

**2015/16 SECTORAL DEBATE PRESENTATION**

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**OPPOSITION SPOKESMAN ON NATIONAL SECURITY**

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**INTRODUCTION**

I welcome this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to participate in another Sectoral Debate.

After more than three decades in this Parliament, one would believe that it would be a mere formality speaking in this debate. But, it is such an important annual event, that even a veteran Member like me, still takes pride in participating.

However, Mr. Speaker, I am forced to remind the members, through you, of the changes which have been made to the format. Most importantly, the time limit, and the need not to disrupt members, who need to maximize the limited time available to them.

**HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT**

As the Leader of Opposition Business in the House, I would like to start by addressing the parliamentary issues.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support the decision to put time limits on the presentations, and I did not expect the change to be seamless. So I understand the teething pains and I hope that by next year we can iron out these kinks.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know if you are familiar with the recently published World Economic Forum report which ranked our Parliament at 86, or in the bottom half of the 143 countries rated in terms of the effectiveness of their law making institutions.

WEP's Global Information Technology (GIT) Report 2015, which rates countries, from one to seven, in terms of the effectiveness of the parliamentary institutions, scored Jamaica at 3.4, which is less than 50 percent of highest possible score of seven.

I can't say how accurate this ranking is, but the fact is that it was supported by a reputable international survey and the report is generally accepted, internationally.

Jamaica was criticised for the slow processes of its Parliament, and the report reminded us of the need for reforms to modernize our Parliament: In other words, step up to the 21st century.

I don't think that any of us could reasonably dispute that.

In light of all of this, it is really inconceivable how the present Government could have taken such a ridiculous decision, as to discontinue the programme of expansion of Gordon House which was started under the previous government.

You stop the progress, ignore the properties acquired under the expansion programme, and say no more money will be spent on the facilities until you are ready to construct a new Parliament building.

But, when are you going to construct the new building?

I know that won't happen any time soon, because the government does not have the courage to make an announcement like that between now and the next general election.

But, in the meantime, what you are doing is only making the dream of a new parliament building more elusive, because the members and the staff cannot work properly in these conditions and the public has become very apprehensive.

Are to remain confined within this building, originally constructed to house the Kingston and St. Andrew Corporation (KSAC), unable to meet either our local or international commitments as a 21<sup>st</sup> century Parliament, and waiting until the government finds it opportune to construct a new building?

As long as our committees cannot find the space to meet; as long as our staff are unable to perform efficiently, and as long as disabled Jamaicans cannot even access the building, it is evidence that while we are failing the people who elected us:

When we continue to fail our people, we lose their trust and confidence, slowly but surely, and that is not something that is easy to recover.

Mr. Speaker, I am appealing to the Government to either re-think their decision to discontinue the expansion we had started, or to commence the construction of a new Parliament before the end of the current parliamentary year.

I am also appealing to the Minister of Finance and Planning to find the funds for the either the necessary improvements to the building, or to start construct of a new one, as quickly as possible.

### **NATIONAL SECURITY**

Mr. Speaker, in January, the Minister, in an alarming statement to this House, assured the country that there was no need to be "unduly alarmed" about the rising murder figures.

It would certainly have been a timely assurance after his search for "divine intervention", if it was justifiable. The fact is that it wasn't justifiable, and more than two months later, we are experiencing a murder rate of over three per day.

No government, no minister, no country can be comfortable with a murder rate of three per day.

Three murders per day add up to approximately 1100 murders per year: If that is a rate that the Minister is comfortable with, fine; he must be convinced that he is winning the fight. But, that is not a figure which the Opposition is comfortable with; nor is it a figure which he should think that Jamaicans, at home and abroad, should be comfortable with.

Mr. Speaker, I too believe in the strength of "divine interventions", but I also believe that God help those who help themselves.

### **CRIME FIGURES.....**

Mr. Speaker, I have taken note of the transfer of Senior Superintendent Steve McGregor from West Kingston to St. James, which has the highest murder rate in the country.

I know that a lot of people's hope for peace and security in that parish rests on his success. However, I hope that the JCF is not returning to those times when it depends heavily on "brand name" crime-fighters with reputation given precedence over scientific study and response to crime.

We cannot return to a system where gunmen and police shoot it out on our streets, like in the days of the Wild West because innocent people will get killed in the crossfire.

I admire what SSP McGregor has done in West Kingston, but I am concerned about public perception of him as a crime-fighter after this, especially in an environment and territory which is new to him and probably lacking in the necessary resources.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, I have taken note of the statements made over the week-end by Assistant Commissioner of Police, George Quallo, about a new teenage gangster phenomenon which has emerged in sections of West Kingston.

According to the report, the ACP said that this gang includes children aged 13-17, who are being recruited and sent out to rob and return with the proceeds.

