

Leave of Absence

Monday, January 07, 2008

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, January 07, 2008

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following Members requesting leave of absence from today's sitting of the House of Representatives: hon. Vasant Bharath, Member of Parliament for St. Augustine for the period December 2007 to January 13, 2008 and the hon. Basdeo Panday, Member of Parliament for Couva North and Leader of the Opposition for the period December 22, 2007 to January 24, 2008.

GREETINGS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, as we commence the First Sitting of the Ninth Parliament in the New Year, let me take this opportunity to wish all Members of Parliament a Happy New Year hoping that you had an enjoyable Christmas season.

In the not too distant future, the Parliament proposes to host a post-election seminar for Members and you will be informed accordingly. I wish to emphasize to all Members that I will continue to uphold the dignity of this House and to function as Speaker without bias, fear or favour, affection or ill will. The staff of the Parliament, the Deputy Speaker and myself are here to assist all Members as you may require. I look forward to an enlightening First Session of this Ninth Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

PAPERS LAID

1. The Civil Aviation [(No. 1) General Application and Personnel Licensing] (Amdt.) (No. 2) Regulations, 2007. [*The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. The Civil Aviation [(No. 2) Operations] (Amdt.) (No. 2) Regulations, 2007. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
3. The Civil Aviation [(No. 3) Air Operator Certification and Administration] (Amdt.) (No. 2) Regulations, 2007. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

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4. The Civil Aviation [(No. 5) Airworthiness] (Amdt.) (No.2) Regulations, 2007. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
5. The Civil Aviation [(No. 7) Instruments and Equipment] (Amdt.) (No.2) Regulations, 2007. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
6. The Civil Aviation [(No. 9) Aviation Training Organization] (Amdt.) Regulations, 2007. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
7. The Civil Aviation [(No. 10) Foreign Operator] (Amdt.) Regulations, 2007. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
8. The Civil Aviation [(No. 12) Aerodrome Licensing] (Amdt.) (No.2) Regulations 2007. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
9. Audited financial statements of the National Commission for Self Help Limited for the year ended September 30, 2005. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
10. Audited financial statements of the National Commission for Self Help Limited for the year ended September 30, 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
11. Audited financial statements of the Community Improvement Services Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2005. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
12. Audited financial statements of National Infrastructure Development Company Limited for the year ended September 30, 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
13. Audited financial statements of Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial year ended March 31, 2007. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
14. Audited financial statements of the National Quarries Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
15. Audited financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Solid Waste Management Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2005. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
16. Audited financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Solid Waste Management Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
17. Audited financial statements of Lake Asphalt of Trinidad and Tobago (1978) Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2001. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

18. Audited financial statements of Lake Asphalt of Trinidad and Tobago (1978) Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2002. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
19. Audited financial statements of Lake Asphalt of Trinidad and Tobago (1978) Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2003. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
20. Audited financial statements of Lake Asphalt of Trinidad and Tobago (1978) Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2004. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
21. Audited financial statements of Lake Asphalt of Trinidad and Tobago (1978) Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2005. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
22. Audited financial statements of the Export Centres Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2005. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
23. Audited financial statements of the Export Centres Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
24. Audited financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited and its subsidiaries for the financial year ended March 31, 2004. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
25. Audited financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited and its subsidiaries for the financial year ended March 31, 2005. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
26. Audited financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited and its subsidiaries for the financial year ended March 31, 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
27. Audited financial statements of the Trinidad and Tobago National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited and its subsidiaries for the financial year ended March 31, 2007. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Papers 9 to 27 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

28. Audited financial statements for the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (T&TEC) for the financial year ended December 31, 2005. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Papers Laid

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29. Second Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the National Housing Authority for the year ended December 31, 1997. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
30. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Cocoa and Coffee Industry Board for the year ended 30 September, 1999. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
31. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Eastern Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 21, 2001. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
32. Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Report on Insurance and Pensions for the year ended December 31, 2003. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
33. Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Report on Insurance and Pensions for the year ended December 31, 2004. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
34. Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago Report on Insurance and Pensions for the year ended December 31, 2005. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
35. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the financial statements of the Institute of Marine Affairs for the year ended September 30, 2004. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
36. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Statement of Recovery of Expenses of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries for the year ended December 31, 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Papers 28 to 36 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

37. Ninth Report of the Police Complaints Authority, October 01, 2004 to September 30, 2005. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
38. Annual Report of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission for the year 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
39. Annual Report of the Teaching Service Commission for the year 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
40. Report of the Public Service Commission for the period January 01, 2006 to December 31, 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
41. Report of the Police Service Commission for the period January 01, 2006 to December 31, 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

42. Annual Report of the Ministry of Public Administration for the period October 2005 to September 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
43. The Freedom of Information Act, 1999 Annual Report to Parliament for the year 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
44. ILO Convention 187—Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
45. ILO Convention 198—Employment Relationship Recommendations. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)**

Urgent Need for Government Action Against Crime

Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj (*Tabaquite*): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order No. 12 of the House of Representatives, I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, namely:

The need for Government to recognize that the people, notwithstanding the several plans and efforts announced by Government over the last six years to fight crime, the people do not feel protected against serious crimes including murder, kidnapping, rape and robbery which are being committed against them on a daily basis and which have spiralled out of control.

There is an urgent need for Government to take immediate and effective action to make the people feel protected against such criminal activities and for them to feel secure, instead of them on a daily basis living in fear and terror. The Government must state what action if any, it intends to take so that the people would feel secure in their homes, at their workplaces and on the streets. They continue to be the victims of gang warfare and these serious crimes on a daily basis. As a result, they suffer on a daily basis naked contraventions of their fundamental human rights as guaranteed to them in the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, namely, their right to life, security and respect for their private and family life.

The matter is definite as it pertains to a specific matter, namely, the failure and/or omission of the Government to take effective action to protect the people on a daily basis against the plague of these serious crimes. The Government has failed and/or omitted to do its paramount duty in protecting the lives of the people

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by giving them protection against these criminal activities. This omission and/or failure of the Government to do its paramount duty to the people continue on a daily basis and as a result their lives, their person and their private and family life are adversely affected.

The matter is urgent because the entire population continues to live in fear of this continuing plague as serious crimes over the last six years have reached record levels. Notwithstanding substantial billions of dollars spent by the Ministry of National Security in the fight against crime, the announcement by Government of several anticrime plans and efforts to combat crime, serious crimes have risen at record levels whilst the detection rate for serious crimes is less than 20 per cent. The criminals have declared war against the people; they have created a de facto state of emergency in the country in that the criminals are committing crimes but they are not detected. They are therefore holding the country to ransom. This amounts to a state of anarchy and lawlessness in our nation which threatens the rule of law.

The Government has shown an inability to take immediate action to provide safety and security to the people for them to live their lives notwithstanding:

- (a) Demands from the people and all sections of the media for the Government to provide the necessary protection and security to the people;
- (b) The Government had notice of a similar application under Standing Order No. 12 on the opening of Parliament on December 17, 2007 but has not provided the necessary protection and security to the people against these serious crimes which have continued to date at record levels.
- (c) The Government, through press releases, public statements and statements made in the Parliament over the last six years, informed the country of what it considered to be its efforts it was taking to combat crime. The people however continue on a daily basis to be the victims of these serious crimes.

The urgency of this matter is not affected by the action of the Government in filing a Motion for debate today in the following terms:

“Be it resolved that the honourable House take note of the Government’s efforts to combat crime.”

The efforts which Government took to combat crime failed to provide the protection and security for the people as stated herein. All the media reported on

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January 03 and 04, 2008 that the Minister of National Security publicly admitted that the Government's initiatives to arrest gang-related crime failed.

The Standing Orders give to the Opposition a specific right, as part of its paramount duty, to make the Government account to the public through Parliament on "specific matters" which affect the daily lives of the people. The Government cannot take away this vested right in favour of the Opposition by filing a motion on a general topic in the hope that it would create an expectation that the Government, in presenting the motion on the general topic, would respond to the "specific matters" which the Opposition claims to be definite matters of urgent public importance.

The filing of such a substantive motion by the Government cannot take away the jurisdiction of the Speaker to exercise his duty and discretion in respect of an application under Standing Order No. 12 which gives that vested right to the Opposition.

In any event, if the Speaker considers that the application meets the legal requirements for him to be satisfied that the matter is definite, urgent and of public importance, the Speaker has sufficient powers under the Standing Orders to prevent later any repetition and irrelevance if the Government in presenting its substantive motion has given the response to the definite matter of urgent public importance.

In the event such circumstances arise, I certainly would not wish the Minister to repeat such matters. This is not to be interpreted that I would necessarily agree that any such response would provide the relief to the people claimed herein. The issue would not be whether I am satisfied with the response; it would be whether the Government has given a response to the definite matter of urgent public importance. If such a response is given by the Government, I would not pursue any leave granted by the Speaker pursuant to Standing Order No. 12.

The matter is of public importance because it impacts directly on the taking of the lives of individuals, attack on their person, their safety, security and that of their families. They feel the real risk on a daily basis of being murdered, kidnapped, robbed and, in the case of females, of being raped.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

1.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, within the recent immediate past there have been public and other comment when the Chair declined to accept a motion of urgent public importance under Standing Order 12. For the benefit and

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information of all concerned, I wish to outline some general principles that the Speaker takes into consideration in deciding to accept a motion under Standing Order 12.

An application for an urgent debate must satisfy, inter alia, three substantive criteria. It must relate to a particular case of recent occurrence. That case must involve the administrative or ministerial responsibility of the Government and it must require the immediate attention of the House and Government. All criteria must be satisfied. The crucial test is whether the question proposed to be raised has arisen suddenly and created an emergent situation of such a character that there is, prima facie, a case of urgency and the House must therefore, leave aside all other business and take up the consideration of the urgent matter at the appointed time.

The urgency must be of such a character that the matter really brooks no delay and should be discussed on the same day the notice is given. The matter sought to be raised must relate to a single, specific matter and must not raise more than one issue. It must not be couched in general terms or cover a great number of cases, nor raise general issues. It must have a factual basis.

The alleged absence of action on the part of the Government is not a particular case of recent occurrence that can be raised for urgent debate. The requirement of recent occurrence refers to when the Member became aware or ought to have become aware of the matter rather than when it actually occurred, as it may have occurred but not have been discovered for some time. If a Member does not raise a matter at the earliest opportunity, or if the matter is not brought before the House in time by utilizing other available Standing Orders, that may well be taken as an indication that it is not of sufficient importance or urgency to qualify under Standing Order 12. The fact that other parliamentary means of debating the subject is available is a relevant consideration for the Speaker to take into account in deciding whether to accept the application.

The urgent debate procedure is a means of debating matters that have occurred and are not in dispute. It is not a means of debating matters that might or might not occur in the future. For there to be a particular case of recent occurrence, there must be either a new situation of importance or a new development in an existing situation of sufficient importance in itself to warrant a debate being held.

The question of public importance is decided on the merits of each individual case. The major hurdle to get over is whether the matter has reached a stage where the business of the House ought to be set aside for a one-hour debate.

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With respect to the process of application, I wish to emphasize that applications must be directed solely to seeking to prove that an issue is sufficiently important, specific and urgent to change the business of the House so as to provide for an emergency debate. The application is definitely not the means by which the Member debates his arguments and proposals on the issues to be raised, like has been done today, which is not to be considered a precedent for the future.

Finally, yet importantly, the Speaker has to state whether he is satisfied that the matter qualifies to be discussed without having to give the reasons for his decision to the House.

The foregoing, which explains the established practice and procedure in this area, leaves no doubt that the matter raised by the Member for Tabagite does not qualify as a matter to be raised under Standing Order 12.

GOVERNMENT'S POSITION ON TOBACCO CONTROL

The Minister of Health (Sen. The Hon. Jerry Narace): Mr. Speaker, I have been authorized by the Cabinet to address this House today on the topic which is of utmost importance to the health and well-being of the population of Trinidad and Tobago and more so to the vulnerable groups—our women and our youth. Allow me, therefore, to inform you of Government's intention to intensify its activities in an effort to reduce the use of tobacco products especially as it relates to smoking and its associated ills.

Cigarette smoking is now recognized globally as a major public health concern. The World Health Organization has identified tobacco use as the second major cause of death in the world and has highlighted the very startling fact that tobacco is currently responsible for the death of one in ten adults worldwide or about 5,000 deaths each year. Furthermore, the organization predicts that if current smoking patterns continue, these deaths will increase progressively to 10 million annually by 2020. Trinidad and Tobago is not immune to this startling global trend.

In fact, a study conducted by Prof. Probhat Jha, Research Chair of Health and Development at the University of Toronto in Canada, estimated that deaths due to smoking in Trinidad and Tobago, for 2002, in the age group 35 years and over, were: 90 per cent for lung cancer, 69 per cent for oral cancer, 38 per cent for respiratory disease, 19 per cent each for ischemic heart disease, stroke and other vascular diseases. Overall, tobacco-related deaths, as a percentage of all medical deaths, were 30 per cent among males and 15 per cent among females in 2002. It

should be noted that over the past decade in some areas Trinidad and Tobago's health profile has taken the pattern of a developed country, even before attaining such a status which, as you know, is our aspiration by 2020.

Having successfully controlled a number of infectious diseases to a level where they are no longer considered public health problems by international health standards, the country's epidemiology has shifted towards a preponderance of chronic, non-communicable or degenerative diseases. This is illustrated by the fact that heart disease, diabetes, cancers and strokes account for over 60 per cent of deaths in this country. Mr. Speaker, the forecast as it relates to tobacco-related diseases remains dire, because it is projected that cancer and cardiovascular diseases, as the current leading causes of death in our country, will increase by at least six per cent by 2030.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will agree with me that these figures are alarming. They speak to the burgeoning of non-communicable diseases which some medical experts now refer to as the silent tsunami that is affecting the health of Caribbean peoples. We must therefore seek to reduce smoking and its associated risks as a priority, along with other conditions such as obesity, alcohol abuse, sedentary lifestyles, stress, high cholesterol, high fat, high salt diets and high blood pressure.

What is also alarming is that cigarette smoking appears to be increasing among the adolescent population. According to the Global Youth Tobacco Survey for the Caribbean, the United States Centres for Disease Control positioned Trinidad and Tobago with 12.9 per cent, as having the fourth highest smoking prevalence among school children between the ages of 13 and 15. The prevalence of smoking in the region for similar ages ranged from 4 per cent in Antigua and Barbuda to 15 per cent in Jamaica. The study also found that children of this age group were exposed to second-hand smoke in varying degrees. Indeed, exposure to second-hand smoke at home was less than 40 per cent in all countries except Suriname where it was 49.7 per cent and Trinidad and Tobago, 40.1 per cent. Exposure to second-hand smoke in public places was over 60 per cent in all countries, except Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Haiti, Montserrat and St. Kitts and Nevis. We know now that second-hand smoke is detrimental to health.

With respect to other factors that influence smoking among the 13—15 age group, it was found that the percentage of students who usually buy their cigarettes in a store range from over 30 per cent in Guyana and Jamaica to 9.4 per cent in Barbados. In Trinidad and Tobago, it was 26.5 per cent despite the fact that the Children Act prohibits the sale of cigarettes to minors. Exposure to direct

pro-tobacco advertising in newspapers or magazines ranged from over 60 per cent in Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, St. Kitts and Nevis and Suriname to 30.4 per cent in Montserrat. Pro-tobacco advertising on billboards was over 70 per cent in Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago with a low of 47.2 per cent in Montserrat.

Mr. Speaker, another major consideration for us in Trinidad and Tobago is the impact of cigarette smoking in shaping youth behavior, especially violence. For instance, a comparison of violence-related behaviours in five developed countries, including the United States, found that smoking was strongly associated with fighting among youths in all of the countries. Similar findings were revealed in another study by Kirk A. Dearden et al, which appeared in the *Pan American Journal of Public Health* in September 2007 entitled “*Teens in Trouble: Cigarette use and risky behaviours among private, high school students in La Paz, Boliva*”.

The authors indicated that:

“Risk factors for smoking—both for males and females—included low academic performance, carrying a weapon, being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property, being in a physical fight, witnessing adults hurting others, attempting suicide, drinking alcohol, using marijuana, and sexual intercourse.

Results from this study also confirm the relationship between smoking and the use of other illicit substances, and support evidence of tobacco’s role as a ‘gateway drug’.”

Reinforcing the links between smoking and risky behaviours, the study quotes Jocelyn Elders, former US Surgeon General as stating:

“When a young person starts to smoke or use tobacco, it is a signal, an alarm that he or she may get involved in other risky behaviours. This is one of the few early warning signs we have in public health. If we can prevent tobacco use in the first place, we might have a big impact on preventing or delaying a host of other destructive behaviors among our young people.”

The economic costs of tobacco use are equally devastating. In addition to the high public health costs of treating tobacco-caused diseases, tobacco kills people at the height of their productivity, depriving families of breadwinners and nations of a healthy workforce. A 1994 report estimated that the use of tobacco resulted in an annual global net loss of US \$200 billion, a third of which occurs in developing countries.

The WHO also states that tobacco and poverty are inextricably linked. Many studies have shown that in the poorest households in some low-income countries as much as 10 per cent of total expenditure is on tobacco. Consequently, these families have less money to spend on basic food items, education and health care. Additionally, malnutrition, greater illiteracy, ill-health and premature death could result since money that could have been used for education, for example, is spent on tobacco instead. Indeed, Mr. Speaker, it is felt that tobacco's role in exacerbating poverty has been largely ignored by researchers.

In 1993, given the growing concerns of the medical profession with respect to the deleterious effects that tobacco use has on health globally, the WHO agreed with the submissions made by two individuals that it should utilize its constitutional authority to develop international conventions to advance the cause of global health.

2.00 p.m.

Trinidad and Tobago signed the FCTC Treaty on August 27, 2003 and was the first in the Caribbean to ratify it on August 19, 2004. This signalled the commitment of this Government to pursue the cause of tobacco control.

The FCTC's role is to strengthen national and international coordination to combat the tobacco-induced disease epidemic through a variety of measures, concrete obligations and other commitments that are framed as goals or recommendations.

The treaty also calls for testing, measuring and regulating the contents and emissions of tobacco products. It calls as well for effective legislative, executive and administrative measures requiring manufacturers and importers to disclose to governmental authorities, the contents and emissions of tobacco and for governments to provide public disclosure of the toxic constituents and emissions of tobacco products.

The Caribbean Community has made tobacco use prevention a primary health concern and has issued over the years, a number of statements concerning tobacco. The 1982 Declaration on Health for the Caribbean Community states:

"Health for all by 2000 in the Caribbean context is taken to mean that people are emotionally well-adjusted individually in families and as communities and free from dependence on alcohol, tobacco or other substances."

