



ELEVENTH REPORT OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

C O M M I T T E E

SECOND SESSION OF THE 11TH PARLIAMENT

Inquiry

Examination of the Audited Financial Statements of
the Land Settlement Agency for the financial years
2008 and 2009



Public Accounts Committee¹

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) established by the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in accordance with Section 119(4) is mandated to consider and report to the House of Representatives on:

- “(a) appropriation accounts of moneys expended out of sums granted by Parliament to meet the public expenditure of Trinidad and Tobago;*
- (b) such other accounts as may be referred to the Committee by the House of Representatives or as are authorized or required to be considered by the committee under any other enactment; and*
- (c) the report of the Auditor General on any such accounts.”*

Current membership

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie	Chairman ²
Mr. Taharqa Obika	Vice - Chairman
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	Member
Mr. Randall Mitchell	Member
Dr. Lester Henry	Member
Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon	Member
Mr. Adrian Leonce	Member
Ms. Melissa Ramkissoon	Member

Committee Staff

The current staff members serving the Committee are:

Ms Keiba Jacob	Secretary to the Committee
Ms Hema Bhagalloo	Assistant Secretary to the Committee
Mr Darien Buckmire	Graduate Research Assistant

Publication

An electronic copy of this report can be found on the Parliament website: www.ttparliament.org

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to:

The Secretary
Public Accounts Committee
Office of the Parliament
Levels G-7, Tower D
The Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre
1A Wrightson Road Port of Spain Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
Tel: (868) 624-7275; Fax: (868) 625-4672
Email: pac@ttparliament.org

¹ The PAC of the Eleventh Republican Parliament was established by resolutions of the House of Representatives and the Senate at sittings held on Friday November 13, 2015 and Tuesday November 17, 2015 respectively.

² The Committee held its first meeting on Wednesday December 2, 2015. At this meeting the Committee elected Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie as Chairman, in accordance with Section 119(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. At that same meeting, the Committee resolved that its quorum should comprise of three (3) Members, inclusive of the Chairman and any other Opposition Member.

Table of Contents

Members Of The Public Accounts Committee	4
Executive Summary	5
Introduction	7
Election Of The Chairman And Vice Chairman	7
Establishment Of Quorum	7
Determination Of The Committee's Work Programme.....	8
The Inquiry Process	10
Land Settlement Agency Profile	11
Background: Land Settlement Agency.....	11
Vision.....	11
Mission.....	11
Guiding Principles.....	11
Overall Strategy	11
Mandate.....	12
Core Goals.....	12
Squatter Regularization	12
Certificate Of Comfort.....	12
Permanent Secretary	12
Accountable Officer.....	12
Background: Auditor General	13
Issues And Recommendations	14
Land Settlement Agency – Concluding Remarks.....	23
Appendix I.....	25
Meetings.....	25
Appendix II	26
Minutes Of Meeting.....	26
Present Were:	26
Appendix III.....	30
Notes Of Evidence.....	30

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT,
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO



Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie
Chairman



Mr. Taharqa Obika
Vice- Chairman



Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy
Member



Mr. Randall Mitchell
Member



Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon
Member



Dr. Lester Henry
Member



Mr. Adrian Leonce
Member



Ms. Melissa Ramkissoon
Member

Executive Summary

The PAC presents its Eleventh Report of the Eleventh Parliament which details its examination of the ***Audited Financial Statements of the Land Settlement Agency (LSA) for the financial years 2008 and 2009***. During this examination, the Committee took the opportunity to discuss with the Land settlement agency and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (MHUD):

General issues relating to the performance of the Land Settlement Agency (LSA);

- The relationship between the Land Settlement Agency (LSA) and other state entities;
- Role of the Land Settlement Agency (LSA) in regularizing squatting across Trinidad and Tobago; and
- Challenges faced by the Land Settlement Agency (LSA) in carrying out its duties.

Based on the Committee's examination the following recommendations were proposed:

- The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development should take the lead and ensure that LSA submits a report on what actions will be taken to have all outstanding financial statements completed and submitted to the Parliament by February 28, 2018;
- The Committee recommends that regular monitoring of all state lands as well as annual land surveys should be conducted;
- Inter-agency collaboration should exist between the: The Central Statistical Office (CSO), Town and Country, Municipal Corporations, and The Commissioner of State Lands;
- To reduce the cost of hiring consultants, LSA must fill the vacant positions and improve the technical capabilities by February 28, 2018;
- The LSA should start maximising the usage of its internal personnel so that it no longer has to contract those services from outside consultants;
- The Committee recommends that the LSA in collaboration with its line Ministry undertake/facilitate a review of the operations of the agency;
- LSA should request support from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service for instances where disputes arise from squatters refusing to relocate fences and other property effective immediately;

- The MHUD should show zero tolerance for squatting in remote areas of State forest lands, forest reserves and other protected areas designated under the National Forest and Protected Areas Policy for Trinidad and Tobago 2011;
- LSA should take the requisite steps to establish a functional Procurement Unit by February 28, 2018 in accordance with the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Finance, consistent with the new procurement legislation;
- LSA should submit a report to the Parliament on the status of the initiatives being undertaken to acquire the requisite Internal Audit staff and establishment of the internal audit unit and function by February 28, 2018;
- The MHUD in collaboration with the LSA should take the requisite steps to that the pricing policy is approved and implemented and submit a status report to Parliament on the progress made in the implementation this policy by February 28, 2018; and
- LSA should submit a report to the Parliament on the status of the initiatives being undertaken to develop and implement a whistleblowing policy by February 28, 2018.

Introduction

The PAC of the Eleventh Republican Parliament was established by resolution of the House of Representatives and the Senate at the sittings held on Friday November 13, 2015 and Tuesday November 17, 2015 respectively.

The Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago mandates that the Committee shall consider and report to the House appropriation accounts of moneys expended out of sums granted by Parliament to meet the public expenditure of Trinidad and Tobago and the report of the Auditor General on any such accounts.

In addition to the Committee's powers entrenched in the Constitution, the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives also empower the Committee (but is not limited) to:

- a) send for persons, papers and records;
- b) have meetings whether or not the House is sitting;
- c) meet in various locations;
- d) report from time to time; and
- e) communicate with any other Committee on matters of common interest.

Election of the Chairman and Vice Chairman

In accordance with section 119(2) of the Constitution, the Chairman must be a member of the Opposition in the House. At the first meeting held on Wednesday December 2, 2015 Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie was elected Chairman of the Committee.

Establishment of Quorum

The Committee is required by the Standing Orders to have a quorum so that any decisions made by the Members during the meetings can be considered valid. A quorum of three (3) Members, inclusive of the Chair or Vice-Chairman), with representatives from both Houses was agreed to by the Committee at its First Meeting.

Determination of the Committee's Work Programme

The Committee agreed to a fifteen (15) entity work programme during its second meeting on Wednesday December 16, 2016. These entities included:

1. Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago
2. Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries
3. Ministry of Education
4. Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries
5. Ministry of Finance
6. Ministry of Health
7. Ministry of Public Administration
8. Ministry of Public Utilities
9. Ministry of National Security
10. Ministry of Tourism
11. Ministry of Trade and Industry
12. Tobago House of Assembly
13. Land Settlement Agency
14. National Lotteries Control Board
15. Regional Corporations

After reviewing the proposed Work Schedule for the 2nd Session the Committee agreed to examine the following entities in the following order:

1. Ministry of Education;
2. Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC);
3. Ministry of Health;
4. Eastern Regional Health Authority (ERHA);
5. Land Settlement Agency (LSA);
6. Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago;

7. Ministry of Attorney General and Legal Affairs; and
8. Ministry of Public Administration and Communications.

Following the submission of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2016 to the Parliament, the Committee agreed to invite the Auditor General's Department to a public hearing to discuss the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2016 and postpone the examination of the 3 entities listed below. This public hearing was held on June 14, 2017.

1. Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago;
2. Ministry of Attorney General and Legal Affairs; and
3. Ministry of Public Administration and Communications.

Following the public hearing held on June 14, 2017 with the Auditor General's Department, the Committee agreed to examine the Ministry of Finance on June 28, 2017 and the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries on September 13, 2017.

The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry Process outlines the steps taken by the Committee when conducting the inquiry into the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2016. The following steps outline the Inquiry Process agreed to by the PAC:

- I. Identification of issues in the Audited Financial Statements for the financial years 2008 and 2009 with specific reference to the Land Settlement Agency (LSA);
- II. Preparation of an Inquiry Proposal for the selected issues. The Inquiry Proposal outlines:
 - a. Background;
 - b. Objective of Inquiry; and
 - c. Proposed Questions.
- III. An Inquiry Proposal was considered and approved by the Committee and questions were forwarded to the Land Settlement Agency for written responses on April 6, 2017;
- IV. Based on the written responses received from the Land Settlement Agency, an Issues Paper was prepared for the Committee's consideration,
- V. The Committee reviewed the responses and Issues Paper provided in preparation of the public hearing;
- VI. A public hearing was conducted and the relevant witnesses were invited to attend and provide evidence on Wednesday June 14, 2017;
- VII. A request for additional responses was forwarded to the LSA for clarification on further details on May 29, 2017.
- VIII. Report Committee's findings and recommendations to Parliament upon conclusion of the inquiry.

Land Settlement Agency Profile

Background: Land Settlement Agency³

The Land Settlement Agency (LSA) was established by an Act of Parliament No. 25 of 1998, and commenced formal operations in 1999. The LSA now falls under the purview of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. Its mandate is to "protect eligible squatters from being ejected off State Lands; to facilitate the acquisition of leasehold titles by both squatters and tenants in designated areas and, to provide for the establishment of land settlement areas".

There are over 250 squatting sites on State Lands in Trinidad and Tobago with approximately 23,000 squatting households. Poverty reduction and the provision of goods and services must be addressed holistically to ensure all citizens are able to have sustainable livelihoods and a decent quality of life. In this regard, LSA's work is viewed as an important platform towards achieving this development.

Vision

To provide security of tenure to certain squatters in accordance with the provisions of the State Land (Regularisation of Tenure) Act no 25 of 1998.

Mission

To regularise certain squatters who have illegally occupied State Lands prior to January 01, 1998 and improve their living conditions as well as to prevent and contain further squatting of state lands.

Guiding Principles

To process the applications for regularisation prior to Jan 01, 1998 and to prepare statutory documents such as the CoCs, Statutory Leases and Deeds of Leases to provide security of tenure for eligible squatters.

Overall Strategy

To partner with other State agencies to ensure containment of further squatting.

³ Ministry of Housing and Urban Development Web. 14 Nov. 17 <http://www.housing.gov.tt/land-settlement-agency-lsa/#1493681624570-405c6f8e-8b4f>

Mandate

To protect eligible squatters from ejectment off State Lands; to facilitate the acquisition of leasehold titles by both squatters and tenants in designated areas and, to provide for the establishment of land settlement areas”.

Core Goals

- To regularise squatter families under an Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) funded Programme. This programme has been ongoing since 2003;
- To provide a more streamlined programme for the execution of statutory leases and Deeds of Lease.
- To Partner with State Agencies to ensure the containment of further squatting on State Lands.
- To reduce the incidences of squatting through public education and information

Squatter Regularization

Squatter Regularization involves two activities:

- Improving the conditions of persons living in squatter communities by implementing or upgrading necessary physical infrastructure such as roads, drainage and sewerage systems along with providing potable water, electricity and other amenities.
- Providing Security of Tenure to eligible Squatters who have been illegally occupying State Lands prior to January 1st 1998, and have completed and fulfilled all necessary requirements under Act No 25 of 1998.

Certificate of Comfort

Under the provisions of the State Land (Regularization of Tenure) Act No 25 of 1998, a squatter who was illegally occupying State Lands prior to January 01, 1998 could only have applied for a Certificate of Comfort (COC) in the prescribed statutory format on or before October 27, 2000. This would have been the first step in a three stage regularization process to obtain security of tenure by way of a Deed of Lease.

