

THEME:
**LEADING THE RURAL TRANSFORMATION DRIVE,
AS JAMAICA EMERGES FROM COVID 19**



GOVERNMENT OF JAMAICA

**SECTORAL
PRESENTATION
2022**

Presented by:

Hon. Desmond McKenzie, CD, MP, JP
Minister of Local Government & Rural Development

GORDON HOUSE | Wednesday May 25, 2022



GOVERNMENT OF JAMAICA

LEADING THE RURAL TRANSFORMATION DRIVE, AS
JAMAICA EMERGES
FROM COVID-19

THE HON. DESMOND McKENZIE, CD, MP, JP
MINISTER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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GORDON HOUSE

*“Leading the rural transformation drive, as Jamaica emerges from **COVID-19**”*

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Madam Speaker...

I am feeling a great energy as I stand to address this House today. It is an energy driven by the desire to do more in service for my fellow citizens. It is also an energy unleashed by the decision by the Government, following two years of careful management of COVID-19, to withdraw the pandemic restrictions. I have returned to the highways and byways, consulting with people around the country, and I have never felt a greater sense of revival and sense of mission as I do now. I give praise to the Most Honourable Prime Minister, Andrew Holness, who continues to provide exceptional leadership to the Cabinet, the Government and to the country. His transformation as a political leader has not yet reached its peak **Madam Speaker**, and Jamaica is blessed to have him in the Captain’s chair as we make the transition **from the worst days of COVID-19, to economic and social recovery**. I am greatly honoured to be part of his Administration, and extremely proud of my colleagues in the Cabinet.

I thank the Permanent Secretary, the leadership team and staff of my Ministry, the staff in the Agencies, the Mayors, Councillors, and all the staff in the Local Authorities, who have given exceptional service especially since COVID-19 hit Jamaica. I also say thanks to my personal staff and my protective personnel, who are ever faithful in all circumstances.

Madam Speaker, to my wife, my children and my extended family: I would not be here without your unconditional love. When all is said and done, you are the wind beneath my wings, the rock of love to which I cling.

Those of us who serve in the political vineyard know that we never work alone. I remain humbled by the tremendous faith that my political family of Western Kingston place in me. My roots are planted there **Madam Speaker**, and I am tremendously proud to state that this is my 48th year as an elected representative in Western Kingston: 37 as a Councillor, and now, 11 years as Member of Parliament. No praises can be too high for my Councillors, my Constituency Executive and all the members of the team, and my Constituents.

Madam Speaker, since March 2020, the system of local government made an effective contribution to the management of public health protocols, and to laying the foundation for economic and social recovery at the community level. Now in 2022, **as the country emerges from the worst effects and adjusts to living with COVID-19**, this Ministry is called on to lead the charge to achieve, at long last, the development of rural Jamaica. I feel very empowered by this mission, about the work that the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development must do to bring about this transformation in the lives of our people.

In the previous designation as the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development, we implemented changes and improvements to the operations and systems of governance at the local level. We provided unprecedented resources to expand the capacity of the elected representatives to effectively serve their Divisions. We made major investments in the Agencies of the Ministry, such as the Social Development Commission and the Jamaica fire brigade, to make them effective organs of service. We introduced new approaches such as water shops, to address some of the long-standing challenges that our citizens endured especially in rural Jamaica.

These things and more, are still being done in our current portfolio of Local Government and Rural Development. However, there is a difference. This Ministry now has a higher and wider level of service to provide, to ensure that the vast majority of the people of Jamaica, are finally and permanently brought into the development curve. An unprecedented emphasis will be placed on rural development Madam Speaker, as the Government increases the pace of economic and social activity. The task before us is not just to make Jamaica as a whole, the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business. It is to make this a reality for people within their communities. This was recognized in 2009, when the Government unveiled Vision 2030, the National Development Plan. It recognized that while the national rate of poverty was declining, rural poverty was stubbornly high. It was also acknowledged that if the country is to achieve “developed country” status, rural economic growth and development has to keep pace with the rates experienced in urban centres. It is important to understand that when we use the term “rural”, we are not just referring to hills, rivers or farmland. Approximately 44% of Jamaica’s total population live in the rural parts of the country.

Our challenge, **Madam Speaker**, is to stimulate rural economic growth so that employment and incomes will increase, thereby reducing rural to urban drift among a range of social problems. In this regard, we also have to sharply expand access to social and productive infrastructure, such as rural electrification and water. These ambitions have been held by successive governments for many years but have never been effectively implemented. However, this is a game-changer Government. This Administration, led by the Most Honourable Prime Minister, believes that now is the time to drive the policies and programmes that will unchain the people of rural Jamaica from the cycles of inter-generational poverty.

This is a daunting task of historic proportions. However, as the American poet William Arthur Ward once wrote: "Adversity causes some men to break; others to break records." Over the last six years, the system of Local Government has demonstrated that with adequate capital investment, it can both enhance and protect the lives of the people of Jamaica. With the governance and service delivery network of Local Authorities established across the country, the task of rural development is a natural portfolio fit, and I once again thank the Most Honourable Prime Minister for his confidence in me, to lead this charge that will accelerate recovery and prosperity.





In my contribution last year, I introduced the Rural Development Programme, which is designed to transform communities in various parts of the island. The pilot area selected was Chambers Pen in western Hanover, and the works scheduled for this project included the installation of water and electrical infrastructure, internet access, roads, sidewalks, community parks and indigent housing. We will use this Programme to give new life to our rural communities over the next two years.

