, comes after three years in office.

During that time, the Jamaican people have kept faith with us, working “with all their hearts” to rebuild and lay a stronger foundation for the growth and development of our economy.

Their sacrifices are paying off.

Jamaica now stands on the threshold of a brighter tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker,

In January 2012 when we took office, we found that our nation was in serious trouble.

We had to make some very difficult decisions in order to fix the foundations of our economy and protect the future of our nation.

It has been a tough journey, and there were times along the way when many persons became discouraged and wondered if we would ever see the top of the mountain.

Today, we can say that our economy has stabilised, the respect for our country by the international community has been restored, and our confidence is rising as we reap success!

Mr. Speaker, the people of Jamaica are the real heroes and heroines. They recognized the peril facing our country and they placed their support behind the bold but tough actions that were required to fix our economy.

By standing up for our country, Jamaicans have created a stable environment for economic growth, investment and job creation.

A word to the wise: the Jamaican people are not fooled by the bluster of ‘sound and fury, signifying nothing’.

2.1 This is Progress!

Mr. Speaker,

Since 2012, Jamaica has made remarkable progress.

Analyses by leading organizations show that the measures we have taken, since then, were and are necessary to put the economy on a **sound footing for long-term and sustained economic growth**.

I know that sometimes it is difficult to 'see' progress, as it is taking place.

The results speak for themselves:

- We have been meeting our targets and have passed all seven quarterly IMF tests so far.

This is progress!

- The 'Big Three' agencies that rate the economies of the world -- Standard and Poor's; Fitch and Moody's; have kept a close watch.

They all agree that we have been meeting or surpassing our macro-economic targets.

As a result, Jamaica's credit worthiness has been upgraded.

This is progress!

- These favourable reviews have been enabling us to access loans, especially in the overseas financial markets, and to positively influence investors.

This, Mr Speaker, is progress!

The Bank of Jamaica is reporting significant activity in the Micro Finance Sector.

This is progress, Mr. Speaker.

These things have only happened in the last three years.

- We have rebuilt the economic foundation of the country.
 - We have restored international credibility.
- This is progress!

We cannot stop now. We have come too far. We have to find the resolve to complete the journey to economic prosperity, as Jacob Miller sang, ***"Forward ever, Backward never!"***

Mr. Speaker,

We must never lose sight of our national goal.

Let us be inspired by the vision of our Founding Fathers, who won our political independence, and who in turn bequeathed to us the mission of gaining our economic independence.

We are moving in the right direction!

When we entered the chambers of this Parliament as elected representatives of the People, we had a mandate.

Our people wanted, among other things, economic independence.

Today, I declare in this Honourable House that the mission of economic independence for the People of Jamaica is not an elusive dream.

My Government remains firm in its resolve to make this a reality for the people.

We will not fail. We are working for that glorious day!

2.3 Context for Action

Mr. Speaker,

Lest we forget...

In January 2012, we inherited a country in social and economic despair.

We needed to take decisive action.

However, while our economic situation is still challenging, there is a marked difference between then and now.

- Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) have rebounded under this Administration.

In 2011, FDI receipts stood at US\$218 million.

By 2012 our FDI receipts had more than doubled – and went up to US\$490 million.

In 2013, the recovery continued with FDI inflows of US\$567 million.

Mr. Speaker,

Just last week, the Bank of Jamaica announced that Jamaica attracted US\$707 million in foreign direct investments over the 12 months ending September 2014.

Mr. Speaker,

The figure at September 2014 is equivalent to \$J 81.3 billion dollars worth of investments flowing into the Jamaican economy.

This is progress.

You see, Mr. Speaker,

There is indeed a marked difference between then and now.

This is progress, and we won't stop the progress!

The Opposition continues to weave a tale that nothing is happening in the economy and that we are worse off.

That is indeed a tall tale – a fairy tale.

- The IDB Country Representative is on record as describing Jamaica as a “sweet-spot” for global investments.
- Jamaica’s greatly improved ranking from 94th to 58th in the World Bank’s ‘Ease of Doing Business Report’ is proof that there is a marked difference between then and now!

Mr. Speaker, I could go on...

- The highly influential Forbes Magazine has named Jamaica as “the Best Caribbean Country in which to Do Business.”
- The ILO 2015 Global Report “*Women in Business and Management, Gaining Momentum*” says that Jamaica has the largest number of female managers in the world!
- We are ranked number 1 with nearly 60% of our managers being women.

That is not only progress, it is progressive!

All of these things have happened in the last three years.

Mr. Speaker,

In the face of this evidence, all of us in this Honourable House must agree that there is a marked, positive difference between Jamaica in 2012 and Jamaica today.

We have rebuilt the foundation.

We have restored international credibility.

We are opening up more spaces in the economy for participation and inclusion.

Mr. Speaker, my fellow Jamaicans, getting to this point was not easy.

I need not remind anyone that in 2012 there was no feasible alternative to securing the stamp of approval of the multilaterals for an economic recovery programme.

This Administration, fresh into office, had to secure the support of the International Monetary Fund to rescue the Jamaican economy.

At that time, the multilaterals – the IMF, IDB and the World Bank-- were not keen on re-engaging with Jamaica.

They had been stung by the broken promises of the Government of Jamaica between 2010 and 2011.

Mr. Speaker, the negotiations with our multilateral partners early in 2012 were tough and uncertain.

I recognised at the time, that bringing them back to the table required deft, quiet and effective diplomacy.

My team and I got to work.

We had to secure the support of our friends and stakeholders at home and abroad.

They included our bilateral and multilateral partners, the Jamaican private sector and the Jamaican people including those in the Diaspora.

We could not afford to *“let Jamaica fail”*.

Fortunately, thanks to our enlightened policy of engagement, which we on this side of the Honourable House have been pursuing since the 1970s, we still had ‘friends in court’ in Washington.

Upon learning of the challenges we were facing, representatives of the Congressional Black Caucus immediately began to lobby the IMF on Jamaica’s behalf.