Permanent Secretary: Mrs. Simone Thorne-Mora Quinones

Accountable Officer: Mr. Hazar Hosein CEO

Background: Auditor General

The Auditor General is required by law to examine and report annually to Parliament on the accounts of Ministries, Departments, Regional Health Authorities, Regional Corporations and such State Controlled Enterprises and Statutory Boards for which the Auditor General is the statutory auditor. The portfolio also includes the audit of:

The accounts of projects funded partly or wholly by International Lending Agencies

- All pensions, gratuities and other separation benefits paid by the State in accordance with the Pensions Acts and other Agreements; and
- The grant of credit on the Exchequer Account in accordance with the requirements of section 18 of the Exchequer and Audit Act, chapter 69:01

The audit services take the form of financial audits, compliance audits and value for money audits intended to promote:

- Accountability
- Adherence to laws and regulations
- Economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the collection, disbursement and use of funds and other resources.

The duties and powers of the Auditor General are defined in the Exchequer and Audit Act Chapter 69:01 of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago.

Auditor General - Mr. Majeed Ali

Issues and Recommendations

1. Submission of Audited Financial Statements

According to Parliamentary records, the last audited financial statements submitted to the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago were for the fiscal year 2009. Accountability to Parliament for the utilization of public funds, was weakened by the failure of LSA to submit its audited financial statements and internal audit reports in a timely manner for scrutiny. In a written response, LSA stated that their statements were submitted late due to awaiting the Audit Reports for the years 2004 to 2009 and the need to make prior year adjustments as recommended by the Auditor General's Department. In accordance with Section 33 of the State Land (Regularization of Tenure) Act Chapter 57:05, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development is responsible for the timely submission of LSA's audited financial statements to the Auditor General's Department. The Ministry's role is to constantly monitor the Agency to ensure that this is done. The following mechanisms were in place to ensure that audited financial statements are submitted in a timely manner:

a. Board Oversight and Monitoring;

The Finance and Administration Committee of the Land Settlement Committee (LSC) has delegated responsibility to ensure that Financial Statements are completed on time and submitted to the Board before onward submission to the line Ministry and the Auditor General's Department.

b. Building of institutional capacity in the Finance Department.

The LSA has strengthened its Accounting Department by introducing new positions in key areas. A restructuring was completed in 2012 and the following positions were added to the Accounting Structure:

- Manager Corporate Services
- Assistant Accountant
- 3 Additional positions of Accounts Clerks

With the additional manpower, the Agency has been able to bring its Financial Statements up to date.

As at April 30th 2016, LSA submitted its financial statements to the Auditor General's Department up to the Financial Year ended 30 September 2016. Financial Statements for the year ended 30th September 2016 were submitted to the Auditor General on the 28th April 2017. The Auditor General's Department is currently undertaking Audits for the Financial Years ended September 2010 and September 2011 and are scheduled to be completed by April 2017

Recommendations:

- ***The Ministry of Housing and Urban Development should take the lead, as a matter of urgency, and ensure that LSA submits a report on what actions will be taken to have all outstanding financial statements completed and submitted to the Parliament by February 28, 2018; and***
- ***The Permanent Secretary should assign an existing member of staff oversight responsibilities over LSA's systems of accountability.***

2. The Regularization of Squatters On State Lands

The State Land (Regularization of Tenure) Act No 25 of 1998, empowers the Agency to regularize squatters who are eligible. Squatters, who entered on state lands before the year 1998, had a grace period up to October 27, 2000 to apply to the Land Settlement Agency to be regularized. LSA has been faced with a huge and undaunted task of regularizing the eligible squatters during the period 1998—2017. Since 2004, Cabinet Committees were established to address the containment of squatting. A major strategy was the formation of a network of stakeholders to assist in monitoring and to provide information to the agencies who have the power in law to address containment. The LSA does not have the power in law to remove squatters or their structures. These powers are held by the Commissioner of State Lands and the Municipal Corporations. The LSA actively monitors state land parcels and conveys the information to the Municipal Corporation and the Commissioner of State Lands for action. LSA liaises with state corporations and statutory authorities such as the EMA on the formulation of public education campaigns on the ills of squatting and to sensitize the public that squatting is illegal. In addition, LSA maintains a hot line for the public to report squatting. LSA estimated that there was approximately 55,000 squatting households. LSA has regularized 30 squatting sites and commenced development works on an additional 14 sites. A number of challenges were

discovered from a survey conducted on the regularisation of squatters such as a mixture of private and state lands in Port of Spain and its environs, the density of the occupation and the closeness of the structures that were constructed and the need for statutory approvals. The LSA stated, that one of the main factors that contributed to the significant increase in squatting since 1998 was the failure of the state agencies to implement the existing laws. These agencies include the Commissioner of State Lands, Regional Corporations and the Town and Country Planning Division. These powers if exercised effectively, will greatly assist in the containment of the unabated escalation of squatters.

Recommendations:

- ***The MHUD, Ministry of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries and Ministry of Rural Development & Local Government should initiate inter-agency collaboration between the Central Statistical Office (CSO), Town and Country, Municipal Corporations, and the Commissioner of State Lands and LSA to properly manage state lands and review and implement the existing laws and standards to regularize persons;***
- ***LSA when conducting its patrol of sites should report its findings to the Commissioner of State Lands and Regional/Municipal Corporations effective immediately;***
- ***The Commissioner of State Lands and Ministry of Rural and Local Government should identify liaison officers to receive and process this information in a timely manner. MHUD should ensure that reports are indeed submitted to the Commissioner of State Lands and Regional/Municipal Corporations; and***
- ***As a matter of urgency, LSA, the Municipal Corporation and the Commissioner of State Lands, should set out how they intend to improve the regularization of state lands for which they are responsible and submit a report to the Committee by February 28, 2018.***

3. Outsourcing of In-house Capabilities

LSA contracted supervisory consulting engineering firms to oversee the works undertaken by construction contractors. Strict protocols of monitoring were used to ensure value for money and works completed in accordance with highest standards. LSA was able to keep the cost of construction within the contract sums and also kept the development cost per lot lower than most other public government organizations while maintaining quality. LSA informed the

Committee that part of its control structure consists of in-house planners, engineers and surveyors, who aid in the management of construction. The Programme, Monitoring and Control Unit of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development in collaboration with the consultants and engineers manage LSA's internal checks. LSA indicated that while it has technical capacity within the agency to handle consultation, vacancies in the engineering positions still exist. LSA indicated that it was actively trying to improve its technical capacity to allow the engineering services to be done internally. LSA indicated that it implemented measures to reduce the exorbitant design and consultancy fees, which are monitored by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development's Programme, Monitoring and Control Unit.

Recommendations:

- ***To reduce the cost of hiring consultants, LSA must fill the vacant positions and improve the technical capabilities by February 28, 2018; and***
- ***The Ministry should designate a named official with responsibility for ensuring that value for money is being achieved with all projects being undertaken by the LSA.***

4. Challenges experienced by the LSA

The LSA indicated that there were a number of challenges that affected its ability to efficiently and effectively execute its mandate. These include:

- i. Financial constraints - the LSA component of the two IDB Loans signed in 2002 and 2011 for squatter regularization, were just over US \$13 million and US \$24million respectively;
- ii. None of the 251 sites compiled in the Act were defined to indicate whether it was state land or private land;
- iii. Density of occupation - multiple structures/households on a surveyed lot;
- iv. Statutory Approvals aren't granted if the physical infrastructure on the squatter sites aren't brought to the full standards;
- v. Inability to identify a "single" eligible occupant/Lessee for a Deed of Lease;
- vi. The withholding of information by squatters;
- vii. Encroachments of structures on lots and right of ways, non-compliance with directives to relocate/shift within boundaries;

- viii. Issues surrounding succession and ownership of structures;
- ix. Issues surrounding illegal transfer of “rights” to the land and structures built thereon;
- x. Issues surrounding absentee structure owners or “rentals”;
- xi. The ability of eligible squatters to pay the premium and infrastructural development costs to advance their tenure status;
- xii. Issues surrounding parties having since acquired property by whatever means and are no longer landless; and
- xiii. Field officer safety - With the majority of the field officers being female, they have to go out by themselves mostly unarmed and without a security detail and must interact with squatters on a daily basis without and form of protection.

Recommendations:

- ***Given the prevailing financial and operational challenges being faced by the LSA on a regular basis, the Committee recommends that the LSA in collaboration with its line Ministry undertake/facilitate a review of the operations of the agency with a view to:***
 - a. Looking at cost containment strategies to reduce the development cost of individual lots;***
 - b. Collaborating with the Central Statistical Office must design and implement a data validation process of persons on state lands;***
- ***LSA should set out its plans for a revised approach for early intervention to reduce the challenges encountered. These should cover: how it will put in place effective prioritisation; planning innovative projects in phases; and planning for public engagement on projects which aim to change behaviour; and***
- ***LSA should submit a report to the Parliament on the status of the initiatives being undertaken to reduce the challenges encountered by February 28, 2018.***

5. Infrastructure Development Constraints

Irregular settlement by squatters makes it difficult for proper planning and engineering standards to be applied. Areas in the process of being regularized by LSA require approvals from the regulatory and statutory authorities such as the Municipal Corporations and Town and Country Planning Division, TTFS, WASA, T&TEC etc. Only once approvals have been granted will the

beneficiaries be able to receive a lease. LSA indicated that in certain instances, the type of terrain, the closeness of structures and the lack of identifiable passageways makes it difficult to improve the infrastructure to the required standards by the regulatory bodies. Some infrastructure development constraints experienced include:

- i. Resistance by squatters to relocate or remove hindrances such as crops or fences when they are obstructing the construction of roads, drains etc; and
- ii. Very high development costs (water installation, electrification, sewer systems, drainage, roads and fire hydrants) in some areas due to remoteness, located on hillsides or have high population densities.

Recommendations:

- ***Request support from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service for instances where disputes arising from squatters refusing to relocate fences and other property effective immediately; and***
- ***The MHUD should show zero tolerance for squatting in remote areas of State forest lands, forest reserves and other protected areas designated under the National Forest and Protected Areas Policy for Trinidad and Tobago 2011.***

6. Absence of Procurement Unit and Strategies

Government entities need to be cognizant of the new Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act (No. 1 of 2015), where certain sections were proclaimed on 31st July, 2015. This legislation seeks to strengthen public procurement systems, and covers all public bodies even State-enterprises and establishes a new public procurement regime in Trinidad and Tobago. To handle its procurement activities, LSA has one procurement position on its organizational structure. LSA stated that the position has been vacant for several months due to its inability to retain the officer on the same wages. LSA further indicated that it has been actively advertising the position but has been experiencing wage demand challenges. With this vacancy in mind, LSA indicated it was aware of the new procurement legislation and was working towards strengthen that area with its parent Ministry.

Recommendations:

- ***LSA should take the requisite steps to establish a functional Procurement Unit by February 28, 2018 in accordance with the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Finance, consistent with the new procurement legislation.***
- ***LSA should submit a report to the Parliament on the status of the initiatives being undertaken to acquire the requisite procurement staff and establishment of the procurement unit by February 28, 2018.***

7. Absence of Internal Audit Unit

The role of Internal Audit is to provide independent assurance that an organization's risk management, governance and internal control processes were operating effectively. The internal audit function is a key component of the internal control system of any entity. An effective internal audit function contributes greatly to achieving and maintaining accountability and good governance and ultimately, to effective service delivery. In a written response, LSA stated that it is audited by Internal Auditors of the Line Ministry who perform audit functions by the request of the Permanent Secretary. LSA has two (2) positions on the organization structure for Internal Audit: Internal Auditor and Audit Assistant, however, none have been filled as these functions are performed by its parent Ministry's Internal Audit team. Going forward, the Ministry's internal audit unit will be strengthened to provide more oversight for the agencies and the statutory authorities under its purview. As at the third week in June 2017, LSA held interviews for the positions of Internal Auditor and Audit Assistant. The filling of those positions would facilitate the initial start of the Internal Audit Department which the LSA expects to be staffed by September 2017.

