

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY



**Statement to Parliament
by the Honourable Peter Bunting, MP
Minister of National Security
Gordon House
Tuesday, 14th June 2015**

Introduction

Let me address two preliminary but important points before I get into the substance of my statement.

Firstly, I would like to use this opportunity to express my condolences to the family, friends, and colleagues of Constable Curtis Lewis who was attached to the Little London Police in Westmoreland. He died as result of injuries he sustained after he was hit down by a motorcycle in Westmoreland yesterday. The death of this young constable reminds us of the variety of risks our security forces face each day as they embark on their duties. I believe I can also, on behalf of this entire House, express our regret and sadness at the loss of over 600 Jamaican lives to violence, especially the 39 children, since the start of the year.

Secondly, many of us here have made remarks on the political platform, which after reflection, could have been put differently. The language of politics is often rough and encouraged by the atmosphere at political rallies. I have regularly been the target of such language. I have been described recently as “callous” and even as “Satan”. In one case I was libeled so severely that I

had to resort to the court to successfully defend my name. But two wrongs don't make a right.

Last Sunday I made comments at a constituency conference in Eastern St. Andrew that were unnecessarily harsh and seem to have caused a fair amount of discomfort; additionally, these remarks are inconsistent with my approach to handling my portfolio. I have been focused on Uniting for Change and my remarks were contrary to that objective. Therefore I would like to use this opportunity to apologize for those remarks.

Jamaica Murder and Crime Statistics in Context

For almost five years since 2011, Jamaica has averaged about 1,100 murders per year well below the all time peak of 1,692 in 2009. While the average has been around 1,100 the actual figures have been within a band of 1,000 to 1,200. Last year was the lowest in a very long time recording 1,005 murders. If we continue at the same rate as the first half of the year, the 2015 figures will end at approximately the 2013 figure of 1,200.

We are all very concerned about reversing the gains we made last year, but those of us who have been studying this problem over many years understand that progress will not always be on a straight line basis. There will be setbacks.

Paradoxically, the figures for other categories of serious and violent crimes are all down. Shootings are down by 8%, Rape down by 25%, and Aggravated Assault down by 14%. Acquisitory crimes or robberies are also down by 16%.

So what we are experiencing this year is not a general surge in crime but rather a spike in murders.

It is important for us to understand some of the main contributors to this spike:-

On a per capita basis the parishes of St. James, Hanover, and Westmoreland have the highest murder rates. St. James has a murder rate of two and a half times higher than the rest of Jamaica.

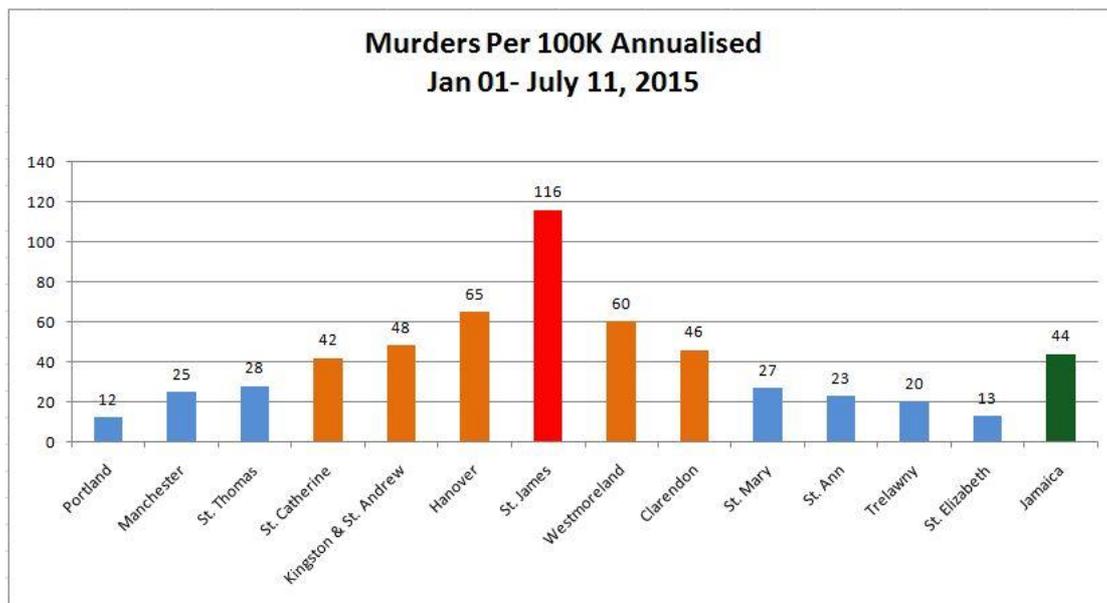


Figure 1 Murders per 100K Annualized (Jan 1 - Jul 11, 2015)