Following the third intergovernmental negotiating body session on the FCTC in 2001, the Latin American and the Caribbean group reached consensus reaffirming their commitment to work towards the achievement of an effective public health convention for tobacco control.

In addition, at the conclusion of the 27th Caricom Conference in 2006, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago offered to host a special regional consultation to consider mechanisms for implementing specific recommendations to combat tobacco use.

As Trinidad and Tobago prepares to implement the mandates under the FCTC, we will be guided by the experiences of countries such as Mexico and Canada which have already implemented several aspects of this treaty.

Article 11 of the FCTC binds each party to institute national laws to regulate packaging and labelling of tobacco products within three years of the entry into force of the convention for that party. Given the date of ratification of the convention by Trinidad and Tobago, the deadline for implementing this mandate is February 27, 2008.

Article 13 of the treaty places a deadline on the country to apply restrictions on, or undertake a comprehensive ban on all tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship by February 27, 2010. Legislation will be the chief means by which this requirement will be instituted and such legislation must be enacted quickly.

Article 5 mandates each party to the treaty to develop, implement, periodically update and review comprehensive multi-sectoral national tobacco control strategies, plans and programmes to effect implementation of the FCTC. A national coordinating mechanism or focal points for tobacco control must also be established. These are necessary initial actions which Trinidad and Tobago will have to undertake in implementing its tobacco control initiative.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform that in implementing the mandates of the FCTC, Trinidad and Tobago will be guided by the Declaration of Port of Spain, issued by heads of Caricom Member States which focuses on the prevention, control and treatment of non-communicable diseases. This Declaration was adopted on September 15, 2007.

That Conference of Heads of Caricom declared inter alia: Our commitment to pursue immediately a legislative agenda for passage of the legal provisions related to the International Framework Convention on Tobacco Control; urged its immediate ratification in all states which have not already done so and support the immediate enactment of legislation to limit or eliminate smoking in public places, ban the sale, advertisement and promotion of tobacco products to children, insist on effective warning labels and introduce fiscal measures that will reduce accessibility of tobacco.

Mr. Speaker, as has been revealed so glaringly today, tobacco products are a major contributing factor in the alarming increase in chronic non-communicable

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diseases among Caribbean peoples and in particular, the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Mindful of this and in keeping with the dictates of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the Government proposes in the coming years to institute the following core package of tobacco control interventions mandated of countries that have ratified the FCTC:

1. Introduce price and tax measures to reduce the demand for tobacco and smuggling control.
2. Implement measures to protect the population from exposure to tobacco smoke.
3. Regulate the packaging and labelling of tobacco products.
4. Ban tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.
5. Monitor and evaluate the plans and programmes implemented to determine the impact they are having on the reduction of tobacco use.
6. Implement tobacco dependence reduction and cessation programmes.

Finally, Trinidad and Tobago is prepared to take the lead in limiting the effects of the risk factors that contribute to the development of non-communicable diseases. We are cognizant of the fact that this will not be an easy task, since on the one hand individuals will be urged to break a long held practice, while on the other hand individuals and companies that trade in tobacco products may feel threatened economically.

We feel confident that all citizens will see the value in putting our health first. Our responsibility to the safety and well-being of the wider national community must be paramount, and we are guided further by one of the major aspirations in our pursuit of developed country status by 2020, that of nurturing a caring society.

Most importantly, our Government remains committed to pursue its policy to have all citizens empowered to lead long, healthy, happy, productive and responsible lives, while having access to quality health care.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

STATUS OF CHILDREN IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

The Minister of Social Development (Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Mr. Speaker, I have been authorized by Cabinet to make the following statement. I wish to thank you and the other Members of this honourable House for the opportunity to address you on a matter which is a priority for the Government's

social sector agenda and indeed a priority in the minds and hearts of this entire nation: the status of children in Trinidad and Tobago.

Vision 2020 articulates that our human capital is this country's most critical resource necessary for achieving developed country status, especially in the context of developing innovative people and nurturing a caring society. Strategic investment in our children is intrinsic to achieving these very goals. The children are our future and to secure our nation's future, we must take all steps necessary to ensure that tomorrow's leaders are healthy, functioning individuals who are suitably equipped to realize their fullest potential.

A scan of the global, regional and national landscape would reveal that the plight of children in the modern age is indeed a serious one. In the past, governments in a number of countries, including right here in Trinidad and Tobago, have responded by placing emphasis on children's rights, responsibilities, care and protection by becoming signatories to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and by establishing committees towards the formulation of legislation, policy and programming, aimed at improving the lot of our children.

In this regard, I am happy to report that in 2007, the Government approved a revised National Plan of Action for Children, which will be the guiding policy for the implementation of key initiatives to improve the welfare of our nation's children over the next three years.

While it may be argued that public sensitization on and media attention to the protection of our children has increased over the last decade, we are still left with an unacceptable level of child abuse and neglect. Case reports of violence against children tear at the very heart of our nation and it has become clear that without a change of mindset, our society will be unable to keep pace with the challenges that confront families and children.

While we all agree that there is a key role for government to play in safeguarding the welfare of our nation's children, we must not obscure the fact that it is the responsibility of parents and families to nurture and protect their children. No one is exempt from this responsibility. Notwithstanding the propensity by some to blame the Government for each and every negative occurrence in the society, we must be careful not to yield to the temptation to shift responsibility completely away from the individual, because this can lead to a scenario in which members of society feel exempt from the consequences of their deleterious actions towards children. They may feel exempt. It is the responsibility of government to plan and coordinate an improved environment for the development of the next generation.

Historically, the social sector has been fraught with complex challenges such as high expectations, poor staffing, inadequate financial resources and reactive, as opposed to proactive, programming and all of this must change for us to succeed in protecting the children and families that are most vulnerable.

This Government has recognized that for our children to have a brighter future, it is imperative that we as a society and as communities work together to transform the way in which we have cultured ourselves to regard our children and to revolutionize the way in which we deliver social services relevant to families and children.

As the ministry charged with the responsibility of coordinating the social sector in line with Government's objectives, the Ministry of Social Development has always been faced with a number of challenges caused by both internal and external factors. In order to address some of these major issues, we have established an executive committee in the ministry which meets on a weekly basis to focus on strategic planning initiatives, aimed at transforming the Ministry in line with Vision 2020.

Some of the priorities that we have identified relevant to families and children and are working with key stakeholders to address include:

- the retraining of every single staff member in quality customer service and professional conduct. The curriculum shall be designed to focus on the mindset and culture of the organization, more towards the needs of clients first and foremost. I emphasized professional conduct.

2.15 p.m.

- Another priority is the development of a six-month plan to surge additional staff into key divisions such as National Family Services, Social Welfare, Probation and the Piparo Empowerment Centre. This process has already started and is linked to a more medium-term strategy to build and sustain staff levels utilizing a range of approaches including contract positions. National Family Services Division already serves as the key division of the ministry that responds to crises involving children and families such as those that have been highlighted in the media. This division is being strengthened, resourced and re-shaped into a team of social-care professionals positioned to respond, manage and monitor the relevant cases of abuse or neglect in a sustained and timely manner.
- The implementation of a National Parenting Programme is another critical initiative which will support the work already being done by the National

Family Services Division and key NGOs throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The programme will serve to provide a comprehensive and coordinated approach to ensuring that parents are equipped with the skills necessary to effectively meet the individual needs of their children and in so doing, strengthen the human capital base of the society.

- Another priority is the development and implementation of a new level of collaboration with civil society and with a range of government ministries in dealing with long-standing issues such as social displacement, street children, the exploitation of children and poor parenting skills. In conjunction with an improved framework for accountability and reporting, we believe that deeper partnerships with the appropriate NGOs can yield unprecedented results in a number of areas. The National Committee to monitor the implementation of the Plan of Action for Children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, convened under the aegis of the Ministry of Social Development, is a prime example of a successful inter-agency mechanism which has proven to be instrumental in promoting action geared toward achieving the best interests of children. This National Committee has benefited from a wide range of constructive contributions from key stakeholders, all in the spirit of collaboration and consultation.
- Another priority that has received insufficient attention in the past is the provision of modern tools and technologies for our social service staff, including computerization of records and process re-engineering to decrease application time, waiting time, manual error, fraud, delays and duplication of effort and to improve case management. A key component of this strategy is the proposed implementation of an integrated social enterprise management system—this groundbreaking approach will provide a common data interface for all the ministry's services and in the long term, the entire social sector. This is in recognition of the fact that inter-agency collaboration is the key to any concerted effort toward improving the delivery of service to the citizens of this nation.

Mr. Speaker, all of these strategies will be accompanied by sustained public awareness campaigns on family and child issues in collaboration with agencies such as UNICEF, but one area that has frustrated stakeholders in the past is the slow pace of establishment of an appropriate legislative framework for the protection of children.

This Government is committed to laying before this honourable House in the current parliamentary term a revised package of children's legislation that is designed to fill many of the remaining gaps.

Status Of Children
[HON. DR. A. BROWNE]

Monday, January 07, 2008

Permit me to remind this sitting of the House that the package of children's legislation comprises the following items:

- The Status of Children (Amdt.) Bill
- The Family Court Bill
- The International Child Abduction Bill
- The Children's Authority (Amdt.) Bill
- The Children's Community Residences, Foster Homes and Nurseries (Amdt.) Bill
- The Adoption of Children Bill
- The Children Bill

Mr. Speaker, policy formulation was a major thrust of the last administration and this will continue to characterize Government's approach to providing guidelines for its developmental processes. Social policy has been developed in areas which impact both directly and indirectly on our nation's children, including issues such as the family, youth, school nutrition, the education system and the disabled or the differently abled. Sound economic policies have also served to positively impact on the quality of life of many citizens in this country and affect the quality of life that we can guarantee for our future generations. Social programming, together with appropriate fiscal mechanisms has also served to reduce poverty in significant ways.

Health initiatives present another area where strides have been made in improving the status and well-being of our nation's children. Comprehensive ante-natal services are now established throughout the country and have served to improve maternal and child health. A significant number of babies have been protected from HIV infection through a nationwide mother to child transmission programme. Breastfeeding is being promoted through the Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative which has been instituted at two of our major health care facilities. The School Health Programme is a collaborative effort of the ministries of Health and Education which provides effective screening services for the early detection of hearing and visual impairment among students at the primary school level. Mr. Speaker, this is indicative of Government's commitment to ensuring that support and opportunities are available for all our children, whatever their ability or challenge.

Mr. Speaker, research is a critical area in which Government has undertaken to improve its targeting and allocation of resources for children. In recent times major surveys have been conducted which will provide data on the more vulnerable groups in society, including children, and these include:

- The 2005 Survey of Living Conditions which sought to assess the poverty situation in terms of its nature, intensity, causes and specific geographic concentration. This survey indicated that levels of poverty had fallen from a figure of 35.6 per cent of the national population in 1992 to 17 per cent in 2005.
- The 2005 Child Health Survey which assessed the nutritional status of 6000 children in primary schools is also notable.
- The 2006 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey is a nationally representative household survey of women and children geared toward assessing progress made in achieving the goals of the 1990 World Summit for Children.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is fully committed to promoting the best interests of all our children by joining with our global counterparts in creating a world fit for children. Our efforts are comprehensive and cohesive in nature as they cover a broad spectrum of initiatives inclusive of policy formulation, programming, legislation, resources allocation and research.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Social Development takes this opportunity to invite the partnership of all stakeholders in a collaborative effort to nurture and protect our children. The fate of a child and the fate of our nation's children should never be used as a political football, as there is way too much at stake. Indeed, let us never forget that we all have a solemn responsibility to the next generation and the future of our beloved country.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, thank you. There are two Motions on the Order Paper, and I wish to underscore the importance that the Government places on dealing with crime by making it crystal clear that the Government intends to debate Motion No. 2 as the first item of Government Business under Public Business and, that is, the Motion dealing with the Government's efforts to combat crime and not Motion No. 1 on tertiary education.

Mr. Speaker: Is it my understanding that the Attorney General will also like to make a statement?

Mr. C. Imbert: Yes, Mr. Speaker. If possible, the Attorney General would wish to make a statement at 3.30 p.m. We are awaiting her return to the House. So, I would ask for that matter to be stood down until 3.30 p.m. [*Interruption*]

Agreed to.

IMMIGRATION (ADVANCE PASSENGER INFORMATION) BILL

Bill to make provision for the transmission of advance passenger information respecting persons travelling to Trinidad and Tobago and for related matters [*The Minister of National Security*]; read the first time.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Immigration (Advance Passenger Information) Bill, 2007 which was introduced in this House on Monday, December 17, 2007 be withdrawn.

Bill, by leave, withdrawn.

INTERNATIONAL CHILD ABDUCTION BILL

Bill to provide for the application on Trinidad and Tobago of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction and to provide for matters connected with or related thereto [*The Minister of Social Development*]; read the first time.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the International Child Abduction (No. 2) Bill, 2007 which was introduced in this House on Monday, December 17, 2007 be withdrawn. [*Interruption*]

Bill, by leave, withdrawn.

GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO COMBAT CRIME

The Minister of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Martin Joseph): Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that this honourable House take note of the Government's efforts to combat crime.

Mr. Speaker, let me start off by making it absolutely clear that this Government recognizes that the issue of crime and violence is the number one issue facing this country and, as a result, it continues to be our number one priority.

Mr. Speaker, in saying that, we are also very clear as to our vision for Trinidad and Tobago; developed society status on or before 2020, where the quality of life and the standard of living of all our citizens would be comparable to what exists in a developed society.

In an attempt to take us along that way five developmental pillars have been identified. The developmental pillar for which the Ministry of National Security has primary responsibility is the question about effective governance or governing effectively. The five goals coming out of that governing effectively are as follows: Our society and our Government will adhere to good governance principles and practices; our public institutions will be high-performance, professional entities effectively and efficiently meeting the needs of all their clients; Trinidad and Tobago would have modern technologically advanced legal, regulatory and enforcement systems; all citizens will be assured of fair and equal justice; and Trinidad and Tobago will be a safe and secure place to live, visit and do business and raise families.

In the Vision 2020 Operational Plan 2007 to 2010, *Transformation in Progress* at page 212, you will see that 10 objectives have been identified to meet the requirements of being a safe and secure place to live, visit, do business and raise families.

For the record, let me identify those 10 objectives:

- significantly reduce crime by using a holistic sustained approach that addresses the root causes of crime;
- reduce the involvement of young people in crime;
- increase the homicide detection rate;
- reduce recidivism through the rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders;
- instil a culture of law, order and respect for human life among all citizens;
- restore public trust and confidence in the protective services;
- create an integrated national security infrastructure, which ensures that the issues of crime, public safety and national security are addressed on a holistic and sustained basis;
- protect the borders of Trinidad and Tobago from illegal entry and exit of people and products;
- secure Trinidad and Tobago's interests through international, regional and local defence efforts; and
- protect all citizens from the hazards of natural and manmade disasters.

2.30 p.m.

It is in that context, Mr. Speaker and hon. Members, that the Ministry of National Security, as part of its responsibility to Cabinet, had to identify targets for the achievement of these particular objectives, and, Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, the targets were identified. The Ministry of National Security in consultation with law enforcement agencies, in identifying the target as it related to the number one issue, homicides, came up with a target of a reduction of homicides by 10 per cent.

Let me just say something, Mr. Speaker, hon. Members: when the Ministry of National Security was required to report to Cabinet on this specific target, the Ministry was reluctant to indicate what its target was. I was embarrassed, because as Minister I was sent back because Cabinet said that you needed to identify, saying safe and secure, et cetera, what was the target. I huddled with law enforcement leaders and at the end of the day, we decided on a 10 per cent reduction in homicides.

Let me tell you how we arrived at that, we did not pull it from the sky. In the previous year, we had reduced homicides by 4.4 per cent or 4.5 per cent. In those circumstances and on the basis of all kinds of other discussions, we felt relatively sure that a 10 per cent reduction was achievable. There is no question, and as a result of that—just for the information of the honourable House and our population—because homicides were so critical to the concern of this Government, this Minister started off reporting on the status of homicides on a weekly basis. However, as the situation with respect to homicides started to improve, Cabinet said not on a weekly basis, on a fortnightly basis and then it was on a monthly basis; there is no question about that.

You would recall on the numerous occasions when I had the opportunity to be part of a post-Cabinet press conference, the question was always asked. I recall some of my colleagues saying that you are digging a hole with respect to this particular position of reporting, because it was the number one issue. Mr. Speaker let me indicate to you, just for the information, why the question about the measurement of homicides is so important, and it is not just important in our jurisdiction, in all jurisdictions the question of homicides is the barometer of police performance. Forgive me or permit me:

"The primary measure of success for homicides unit..."

I am quoting from a report that was sent to Cabinet, because I would come to it just now.

“or clearance rate, a detection rate is calculated by dividing the number of homicide cases in which an arrest is made by the total number of homicide cases. A homicide is detected when the police have sufficient evidence to arrest and charge an individual for committing the offence.”

Because homicide is considered such a serious offence and because homicide statistics tend to be recorded more accurately than other offence types, because you cannot hide—later on I am going to talk about the statistics and then you would hear me talking about reporting. There are a number of crimes that are not reported and that is a fact and that is not confined to us alone, it is in all kinds of jurisdictions; what cannot be under-reported is homicides.

The proportion of homicides solved by a police organization is often used as a reflection of its overall effectiveness. Police organizations with high homicide detection rates are more likely to realize three criminological benefits: one, incapacitating offenders thereby reducing the probability that they will commit another homicide; two, creating a culture of general deterrence whereby citizens know that if they were to commit a homicide they would be apprehended; and, three, promote a feeling among the population of just deserts or they sense that justice is being done, which establishes confidence in the police. It is as a result of this that the Ministry approached Cabinet and asked Cabinet to do a couple of things. Mr. Speaker, I think I better get into it one time.

First of all in approaching the whole issue, especially of gang-related homicides on the basis of recommendations from our consultants, and we are not afraid to say our consultants are Mastrofski and Partners from George Mason University (GMU). Interestingly enough, in responding to some questions being asked about GMU, I went and did a little research. In 1999—GMU, of which Mastrofski is a principal consultant and others—the then government was approached by GMU and agreed to enter into discussions with GMU to provide services with respect to law enforcement issues. For some reason, I do not know what happened, but the question about follow up and implementation did not—*[Interruption]* a little smarter than you—take place.

