

STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
BY MINISTER OF NATIONAL SECURITY, THE HON. PETER BUNTING, MP

This afternoon I will update this Honourable House, and the nation regarding two recent issues, which this Administration considers to be serious threats to our national security. The first concerns our recent refusal to land a CARICOM national in the interest of public safety and security, and the second, the security sector's contribution to Jamaica's preparedness for the threat posed by *the Ebola virus*.

The Most Honourable Prime Minister tabled the 2013 National Security Policy (NSP 2013) in this House earlier this year. The NSP 2013 identified terrorism and natural hazards (including infectious diseases) among the *Tier 2* threats to national security. Tier 2 covers threats that are currently seen as relatively low probability (i.e. they might not happen) but could be high impact if they did (in terms of fatalities, economic loss, civil unrest or social disruption). The Tier 2 threats therefore require very careful monitoring. It is also essential that we take all necessary steps to ensure that they are prevented or mitigated as far as possible.

The NSP 2013 noted that there are two key points with respect to Tier 2 threats such as terrorism and infectious diseases. First, these threats have the potential to cause catastrophic harm to Jamaica so it is important to actively monitor all Tier 2 items so that they can be rapidly upgraded to a Tier 1 'Clear and Present Danger' if necessary.

Second, the concept of 'low probability' always refers to a particular period of time. So, for example, the probability of a terrorist attack may increase during certain high profile events relative to other periods. A US-led operation in the Middle East, for example, might increase the risk of a terrorist attack on American tourists in a third country – such as this one.

Similarly a 'low probability' designation would have applied to the threat of Ebola even a few months ago. Now, however, as a result of the recent spread of the disease across the world, the risk that it might arrive in Jamaica has increased.

It is within this policy context that I now to turn to the two issues.

The first is the **REFUSAL OF LEAVE TO LAND YASIN ABU BAKR**

This Honourable House would be aware that the Nation of Islam held a mass event at the National Arena last Sunday to commemorate the 19th Anniversary of the Million Man March. Kingston welcomed hundreds of members and well wishers from the USA and other countries to participate in this event. Our security planning recognized that while the Nation of Islam did not itself represent any threat, it was possible that the occasion might be used as a cover for others to enter Jamaica for purposes that could be detrimental to our national security. Therefore, the security forces and PICA maintained a heightened state of alertness during the period around the staging of this event.

On Wednesday, October 15, 2014, Jamaica's Passport Immigration and Citizenship Agency (PICA) executed a decision to refuse leave to land Trinidadian Yasin Abu Bakr, leader of the Jamaat al Muslimeen, a radical group based in Trinidad and Tobago.

WHO IS YASIN ABU BAKR?

Given the wide speculation and public deliberation on the matter, it is important to share with this Honourable House, a brief history of Abu Bakr's and the Jamaat al Muslimeen's conflict with the law.

1) In 1990, Abu Bakr co-organized and attempted a violent coup d'état, with the suspected aim of establishing an Islamic state in Trinidad and Tobago. The country's then Prime Minister, A.N.R. Robinson and other Parliamentarians were taken hostage. The Prime Minister was subsequently shot and another Member of Parliament was killed. Twenty-four deaths were attributed to this coup attempt.

A March 2014 Commission of Enquiry Report into the 1990 attempted coup identified Abu Bakr as the unrepentant mastermind and described him as "ruthless".

2) In November 2005, Abu Bakr was arrested and charged with inciting extortion and sedition. A search of his office turned up a high-powered assault rifle, along with a hand grenade and 700 rounds of ammunition.

3) In 2007, Bakr found reason to deny connections that were made between him and an alleged plot to bomb the JFK International Airport in New York. The alleged plot led to the arrest and conviction of two nationals from Guyana and one from Trinidad and Tobago.

4) To date three members of Bakr's Jamaat Al Muslimeen group have pleaded guilty to the murder and dismemberment of a Trinidadian woman.

It has also been reported that a number of Trinidadians are currently fighting for or otherwise aiding ISIS and other Islamic terrorist groups. There is therefore a possibility that there are now connections between radicals and militants in Trinidad and some of the most dangerous and ruthless terrorist organizations in the world.

WHY ABU BAKR WAS REFUSED LEAVE TO LAND

1) Bakr was refused leave to land under Section 4 (1) h of the Immigration Restriction (Commonwealth Citizens) Act. The Act permits the Minister of National Security to refuse leave to land to

"Any person who, from information or advice... is deemed by the Minister to be an undesirable inhabitant of, or visitor to the island".

2) Under the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, a CARICOM state is allowed to refuse to land a CARICOM national on the grounds of national security. In the Shanique Myrie ruling, The Caribbean Court of Justice said at paragraph 70

*"...no restrictions in the interests of public morals, national security and safety, and national health should be placed on the right of free entry of a national of any Member State **unless** that national presents a genuine, present and sufficiently serious threat, affecting one of the fundamental interests of society".*

In the judgment of this Administration, Yasin Abu Bakr "...presents a genuine, present and sufficiently serious threat..." to our national security to prohibit his free entry to Jamaica.