St. James, Hanover and Westmoreland are the parishes where lottery-scamming activities are concentrated and also where the murder rates are the highest. A recent analysis by the NIB found that at least one in three murders in Area 1 were identified as lottery scam related and it is suspected that the figure may be significantly higher.

About half of the murders island-wide are categorized as gang related and earlier this year there was a significant increase in murders in St. Catherine North as a result of an intra-gang feud. This has subsided based on a number of initiatives introduced in that police division.

We can conclude that participation in scamming and gang activities is what places the victims, their families, and friends/neighbours at greatest risk. This is corroborated by studies by the Violence Prevention Alliance, which suggest that only 15% of violent incidents are committed by perpetrators unknown to the victim. It also helps to explain the results of the recent LAPOP study that placed Jamaica at the lowest level of crime victimization in the hemisphere.

Violent crime is very concentrated on victims who themselves are involved in scamming or other criminal activities, and in the places where they hang out. This should be a warning to parents, families, and neighbours who turn a blind eye to that youngster who they know is scamming or otherwise “mixed-up”.

Underlying these specific scenarios is the culture of violence that has developed in much of our society. Even family members resort to extreme violence to settle disagreements, evidenced in 52 domestic murders so far this year (20 more than last year). Many cases of child on child violence, some fatal, have also been occurring.

We know the contributing factors: i) poor parenting; ii) inadequate schooling; iii) poor social conditions; iv) undiagnosed or untreated mental health conditions; v) lack of employment. All these factors contribute to increasing the vulnerability of youth to crime. However, it is the culture of violence and acceptance of criminality that exists in many communities plus easy access to guns (fed by the guns for drugs trade) that complete the ingredients necessary for the high murder rate that we have experienced for decades.

I invite the Leader of the Opposition to do some research on the multiple causal factors that contribute to violent crime and he will learn that it is not simply about income or poverty. Right here in the Caribbean we have the examples of Trinidad and the Bahamas with much higher per capita incomes than Jamaica yet with similarly high murder rates, while Haiti with the lowest per capita income in the hemisphere has one of the lowest murder rates in the Caribbean.

The response to the spike in murders

The Commissioner of Police recently outlined a series of operational responses, which I will not repeat today. However, there are a number of supporting initiatives from the policy level, which I will outline, starting with the **support for improving the operational capability of the security forces.**

1. There will be a substantial improvement in the operational mobility of the security forces over the next few months:
 - On the JCF side, 60 motorbikes have already been purchased for delivery by the end of this month and orders for 45 patrol cars, 27 pickups, 4 trucks and 3 buses are in the final stages of the procurement process. This will be in addition to 22 vehicles already acquired in April 2015.

- The delivery of new Protected Mobility Vehicles (PMVs) for the JDF has commenced. Nine PMVs are scheduled for delivery this year. This is the first set of new PMVs provided to the JDF since the V150s were acquired in the 1970s. The acquisition of these rugged all terrain vehicles will assist the JDF both in combating heavily armed criminal gangs as well as in disaster relief situations.
2. A MNS team, drawn from the FLA, JCF, and the Audit Department, has completed an audit of private firearms and ammunition stored in every police division across Jamaica. On completion of each divisional audit, the firearms and ammunition were transferred to the FLA for safekeeping and ultimately for destruction. This exercise involved over five thousand firearms and tens of thousands of rounds of ammunition, some of which had been left with the police by their owners decades ago. This exercise has eliminated the possibility of leakage of these firearms into the illicit trade.
 3. We have recently completed an upgrade of the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (APFIS) and the Telecoms infrastructure of the JCF and work is underway to upgrade the 119 emergency call centre. The total cost of these upgrades is in the region of a billion dollars.