That was confirmed by the Managing Director of the IMF, Madame Lagarde herself, when she visited Jamaica, last December:

“I remember the 24th of December, 2012, the day before Christmas.... We had been told how difficult the situation is... and I was in close contact with Minister Phillips, but little did I know that there would be international pressure coming from the Hill.”

She went on to say:

“I welcomed on that day, 24th December, a group of Congresswomen and one man who came unannounced, sat in my office and said to me,” “You have got to help Jamaica.”

As a result of that, thankfully, we were able to re-establish negotiations with our multilateral partners, early in 2012, and to arrive at the Extended Fund Agreement.

Quiet, behind-the-scenes diplomacy won the day for Jamaica.

Not noise, not bluster, not bullying and not arrogance.

I thanked members of the Congressional Black Caucus, while I attended the Caribbean Energy Summit in Washington this past January.

Today, I am pleased to place on record in this Parliament my thanks to my dear sister and friend, the distinguished United States Congresswoman Maxine Waters.

I also wish to thank Congresswoman Yvette Clarke, daughter of Jamaican-born former New York City Council Member, Una Clarke.

I express the appreciation of the Government and people of Jamaica to the members of the US Congressional Black Caucus, who spoke-up on behalf of Jamaica.

There can be no doubt that having signed off on the Economic Reform Programme, which is a central tenet of Jamaica’s agreement with the IMF, Jamaica is in a better position today than it was three years ago.

This is progress.

Mr. Speaker,

The Opposition would have you believe that we have not made any progress.

The Opposition Leader even resorted to comical theatrics by bringing three baskets to this debate.

When I introduced the food-basket to Parliament, many years ago, it was not meant to poke fun at the plight of the people.

I feel the pain our people are facing and know the difficulties. The pain is real. People's pain should never be exploited for cheap theatrics and political grandstanding.

What is worse, Mr. Speaker, most of the items in his food baskets were imported.

There was no yam or dasheen.
I didn't see any plantain or banana.
I didn't see any peanut or red peas.
I didn't see any cabbage or callaloo.

On behalf of the farmers of Jamaica, I say that we must eat what we grow and grow what we eat.

Mr. Speaker,

Some people are green with envy that we are passing the IMF tests.

If we did not pass the seven IMF tests, there would be nothing in the basket, except, perhaps, a little Eucalyptus Oil.

Why are they so upset?

Do they not want progress for Jamaica?
Do they not want what is best for Jamaica, land we love?

Mr. Speaker,

I am confident that the majority of Jamaicans want what is best for our country.

Once again, I salute all our public servants for their fortitude and understanding and ask for their continued support to see the journey through.

They want the best for our country!

We also recognise with gratitude, the sacrifices made by several institutional and individual bondholders, who took a cut on their investment returns under the debt exchange programme.

They want the best for our country!

Our growth agenda, guided by our fiscal policy is designed to achieve the best for our country.

SECTION 3

Physical Infrastructure

Mr. Speaker,

To support our growth strategy and our social development, we are improving our infrastructure:

- Better roads allow farmers to get their produce to market quicker.
- Greater access to water improves our production levels, productivity and personal comfort.
- Building more homes increases opportunities for employment, fosters better community life and allows more Jamaicans the opportunity to own a piece of this Rock.

These will lead to greater productivity and efficiency and, ultimately, economic growth and development.

Mr. Speaker,

The Public Sector, Public/Private partnerships and the Private Sector on its own, have implemented several infrastructure projects.

3.1 Roads

I now begin with the nation's roads.

Last year, I opened the Moneague Leg of the North-South Highway.

We now have the first phase of a direct link from Kingston to the North Coast. This has improved on the North Coast Highway created by a previous Administration, led by us.

Both the North Coast Highway and the South Coast segment of Highway 2000 have stimulated expansion in housing and commercial developments.

The same will hold true for the North-South Highway, which is being developed with private capital in partnership with the Government.

I commend China Harbour Engineering Company for its significant investment, which is well in excess of US\$600 million in the North-South Highway project.

The opening of the Mount Rosser segment, last year, is already having a major positive impact on the transaction of business along the North Coast and the western end of the country.

Passenger and business commute has been made easier and persons now have greater options in determining where to live and work.

That is development. That is progress.

We are moving forward!

The developers have promised that the Bog Walk Gorge Bypass segment of the North-South Highway should be opened, by early next year, with completion of the entire roadway by, or before, December next year.

The Jamaican private sector is being encouraged to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by this highway.

We are moving ahead with other important road-works under the Major Infrastructure Development Programme.

\$1.5 billion dollars has been earmarked to finance the rehabilitation of approximately **60 kilometres of roadways**, and \$127 million for **repairs and reconstruction** of six bridges.

There is much more that can be said about roads, but the Minister of Transport, Works and Housing will present details, when he addresses the House.

He will also tell the House about other infrastructure projects taking place including the development of our airports and seaports.

Kingston Container Terminal

However, Mr. Speaker,

I am pleased to announce that the Port Authority of Jamaica has concluded negotiations in respect of a long term concession to Finance, Expand, Operate, Maintain and Transfer the Kingston Container Terminal.

The Cabinet yesterday gave approval for the signing of a Concession Agreement with the Preferred Bidder, the **Terminal Link/CMA CGM Consortium**.

The official signing will take place on April 7.

The Agreement contemplates dredging, optimisation and expansion of KCT in two phases, which will include dredging of the ship channel, turning basin and some berths to accommodate Post Panamax Vessels.

Phase 1 also contemplates significant civil works to retrofit and deepen some areas of the berths.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that this transaction does not require a Government Guarantee and is the first transaction that would be included in the Contingency Ceiling legislated in April 2014.

Mr. Speaker, this is a major development which will have significant benefits for the country's development and is an important component for the Logistics Hub.

This is progress!

We are moving forward!

3.2 Water

Mr. Speaker,

Water systems are essential for meeting the domestic needs of the people as well as to boost agriculture, manufacturing and tourism expansion.

The provision of potable water to our people, wherever they live, is critical to their quality of life.

I think we can all agree that, while we have made significant progress in the provision of potable water to our population, we still have some way to go.