The works have not progressed at an ideal pace, but all the activities critical to this development pilot at Chambers Pen are being implemented. The Social Development Commission has completed a full Needs Assessment for the community and is implementing a skills training programme at a cost of \$1 million. The Rural Agricultural Development Authority will also be providing assistance to the farmers of Chambers Pen, to the tune of \$2 million. With regard to the construction of indigent housing, \$28 million will be spent to construct four units. The Poor Relief Department has assessed these locations, and the designs and estimates for two family units and two studio units, have been completed to facilitate construction. Additionally, **Madam Speaker**, road rehabilitation works will be implemented at a cost of \$100 million.

- 300 houses in the community will be wired at a cost of \$27 million. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Jamaica Social Investment Fund, and works are expected to begin at the end of this month.
- The community centre and basic school will be repaired at a cost of \$4 million and \$20 million respectively. The Ministry of Education and Youth opened the tender process for these repair projects on May 6.
- The Chambers Pen Water Supply System is also being implemented by our Agency, Rural Water Supply Limited at a cost of \$30 million. A contract was signed for the provision of 3.4 kilometres of pipe and fixtures, while a separate tender process for the installation of the pipes was implemented.

The successful Bidder will be signing a contract with Rural Water before the end of this month, and it is expected that works will commence in June.

- Through this project, approximately 1,500 persons in 300 holds will benefit from the supply of 52,500 gallons of fresh water every day. Additionally, 300 service connections to the National Water Commission's Great River Treatment Plant will be installed, and 300 black tanks will be provided, at a cost of \$9 million. These 400 gallon tanks will be distributed to each household in Chambers Pen.
- I am looking forward to the official ground-breaking for the water supply project next month, and to the completion of the works by the end of September.

Madam Speaker, the overall cost of this critical pilot, the revitalization of Chambers Pen, is \$223 million.



I now naturally turn to minor water supply. Rural Water Supply Limited came into the Local Government portfolio in the last quarter of 2020, and the great worth of this Agency is being tangibly demonstrated on the ground.

In the last financial year, Rural Water Supply Limited completed a range of major projects which connected more and more Jamaicans to piped potable water within their communities. These included Penn and Lucky Valley in St Catherine, Brandon Hill and Salt River in Clarendon; Portland Cottage and Rocky Point in Clarendon; Bangor Ridge in Portland; Coral Gardens, Flower Hill, Torado Heights and Stonehenge in St James. **Madam Speaker**, the flagship project completed was the Top Aberdeen Water Supply system in St. Elizabeth.



Commissioning of the Top Aberdeen Water Supply System in St. Elizabeth.

The works included the construction of a new pumping station and storage tank; the installation of a solar pumping system, and new distribution and transmission pipelines, at a cost of J\$111 million. I had the honour of officially commissioning this facility into service in February, and over 1,600 residents of Top Aberdeen are benefiting from reliable water supply.

The Agency also installed catchment tanks and rainwater harvesting facilities at over 30 schools, institutions and communities around the country. These included Springfield and Quickstep in St. Elizabeth, Jeffrey Town and Carron Hall in St.

Mary, Bensonton in St. Ann, Harrywatch in Manchester, Greater Portmore and Troja in St. Catherine, Content in Westmoreland and Smithville in Clarendon.

The rainwater harvesting projects now being implemented, will benefit over 40 thousand residents in their communities.



Madam Speaker, the challenge of DROUGHT is never far in the background. Though the last financial year was not the driest in recent times, there were communities in parts of the country that were significantly affected by drought. In this regard, the Ministry played a vital role in assisting the Local Authorities to distribute water. \$31 million was spent on the trucking of water.

This year, indeed at this time, drought is a reality that has fully focused the mind of the Government. Its effects are being felt in parts of rural Jamaica and in the Corporate Area. A Drought Task Force has been established to address this issue, and is working on a comprehensive programme that includes the trucking of water, as well as the provision of water trucks to the Municipal Corporations. In this latter respect, six trucks have already been given.

I commend the Rural Water Supply Limited for a job well done. There is more hard work ahead. The Government is determined to dramatically improve public access to piped, potable water. **Madam Speaker**, the most recent assessment done in 2019, showed that piped water supply systems reach 70% of Jamaicans. Additionally, 27% of people who access water from standpipes in rural areas, have to walk more than 500 metres to get it.

This is the challenge that we are determined to overcome. The Ministry is committed to the implementation of projects and programmes to expand minor water supply across Jamaica, in keeping with the National Water Sector Policy and Implementation Plan. We will improve lives, sustain livelihoods and revive communities by providing modern and reliable minor water supply systems.

The Ministry also continued to implement road patching, rehabilitation and related works over the last financial year. In addition to drain-cleaning and bushing, 27,306 metres of road were patched and 51,466 metres were rehabilitated, at a total cost of \$245 million. One of these rehabilitated roads that I was honoured to open officially in January, was the Tivoli Road in Bath District in Westmoreland, which was resurfaced at a cost of \$14 million.



Official Opening of the Tivoli Road in Westmoreland

We will be repairing the Stonehenge and New Roads in Westmoreland, in keeping with the promise made by the Most Honourable Prime Minister. We are also committed to rehabilitating a parochial road in the Lennox Bigwoods area, **which has been put to tender, and is estimated to cost \$52 million.** The Government is committed to improving living standards by restoring selected parochial roads around the country.



A recent Tour of the Lennox Bigwoods Road which will be rehabilitated at a cost of \$52 Million.



Madame Speaker, the Social Development Commission continues to be an impressive example of the great things that can be achieved, once resources and encouragement are provided. Before the pandemic, the SDC intensified its community transformation programmes not only through sport, but crucially through the Local Economic Development Support Programme among others.