Recommendations:

- ***LSA should establish a proper Internal Audit Unit by February 28, 2018;***
- ***LSA should take urgent steps to implement an effective Internal Audit function by February 28, 2018;***
- ***LSA should submit a report to the Parliament on the status of the initiatives being undertaken to acquire the requisite Internal Audit staff and establishment of the internal audit unit and function by February 28, 2018.***

8. Absence of an effective system for debt collection

The Trade and Other Receivables account consists mainly of estimated amounts outstanding from Clients of HDC's Project Execution Unit (PEU). The PEU was established under the first National Settlements Programme of the IDB in the Year 2002. LSA was requested to manage these sites from the Year 2000. Due to the lack of a pricing policy, the Agency was unable to implement an effective system for debt collection. These debts are in relation to the repayment of the premium and infrastructure development costs of squatters who received regularization. Because LSA depends on subventions for all of its activities, uncollected revenue could have been used for infrastructural works to develop squatter sites and provide tenure to persons. If a pricing policy is established, the Agency would be able to fund its own operations and not rely on Central Government for subventions for development works. LSA indicated that a system for debt collection was developed but could only be implemented when the pricing policy is approved. While pricing policies were developed and approved in 2009 and later in 2013, a new pricing policy was developed and was currently being reviewed. The MHUD, the Commissioner of State Lands and the Housing Development Corporation were consulted during the development of the new policy.

Recommendation:

- ***The MHUD in collaboration with the LSA should take the requisite steps to ensure the pricing policy is approved and implemented and submit a status report to Parliament on the progress made in the implementation this policy by February 28, 2018.***

9. Absence of a Whistleblowing Policy

LSA does not have a Whistleblowing Policy. A Whistle-Blowing Policy provides standard guidelines within which organizations respond to the ethical or moral concerns of their employees. Whistleblowing policies should have the following components as a minimum:

1. A clear statement that employees who are aware of possible wrongdoing within the organization have a responsibility to disclose that information to appropriate parties inside the organization;
2. The designation of specific individuals or groups outside the chain of command as complaint recipients;

3. A guarantee that employees who in good faith disclose perceived wrongdoing to the designated parties inside the organization will be protected from adverse employment consequences; and
4. The establishment of a fair and impartial investigative process.⁴

In the written responses LSA indicated that all processes are transparent and operate based on guidelines and an open line of communication amongst staff. LSA further indicated that its employees were expected to adhere to the confidentiality clause in their contracts. The confidentiality clause is referenced in the contracts for employees due to the sensitivity of the socio-economic data retained by the LSA. However, Section 6. (1) of The Whistle Blower Protection Bill 2015⁵ states that “An employee of an organisation may make a disclosure of improper conduct to a whistleblowing reporting officer or a Whistleblowing Reports Unit based on his reasonable belief that improper conduct has occurred, is occurring or is likely to occur within the organisation.” Referencing the use of confidentiality clauses, Section 6 (6) of the Act states that “Any provision in any contract of employment shall be voidable in so far as it purports to preclude the making of a disclosure”

Recommendations:

- ***LSA should develop a policy document on whistleblowing within the shortest possible time frame to ensure that staff appreciates the ethical environment of honesty, integrity, ethics and fair play; and***
- ***LSA should submit a report to the Parliament on the status of the initiatives being undertaken to develop and implement a whistleblowing policy by February 28, 2018.***

⁴ Why Your Company Should Have A Whistleblowing Policy by Tim Barnett, Assistant Professor of Management, Louisiana Tech University Sam Advanced Management Journal, Autumn, 1992, pp. 37-42
http://ethics.csc.ncsu.edu/old/12_00/basics/whistle/rst/wstlblo_policy.html

⁵ The Whistle Blower Protection Bill 2015 <http://www.ttparliament.org/legislations/b2015h15.pdf>

Land Settlement Agency – Concluding Remarks

The information provided by the LSA suggests that over the last two decades, there has been a consistent increase in the number of squatting sites developing across Trinidad. The Committee is of the view that this is attributed to the lack of a cohesive inter-agency approach to squatter containment. Also playing a role is the LSA's lack of legal authority to effectively contain the spreading of squatter settlements is a major source of concern for the Committee.

While other state bodies may have the power to prevent squatting or eject illegal squatters, LSA only possesses the technical expertise, records and experiences in dealing with regularizing squatters. In light of this, there is a need for the unification of efforts among the agencies to regularize and contain squatters. The Committee is of the view that a comprehensive review of the Act and by extension the operations of the LSA should be a priority item for the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development.

This Committee respectfully submits this Report for the consideration of the Parliament.

Sgd.
Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie
Chairman

Sgd.
Mr. Taharqa Obika
Vice - Chairman

Sgd.
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy
Member

Sgd.
Mr Randall Mitchell
Member

Sgd.
Dr. Lester Henry
Member

Sgd.
Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon
Member

Sgd.
Mr. Adrian Leonce
Member

Sgd.
Ms. Melissa Ramkissoon
Member

APPENDIX I

Meetings

At the meeting held on Wednesday May 24, 2017, the witnesses attending on behalf of Land Settlement Agency (LSA) were:

Auditor General's Department

- Mr. Shiva Sinanan - Assistant Auditor General
- Ms. Cheryl Wright - Acting Audit Director

Land Settlement Agency (LSA)

- Mr. Ossley Francis - Chairman
- Mr. Hazar Hosein - Chief Executive Officer
- Ms. Lorraine Heath - Corporate Secretary
- Ms. Oma Moonoo - Senior Accountant
- Ms. Marissa Edmund - Assistant Accountant
- Mr. Satchdanand Bassaw - Senior Design Engineer

Ministry Of Housing and Urban Development (MHUD)

- Ms. Marion Hayes - Permanent Secretary
- Ms. Goomatee Maharaj - Auditor II (Ag.)

**THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE –
SECOND SESSION, ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT**

**MINUTES OF THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING HELD ON
WEDNESDAY, MAY 24, 2017 AT 10:17 A.M.
IN THE ARNOLD THOMASOS MEETING ROOM (EAST) AND J.
HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM, MEZZANINE FLOOR, OFFICE OF THE
PARLIAMENT, TOWER D, THE PORT OF SPAIN INTERNATIONAL
WATERFRONT CENTRE, 1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT-OF-SPAIN.**

Present were:

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie	-	Chairman
Mr. Rodger Samuel	-	Vice- Chairman
Ms. Jennifer Raffoul	-	Member
Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon	-	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacob	-	Secretary
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	-	Assistant Secretary

Excused were:

Mr. Randall Mitchell	-	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	-	Member
Dr. Lester Henry	-	Member

Absent was:

Ms. Marlene McDonald	-	Member
----------------------	---	--------

COMMENCEMENT

- 1.1 At 10:17 a.m. the Chairman called the meeting to order and welcomed those present. Mr. Randall Mitchell, Ms. Jennifer Raffoul and Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon were excused from the meeting.

THE EXAMINATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE SIXTEENTH MEETING

- 2.1 The Committee examined the Minutes of the Sixteenth (16th) Meeting held on Wednesday May 29, 2017.

- 2.2 There being no further omissions or corrections, Minutes were confirmed on a motion moved by Mr. Rodger Samuel and seconded by Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE SIXTEENTH MEETING

- 3.1 The Committee agreed that a press conference will be held on May 26, 2017, to highlight the findings and recommendations in the Seventh Report of the PAC with specific reference to the Ministry of Education.

PRE-HEARING DISCUSSION RE: LAND SETTLEMENT AGENCY (LSA)

- 4.1 The Committee agreed on the focus of the meeting which were the concerns raised in the Audited Financial Statement of the Land Settlement Agency (LSA) for the years 2008 to 2009.
- 4.2 Members discussed the issues of concern and the general approach for the Public Hearing.
- 4.3 There being no further business for discussion *in camera*, the Chairman suspended the meeting at 10:39 a.m.

EXAMINATION OF THE LAND SETTLEMENT AGENCY (LSA)

- 5.1 The Chairman called the public meeting to order at 10:45 a.m.
- 5.2 The Chairman welcomed officials from the Auditor General's Department (AGD), the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, the Land Settlement Agency (LSA), members of the media and the public to the Seventeenth (17th) public hearing with the PAC and introductions were exchanged.
- 5.3 The following officials joined the meeting:

Land Settlement Agency (LSA)

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| • Mr. Ossley Francis | - Chairman |
| • Mr. Hazar Hosein | - Chief Executive Officer |
| • Ms. Lorraine Heath | - Corporate Secretary |
| • Ms. Oma Moonoo | - Senior Accountant |
| • Ms. Marissa Edmund | - Assistant Accountant |
| • Mr. Satchdanand Bassaw | - Senior Design Engineer |

Ministry Of Housing and Urban Development (MHUD)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Ms. Marion Hayes | - Permanent Secretary |
| • Ms. Goomatee Maharaj | - Auditor II (Ag.) |

Auditor General's Department

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| • Mr. Shiva Sinanan | - Assistant Auditor General |
| • Ms. Cheryl Wright | - Acting Audit Director |

5.4 The following issues arose from the examination of the LSA:

- The regularization of eligible squatters on State lands;
- The challenges faced in the regularization of eligible squatters;
- The mandate of the LSA;
- The status of the LSA's operations from 1998 to present;
- The number of squatting households on State Lands;
- The clarification of 'corrective works' on squatter sites;
- The status of the projects executed under the IDB Loans;
- The role of the LSA with respect to new squatting households;
- The selection process for the firms contracted to provide supervisory consulting services;
- The LSA's technical capacity to undertake engineering services in-house;
- The cost to develop a squatting lot;
- The purpose of the allocation of funds to the institutional strengthening in the Greater Port-of-Spain area;
- The outcome of the regularization of squatting study conducted on the Greater Port-of-Spain area;
- The risks encountered by LSA personnel when entering squatter communities;
- The status of the Land for the Landless Program;
- The total sum of funds spent on the Land for the Landless Program;
- The number of sites developed and distributed under the Land for the Landless Program;
- The process used to prioritize site development;
- The status of LSA's internal audit function;
- The number of personnel employed by the LSA;
- The reasons for Certificate of Comfort squatter information being unverifiable;
- The lack of procurement strategies at the LSA;
- The status of the money owed to contractors;
- The relationship between the LSA and the Housing Development Corporation;

Please see the attached verbatim notes for the detailed oral submission by the witnesses.

5.5 The Chairman will informed the Committee that a letter was dispatched to LSA with a deadline of June 9, 2017 for the submission of additional information to all unanswered questions.

SUSPENSION

6.1 At 12:23 p.m., the Chairman suspended the *public* meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

- 7.1 The Committee agreed to discuss the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2016 at the next meeting.
- 7.2 The Chairman thanked Members for their attendance and the meeting was adjourned to **Wednesday June 14, 2017.**

We certify that these Minutes are true and correct.

CHAIRMAN

SECRETARY

May 26, 2017

**VERBATIM NOTES OF THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF THE
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE HELD IN THE J. HAMILTON
MAURICE ROOM, MEZZANINE FLOOR (IN PUBLIC) TOWER D, THE
PORT OF SPAIN INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTRE, 1A
WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN, ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 24, 2017,
AT 10.45 A.M.**

PRESENT

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie	Chairman
Mr. Rodger Samuel	Vice-Chairman
Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon	Member
Miss Jennifer Raffoul	Member
Miss Keiba Jacob	Secretary
Miss Hema Bhagaloo	Assistant Secretary

ABSENT

Dr. Lester Henry	Member
Miss Marlene Mc Donald	Member
Mr. Randall Mitchell	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	Member

AUDITOR GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Mr. Shiva Sinanan	Assistant Auditor General
Ms. Cheryl Wright	Audit Director (Ag.)

MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Marion Hayes	Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
------------------	---------------------------

Ms. Goomatee Maharaj

Auditor II (Ag.)

LAND SETTLEMENT AGENCY (LSA)

Mr. Ossley Francis

Chairman

Mr. Hazar Hosein

Chief Executive Officer

Ms. Lorraine Heath

Corporate Secretary

Ms. Oma Moonoo

Senior Accountant

Ms. Marissa Edmund

Assistant Accountant

Mr. Satchdanand Bassaw

Senior Design Engineer

Mr. Chairman: Okay, good morning everybody. I want to welcome all the officials from the Auditor General's Department on our left here and from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, the members of the Land Settlement Agency and, of course, members of the media who are here to cover this event and members of the public who are in the public gallery.