The provision of water from new or upgraded sources, for domestic use and irrigation to expand agriculture, is among the priorities of the Government.

Water projects completed or now underway include:

- Rainwater Harvesting Programmes all in St. Elizabeth, Clarendon, Westmoreland and St. Ann;
- Over \$170 million was spent on twenty (20) rural water supply and pipeline upgrading projects across nine parishes during the last three years.
- Several rural communities in Westmoreland, St. Elizabeth, St. James, St. Mary, St. Ann, St. Thomas, Portland, St. Catherine and Clarendon benefitted from these projects.
- The Martha Brae Plant has been expanded to increase supply to areas in St. Ann and Trelawny. This will impact some 70,000 persons.

In the coming year, there will be greater emphasis on expanding rural water supply to areas that are still underserved.

These include:

- Upgrading of the Linstead/Ewarton system in St. Catherine and the Norwood System in St. James with a total investment of \$750 million by the Government, will benefit 60,000 persons.
- Refurbishment of plants at Bogue in St. Ann, Great River in St. James, and Martha Brae in Trelawny with an \$800 million investment by the Government, will improve water supply to another 360,000 residents.
- Plans are also being developed for new water mains through the town of Lucea, Hanover to increase supply for areas extending as far as Negril. This will benefit about 70,000 persons.
- As we continue to improve the town of Port Antonio, the construction of Stage 1 of the Port Antonio Water Sewage and Drainage Project is far advanced. This project is estimated to cost \$1.9 billion and will benefit 75,000 people.

Mr. Speaker, several areas in rural Jamaica will benefit from a range of ongoing water and sewage projects, in this upcoming financial year, representing a total of \$5 Billion dollars in capital expenditure by the Government.

I will mention just a few of these projects:

- \$1.2 Billion is being spent on the construction of a groundwater facility in Innswood, St. Catherine.
- \$450M is being spent on the construction of the Non-Pariel to Orange Hill and Retirement water system in Westmoreland; 20,500 persons will benefit from this water supply system when it is completed
- \$205M for the construction of the Mason River/Kellits/Bullhead and Sandy River water supply system in Clarendon, which will benefit 6,500 persons when completed.
- \$170 million dollars - for the construction of the pipeline from Nain to Junction in St Elizabeth
25,000 residents in these communities will benefit from improvements in their water supply.

3.3 The Ownership Society

The progress we have made in the provision of land and housing for the people represents a significant effort to improve their quality of life.

We want more Jamaicans to own a 'piece of this Rock'.

Between last year and this year, I have presented titles, keys and other instruments of ownership to Jamaicans in St. Mary, Manchester, St. Thomas, Clarendon, Trelawny, Westmoreland, and St Catherine, among other parishes.

It is always such a delight for me to share the joy of land ownership with persons across the island.

Mr. Speaker,

I turn next to the National Housing Trust, which falls within my Ministerial portfolio.

There are some who would want the people of Jamaica to think that the NHT is not doing its job of providing housing for NHT contributors.

Let us take a moment to look at the record of housing delivery by the NHT under my watch since 2012:

- \$3.6 Billion spent to provide 226 housing solutions at Hellshire Phase 4
- Some 2,436 houses and serviced lots delivered to NHT contributors since January 2012

These developments are all over Jamaica:

- Majesty Gardens in St. Andrew
- Bushy Park, Union Estate and Caymanas in St. Catherine
- Longville in Clarendon
- Meylersfield in Westmoreland
- Creighton Hall and Bellrock in St. Thomas
- Nashville in St. Mary

- Perth in Manchester and
- Hampden in Trelawny
- ***NHT Construction Projects now underway include:***
 - 113 lots in Balaclava, St. Elizabeth
 - 44 Townhouses at Eltham, St. Catherine
 - More houses at Longville Park, Clarendon
 - Serviced lots at Granville, Trelawny
 - Houses at Industry, Hanover, and
 - More houses at Perth, Manchester and at Hellshire.
- The NHT has also provided loans totalling \$3.1 Billion to the Housing Agency of Jamaica which provided some 1,100 additional houses and house lots, between 2012 and 2014.

Between 2012 and 2015, the Jamaica Mortgage Bank, provided more than \$4 Billion in loans to private developers to provide more than 1,200 houses, apartments and house lots.

These housing solutions are located in:

- Discovery Bay, St. Ann
- Negril, Westmoreland
- Montego Bay, St. James
- Huddersfield, St. Mary
- May Pen, Clarendon
- Providence, Manchester
- Spanish Town, St. Catherine, and
- In St Andrew at:
 - Kensington Avenue
 - Charlton Road
 - Red Hills Gardens
 - Stilwell Road
 - UWI Campus
 - Halifax Avenue; and several others

This is progress.

This is government at work.

3.5 The Development Agenda

Mr. Speaker, the Urban Development Corporation (UDC) is making a significant and renewed contribution to the National Development Agenda.

Today, the UDC is a renewed organisation.

The organisation has emerged from an operating loss of \$1.2 Billion in the financial year 2011/2012, and is now in the black. It is again profitable.

In 2012, I appointed a new Board of Directors to rebuild and reposition the UDC to once again stimulate economic growth and national development.

Three years later, a stronger more focused UDC has emerged.

Over the last three years, the UDC has earned approximately \$2.5 billion from an aggressive divestment strategy through sale of assets and leases of several non-performing or under-performing assets.

Mr. Speaker, over **\$81 Million** has been saved in annual holding costs by the divestment of six assets:

- The Machado Complex
- Mahogany Inn
- The Jamintel Building
- The Forum Hotel and Cottages
- The Oceana Hotel, and
- Lot 21 in Downtown Kingston

I am pleased to say that the UDC is projected to make a modest operational profit, by the end of this financial year.

The Forum Hotel

Mr. Speaker,

The old 11 storey, 200 room Forum Hotel and Cottages languished for decades despite repeated efforts by successive governments to divest this non-performing asset.

There was so little hope for its eventual sale that it was suggested that the government should just give away the property.