Even as the Agency devoted much of its attention to issues surrounding COVID-19, work continued on the programmes it is mandated to provide. The Local Economic Development Support Programme is the flagship in this regard, and the SDC provided vital support to grassroots businesses, to help them survive the economic punches from the pandemic. 149 Capacity Building Sessions were held, which provided training and business support for 406 Local Economic Initiatives. These activities generated employment for 1,563 persons. Additionally, the SDC invested over \$27 million in hosting 43 community markets and business fairs, which involved a wide range of local entrepreneurs, including farmers and distributors.

Madam Speaker, these fairs earned almost \$50 million. The SDC also gave targeted support to 115 small self-owned business across the Corporate Area, through a special economic grant valued at \$6,488 million. This grant is a new component to the LED Programme, and it demonstrates the ingenuity and responsiveness of the Agency not only to crises, but to the opportunities that exist.



Community Market and Business Fair.

In this context **Madam Speaker**, it is clear that as Jamaica has entered the phase of economic and social recovery from the pandemic, that the SDC will also have to evolve in a structured way to ensure continued relevance, faithfulness to its mandate, and the maintenance of its very high standards of performance. As rural development takes on greater urgency in the Government’s plans for national transformation, the Agency’s importance will continue to increase, and will need to be re-positioned and further equipped to make it an even sharper instrument of social change. The SDC will be instrumental to the effort that we will be making to revitalize community centres as places of entertainment, learning and generally positive interactions within and between communities. I will have more to say on this initiative, which will reflect a special collaboration involving the Ministries of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport, and Education and Youth.

It is a testament to the high value of the Social Development Commission, especially over the last six years, to the effort to build Jamaica, community by community, into a country that is desirable for all its people.

JAMAICA FIRE BRIGADE

Madam Speaker, the Jamaica Fire Brigade has maintained its highest traditions as a respected national institution, which is now 150 years old. Since 2016, this Administration has invested nearly \$6 billion (\$5.74 billion) in equipment and infrastructural development, and the JFB has raised its standards of reliability and responsiveness, and continues to do well in serving the people of Jamaica.

I must specially commend the Agency for the work done to expand the availability of Emergency Medical Services across the country, and especially in the parish of St. Ann. In the last financial year, the JFB responded to 4,261 emergency calls in this regard and has literally saved thousands of lives through this service alone.

In my contribution last year, I announced that the fire brigade would be acquiring 30 new fire trucks at a total cost of J\$3 billion. I am happy to report this year that all the trucks have been acquired (June - August 2021) and are in service. These are state-of-the-art service vehicles, that are fitted with extraction equipment among other features.

The investment in our firefighters didn’t stop there. \$248 million was spent on firefighting equipment, as well as water rescue equipment and three stand-by generators to continue the project of improving the efficiency of every fire station.

I am very happy to tell this Honourable House that every fire station now has a fully functional fire truck. The significance of this cannot be overstated. **Madam Speaker**, when we came to office, no one even talked about the idea of one fire truck at each fire station. We took on the challenge, and by 2018, 16 trucks had been bought, and seven fire stations had their own dedicated fire trucks. There has been steady investment every year since 2016, right up to this moment.



New Fire Trucks

Moreover **Madam Speaker**, this Administration will be increasing the pace of building out new fire stations, to meet the needs of our evolving population. The House is aware of the three main stations to be constructed under the Jamaica Disaster Vulnerability Reduction Project - at Yallahs, Montego Bay and Port Maria. **After significant construction challenges, I am happy to advise that the Barnett Street Fire Station was officially opened on May 13. This is a major development for the city of Montego Bay, especially when it is remembered Madam Speaker, that in 2016, when this Administration was elected, the fire station in Montego Bay had been closed for seven years.**



The Official Opening of the Jamaica Fire Brigade Area 4 Headquarters Montego Bay.



An aerial view of the Jamaica Fire Brigade Area 4 Headquarters, Montego Bay.

Work is also far advanced on the Yallahs Fire Station in St. Thomas, and I expect to officially open it in this financial year. The Port Maria Fire Station is expected to be complete by the end of May, and I am also looking forward to opening this brand new station shortly. Over the last fiscal year, tremendous work was done to complete the Old Harbour Fire Station at a cost of \$59.9 million, and I had the pleasure of officially opening it on April 19.

Under the Infrastructure Development Programme, Phase 1 of the rehabilitation of the Black River Fire Station was completed at a cost of \$30 million, and Phase 2, which started in November 2021, is being implemented at a cost \$38.7 million. We will also be breaking ground for a new fire station in Balaclava in St. Elizabeth, and **Madam Speaker** - I know you are ready for this - **we will be breaking ground for the new fire station at Ulster Spring in Trelawny on Friday June 17.**



The Old Harbour Fire Station

As the Government continues to invest significant sums to improve the infrastructure of the JFB, I want to say from the floor of this House, a huge thank you to the firefighters in the field, and to the administrative staff who provide critical support.

This Administration has invested significantly more than any other, in new equipment and infrastructure for the Jamaica Fire Brigade. The Government is determined to ensure that through the restoration of current stations, and the building of new ones, the Jamaica Fire Brigade will feature an efficient network of fire stations that will provide a rapid response to any emergencies that arise. Such a network will also require sufficient personnel, and I am heartened to report that a new batch of 90 firefighters commenced training exercises in February this year.