Mrs. Kangaloo: They started to implode.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: They started to implode. The recommendation was to establish: one, a homicide prevention working group; two, a homicide bureau of investigation, to bring the investigation of homicides under one head—

I will come to some more details about that—a repeat offenders programme, design again, to look at the violent repeat offenders and to put mechanisms and resources in place to deal with those violent repeat offenders, because the information indicated that there was a small number of offenders who were committing a majority of the homicides. Also with that, was the establishment of an inter-agency task force to deal with the question of suppression.

Mr. Speaker, I am indicating the reason the question about homicide is so important and the question about the recognition of that on the Government's path and the requirement to put measures in place to deal with the question of homicide. I am putting all that in context, you know why? Because recently there was a big forum that said that the Government failed on its crime reporting initiatives.

Mr. S. Panday: You said so.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: I never said that the Government failed. I said as it related to some of our measures, the measures did not give us the results and we are not afraid to say that. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: It was not that the Government failed. The Government did not fail, neither did the Minister of National Security fail. I put the question about the 10 per cent in a context of being able to measure performance. There is no gainsay that at the end of the day—and we have been very upfront with the population as it relates to the question about crime and crime statistics; we have been very, very upfront.

It is amazing, when in the earlier part of the year we started to see the reduction in homicides we were criticized for talking about the reduction in homicides, but we have already indicated the statistics are the barometer for determining success or non-performance. It is the barometer, so at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, hon. Members, what I am trying to indicate is the question about the homicides and the status with respect to homicides represent a critical issue about law enforcement and law enforcement effectiveness or otherwise.

In 2007, the statistics are very clear. In 2007, at end of the day, the reported number of homicides for 2007 stood at 388. When compared to 2006, in 2006 it was 371, which represents a 4.5 per cent increase in the number of homicides. What about other categories, because I was listening and we keep hearing about the other categories. Again, on the basis of crime statistics reported, wounding and shootings in 2006 stood at 657 reported; in 2007 it stood at 645; a miniscule

reduction of 1.83 per cent. Rapes, incest and sexual offences: in 2006, the figure was 903; in 2007, 759, a 15.9 per cent reduction. Serious indecency: in 2006, 81; in 2007, 66; an 18 per cent reduction. Burglaries and break-ins: in 2006, 4,973; in 2007, 4,851; a 2.4 per cent reduction.—[*Interruption*] It is the same reported in 2006, 2005 that we are using—Robberies: in 2006, 5,633; in 2007, 4,851; a 13.8 per cent reduction. Abductions and kidnappings: in 2006, 214; in 2007, 162; a 24 per cent reduction.

But, Mr. Speaker, with respect to kidnappings for ransom: In 2006, there were 16 kidnappings for ransom; in 2007, there were 13 kidnappings for ransom, but we keep hearing about escalating crime in all of these other areas. The reason I am taking pains to put it on the public record is because you would see the categories in which we have been achieving reductions.

Mr. S. Panday: Reported.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: It has to be reported; that is the only thing that we can use, hon. Member for Princes Town North; we cannot do anything other than what is reported. Fraud offences, 322 in 2006; in 2007, 213, a 33 per cent reduction. Increases: Grand larceny, 3,064 in 2006; 3,494 in 2007; a 14 per cent increase. Larceny of motor vehicles: 1,496 in 2006; 1,740 in 2007; a 16 per cent increase. Larceny of dwelling house: 452 in 2006; 426 in 2007; a 5.7 per cent reduction. Narcotics offence: 543 in 2006; 589 in 2007; an 8.4 per cent increase.

So, Mr. Speaker, when categorized as serious crimes against the person, with the exception of homicides, all the other serious crimes against the person: wounding and shootings, rape, incest and sexual offences, serious indecency, robberies, kidnappings, including for ransom, down by some 12.5 per cent. Serious crimes against property, with the exception of grand larceny and larceny of motor vehicles, increased by 3.7 per cent. Narcotics offence increased by 8.47 per cent. So, Mr. Speaker, I think we need to be honest in terms of our reporting when we look at the question of crime and crime statistics.

Because otherwise, Mr. Speaker, you do law enforcement an injustice when you lump everything into the pot and say that all aspects of crimes have been increasing. That is not the case.

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, having said that, the question is, what is causing these unacceptable levels of crime and violence in this country. Again, an impression is

being given that the Government is sitting on its hands and allowing crime and violence to increase.

Mr. Ramnath: True, true.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Let me quote—because if I say it they will say it is all self-serving—from a March report, I cannot say recent anymore because this is a March report of 2007 commissioned by the UN World Bank Report called *Crime Violence and Development Trends, Course and Policy Options in the Caribbean* and permit me to quote aspects of it:

“Through multiple channels, crime and violence threaten the welfare of Caribbean citizens. Beyond the direct effect on victims, crime and violence inflict widespread costs, generating a climate of fear for all citizens and diminishing economic growth. Crime and violence present one of the paramount challenges to development in the Caribbean...”

Let me repeat: crime and violence present one of the paramount challenges to development in the Caribbean.

“Several factors which cut across the diverse countries of the region heighten their vulnerability to crime and violence. Primarily among these is the region's vulnerability to drug trafficking. Wedged between the world's source of cocaine to the south and its primary consumer markets to the north, the Caribbean is the transit point for a torrent of narcotics...Compounding their difficulties, Caribbean countries have large coastlines and territorial waters and many have weak criminal justice systems that are easily overwhelmed.

While levels of crime and associated circumstances vary by country, the strongest explanation for the relatively high rates of crime and violence...in the region—and their...rise in recent years—is narcotics trafficking.”

Let me say it again to underscore it, Mr. Speaker: while levels of crime and associated circumstances vary by country, the strongest explanation for the relatively high rates of crime and violence in the region and their rise in recent years is narcotics trafficking.

Mr. Speaker, this Government did not need the UN World Bank Report to let us know what we were facing, what the environment showed up and what we needed to do. It is in those circumstances, Mr. Speaker, that this Government has invested heavily in putting measures in place to stem the inflow of drugs and guns coming into this country, because what happens—for the information of hon. Members, which I am sure they know—the drugs are accompanied with guns coming into the country.

Mr. Ramnath: Really.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, depending on whether or not Trinidad and Tobago is the only drop-off or the transshipment point to the rest of North America, the drugs continue north, the guns remain because most of the guns come from the north anyway.

Mr. Ramnath: How do you know that?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Because we are doing tracing, et cetera with respect to the guns to determine where they are coming from.

Mr. Speaker, if another Caribbean island is a drop-off point prior to going up north, the guns will continue with the drugs up the islands. Wherever the last drop-off point is, is where the guns remain and that is what is fuelling, especially, the gun-related violence that is confronting the rest of the Caribbean region.

In an attempt to stem the inflow—look at how close we are to Venezuela? It takes only about 7 minutes in a go-fast to come and drop off drugs in Trinidad, a lot of our under-protected and unprotected coastlines also allow it. To come to this debate this morning about four persons from the north coast called me, they said, please do not mention their names, “eh”.

I want you to understand the extent to which drugs and guns are coming into our coastline. Do you know what he is saying? He is saying, “Minister, your coastguard cannot protect four hours, ‘you know.’” They must protect 24/7. But of course, Mr. Speaker, protecting 24/7 at this particular point in time is a difficulty. It is a difficulty and it is in recognition of that that this Government has decided to invest in resources designed to reduce the inflow of drugs and guns.

The 360 degree radar system; the purchase of three offshore patrol vessels; in the interim the three offshore patrol vessels, two interim vessels to be provided, we would be in receipt of one in a matter of weeks. The six fast patrol vessels, six interceptors and helicopters, because from the radar system we are seeing the pattern of drug flow into the country. What needs to happen is that we need to put mechanisms in place to reduce that inflow. When we say that, people seem to misunderstand or to under-estimate the impact that the drug trade is having on the crimes and criminal activities that are taking place in this country and as a result, the Government is investing heavily in ensuring that we stem the inflow of drugs and guns and by extension reduce the number of violent crimes that are plaguing—

Mr. Ramnath: How is the radar helping you to detect the pattern?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Because we could see. You could see the movements of the boats, et cetera, and in those circumstances, Mr. Speaker—

Dr. Gopeesingh: How much do you have a day?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Let me talk to you, Mr. Speaker. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, let me just indicate something else also. [*Interruption*] We always have to strike a balance between how much we divulge, because the more you divulge is the more you make those persons aware of everything that you are doing. I think we need to be very conscious of that and I will be saying something about that later on. As far as the coastline is concerned and the extent to reduce the inflow, that is the strategy that the Government is using to treat with that. Later on I will talk about something else that we would be talking about as it relates to use of drugs among our population.

Let me just say something else, Mr. Speaker, and I think it is important. When we first started to see cocaine coming into this country many years ago the reaction was our citizens were not using it. It was a transshipment point and as a result we did not pay too much attention to it at all because it was not staying here. But then, Mr. Speaker, gradually, it started to remain, gradually it started to become payment and other things and we see what is happening. I am saying this, because we started to see another pattern of drug movement taking place in this country, and law enforcement must not make the same mistake we made with cocaine. We started seeing heroin coming through our borders, because I understand that is also much more profitable in some instances, especially in some parts of Europe than cocaine, and what it is we are requiring law enforcement to do is to pay particular attention to this question about cocaine. Because again, our population is not using cocaine, but we do not want to find ourselves in a situation in which just what happened with cocaine happens with heroin, so that is something that we also need to be concerned about.

Mr. Speaker, the second challenge that we face, the question about weak law enforcement. Let me address the question about weak law enforcement. With respect to weak law enforcement, the strategy was to look at it from two perspectives—a two-pronged-attack—one to deal with the unacceptable homicides; treat with the homicides. As I said earlier on, in treating with the question about homicides and the violent crimes, we talked about the establishment of the homicide prevention working group.

The homicide prevention working group was established in September 2005. It is a multi-agency group, its goal is to initiate homicide control interventions,

inter-agency cooperation, information sharing, planning and coordination. Coming out of the homicide prevention working group was a recommendation for the establishment of the Homicide Bureau of Investigation (HBI) and as I indicated earlier on, the ministry approached Cabinet and got Cabinet's approval for the establishment of the HBI. I read out earlier on about part of the justification for the establishment of the HBI.

Mr. Speaker, let me just give for the record, some of the aspects of the justification used to get the Government to go along with the establishment of the HBI. I talked about the three criminological benefits from the question about dealing with homicides. In this regard mention was made of the fact that the crime statistics for the last five years revealed that there has been an increase in the number of homicides committed from 150 in 2001 to 380 in 2005, while the detection rate has decreased from 50 per cent in 2001 to 20 per cent in 2005. The report identified the reasons for the low detection rates as being:

- a) lack of structural and operational clarity;
- b) lack of dedicated resources;
- c) processing delays;
- d) lack of homicide investigator experience and training;
- e) lack of investigator and managerial accountability.

Accordingly the report recommended the implementation of certain organizational staffing and operational initiatives to address the issue in the shortest possible time frame. Included among the recommendations are:

- i) the creation of a full service homicide unit;
- ii) the establishment of a new organizational structure for the homicide unit;
- iii) the increase in the number of homicide investigators;
- iv) the assignment of homicide investigators to teams;
- v) the assignment of homicide investigators to time periods when they are needed most;
- vi) the careful selection and assignment of homicide investigators;
- vii) the establishment of a cold-case squad;
- viii) the increased accountability and employee performance standards.

At the present time, the note said that the staff of the informal unit comprised of 71 police officers. And the Note to Cabinet was to increase the homicide

bureau to some 200 in the following ranks: Assistant Commissioner of Police, Senior Superintendent, Superintendent Assistant.

The point, Mr. Speaker, was to improve and increase the staffing of the Homicide Bureau of Investigation so that they would have been able to deal with the homicide.

Mr. Ramnath: These are people who failed in the past; you are bringing them back again.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: In doing that we had also established some detection rates that were to be achieved. Those detection rates were identified. However, at the end of the day the targets were not achieved. The targets were not achieved; the staffing of the HBI was not staffed in the way in which it was supposed to have been. In other words, Mr. Speaker, there was an implementation issue that was faced as it related to this matter.

Mr. Speaker, we also established the repeat offenders programme. As I said earlier on, the repeat offenders programme was designed to make sure that we targeted the repeat offenders to make sure that they could have been dealt with in a way that would have gotten them out of the system. The repeat offenders programme initially started off and was a success but then subsequently it petered out as with the other initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, the Inter-Agency Task Force, we established the Inter-Agency Task Force in 2003. And the purpose of the Inter-agency Task Force is that we brought defence force personnel and police personnel together to deal with some of the hot-spot areas to serve, as I said earlier on, as suppression in those particular areas. Again, the success of the Inter-Agency Task Force because of displacement, because of the challenges placed on law enforcement it was necessary for the Inter-Agency Task Force to become more diluted and in the circumstances we saw what it is that we have achieved in terms of some of the results.

3.00 p.m.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is quite clear that we are going to have to look at those measures that we looked at to deal with the question of homicides and later on we will indicate to you what are some of the measures that we will be putting in place to deal with that.

The other area of the concern not reported as extensively, is the question of policing at the police station district level. We have recognized that the situation

as it relates to policing—before I do that, let me just indicate because it is necessary to remind hon. Members about a decision taken in a previous Parliament designed to ensure that the police organization is provided with the resources necessary in order to discharge its responsibility. You would recall that last year or the year before when we were expressing concerns with respect to the effectiveness of law enforcement, coming out of the crime talks, a decision was taken that it was necessary to provide the Commissioner of Police with the operational mandate to manage his organization. As a result, it was necessary to pass the appropriate legislation which was passed to do a couple of things:

1. to change the focus of the Police Service Commission;
2. to cause the Police Service Commission to be primarily responsible for the appointment and removal of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners and to be responsible for overseeing the performance of the police organization through the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners. So the Commission is now primarily an oversight body to review the Commissioner discharging of his functions in terms of discipline, in terms of promotion;
3. to provide the Commissioner with the authority to run his organization—because part of the challenge we faced in the past was that you had a Commissioner of Police who did not have authority over his—*[Interruption]*

Mr. S. Panday: Over his bull dogs.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Well, a former Commissioner referred to himself as a toothless bull dog—and you would recall also when Giuliani visited here some time ago, he talked about ensuring in all of his jurisdictions that the Commissioner of Police has the authority to run his organization, so we have put measures in place to give the Commissioner the ability to run his organization.

To do so, Mr. Speaker, it was necessary to do some other legislative things. The key legislative thing that was necessary, was to remove the—what was the word the Prime Minister in the past exercised in terms of Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners—*[Interruption]*

Mr. S. Panday: Veto.

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Veto. The Prime Minister had to give up his veto power with respect to the appointment of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner. The Parliament now has a say with respect to the appointment of Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, responsibility. The Commissioner now has the authority

for all ranks other than Deputy Commissioner. In order to support that, we also had to introduce an assessment process. Again, all passed in this Parliament to allow the Commissioner to be able to ensure that he or she has the most competent persons in the leadership of his police organization by ensuring that the assessment process—you would recall when we brought that to Parliament, people were concerned about written and oral exams and then also the question—
[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Exactly—so we have put measures in place to make sure that we strengthen law enforcement capability, so that law enforcement is able to manage their affairs.

Mr. Speaker, another initiative introduced by the Ministry, “Policing for People”. Because of a cultural development—one must be careful because one does not want to give the impression that one is unduly criticizing our police organization, but there is a reality in terms of the culture of the police organization over the years and how it has discharged law enforcement. It has discharged law enforcement in a particular type of colonial context. What is now required in this new environment is a relationship between law enforcement and the community that will ensure that a partnership exists so that the community and law enforcement can work together so we can improve policing in the various communities.

Mr. Speaker, in those circumstances, we introduced what we call, the model police station initiative in which the effort was tried in five police station districts: West End, Morvant, Arouca Chaguanas and San Fernando. What was this policing for people initiative designed to accomplish? First of all, the organizational change model which was adopted is a very straightforward one. We want to change police practices so that they will be more effective and especially that the public will have a greater confidence in them, and therefore increase their willingness to cooperate with police in efforts to reduce crime and disorder. Because of the colonial heritage and enduring influence on the police, colonial police was much anything as an occupational force that focused on enforcing laws while keeping a distance from the public. Today, that culture of alienation continues in the belief structure of many officers that they are merely to catch the bad guys and keep the public in line. This view unfortunately often results in officers viewing the public as the problem, rather than the partner.

Clearly the public wants and deserves a very different orientation, but changing police practices is not an easy or simple thing, especially when they

have been ingrained for more than a century. Only a naive person will believe that you can simply throw some additional resources to the police, change some policies and add training. We are creating something entirely new, an effective and efficient organization. To be sure all of these things are necessary, but what we are trying to do, is to change the culture of the police service.

First, we needed officers assigned to the model stations to show up to work routinely and to put in a full day's work on the job. You cannot have policing without police. This seems so fundamental as to be silly, but it has been a problem for the police service and that is part of the challenge with respect to having sufficient police in the communities to serve "policing for people". So in the model police stations we increased the number of police to deal with "policing for people" initiative.

Secondly, we wanted the model police station officers to behave in ways that placed service to the community upper most in their priorities. That is what we mean when we say that we want model stations officers to adapt, policing for people philosophy. The standards for policing for people are as follows: attentiveness; being accessible to the public to attend to their needs; responsiveness; timely assistance that helps citizens solve their problems; competence, knowing how to get the job done;—whatever it is—reliability; respect; fairness.

Mr. Speaker, in the model stations what we have also done is to remodel the model stations so that the interface between citizens and the police is such that it is much more conducive to the relationship between citizens and police. We have increased the victim assistance officers—we have now introduced victim assistance officers in the model stations, so that again, the relationship between police and law enforcement can change.

As a result of the initial success of the model station initiative, it is the intention to expand the model stations so that citizens in a number of other police station districts will benefit from the initiatives that are being put in place.

One of the challenges we face is the question of manpower resources. The police service has an approved strength of approximately 7,691 officers, but in terms of the actual strength, it is approximately 6,051 officers among some 32 stations, branches and units. This represents a shortage of some 1,600.

Mr. Speaker, what we have done over the last year, was to address this manpower shortage, and we have addressed this manpower shortage in a number of ways. In the first instance, the Government has indicated its intention to recruit 750 new officers per year for the next five years, starting in 2008. We have

brought back some 75 officers; recently retired officers in key areas of operations to provide support to law enforcement. We have called out 280 defence force volunteers for them to assist regular defence force personnel so that the interagency task force and the joint army/police patrols can be beefed up to treat with the challenges that we face in our communities, especially during the Christmas and the Carnival periods. What we have done is that we have now allowed approximately 800 normal part-time SRPs to work full time until the end of February to beef again the manpower challenges that we face.