This meeting is held in public and is being broadcast live on the Parliament's Channel 11 and on radio 105.5FM and on the Parliament's YouTube channel, which is *ParlView*. The members who are listening or watching can send their comments related to today's topic and so participate, either by email and that email is Parl101@TTParliament.org. Parl, P-A-R-L 101@TTParliament.org. They can do it through Facebook at [Facebook.com/ttparliament](https://www.facebook.com/ttparliament) or by [Twitter@ttparliament](https://twitter.com/ttparliament).

Now, the purpose of a Public Accounts Committee meeting is to examine the concerns raised in the audited financial statements and ask the representatives here to respond.

Today we have a situation which is not the happiest situation in that we are examining the accounts for 2008/2009, which means that we are going into accounts that are very far back. But I have already indicated to members who are present and

we will be joined by another Senator shortly, that they are free to raise issues about the LSA, not necessarily limited to the 2008/2009 accounts, although we will raise that and its implications for the current situation of the LSA.

Now, these meetings are held—and the Committee is always desirous of hearing from the key stakeholders, in this particular case of the Land Settlement Agency—to learn the challenges being faced and determine some of the possible solutions to these challenges. The role of the Committee is to help the LSA improve its delivery and services in an efficient, effective and economic manner.

I will ask members of the Committee to introduce themselves. I will also ask members of the Auditor General's Department to introduce themselves, and then I will ask the members before us, from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and the Land Settlement Agency to introduce themselves, and then I will ask the Chairman. Sorry, the Chairman of the LSA is present? Yes, I will ask the Chairman of the LSA to make a brief opening statement before we start the questions. As I said, on this Committee today there are only three of us, but we will be joined by a fourth member presently. Okay, so we start with ourselves. I am Chair, of course. My name is Bhoe Tewarie. I am a member of the Committee and Chair.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: All right, thank you all very much. I want to thank you for coming and for participating in this. These are very important meetings from the public point of view because this is the only way that the public gets an opportunity, the citizens get an opportunity, to see how the institutions that they pay for as taxpayers operate, and to get a sense of what they are doing.

So, I will begin by asking the Chairman if he would make an opening statement, following which we will ask some questions.

Mr. Francis: Thank you very kindly, Chairman. Members of the Committee,

pleasant good morning to you all. Chairman, you all have asked us, that is the Land Settlement Agency, to appear before you all this morning as witnesses to the hearing, and we are prepared, Chairman, to co-operate fully and answer all the questions that you intend to pose to us so as to assist the Committee in its deliberations, and to give a better sense of what we in the LSA are faced with, the challenges that we are also faced with, in regularizing eligible squatters who occupy state lands at their own free will, without consent or permission from the State.

Chairman, the Act empowers us to regularize squatters who are eligible, and those squatters, Chairman, are those who entered on to state lands before the year 1998, and they had a grace period up to the 27th of October, 2000, to apply to the Land Settlement Agency for them to be regularized.

Chairman, members of the Committee, we are faced with a huge and an undaunted task at present between the period 1998—2017. Chairman, members of your Committee, we are open and ready to respond to all the questions that you may wish to pose to us. I thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for making that statement on behalf of the LSA. We are very pleased that we have your full co-operation and we will ask you questions that clarify, for members of the public, some of the issues that are involved.

The first thing is, in your statement you mentioned that basically what you deal with is the regularization of squatters on state lands. So, I just want to clarify that for the public. The squatting that you deal with has to do with the occupation by squatters of state-owned lands in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Francis: You are very correct, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: The other thing that I wanted to mention, or I wanted to ask you, because you sought to clarify that in your statement, is that the institution was established in 1998. The institutional mandate, I thought, I heard you to mean, was

to regularize squatters who had in fact been squatters 1998 and before?

Mr. Francis: True and correct, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, and that they had a period between 1998 and 2000, in order to register their interest.

Mr. Francis: That one you are correct also with.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Now, you then mentioned 1998—2017, and you did not give any details about that. But what does it mean for you now, given that we are in 2017, given your original mandate and what has happened since and what is the reality that you have to deal with?

Mr. Francis: Chairman, squatting has continued unabated to this date. We in the LSA do have powers and again we do not have powers. We do not have powers, Chairman, to eject or to remove squatters from state lands. Those powers are not vested in the LSA and hence the reason why I said, and you picked up on it Chairman, from 1998 to date squatting has continued unabated.

Mr. Chairman: Do you have any idea what the number is at this time?

Mr. Francis: Chairman, an educated guess is that we have about, at least, 55,000 squatters on state lands, as of 2017, to date.

Mr. Chairman: These would be 55,000 households or 55,000 persons?

Mr. Francis: I will ask my CEO to elaborate further to give clarity to that question you have asked, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Hosein: Chairman and members, good morning. As at this date, 2017, our best estimate, as my Chairman has put it, is the number is close to 55,000 families.

Mr. Chairman: Families, okay.

Mr. Hosein: So if we take on average four persons per family, we are well over 200,000 persons who are squatting on state lands.

Mr. Chairman: Could I ask a question about that, though? Because when I read the document here, the document had to do with the audited financial statements and

some of the responses that were given. One of the numbers mentioned was 731, I think, squatter settlements. Is that correct?

Mr. Hosein: Chairman, the number of squatting settlements as listed in Act 25 of 1998, is 251 in Trinidad and there are three listed in the Act in Tobago, for which we have no responsibility. So it is 251 in the Act. As at this point, 2017, our best estimate puts the number of squatting settlements at over 350.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, I do not want to take up the time to look for it now but while other members are asking questions I am going to look for it, because I am almost sure that I saw 731 squatting communities in Trinidad and Tobago, based on a survey that was done by you all, and if I—I do not want to be alarmist but if I calculate maybe 250 families in each squatter settlement you are talking about an alarming number of families, and if I multiply each squatter settlement by 1,000, you are talking about half the population of Trinidad and Tobago. So that is why I do not wish to be alarmist about it, but we will come back and interrogate the issue; 731.

I was wrong. It is 705 squatter sites and it is on page 27 of the document, the document being Land Settlement Agency and Agency of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, Invitation to the 17th Meeting of the Public Accounts Committee, May 03rd, and basically it is responses to questions on the audited financial statements of the Land Settlement Agency, financial year 2008/2009 and what it says here is that:

396 maps identifying the squatter site boundaries, status and outcome, 396. However, not all sites were surveyed and profiled as in 2015. There was a total of 251 scheduled and 454 unscheduled sites in Trinidad, a total of 705 squatter sites.

So if we do some multiplication, even on rough numbers, we see that we are dealing with a substantially large number of families and a large number of individuals, citizens, I hope, in these squatter sites. Okay? As I said, we can come back to that.

But I wanted to raise some issues, which I think are very important. All right? And this has to do with, of the 700,000 or so squatter sites, or if you want to say the 55,000 families, to use your number, I mean, what has been achieved in terms of the regularization of squatter sites, and basically the settlement of some of these communities that are on state land held, squatter sites in Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. Hosein: Chairman, okay, to date since the LSA began operation in 1999, we have regularized some 30 squatting settlements out of the ones listed in the Act. That is 251. Now, you also mentioned the numbers that were presented. There are a number of sites where you have one or two persons. So, in the true sense they are not really squatting sites but you have one or two persons who may have settled in some areas. And the Act talks about regularizing persons who are on designated sites, 251.

So, at the end of the day, what has to be done, in accordance with the Act, some persons would have to be moved into some squatting sites and where you put them together. Okay? So, to date, we have done regularization in 30 squatting sites; that is development works. At this time, we are doing regularization in another nine and within the next month, we would be starting corrective works on at least 14 sites.

Mr. Chairman: What does corrective work mean?

Mr. Hosein: Good. Corrective works is bringing these sites up to full standards; that is improving the drainage, putting in concrete drains, box drains, improving the water supply by improving the water infrastructure. Electrification and also putting in fire hydrants in these sites. So we would meet all the regulatory approvals, so that we can then move the sites to the full standards and be able to offer deeds of lease in accordance with the Act.

Mr. Chairman: And how is that different from the nine that you said that you are going to do?

Mr. Hosein: The nine sites that we are presently working on, are all over the country

where we are working on these sites and we are putting in full infrastructure in these nine sites that we are working on.

When the Act was contemplated, Chairman, and the Act clearly states that the squatter regularization process should have been an incremental one, and it made mention of incremental development over the years. When the LSA started operations back in the year 1999, the concept then was that we would do earthen drains, gravel roads, pitch-run roads. Now, the concept has changed a bit because we are trying to be in line with these regulatory agencies, the Town and Country, et cetera, where they have demanded that we bring the sites up to full standards to meet all the requirements, so that they can give us the approvals so that we can give deeds of lease, marketable deeds of lease at the end of the day.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, so I just want to get the numbers straight. So from inception, from 1999 as an executing agency, you have actually fully regularized 30 sites. You are in the process of doing nine. What would be the termination date for those?

Mr. Hosein: Okay, the nine sites that we are currently doing, out of the nine, eight are substantially completed. Works are ongoing in one of the sites. That is Sunrees Ramlal in Penal. That should be completed by the end of June.

Mr. Chairman: All right, so by the end of June this year?

Mr. Hosein: End of June this year.

Mr. Chairman: So by the end of June this year you would have completed nine more.

Mr. Hosein: That is it.

Mr. Chairman: And you are embarking on achieving full standard for 14 more. And what is the termination date for that?

Mr. Hosein: These contracts are going to run from 1st of June until the 30th of September this year. So by the 30th of September this year, we will bring the sites up to full standards, where we can then approach the regulatory agencies, WASA in

particular, the drainage department, to get their approvals.

Mr. Chairman: So by September of 2017, you will have done, during this particular two-year period, 23 sites. Is that what you are saying?

Mr. Hosein: That is it.

Mr. Chairman: And you had done 30 before.

Mr. Hosein: We completed approximately 30 before this time.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, I see my colleague wanting to ask a question here. I just want to ask a question related to this before. The IDB loan, what is the status of the execution of the project intended under the IDB loan taken, I think it might have been in 2002, and where are you now with that?

Mr. Hosein: Okay, Chairman the 2002 IDB loan, it was a total of US \$40million, just over \$13 million was a component geared towards squatter regularization. So that is the part that the LSA was implementing. The rest of it was under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development for institutional strengthening, for grant, et cetera.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, let me just get that number correct. Assigned to the LSA, in relation to the IDB loan was only a total of \$13million?

Mr. Hosein: Yes, just over US \$13 million.

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Mr. Hosein: And the objective there was to regularize these sites, put in infrastructure in the sites, as outlined in the loan and to bring them up to full standards.

Now, when that loan was signed on to, the per lot development cost at that time, taking into consideration the standards that were contemplated, the LSA was expected to spend some US \$5,000 per lot, approximately TT \$30,000 per lot. By 2009, with the change in policy and trying to meet all the regulatory standards, that development cost went from US \$5,000 or TT \$30,000 to just over US \$11,000, or

close to TT \$70,000 per lot, because we were required to put in all the infrastructure and bring it up to the full standards: electricity water supply, concrete drains, paved roads. When we started, the number of lots that was expected was just over 5,000 lots. We ended up with 3,117 lots or thereabout.

Mr. Chairman: And do you have any money remaining out of that now or has that been expended?

Mr. Hosein: Now, the two loans; the 2002 loan was completed in 2010. A new loan was signed on to in 2011, for US \$50 million. The LSA's component for squatter regularization was just over US \$24million. Out of that, we are using funds from that for the nine sites we spoke about and to do the corrective works on the other 14 sites. That loan will be completed. It is expected to be completed this year. In fact we got an extension, and as at this point the extension takes us to September, and that is the reason we mentioned that we are supposed to complete all the works by that time. So we would utilize all the funds. As far as squatter regularization goes, we would have utilized all the funds by that date, under the loan.