Fire Brigade personnel perform among other duties, inspections of buildings, and are part of the multi-Agency assessment teams that carry out the development approvals process. To raise additional revenue in order to further revitalize the fire brigade, we are examining the levying of a fee on new construction projects that exceed a prescribed height. I will say more about this at another time **Madam Speaker.**

Despite the JFB's hard work, I remain concerned about the number of fires that are occurring, many of which were entirely preventable. There is still much to be done to get our citizens to accept greater personal responsibility to prevent the death and devastation caused by fires. Between April 2021 and February 2022, the JFB received 15,056 emergency calls. 1,586 people were displaced because of fires, 77 people including 13 firefighters were injured and 34 people died.

On March 24, two young girls, 3-year-old Abigail Thompson and her sister, 4-year-old Kayla Thompson, perished in a house fire in Clarendon. A terrible record was also set through this tragedy **Madam Speaker**, as these two precious little ones were the first fire-related deaths of 2022.

This is why the public education and outreach through the JFB's Community and Life Safety Programme continues to be relevant and crucial. In the last financial year, 341 fire drills were conducted in schools, workplaces, and places of safety across the island. 894 fire hydrants were maintained and 295 repaired, while 6,024 buildings were inspected. I cannot overemphasize the point that fire safety is everybody's business. I also want to urge **those** who continue to make prank calls to the fire brigade to stop doing it! Every fake call to the JFB has the chance of causing damage and death, because firefighters were diverted away from people who genuinely need help. Over the last five years, there has been a downward trend in the number of prank calls, which previously had a yearly average of 2,000. **However, in 2021, there were 1, 174 prank calls, a 5% increase over the 1,119 recorded in 2020.** I am asking for greater responsibility, both at a personal level and also in the supervision of children, to sharply reduce the number of prank calls.

I also want to urge the elected representatives at every level, to advocate a culture of fire awareness and fire prevention.

BOARD OF SUPERVISION

Madam Speaker, the welfare of our vulnerable citizens, from the outdoor poor to the residents in our Infirmaries, increased in importance during the height of the pandemic. The work of the Board of Supervision in successfully managing the care of our brothers and sisters, cannot be overstated. I must give full praise to the leadership and the full team of the BOS, for its efficiency and innovation in addressing the evolving needs of the vulnerable population.

In the last financial year, the Board of Supervision continued to ensure that Infirmary care was delivered in the strictest sanitary environment, to achieve optimum infection prevention and control. 85% of all residents were vaccinated. Visits remained suspended, as were admissions of new residents. The effectiveness of the BOS’ work paved the way for the temporary resumption of visits to the Infirmaries in January this year.



Sanitation exercise at some of our Infirmaries

CARE FOR THE OUTDOOR POOR/INFIRMARIES

One of the things I am most happy about **Madam Speaker**, is the continuing work of the BOS to make the Infirmaries places of dignity, where residents experience modern standards of care, and enhanced quality of life. Since January 2021, four

physiotherapists and three dieticians have been added to the service structure of the Board of Supervision. Safety has been increased through specialist training in the movement of physically challenged residents. Nutritional integrity has been improved through a revised diet plan approved by the BOS. Additionally:

- Three therapeutic parks were completed at the Manchester, St. Mary and Trelawny Infirmaries.
- Two new kitchens were built at the Hanover and Manchester Infirmaries.



Newly constructed kitchen at the Hanover Infirmary.

- The new female ward at the Manchester Infirmary was completed at a cost of \$58.2 million and is now occupied. The Matron’s Quarters at the Westmoreland Infirmary were completed at a cost of \$7.6 million. Works at the Portland and St. James Infirmaries were completed at a cost of \$45 million and \$32.5 million respectively.



New Female Ward at the Manchester Infirmary.

- The new male ward at the Westmoreland Infirmary, which is being built at a cost of \$41 million, is almost complete. The new Administrative Building at the St. Elizabeth Infirmary, construction of which cost \$21 million, was completed and is now occupied.
- Through the partnership with the Ministry of Health and Wellness, we are relieving the hospitals of social cases and by so doing, creating more bed spaces. Social cases account for approximately 300 hospital bed spaces, and the BOS has already relocated 45 persons into more appropriate care facilities such as the Golden Age Home.
- Partnerships continue with entities such as Food for the Poor and the National Health Fund, which provided wheelchairs, personal protective equipment and other essential items for improved service delivery in the infirmaries.

CARE FOR THE OUTDOOR POOR

Madam Speaker, the pandemic did not stop our drive to serve our outdoor poor population. Through the work of the BOS, the Local Authorities and our public and private sector partners, we increased the scope and quality of outreach. Accordingly, in 2021/2022, 37 concrete indigent houses in 10 parishes were constructed through the Poor Relief Departments, at a cost of \$79.8 million.

Construction of new housing units is taking place in St. Mary, Westmoreland and in Kingston and St. Andrew at a cost of \$73 million.



Groundbreaking Ceremony for the construction of indigent houses in west Central St. Andrew and St. Andrew South West.

Additionally:

- 96 housing units were repaired
- 38 children were assisted through educational grants
- I have to sing the praises of the Minister of Finance and the Public Service, who provided an additional \$26 million for Outdoor Poor Relief under the SERVE Programme. Due to the increased allocation for Outdoor Poor Relief

Services of \$260 million, we were able to care for the vulnerable even more effectively.



Completed Indigent House in St. Mary

To expand and improve the quality of care to our **HOMELESS** population, construction works began on two night shelters in Trelawny and in St. Ann, at a combined cost of \$41 million, and we expect them to be completed in this financial year. We have continued to provide three nutritious meals daily - a total of 550-thousand meals - at designated locations across the island. Last year, I announced the start of construction works for the King Street Adult Transitional facility, which will be managed by the Kingston and St. Andrew Municipal Corporation. This facility will greatly assist in caring for the homeless population of the Corporate Area, which accounts for the majority of the homeless in the country. It is now ready and **will be officially opened by the Most Honourable Prime Minister this Friday, May 27.**



The King Street Adult Transitional facility to be officially opened on May 27, 2022.