We are also looking at the possibility of buying out the leave of a number of First Division Officers, so that again critical leadership support can be provided. We are also looking at a model adopted in the United Kingdom called "30 Plus". In 30 Plus, that model utilizes the services of competent officers who are due to retire and instead of allowing them to retire, they retire for one day and their services are brought back over a two-year period. In looking at that model, we have a challenge that we have to face and the challenge we have to face is a situation in our law enforcement where there is a huge amount of vacation leave that officers have accumulated. If we are to look at that model, the question about that huge amount of accumulated leave has to be addressed and it is in that context that we are looking at the buying out of the leave of a number of officers designed to provide some immediate relief to the challenge that we face as it relates to the question about law enforcement.

Dr. Moonilal: Why do they call it 30 Plus?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Because I think it is about 30 years that they normally demit the service.

We have also talked about the number of persons whose services we are trying to retain to deal immediately with the shortfall of the service strength.

3.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we have also used technology, to a large extent, to deal with the issue of crime and violence. The Special Anti-crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (SAUTT) has been using technology to drive its operations and the police service utilizing state-of-the-art technology. We have been training our law enforcement officers in modern crime control policing, especially as it relates to the DNA Bill that has now been passed and which we are now operationalizing.

We have established a DNA working group comprising representation from the Attorney General's Office, the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) Office, the Ministry of National Security and the Forensic Science Centre, designed to make

sure that in the shortest time possible we would be in a position to implement DNA. One of the challenges law enforcement faces is with respect to the question of the intimidation of witnesses and the need for more scientific evidence to treat with the prosecution of cases. That is not something unique to Trinidad and Tobago. It is a challenge faced in a number of jurisdictions as it relates to the question of witness intimidation and the failure of witnesses to give evidence in matters, so we are relying as much as possible on scientific evidence.

The Justice Protection Act 2000 was also proclaimed in 2007 and the appropriate regulations to support the Act were also implemented. We also now have in our arsenal the breathalyzer. It is the expectation of Government that the breathalyzer coupled with increased police road patrols would lead to the reduction of carnage on our nation's roads.

The introduction of speed detection devices will reduce the high levels of reckless speeding on the nation's roads and will lead to a reduction in road carnage. This Government recognizes the need for a joint effort with the entire population in this fight against crime. In this regard, we are focusing on building sustainable partnerships between law enforcement and the community and we are providing alternative opportunities for our young people, some of who fall into the trap of criminal activities.

The initiatives include the Citizen Security Programme, which is an IADB/Government of Trinidad and Tobago funded programme focused on providing real opportunities for youths at risk within our communities. Approximately TT \$35 million will be spent over the next two years. The Citizen Security Programme will focus on providing alternative programmes to at risk youths and young persons in our society. The 555 anticrime initiative has already proven to be a very significant factor in the battle against crime; to date, more than 200,000 calls have been received at the 555 call centre. Our citizens through this programme have already saved lives. The 555 anticrime public education programme will soon be implemented in the nation's schools. It will afford teachers and students the opportunity to understand their role in crime prevention and crime reduction.

Arising out of the successfully concluded series of consultations on crime, a non-partisan Crime and Justice Commission headed by Justice Lionel Jones to evaluate the recommendation of the consultation relating to law enforcement and the justice system and to recommend to Cabinet the appropriate legal framework for implementation is relevant.

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The primary functions of the Crime and Justice Commission are, one, to provide a mechanism for experts outside the Government; to provide policymakers and the public with recommendations to reduce crime and improve the administration of justice; two, to receive the public's concerns and ideas about crime and the administration of justice and to convey these views to relevant policy makers and non-government institutions concerned with crime and justice.

The activities of the Crime and Justice Commission will receive the public's views through public hearings in venues around the nation and a website for online forums; hold hearings and convene panels of experts on particular issues of crime and justice; formulate policy recommendations on crime and justice; recommend studies and evaluations that may be needed to gain further insight into problems and policies in the domain of crime and justice, and write reports for Cabinet, other policy makers and the public at large that summarize the Commission's findings, and receive the public's views through public hearings in venues around the nation.

We have since established three ministerial committees to implement, one, a national fingerprint database with the capacity to store the records of each citizen from birth, a procedure adopted in a number of developed countries; two, a structured mentoring programme which utilizes trained professionals to provide one-on-one mentoring for at-risk youths and, three, a sustained national campaign to educate and inculcate sound family values, behaviour modification, civics and positive attitudes utilize all appropriate institutions and channels of communication.

It is the Government's intention to ensure that the prison service continues to play its pivotal role in the fight against crime. Towards that end, its roles and responsibilities are being reviewed through the prison service Transformation Unit. We will continue to pursue the restorative justice philosophy in our prison system, ensuring that convicted persons are provided with intensive support and supervision to help them break with a life of crime. We are already seeing significant progress in this area.

Mr. Speaker, a new parole system in the criminal justice system will be implemented in the next 18 months. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Members: Take your time!

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Having outlined what are some of the measures that we have put in place to deal with the situation with respect to especially gangs and gang-related homicides, let me indicate what we propose to do as it relates to this question.

The Homicide Prevention Working Group will be strengthened. There is also the incorporation of a socially focused component through the Ministry of National Security's Citizens Security Programme. The Citizens Security Programme's steering committee incorporates ministries responsible for socially focused programmes. This will provide the avenue for a coming together of the law enforcement and prosocial ministerial entities. This also represents an interdisciplinary approach, including non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and other organizations whose contributions will impact favourably on crime prevention/reduction programmes. Note that the socially focused ministries have a significant social component; they are the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Development and Gender Affairs, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs and the Ministry of Community Development.

The strengthened Homicide Prevention Working Group's mandate will be, one, refocus and expand the interagency working group, incorporating elements of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the Defence Force and the Special Anti-crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago; to continue to utilize the crime analysis from the crime and problem analysis branch to develop and select focused interventions; evaluate and assess interventions so that the appropriate feedback could be submitted to relevant law enforcement agencies and, finally, broaden and widen the focus based on the displacement that is resulting in known criminal elements seeking seclusion in various rural communities.

There is no gainsaying that this displacement is causing criminals to move from urban to rural areas where they are now engaging in certain criminal activities, hitherto not experienced in some of those rural areas. While I am on that, in response to some concerns expressed in the Brasso and Las Lomas areas, the police are establishing a temporary police post in the Flanagan Town area to take care of the challenge in the Brasso and Las Lomas areas. It is expected that these police posts should be ready for operation before the end of this month. I am sure those who represent these various communities will be seeing a lot of activity taking place as it relates to the establishment of these posts to deal with the Brasso and Las Lomas problem. *[Interruption]* I will speak to that just now.

Dr. Rafeeq: When, when?

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: With respect to the Manzanilla community, a temporary police post will be returning there before the end of the month. Let me just address also the question of accommodation for the police. This Government has invested heavily in improving the accommodation of our police stations. Over

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the last three years some 51 police stations have been refurbished and in some instances renovated. We have been constructing five police stations over the last few years; not six years.

When I was in this House some time ago I indicated that it had taken us almost four years to build four police stations. So far we have taken receipt of the Gasparillo Police Station and the Toco Police Station. We are to take receipt of the Mayaro Police Station and the Tunapuna Police Station, and we are still to take receipt of the Belmont Police Station. As I indicated before and I will indicate again, this Government will not find itself in a similar situation again ever, as it relates to police and fire stations.

There is no way that we ought to take so long. When I say “we”, I am talking about those charged with the responsibility of constructing police stations. In those circumstances, Cabinet has given approval to the Ministry of National Security to enter into new arrangements. I give this honourable House the assurance and, by extension, the national population, there are 18 police stations due to be constructed and they will be constructed in three years' time, because we have now found a formula to treat with that. [*Desk thumping*]

We have taken some unnecessary blows, because we have been accused of having our priorities wrong. It is not as a result of this Government not putting resources in place to deal with police stations; that is not so. It is not blaming. I am stating the facts, hon. Member for Couva South. They have not been able to deliver on our construction programme. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: As a result we have taken unnecessary criticism with respect to our priorities, and that will not happen again.

3.30 p.m.

We have put mechanisms in place, as I said, to deal with the construction of police stations in the shortest order and I give a commitment on behalf of the Government that the 18 police stations carded for construction will be constructed in the next three years. Some time I will come to this Parliament and provide you with a priority list so you will know which ones in 2008, which ones in 2009 and which ones in 2010—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, as previously agreed we will now have a statement by the hon. Attorney General.

INTEGRITY IN PUBLIC LIFE ACT

The Attorney General (Sen. The Hon. Bridgid Annisette-George): Mr. Speaker, I am authorized by the Cabinet to make the following statement:

Mr. Speaker, the Integrity in Public Life Act No. 83 of 2000 brought under its purview persons described as “persons in public life and persons exercising public functions”. Under the Act, persons in public life and persons exercising public functions are regulated through a Code of Conduct, while persons in public life are in addition required to report to the Integrity Commission by making annual declarations of their income and assets and completing an annual register of interests.

The Act also created certain offences and empowered the Integrity Commission to investigate persons coming within its ambit either on its own initiative or on the basis of a complaint made by a member of the public.

The persons who were categorized as persons in public life were specified in the Schedule of the Act which was subsequently widened by the Integrity in Public Life (Amdt.) Act, No. 88 of 2000 to include among other offices judges, and magistrates appointed by the Judicial and Legal Service Commission and members of boards of all statutory bodies and state enterprises including those bodies in which the State has a controlling interest.

The inclusion of judges and magistrates as persons in public life for the purposes of the continuous reporting obligation to the Integrity Commission has been a matter of much public debate and had engaged the attention of this honourable House since December 2004 in a statement made by the former Attorney General.

Mr. Speaker, the question as to whether judges and magistrates ought to be subject to the reporting obligation to the Integrity Commission was addressed in the matter of the Integrity Commission and the Attorney General High Court Action No. 1735 of 2005 in which the learned judge held that judges and magistrates were not subject to the provisions of the Integrity in Public Life Act, 2000.

Further Mr. Speaker, in that matter, questions were also raised regarding the identification of the institutions, agencies and organizations which fell under the designation of all statutory bodies and state enterprises including those bodies in which the State has a controlling interest. The learned judge at paragraph 250 of the aforementioned decision, held that on a proper interpretation:

- (i) all organizations or bodies established by statute; and

- (ii) all businesses or companies controlled by or on behalf of the State were caught by the description of “all statutory bodies and state enterprises”, and that further all persons who are part of the decision-making process or who are responsible for the management of those bodies were governed by the Integrity in Public Life Act.

Additionally, although the honourable judge in the said decision set out a three-pronged formula for the identification of businesses or companies controlled by or on behalf of the State, there still exists confusion in the identification of which organizations qualify under the formula.

The consequences of this decision by the High Court are quite far reaching as a multitude of ordinary citizens are now recognized as falling under the ambit of the Act; a situation which this Parliament certainly did not intend when it amended the Act in 2000.

Mr. Speaker, it now appears that every director and manager of every charitable, sporting, professional, religious and cultural association, organization and society which has been incorporated by an Act of Parliament would have to comply with the annual reporting requirement of making declarations of income and assets and registration of interests to the Integrity Commission and are now potential subjects to investigation by it.

Mr. Speaker, may I crave the indulgence of this honourable House to list some of the organizations, associations and societies affected by this High Court decision. These include the directors and managers of societies such as:

- The Trinidad and Tobago Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals;
- Horticultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago;
- St. Joseph’s Convent Past Pupil Association;
- All the Lions Clubs incorporated by an Act of Parliament.

Sporting associations such as:

- The Trinidad and Tobago Wrestling Association;
- Trinidad and Tobago Football Association;
- Trinidad and Tobago Netball Association and
- The Trinidad and Tobago Secondary Schools Football League.

Other organizations, the likes of:

- Independent Baptist Mission Churches;
- Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha of Trinidad and Tobago;
- SWAHA;
- Soroptimist Club of San Fernando;
- Pan Trinbago;
- Hindu Women's Association of Trinidad and Tobago;
- Trinbago Unified Calypsonians Organization; and
- The National Chutney Association.

Directors and managers of these organizations and other similar bodies are, by the judicial interpretation of the legislation, now held to fall within the ambit of the Integrity in Public Life Act.

Such a situation is, in the Government's view, an unnecessary and untenable encroachment on the lives and privacy of our citizens. Additionally, the burden that shall be placed on the Integrity Commission in the administration of such a scheme could so negatively impact upon its financial and human resources, leading to systemic weakness and preventing the Commission from fulfilling its mandate as set out in section 5 of the Act.

Mr. Speaker, arising from the Government's experience in making appointments to the boards, it appears that many a suitable and well-qualified citizen has shied away from accepting the call to public service on account of the continuous reporting requirements of the Act and the invasive investigative powers of the Integrity Commission as it relates to them, their spouses and their dependent children. The Government, however, has to balance this reality with its international obligations under the several international treaties to which it is a signatory.

Mr. Speaker, as a consequence the Government intends to make legislative changes which will not only meet our international obligations but shall also have as its overarching consideration that the identification of a person in public life in the Act must be consonant with the definition of a public official as commonly understood in our cultural context. As a starting point the Government shall reconsider the underlying policy of the repealed Integrity in Public Life Act, 1987.

Mr. Speaker, the Government further intends to closely scrutinize the procedure for making complaints to the Integrity Commission and the consequential procedure for investigation.

This Government ascribes to the principles of integrity, honesty and transparency in public life. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago in its operational plan 2007—2010 for the achievement of Vision 2020, speaks to one of the pillars of Vision 2020 as promoting effective Government. The Government has deliberately put the spotlight on the issue of effective government, since this serves as a catalyst for change in our society and a main driver of improvements in the quality of life in the country.

Mr. Speaker, the Government appreciates that it must lead by example, and therefore, must itself function in accordance with the highest standards of public accountability, transparency, efficiency and integrity and must subject itself and its officials to scrutiny and disclosure.

However, the Government recognizes that protection must also be afforded to civic-minded, well-qualified and suitable citizens who have made and are willing to make themselves available to public service from being unnecessarily and unjustifiably harassed by a microscopic inquisition based on a spurious or vindictive complaint and that there must exist adequate safeguards against persons in public life falling victim to unjustified and irreparable damage to their reputation.

At present, Mr. Speaker, any person who wishes to make an allegation against a person in public life needs only to do so in writing. In contrast to other jurisdictions with similar legislation, there is no requirement in the Integrity in Public Life Act, 2000 mandating the accuser to verify his complaint on oath or to provide supporting evidence to establish reasonable belief in his complaint or even to supply evidence to support that his allegations are of any substance. This cuts across a fundamental principle of natural justice that he who alleges must prove.

It is now quite apparent that this very lax procedure for laying complaints may amount to a licence to the public to engage in frivolous and malicious complaints to the Integrity Commission, leading to the investigation of such complaints amounting to a waste of the Commission's time and resources and causing injury to falsely accused persons.

It is here, Mr. Speaker, that I wish to quote Mr. Stephenson King of the United Workers Party in St. Lucia, who presented a paper entitled: *Pursuing Integrity in Public Life*, on May 30, 2005. He noted, and I quote:

“Public scrutiny is a continuous thing, but we all must understand our role is not to embarrass public officials, but to monitor their behaviour to ensure that it is consistent with the principles of integrity.”

In the Government’s view, this is a statement that any Integrity Commission should wish to use as its beacon.

Mr. Speaker, one can therefore expect that in presenting legislative amendments to the Integrity in Public Life Act, this Government shall ensure that enshrined in the Act, will be procedures for the laying of complaints, and for the pursuit of investigations by the Commission which reflect and mandate compliance with the principles of natural justice.

Mr. Speaker, the Government shall be inviting the Opposition to lend its support in due course to the passage of appropriate amending legislation, which shall ensure that the legislation complies in all respects with the supreme law of the land and streamlines the Integrity in Public Life Act to focus more accurately and precisely on the objectives for which it was originally intended.

The Government assures this honourable House, and by extension, the citizens of the nation, that in the consideration of amendments the Government shall hold true to the seven accepted essentials necessary for beating corruption, that is to say:

- Political will and commitment;
- Strong laws that reflect the values of the community combined with effective investigative powers;
- A clear, complete, coherent strategy for the elimination of opportunities for corruption from the system which is aimed at both prevention and education;
- Coordinated action resulting from such a coherent strategy;
- Provision of adequate resources;
- Enlistment of public support in flagging breaches; and
- Exhibiting the requisite endurance and commitment in the eradication of the potential for corruption for those in public life.

3.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, may I add that gaining and keeping the public trust must be approached holistically and this Government intends to continue to approach the issues of integrity, transparency and accountability in a holistic manner.

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Finally, I wish to end by stating that this administration unreservedly recommits itself to upholding the rule of law and the principles of natural justice and to foster further, these principles in all of its affairs.

I thank you.

GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO COMBAT CRIME

Sen. The Hon. M. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, I was indicating the measures to address the gang-related homicides; that the Homicide Prevention Working Group would be strengthened and I indicated how we are going to strengthen it. I also indicated the mandate that the Homicide Prevention Working Group would be given. The establishment also of more stringent guidelines for the reporting of the Homicide Prevention Working Group, the rules on protocol governing the functioning of the Homicide Prevention Working Group to ensure accountability under the direct supervision of the Commissioner of Police.

With respect to the Homicide Bureau of Investigation, its capacity would be strengthened through a formal arrangement between the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago in the investigation of gang-related homicides. Additionally, the UK officers will play an increased mentoring role for homicide investigations.

Focused training for detectives, investigators and their supervisors will improve the capacity and skills of investigation officers. With respect to the Repeat Offenders Programme, it has been able to contain criminal activity in some of the targeted areas. Recent training from the George Mason University team and the provision of requisite resources from the Ministry of National Security have provided the task force with increased competence in addressing gang operations. The Repeat Offenders Programme Task Force would be realigned to utilize crime data analysis from CAPA, build criminal cases against repeat violent offenders and arrest them.

The Inter-Agency Task Force commenced its operations in July 2003, with a combination of army and police personnel as a unit responsible for crime suppression. While the entity has enjoyed some successes, the time has come for a review of the effectiveness of the unit in the current environment. As such the Task Force would be refocused to provide increased gang suppression support in targeted areas. A committee will provide the final structure and leadership of this Task Force in the next ten days. There will be greater involvement of the defence force in law enforcement. Tangible results which will allow the defence force to work independently of the police service are being developed. Currently the

defence force operates at the lowest end of the continuum, that is aid to the civilian authority as part of the Inter-agency Task Force and in joint police/army patrols, to the highest end of the continuum, that is powers under a state of emergency. This measure seeks to locate a strengthened defence force team in the continuum that would significantly impact on gang-related activities with greater effect.

