

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, November 23, 2018*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the hon. Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Edmund Dillon, MP, Member for Point Fortin, has requested leave of absence from the sittings of the House during the period November 19th to 25th, 2018; Mr. David Lee, MP, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, and Mr. Barry Padarath, MP, Member for Princes Town, have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE**(CHANGE OF MEMBERSHIP)**

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, correspondence has been received from the Vice-President of the Senate dated November 20, 2018, which states as follows:

“Dear Honourable Speaker,

Change of Membership to Joint Select Committees

I wish to inform you that at a sitting held on Tuesday November 20, 2018, the Senate agreed to the following Resolution:

‘Resolved: that the Senate agree to the appointment of Mr. Paul Richards in lieu of Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir on the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration.’

Accordingly, I respectfully request that the House of Representatives be informed of this decision at the earliest convenience please.

Yours respectfully,

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Nigel De Freitas

Vice-President of the Senate.”

CONDOLENCES

(DR. RUPERT GRIFFITH)

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, as you may—[*Interruption*] Hon. Members—excuse me AG, I am hearing little overtones. Hon. Members, as you may be aware, one of our former Members of Parliament, Dr. Rupert Griffith, passed away on Wednesday, November 21, 2018. Dr. Griffith served on several occasions as a Member in this House which included his tenure as Deputy Speaker and Speaker of the House of Representatives. As we mourn his passing, we also honour his legacy. I now invite hon. Members to pay their respective tributes to Dr. Griffith. Hon. Minister of Education.

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Today, I bring condolences on behalf of the Government on the passing of Dr. Rupert Griffith. Within this year alone, the people of Trinidad and Tobago have been rocked with a number of our noteworthy citizens departing this life, but we must always ensure to acknowledge the contributions they have made and celebrate the life they have lived.

Today, as I celebrate the public service career of Dr. Griffith, it would be remiss of me to stand in this House and not also offer condolences on behalf of the people of Arima whom Dr. Griffith served before me. A career that spanned over two decades, having had some noteworthy happenings during that time, Dr. Griffith offered his energy, skills, talent and expertise to serve the people of Trinidad and Tobago well. Joining the People’s National Movement and ascending to Member of Parliament for Arima, Dr. Griffith used his position as a launching pad for his

Condolences (Dr. Rupert Griffith)
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political career.

During his time as a member of the PNM, he served in capacities such as Deputy Speaker, Opposition Member, Independent Member and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister. When Dr. Griffith crossed the floor in 1997, he joined the United National Congress (UNC), he went on to hold the portfolios such as Minister of Information, Communications, Training and Distance Learning, Speaker of the House, Minister of Tourism, Minister of Sport, and Minister of Science and Technology. A wealth of experiences that he used his training, as evidenced by a master's degree in Career and Industrial Technology Education and his PhD in Education Administration and Supervision to supplement and support the Governments of this country.

We will always remember the moment in our political history when crossing the floor from the PNM to the UNC, Dr. Griffith gave the latter control to the Government after a 17-17-2 result, thus I would say, etching his name in our history books forever. The people of Toco/Sangre Grande were also fortunate to have been represented by Dr. Griffith, and I know that my colleague, Mrs. Jennings-Smith, would ensure that the people of that constituency will be well taken care of.

The one thing I can say that brings me comfort, and I would hope brings comfort to his family at this time, is the way in which his political experiences have not detracted from the memory of whom he was as a person. One that, no matter on which side of the floor he sat, was committed to serve. Interestingly, just a few days ago his nephew visited me at my home to inform me that Dr. Griffith was not doing well, and that it seemed as though his demise was imminent. He reached out to me to ask if I could include him in my prayers as he knew of the

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good relationship we shared, not only as residents of Arima, but both of us having an interest in the education of young people.

Dr. Griffith had the responsibility in his portfolio as the Minister of information, Communications, Training and Distance Learning, for YTEPP when I served as a member of the board, and we shared many amicable relationships since then. For all of us, the time will come and someone will be offering similar remarks on our behalf, the question now becomes: What is the legacy that will be left, how will we be remembered? Dr. Griffith has left a legacy of service and willingness. Today, we offer our thanks for the work that was done and his contributions to Trinidad and Tobago. To his family, it is hoped that the positives of his memory will comfort you through this difficult time.

Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Chief Whip, Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, on behalf of the hon. Leader of the Opposition, United National Congress, my parliamentary colleagues and the membership and supporters of the UNC, I rise to pay tribute to a most worthy citizen of our country, the late Dr. Rupert Griffith, and at the same time extend our collective condolences to his family. May God grant them courage in their time of loss and grief. Today, in our tribute we hope to celebrate the life and contribution that Dr. Rupert Griffith made to his country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a life in public service is one of commitment, dedication and personal sacrifice. Dr. Griffith dedicated much of his life to the service of Trinidad and Tobago. Public service is selfless service in which one utilizes the positional authority and power to make better the lives of others and to

Condolences (Dr. Rupert Griffith)
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advance the cause of the nation.

Dr. Griffith was motivated by this vision and lived the values of a servant of the people. Whether as Member of Parliament, Minister of Government, or in the exalted position of Speaker of the House, Dr. Griffith carried out his functions with fairness and equity. Despite his academic achievements and the several positions of status which he occupied, he remained a humble and polite individual committed to fostering harmony and resolving problems to the satisfaction of all concerned.

He represented the values of humility and never bore grudges nor considered others as enemies. However, he was intolerant of exploitation and chastised self-serving behaviours. In fact, he was never afraid to speak his mind or provide constructive criticism. Where he disagreed, he did so in a supportive fashion. It is qualities like these which endeared him to people and indeed our Cabinet. It is not surprising, therefore, that he was able to transcend political parties, winning elections as both PNM and People's Partnership. To have achieved this means that people saw him as a principled person and chose to follow principles, the principles and values for which he stood.