Night Shelters are also important locations of rest and care for the homeless population, and this Administration will be creating a network of these safe spaces for the homeless, **beginning in St. Thomas this financial year. Our intention Madam Speaker, is to build a night shelter in every parish over the next two years.**

A critical part of the national recovery process, is the infusion and maintenance of hope in our young people. The **YOUTH SUMMER EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME** is doing just that **Madam Speaker**. Every elected representative can attest to the excitement that the Programme has generated among our youngsters all over the country. Critical skills have been imparted, and doors to permanent careers in Local Government have been opened since YSEP was launched in 2017. The 2021 Youth Summer Employment Programme, which was launched in Portland was a tremendous success, **with an unprecedented 6,000 young people being engaged**. They were deployed across the country to assist in implementing the COVID-19 Support Programme under the guidance of the Social Development Commission and the Municipal Corporation.



Participants of YSEP at the Launch Ceremony 2021.

This was in addition to their work in collecting data about streetlights, traders, car marts, garages, building construction, old and dilapidated buildings, and emergency assistance. The demand for the Programme is intense **Madam Speaker**, and we hope to expand it yet again this year.

OFFICE OF DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

As the main implementation Agency empowered by the Disaster Risk Management Act, the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management contributed greatly to the national effort to manage COVID-19. ODPEM has been at the centre of the planning and implementation of all the protocols and other measures that were used, and are still being used, to deal with the pandemic. **Madam Speaker**, Jamaica’s management of its economy and society over the past two years has attracted positive international attention. One of the most recent examples of this was Jamaica’s successful, historic hosting in November last year, of the United Nations’ 7th Regional Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas and the Caribbean. Despite the virtual nature of the event, there was tremendous public interest throughout the Region, as over 2,500 participants were connected through the digital platform, and more than 35,000 people followed the more than 30 sessions that were held, through social media and live streaming.



7th Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas and the Caribbean, held at the Jamaica Conference Centre November 1-4, 2021.

It was the first time that Jamaica, as an English-speaking Caribbean country was asked to be the host. It was also the first Regional Platform to be preceded by a Youth Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction, which was proposed and staged by Jamaica.

It was the first Regional Platform to have a youth representative address the opening event, the first one to invite a representative of the youth to the Ministerial and High-Level Authorities Meeting, and the first one to end with specific commitments made, to ensure that youth are officially integrated into the Region’s collective efforts to systematically reduce disaster risk and build resilience.

Madam Speaker, the 7th Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas and the Caribbean has further confirmed and enhanced Jamaica’s standing on the international stage, and reaffirmed the high consideration and respect that this country enjoys throughout the Region and beyond. This is due in no small way to years of advocacy for Small Island Developing States, as well as the tangible development of policies, laws and institutions to manage disasters and build resilience.



7th Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas and the Caribbean, held at the Jamaica Conference Centre November 1-4, 2021.

I thank on behalf of the Government, all the people and institutions that made this meeting a total success.

One of the ODPEM’s key responsibilities is of course, Disaster Preparedness, and at this point **Madam Speaker**, I want to focus on preparations for hurricanes.

We are of course very thankful that none occurred last year. At the same time, the

value of the Disaster Fund is steadily increasing, and now stands at \$380 million. In addition to completing a range of draft Policies and Plans over the last financial year, ODPEM's work reflected the Government's key mantra of **Partnership**. A partnership was developed between ODPEM and telecommunications provider FLOW, to support the National Shelter Management Programme. The company donated 1,000 vests for Shelter Managers, and 250 Shelter signs valued at a total of \$3.1 million. This donation will significantly increase the operational capability of the Shelter Management Programme for the upcoming Atlantic hurricane season and beyond. Not to be outdone, **Digicel** entered into a partnership with ODPEM to improve Shelter accessibility to persons with disabilities. Through a Sponsorship Agreement in September 2021, ramps with rails were installed at five shelter facilities in St. Elizabeth, Manchester, St. Catherine, Westmoreland, and Kingston and St. Andrew. Additionally, wheelchair access aids to the bathrooms at these facilities were constructed, as well as Shelter Signs to make access easier for physically challenged persons. These partnerships are welcome **Madam Speaker**, and reflect corporate recognition of ODPEM's role in preserving Jamaica as an increasingly desirable place to do business.

In addition to the recurrent hurricane season, is the challenge of the changing pattern of climatic events including seasonal rains, and the resulting impact on infrastructure. The placement of early warning signs in areas well known to be vulnerable to flooding, is a key component in the strategy to prevent loss of life and property. This year, these signs will be installed at Benson Crossing in Kingston, Port Maria in St. Mary, and at Alley Bridge in Clarendon.

NATIONAL TSUNAMI READINESS PROGRAMME

As a Small Island Developing State, the protection of people in coastal areas from Tsunamis is of great importance. ODPEM, in partnership with the Intergovernmental Coordination Group, a subsidiary of UNESCO, and the International Tsunami Information Centre for the Caribbean, collaborated to strengthen early warning and response mechanisms. As a result **Madam Speaker**, Tsunami Plans, Templates and Standard Operating Procedures were developed, including a Tsunami Response Plan and Standard Operating Procedures for the vulnerable community of Old Harbour Bay in St. Catherine. As part of this important partnership, ODPEM is also implementing a Tsunami Readiness Pilot Recognition Technical programme. This programme is designed to ensure that recognised

communities possess the tools, operational procedures, knowledge and skills to effectively respond if a Tsunami occurs. Communities that are recognised under the programme must be retrained every 4 years and must demonstrate adequate maintenance of their systems.