Mr. Chairman: How many settlements did you regularize from the time of the loan in 2011, to the present time?

Mr. Hosein: Okay, so it is the nine sites that we have been working on; that is the physical work on nine sites. But apart from that, we have been doing other works on other sites and that include land use planning, topographic surveys, engineering designs in a number of other sites, in preparation for doing physical works.

Mr. Chairman: There was a digitization exercise on which you embarked, I suspect it was part of this loan, in order to identify every single squatter home in the country. Has that been completed and do you have on that digitized system all the squatters, up to the point when you would have completed the survey?

Mr. Hosein: Chairman, that survey was started in the year 2009, and substantially completed by 2011. We engaged the services of persons from the public in doing

that survey. Just over 30 persons were engaged, together with the staff of the LSA. By 2012, we completed that survey. So 2009 to 2012, it was a long period.

At the end of that, the numbers that we picked up, we got some 35,000 residential structures on state lands. Our estimates are really based on that, the number of squatters. So we got 35,000 residential structures. Out of that 35,000 residential structures, 7,000 of those persons matched our database. It means that we had approximately 14,000 persons who did not match our database. So added to the 35,000, we added the ones that did not match and then over the years, from 2012 to now, over 1,000 new structures per year, hence the reason for giving the number 55,000, thereabout.

Mr. Chairman: So that is how you got your 55,000?

Mr. Hosein: That is how, exactly.

Mr. Chairman: Are these 55,000 now digitized? Are they part of your collection?

Mr. Hosein: Yes. By and large, most structures have been digitized. We have the eastings and northings for each structure. We do not have names for every structure because it is not very easy to get the names of every squatter in every structure, but we have now recorded every structure and where it is located and we have tried our best to match that data to our database to the persons who apply for regularization.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. What is the situation with people who create new residential structures on new sites or who create new settlements in new areas? What is happening with that?

Mr. Hosein: Chairman, that is a matter for other state agencies to deal with. The LSA does not have the power to deal with new squatting. We deal with the regularization of squatters.

Mr. Chairman: Who deals with that?

Mr. Hosein: As far as we know there are other agencies such as the Commissioner of State Lands, who has responsibility to do that. Our Act clearly says that the

Commissioner of State Lands has responsibility for dealing with new structures on state lands.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So, is there any—I mean, you cannot have a situation where you are charged with execution for regularization and the number of squatting settlements just increases without your jurisdiction or else you would end up doing this forever. So how is that resolved?

Mr. Francis: Chairman, very pertinent question you have asked. We in the LSA, Chairman, as I said before, are charged with the responsibility of developing the sites, regularizing the squatters, putting in proper infrastructure to a very high standard that is demanded of us. We in the LSA do not own the state lands. We are not landowners.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Francis: We are merely facilitators, facilitating the squatters by putting in proper and good first-class infrastructural development. That is what our duties and responsibilities are, Chairman. We are not landowners.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Francis: So that is the challenge that the LSA has been faced with. We prepare the land; people just move in, Chairman, in droves, and we cannot remove them; just cannot do it.

Mr. Chairman: All right, I understand and I appreciate your position. Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon, member.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, Chairman, and I want to go back to your previous line of questioning, with regard to the work that is being done now. Just simply, can you tell me which are the nine sites that are currently being regularized?

Mr. Hosein: Okay member, so we would list the sites that are being regularized at this time. We would go as far as Guayaguayare in Mayaro. So we have La Savanne in Guayaguayare, Nurse Trace in Guayaguayare. We have Sunrees Ramlal in Penal.

We have Arena, two sites in Arena, Freeport. We have Kangalee in Valencia. We have three sites in Moruga. That is Pro Village, Western and Gomez Trace. So those are the sites that we are currently working on, that we are completing regularization works on.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you, and could you tell me which firms provided the contract supervisory consulting services to the Land Settlement Agency for these projects?

Mr. Hosein: Okay, we have a number of firms who have provided consultancy. I would ask Mr. Bassaw to give you the detail of that.

Mr. Bassaw: Okay, so the engineering consultant firms were Alpha Engineering. We have Trintoplan Consultants. We have Plan Viron Limited. These three firms were responsible for the supervision of the construction of the infrastructural development of these sites.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Can you tell me how these firms were selected?

Mr. Bassaw: These firms were selected through a tendering process. They were prequalified. We had shortlisted firms for the tendering. They were invited to tender and it was based on a point system and we selected the firms which met the criteria that we had required for the developments.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Okay. That is fair. But in-house, do you have the capacity to do any of the technical engineering services that you have outsourced? Do you have that in-house?

Mr. Bassaw: Yes. Part of the control structure that we have, we have planners, engineers, surveyors, in house, who also manage the construction. So we have the consultant engineers managing but we also have the internal checks within the LSA and we also have support from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. They have the programme, monitoring and control unit and we also have support from the IBD as it is an IDB administered loan.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: So then you are saying that the engineers that are employed within the agency are really just doing oversight work? Is that so? And you outsource all of your engineering services.

Mr. Bassaw: For this current loan that—if we are talking about the current loan that we have now for the nine sites, we outsourced the engineering design and the planning and we did a lot of the supervision of the design. And the implementation, we are just overseeing. So it is correct. We are just overseeing the implementation of the sites.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Do you have any intention to improve your technical capacity within the Ministry so that some of the engineering services which were previously contracted out, are now contracted out, can in fact be done internally?

Mr. Bassaw: Yes, actually the corrective works that we are going to be undertaking we are going to be doing the supervision internally. So, instead of outsourcing and paying the exorbitant fees of the design consultants, we are going to be managing these internally. So we have a structure in place to manage these so that we would be able to finish by September. So the design was outsourced but the construction supervision would be managed by the Land Settlement Agency and we will be monitored by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, their programme, monitoring and control unit.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: But do you have enough technical capacity?

Mr. Bassaw: At this stage, we have technical capacity in the institution but there is room for additional engineers at this time and we are working to fill those vacancies.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: So then should we see the cost per lot going down then? Because the CEO had said that the cost had gone up from about US \$4,000-something to US \$11,000. Now that are going to be undertaking some of the works and not outsourcing at those exorbitant rates, can we see the cost per lot going down?

Mr. Bassaw: Yes, definitely you are going to see a cost reduction. The engineering design, even though now is about TT \$130,000 to develop one lot at the LSA, which is much less than other state agencies, the cost for the design and the supervision is just about \$5,000 to \$10,000 per lot. So it is not a big cost in the supervision but that cost applied across all the lots within the development will be a considerable saving to the agency going forward.

Mr. Hosein: If I could just add, member, the cost as pointed out before, we had moved from approximately US \$5,000 to US \$11,000 per lot. That is in 2009. The cost now, to develop a lot of land, it ranges between TT \$100,000 to TT \$130,000 to bring the lots up to full standards. You asked the question about whether if we will use in-house capabilities, certainly we have been using in-house capability in planning and designing new sites. I made mention of that before; sites like Guapo in Point Fortin, Sahadeen Trace in Vega de Oropouche. We are using in-house capability to design some of these sites now, which will bring the cost down, in terms of reducing the consultancies on these.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What is the cost per lot now? You quoted in TT dollars.

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Before I noted that the cost per lot was \$11,500, so we are now down to, let us say—

Mr. Hosein: In 2009, member, the cost per lot per was approximately TT \$70,000, if we convert to TT. The cost now ranges between \$100,000 to \$130,000, depending on the topography of the land.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: So it has increased?

Mr. Hosein: It has increased between 2009 and 2016.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: But then, there were allocations for institutional strengthening and we are looking at, the period under review is 2008 and 2009 and there were allocations of \$10million in both years for institutional strengthening. Has that not

helped?

Mr. Hosein: Okay, that institutional strengthening project dealt with works that we did in Port of Spain and environs. So it was really not institutional strengthening of the agency in-house, but institutional strengthening of the communities in those areas. So we did substantial work in areas like Scorpion, Dundonald Hill in those years.

Part of the mandate of the LSA is not only to put in infrastructure but build capacity within these squatting settlements. So it was building capacity while doing improvement works, but building capacity of persons who reside in these areas so that they can be able to help themselves at the end. So we actually did training of individuals in management training. We did skills training where persons in those communities were developed and they were able, at the end of that period, to become masons, carpenters, et cetera, and they actually did some of the work during that period of time.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: During the period as well, you had conducted a regularization of squatting study. What was the outcome of that study?

Mr. Hosein: Okay. So, again that study was conducted in the Port of Spain and environs area. One of the outcomes was trying to determine the number of squatting families we had in that area. The numbers at the end, what we got was there are over 10,000 squatting families in Port of Spain and environs. One of the challenges that came out of that programme is that there is a mixture of private and state lands in the Port of Spain and environs area. It is a mixture of lands. So that is one of the challenge we realize in doing the work.

Another challenge is the density of occupation; how close the structures are. And that we realize is a major challenge in regularizing squatters in these areas. You know, coming out of the study, we have to make decisions as to how are we going to facilitate the regularization process in these areas because the Act talks about

5,000 square feet, more or less, that a squatter should get when he is fully regularized. It is no way, given the situation, and coming out of the study in these areas, that we would be able to give 5,000 square feet.

Another challenge was the challenge of the statutory approvals. Now, again, because how closely these houses are constructed, and most of them being on hillsides, you do not have the traditional roads and traditional drains that are in most other squatting settlements. You have footpaths leading up to a number of structures where ambulances, where fire trucks cannot go. So there is need for a comprehensive review of these areas, and to review the standards which would allow us to regularize persons in these areas. So all of that came out of the study and the need to change. And we have been talking to the Town and Country Planning Division and other agencies, WASA, other state agencies, the drainage department, into changing some of the standards which would allow the LSA to regularize persons in these communities.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: We were all told there was no benefit from that study to the residents of that Port of Spain area.

Mr. Hosein: No, member, the benefits, we were able to improve the infrastructure in these areas.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Right.

Mr. Hosein: We were able to improve the drainage. We were able to improve the roadway, garbage collection facilities, footpaths leading up to homes. So there were tremendous benefits. And, you know, one of the biggest benefits was the building of institutional capacity within these settlements, where persons were trained in the various aspects of works and they could have then used that training to help themselves after we were finished in those sites in those areas.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Thank you.

Mr. Francis: Let me, Chairman, further embellish the point that my CEO has made.

In Dundonald Hill, Belle Vue, in Soogrim Trace, Laventille; and in Scorpion Village, Carenage we did a tremendous amount of work in those areas. Chairman, those areas are exactly what my CEO has just explained, hillside. And we had to get a buy-in from the village council for them to work with us and we were successful, very successful. We had engineering designs done with qualified engineers and firms that were selected to work in those villages. It is not easy, you know, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: I have an idea. I have a little idea. Thank you. Sen. Samuel.

Mr. Samuel: I have a few questions, but the first question I want to ask is: Have you ever experienced any risk factor entering these squatting settlements, and if so what is the magnitude of the risk and danger to your staff?

Mr. Hosein: Member, that is an excellent question. On a daily basis my officers face the risk going out into squatting settlements. We have patrol officers. They do not carry weapons. They do not carry batons. They go out there trying to control and persuade persons who are attempting to go on to state lands and to cooperate with us.

As we develop squatting sites, my Chairman mentioned before the challenges we face and the risk we face on these sites, where—let me give examples like race course where we developed 703 lots. There were approximately 300 residential structures there when we were finished with the site and the risk and the challenges came with the persons who came on to the sites after. Four hundred persons invaded that site and took every lot that existed on the site. And the risk to our officers was trying to go out there and persuade them, without anything to protect themselves and without anything in law for the LSA to act upon and to deal with that situation. This is just one for example.

Now, we have the risk of our officers who are doing development works together with the contractors. We are challenged every single day by persons, as we

do development works, who attempt to grab more lands. They refuse to give up lands for us to put in the roadways and the drains, refuse to move their fences and the officers have to, you now, interact with those persons on a daily basis. So it is a risky thing.