Recognizing that crime statistics are outcomes of failures or weaknesses at many different levels of the society, we are **implementing a comprehensive set of social intervention initiatives** that target the root causes of crime. For example:

- Employment, training, restorative justice, and dispute resolution initiatives through **CSJP III**
- **Parenting campaign** via media and public education events
- **National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention** - Over 1,000 Jamaicans from across the country came together on June 16th at the Jamaica Conference Centre to join in the cause and Unite for Change. Of those attending 450 persons signed up to volunteer

with programmes aimed at Youth Violence Prevention under the Theme: 'Do the right thing – Volunteer to protect our Children'. 25 organisations were on display and over 30 presented on opportunities to volunteer in the areas of Parenting, Community Safety Planning, Youth Leadership, and Preventing Reoffending. These volunteers will be managed through the Council for Voluntary Social Services in Jamaica. The Deputy Governor General, The Prime Minister, Several Cabinet Ministers, and the Deputy Opposition Spokesman on National Security, and the leadership of the Umbrella Group of Churches, the Council of Voluntary Social services, and the Violence Prevention Alliance all participated in solidarity.

- **Violence Interrupters** – The Ministry has increased its sponsorship of violence interruption activities. Fifty persons (with credibility with youth in communities) have been recruited and are being trained by the Peace Management Initiative (PMI) and Cure Violence in violence interruption methodologies and then deployed back into communities with the highest levels of violence. Twenty have been trained and deployed in St. Catherine North since the beginning of June and an additional 30 have been recruited and are scheduled to be trained this month for deployment in St. James.

Finally, since taking office we have been working assiduously to **develop policy and pass legislation to support the fight against crime.**

- The 2013 National Security Policy established the broad framework of strategic analysis and direction for the medium term.
- The Law Reform (Fraudulent Transactions) (Special Provisions) 2013 Act created a new set of offences covering activities related to advance fee fraud, identity theft, etc. This has facilitated the arrest and prosecution of hundreds of scammers since its introduction.
- The Criminal Justice (Suppression of Criminal Organisations) Act 2014 created a new class of conspiracy type offences. It is similar to the anti-racketeering legislation used in the USA to prosecute organized criminals.

- Amended the Proceeds of Crime Act to ensure that we take the profit out of crime and make it more difficult for the facilitators of money laundering.
- Tabled the DNA Act, which provides a powerful investigative tool to help identify perpetrators and secure convictions.

I am today tabling a Bill entitled “The Maritime Drug Trafficking (Suppression) (Amendment) Act, 2015. The Bill seeks to grant the Minister responsible for National Security the power to waive Jamaica’s right to exercise jurisdiction over Jamaican nationals who have been detained by law enforcement authorities of a treaty state seaward of any State’s territorial sea.

The law enacted in 1998 allows the Minister to waive Jamaica’s rights to exercise jurisdiction over vessels, cargo, and non-nationals but not over Jamaican Nationals. It has been difficult to successfully prosecute cases when Jamaica has asserted jurisdiction over nationals.

With the country located in the corridor between the main drug producing and drug consuming countries, collaboration with our international partners to prevent traffickers transiting the country’s waters is an absolute necessity.

This amendment has become even more urgent as there has been an increase in cocaine traffic through the Caribbean as law enforcement concentrates on the Central American routes. It will also be useful in tackling the guns for drugs trade between Jamaica, Haiti, the Bahamas, and Florida.

Conclusion

I have today outlined the three-pronged approach that this administration is taking to combat the current murder spike (and long term violent crime challenge) through: 1) Strengthening the operational capabilities of the security forces; 2) Addressing the root causes of our societal violence with various social intervention strategies; and 3) bringing important legislation to this House to support the investigation and prosecution of criminals.

We can no longer afford to diminish our will and efforts to defeat crime in this country by political point-scoring and gamesmanship. This will only serve to

weaken the morale of the security forces, embolden the criminals, and trigger undue fear and alarm in the society.

Let us instead unite around the best ideas to tackle this problem. I close by inviting the Opposition to bring forward any ideas that they may have for additional measures to address this long standing obstacle to Jamaica's development – violent crime.