ACP Quallo did not pinpoint the operational area for this gang, and he did not respond to the rumours that the current killings in the areas bordering Central and West Kingston are intra-party, or conflicts between gangs showing allegiance to one party, but his revelation is very startling, however.

I want the minister to bear in mind, that when he accuses parents of failing to control their children, he should bear in mind that the majority of these boys are already fatherless and at-risk, with mothers who are saddled with growing up more children than they can handle.

As politicians, we are caught between a rock and a hard place, because if we suggest using public resources to assist them, we would be accused of using the public funds to support careless and irresponsible parents. But, if we don't, we know that the lure of quick and easy money is not only attractive to the children, but also to the parents, themselves.

But, something has to be done, Mr. Speaker.

#### YOUTH VIOLENCE

Mr. Speaker, I too am very concerned about the violence being perpetrated against our children, and which is being perpetrated by them, in some cases.

When children under 18 years of age start turning to gangsterism, in the way that the police has suggested is happening in downtown Kingston, then we are going to end up with more and more of them below the age of 18 being killed, as well.

It is a vicious cycle, and I am sure that it is giving the minister migraine headaches. But, he must fulfill his responsibility as Minister of National Security to serve and protect Jamaicans.

We notice, too, that it is not only a question of boys 13-17 years old turning to crime and violence, but girls are also turning to prostitution, becoming victims of trafficking in persons and various types of lewd activities in order to attract attention and make a living from them.

Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt that a lot of this is the result of the increasingly high levels of unemployment affecting the parents, and the lack of opportunities and the loss of hope which has resulted from the austerity that is being heaped on the people under the current Extended Fund Facility agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Mr. Speaker, the government loves to boast that it is doing the right thing by following a course of austerity, and demanding more and more sacrifices for the people, despite obvious signs that the people have already passed their limit.

They have passed their tax limit, and they have passed the limit in which they can continue to survive the endless pain, quietly.

This is a major issue and I noticed that in your speech last week you showed that you recognize that it was a challenge, not only for your ministry, but other ministries, as well; including education, health, labour and social security, perhaps agriculture and certainly finance and planning which holds the purse strings.

#### **POLITICAL COOPERATION**

Mr. Speaker, I don't think that the minister was being fair to us, when he invited the Opposition to "sincerely unite for change in the interest of the country".

I will quote the minister from his speech last week in the sectoral debate:

"I say to the Leader of the Opposition that our recent walk in Monymusk, Clarendon, where together we sympathized with the families of the victims in the wake of that tragic incident, is an example worth repeating."

Mr. Speaker I was totally taken by surprise to hear him utter those words. I could not have said it any better, Minister. I only wished you had said that when you were the Opposition's spokesman on national security.

However, the minister conveniently ignored the fact the first offer the current Leader of the Opposition made to the current Prime Minister, when he assumed the office of Prime Minister in October, 2011, was to suggest that they walk together through the so-called "garrison" communities, as a symbolic gesture to show they are at one on fighting crime and violence in these communities.

But, the Minister didn't stop there either. He went on to say:

"We need to demonstrate a more enlightened politics, to set an example in this area and to reinforce the culture of lawfulness in our society."

You know what came to my mind at that time, Minister, was look how far down of the road integrating these communities we could have been, if he had only said that to our current Prime Minister before she rejected the idea in 2011.

If seeing the Leader of the Opposition and the Minister of Justice walking through Monymusk, Clarendon, could have meant so much to that community, imagine how much more could have happened between 2011 and now.' Mr. Speaker, Bob Marley has a song that says "rain don't fall on one man's housetop".

So, when it comes to issues like national security, health and education – vital social services- we have always suggested that they be ranked above partisan political matters. That is how you demonstrate enlightened politics: by showing the maturity to remove partisanship from issues that affect the basic lives of all Jamaicans.

Mr. Speaker, when crime is in ascendancy, all Jamaicans, regardless of political affiliation, religious affiliation, class, colour, race, and including those living in the Diaspora, are concerned.

### **INTERNATIONAL THREAT**

Mr. Speaker, the recent visit to Jamaica by the President of the United States, Barack Obama, has raised a couple of security issues, which I would also like to address.

First let me express my pride in the effective co-operation of our security forces with the President's security personnel, which ensured an incident-free visit.

I have always felt confident about the ability of our security personnel to match those from anywhere else in the world, when given adequate resources and experienced leadership.

However, Mr. Speaker, we must admit that our national security threat has now extended way beyond our borders, and the threat of the Islam State (IS) or ISIS, as it is sometimes called, is not to be ignored.

I recall that when it was first suggested that our youth could be drawn into this violent circle, the minister dismissed it as frivolous.

I hope that events since then have changed his opinion and I hope that, in the very near future, he will be able to bring to Parliament a statement updating us on what are the steps being taken in this direction.