We have field officers, the majority of whom are women, who go out, by themselves, into these squatting sites to pick up information so we can improve the tenure, give certificates of comfort and move to the other stages and they go out into these sites all by themselves. So it is a risky business.

Mr. Samuel: I am getting the impression, Mr. Hosein, that, I almost said you were a toothless bulldog but you are not even a bulldog, far more to be a toothless-

Mr. Hosein: You said it member.

Mr. Samuel: I say that because, if there is danger, I am not hearing that you are getting the kind of support from other agencies to fulfil your task and to reduce the level of danger. I am not hearing that.

Mr. Hosein: Member, I do not want to get into the roles of the other agencies, but what I can tell you between 1999 and 2017, the LSA has stuck to its task and continue to perform the work that we are required to do. We have not backed down from what we are required to do in accordance with the law. So we continue to do what we have to do. The other agencies have a responsibility. But we are not here to, at least, I am not here to discuss what their role is.

Mr. Samuel: Another thing I am quite concerned about, the average citizen who has to work, buy a piece of land at their own expense, develop it, whatever, would have tremendous problems accepting the whole issue of squatter regularization, and you know that. Can you walk us through what the process is? You said that you have regularized 30 squatting sites. Can you walk us through what you mean by regularization? What is entailed? Was the cost to the people being regularized or the process has been?

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Hosein: So regularization, it is several components. One, it is infrastructure improvement—we spoke a lot about that before—and improving infrastructure in these sites and bringing them up to standards. Most squatting sites do not have proper infrastructure, do not have garbage collection facilities and do not have proper drainage because they were set up haphazardly all over the place on hillsides, et cetera. That is one aspect of regularization.

The other aspect of regularization, according to Act No. 25 of 1998, it is tenure regularization. And, again, there is a process. Starting with the application process, persons who applied—and my Chairman made mention you had until 27th of October in the year 2000 to apply—we had approximately 23,000 persons or families who applied.

Now, the first stage is the Certificate of Comfort stage, where we provide a Certificate of Comfort to persons who have met all the requirements in accordance with the Act. Following the Certificate of Comfort stage, you move to the statutory lease stage—that is a period for 30 years where persons will be allowed 30 years in order to make all their payments, et cetera—and, finally, the Act talks about a deed of lease stage where persons will receive a deed of lease for 199 years from the LSA. So, basically, that is the regularization process.

Mr. Samuel: So that to the average citizen who feels that the land is free, it is not free?

Mr. Hosein: Well, member, it is not supposed to be. The Act clearly says that squatters who are eligible for regularization and who meet all the criteria are supposed to pay two things: one is a premium and the second is a part of the infrastructure development cost.

Mr. Samuel: You spoke about indiscriminate development of sites by people that is very haphazard, people just occupying lands. Some of these lands are where they

destroyed forestry and they dwell in there and then it grows and it becomes an acceptable norm. Are you saying that squatting has become an acceptable norm in Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. Hosein: Not for the LSA. We continue to stick fast to our mandate, but you are right in that we are challenged. Squatters tend to go where the lands are and in the forestry areas, especially in the Toco/Sangre Grande area, where there is a lot of forestry plants and forest reserves, you find there is a large number of squatters who are going into those areas. So those areas, the numbers are increasing. In the Point Fortin area, we have a huge influx of new squatters as well, and it is a challenge as you pointed out.

Mr. Samuel: I have heard of issues where people traverse Trinidad and Tobago or Trinidad and they build little bungalows on lands that are squatting sites all over. I am talking about one person may traverse different squatting sites, grab a piece of land, build something, go another place and build something, and then eventually hold these things and then sell them off. Have you encountered those kinds of things?

Mr. Hosein: Member, that is a reality that we face now. We have a term for persons like that which we call “squatlords” now—instead of landlords, they are “squatlords”. They tend to occupy, as you have said, more than one lot of land. More than that, we have “squatlords” who are now developing areas of state land and selling these lands to other persons. Just to make the point that the person who is doing that, it is an illegal act and the person who is also buying, they are conducting an illegal transaction as well. So that is a challenge we face.

Mr. Samuel: Some time ago, Mr. Hosein, the LSA developed a project called the Land for the Landless or something of that nature. Can you tell me about that?

Mr. Hosein: That was a programme that was launched in 2012. It came out of a Cabinet directive, and that programme was launched in 2012. As at 2015, the

programme was on hold, as at that time, for review.

Mr. Samuel: What was the status of the programme between 2012 and 2015? How many sites were you able to develop for the purpose of that?

Mr. Hosein: Okay. So there were a number of sites that we worked on during that period. Some of these sites came out of the EMBD project, EMBD/Caroni Project where lands were developed under that programme, and some of those sites were handed over to the LSA to complete those sites and to make them available under the programme. Sites such as: Factory Road, Chaguanas; Beaucarro, Orange Field Road, Roopsingh Road and Chin Chin in Cunupia. Those are sites developed under the programme. Some of the new sites that were developed under that programme would have been Corinth—three sites in Corinth in San Fernando—Picton in Diamond in San Fernando. Those are some examples.

Mr. Samuel: But just apart from that, when you have squatting sites, what is the process used to determine which site is given priority for development?

Mr. Hosein: What the LSA follows, coming out of the survey of 2009 to 2012, it was not only a survey to pick up the number of structures. That survey revealed a number of other things. It revealed the type of infrastructure that existed in all the squatting sites. So in making the decision as to which site using very scarce resources we should go on, we used the data out of that survey. The sites that have the least infrastructure that we think that we should try to approach and that is the approach we use at this time.

Again, the numbers would tell you we have done 30 sites prior to the present loan. We are doing nine now. We have over 200 sites still to do. We have very limited resources which to use so we have to prioritize, and the prioritization is really based on the infrastructure that exists on these sites, and also the number of families that exist on these sites.

Mr. Samuel: In the many years of existence of the LSA, what would you say is or

was the largest squatting site you have developed? When you say large, give us an idea.

Mr. Hosein: Well, the largest squatting site that we would have developed in terms of the number of lots would be the Race Course site—the Race Course in Arima site—which at the end of the development we got 703 lots, approved lots by the Director of Surveys. However, because of the invasion that took place, the number of lots has been reduced to 500—just to about 530—because persons have occupied those developed lots in all sorts of manners. Some persons have occupied up to 18,000 square feet in this area. So that is one of the largest site we worked on. We also worked on the Bon Air, Arouca site, that is approximately 450 lots; Pine settlement, close to 400 lots; and we are developing other sites and we are doing engineering designs for many other large sites at this time.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Just a follow on. You were talking about the Land for the Landless Programme. What were the particular areas worked on during that programme? The Land for the Landless Programme, the particular areas worked on.

Mr. Hosein: The particular sites.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: The particular sites.

Mr. Hosein: Okay, so I outlined some of them before, I would say them again. Some of the areas: Factory Road in Chaguanas; Beaucarro; we had Roopsingh Road, again in Couva, north of Couva; we had Orange Field Road, Couva; we worked on the Felicity site; we worked in Picton, Diamond; we worked in Corinth, three sites in Corinth, South Trinidad; and Golconda was another one of the sites we had started works on doing engineering designs—land-use plan engineering designs. We did not get to infrastructure works on that site. We worked on the La Romaine two sites where we did engineering designs, land-use plan, but we did not get to the stage of infrastructure works.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: So you would say the focus was, more or less, in the Chaguanas

area—more central and southern areas as against the East-West Corridor.

Mr. Hosein: Yes, you are right.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: These are just follow up to some of the questions raised. I think you may have touched on the 2009 site profiling exercise. I went through that and I noticed that you had collected information for 396 sites on the occupants' Certificate of Comfort status, but also I noticed that you said that the information was "unverifiable". That is a serious issue, because this is a massive exercise to collect that information and yet you deemed it to be "unverifiable". Why was this so?

Mr. Hosein: The challenge in doing survey on squatting sites, the main challenge is getting information from the occupants, and that was one of the major challenges we faced in doing this exercise during the years 2009 to 2012. When we were complete with the exercise, we tried a matching exercise of the information collected for approximately 35,000 residential structures against our database of 23,000 persons who applied for regularization in accordance with the Act. Again, we were only able to match a handful of that data. Mr. Chairman, 7,000 names matched with our existing database and for that reason we used the term. The challenges that we faced we were not able to verify all of it. A number of persons refused to give information who occupied squatting sites for one reason or another. I think, you know, they do not want to be identified and that was one of the challenges.

Now, there is need and we are making plans to do another survey of squatting sites. We hope it can be done in a much shorter period. Our board has mandated that we look at this issue. Coming to the end of this year, we hope that we can do another survey in a much shorter period of time where we can verify the numbers, the true numbers of squatters that we now have.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: What is puzzling me, if you do this massive exercise and you are only able to get a handful of the responses that you actually want, is there some

other way of conducting such an exercise, because at the end of the day, you do want to regularize persons who have been there for a particular number of years. Are we doing the thing the right way? I mean, how can we help?

Mr. Hosein: Well the intention, again, is to liaise with the CSO and other agencies who have done this in the past, so we can get their help in conducting this exercise and maybe get better results this time around.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: So then, I mean, I really do not see the benefit of it, because you do these streets audits. Is it that you do it street by street?

Mr. Hosein: Street by street, home by home. That is how it was done. But, as I pointed out before, it is not always to get information coming from illegal occupants. Most of these occupants are illegal, persons who came after the year 1998 who, in most cases, do not want to be identified because they know they have done an illegal thing. They are occupying State lands illegally, so why identify myself.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Well, I mean, it begs the question, are you making the right approaches? Is this the right way to conduct the exercise? I mean, if you are not getting results in the manner in which you are making an approach, is it that you are not going to review the way you do things? This seems all so useless if you are going to do all this—it costs money—street-by-street audits and so on and then you are collecting all this information and you deem it unverifiable. I mean, what is the purpose of all of this?

Mr. Hosein: Member, the term “unverifiable” may be a harsh term that was used. Coming out of the exercise, we were able to give the numbers that we now have in terms of squatting. The part that was not verifiable, in most instances, would have been the names in all cases of the squatting families, but there was substantial information that came out of those surveys. We were able to determine where infrastructure was lacking in most cases; we were able to determine how persons occupy; we were able to obtain the GPS coordinates of each structure which is

helpful and very useful information for other state agencies such as the Commissioner of State Lands.

As you know, the Act says that only persons who were there before the 1st of January 1998 could be regularized. The data that we collected were able to match that data and to match the structures there against the 1998 data that we have and images that we have. So there were a lot of benefits coming from the exercise. Next time around—and we hope to conduct this exercise again in the next few months—we will utilize the help of the other agencies, especially the CSO where we can get better results.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: But before I just go, the prioritization of the sites for the conduct of these exercises and so on, is that done by the LSA or is that a policy—is that done by the Executive?

Mr. Hosein: Prioritization in terms of development works?

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: As I pointed out before, prioritization in terms of development works would be based on the surveys that we have done and based on the level of infrastructure that exists in the various areas. The challenge is you have 251 sites listed in the Act—over 350 sites in total in Trinidad—and trying to use very scarce resources to work on. For example, with the present loan, we were only able to work on nine sites and you had to prioritize which nine sites to complete those works on.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: So there is a priority listing?

Mr. Hosein: It is based on the level of infrastructure that exists and, again, based on policy directive.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Could you please provide that listing to the Committee?

Mr. Hosein: We can provide the full list of sites.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: And the priority listing. Yes, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. I have a couple of questions here that I

want to ask which is—I would start by asking this question: Are you satisfied that the taxpayer, the ordinary citizen has gotten value for money from the work of the LSA in terms of money expended and results achieved?

Mr. Hosein: Chairman, we at the LSA, we are very satisfied, even more than satisfied with what we have been able to do in these squatting sites and to achieve and to bring—although we have worked on very few sites, but to bring these sites up to full standards so that persons can have a tremendous improvement in their standard of living when we are finished. Because of the work that we have done, we have been able to move persons along the process of tenure, and we can now, in the very near future, we will be able to offer statutory leases and deed of lease to persons.