In this regard, **I am pleased to advise the House that Old Harbour Bay has been designated Tsunami Ready.**

I am also pleased to tell you **Madam Speaker**, that support has been offered to develop another Tsunami Ready coastal community, through the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, and UNESCO. Accordingly, **Port Maria in St. Mary, which as recently as January was the scene of flooding, will become Jamaica’s second Tsunami Ready community.**

JAMAICA/JAPAN BILATERAL PROJECT FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEMS IN JAMAICA

Madam Speaker, a vital component of any disaster management and recovery plan, is a secure and reliable emergency communications system. The Project for the Improvement of Emergency Communication System in Jamaica, is a critical bilateral arrangement between the Government of Jamaica and the Government of Japan. It is intended to install wireless systems across the island, to deliver effective communication between Government offices and the Jamaican people. Extensive work was done in the last financial year to advance the project, which is being implemented at a cost of just over J\$2 billion. The Government of Japan is providing a grant to the equivalent of J\$1.75 billion, while the Jamaican Government is contributing J\$350 million. The Bid Notice for the supply of equipment for the project was published in Japan in February this year, and it is expected that a Supplier will be selected by June. Based on the project schedule **Madam Speaker**, Jamaica will receive the first shipment of equipment for installation in January 2023.

This project, once completed will be a game changer in the process of Disaster Management locally. It is the latest expression of the close bond that exists between Jamaica and Japan, and I must express gratitude to the Government of Japan for its longstanding and continuous friendship with the Government and people of Jamaica.

NATIONAL SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

Madam Speaker, the National Solid Waste Management Authority continues to be a prime example of efficiency and dedication. No commendation is too high for this Agency, which has not only turned its performance around, but in challenging circumstances has maintained high standards of management and corporate governance. I must specially commend the truck drivers and street sweepers for the high levels of dedication they continue to demonstrate. **I must also advise the House that all sweepers, sidemen and drivers received their retroactive payments, a one-off payment of \$40,000, as well as a 4% salary increase.**

The Agency collected just over 903 thousand tonnes of waste in the last fiscal year, at a cost of \$850.3 million. The mobile app that was developed in 2021 to report littering in public spaces and illegal dumping continues to generate significant support. With the assistance of the app the Authority was made aware of the location of 302 illegal dumpsites across the island. Investigations into 194 of these have already been concluded. As a result of ongoing sensitization about proper containment of waste, commercial compliance is at 91.8% and residential compliance is at 92.9%. **Madam Speaker**, the NSWMA continues to demonstrate frugal management, by earning Own Source Revenues amounting to nearly \$438.8 million, up to February 2022.

Important work was also done to continue the active protection of the environment at the community level. Phase Two of the Environmental Warden Project, which is part of the Integrated Community Development Project was launched in August Town. Under the Project, which is funded by the Jamaica Social Investment Fund, 34 Environmental Wardens were certified, and are empowered through the National Solid Waste Management Authority Act to issue anti-litter tickets for breaches. An overall 2,443 anti-litter tickets and 5,441 removal notices for litter breaches, were issued over the financial year.



Under the initiative between the NSWMA and Caribbean Cement Company to preserve the environment by eliminating old tyres from the Riverton City Disposal Site, 11,743 tyres were removed.

ENFORCEMENT OF ANTI-LITTER AND BUILDING LAWS IS HIGH ON THE GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Madam Speaker, we will resume the procurement of trucks, and expect to purchase 50 this year. However, as the NSWMA steadily overcomes operational challenges, its strong efforts are being undermined by selfish individuals, and sometimes by selfish communities.

Let me be even more blunt. A culture has developed whereby garbage is being deliberately dumped into gullies by people, who are doing this under the impression that they will be employed to clean it up! I am using the floor of this House to send a clear message: Stop it. You won't get one cent for littering the gullies.

Madam Speaker, my message is not limited to this category of misguided people. Irresponsible people in the construction industry and also at the domestic level, continue to carry out practices that endanger citizens in very direct ways. One such practice is that of having sand, gravel and blocks unloaded onto the sidewalk, thereby forcing pedestrians to walk into the road and into the path of motor vehicles. Up to very recently, I received a report about someone who had to be rushed to hospital in exactly these circumstances. Then there are those who

tip large amounts of construction waste into gullies in the dead of night. The unwanted block pieces, sand and stones form a solid layer in the gullies, which are then overwhelmed when it rains. We all as Members of Parliament know how lives and livelihoods can be set back in a flash because of property damage caused by flooding.

I’m “talking up de tings” **Madam Speaker**, because these are immensely harmful practices that we see right across the country. There is another category that I have to talk about. Almost everywhere you turn, on main roads, on side roads, on through roads and on dead-end roads, you find illegal garages with cars parked on the sidewalks, thus once again endangering pedestrians. In some cases the cars have been parked there for years. At the same time, there are used car dealers who have made themselves nuisances and merchants of danger, by placing their vehicles on the sidewalks. Let me be very clear. The Government encourages entrepreneurship and free enterprise within the boundaries of the law, not chaos, selfishness and disorder. **An atmosphere of nuisance has emerged across the country, and the issues I have drawn attention to are not just offensive, they are all illegal.** Elected representatives, the police and the Local Authorities get constant complaints about these and other illegal acts happening across the country.

However **Madam Speaker**, we won’t only talk about these things. We will be taking two clear stages of action.