Well, Mr. Speaker, today we can proudly say that not only have we **NOT** given away the property; we can say that the sale of the old Forum Hotel was completed by the UDC in 2014 for a total of \$350 Million.

The property has been sold to a Jamaican private sector group **Portmore Marina Development Limited** which is transforming the site into a one-of-a-kind modern residential and commercial waterfront development.

When completed, the project will boast panoramic harbour and city views for:

- 75 two and three-bedroom single family bay-front villas; and
- 120 bay-front apartments

The development will also showcase a Bay Front Club and Marina, which will offer a full suite of dining, recreational and entertainment facilities and amenities to Portmore and other communities.

During the construction phases, approximately **350 jobs** will be created.

Within 18 months, the overall project will result in investments of approximately **\$2.2 Billion**.

Mr. Speaker,

This development project will bring an exciting new dimension to the municipality of Portmore.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is new, tangible investment by our local private sector.

This is wealth creation.

This is job creation.

Local investors are showing confidence in the Jamaican economy!

This is progress. We are moving forward!

Mr. Speaker,

The fisher-folk and other persons involved in associated commercial activities, who were utilising the Forum Beach, have been relocated to a New Fishing Village Complex created by the UDC at Sector M East on Port Henderson Road. Several shops are now in operation and the new fishing beach is being utilised.

A formal management group representing fisher-folk, vendors and other commercial interests has been established and has already received training.

They have applied for permission to form a Fisherman's Cooperative. This new Fishing Complex is open for business.

This is development at work.

This is progress.

Oceana Hotel

Another facility owned by the Government, which had been slated for divestment over a prolonged period of time, is the old Oceana Hotel in Downtown Kingston.

In 2014, a Jamaican/Canadian consortium purchased the Oceana Hotel from the UDC for \$385 Million.

The two companies involved in the consortium boast Jamaican vintage.

Mr. Anthony Alberga is the Chairman and CEO of Downing Street Partners Realty, a proud Jamaican whose talents and professional expertise in real estate investment have taken him overseas.

He has partnered with Mr. Stephen Facey, CEO and Chairman of Pan-Jamaican Investment Trust Limited, to renovate and refurbish the Oceana property to create an upscale hotel and multi-use business complex.

Starting with the commercial complex in Phase One, there are planned investments of approximately \$1 Billion dollars over the next 12-18 months.

The full roll-out of the overall development, inclusive of the hotel operations, will also see additional investments being made in future phases.

Demolition work has already started on the ground floor of the Oceana building.

The ground floor, which spans 70- thousand square feet of space, is being fully renovated.

It will be outfitted with new equipment, fixtures and fittings to accommodate 400 to 500 persons in modern office space facilities.

Design and planning works are already underway and physical works are expected to commence, within three months.

We are reviving Downtown Kingston.
This is Progress!

Such a bold undertaking is not new for the Pan-Jamaican Investment Limited, one of our leading and highly successful property conglomerates.

Today, Stephen Facey steers the ship of the Pan-Jam conglomerate which is also responsible for the Construction of the 129 room 'Courtyard By Marriott' hotel in New Kingston. This hotel will be opened by this summer.

We salute the Facey family for these important projects – continuing the vision and legacy of its patriarch, the late, great, Honourable Maurice Facey.

Victoria Pier

The Victoria Pier on the Waterfront will be leased to another local investor who is already renovating the old building to develop a first-class restaurant, a lounge complete with gaming facilities and an art gallery.

Another UDC-led project is the Festival Marketplace, which is projected to become the newest social hub of Kingston.

This project is being implemented by the UDC and will involve the construction of a Food Bazaar on the Kingston Waterfront and development of restaurants, sidewalk kiosks, and entertainment facilities along the Craft Market waterfront area.

Beautification works have already commenced along Ocean Boulevard from the corner of Princess Street to Orange Street.

The Festival Marketplace will extend all the way to the corner of Church Street and will involve an investment of \$100 million dollars, when completed in May 2016.

Mr. Speaker,

The sale of Lot 21 in Downtown Kingston by the UDC to Grace Kennedy Limited for **\$75 Million** is another divestment linked to the transformation of Downtown Kingston.

US \$20 Million dollars – that is over 2 billion Jamaican dollars – will be invested to create a mixed use commercial centre with over 70,000 square feet of premium office and retail space supported by a multi-storey parking facility.

The construction phase of this project is expected to **employ over 200 persons**.

Mr. Speaker,

The UDC is positioned to spend **\$2.2 Billion** on capital development and investment projects, this year.

These projects will create real economic activity and contribute to growth.

Some of the major projects planned for the 2015/2016 financial year are:

- Caymanas Estate Sewage Conveyance System – **\$463 Million**
- Primary Infrastructure for Caymanas – **\$131 Million**
- Caymanas Estate Water Supply Phase 3 – **\$20 Million**

This expenditure will result in a total investment of \$614 Million in the Caymanas Estate to make the lots ready for investment to support the Special Economic Zone.

In yet another demonstration of joined-up Government, between the UDC and the NHT, the Hellshire Development Area will also benefit from further investments in sewage infrastructure totaling some **\$364 Million** in the 2015/2016 financial year.

This will benefit the people of:

- Seafort, St. Georges,
- St. Georges Cliff,
- Sandhills and Sandhills Bay,
- Fort Clarence;
- And will also serve new NHT residential developments.

Last month, I handed over keys and possession letters to sixty proud homeowners at Sandhills in Hellshire.

The investments will not stop there. UDC will also be working, working, working in Downtown Kingston on several projects that are estimated to cost \$504 Million. These projects include:

- The refurbishing and repair of the Office Centre Building – **\$106 Million**
- Tiling and Refurbishing of the Tax Office on King Street – **\$23 Million**
- Facelift of East Street, an important gateway to Downtown Kingston – **\$18 Million**

- Phase 4 Renovation of Jubilee Market – **\$82 Million**
- Repairs to the Office Centre Building – **\$49 Million**
- Phase 1 of the re-development of the Old Naval Hospital – Port Royal Museums and Historic Walkway – **\$160 Million**

A further \$293 Million will be invested in upgrading works at the Dunn's River Attraction to include:

- Beach replenishment,
- Development of the central gardens,
- Expansion, and
- Upgrading of public restrooms and other infrastructure.