I hope that the minister does not ignore this threat, because it is such a real possibility and a danger to our youths, who could easily be lured into terrorism.

### **VISION 2030**

I also urge the minister to bear in mind that we also have a National Development Plan, Vision 2030, which is the 'roadmap' for making Jamaica, "the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business".

We only have 15 years to go to that target date, and national security must be the foundation on which we hope to achieve that goal. If we are not able to bring our murder figures under control, we will not be able to attract the kind of investments that we need to reach the level of growth that we want.

But, I have been noticing a the lack of reference to Vision 2030 in almost all the contributions made by the government so far, including that on national security. It raises a concern in my mind, as to whether the

government has lost faith in this national development plan and the projects necessary to help us make that deadline.

It is a genuine concern, because all our economic and social projects should be geared to moving us closer to achieving the goals of this plan.

I know that the Minister tabled a National Security Policy Ministry Paper late last year, but what has happened since. Are we going to just table these documents and leave them gather dust.

I am sure that if we were paying attention to that deadline, the budget for national security could not have remained at the same level for the past two years.

It is obvious that the priority that this subject demands is not recognized by the government or the minister of finance.

### **E-DIARIES/APFIS/ SMARTPHONE APPLICATION**

I welcome the announcement to introduce E-diaries to the police stations, to replace the old paper diaries, and I am happy that the minister has seen fit to introduce them in two rural parishes –Manchester and Clarendon- which should give us a good indication as to how effective that project can be.

I also appreciate the upgrading of the telecommunications and Automated Palm and Fingerprint System (APFIS), as well as the Unite for Change Smartphone application which could go a long way in assisting the police to respond to emergencies as quickly as possible.

These are useful resources in containing crime which, if properly applied, could greatly improve the reporting and investigatory aspects of policing.

In terms of APFIS, I know that the system had become untenable, because it could not handle the level of fingerprinting which was required. So, I am glad to see that the problem has been resolved, at least for the time being.

### **ZINCE FENCE**

The zinc fence removal project is something which we strongly support, due to the change in the environment which it creates, and benefit it provides for security personnel.

However, I have some suspicions, Mr. Speaker, that it may be becoming politicized, and I believe that may be the reason for the minister informing us last week, that he has received only two interests in this project – from Canterbury, St. James and Windsor Heights in St. Catherine.

I find it difficult to believe that any MP who has a significant number of zinc fenced communities would refuse to support this initiative, including the concessions made by the Cement Company and Tankweld in terms of the provision of cement and steel for the projects.

The Minister needs to provide the members with some more details about this programme and how it can be accessed, because I am sure that many more MPs who would gladly expressed an interest in this programme.

### **NEW TECHNOLOGY**

But, Mr. Speaker, we have heard nothing about three major pieces of anti-crime technology, which the previous government, as well as the current government, had seen as critical resources for the police – the shotspotter, the body camera and the expansion of the use of CC-TV.

We have heard nothing about increased mobility for the police. We have heard nothing more about the plans to replace the aged armoured vehicles being used by the Jamaica Defence Force.

We have seen a reduction in the budget for the police, which obviously means that they will have to do more with a lot less.

## **MOCA**

Mr. Speaker, I also took note of the Minister's grand announcement that between January, 2014 and March, 2015, the Major Organised Crime and Anti-Corruption Agency (MOCA) arrested 688 persons, charged 411, but only 29 persons have been convicted.

Another concern I have, Mr. Speaker, is that while MOCA currently operates as a joint staff agency with JCF members and civilian staffers, cabinet now wants it to become a statutory body, independent of the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), which means that MOCA will not fall under the Commissioner of Police. This is something that the Opposition cannot and will not support.

The Opposition totally rejects that MOCA should report to a political entity, instead of the Commissioner of Police. I brought our position, as forcefully as I could to the attention of the Minister when we discussed this issue, and I want him to be fully aware that we have not changed that position.

I have a serious concern about such a powerful policing agency not being under the command of the commissioner. Who then will be in charge? The minister?

We are not talking about a regulatory agency. We are talking an investigative agency, with police powers and civilian employees and, therefore, should remain under the command of the commissioner of police.

## **DECRIMINALISING GANJA**

Mr. Speaker, I have been watching with some consternation, the latest social project being pursued by the government: the decriminalizing of ganja.

We support the idea that too many of our young people have had opportunities to transform their lives dashed by smoking a ganja spliff or walking around with a stick of weed, and we voted for decriminalizing.

But, in doing so, we never saw, even in our wildest imagination, the possibility of such a mockery being made of the implementation of the legislation as has been emerging.

Who would have thought that the government would have implement such an important piece of social change legislation without settling the process of implementation?

There are so many issues which have not been resolved.

How does a policeman issue a ticket, without being able to properly identify the suspect?