In **Stage One**, which will begin shortly, a public education drive will be implemented around the country, and this will be led by the SDC, with support from ODPEM. We will make the appeal to all sectors of the society, including private sector representatives, as domestic and commercial disposal practices still leave much to be desired. In fact, **Madam Speaker**, I have already met with with the president of the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica and members of that body, and I am very encouraged by their response to this initiative.

Stage Two, will involve strict enforcement of the NSWMA Act and the Building Act. A special Task Force comprising the Jamaica Constabulary Force, the Jamaica Defence Force, the Municipal Corporations and the National Solid Waste Management Authority will be traversing the country, and visiting the locations where breaches have been reported as well as observed. They will require vehicles, material or any other objects that are improperly placed to be removed, failing which, the offending objects will be confiscated. **The message here is very**

simple: If you don't remove it, you will lose it. There is no excuse. Your survival and prosperity do not require the blocking of the sidewalks or the roads. Recovering your financial position from COVID-19 does not require illegal dumping. The Government will be pushing back strongly against the disorder that is being experienced on a daily basis. I want to assure the people in communities across the country, that their complaints are being heard and will be addressed.

We will curtail these abuses of the built and the natural environment, and improve your quality of life by removing these nuisances from the main roads and communities. Accordingly, The Regulations to the NSWMA Act, have been submitted to the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel for review.

COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW AND RENOVATION OF MARKETS TO BEGIN THIS YEAR

Madam Speaker, we will be paying greater attention to our Markets this year, especially in the context of rural development. We have heard the pleas of vendors for better facilities from which they can conduct business, and we recognize them as important players in the economic life of the country.

While a number of markets are currently being repaired and rehabilitated, one project, Phase 3 of the **Clarks Town Market**, was completed in the last financial year, **and will be officially opened on June 16**. This Phase involved the construction of the office building and shops, and was completed at a cost of \$10 million. In Hanover, the major renovation of the **Hopewell Market** is near completion. A full overhaul of sanitary facilities, plumbing and electrical infrastructure is being done at a cost of \$24 million. Admittedly **Madam Speaker**, the last financial year was not a glowing one where the development of markets was concerned. Apart from the impact of the pandemic on construction, there were several fires of great severity at several markets. We intend to redeem this situation with a comprehensive programme of market assessment and rehabilitation, which will be implemented over two years. Among the factors that will determine the priority of these works, is the age of the markets. This year, we will identify four older markets and renovate them.

Meaningful investment in physical infrastructure must include the maintenance and expansion of the country's network of **STREETLIGHTS**. **Madam Speaker**, there are still many issues to overcome to ensure that our roads are adequately, reliably and efficiently lit, so that our citizens can feel satisfied that they are receiving value for money. In the last financial year, the JPS charged \$2.913 billion for the provision of streetlights, and the bill was paid in full. In other words, **the**

JPS was paid an average of \$243 million every month to provide this service.

The reality remains however, that not all the streetlights are working, and the Local Authorities and the citizens who fall within their jurisdictions all over the country, deserve better. As had been promised to this House in my last presentation, I have been meeting, along with Ministry officials with the JPS to resolve a wide range of issues, and the consultations are continuing. In the last financial year, the company installed 725 new streetlights, which was 358 short of the installation target of 1,083. With regard to repairs, the JPS reported that 13,575 streetlights were repaired between April 2021 and March 2022.

Madam Speaker, the issue of value for money brings me to a serious and worrisome subject: the theft of the streetlamps. We have the breakdown of **where the thefts** have occurred, from parish to Division. Unscrupulous people are preying on the network, all over the country. **In the last financial year, 723 streetlights were stolen, and the JPS spent US\$303,660, or over J\$47 million to replace them.** The taxpayers of this country must know **Madam Speaker**, that the average cost of replacing one streetlight is US\$420. While the thievery has occurred in every parish, I want to give two examples of the criminality that is occurring.

The Chesterfield main road in St. Andrew is the site of repeated thefts. Thirty two lights, along with 3,200 metres of service wire were stolen on three separate occasions. They have been replaced three times at a cost of nearly \$US 50,000. The JPS is reporting that lights along the Chesterfield Main Road have been stolen for a fourth time, and that it will cost US\$16,000 to replace them.

The second example **Madam Speaker**, is the Hellshire main road in St. Catherine, where 15 lights and 1,500 metres of service wire were stolen all at once on one night. These lamps and wires were replaced at a cost of US\$7,800.

While it is clear that these criminal acts require a police response, it is not possible for the Constabulary to be on every road to address this issue. The streetlights are being stolen on the main roads and within urban and rural communities. I call on residents everywhere to be vigilant, and to help to prevent the highways and byways being plunged into darkness.

THE RESILIENCE OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THEIR VITAL ROLE IN POST-COVID-19 TRANSFORMATION

Madam Speaker, I have spoken many times about the essential and intimate role of the Local Authorities in daily life.

Their value goes far beyond providing support services in their parishes. **Madam Speaker**, there is a general misconception that this is all they do, that there is no sophistication or skill in the tasks that they perform. I want to dismiss this by citing one example: the role of the Local Authorities in Disaster Risk Reduction.

Jamaica, as a Signatory to the Sendai Framework for Action 2015-2030, has made significant progress in implementing its targets. Target E measures the number of countries and local actors that have implemented Disaster Risk Reduction strategies. Jamaica is one of nearly half of the countries in this Region that has disaster risk reduction strategies, plans and policies in place, and the Local Authorities have been critical to this process. Late last year, all the Local Authorities became official signatories to the Making Cities Resilient 2030 Initiative. **Jamaica is the first country in the world to have all local government authorities join the initiative.**

Madam Speaker, the Local Authorities have been carrying out their responsibilities over the last two years, without the benefit of all the usual Own Source Revenue streams, in particular, amusement licences for approved entertainment events. Unquestionably, the recovery of their financial position is an important objective for the Municipal Corporations. Of equal importance is the improvement and expansion of their capacity to regulate the activities that fall under their purview. One of these is construction.