\$220 Million will also be spent on the Ocho Rios Fisherman's beach.

The UDC has had a rebirth and is revitalized, stronger, and more relevant.

I wish to congratulate the Chairman of the UDC Board, the Honourable K.D. Knight and his team.

Mr. Speaker,

Tangible developments are taking place in the country. These are real, not imagined.

The investments that are taking place by the private sector, both our local investors and those from overseas, are also real, Mr. Speaker.

SECTION 4

Investment, Employment and Growth

Mr. Speaker,

Our platform for growth and jobs is benefitting from an increased momentum in investment.

Two weeks ago I addressed investors in Montego Bay at the Jamaica Investment Forum 2015.

There is renewed optimism among investors, who have seen the strides we have been making in the economy and the significant improvements in the business climate in our country.

I met with potential investors and expect that from those meetings, additional investments will materialize.

We are securing new investments in renewable and other areas of energy, in agriculture, mining, information and communications technology, industry, financial services, physical infrastructure and tourism.

4.1 Salute to Investors

Mr. Speaker,

To listen to my colleagues from that side of the House, you would believe that there is nothing good happening in Jamaica.

The people of Jamaica need to reject those who constantly preach gloom and doom and would keep us in a state of perpetual negativity.

This saps the confidence and energy of the country. This is not the people we are!

We are a resilient people and I will never lose faith in the Jamaican people.

There have been several persons and businesses that have seen growth in profits and are moving ahead with significant investments to create new jobs and grow the economy further.

Today, I want to acknowledge and salute some of them.

Sutherland Global

I want to pay tribute to Mr. K.S. Kumar of Sutherland Global Services (SGS).

Sutherland Global is the single largest investment resulting from the Jamaica Investment Forum 2012.

Sutherland Global currently employs over 30,000 professionals in 35 delivery centres across the world. Sutherland Global employs 2,000 persons in Jamaica.

The SGS business model creates employment for University students who can work to maintain themselves as they study.

Over 80 per cent of the company's clients are Fortune 1,000 companies.

The company has expanded outside its original centre at the UWI, with operations in New Kingston and plans to open in Mandeville.

Jamaican Private Sector Leaders

I want to commend the members of the local private sector who are investing in our country, expanding their businesses and providing employment for our people.

A business which has created its own niche in the transport sector is the Knutsford Express bus company.

I salute Mr. Oliver Townsend of Knutsford Express and his team for providing efficient, reliable, comfortable and safe shuttle services in modern executive coaches which traverse our highways and major thoroughfares.

I salute Mr. Yoni Epstein, who is the President of the Business Process Industry Association of Jamaica and is responsible for collaborating with industry players and the Government to expand Jamaica's growing outsourcing industry, that has created 5,000 new jobs – particularly for young people.

Mr. Speaker,

Mr. Jeffrey Hall is the Chief Executive Officer of Jamaica Producers Group. Under his leadership the company has focused on manufacturing, logistics, mining and agri-business in the Caribbean and Europe and has made significant investments and acquisitions in the past few years.

Mr. Gary "Butch" Hendrickson, serves as Chief Executive Officer of Continental Baking Company Ltd. and Coconut Bay Management Ltd. Mr. Hendrickson is also the Chairman of EXIM Bank and has held several notable leadership positions in Jamaica.

His family has the largest inventory of hotel rooms in the island. They provide jobs for 4,500 Jamaicans and are major players in poultry and meat-processing, baking, packaging, and animal feeds production.

Mr. Glen Christian, the founder and Chairman of Cari-Med Limited, Kirk Distributors Limited and Federated Pharmaceutical Limited, started his own pharmaceutical distribution company, Cari-Med Limited, with three employees.

Now, across his three companies, this business leader and philanthropist employs approximately 700 workers.

There are so many others, Mr. Speaker. I wish I could make mention of all of them, but time does not permit.

These are just some of the captains of industry who have continued to invest their time, energy and resources into our nation.

We cannot forget the business women, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Yanique Page is a dynamic young woman who founded Future Services International Limited, the first company in the region to specialize in legal funding and helping companies manage enterprise risks.

Mrs. Marjory Kennedy is another phenomenal Jamaican businesswoman, She is a director at Jamaica Freight and Shipping Company Limited, who has extensive experience in the shipping industry, has been appointed Honorary Consul and is a past President of the Jamaica Exporters' Association.

Mr. Speaker,

Some of these entrepreneurs started as small business persons with big dreams.

They are Jamaicans and overseas investors who are serious about this country and confident in the potential and future of this great nation.

My Government will do all that is possible to continue to facilitate their expansion as we all go for growth and development with job creation.

4.2 Energy

Mr. Speaker:

Addressing the issues surrounding energy is a key part of our growth strategy.

Mr. Speaker,

As we are fully aware, Jamaica's economic competitiveness depends on reduced costs of energy.

Since late last year, we have experienced some reduction in the price of petroleum products. We cannot afford to take this for granted.

We have experienced significant reductions in oil prices before, only to see them rise again.

It is in recognition of the need to reduce the risks to the economy and our Growth Agenda in respect of energy prices why my Government has been pursuing a comprehensive energy strategy:

- (1) Increasing the proportion of renewable in our energy mix;
- (2) Diversifying the fossil fuel sources for the bulk of our electricity needs;

- (3) Increasing the efficiency of generating units through the replacement of old and inefficient units;
- (4) Implementing a conservation programme; and
- (5) Hedging to insure our oil imports against later sharp increases in prices.

The US\$90 million wind project by Blue Mountain Renewables is an example of the first element of the policy – that is, increasing renewables.

The expansion of the capacity of the Wigton Wind Farm; and an investment to be made in a solar facility in the constituency of South West Clarendon, are further examples of this important strategy.