Furthermore, the cost of development and bringing these sites up to full standard—and if you look at our figures and look at what we have done over the years—we have been able to manage our cost very, very well and our cost, per development, cost of a lot of land, it is much lower than most other state agencies. We bring these sites up to the same standard or even, in some cases, better standard than other state agencies.

Mr. Chairman: But \$130,000 per lot is not a small amount though. I mean, what does 130,000 pay for in terms of how it enhances the lot to the tenant or the squatter or the potential owner?

Mr. Hosein: Chairman, as you get into these sites, there are no roads, there are no drains, no electricity, no water and no sewer systems. When we are finished, all of these facilities are put into these sites. They are brought up to full standards. These sites can be compared—and if you drive into one of these sites when we are finished—it can compare to any other residential development in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Chairman: We have a number of squatter sites on the East-West Corridor,

some of which you have regularized and you are continuing to regularize. Is there any land available in the East-West Corridor for the Land for the Landless Programmes?

Mr. Hosein: The only areas that we have been able to identify state land which is not forest reserves would be in Talparo area, the Wallerfield area. Those are the only areas that we have been able to identify lands. Most of the others are challenged in terms of finding lands for such programmes.

Mr. Chairman: Is that why the decision was taken to go in other parts of the country like south and central for Land for the Landless Programmes?

Mr. Hosein: One of the reasons would have been where land is available and the other would have been a policy directive.

Mr. Chairman: I want to ask some questions about the management of finance aspect of the LSA. When the agency was restructured in 2012, you added an audit department to the organizational structure, but, from what I read, those positions have not been filled. I do not know if they have since then. As I understand it, it is the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development that, in fact, does the audit function within the LSA. Does that still continue? What is the problem? Does that make the organization efficient, effective and functional?

Mr. Hosein: Chairman, the challenge, yes, the agency was restructured in 2012 and the size of the organization in terms of the number on the organizational chart grew. An audit department was introduced in that restructuring. Unfortunately, we have not been able to fill those positions. We have been using the services of our parent Ministry to provide this service, and they have been providing that on a regular and, in our mind, an efficient basis, hence we have been able to maintain our controls and be able to produce good financial results and good financial statements which I think I am sure the Auditor General agrees with what we are saying thus far.

Mr. Chairman: Well, I would ask them just now. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Hosein: So, it does not hamper our efficiency in terms of what we do. There is need to full a number of positions but, of course, as you know Chairman, we are also challenged with the amount of money that is given to us for our administration and running the administration. On a yearly basis, we get less than half the amount of money that we require to effectively run the administration. You have to prioritize what positions you can fill based on what funds you are given, because we are totally dependent on the State and our recurrent budget.

Mr. Chairman: I wonder if I could direct this follow-up question to the Permanent Secretary. All the offices in the LSA are contract positions. There are no permanent positions in the LSA, as far as I am aware. What does that mean for the sustainability of the LSA and the continued functioning of the LSA as an execution agency under your Ministry? I think the Permanent Secretary will be best placed to answer that.

Ms. Hayes: As you said, the positions are contract positions, but those positions, based on the mandate of the LSA, those positions, the contract positions, can be renewed. So as the need arises, as the mandate continues, the positions will be renewed. I am not sure if we could go into establishment positions for the LSA. But as I said, the contract positions will be continued and renewed as the need arises.

Mr. Chairman: Are you comfortable with playing the auditing role in relation to the LSA given that you have a board responsible for the LSA? Are you comfortable with that position playing that role?

Ms. Hayes: Well, for the time being that is what we have to do, so we will continue. But as in one of our recommendations going toward, we did say that we wanted to strengthen our internal audit unit to be able to provide more oversight for the agencies and the statutory authorities under our purview. So now that is what we can offer and we are offering it.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, to Mr. Hosein, the CEO, these “squatlords” that you mentioned, have any sanctions—has the law been applied? Has anybody been

brought to the court, to the jail and to justice for so violating the law and abusing a system of need in this society?

Mr. Hosein: Chairman, as far as we know, the limited information we have, nobody has been brought or has been held for such offences. Again, the challenge is getting information from the persons who are purchasing lands from these “squatlords” and that has been the challenge.

Mr. Chairman: Do you know who the “squatlords” are? Do you have a good idea?

Mr. Hosein: No, Chairman, I do not know who the “squatlords” are.

Mr. Chairman: If you did know the names or the identities of these “squatlords”, which would be the agency that you would refer the matter to?

Mr. Hosein: We would certainly refer the matter to the police and to the Commissioner of State Lands.

[Miss Raffoul enters the meeting]

Mr. Chairman: So, it is only the police who can intervene in this matter?

Mr. Hosein: Chairman, as far as we know, we would refer it to the police and to the Commissioner or State Lands.

Mr. Chairman: All right. We are moving on time here and we had made a commitment to close at about 12.15 so I would stop my questions at this point and I would ask Sen. Raffoul if she would ask some questions.

Miss Raffoul: Thanks. Apologies for being late. I had another JSC at the same time, so I came after that was finished. I have a question about the mandate i.e. purpose, the intention of LSA. My understanding is that it is supposed to be for squatter regularization. My question is twofold: one, what exactly is the justification for helping squatters to regularize in your interpretation? Then my follow-up questions I would ask afterwards.

Mr. Hosein: Let us go back to the purpose and mandate of the Act, member. When the Act was contemplated it was contemplated based on what existed in the country

at that time. You had over 100 years of squatting, more than 100 years of squatting—people lived in very deprived and deplorable conditions. The purpose of the Act was really to improve the lives of those persons who were squatting, who applied for regularization—and that is the purpose of the Act—to bring their standards up, because you cannot have one sector of the population being left behind. Yes, they have broken the law, they are squatting, but if you leave them behind, then what happens to all the other persons in the country? There are repercussions for that.

Miss Raffoul: So follow-up question then. It seems to me that there is a bit of duplication between what LSA is doing compared to what other agencies are doing, in the sense of being very humanitarian and not necessarily being focused on what the mission is at hand, i.e. squatter regularization, because of the documents submitted which explained there is also a methodology which looks at different income brackets, different disabilities—there are different criteria for where an intervention should be made. It seems like there is a bit of overlap between what LSA does, compared to what also the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services does with disability grants and what the different entities within the public sector do to support low income persons.

Do you feel that the LSA has a bit of duplication in a sense of doing what other agencies are already doing or what they should be doing? Do you feel that you are doing work that is somewhat beyond your mission in order to compensate maybe what other agencies are not doing? Do you think that maybe it would be a good thing to be more focused? I would love to hear from you, how you feel that the work of your entity—if it is focused, if it is achieving the results intended. How things could be improved in general?

Mr. Hosein: Okay, to start with your first concern, member, there is no other agency in Trinidad and Tobago who does squatter regularization. The LSA is the only

agency who has the responsibility in law for squatter regularization, and it is the only agency that has gone into squatting sites and improve the infrastructure and try to improve the lives of those persons.

Yes, we collaborate with other agencies and they too have a responsibility. For example, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, they would have a responsibility to get into these sites and work with the LSA to improve the lives of persons in terms of bringing communities together, helping with microenterprise, et cetera. So there is no duplication as far as the work of the LSA is concerned in accordance with the mandate.

Now, there are other programmes that other agencies are involved in. There are other housing programmes, but those programmes cater for persons who are looking for state-funded homes. The LSA is not in that business. We are regularizing persons who are already living on state lands, so there is no duplication.

Miss Raffoul: Okay. Could I ask where the majority of the funding goes into? As our Chairman said, it was about \$130,000 per lot. What comprises the majority of that cost?

Mr. Hosein: The majority of the cost would be in roadways, preparing the roadways to bring it up to the full standards and to have asphalt paved roads at the end of the day. Water infrastructure is also costly and electrification of these sites and where we have to put in sewer systems, that is a very costly exercise.

Miss Raffoul: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Hosein: You are welcome.

Mr. Samuel: The regularization of persons on squatting sites, is it for citizens of Trinidad and Tobago or occupants of the land?

Mr. Hosein: Member, in accordance with Act No. 25 of 1998, the State Land (Regularisation of Tenure) Act, it clearly says it is for citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Samuel: Have you encountered non-citizens applying for land or occupying land in Trinidad and Tobago?

Mr. Hosein: Our social surveys that we have conducted, the extensive social survey between 2001 to 2012 and further social surveys and information that we gather, yes we have come across persons who are non-citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Samuel: When we say “non-citizens”, are we specifying citizens from Caricom or outside of Caricom?

Mr. Hosein: We have come across both.

Mr. Samuel: What percentage are we talking about?

Mr. Hosein: I am not in a position at this point to give you the percentages, member, but we could certainly try. You know, we spoke about the further exercise that we intend to do, and one of the questions in that exercise that we intend to put on is to try to get some of this information so we can provide more data like what you are asking.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: My question is with regard to the organization. Something you said early about expenses and moneys requested and you do not get quite what you have asked for, but I noticed under the 2016 revised estimates for Contract Employment, a figure of about \$18 million and that prompts me to ask: what is the number of staff employed—the number of persons employed by the LSA? I am getting to the point of procurement because within your organizational structure, I noticed one slot for a procurement specialist.

Now, you are also an organization that is engaged in a lot of procurement activity, hiring of contractors, et cetera. I am sure you have hired a lot of rogue contractors in the past and so on—who turned out to be rogued. You did not hire rogue, they turned out to be rogued. So, the question is: How large is the organization? One procurement specialist is certainly inadequate. With the new procurement legislation, have you put your new structure in place? Are you moving

with some degree of alacrity to fill those positions as you continue the work that you are doing?

Mr. Hosein: Member, so the size of the organizational structure is 193, on the organizational structure. At this time, we have 70 members who are on contract with the LSA. We do have some temporary staff, but we can only fill that 70 at this time and it is based on the funding that we have. Now, in order to fill all 193 positions on the organizational structure, we would need approximately \$35 million for the year. We get nowhere close to that, so we have to prioritize which ones we fill.

On your question with respect to procurement, we have one procurement position on the organizational structure. Unfortunately, that procurement officer is no longer with us because we could not afford to pay the officer, and we have not been able to attract another one to the position thus far. We are totally dependent on the CPO with respect to terms and conditions of employment, and that has been another challenge for the agency in that you have not been able to attract persons to a number of positions because of the salaries that we offer and the terms and conditions that we offer. But we are very mindful of the new procurement legislation and the need to strengthen that area, and we are working towards that with our parent Ministry.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: But, I mean, you found yourself in a very grave situation where you have no procurement officer in all of the Land Settlement Agency.

Mr. Hosein: She resigned a couple months ago.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: But couple months? But I cannot imagine that any contracts are being given out at this stage without having a procurement officer in place. You seem a lil bit casual in saying that you are mindful of the legislation. You cannot be mindful of the legislation. The legislation demands that you put proper procurement practices in place and, therefore, it is not a casual circumstance. I cannot imagine that you are issuing any contracts at this time or are you?

Mr. Hosein: Member, we have been using and over the years we have used the IDB procurement processes. We are monitored by the Programme Monitoring Coordinating Unit which also plays a role in the procurement of contractors, consultants for doing our works. So we have continued to use this. We are closely monitored by the IDB in what we do, because the moneys that we spend comes out of the IDB loan and we have been able to maintain, and be above board in all our procurement rules. Our board, the Land Settlement Committee, oversees all our procurement activities. There is a Tenders Committee of the Land Settlement Committee which closely monitors what we do at the organization.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: Tell me what is the procurement structure that you are now to put in place having regard to the legislation?

Mr. Hosein: At this time, the one procurement position is still on the organizational structure. We are working with our parent Ministry to get that contract position and get the approval to fill that position. As the Chairman has reminded me, we have advertised that position again since that person left and we have been trying to attract persons to that position.

The challenge here has been the wages. The procurement officer who resigned, resigned because we could not afford to meet the terms and conditions that that person wanted, and that has been the challenge to us.

Mrs. Gopee-Scoon: It just remains a very serious issue. I could only—in fact, your parent Ministry obviously has to take this matter in hand with regard to the setting up of a proper procurement department suitable to the kind of work that you do.

Mr. Hosein: Agree.