Accordingly, the Local Authorities worked diligently to approve properly developed construction applications. In the last financial year, 4,032 building permits were issued, valued at J\$130.6 billion. **This is a 24.5% increase over the total number of building permits issued in the 2020/2021 financial year. 83% of these permits were issued within the benchmark 90-day period.**

In the last financial year, 4,542 applications for permits were received, reflecting an investment value of J\$171.5 billion. This is an 11.8% increase over the number of applications submitted in the previous financial year. The vast majority of applications submitted - 89% - was for residential developments. Of this percentage, 63% reflected small residential projects, with the remaining 26% being large residential projects.

Madam Speaker, one of this Administration's great priorities when it took office in 2016, was to raise the standards of accountability and governance in the Local Authorities. We have improved the oversight of the Local Authorities through better and more frequent auditing by the Ministry. I want to say a special thanks to the Auditor-General's Department, who has been working closely with the Ministry to further improve the levels of compliance from all the Local Authorities. They have come a long way, and I look forward to the continuation of this relationship with the Office of the Auditor-General, as we move to ensure full compliance with all the rules that govern the local government system. Finally, **Madam Speaker**, it is publicly known that in February this year, the Parliament approved the Motion to name Portmore as Jamaica's 15th parish. A submission in this respect is almost ready for the consideration of Cabinet, after which instructions will be given for a Bill to be drafted for Parliamentary review. We look forward to this historic development, which when it occurs, will be the first time that a parish would have been created in Jamaica since 1867.

CONCLUSION

Madam Speaker, I share the sense of personal relief that the Most Honourable Prime Minister spoke about in the Budget Debate. The pandemic is not over, and we must all take due care. The Government has shifted into a higher gear, and a buzz of activity is happening across the country. It is a great feeling to be back in the communities, interacting with our stakeholders, and responding directly to their suggestions and concerns. We are eager to get past the recovery phase and resume the focus on prosperity. The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development will make an even stronger contribution to the transformation of Jamaica.

We want to erase the experience of people walking for miles to get water. That is why the drive to increase minor water supply is being accelerated. This year, we will complete the water shops at Commodore in Portland and Myersville in St. Elizabeth. We will build more water shops in Manchester, at Mile Gully, Porus, Somerset and Johns Hall.

This year, we will complete a wide range of water supply projects at Watermount and Pear Tree Grove in St. Catherine;

- Cornwall Barracks, and Bangor Ridge Phase 2 and Stony Hill in Portland;
- Thicketts in St Ann; Maybole in St Elizabeth, and the Comma/ Mango Valley area in St Mary, all at a cost of \$215 million.

The Government is listening to the call for better parochial roads. The answer of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development this year, is that \$250 million will be provided to carry out repairs.

Many residents in rural Jamaica want to be properly connected to the electrical grid, but can't afford the cost of house wiring. In some areas, infrastructure such as light poles is insufficient. **That is why this year, through the Rural Electrification Programme, we will be spending J\$300 million to erect an additional 10 kilometres of new light pole lines, and connect 2,000 houses across ten communities to the electrical grid.**

We will build at least 11 new concrete indigent houses in St. Mary, Hanover and Westmoreland this year. Additionally, through a joint initiative with the Ministry of Economic Growth and Job Creation, an unprecedented 120 social housing units will be built in various parts of Jamaica this year.

Rural Development, indeed development anywhere, is not only about economic matters. Civic Pride, and the symbols of civic pride are also important. In keeping with our 60th year of Independence, 60 sites of historical importance in our municipalities will be chosen as legacy projects, and refurbished to their full glory.

The Government will also implement a special project to clean the landscape as part of the official recognition of Jamaica 60. A special inter-Ministerial Committee has been convened and is hard at work to roll out this project. The Committee, which I have the privilege to Chair, is composed of the Hon. Pearnel Charles Jr., the Hon. Matthew Samuda, the Hon. Everaldo Warmington and the Hon. Floyd Green.

Under the **Paint the City Initiative**, significant work is being done to improve the look and feel of our urban spaces. The transformation of Crab Circle in the vicinity of National Heroes' Park, Carter Avenue off Hagley Park Road in Kingston, Brown's Town in St. Ann and Lucea in Hanover are a taste of things to come. I must give a big thanks to J. Wray & Nephew Limited as our major partner in these projects. This year, \$298 million will be spent to transform other spaces in Harbour View, in St. Mary, in St. James and in St. Ann.

Madam Speaker, this is the seventh occasion on which I have had the honour of addressing this House as the Minister responsible for Local Government. I am refreshed, ready and eager to continue the transformation of the system of local Government, and to use the opportunity given to me to change rural Jamaica in a

historic way. The task before me is huge, but I am confident that it can and will be done. As former US President Barack Obama said: "The future rewards those who press on. I don't have time to feel sorry for myself. I don't have time to complain. I'm going to press on."

I call on every Jamaican to play his and her part, in speeding up the process of national recovery, in helping to bring back a strong sense of public order, to bring back a general sense of civic pride, and to restore a strong sense of personal responsibility. These attributes are within us, and we need all of them in order to move from recovery to lasting prosperity. Armed with these qualities, along with the blessings of the Almighty, there is no achievement that is too great, no mountain too high for the people of Jamaica. God bless Jamaica. God bless the people of Jamaica.

Desmond McKenzie, CD, MP, JP

Minister of Local Government and Rural Development

May 25, 2022

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