The decision by the Government to accept the recommendations of the joint public/private Energy Sector Team (ESET) addresses the second and third strategies of diversifying our fuel mix and ensuring more efficient power generation.

A framework proposed by the Team has been accepted by Cabinet.

If all goes according to plan, it will involve an investment of over US\$1.5 billion in a three-year time-frame.

This will have a great impact on our economy, first on employment during the construction phase, as well as on the purchase of local goods and services.

On completion, Jamaica will be provided with adequate, stable and cheaper electricity.

However, not all our efforts with respect to energy are on the **Supply** side.

Quite a bit of attention is being given to the **Demand** side as well.

In other words, the way we consume energy must continue to change.

This means that we have to intensify our efforts in energy conservation.

Every business, every household has to make it a priority to conserve energy.

Mining

Mr. Speaker, I turn briefly to mining.

I have good news to report about Jamaica's bauxite/alumina sector.

Today, I am pleased to announce that Rusal Alpart commenced extraction of bauxite yesterday, March 23rd.

The company has already employed 40 people and has committed to hire an additional 70 persons by the end of this month, and is on track to hire 250 people in total for the duration of the project.

UC Rusal has secured all the required permits for its operations.

Haulage of bauxite from the plant to the port will commence by the end of April 2015.

Igor Dorofeev, the Country Manager of UC Rusal, is with us today, and I wish to thank him for his company's commitment to Jamaica.

This is progress!
We are moving forward!

4.3 Tourism

Mr. Speaker, during the past three years, investments in the tourism sector have reached almost J\$35 billion with the building, renovation and upgrading of several resort properties.

This has been another year in which Jamaica has set new records in the tourism sector.

We achieved another major milestone when we welcomed over 2 million stopover visitors surpassing the 2013 record by 3.6%.

The indications for the 2014 calendar year's gross foreign exchange earnings for the tourism sector stood in excess of US\$2.2 Billion – a 5.8% increase.

Our cruise passenger arrivals were even more impressive in 2014 when compared to 2013. We saw an increase of 12%, with over 1.4 million arrivals.

In total, Jamaica welcomed over 3.5 million visitors to the island in 2014. This is the first time that we have ever achieved this in Jamaica.

Mr. Speaker,

Last Friday, I was delighted to officially declare open the Hyatt Ziva & Zilara Hotel in Montego Bay.

There are still more investments on stream.

These are NOT just about statistics. These investments will result in the creation of new jobs and opportunities for Jamaicans in the sector.

Additionally, over \$1.6 billion will be expended in various programmes across the island including:

- An Islandwide Public Beach Park Programme. We are ensuring that our children will have access to the best beaches in Jamaica.
- Health tourism projects including the Milk River Hotel and spa redevelopment project;
- The Ocho Rios Enhancement Project (Phase 2); and an
- Islandwide Rest Stop Programme.

Mr. Speaker,

This year, the Ministry of Tourism through a partnership with the Tourism Enhancement Fund and the Tourism Product Development Company will commence work on the Islandwide Rest Stop Programme, as I have insisted. The programme will be implemented over three phases.

Twelve locations have already been identified for Phase 1 – in St. Elizabeth, St. Ann, Trelawny and Hanover.

Other major initiatives include the enhancement and development of heritage sites and museums; including the Roxborough Museum, Seville Museum and the Civic Centre in Montego Bay.

Mr. Speaker,

Tourism is not just about sun, sand and sea.

We are investing in our culture and our people so that our visitors can share in Jamaica's diverse offerings.

Mr. Speaker, I move now to this Government's new emphasis on an economic ecosystem of innovation as we move forward with growth and development.

4.4 Economic Ecosystem of Innovation - Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics and Culture & Creative Industries

Mr. Speaker,

Last year I announced the reconstitution of the National Commission on Science and Technology and the formation of the **National Cultural & Creative Industries Commission**.

This year, I am pleased to announce to this Honourable House that both entities have been established and are working.

Both Commissions are made up of private and public sector stakeholders, in keeping with our inclusive partnership based approach to governance.

As a Government, we are taking a targeted and focussed business approach to the related Cultural, Creative, Science, Technology, Energy and Mathematics Industries.

This approach of creating an ecosystem for complementary sectors represents the new thinking of this Government.

The objective for the Government is to create an enabling environment in which more businesses, grounded in innovation, talent and science can be established and thrive.

I will first take a closer look at our Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics based industries.

4.4.1 Science and Technology

Mr. Speaker:

An increased emphasis on the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) is now recognised as an important route for equipping our people for the demands of the modern job markets, now and into the future.

About **80% of the fastest-growing occupations** require the mastery of mathematics and scientific knowledge and skills.

These include Information and Communications Technology based industries, including software development and animation.

It also includes bio-technology and neutraceuticals, among others. For Jamaica to go forward, and become more competitive in these areas, we need our people to embrace STEM activities.

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science, Technology, Energy and Mining are working to build up our STEM capacity.

As I share with you some of the STEM activities taking place, you will immediately see the linkages to the development of our creative industries, through innovation and content production.

Mr. Speaker, over the last three years:

- Approximately 24,000 tablets have been distributed, free of cost, to students and teachers in 38 educational institutions under the Government's \$1.4 billion **Tablets in Schools Pilot Project**.

These educational institutions include pre-primary schools, primary schools, all-age and junior high schools, high schools, a teachers' college and a special education institution.

Today, we have in the House, sitting in the galleries, seven students from the Haile Selassie High School in my constituency.

They are proudly showing off their new tablets and they are online watching my speech and tweeting messages to their friends!

- Through the **Universal Service Fund**, some **205 Community Access Points** have been established at a cost of \$605 million.

All 156 secondary schools, which are now equipped with computer labs and broadband technology, will benefit further from interactive whiteboards

- There has been the training of 335 High School Principals and Heads of Department to lead the '**mathematics revolution**'.

- Over 700 teachers were trained in various subjects to improve their technical expertise.
- \$40 million worth of Technical training Equipment has been provided to schools.
- A National Mathematics Policy and Programme is being implemented to achieve 85% proficiency in mathematics at Grade Four by 2018.