Mr. Speaker, not only are we beefing up efforts to reduce the inflow of illicit drugs into the country, we are also going to deal more aggressively with those in the retailing of drugs. The retailing of drugs on the streets of our neighbourhood strengthens the inability of families to keep children on a straight path to being well educated, productive citizens.

In the first quarter of this year, the police service will roll out a comprehensive programme to disrupt and diminish the level of retail drug trafficking in its neighbourhoods. The police service will use its growing crime analysis capabilities to map drug hot spots and then operational units will work together to make frequent interventions that will stamp out drug selling and buying. The police service will also work closely with other parts of the criminal justice system so that the cases against arrested drug offenders will result in successful prosecutions so that offenders would receive justice on a timely basis.

Immediately, an inspectorate audit team will be established to visit all police divisions to conduct audits of human resource issues, infrastructure and the various processes. The inspectorate will interview junior officers, the business community and the wider community. The derived benefit is that supervisory officers accountable will now be closely examined and will begin to ensure that their staff officers are enforcing the laws across the fullest spectrum. This focus will provide society with improved policing. This Government continues to be committed to ensuring that the police service and all law enforcement agencies have the resources they require to continue to pursue a tough effective strategy to stamp out crime and make our community safer.

We are also going to concentrate on getting the right people in leadership positions and holding them accountable. The strategies we have been seeking to implement have for the most part been sound, but must be properly implemented and to do so we need to ensure that the leadership and management of our law enforcement agencies, especially the police service, is up to par with the task.

Mr. Speaker, to make the kind of impact on crime that is necessary and demanded by the public, the police service must itself step up its operation even further to deal with those who pose the greatest threat to the safety and security of our country. The police service must work to restore public confidence and trust

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in its ability to exercise its duties and enforce our laws with integrity. Government intends to fulfill our social and moral responsibilities to the people of this country. As the honourable Prime Minister said, the solution to crime is not an overnight one. It takes a lot of effort, but we are going to try until we get it right. I am confident and optimistic that the improved and increased collaborative and coordinated efforts of our law enforcement and other support agencies will lead to a sustained reduction in crime.

I give the commitment that the Government through the Ministry of the National Security will continue to inform the Parliament and the national community of all the developments that are taking place in law enforcement in this country. We generally build a strong Trinidad and Tobago where people can raise their families, do business, visit and live, if we work together to make sure that people feel safe in their homes and in their communities.

I beg to move.

Question proposed.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. At the beginning, let me say that on another occasion one would have eagerly sought your leave to welcome new members to this Chamber and to express best wishes to all Members at the beginning of this year 2008. But, Mr. Speaker, given the gravity of the matter we are dealing with; given the seriousness of the national population on this matter, I will waste very little time in welcoming new Members and no time to wish them well, given the topic with which we are dealing—crime: insecurity, fear, murder and kidnapping.

Mr. Speaker, after listening to the Minister of National Security for about 75 minutes, I ask myself whether any citizen is feeling safer; whether any citizen will decide to step out of his or her home, open his or her burglar proofing, go on the streets, go to the movies; whether any citizen will be reassured by the statement in which the Minister has said absolutely nothing new. [*Desk thumping*]

It is shameless that this Government should come to this House and regurgitate all of these policies, plans and measures it has been speaking about for six years. I will quote from the social review of their budget documents and I will demonstrate that the Minister of National Security received a brief from his office which allowed him to repeat every single thing they have been saying for six years—everything that has not worked.

I begin by reading one part of what should have been in the Minister's statement. I read one page that should have been in the Minister's statement a few minutes ago. I did not hear him; I do not know if I missed it, but the Minister should have ended that statement with the following words.

The Hon. Patrick Manning, MP
Prime Minister,
Office of the Prime Minister,
Whitehall,
29 Maraval Road,
Port of Spain.
January 07, 2008.
Hon. Prime Minister,

I have painfully taken note of the widespread public outcry surrounding the unprecedented spate of criminal activity over the recent past, culminating in the highest rate of murder of 388 in 2007, and the continuing failure of our best efforts to curtail such criminal activity and violence.

It is now widely believed and accepted that under my stewardship as your Minister of National Security we have failed to manage the spate of criminal activity which has engulfed our country leading to widespread and deep public fear, insecurity and trauma.

In contemplation of the highest convention of ministerial responsibility in our Westminster system of government, I hereby tender my resignation with immediate effect as Minister of National Security.

Yours faithfully

Senator Martin Joseph.

I invite you, on behalf of all right-thinking citizens of this country, to sign this and pass it to the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, this is what the nation expected. This is what the nation wanted as the first step of this Government's suggestion that it has compassion and giving reassurance that it is serious about dealing with the spate of criminal activity and violence in this country. This is what the nation is craving as a first step.

This Government is attempting to hoodwink the population. It is a public relations gimmick to suggest, after six years, that they are serious about murder, kidnapping, rape and robbery.

4.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, by bringing this Motion: Be it resolved that this honourable House take note of Government's efforts to combat crime, the Minister is on public record. He said that they have failed. His efforts have failed. He admitted that.

Mr. S. Panday: Thursday.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thirteen private sector organizations complimented him on his admission of failure. In fact, it must be a banana republic. Usually, organizations will compliment a minister on his success. This is a case where 13 organizations complimented a minister on the admission of his failure. When that happened, the Prime Minister jumped up, as he is wont to do, and said: "No, no, no, he did not admit that he failed. He partially admitted that he failed." We, of course, understood—knowing the Prime Minister for all these years—the problem. The issue is simply this, his efforts have failed but he has not failed to bring effort. That is what they are suggesting. His efforts have failed. He admitted it this afternoon in his contribution. We took note at every point; failure to implement, failure to succeed. There was the euphemistic language to suggest failure. That is where we find ourselves.

The Minister, ignorant of the tradition of this type of system, continues in office, oblivious to the fact that the national community is demanding that the Government take strong action. This was the opportunity for the Minister to come to this House and tell us, in concrete terms, what he is doing. Tell us your targets, so that we can quantify and measure. Tell us by Friday 11th, 12th or whatever. Tell us at the end of this week what the population can expect. Tell us your targets. What did the Minister do? He came back and repeated data from Budget Speech 2003 and data from the Review of the Social Development Programme, 2005; every single thing, word for word, as if he will bring some assurance to this population.

We are at a stage in this country, under this Prime Minister—his office was burglarized in San Fernando.

Hon. Member: Who?

Dr. R. Moonilal: The Office of the Prime Minister.

Dr. Gopeesingh: He did not want the police, he wanted SAUTT.

Dr. R. Moonilal: He wanted the Special Anti-crime Unit to attend. When they burglarized his office on "the Coffee", the police said that they admired the tenacity of the thieves.

On the weekend, at the Caura River—there are citizens who would like to escape the depression of crime and the sense of despair—bandits raided persons at gunpoint. Now, if you are going to Caura River you have to write a list: do not forget to take the firecracker, your bathing suit, rubber slipper and bulletproof vest. That is what this country has reached to. You are not safe.

This is a country where, in 2007, we saw the bloodiest year in our history. They have come back with the same nonsense about institutional strengthening. One just has to reflect on this matter and invite the Minister. It is not too late. You are taking a copy of my letter. I took the liberty of assisting you, so that you will not be burdened with such a pain, to tender your resignation and allow someone else with greater expertise or experience to deal with this matter. Minister, you admitted that you underestimated the task of running the Ministry of National Security and dealing with crime. You admitted that. You came to this House during the budget debate. Do you remember when we were asking you about the police station, you said, we can never forget: “Well I doh know why they did not build the police station. Ah mean, I am not holding my breath because I doh know when they will build it.” You said that in the budget debate. Now you are telling us—this is January. In October you said do not hold your breath because you “doh know when they building police station”. In January you are telling us that in three years, 18 police stations will be built and we can take that to the bank. That bank will be robbed. The Minister has admitted his failure to the national community.

I want to leave the Minister alone at this point. Who do you think you are fooling, the media, citizens out there, or the Opposition, maybe? I do not know who you think you are fooling, but you are not fooling anyone.

Mr. Minister, I truly believe that you are living on another planet.

Mr. S. Panday: Mars. He is a Martian.

Dr. R. Moonilal: You cannot be on this planet. The problem in this country with crime does not require any sophisticated thinking, all this policy and philosophy. Last Thursday, I would give you two examples, in Ste. Madeleine, the unprotected constituency of San Fernando East, young men were on the road fighting, throwing bottles and hurling abuses at each other. I called 999 and made a report. They took the information. Within 10 minutes the Ste. Madeleine Police Station called me on my mobile number, which I used. The police officer was very kind and identified himself. I said: “Look, there are young men fighting on the road and hurling abuses and flinging bottles. I have not seen any guns. It is 9

o'clock in the night and I cannot see and I am not going to look." The officer said: "Sir, we will try to assist. The problem is that we have a car, but we have no driver. He went on seven days' sick leave." That is the problem. The 999 service called me back a few minutes later. Like good performance management, they are following up to see what has happened to the complaint. The person called back and a voice came on. He said: "Sir, I am just following up to know if the police have taken action. We need to follow up." I told the personnel at 999 that the police station called. They have a car but they have no driver. He said: "Oh shocks." That was it. That does not require reforming the Homicide Investigation Bureau, the philosophy about crime, masculinity and all these types of things. That does not require that. That requires getting the driver; deployment of human resources.

In Sangre Grande there was a case in the newspaper recently. The problem is resources. The police complain time and again. For six years we have been hearing the same complaint. We have some details to share as we go along. This is not a situation where you have to give us long-term philosophy and sophisticated policy. We know the world has crime and we do not want to know that anymore. We watch television. We do not want to know about crime in the international community and the region.

You have people living in a hole in Trinidad and Tobago. When you come to this House and speak about the reduction in the kidnapping rate and that kidnapping is not as high as it was before, that is not because of your actions. That is not because of the police. There are reasons for that. There are people in the society; businessmen and women, who are paying money, extortion, to protect their families. Many businessmen and women who perceive that they might be victims migrate or operate with a new development where they have a semi-migratory pattern. They live in Trinidad for three months, go to Miami for three months, come back and go back. In a way, they are sometimes here and sometimes not here. They run their business from another country, where they have faith in the Minister of National Security.

Also, persons who believe that they might be victims of kidnapping, lockdown themselves. At 4.00 p.m. or 4.30 p.m. they go in their homes and padlock the doors. They have double burglarproofing.

Mr. Maharaj: Shops close at 6 o'clock.

Dr. R. Moonilal: They close up and lock up tight. They do not go out to the church functions or recreation.

Dr. Gopeesingh: People being killed by the churchyards now.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Somebody was killed behind the model police station.

Dr. Gopeesingh: In the churchyard.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Over the last few days—[*Interruption*] I will come to that. Many citizens in this country now depend on their own survival strategies to protect themselves. Businessmen will go out and round-up 10 persons to go with them. They move in a convoy, so if anything is happening they have three or four vehicles and they then lockdown themselves in the night. You are paranoid. You have three or four cellular phones in case you are nabbed. You may have a cellular phone in your socks. That is where we are. Businessmen are adopting their own creative survival strategies. In some measure, they are doing that to protect themselves. When you see the reduction in kidnapping, do not feel it is because the police—You cannot see a police. If you drive up and down the highway you would not see a police.

I remember being in London last year and the Commissioner of Police addressed a Commonwealth Parliamentary group. The Commissioner said to us: “I want you to walk on the streets of London and if in 10 minutes, you have not seen a police officer call me. I will take disciplinary action immediately. You could be outside for 10 hours in Trinidad and Tobago and you would not see a police officer. You would not see them. I will get into this matter of the Special Anti-crime Unit. I remember—they are always declaring war on the criminals. You all should stop declaring war; declare peace.

In the budget statement of October 06, 2003 read by the Member for San Fernando East—I would read a small section:

“Mr. Speaker...”

It was the same Speaker as today, Sir.

“the level of security enjoyed by citizens is the most critical problem facing Trinidad and Tobago today. The population is being terrorized as the criminals have declared virtual war on the society.

The Government must and shall respond. Accordingly, we now declare war on the criminals and shall do whatever is necessary,...to return this nation to that state where our people can conduct their lives in full safety...”

The Prime Minister went on.

“With immediate effect, Colonel Peter Joseph is relieved of his command as Commanding Officer of the Trinidad and Tobago Regiment and mandated to establish a special Crime Fighting Unit.”

This is the Prime Minister declaring war on the criminals.

“To undertake this most important assignment, Colonel Joseph is promoted to the rank of Brigadier with immediate effect.”

Thank you.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: 2003.

Dr. R. Moonilal: 2003! He declared war. I will quote later from this document and suggest to you that absolutely nothing is new. We thought the Minister would come and tell us how many more police vehicles we will have by Friday and of manpower deployment with immediate effect. They are talking about a mobile post in Las Lomas. The newspaper reported that the mobile post's clutch is not working. They had to get a spare part from somewhere and they did not get it. You could deploy what you want, it is not operational and that is the crisis we face in the society today.

The Minister is right when he said that his efforts have failed to provide security. You do not know if they are blaming the police on the one hand or not blaming the police on the other. We speak about the police; the same police they are talking about who cannot implement at every point. That is the same police they want to institute for 30-plus. They want to bring back the same officers; the officers they are complaining will not implement the changes they are suggesting. They are coming back with 30-plus. Presumably, the Commissioner of Police, Deputy Commissioner and executive officers may sign up for 30-plus and return. They may not have had 11-plus but will sign up for 30-plus. You are taking the group of people whom you said cannot implement and your policy is to recruit them back into the service. They are not about that.

I thought the Minister would have come to this House and said that he is passing a law that senior executive police officers should not attend fetes.

Every time you see the Commissioner of Police, Deputy Commissioner or Head of Regiment, they are in British descended garb, knocking champagne glasses and having Johnny Walker Black, guzzling scotch and wolfing down shrimp.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the police service is feting. In fact, the Commissioner of Police has already distributed invitations to his carnival fete. He is planning his carnival fete. He is not planning to catch murderers, kidnappers and bandits, but he is

planning a carnival fete. That is the big item on the agenda for the end of the month, and not what you are talking about. At the end of the month is the police carnival fete and security will be tight there. That is what they are concerned about. So, all these initiatives that we are hearing from the Minister will come to naught. To deliver that statement is to suggest contempt.

Today, we are debating a Motion on crime, and we had ministerial statements galore. Finally, we learnt about the dangers of smoking from the Minister of Health, but he could have directed us to the *British Medical Journal*. [*Desk thumping*]

The new Minister of Social Development, the Member for Diego Martin Central—with the greatest of respect, this is the first sitting, and I really should not be targeting the Minister. At the end of the Minister's presentation, I asked my colleague: What did the Minister say at the beginning? This is what they are doing. We are dealing with crime and we have learnt about antenatal strategies. That is their views and their perspectives on crime.

Mr. Speaker, I hope the population is taking note. The Minister came to this House and said that as the Minister of National Security, he does not like to go to Cabinet and tell them about targets, because he may not reach his targets. This is national security. Murder! Mayhem!

Hon. Joseph: On a point of order.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I am going to allow you to talk after the tea break. [*Interruption*]

Hon. Joseph: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, the Member is misleading this House on what I said.

Dr. Gopeesingh: What did you say? [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Dr. R. Moonilal: The Minister told us that in 2007 the murder rate—he has identified homicides as the key indicator of crime—went up by 4.5 per cent, and that is the increase in the key indicator, but there is a suggestion that okay, we are working, but 4.5 per cent is not a huge increase, but 4.5 per cent of 388 is 17. So, if the murder rate goes up this year to over 400, that is only a 4.5 increase. In fact, if the murder rate goes up by 4.1 per cent you might be doing well, but it is going up by less. That is the approach. They did the same thing with inflation. That is how they calculate. The Minister also told us about Trinidad and Tobago being

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close to Venezuela. Well, thank God for this revelation. [*Laughter*] I would have been robbed had I not presented myself today.

We are hearing the same rubbish about the 360 degree radar. We have been hearing about this radar since 2003, and the importance of the radar in dealing with the drug trade; targets were not achieved; the Homicide Bureau was not staffed;—I like this one which was an implementation issue—388 dead and today 14 persons are dead! This was an implementation issue “388 dead and 14 as of now dead.”

The Inter-Agency Task Force became diluted. I love that one. Fourteen persons were murdered, but the Inter-Agency Task Force became diluted. I like that. There is no passion to fight crime; no compassion for the victims. Many persons were murdered and kidnapped, and did you see a government Minister, in the last incarnation—many of them are new—at the home of a victim or the relative of a victim extending some sympathy or compassion? Never! The Prime Minister never did that. He is busy teaching people ballroom dancing. [*Laughter*] He has no time to go to anybody's home when there is a kidnap victim! Mr. Speaker, there is no compassion and this is why you will not see it reflected in policy, action and implementation. It is going to be dismissed as an issue of implementation.

Mr. Speaker, they could not deal with crime for six years—six years they could not prevent crime; and for six years they could not have taken steps that would make a mark with respect to the battle on crime, and they have come today to ask us to take note of their failure.

“Be it resolved that the honourable House take note of their failure.”

That is what it is, but without concrete steps. This will bring no relief to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago; absolutely none!

The goodly Minister spoke about the Citizen Security Programme, a programme that was funded by the Inter-American Development Bank in November 2005. This is January 2008, and we are still in the process of establishing machinery and institutions to give effect to the Citizen Security Programme. Five police stations were built in six years, but 18 police stations are to be built in two years. Mr. Speaker, I do not know who the Minister is trying to fool. I have absolutely no idea. It will not be the national community, but himself. This is why I advise him that it is not too late to get a hold on the letter I read at the beginning and sign it and stamp it.

Mr. Speaker, crime will not be dealt with by this Government. There is a reason for that. Mr. Speaker, if you want to understand the problem that we are facing today with murder, violence and criminal activity, you need to understand, why? The “why” is not Venezuela, Barbados and Jamaica. Where were those countries between 1995 and 2001? Were they in the Pacific? They were there.