Mr. Chairman: Could I ask a derivative question from that which is: how much money do you owe contractors now at the LSA?

Mr. Hosein: In terms of numbers that we owe contractors, it would be close to \$10 million.

Mr. Chairman: \$10 million?

Mr. Hosein: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: How much money is owed to you from various sources?

Mr. Hosein: Owed to us from various sources?

Mr. Chairman: Anybody owes you money?

Mr. Hosein: No. We are not owed moneys by anyone at this time, primarily because we are now getting to the stage of offering deeds of leases and that is why we are bringing the sites up to full standards so we can offer deeds of lease and when we do so, then we will be able to attract payments from persons or citizens who are squatting who are eligible for regularization.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. The money that you are using now in terms of allocations, do they come only from IDB sources? I saw in one instance here that you had money from the IDB and the Government put an additional \$8 million. I do not know what the situation now is. Are you funded only by IDB funding through the PSIP right now?

Mr. Hosein: Okay. All our funds come through the PSIP, whether it is an IDB loan or not, all comes through the PSIP and moneys are released. Through the PSIP it comes to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and to us. So that is the process. So we are totally dependent on Government funding for all of our operations.

Mr. Chairman: I mean, is it IDB funding at the present time?

Mr. Hosein: For our cost of administration, it is not IDB. For the development works that we are doing at this time, it is IDB.

Mr. Chairman: So all the contract issues, the procurement issues are governed then by IDB rules? Is that correct?

Mr. Hosein: All of it is governed by IDB rules.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, I just wanted to clarify that. So that they have a stake in this

matter and an interest and an oversight role in this matter?

Mr. Hosein: And Chairman, you are right. They have a very keen interest and they are an integral part of the procurement process that we follow.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Now, we are almost at the end and I want to get into some kind of solution issue which is, first of all, I see you note here on page 9 that all of the shortcomings in the legislation as it relates to squatter regularization, et cetera—I am just focusing on the word “shortcomings”—I think you are suggesting that the legislation needs to be revised. Is that correct?

Mr. Hosein: Based on the work we have been doing over the years, definitely there is need for a revision of the legislation. I could just point you to a couple of areas. Certificates of Comfort, for instance, 23,000 persons or thereabout applied for Certificates of Comfort. Many persons who applied have passed away. The legislation did not provide for that to be passed on to another person. So when the person who applied dies, there is no succession, but you have other persons who are living in that structure. So there are people also who are living there and need to live somewhere or who have been squatting together with the principal applicant. So that is one of major deficiencies in terms of the legislation and there are others. In terms of looking at the legislation, sites were listed in the Act that are on private lands, sites were listed in the Act that belong to other state entities like Petrotrin, PSAEL and PTSC, and those things need to be revised.

Mr. Chairman: There is another issue though which is, I noticed that some squatter areas under your jurisdiction because the land was vested in the HDC, they have taken control of that. What is the ongoing situation in relation to that? Is it that HDC will now manage that and these are no longer under your jurisdiction?

Mr. Hosein: We work very closely with the HDC being another agency under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. Over the years, we have worked again, as I said, closely with them. We have been able to develop sites that are vested

in the HDC, for example, the Bon Air sites. The mechanism to move from development to leases, we are working with the HDC with respect to that and the HDC may be the ones who will eventually give the leases on those lands being vested in the HDC.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. So there is the legislation issue; you find a level of co-operation with the HDC on the differentiation of roles in relation to the land and land ownership. As you said, you are not landowners.

Mr. Hosein: We do not own any land.

Mr. Chairman: And then there is the third issue of jurisdiction, which is to say who owns the land, that is the Commissioner of Lands, because they are state lands; secondly, you would deal only with state matters; and, thirdly, the enforcing authority does not reside within yourself, it is either the Commissioner of State Lands. And I suspect—is local government involved in this at all?

Mr. Hosein: Definitely, they are also involved. One of the major challenges, as you are pointing out some of the challenges identified, you have sites listed in the Act, 251 sites. Now, they are just a list of names in an Act. None of these sites were defined as to what is state land, what are the perimeter of these sites. We are now completing that exercise where we are going site to site to define the boundaries of these sites. Many persons who applied thought they were on state land but, in fact, they are on private lands. So we are now doing that exercise to determine that.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Can I—I mean, I am going to hazard an assumption here which is that if you wanted to deal with this squatter regularization issue, and to not have a lawless society with regard to the land grabbing and simply the usurpation of land because you have a need. How would that be addressed? We would have to deal with the legislation; we would have to deal with the jurisdictional issues to make that as clear as possible; we would have to put an end to new squatting and find a solution for that may be by some land distribution programme or integration into the

existing squatter regularization programmes and we would then have to have a dedicated effort at squatter regularization across the country wherever the sites are. That is doable? Those things are doable, they are achievable?

Mr. Hosein: Most of it, as you pointed out, are policy decisions to be made with respect to controlling new squatting. What we at the LSA would need is more funding. We get limited funding to do the programme. If we are to do all 251 sites listed in the Act and the others that are not listed, and eventually if those are brought into the legislation, we would need a tremendous amount of funding to do all of that. We have been limited in the number of sites that we have been able to do because of limited funding.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. I think I would ask the Auditor General's Department to comment on what they have heard so far given the report that we have before us; given the fact that we are dealing with 2008/2009; given the fact that you have accounts to audit up to the year 2016 for this entity. Would you like to make some comments on what you have heard so far?

Mr. Sinanan: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have just finished the 2010/2011 audits to be reported on this year, after which we will begin the other years soon afterwards maybe into the new year next year, I guess, due to the staffing constraints at the audit department. Based on the questions and answers provided and this document we have gone through and the answers provided this morning, we look at an organization that was operationalized in 1999 after being put in place legally in 1998. On average, 20 per cent of the original 250 squatter sites have been regularized, on average, even with the new 18 coming in just now—14 coming in.

We looked at the problems with institutional weaknesses due to lack of resources, the legal constraints of the original Act—and they have been doing the best they could, in the meantime, to manage this creature called squatting because different facets, as discussed this morning, are really intricate to deal with based on

the Act 1998. We looked at page 27, that survey that was done, which we believe was a driver of what could be done by the LSA that should have been operationalized and maybe some better answers could have been provided, but it is a major constraint.

12.15 p.m.

And moving forward, we would just like to remind the—not to say LSA, but most statutory boards, that the procurement Act is coming on board soon and the procurement department structures must be put in place in time. We cannot wait for the legislation to be fully proclaimed. I believe there are some formats that have been addressed and sent out to be put in place before that legislation is fully proclaimed.

The reports for 2008 and 2009 were clean, in that all the relevant explanations, documentation we required, they were provided to us. So generally they were clean reports and we had a good relationship with the agency during—those two audits and the present ones that were just concluded, 10 and 11. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Are you satisfied that the LSA is doing the best that they can under the circumstances to meet the requirements of good governance in terms of financial management and secondly meeting the requirements of spending on the basis of value for money?

Mr. Sinanan: Mr. Chairman, based on the management letters issued, our exec meetings for the clients—even the exec meetings to be held, maybe next two weeks on the last two years of accounts, we generally see good management of the finances of the agency, relevant explanations have been provided, documentation is always present, generally speaking.

With respect to value for money on these projects, we cannot comment on them as yet because of the intricacies of the problems that have been explained this morning. They are far-reaching and we would prefer not to make a comment on the

value for money aspect of the operations of LSA without a full value for money audit. We just did the financials.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. All right, fine. Sen. Raffoul you wanted to question—

Miss Raffoul: Thank you. A follow-up question to what I was asking earlier about the methodology for applicants. I was reviewing it and there are different criteria for different income brackets as well as disabilities within a family or household. I am curious as to why we have different income brackets within the criteria and why the LSA has divided the income brackets from \$8,000 to \$10,000, below \$8,000 and then \$10,000 to \$30,000. Do we have a lot of applicants within the \$10,000 to \$30,000 income bracket? Why is that being dealt with as a squatter issue as opposed to an HDC issue? Why is that seen as a middle-income squatter issue? I do not really necessarily see that so I am really curious to hear the explanation.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. Member, I think, just to clarify that. The income brackets that you have seen in document pertains to the Land for the Landless Programme and has nothing to do with the Squatter Regularization Programme. Those income brackets were really to determine and come up with a point system for the allocation of lots developed under that programme. Squatter regularization has no boundaries in terms of income or age. The only boundary is that you must be a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago.

Miss Raffoul: Well then, can you comment a little bit more on the Land for the Landless Programme?

Mr. Hosein: As mentioned before, that programme is currently on hold and the programme was conceptualized in 2012. It came out of a Cabinet directive and the LSA implemented, between the years 2012 to 2015, that programme.

Miss Raffoul: How many lots of land were distributed then?

Mr. Hosein: I can tell you how much lots were developed. The number of lots that were developed was close to 1,500 fully developed lots.

Miss Raffoul: Were any distributed?

Mr. Hosein: As we speak now, the number of lots that were fully distributed in terms of leases signed by the Commissioner of State Lands, it is six lots that were signed off by the Commissioner of State Lands.

Miss Raffoul: And the other 1,494 just on hold?

Mr. Hosein: Those lots are on hold.

Miss Raffoul: But they were developed?

Mr. Hosein: Yes, they are fully developed.

Miss Raffoul: Developed in terms of transportation, roads, water, electricity?

Mr. Hosein: To full standards.

Miss Raffoul: Was there ever an analysis of justification for public sector involvement in developing land for the landless versus private sector partnership or private sector incentives?

Mr. Hosein: In 2015 some consideration was given to that in looking at whether you could use a private/public partnership agreement with respect to that, but there are a number of complicated issues that has to be worked out if you go into that. One of the main issues in such an arrangement would be, you need to fully develop the lots and to get the full approvals before you can hand out those lots. So that may be a deterrent to having private partnership in such an arrangement. And the approval process is a lengthy one.

Miss Raffoul: And approvals through Town and Country Planning Division.

Mr. Hosein: Not only Town and Country, in terms of the—Town and Country, in terms of the drainage department, fire service, WASA, T&TEC. It is a very lengthy process. That has to be ironed out.

Miss Raffoul: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I would not want to close the meeting without drawing attention to something on page 49 which is the last page of the document before us and it has

to do with the whistle-blowing policy. [*Crosstalk*] No, no, you have to wait now. Just hold on. It has to do with the whistle-blowing policy. And I noticed that in response to one of the questions you indicate that—in response to the question:

It is to be noted that contracts of the employees of the LSA consist of a confidentiality clause which employees are expected to adhere to.

Now, you know, the issue of procurement was raised and that was an important issue and the Auditor General—building on what had been said by Mrs.Gopee-Scoon—indicated how important it was to prepare even before the legislation was in fact fully proclaimed. And the whistle-blowing issue is a very important thing which cannot really be undermined by confidentiality clauses in a contract for employees. So I just want to draw that to your attention and make it clear to the public that confidentiality clauses are not meant to undermine the right of an employee to indicate that something is wrong or what must be put right in an organization. And I would not have wanted this to pass without drawing that to your attention and to the attention of the public. So I will ask Mrs.Raffoul to ask her question and then we will close up the meeting.

Miss Raffoul: Thank you. Just the final question was, how much in total was spent on that Land for the Landless Programme?

Mr. Hosein: To date from the time the programme was lounged to now, the total amount that we have received from Central Government would be close to \$70million on that programme.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. I now take the opportunity to bring this meeting to a close. I want to thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, yourself, CEO and other members of the team who I am sure even though they did not speak during the meeting, would have been there ready to support or to elaborate on anything that we might have asked. I also want to thank the Permanent Secretary because of the strong connective role between the LSA and the Ministry itself.

So I want to thank you all for coming. I want to thank the Auditor General's office and the assistant Auditor General and his colleague for being here and for contributing. And, of course, I want to thank all my colleagues who are mandated to be here to conduct this business and the media who are present to cover and make available to the public the information that was shared here today. I also want to thank members of the public gallery for being present today and all of those who have either listened or watched the programme. Thank you all very, very much.

12.23p.m.: *Meeting adjourned.*