It is also encouraging, Mr. Speaker, to see that the private sector is involved in this drive to improve the performance of our students in the important subject of mathematics.

Every parent knows that having passes in mathematics increases their child's ability to secure better jobs.

Through our investment in the STEM subjects, we are helping families to lift themselves out of poverty through education.

This is transformation at work.

We have quite some way to go but we are indeed moving in the right direction.

We are moving forward....

Neutraceuticals

Mr. Speaker,

Just last month I attended a special event showcasing the products of our neutraceutical industry – which is another important science-based sector.

Over 50 per cent of the plants identified worldwide as having medicinal properties are found in Jamaica.

We also have some of the best healing waters in the world – Rockfort Mineral Springs, Milk River in Clarendon, and Bath in St. Thomas.

Mr. Speaker,

Again we commend the scientific community for their work in this area.

We are ensuring that these national assets are developed in a sustainable and strategic manner in order that our country and our people can derive maximum benefits.

We look forward to the benefits to be derived from medical marijuana.

We are moving forward...

Science, technology and the new creativity revolutions are directly related to each other.

Many creative activities are now Internet based. Music, film, animation, special events, sport, broadcasting and other areas are heavily reliant on technology for the delivery and trade of creative and cultural products and services.

This is why we have paid such close attention to the development of the cultural and creative ecosystem and economy.

4.4.2 Cultural and Creative industries

Mr. Speaker,

This year, this Government has budgeted over \$2.6 billion across Ministries in support of the creative economy.

Of this:

- The Ministry of Youth and Culture and its agencies will receive an allocation of approximately J\$1.2 billion for ongoing cultural programmes
- \$86 million has been allocated for the implementation of the programmes of the Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment, including craft enhancement.

This is an increase over the approximately \$11 million allocated the previous financial year.

- Through the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce approximately **J\$83 million** has been allocated for cultural and creative industries related activities.
- The Ministry of Science, Technology, Energy and Mining's budget related to creative industries, and with specific reference to the neutraceuticals and animation industry, is \$184 million.
- The Government's budget for sport exceeds \$593 million, and
- \$10 million has been allocated to the work that seeks to coordinate cultural and creative industries across Ministries, through the Commission.

We are moving forward with new approaches and new ways of thinking to spur growth, investment and jobs!

Mr. Speaker,

I want to spend a little time today on Sport. This sector exemplifies what is possible when we are strategic and consistent in our planning and implementation over time.

4.4.3 Sport

I have long since said that 'sport is the greatest unifying force in the world, seconded only by music. Our enthusiasm for sport never dies. Sport is also big business! We continue to develop strategies which include the expansion of infrastructure to facilitate growth in this sector.

Mr. Speaker,

In August last year, I switched on the floodlights at the Sabina Park Cricket Complex, installed at the cost of \$303.9 Million.

This project was made possible through a bilateral agreement between the Government of India and the Government of Jamaica. Funding was provided by our partner, the Government of India, the Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF) and the Consolidated Fund of the Government of Jamaica. The project was managed by Urban Development Corporation.

We have opened up new opportunities for City Kingston.

I now invite members of our private sector to take advantage of the fact that this facility and others are now open for business and can be put to work to generate income.

Investment in sport infrastructure continues during 2015/2016 with several other major projects including the reconstruction of the running track and infield at G.C. Foster College of Physical Education & Sport at a cost of J\$168 million.

We have also implemented the High School Sport Infrastructure Improvement Project. **\$250 million is being invested** in the upgrading of physical infrastructure of sporting facilities in 24 schools over a two year period.

We established **Jamaica Sport**, which is a Technical Working Group, with linkages between the Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment and the Office of the Prime Minister, which will coordinate and develop sport tourism locally and leverage 'brand Jamaica'.

Mr. Speaker,

The Jamaican Athletes Insurance Plan will also become a reality in 2015/2016. An actuary has been engaged and stakeholder consultations have begun to discuss the results of the actuarial study.

Mr. Speaker,

Everywhere I travel it doesn't take very long for the name Usain Bolt to come up in conversation.

'Brand Jamaica' has become synonymous with our athletes.

As a result of this consistent effort over time, we now boast a constellation of stars including Ambassador Shelly Ann Fraser-Pryce, Veronica Campbell Brown, Asafa Powell, Javon Francis – to name a few of our athletes.

We must not forget that we also have flag bearers in our gold medal swimmer, Ms. Alia Atkinson, and WBA Super World Featherweight Title Holder, Nicholas "the Axeman" Walters.

We are not stopping, we are moving forward to investment, job creation and growth.

We have taken a sector where the emphasis has traditionally been on recreation, wellness and spectacle, and have begun to provide an enabling environment and improved physical facilities, with a view to developing a viable industry.

From the building of the National Stadium, to the establishment of GC Foster College of Physical Education, the Sport Development Foundation, INSPORTS and the CHASE Fund; to the tabling of the National Sport Policy in 2013, we have taken Jamaican sport 'to the world'.

SECTION 5

The Global Context: Good Neighbours, Good Friends

5.1 Economic Diplomacy for Growth

Jamaica's strong international partnerships are being pursued through trade, investments and people to people exchanges.

We remain faithful to our commitments for the economic advancement and social development of our people within the Caribbean Community, other regional groupings, and to our obligations as a responsible member of the global community of nations.

On behalf of the people and Government of Jamaica, I wish to acknowledge all our bilateral and multilateral partners.

In 2014 we strengthened our cooperation with our partners in the United States of America, Canada and the UK in areas such as financial services, trade, investment, tourism, security, and human rights.

At the same time, The PetroCaribe Agreement continues to shine as a beacon of cooperation between Venezuela and several countries.

Jamaica will host the 10th Anniversary PetroCaribe Summit in Montego Bay in September 2015.

This special Summit will be convened against the backdrop of:

- The 200th Anniversary of the famous 'Jamaica Letter' written in Kingston by the Venezuelan Liberator, Simon Bolivar;
- The 50th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between Jamaica and Venezuela; and
- The opening of the Simon Bolivar Cultural Centre in Kingston later this year.