We know the geography and the problems and so forth with drugs. There are reasons to explain the rapid escalation in criminal activities and violence beyond normal. There are reasons. Mr. Speaker, I will deal with the reasons. No number of retreats—in fact, the Minister started on the wrong foot. They went up to Toco—

Dr. Gopeesingh: In Salybia. [*Interruption*]

Dr. R. Moonilal:—and between lunch and happy hour they were discussing crime. Now, you could have met 12 persons in Port of Spain in a boardroom and discussed crime. From the Minister’s presentation today, what did the Minister discuss for those two days in Toco? These are the same things that were in the Social Sector Investment Programme in 2004. What did you do in Toco?

Mr. Speaker, the citizens of this country will not be comforted. The relatives of Samdaye Mootilal, Ravin Manwah, Elizabeth Sutherland, Sean Luke, Vindra Naipaul-Coolman, Rebecca Soogrim and Russell John would not be comforted by the Minister’s statement. They may get some temporary relief if the Minister signs the letter that I gave him, but they will not be comforted. They would not feel secure in the morning, during the day and in the afternoon, because the Minister has not outlined any concrete steps. All his long-term measures will come to naught. If you do not have the political will, management and courage you cannot fight crime in this country. You just cannot. You are involved in bureaucracy and administration—writing letters and so forth.

Mr. Speaker, even the fire service is complaining. They do not have enough manpower, proper equipment and so forth, but that is another matter for another day.

The issues facing us are practical. That is the point. There are practical problems and practical challenges that require short term responses. Long term is good. We could talk about theory on policy and so forth forever, but you are required to do certain things now.

The police service has been complaining—not today, not yesterday—for several years now about deployment and manpower resources. There are Special Reserve Police officers who have been recruited and cannot be provided with

uniforms. There are a limited number of bullet proof vests available for police officers; there are no pocket diaries; and the vehicles are not sufficient.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: And they have spent \$17 billion.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Do you know where the \$17 billion went? It went to the Special Anti-Crime Unit of Trinidad and Tobago (SAUTT) and that unit has served as the greatest demotivating factor in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. [*Desk thumping*]

When you took officers without transparency and without rhyme or reason—you selected them by your own whim and fancy to go in the Special Anti-Crime Unit to get \$5,000 more and other benefits like housing, hotel accommodation and meals and you demoted the hard-working and honest policemen in the divisions. [*Desk thumping*] These officers then said: Why are we supervising five police stations when somebody is getting \$5,000 more than us? Who are they accounting to?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Is it the Attorney General?

Dr. R. Moonilal: When we asked the Minister of National Security in this House for the names of these officers we could not get them. We found out that the package was superior to the hard-working, dedicated and honest police officers in the divisions. [*Interruption*] Because of that, you have this state where you do not have a balance. There is this disparity where inspectors are getting more money than assistant superintendents and superintendents and so forth. You have demotivated the police service.

When you have officers in these police stations that are closing down, where rats are falling down from the ceiling and where they could walk and break their feet on the ground—I think Manzanilla Police Station is in a Post Office—when you do that you demotivate police officers. All the theory about motivation and performance management and Mastroski and so forth—\$80 million was paid to Mastroski to tell you something from a US textbook on social justice on criminal behaviour! They cut and paste a textbook and took \$80 million from this Government for that. They have been reforming the police service six years now and nothing has been done.

The Minister had a golden opportunity today to tell us something as it relates to reporting on the findings of the enquiry into the allegations of Superintendent Chandarbhan Maharaj who made stinging allegations against police officers. The Minister had an opportunity to tell us about the report and to give us an update of that report dealing with corruption in the police service, but there was no word on that matter, but the Homicide Bureau is to be restructured.

There was a statement in the newspaper about the establishment of a new unit; the National Information Centre and so forth, and the Minister did not say anything about that, so I assume that is incorrect. They are establishing another unit now. That is the problem.

Mr. Speaker, do you know that all the policemen are in some specialized unit and there are no policemen to walk on the road? Everybody is in a specialized unit. You cannot get a police officer to go to the scene of a crime. Everyone is in a specialized unit. There are more units than police officers. That speaks to incompetence; it speaks to the lack of management on the part of the Minister of National Security.

Minister, we have nothing personal against you, I just want to tell you that. I would be happy if you could retreat to Balisier House and do what you were doing before. You were doing some voluntary clerical work there and we will be happy with that. We have nothing personal against the Minister, but the problem is that the Minister has failed. His efforts have failed and he has admitted it today. Many of the Minister's policies have not been implemented. There is a point when you cannot blame much other people. You just have to say, look, they are my policies and I am responsible. I am the Minister of National Security and under my watch we have had the bloodiest period in our history, and do the honourable thing. Who knows, 25 business organizations may compliment you then and not 13. Who knows, you could be a hero. Mr. Speaker, when the Minister rehashes these things it really affects us.

The Government is guilty of fuelling and sponsoring crime. After they have spent \$1 billion in the Unemployment Relief Programme (URP), that is partly responsible for the crime that we are facing today. I am going to speak about this later.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the sitting of the House is suspended for tea and we will resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Oropouche.

Dr. R. Moonilal: The Member for Oropouche East, thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, before the tea break I was alluding to the fact that in this war on crime it was incumbent upon the Government to reflect as to what were the causal factors that led us to such a grave situation; that led us to a situation with criminal

activity and violence that appears almost irreversible given the spate of murders that has plagued this country.

For the last six years you would be aware that those of us on the Opposition Benches then, were arguing that the Government was either directly, indirectly, inadvertently, innocently or wilfully participating in the sponsorship of crime. And we were suggesting that the Government under the guise of social expenditure, of make-work programmes and so on, had been farming out and contracting large chunks of the social expenditure budget to criminal gangs, criminal enterprise and therein fuelling the spate of criminal activity.

It is not a surprise to us when we are reading the newspaper, listening to the news and you hear that a victim or victims are employed in the URP, a foreman, labourer; somehow you do not hear that they are employed at the Airports Authority, Petrotrin, Seereram Brothers or elsewhere, but involved in make-work programmes of the Government. And over the years beginning from that fateful meeting between the Member for San Fernando East, the Prime Minister and who he deemed to be community leaders, the Government sought an approach of farming out contracts, farming out moneys to community leaders in the hope, maybe innocently, that you can inculcate some type of positive values, work ethics and develop—

Mr. Dumas: Kicking down back doors.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I will come to the Member for Tobago East in a while, because he actually has a role to play in this very matter. I do not know what happened in the other place but you would get an opportunity here to speak. The Member for Diego Martin West in an earlier incarnation as Minister of Local Government acknowledged that there were problems associated with the URP and there were—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Tobago East.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Tobago East; Tobago West was concerned with another criminal activity and another matter involving the Integrity Commission; I will speak about that in a while. The Member for Tobago East, as Minister of Local Government, alluded to the fact that there was a need to look at the URP programme, to assess the programme and to see whether or not, in fact, criminal gangs and so on were also involved in the programme.

Mr. Speaker, six years or so ago, the former Member for Arouca North, the hon. Jarrette Narine, when he was responsible for the URP, also came to the House and indicated that it was time the Government clean up the URP and get criminal

elements, if they were there, out of the programme; the Member for Tobago East had a similar thinking.

The Member for Tobago East would want to remind himself of an editorial in the *Newsday* on Saturday, January 05, 2008, titled "Dismantle URP", in which the editor is making the claim:

“...that the PNM regime was supposed to have done this already.”

To clean up the URP.

“In 2005, then-Local Government Minister Rennie Dumas promised to clean up the URP—the first time any Government Minister had even admitted that there was something to be cleaned up. Mr. Dumas spoke about rotating labourers so everyone gets a share, assured that ghost gangs had been reduced, told contractors that their contracts would be aborted if projects went over the deadlines,... To date, no word has been heard about any of these initiatives—but the fact that no arrests have been made for URP-related fraud suggests that no significant changes actually occurred. And gang related murders, several connected to the URP, continue to rise.”

They began by looking at the URP as a social programme. I remember the former Member of Parliament for Diego Martin Central, “Citizen Ken”, as he is known now—said in this honourable House, if you do not deal with these groups of people by providing work, social programmes and so on, they may come back to sting you. And I told him on that occasion that you must not keep corbeau as pets, they would dig out your eye eventually, and they have been doing that.

Every member, every community leader, everyone who met with the Prime Minister, I think by now they have all been murdered; the only person alive from that room is the Prime Minister—everybody. Those are the community leaders that you met, you treated with and provided large chunks of taxpayers’ money, so that they would recruit labour and collect that type of money.

Mr. Speaker, I want to tell you when we talk about money what we are talking about. In 2003, the budget for URP was \$125 million; by 2004, \$125 million turned to \$313 million. When we calculate based upon budget documents, this Prime Minister under his previous administration spent \$1.5 billion between 2003 to 2007 on URP. We have no investigation yet; we have no report to tell us where this money went. All the fraud that was taking place we have no report; nobody has been charged, so we do not know and we are arguing that until and unless you deal with Government expenditure in the social sector, that fund and channel of moneys to criminal enterprise, you cannot deal with crime; you just cannot.

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I do not want to scare away our new Members of this House; I mean I may even be welcoming in some regard. I want to advise the new Members coming here and those newly appointed Ministers and so on, be very wary of all that URP infrastructure that you have around you in your constituency office and that you are now meeting and treating with, because already I know there are complaints among new Members about threats, violence, warning and so on for contracts. So, let them keep a note of that.

Mr. Speaker, the Community Enhancement and Regeneration Programme for 2003, under the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs spent \$193 million, and it is stated in a budget document, Social Sector Investment Programme, that community leaders are consulted to develop a plan of works to be undertaken in depressed communities; now that sounds laudable, sounds commendable. But when you take \$193 million, interface with community leaders, many of whom are alive today and dead tomorrow, you are fuelling violent crime and gang warfare. [*Desk thumping*] That is what they have been doing.

This type of money is also being used today to recruit entrants from the secondary school system. There are secondary schools in this country that are breeding grounds for young criminals; a recruitment centre where contractors with money, some of it coming from the Government go to the secondary schools and recruit criminal elements at a tender age.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the speaking time of the Member for Oropouche East has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [*Mr. H. Partap*]

Question put and agreed to.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and colleagues on both sides of the House. This tendency for the Government to use its social sector programme to fuel crime is a serious and fundamental cause of this level of criminal activity that we are witnessing today, and unless the Government addresses that matter, all of your homicide restructuring, radar and how much gunship and gunboat will come to zero if you continue to fuel crime under the guise of social sector spending. And that is one programme we are talking about, there are others.

While that has been happening, the Prime Minister—hopefully being misquoted—outlined a trial and error approach. For the Prime Minister, if plan A does not work, you go to plan B; if plan B does not work, you go to plan C; and then when you reach plan Z, what you do, like the number plate, you go to plan AA. You cannot approach crime like that—in that flippant way. You must be stern enough to set targets and when Ministers and/or department heads fail to realize targets, some action should be taken. That is how you hold your Government accountable.

The Prime Minister will also need to be mindful of one other important issue in the battle against the criminal enterprise. Now whether you like it or not, while the PNM has a parliamentary majority in the wider society they are in a minority. Because the majority of citizens who burdened themselves to go to the voting booth voted against the Member for San Fernando East. The majority who took the time and effort, got there, and stood up in the line, they voted against you. After claiming how much you have done and how much you have spent, the majority of people decided that they wanted no part of you. So, while you have a parliamentary majority and that is fine, the wider society is not in support of that Government. [*Interruption*] I am not arguing who is in support of the Opposition, I am telling you your position. I am telling you your position, that is important, and I will tell you why it is important. Mr. Speaker, please, I will not interfere with these political virgins on the other side. Let me address the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker: One minute please. A little crosstalk is not bad and is acceptable, but do not forget we have a Hansard reporter here who is in the middle of all this crosstalk. Please continue.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, Mr. Prime Minister, the point I am making is that when you lead a government in this way, in that national context you have to be mindful of your obligation to consult, your obligation to work in partnership with several forces in the society, because your political party by definition cannot represent the majority. So, if the Government decides that it would continue with the same arrogance, same reckless, "we in office, we could do anything we want, we here, we win", if you decide that that is the approach, you are in for some shock and awe over the short term, because the majority of people who troubled themselves would not support you. That is all I am suggesting, in fact it might be in my interest for you to be arrogant too. I am suggesting that when you lead a government in this social context, you need to be mindful that the minority of citizens are in support of your political party.

It is not that the Government and the Prime Minister were completely inept and they were completely incompetent; they were successful in some way; I think they put up street lights—the Street Lighting Programme; the Cocoyea Roundabout looking now like Dubai. *[Interruption]* Oh, yes, we have a dance orchestra or something like that.

They took all their energy to hound down the Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago; 25 police officers by the Chief Justice house on a Friday evening. The Chief Justice hiding in the official residence of the Chief Justice; a wanted man. The Project Manager did not return as Attorney General; where is he, we do not know; we do not know what he is up to. He was the project manager of that campaign to remove the Chief Justice. They hounded down the Chief Justice; the Mustill Report is there. I do not know the Prime Minister, surprisingly, is not fond of jumping up this year as he was in the previous years; you know he regularly interrupts Opposition speakers.

5.15 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister may well want to tell us whether or not he extended an apology to the Chief Justice of Trinidad and Tobago for bringing him into disrepute, humiliation and malicious prosecution, when the Mustill Report indicated that you had no grounds, and the Prime Minister told the Chief Justice to resign or face prosecution. That is what he told him, resign or face prosecution! He did not resign; he stood up. Today, vindicated in office—at least for a few hours again—and the Prime Minister should have apologized to the Chief Justice. *[Desk thumping]*

Mr. Ramnath: And to the country.

Dr. R. Moonilal: And to the country. *[Interruption]* And when you were doing that the criminal elements were running wild because they know you are not interested in them; you are interested in Satnarine Sharma and the Member for Couva North, the former Prime Minister. Twenty-five policemen armed to their teeth searching his house every week. That is where the resources went to. All of the resources went to the Anti-Corruption Bureau. They did not have time to check for murderer, kidnapper, robbery and violence in the society. *[Interruption]*

Those on the other side who read; I am convinced there are persons there who are reading regularly and so on. That is a trait in banana republics, in failed states, states led by dictators, generally all the protective service will concentrate on political opposition, trade union leader suppression and you will have a high crime wave because you are not concentrating on crime; you are not concentrating

on dealing with criminals. That is the hallmark of that type of failed banana republic, and today we are where we are because of that approach. If the Prime Minister had pursued the criminal elements with the same intensity—

Mr. Ramnath: Vigour and vitality.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—vigour and vitality that he used to pursue the Chief Justice and the former Prime Minister we would have been assured that crime would not have been this big problem that we face today.

Mr. Speaker, another area, the Minister came and as I said told us absolutely nothing new, nothing fresh from Toco; nothing at all that we did not hear before and could not have implemented before. The Minister is presumably telling the country believe me now.

Mr. Ramnath: The radar is picking up the cocaine.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Because after six years, the seventh year we are in now, we are still hearing about implementing the DNA legislation of 2000. How much time do you need? And you now establish some implementation committee. Whether that committee will work or not we do not know but we are now hearing about DNA legislation. Breathalyser to be implemented. Everything is to be implemented! Six years we are hearing this, but nothing! The Equal Opportunity legislation; inequality and poverty go hand in hand. Poverty and depression related to crime, to ghetto, to lawlessness and even to extremism. But we are not hearing about the Equal Opportunity legislation and the implementation of the institutions of the Equal Opportunity Act. Nothing, Mr. Speaker!

Compensation for victims of crime! Do we have the agency in place? Do we have the institution? The personnel? Absolutely not!

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: Because they do nothing else.

Dr. R. Moonilal: They do nothing, they just go around in jacket and tie and cut ribbon and talk, drink and eat. [*Interruption*] This is their way, and this is the season so I am not offending anyone. I know this is the season when you would have to attend a lot—the Commissioner of Police fete too. They operate more for bureaucracy and ceremony; not for implementation and action. If they were a Government driven to implement and for action that statement from the Minister would never have been made. Never! He would have been able to come here and tell us at the end of this week we have 100 more vehicles being dispatched to three geographic locations. [*Interruption*]

The Minister spoke about the increase in the strength of the police service. Good. Since 2004 Trinidad and Tobago Police Service Crime Management

Government's Efforts To Combat Crime
[DR. MOONILAL]

Monday, January 07, 2008

Review, the police service made it clear how many officers they needed, how the force was being depleted by retirement and attrition; how many officers they needed at every level to get up to strength—2004 report. To this day we do not know how many have been recruited, how many more will be recruited and when. What we are told is that the training academy of the police service is not functional at this moment. Now you are recruiting police officers and where are you training them? At UTT? *[Interruption]* Where are you training the police officers if the training academy is not up and running? How are you recruiting? Where are you training? How quickly?

Mr. Dumas: Who told you that?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, you would deal with that later; tell me I am not correct and so on.

Mr. Speaker, how are you going to recruit and train when your police training academy is not functional at the moment? So that recruitment and deployment of new resources, you are looking at a next year or two. *[Interruption]* They fast track everything except policing. The Prime Minister's residence fast tracked, \$148 million.

Mr. Ramnath: No, he is not so extravagant.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Fast track! Built in record time. The Tarouba Stadium waiting for the next world cup. *[Interruption]* The Scarborough Hospital building 100 years now? *[Interruption]* Point Fortin Hospital—

Dr. Gopeesingh: 2001 promise.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: 2020.

Dr. R. Moonilal: But, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to building police station, providing infrastructure for security, *[Interruption]* when it comes to fighting crime, somehow we do not have fast track approaches. You do not get it there. You get it if you have to set up some make-work programme, a social sector programme targeting their supporters in dealing with crime; get a fast track approach with police stations. The Minister is always sensitive when we talk about police stations. They boast 10,000 houses they built and so on, all the houses built and you could see they are building house; election come and election gone but no boasting about how many police stations you built.

When the police service review document recommends in 2004 the construction of 38 police stations. *[Interruption]* Refurbishment of nine facilities for women

police constables and so on. So you have 38 police stations to be built—at least this is what the police is saying—you built five in six years and nothing is wrong with that because it is more important to build house of course. That is your political strategy. And this is why we would not make any significant step forward under this Minister. This is why police still complain. There are police stations without photocopying machines. Do you know police officers have to take important documents for court and go to a bank to photocopy.

Mr. Speaker: What!

Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, if the bank is located opposite the police station and so on. They go to a business place and ask for a favour to copy documents and so on because they do not have photocopying machines that are working. *[Interruption]* We spoke already about the situation with human resources.