How can an officer determine whether the smoker is psychotic, or whether the morsel of drug is just above or just below two ounces; and, in any case, how is he going to issue a ticket when they are not available.

The deeper we go into this implementation process, the more it appears to be a comedy of errors, emerging from a mad rush to decriminalize the weed before an election is called.

Everybody is in limbo as how to proceed. There is too much confusion, because the ministers involved mishandled the process.

I don't think this would have happened, if there was some bi-partisan discussions on the issue, before the Bill was implemented.

### **DNA Bill**

And this is why, Mr. Speaker, I will be insisting on a joint select committee of Parliament to review the provisions of the DNA Bill.

The government cannot expect to come to this House and admit that it has taken them three-and-a-half-years to finally draft a Bill, Parliament, but it must pass it within weeks.

I have seen where the minister has been insisting that there will be no select committee discussions on this Bill.

But, we are equally insisting that it is much too important a measure not to have the scrutiny of a joint select committee.

Parliament needs to have the opinions of experts in the medical and policing fields on these provisions, before we pass judgment on the Bill. We might get away with slipping up on the Ganja Bill, by failing to answer pertinent questions but, the people of Jamaica will not forgive us for passing a faulty DNA Bill.

### **UNITE FOR CHANGE**

Mr. Speaker, the minister has been relying a lot on the success of the Unite for Change (UFC) initiative.

The fact is that UFC is not really anything new. It is simply the bundling of a number of social intervention projects

I am not against the basic principles behind the UFC. However, I am aware that programmes like these do not create short-term changes: They take time.

The government and the minister need to understand that, although social change is a must in every society, the rate, the tempo, the speed and extent of change is not uniform.

It differs from society to society. In some societies, its speed is rapid; in another it may be slow. In some other societies it occurs so slowly, that it may not be noticed even by those who live in them.

Social and cultural change is not something that we can impose or legislate. There are too many factors involved.

We believe that one of the keys to success in this effort must be a transformation which will allow the average Jamaica to balance his/her life: Not a transformation dictated by our creditors, whose main interest is the repayment of debt, but by our commitment to reduce poverty.

The fact is that this government has been focusing so much on its economic policy, that it has forgotten its promise to balance the people's lives, by giving them an opportunity to move from poverty to prosperity, as we grow the economy.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, we insist that the government may be passing its economic tests, but it is failing the people's test.

It is creating a lost generation, which will take a lot more than the UFC to change.

It is creating a society in which most of our children are leaving secondary and tertiary institutions with a little piece of paper they hope will transform their lives, and the lives of their families, only to find that the economy cannot accommodate the majority of them.

It is creating a society in which most of our youths are willing to exchange their nationality, for opportunities abroad because they are losing faith in our ability to give them hope.

It is creating a society in which, as the National Security Policy states, many communities have come to accept crime and violence as a means of survival, and accept gangs and "Dons" as necessary to their social and economic existence.

The Minister's own statistics last week informed us that second only to the number of lotto scammers prosecuted by MOCA, was the police, themselves.

In a situation where there is so much corruption, where there is so much nepotism in the offering of jobs and the award of contracts, and where the government seems to be ignoring so many of these practices, even within its own ranks, social change is extremely difficult, minister.

The government needs to take its face out the paperwork from the IMF, and take a peek at the number of little boys returning to the streets to wipe car windshields, the number of young girls turning to prostitution while they are in primary school, and having relationships with older men even while the parents are aware.

What the minister must ask himself is, why are these things happening?

The fact is that, Mr. Minister, you can't grow a rose in a desert.

We can't build an economy while ignoring the suffering of the people, and we can't build a nation while we ignore the cries of our children.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Mr. Speaker, it must be evident to all of us here, that national security has to become the platform on which we promote ourselves as being open to investment, open to development and open for growth and an ideal destination.

It is a primary factor in our intention to take Jamaicans out of poverty and into an era of prosperity, supported by the tenets of our national development programme, Vision 2030.

However, it is obvious that the government does not see it as a priority for growth, otherwise in a period which cries out for growth and development you could not have reduced the budget of this ministry.

Regardless of the economic climate, national security must be treated as a priority in our efforts to transform the economy and the culture of our people.

I am calling on the government to see that the security forces are provided with the tools they need to carry out their tasks.

I am also urging the Minister of Finance to treat the police as a special case in the current negotiations with government employees and their unions.

I am calling on the minister of national security to make a special effort to stamp out extortion in our business districts, so that investors, especially small businesspeople, can feel safe to invest in new businesses and not be subjected to gangsters demanding money and goods.

I am urging the Minister to look at the mobility of the police, as a priority, in light of the fact that it is my understanding that the JCF only has 45 percent of its needs.

But, most importantly, I want to take up the minister on his own words expressed in this House a week ago: that we need to demonstrate a more enlightened approach to national security, in order to reinforce law and order in our society.

**Thank You.**