COST FACTOR

A great deal has been said in media and by the Opposition about the sum paid by the Government, to charter a private plane to return Yasin Abu Bakr to Trinidad. Here are the facts surrounding this specific issue:

- The immediate attempt was to return Abu Bakr on a Caribbean Airlines flight to Trinidad. He was not cooperating and had to be accompanied by immigration and security personnel. He was placed in an economy-class seat, but became boisterous, uncooperative and refused to comply, citing medical issues among other reasons.
- Authorities at Caribbean Airlines (CAL) indicated that it would be a breach of security protocol to have a non-compliant passenger fly in the first class cabin (in the vicinity of the cockpit) and which in any event was already fully booked. The flight was unwilling to depart given Bakr's display of resistance and the entire flight was at risk of being cancelled as the other passengers became increasingly concerned.
- Section 28 of the Immigration Restriction (Commonwealth Citizen) Act provides that, in these circumstances, it is the duty of the state that refuses a person leave to land to bear the cost of the return of the individual from its public funds.

All things considered, this seemed the best course of action immediately available to the government.

- it was clearly in the interest of national security to not land this individual and to remove him from Jamaica at the earliest opportunity.

- The individual's non-compliance and unruliness was an obstacle to his traveling on commercial and most private chartered aircraft.
- He needed to be accompanied by a number of immigration and security personnel.
- Notwithstanding all the above the Jamaican government still had a duty of care to the individual particularly with regard to his medical issues which may have put him at risk from protracted delay or even traveling in economy.

While the cost of Abu Bakr's removal by a private charter was significant, it pales in comparison to what the attempted coup d'état cost Trinidad in 1990, or what a terrorist incident would cost Jamaica today, or even with the billions of dollars that the mishandling of the Christopher 'Dudus' Coke extradition cost this country in 2010.

Mr. Speaker, I regard this expenditure the same way I do a home insurance policy. We regret having to pay the premium when nothing happens, but we are really happy to have that insurance in place when a hurricane hits.

I now turn to the second issue -

THE NATIONAL SECURITY MINISTRY'S CONTRIBUTION TO JAMAICA'S PREPAREDNESS FOR A POSSIBLE EBOLA OUTBREAK.

Mr. Speaker, as you may already be aware, the Most Honourable Prime Minister has established the Integrated National Coordinating Team to lead the country's preparations, should the Ebola virus reach Jamaica.

This multi-agency taskforce is jointly led by the Ministry of Health and the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF). It is important to understand that responding to an outbreak of a serious infectious disease (such as Ebola) does not only require the medical care component, but also requires a serious logistics capability - to plan, implement, and coordinate the provision of facilities, supplies, personnel and services for the operation. This is traditionally a core competence of military organizations and the JDF has always played a critical role in our disaster preparedness and response.

It is important to note that one of the contributing factors to the successful response to Nigeria's recent Ebola outbreak was that they had a Command Centre - originally established by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to fight polio - but which was rapidly redirected to coordinate the national response to Ebola. The World Health Organization and public health experts are now applauding the speed, decisiveness and coordination of the response by the Nigerian government.

We too have put the necessary facility in place. Jamaica has established its National Emergency Operation Centre (NEOC) which is based at ODPEM and supported by the JDF and the relevant

partner agencies, and will be utilized to coordinate our Ebola preparedness and, if necessary, our response.

Mr. Speaker, let me assure this Honourable House and the people of Jamaica, that our preparation to fight Ebola is in keeping with the best-known practices as stipulated by the WHO and adopted by countries that are now Ebola free.

The Ministry will be taking a number of steps to strengthen border security:

- The Coast Guard and Marine Police will be increasing surveillance of our maritime space
- PICA will be enforcing the recently announced travel ban on persons traveling from or via countries designated by the WHO as worst affected by the Ebola outbreak
- PICA/MoH will be implementing temperature sensors at our ports of entry. A number of handheld versions of temperature scan machines have already been handed over to staff at our ports of entry. These machines were made available through kind donations from well-thinking citizens. Just this morning, Minister Ferguson and I accepted a cheque of J\$4.3 million from Sagicor Jamaica Limited as a donation to PICA to purchase a body-scanning machine that uses infrared technology to detect individuals with elevated body temperatures.
- **The JDF will participate in the establishment of quick response teams to be based at Up Park Camp and support the public education and partner engagement activities of the Ministry of Health.**

The JDF has the track record, both in terms of experience and capacity to lead in disaster preparedness and relief, and will support the Ministry of Health in mounting a robust response to the threat of Ebola.

CONCLUSION

The Government is taking all necessary steps to protect our citizens from threats to our national security - whether from terrorism or infectious disease.

We must avoid panic and fear mongering. We must all focus on what we can do to educate the public, encourage them to keep calm, and build our preparedness for, and resilience to, these threats.

We hope and pray that Jamaica will avoid these threats altogether, but we will also ensure that if we are faced with a major incident, we will have the capacity to respond effectively and minimize the impact on the people of Jamaica.

October 21, 2014