Mr. Speaker, the other Members in the Opposition will speak about important issues as the detection rate; the criminal prosecution system that has almost collapsed. I am not surprised that the Minister said somebody gave him information and said do not call my name, because they have no faith that they would be protected. That is it! And when you depend on eyewitness—who in their right mind say they want to go to court and testify against some known criminal from a gang in a court? Nobody! What do you think, they want to die? Nobody! Because you have no faith. This is why witnesses are changing their stories. A witness goes to court and says my story changed; the police forced me to say or to write something. Do you know why? They chance their luck with the criminal element rather than the police protection. They prefer to chance the criminal than to have the police protect them, and that is the problem we face.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Serious issue.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Detection! Prosecuting! In the courtroom we are told by some of the police officers, you lay a complaint, the police complainant could be a constable making a murder charge or something like that and go to the court, they cannot answer, they are inexperienced, they are young, they do not have expertise, defence attorneys tie them up and the accused goes free. That is the situation. Witnesses do not even appear, far less go to testify. So how could you create some dent in this matter when you cannot depend on a witness to go to a court and participate in a prosecution process? You cannot!

The Minister told us nothing about any efforts to upgrade, to intensify, to develop further the witness protection programme. I think there is a witness

protection programme; not protecting much, but there is a witness protection programme. We know nothing of it! And unless and until you do not deal with these concrete practical matters, no philosophizing, theory and policy long-term will make any dent. These are the issues that the Minister should be telling us about.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what is amazing in the fight against the criminal enterprise? The Prime Minister is chairman of the National Security Council. The Prime Minister had at his disposal personnel such as former Minister of National Security, Herbert Atwell; former Minister of National Security, Overand Padmore; former Minister of National Security, John Donaldson; former Minister of National Security, Joseph Theodore; current Minister of National Security, Minister Joseph; former Minister in the Ministry—I beg your pardon, Minister of State in the Ministry—of National Security, Fitzgerald Hinds; our colleague who is now located more to the Opposition, former Minister in the Ministry of Social Development, Anthony Roberts. All in the Ministry of National Security personnel with an accumulated capital of over 100 years parliamentary and Government experience. *[Interruption]* And they still cannot deal with the crime.

Dr. Gopeesingh: The man who was in the coup was advisor to the Prime Minister.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I do not want to get into who was in the coup and in his Cabinet. I will leave that for colleagues who know about that. *[Interruption]* Because I myself do not know much about that. I will say nothing about that. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker, with that resource you have; with clearly, the money you have, how could you let this situation reach to the point it reached? With this level of expertise; hundreds of years in government and in Parliament; money at your disposal and still absolutely nothing. The Minister said—key indictors—homicide is escalating. Last year a record. So it clearly is not expertise, because with due respect I do not think anyone of these worthy gentlemen are so incompetent. It is not money. It is something else and that something else is the capacity of the Government to interface with the criminals. That is the problem. There is no other problem, and what help do you need? The Government comes to the Parliament today to tell us that they need help. I think the new Leader of Government Business began on a right note when he withdrew a Bill. His first act was to withdraw two Bills. I think that speaks volume for his competence.

Mr. Speaker, they were not sure if they need our support for the Motion or do not need the support, or what is happening with that. But no Motion will solve

this matter. What you need is concrete, tangible and measurable targets that are short-term. That is what you need. And, Mr. Speaker, the United National Congress dealt with this matter indicating clearly a commitment to increase manpower, equipment; not just cars and vehicles; introduce technology. I mean six years we are hearing about CCTV; unless I am mistaken, I have not seen any CCTV anywhere.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar: They have none.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Six years we are hearing about this! In fact in a previous budget debate a Minister told the House they had already entered into arrangements with a foreign supplier for all the equipment that will go up around the corner that they will detect criminal activity on the street. We have not had anything! So, the Minister should tell this country when we expect to see these cameras on the road, in the cities. The Prime Minister promised in the 2003 budget that the cities would be protected by CCTV and so on. I do not know of any city that has been protected so far. I do not know. [*Inaudible*] I will get it for you in due course. I will get it for you in due course and if you want we will get that budget statement as well and read it for you so you will be aware that when you make these types of pronouncements and four years later there is nothing, that the population will hold you responsible.

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, since 2003, the Government has been speaking about introducing ultramodern radar systems to provide unprecedented level of protection and capability. They have been talking out of global marine distress and safety system. They have been speaking—well expanding the Boy Scout movement, Girl Guides and so on, but that is not what I want to focus on at this moment. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Ramnath: Helicopters.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes, helicopters, Mr. Speaker. Every single thing that they spoke about today, they have been promising since 2003 and to this date, their delivery is suspect at best. We have indicated in some way what may be the causal factor and some of the critical matters that they should deal with.

Another critical issue has to do with the investment in the Judiciary. We still have a situation today where Members of the Judiciary—judges, magistrates, practitioners—complain about the poor conditions that they operate in. Just a few weeks ago I think, there was a situation where a magistrate had to close up and go home because the air-condition system was not working. We are still dealing with

the courts. A few days ago in the newspaper, a criminal broke through a fence or some barricade in the court itself and escaped. I think a few weeks ago as well, an accused hurled some material at a magistrate—filth to use that more pleasant description. Hurling filth at a magistrate! This is Trinidad and Tobago in 2008 when you have billions of dollars, the accused can hurl filth at the magistrate and walk out of a courthouse in Princes Town. Mr. Speaker, the Judiciary is still complaining about building, about capital and equipment.

Over the last six years, Members on the other side would have noticed that the US Embassy donated electronic equipment to the Judiciary in this country. We depend on Uncle Sam to give us some recording device, latest technology and so on. While we have a Government in place, resources, and the Judiciary is complaining. We have noticed within recent times, the Chief Justice, Sat Sharma, called on the DPP to meet with him to discuss the crisis and the problems facing the Judiciary. I think the Attorney General attended the meeting, but the DPP did not. He had something more important to do than discuss the state of the Judiciary and the provision of support to magistrates and judges. When you have that arrogant approach, you get nowhere; you get nowhere in dealing, in meeting and treating with the problem of crime.

I also want to remind the national community that over the years they have accused the Opposition of everything under the stars. They said we were not supporting them with crime legislation. We gave support. The Opposition joined the Government, passed important legislation for police service reform; for the constitutional amendments and so on to make system more flexible, adaptable and efficient.

The UNC gave support for legislation; so no one can say we are obstructing and so on by preventing the Government from passing important pieces of legislation to deal with crime. You cannot complain about that. What you can complain about is the lack of implementation. That is what you should complain about, and the role of the Opposition cannot be for implementation. This is an important point that members of the national community must understand. In our system the Opposition cannot implement.

I am reading where the religious leaders talked about people must get involved and it is a people's solution. That is fine, but at the end of the day there is a Government; there is a police service; a Minister with responsibility, primary responsibility. The head of a religious group cannot call the Commissioner of Police and tell him to send two more vehicles to Ste. Madeline. He cannot do that. While it is our responsibility as people, as parents, as guardians, as church

leaders, politicians, we all have some responsibility. The lead responsibility; the primary responsibility is with the Government, with the Minister of National Security.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I want to sincerely advise the Minister of National Security, it is not too late, Sir. When at the beginning of my contribution, I read that one-page letter for you; I was being very serious and responsible. It is not too late for you to—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Ramnath: Disassociate yourself from that Prime Minister.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—sign that letter; deliver it to the Prime Minister and then relieve yourself of this burden that you have not been able to manage. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Ramnath: He is a good man.

Dr. R. Moonilal: And he is a good soul. I am sure there is something else you may be well equipped to handle—they are suggesting elsewhere. It is not too late and at least you would allow the national community to feel that the Government is serious; but by rehashing and repeating and regurgitating all of these policies and philosophies and so on that we have heard from 2003, will get us nowhere in dealing with the practical challenge that we face today.

The people who are going to be murdered for the rest of the week, they do not have long to live. They do not have to wait for 18 police stations and 360 degree radar and the institutional strengthening of the homicide investigation bureau. They cannot wait for that; just cannot wait. We need to take some action now and that is what I think that the debate—at the end of this debate, notwithstanding the speeches and so on, it would be productive if we have concrete measures which can be implemented, a target set for the very short term of two weeks to one month.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you. *[Desk thumping]*

The Minister of Social Development (Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured and privileged to make my first contribution to a debate in this honourable House. *[Desk thumping]* Privilege is even greater, because the important issue that is being debated relates to crime and strategies to combat crime in our beloved nation of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that the tradition is to rebut contributions that may have come before, but I am stretching my mind to imagine any concrete

points made by the Opposition that are deserving of a rebuttal. [*Desk thumping*] There were just a series of readings from the media. I heard the *Express* and all sort of media clippings, but with regard to a serious address to the issue of crime, there was none. So, therefore, there shall be no rebuttal of serious issues.

I am very concerned because there was an attempt to move crime as a matter of urgent public importance, but when the opportunity came to debate the issue, there were so many jokes, references to corbeaux, letters of resignation, dance troupes, lots of smiles on the other side, and it made me concerned because the question is: Who cares? Who really cares? If we are posturing on a matter of urgent public importance—the matter should be dealt with greater seriousness than has thus been advanced.

Mr. Ramnath: [*Inaudible*]

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: This administration cares. Mr. Speaker, in exploring the issue of violence on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago; in exploring the issue of gangs and gang violence on the streets of our country, one should consider the issue of the psyche of young men in our country today. The perpetrators and the victims of violence on our streets are overwhelmingly young males. That is the reality.

In the Caribbean, over 80 per cent of violent crimes are committed by men, particularly young men; the majority of whom are under 35 years of age. Just like a few Members of this honourable House; it is possible. Last year alone, over 250 murders were either gang related or drug related and this cannot be acceptable to any citizen. This must be unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, the bodies that end up on the streets of our nation are overwhelmingly the bodies of young males. Researchers, Dr. Charles Caps and David Choate, have estimated that 95 per cent of gang members in this country are young men; so it is a male phenomenon we are dealing with. It has become painfully obvious that many young men have been feeling alienated from the mainstream society. This is not a Trinidad and Tobago phenomenon alone, and the marginalization of young people in a fast developing world is something that our local youth councils have been documenting, examining and advocating on for several years now. Young people are often made to feel irrelevant and this leads that degree of alienation. They are made to feel that they have little to offer and at times their constructive views and contributions are often stifled, or worst yet, belittled by those who feel they have more experience on the other side.

I feel well qualified to raise some of these issues because I have some way to go before the age of retirement—[*Crosstalk*] [*Laughter*]*—and it is with a heavy heart that I now share with you the general perceptions of some of our young people, about debates among politicians in Trinidad and Tobago. Unfortunately, we are getting a classic example of the root of those negative perceptions among young people.*

Mr. Speaker, youth tend to feel that these debates often have very little to do with them and the issues that confront them. The youth tend to feel that the antics and machinations of some Members in the past and those to whom I refer may know themselves—"Who the cap fits", as Bob Marley says—have led some to conclude that this is all just a game of posturing, but we are dealing with a very important and critical issue.

The disrespect shown by some Members to each other, and to figures of authority in this honourable House is a useful road map to the general disrespect of public figures and authority figures that has been growing across the land of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] That type of disrespect; that bad example was reinforced at the last sitting of this honourable House and, unfortunately, we may be seeing additional examples today. This leads to disenchantment of our young people and they tend to switch off from important national discussions. I must confess that I felt a renewed sense of optimism when I examined the representatives present for this current term, particularly, the representatives on this side of the House. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Speaker, instead of the usual 80-, 70- and 60-year-olds, there are some younger faces. Instead of the old boys' club that is very much in effect elsewhere, there is better representation of young people, and women as well—very important phenomenon. [*Desk thumping*] These women are bright, vibrant and enigmatic and should give good hope to the young people of Trinidad and Tobago.

I believe that the young people of this country have been crying out for a fresh direction. They have been crying out for fresh ideas; a new perspective; a new approach to public life and national debate. Unfortunately, we just had a very poor example of a fresh direction because that was not a fresh direction. More of the same.

5.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, it is in this context that I would like to categorically reject a term that some members of the media and some Members opposite have tried to introduce into the lexicon of public life; that is the term "neophyte". I reject that term.

The voting population of Trinidad and Tobago has elected these so-called neophytes to raise the standard of debate in this honourable House and that is exactly what we shall contribute to doing. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] Whether the other side pretends that they are dealing with matters of urgent public importance and then gerrymanders and jokes about corbeaux and dance troupes, we recognize the seriousness of the matter that has brought us into this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. Dr. A. Browne: The young people have been crying out for a fresh direction, fresh ideas, and a new standard of discourse in public life. [*Crosstalk*] As we debate critical national issues like crime and strategies to combat it— [*Interruption*] [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Speaker: Order!

Hon. Dr. A. Browne:—we on this side will like to disassociate ourselves from the displays that continue on the other side of the isle. [*Crosstalk*] These are displays that should be discouraged. When discussing serious issues like crime, we invite all Members to join us in setting a good example in this House for the young men and women of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Crosstalk*]

We cannot stop the gangs if we behave like gangsters ourselves. [*Desk thumping*] We cannot improve civility if we ourselves are rude and uncivil. [*Crosstalk*] Members on this side reject categorically the display of rudeness by the Member who spoke before toward the Minister of National Security, in reading that disrespectful letter of resignation. [*Crosstalk*]

It is with a heavy heart I confess that I understand the degree of alienation some of our young men feel in society today. I recall when applying for my first job fresh out of secondary school, I sent applications to about 50 private sector companies and each one came back saying, "Too little experience; not enough experience; we will keep you on file", et cetera. That was a common phenomenon in this country and has led to some degree of alienation; "No suitable positions for you; need more training; we are looking for more experienced candidates." As the weeks went by, I became more and more frustrated personally; so I understand how some of our young men feel in society today.

This sense of frustration only increased when I saw some of my schoolmates driving their cars to jobs in financial institutions and banks, and so on, especially when I knew that I was more qualified than some of them. Finally one of those

applications came back with a positive response; a job in a hardware division packing shelves. I remember feeling powerless. I remember feeling optionless and frustrated, so I understand. I remember feeling that I had a lot to offer, but for some reason society was not yet ready to accept that offer. I remember feeling tempted for a few moments to think that there were two societies: maybe there was a mainstream society and maybe there was another society.

The PNM has invested significant resources to help change exactly that scenario for today's young people; many of them are benefitting. [*Desk thumping*] So the disparity that may have led to the alienation of some of our young men is being addressed by this current administration.

The On-the-Job Training Programme must be considered as one of the most important mechanisms to help reduce this alienation among young men in this country. [*Desk thumping*] It must also be considered a very important mechanism to reduce the vulnerability of young men who might otherwise be attracted to gang life or street life. [*Crosstalk*] This important programme now targets young persons aged between 16 to 30 years who are graduates of secondary schools, tertiary and vocational institutions. Already over 27,000 young persons, both male and female, have been placed through the OJT Programme, all of whom have gained valuable work experience, while receiving pay, and being empowered to avoid gang life, street life, thug life, and avoid that sense of alienation that some of us understand only too well.

We have now exceeded over 8,000 inductees per year into this particular programme, towards a target of 10,000 individuals per year. The youth of today, the young men of today, undoubtedly have many more opportunities than the youth of just a few years ago, and certainly more opportunities than young men of past generations.

For those without secondary education who may be particularly vulnerable, we now have other programmes, such as the HYPE programme, and the data tells us that more and more of our young men are taking advantage of these programmes and opportunities, so there are some encouraging signs for the future. We cannot change what has happened in the past, but we can work together to address the future.

The statistics also tell us that it is only a small number of our young males who are particularly involved in these gangland activities, a small number involved in gangs. Experts say that it is several hundred in number so you are dealing with a discrete cohort of young men, usually from urban environments.

While this quantity pales in comparison to gang membership in other countries, and I know that we do not dwell too much on other countries, it would appear, this number should give us cold comfort. Our gangs appear to be particularly well armed in Trinidad and Tobago. They appear to be well funded and not coincidentally they appear to be well linked with the trade of illicit narcotics in this country. This is a nexus that must be broken. This is the link that we must work together to crush.

This Government is committed to employing a comprehensive range of strategies to reduce gang violence, and the hon. Minister of National Security referred to several of the law enforcement approaches that are being rolled out at this time to help reduce gang violence, to help reduce gang prevalence, to reduce the incidence of serious crimes and also create an environment in which our youth are less likely to resort to the gun, and that is the key; to create an environment in which our youth are less likely to resort to the gun for social and economic advancement.

Mr. Speaker, let us make no mistake, treating with the softer social issues is not meant to substitute for the essentially tough law enforcement strategies that must be rolled out and are being rolled out, as discoursed by the Minister of National Security, but treating with these softer social issues is an important supplement to those strategies.

I am particularly looking forward to the results of the new investments in counternarcotics technology, in equipment and expertise. One indicator must be the taking down of the big fish, the players, the funders, those with large bank accounts that cannot be explained and those with businesses that appear overnight from nowhere.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Members of this House are only human, so we can be forgiven, from time to time, for making statements that might be naive. That being said, the most naive statement that I personally have ever heard was this foolishness that crime will go down only if the current administration is deposed. That is the most naive statement I have ever heard emanating from Members in this House. Such a statement cannot be acceptable to any criminologist, any policeman, and any right-thinking citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. It is a gross oversimplification and actually an insult to the intelligence of the citizens. Such statements do not properly examine the origins of violence; such statements are a misestimation of the multi-sectoral nature of the problem and avoids any discourse on real solutions to our crime and gang violence situations.

Money laundering is a classic example of an area in which the partnership and, indeed, the leadership of the private sector is essential for meaningful success. So it is not just a government only approach. Through this new era of partnership against crime that was signalled by the Minister of National Security, I look forward to seeing the private sector even more involved in nationwide crime fighting strategies, to see the private sector even more involved in collaborations designed to identify and destroy those who might be contributing to the destruction of the next generation in this country.

Mr. Speaker, the United Nations Development Programme and the South Chamber of Industry and Commerce have recently been documenting and emphasizing the need for improved corporate social sector responsibility. I might want to add that there is also a need for improved individual social sector responsibilities, but we will deal with that maybe on another occasion. The gap has been filled, to some extent, by a wide range of civil society organizations, and I salute the role of civil society organizations and also the faith based groups, the church groups, who have been doing yeoman service mitigating risk. These groups are partnering more and more with government agencies and ministries, including the Ministry of National Security and the Ministry of Social Development.