Mr. Speaker,

The upcoming Summit of the Americas, to be held in Panama City next month will mark a defining moment with the historic participation of Cuba.

On the eve of the Summit, Jamaica will proudly host President Barack Obama.

Mr. Speaker:

Jamaica continues to be appreciative of the development assistance provided by EU Member States individually and collectively.

Jamaica's economic development is also benefitting from the overseas investment thrust of, and grant funding from, The People's Republic of China.

Last year, Jamaica and Japan celebrated the 50th Anniversary of diplomatic relations, and renewed our mutual commitment to further cultural and economic cooperation.

Mr. Speaker,

Diaspora relations constitute an important part of our international focus.

This year we will convene the 6th Biennial Jamaica Diaspora Conference from 14th – 18th June 2015, in Montego Bay under the theme: *“Jamaica and the Diaspora: Linking for Growth and Prosperity”*.

Mr. Speaker,

Jamaica will continue to actively participate in the deliberations on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), leading to an agreement on a Post-2015 Development Agenda.

In order to advance our positions on the new development agenda, cooperation is critical at the regional level, as we engage with our CARICOM partners, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and the group of Small Island Developing States.

Jamaica continues to nurture its relationships with its good neighbours, and good friends.

Our foreign relations and activities continue to be a strategic element of our growth and development agenda.

SECTION 6

Education and Training

Mr. Speaker, the Education Reform Programme that we have embarked on seeks to strengthen all elements of our education system – early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary.

There is much more to do, even as we have seen great successes across the spectrum of our education system.

While there is much to say and many great stories to tell, I will leave the details to our Minister of Education.

There is an area I must speak to, however, which is central to the growth agenda, and that is our emphasis on productivity and training.

Mr. Speaker:

An important part of any growth strategy is an educated and trained population, especially in the relevant areas that will lead to more and better-paying jobs for our people.

We have to train our people to be able to perform in traditional sectors, the emerging sectors I have described, and for the global labour market.

Among some programmes being pursued by the Ministry of Education are:

- The provision of TVET kits –which places greater emphasis on vocational training in 60 of our high schools.
- The introduction of new TVET programmes in two additional skills areas in 2014: Hydroponics and Customer Service.
- The Registered Apprenticeship Programme which was launched last year is benchmarked against international standards.

14,000 participants have been provided with free access to HEART/NTA level one and level two programmes at Community Training Institutes.

- Five new CAPE subjects have been added that have immediate relevance to job opportunities.

These new subjects are:

- Tourism,
 - Agricultural Science,
 - Entrepreneurship,
 - Performing Arts,
 - Physical Education & Sports.
- The HEART Trust/NTA is being repositioned to focus on the creation of a comprehensive National Training Agency to drive Workforce Development.

SECTION 7

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker,

I have given an outline of some of the strategies my Administration has been pursuing as we move forward to growth.

We know where we are going.

We are moving forward:

- More investment,
- More jobs,
- More opportunities for our people,
- More growth!

Mr Speaker,

Growth is the imperative of an entire nation! We are all in this thing together.

We have laid the foundation.

We are moving forward!

We are now confident that:

- Growth will be accelerated as more entrepreneurs formalize their businesses.
- We are moving forward!
- Growth will be even more obvious as more local and overseas business-persons choose to invest in Jamaica.
- We are moving forward!
- Growth will be undeniable as we all make the commitment to increase our productivity, follow our ideas with action and get the wheels turning.
- We are moving forward!

The growth agenda is Jamaica's agenda.

We are moving forward!

Whether you grow ginger or make music; whether you do nails or drive a taxi; whether you are in big business, small and medium sized, private or public sector; you are part of the growth agenda.

Your growth agenda is our agenda!

We are moving forward!

Mr. Speaker,

The economic foundations of our country are much stronger today than they were when we took office in 2012.

Jamaica is in a much better place.

Things are not perfect, but we are making progress.

We are moving forward with Jobs.

We are moving forward with Investment.

We are moving forward with Growth and development.

That is what we are working for.

Everything that this Administration does is grounded in our belief in equality of opportunity and equity. These principles and ideals are at the core of our philosophy as a Government.

Equality of opportunity and equity are what our ancestors dreamed of when they were shackled as slaves.

These are the principles:

- Marcus Garvey wrote and spoke about,
- Norman Manley advocated for and acted on during his tenure in government.

These are the principles:

- Sir Alexander Bustamante agitated for,
- Nanny of the Maroons fought for and
- Sam Sharpe, Paul Bogle and George William Gordon died for.

Mr. Speaker:

When I leave here this evening, I will travel to New York to join world leaders at the unveiling of the **Permanent Memorial to Honour the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade**.

This takes place tomorrow at the United Nations.

This was an initiative of the Jamaican Government.

Once again, Jamaica took the lead to propose to the world that the notions of equity and equality of opportunity must be upheld. We hold fast to these principles!

That is why Mr. Speaker, our progressive agenda will not be constrained by labels. Development is our doctrine.

Increasing jobs, our aim.

Sustainable Growth is our mission.

Mr. Speaker,

This is a pivotal period in the history of our beautiful country.

We are operating in a world of change and challenge.

We have come this far, lifted by the resilient spirit of the Jamaican people; propelled by their undying faith in themselves and their country.

We are a progressive people and we must move forward and not be deterred.

We must continue to build on the foundation laid over the past three years.

We are not there yet, but as a nation of God fearing people we can say, “Hitherto hath the Lord helped us” (1 Samuel 7:12).

Let us not magnify the problems, but instead magnify our achievements.

We shall not be depressed, defeated, or depleted.

There is a light shining in us that the world cannot put out.

I call on my Jamaican people, my brothers and my sisters.

Let us stay the course. Let us find that inner strength to push forward.

The mountain top is not far away. It is in sight and together we will get there.

We are determined and we can accomplish what we will.

We are moving forward, onward and upward, to a better Jamaica and a stronger and more prosperous people.

God bless you all.

God bless Jamaica, land we love.