In the corporate world there are some very good examples of this type of partnership in reducing risk among our young people and helping reduce the tendency towards violence, street life and thug life. There are examples such as BpTT and the Unit Trust Corporation that have done excellent work in the social sector addressing some of the gaps that still exist in society. Another company by the name of Aegis Business Solutions Limited has an employee led programme that specially identifies vulnerable families across the country and targets them, not just for a day, but with long-term interventions such as the provision of household items, beds, mattresses, clothing, gifts, toys, medical support and, most importantly, the provision of educational support to the children; again targeting the vulnerability, targeting the alienation, targeting the risk factors that can lead to crime and gang violence.

We are well aware that not everyone shares this vision of collaboration and partnership against crime. We know that some persons might prefer if the national community sits back and says, "Crime is a government problem; the risk of crime is a problem for the Government; let them fix it; we will do nothing." There are still a few people who when you ask them, "What do you anticipate for the coming year?" they would respond, "I anticipate the gloomiest year in the history of Trinidad and Tobago." But Members on this side do not share that vision for this beloved country.

The vigour and passion of this new PNM administration along with the commitment of many sectors of society across the national landscape will help those gloomy predictions to fail miserably. I believe that as a nation we shall succeed towards developed country status. [*Desk thumping*]

[MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

This Government has been rising to the occasion. We well recognize that the formation and flourishing of these violent gangs are not easy issues to address, and that has been very well acknowledged by those responsible; nor will they disappear overnight; nor will they disappear by meaningless taunts being thrown across the aisle; that is not how these issues will be properly addressed. [*Desk thumping*]

6.00 p.m.

We also recognize Mr.—Madam Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] I salute you, Madam Deputy Speaker. We also recognize that this country's social safety net also has to be made stronger, and smarter.

While childhood malnutrition has been reduced to low levels, and while overall poverty rates have declined from 35 per cent to approximately 17 per cent, there is still important work to be done in our social sector to help reduce the risk of young persons joining gangs and being involved in violent activities, and the fate of our poorest and most vulnerable must continually engage the minds of Government Ministers and also other Members of this honourable House because we must become an all-inclusive nation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am a very firm believer in the role of research in shaping public policy, and in developing and implementing strategies that will help address our crime and violence situation. The Ministry of Social Development will be working much more closely with researchers in a number of key areas to assist in exploring how we can help reduce and address the origins of crime and I will give you some examples.

One is the conduct of a study on the status of males in the society and the request for these proposals has already gone out. Another related study, Madam Deputy Speaker, is one of the causes and effects of alcoholism and a report on this particular study is now being prepared by consultants, again being linked to drug use, violence, vulnerability and the destruction of families.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is also the comprehensive analysis of a 2005 national survey of living conditions and I am quite troubled that in the past, it has

taken years to analyze some of these important pieces of research which can help give us important clues as to how we can reduce the crime and violence situation on our nation's streets. In that regard, the 2008 survey of living conditions will piggyback upon the Ministry of Finance's Household Budgetary Survey resulting in synergies and a much reduced lag time in terms of preparing analysis.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are also exploring a range of other options in the social sector, other important pieces of research pertaining to substance abusers, deportees, children who might be at risk leaving children's institutions and pertaining to displaced persons and ex-prisoners.

Rapid implementation historically has not been synonymous with public sector bureaucracy, but we would be unable to prevent the formation of future gangs, and prevent the mobilization of future gang members unless we strengthen the support systems for the family, and in 2008 we would be doing exactly that, strengthening the support systems for families at risk in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Deputy Speaker, again we are talking about exploring the risk factors and vulnerability to gang membership and violence. While there may be some who would like to pretend it is just a matter of PNM, UNC-A, or COP, it goes deeper than that, Madam Deputy Speaker. The implementation to which I am referring in 2008 is with regard to the national policy on the family and the surging of key staff into divisions such as the National Family Services Division which is designed and set up to help mitigate risk, recognize families who might be vulnerable, and address their social needs before the complete alienation of young members and children and their recruitment into a life of violence.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there is also the consideration by Cabinet at this time of a comprehensive proposal for ex-prisoners and again, the hon. Minister of National Security referred to the high rate at which our ex-prisoners relapse into criminal activity, and the social sector has an important role to play along with the Ministry of National Security in 2008 in addressing this particular phenomenon. We know we have to treat better with these repeat offenders.

Madam Deputy Speaker, also relevant in 2008 is the implementation of a nationwide counselling programme for Trinidad and Tobago through the National Family Services and also through a range of civil society organizations and relevant NGOs and church groups that have been working very closely with us in the social sector already.

This nationwide programme of counselling is currently being costed and we really look forward to the type of collaboration that to some extent has been

lacking in social sectors in years past, but which is increasingly being brokered as we proceed towards full development.

Also relevant to reducing risk among our young persons and children; risks that might lead to gang membership or violence is the establishment of the Children's Authority and the relaying of larger packages of children's legislation in this honourable House. I would also add the implementation of the second national plan of action for children regarding that the first national plan of action actually occurred in the 1990s, so there has been a gap and that is being addressed at this time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we also have an important role to play with regard to the decentralization of social services. This would result in bringing social services that reduce risks much closer to the urban and rural environments that have been described by the hon. Minister of National Security as leading to a propensity towards crime and gang violence. So it is not a role for the Minister of National Security alone, it is also not a role for the Ministry of Social Development alone, it is one for the entire Government and other sectors of society, and the entire national community if we are to successfully turn back the tide of violence which we have been seeing related to these gangs and gangland activities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, another important programme for 2008 is the wider computerization of our social welfare system and of all client records for a much faster processing, application, reply and faster response time. Again allowing our social sector to have the flexibility to identify risks and mobilize resources in the shortest possible time; going a step further than the superficial approach that might have been advocated on the other side; going a little deeper into the root causes of crime and trying to mitigate these risk factors before they become our gangs of tomorrow. So while the Minister and the Ministry of National Security are hard at work combating the crimes of today, we have to look towards the future otherwise these problems will not go away.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I have made several references to the role of civil society and these really cannot be underestimated, and while there is the temptation by some to continually look towards Government for all the solutions for all their problems in Trinidad and Tobago, we well recognize that such a partnership with civil society is essential if we are to solve some of the complex problems that still face members of society, and in that regard, we are looking to scale up the relationship with non-governmental organizations, community groups, and faith-based organizations across the social sector spectrum. Of course, with improved systems for accountability and results-based assessments of proposals.

Another point I would like to make, Madam Deputy Speaker, with regard to 2008 implementation in the social sector that is relevant to reducing the propensity for violence and gang membership, is the scaling up of our community mediation programme. This really targets violence at its core and at its source. This programme is being scaled up because there is very good evidence of its success both in this country in its pilot form and in many other countries in which this type of community mediation approach has been used.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there are currently five community mediation centres in Trinidad and Tobago. These are located in Arima, Sangre Grande, Cunupia, Point Fortin, San Fernando and Port of Spain and these centres have already served over 2,600 members of our population, over 2,600 clients at risk for violence.

The issues addressed at such centres include conflict resolution, life skills training, parenting support, risk reduction and therapeutic counselling. Maybe one day we can invite the mediation programme to the honourable House and share some strategies with Members.

In any case, Madam Deputy Speaker, this service is being scaled up recognizing that not just our urban areas, but also rural areas would benefit from this type of community mediation and really help address violence at its source. We must also recognize that this type of specific social expertise can also be elaborated through non-governmental groups and trade unions, and I am referring to community mediation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we cannot underestimate the impact of a bad example on the young people of this country and when there continues to be a propagation of disrespect or mistrust of our police service, it is no wonder that young people tend to shy away from making appropriate police reports or even trusting the police service with regard to reducing the rate of crimes in their communities and on the streets of their towns and, Madam Deputy Speaker, I regard this as a very serious issue.

I have heard many derogatory references earlier to senior police officers and to the role of the police in general. There was a reference to a decrease in kidnappings which—maybe we have made history—has been acknowledged for the first time on the other side today. So I congratulate Members on the other side for that recognition, but there was a reference that this decrease in kidnappings could never be the result of police activity, and that assertion is completely beyond me because no evidence was offered to support it, so that assertion really has to be regarded as absurd. [*Interruption*] Again, it is helping to create and

propagate that sense of mistrust of the police service, which is exactly what we need to reverse—a mistrust of public figures. It is exactly what we need to work to reverse if our young people are to again accept a meaningful role within society.

Madam Deputy Speaker, on this side we recognize the importance of leadership and utilizing the national platform in a constructive manner and sending the right signals to our society, and to young people that we are serious about the business to which we have been elected and assigned. This is related to the issue of nation building and patriotism.

Again, these are issues that we need to continue focusing much more on, both in our schools and among our youths on the block simply because an increased sense of patriotism and love for country can help deter some of our young people from the violence to which they seem to tend.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government's approach to this issue is a comprehensive one and, as I indicated, it does not just depend solely on law enforcement strategies, but it is also an improvement of the social sector programmes and approaches that have been elaborated in the past and there are identification of new strategies to help improve and strengthen our social sector in Trinidad and Tobago.

6.15 p.m.

Madam Deputy Speaker, included among these approaches is the importance of a National Parenting Programme for Trinidad and Tobago. Many have lamented in the past, including many in the media, the dearth of parenting in Trinidad and Tobago. That is something we must all work together to address.

The progress in the economy must be coupled with progress with regard to family, the strengthening of family life and a reduction of the single parent phenomenon that we have been seeing. Again, one cannot depend solely on the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, but one must depend on a strong collaboration between Government and other sectors of the society to help turn back some of these risk factors. I reinforce that we cannot oversimplify the crime issue, otherwise we will never solve the issue of violence and gang life in this country.

Madam Deputy Speaker, there was a multisector task force that examined the social sector and the whole range of programmes, some of which were identified by Members opposite. This task force recognized that there were a number of areas of duplication and a number of areas in which improved synergy could be derived among these social sector programmes.

In 2008, all government Ministries and agencies will be working much closer to help improve synergies between these programmes, again resulting in cost savings to the population and also a closing of any gaps that might continue to exist.

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Speaker, we must recognize that we are dealing with a regional problem when it comes to trafficking of narcotics and the associated trafficking of ammunition and arms. We are certainly looking forward to the upcoming anti-drug infrastructure to be used not just on a national level, but also on a regional level to help mitigate the gang violence that is not just seen in Trinidad and Tobago, but also in St. Lucia, Jamaica and other islands in the Caribbean.

It is often wise to lean on the wisdom of members of the wider society and we must never pretend that all wisdom is confined to this honourable Chamber. We have been observing quite closely the offerings of members of society on this issue of reducing gangland violence and addressing crime and violence in Trinidad and Tobago. Even past Presidents have been weighing in on this issue and I must admit offering concrete and meaningful intervention that go beyond the superficial approach that might be advanced by some.

We all remember a campaign of a few years ago that identified a possible solution as “fix me first”. That resonated with a number of members of society because we really have to “fix me first” before we try to fix other members of society. There are some who seem to have the approach of “fix you first”; always wanting to fix someone else before they fix themselves. I believe we must all recognize that every aspect of national life must be built up. The collaboration must be strong before we can solve some of these deep problems.

The philosophy of this current administration really is one of increased collaboration and consultation. We recognize that fairness is essential if we are to reduce the alienation that some people feel in society, especially our young males, and that sense of fairness is being conveyed through the operations of all government Ministries and I can speak specifically to the Ministry of Social Development. It is very important how we treat, not just with one another, not just with Members opposite, but how we treat with members of society to increase an atmosphere of inclusion and to create an environment in which young people feel a part of the social process.

This sense of optimism has been misinterpreted in the past and may continue to be misinterpreted. However, I strongly believe that a sense of optimism is very

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important if we are to confront some of the long-standing problems that remain in society. If we have a sense of negativity, if we continue to predict that 2008 will be the gloomiest year in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, that will not get us where we need to be.

We look forward to the results of the surge in resources referred to by the Minister of National Security to combat the drug trade and gangland violence in Trinidad and Tobago. We look forward to the surge of police presence, to the strategy of bringing back just the good ones from retirement, as referred to by the Minister of National Security. We look forward to the increase in public trust on the issue of citizens' safety that must accompany any successful effort against crime.

Mr. Speaker, we reiterate our willingness to work with all partners across the national landscape towards a constructive approach to a solution to gangland violence and crime. We also have to look at positive examples elsewhere confronting the issue of gangs in the many major cities in the United States and elsewhere, which, after years of struggle with the gang phenomenon, through a combination of effective law enforcement and pro-active social programming, have reduced the gang situation to much more meaningful levels.

But again, there is a recognition of the importance of collaboration in dealing with these issues. I refer to the gangland situation in the city of Boston in the 1980s and 1990s.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member's speaking time has expired.

Motion made, That the hon. Member's speaking time be extended by 30 minutes. [Hon. Dr. K. Rowley]

Question put and agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the House be adjourned to Friday, January 18, 2008 at 1.30 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there is one matter to be raised by the Member for Caroni Central.

Preysal Community Centre (Completion and Cost of)

Dr. Hamza Rafeeq (Caroni Central): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In January 2008—I should not be raising this matter of a community centre in Preysal which the

residents have been pursuing for the last 50 years. I am here this afternoon to express their disgust and frustration at not having a centre constructed, since they have been clamouring for a community centre for the last 50 years.

Preysal is a rural community with about 5,000 to 6,000 residents and, since the 1960s, they have been making representation to the Government by way of letters, delegations and representations to have a community centre constructed. Nothing had been done until a couple years ago.

In 1994, a letter was sent to the Ministry of Community Development raising the issue of constructing a community centre and the request was rejected by a letter from the Town and Country Planning Division saying that the piece of land the villagers had suggested for the construction of the centre was not suitable. At that time, as the president of the village council, I wrote to the Town and Country Planning Division giving seven or eight grounds of objection as to why the land was suitable.

Following that, the Town and Country Planning Division and the Ministry of Community Development made a visit to the village to the parcel of land we had suggested for the construction of the centre and after that visit told us that they had approved the construction of the community centre at that site.

Nothing was done again, but in 1997, after the Preysal Village Council made representation to the then Caroni (1975) Limited to negotiate the transfer of that piece of land for the construction of the community centre, a note was taken to Cabinet and that land was acquired for the construction of the community centre.

In 2001, a sod-turning ceremony was held in Preysal for the construction of the community centre there and construction was about to begin. In December 2001, the Government changed and, in 2002, a note was taken to Cabinet to remove the funds from that particular community centre to construct a centre elsewhere.

In 2002, I raised the matter in Parliament, on a similar occasion, on the adjournment of the House, and the Member for Arouca North responded to that Motion and said that construction would begin the year after, which would have been 2003. Nothing happened again, but, in 2006, construction finally began on the centre.

At that time when construction was about to begin, I informed the contractors and those who came to the ceremony—it was another sod-turning ceremony—that the design was not suitable. When I saw the design, it appeared that the stage in the centre was larger than the hall because the hall could not accommodate the number of people the community centre was supposed to cater for.

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They ignored that and started the construction of the community centre. A couple months later—construction started in March 2006—it was halted in November 2006. I raised the question again in this honourable House as to when the construction of the centre would be completed. The then Minister in the Ministry of Community Development, the Member for Laventille West, I think, indicated that the projected completion date for the centre was November 30, 2007.

Nothing has happened since then, but the strange thing is that the reason given for the halting of the construction of the community centre at that point was that the design was flawed, something we pointed out to them before construction began. Mr. Speaker, they said the design was flawed because the Ministry's guidelines for an assembly hall is of a size that represents 30 per cent of the building covered area and the design only provided for an assembly hall of 18.7 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, that is wasting money. When they got the design for the centre, they should have realized then that the hall only covered 18.7 per cent of the building covered area. After 65 per cent of the construction was completed, it was then realized that it was so and they halted construction of the centre.

6. 30 p.m.

In the reply given by the Minister in the Ministry of Community Development, she mentioned that the revised architectural designs were completed in January 2007. The structural designs were completed in May 2007. Negotiations with the contractor on firm prices for the revised designs had been concluded. This was September 2007 and the new completion date was projected to be November 30, 2007.

In addition to that, the Minister mentioned that the cost of construction of the community centre in Preysal would be \$11 million. When I mentioned this to the villagers in Preysal they were stunned, because when they looked at what was happening in the building, they could not understand where \$11 million went for the construction of that particular centre.

I know this is a new Minister that we have in the Government at this point in time and I would like her to look into this matter as urgently as possible. I would like to hear from her today, what plans she has for the completion of this centre, seeing that she has had exposure to this Motion at least three or four weeks ago. I wait to hear her reply.

Thank you very much.

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The Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs (Hon. Marlene Mc Donald): Mr. Speaker, in response to the matter raised on the Motion for Adjournment by the Member for Caroni Central, I wish to respond as follows: The official report of this honourable House, dated September 14, 2007, revealed that the following question was asked by Dr. Hamza Rafeeq, then and now the Member for Caroni Central:

“Could the Hon. Minister of Community Development, Culture and Gender Affairs advise:

- (a) when the construction of the Preysal Community Centre will be completed;
- (b) the cost of this project; and
- (c) the reason for the delay in this project?”

Mr. Speaker, I can now report to this honourable House that by mid-September 2007, the demolitions required for the construction of the enlarged assembly hall were completed. However, the project has experienced some slippage of the work schedule as a consequence of inclement weather and under-resourcing by contractors. I have been advised that the revised project completion date for the Preysal Community Centre is now May 31, 2008.

Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to convey to the Members of this honourable House and the national community that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago remains committed to the provision of modern, multi-functional facilities for communities across Trinidad and Tobago, including Preysal. This is in keeping with the Government’s goal of having strong communities and strong families as a foundation of Trinidad and Tobago, as embraced under the Vision 2020 developmental pillar of nurturing a caring society.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Appointment of Committees (Deferral of)

The Minister of Works and Transport (Hon. Colm Imbert): Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that this House agree to the deferral of the appointment of committees, pursuant to section 66A of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, to the end of January 2008.

Just a way of explanation to our honourable colleagues opposite. The next sitting would be January 18, 2008. That would have fallen one day outside of the initial one-month period stipulated in the Constitution. Therefore, since we are returning on January 18, 2008, the one month would have fallen on January 17,

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2008. The Constitution allows a three-month extension and I therefore beg to move that we agree to the deferral of the appointment of these committees to the end of January 2008.

Question put and agreed to.

Dexter Francois
(Reassignment)

Mr. Speaker: Before I move the Motion on the Adjournment, permit me to inform you that one of our long-standing orderlies, Mr. Dexter Francois, is leaving us today. You may see him, because I am told that he is joining the Immigration Department. On your behalf, my own behalf and on behalf of the staff of the Parliament, I wish to thank Dexter for his services to the Parliament and wish him all the best in his future job. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.36 p.m.