There is hardly a public official, particularly a Member of Parliament or a Minister of Government, who will be liked by all. Dr. Griffith, like all of us in this House, also had his detractors and opponents. However, the remarkable quality of his was that he always sought to understand the motivation that gave rise to their behaviours and in so doing generally avoided confrontational behaviour, but when called upon to confront behaviours, decisions or policies which he felt were anti-people or regressive, he fought hard. As a Minister and MP, he was particularly distressed when he could not deliver to his constituents and especially so, to poor

Condolences (Dr. Rupert Griffith)
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people.

Indeed as Member of Parliament for Toco/Sangre Grande, under the People's Partnership, he was confronted by poverty and neglect, by unemployment among youths, and he worked diligently to bring relief to people. Dr. Griffith also added great value to the country by implementing programmes to develop people and improve our global competitiveness. We were all proud to have him serve as a member of the Cabinet and thank him once again for the support he gave to the administration of Kamla Persad-Bissessar, as well as the creativity and innovations he brought to his Ministry.

It is said that the gift of a human birth is the most valuable gift which any person can be blessed with. What is more important though is what we choose to do with this gift. Dr. Griffith chose to use his gift of a human body with the capacity for intelligent choice to serve his fellow citizens. In a sense, this is not surprising because he was spiritually focused, a trait which made him see every human being as a human being first, as an equal person, and it also inspired his selfless service.

Today, I wish to put on the record our heartfelt thanks to Dr. Rupert Griffith and his family for their great contribution to our society. For they too shared and supported what he did for this society. May God therefore bless him with the rewards due to him for his contribution, and may his wife Sandra Ray-Griffith and his three children find comfort in the knowledge that he by his existence and time on this earth empowered many a life.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I too would like to pay tribute to Dr. Rupert Griffith. A former Member of this House, Dr. Griffith had a PhD in Education

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Administration and Supervision, and a master's degree in Career and Industrial Technology Education, and brought his knowledge and expertise to the many portfolios he held during his parliamentary tenure.

Outside of the Parliament, Dr. Griffith provided sponsorship to many community groups, sporting clubs and steel pan organizations. We will forever be grateful for his many contributions in this House. Dr. Rupert Griffith will not only be remembered as a politician, but also as a husband, father, friend and colleague. I take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences to the Griffith family during this time of mourning, and I pray that the Almighty grants them the comfort and strength needed in this time of bereavement. I now ask that we stand and observe a minute's silence as a mark of respect.

The House of Representatives stood.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: May his soul rest in peace.

Hon. Members, an appropriate letter will be sent to convey our condolences to the wife and family of the late Dr. Rupert Griffith.

1.45 p.m.

PAPERS LAID

1. Second Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statement of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2008. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statement of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2009. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

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3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statement of the San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2010. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
Papers 1 to 3 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
4. Audited Financial Statements of Clico Investment Fund for the financial year ended December 31, 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
5. Audited Financial Statements of Clico Investment Fund for the financial year ended December 31, 2017. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
6. Consolidated Audited Financial Statements of Evolving TecKnologies and Enterprise Development Company Limited for the financial year ended September 30, 2017. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
Papers 4 to 6 to be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
7. Annual Report of the Legal Aid and Advisory Authority for fiscal year 2013 to 2014. [*The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi)*]
8. Annual Report of the Statutory Authorities Service Commission for the period October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017. [*The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. Marlene Mc Donald)*]
9. Ministerial Response of the Office of the Prime Minister to the Eighth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity on an Examination of the Perceived Inequality Faced by Single Fathers in Trinidad and Tobago with specific focus on Custody Matters, Policies and Access to Programmes and Services. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
10. Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation (Vesting) (Amendment to the First Schedule) Order, 2018. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

11. Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation (Vesting) (Amendment to the First Schedule) (No. 2) Order, 2018. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE

(Presentation)

Social Services and Public Administration

Mental Health and Wellness Services and Facilities

Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of National Security (Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have the honour to present:

Sixth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration, Fourth Session (2018/2019), Eleventh Parliament, on an Inquiry into Mental Health and Wellness Services and Facilities in Trinidad and Tobago.

URGENT QUESTIONS

Augustus Long Hospital

(Status of)

Dr. Lackram Bodoie (Fyzabad): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In light of the pending closure of Petrotrin, could the Minister inform the House what will be the status of the Augustus Long Hospital as of December 01, 2018?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As it is now well known, transition to the new organizational structure will be effective the 1st of December 2018. On that date, all operations at Petrotrin's medical facilities will be terminated. The company has introduced a new medical plan which is being rolled out next week and various meeting dates with pensioners and employees have been published in the newspaper today. With regard to the Augustus Long facility

Urgent Questions
Sen. The Hon. F. Khan (cont'd)

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specifically, RFPs are to be invited in January of 2019 for lease or sale of the property.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Minister, in the interim, can you give us an idea of what steps will be taken to protect the plant and equipment that will remain idle from December 1st?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Well, there is a security arrangement and there is infrastructure in place to protect all plants at Pointe-a-Pierre, including the refinery which is being mothballed as we speak and also the bungalows, and obviously including the Augustus Long facility.

Dr. Rambachan: Minister, is it true that the plan that is being put into place is a plan with Sagicor for two years? And what happens after those two years to the persons who would have been entitled if Augustus Long had stayed for treatment through life?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: It is true that a plan has been worked out with Sagicor through RFPs and it was a public tender for two years after which it will be further rolled over or re-evaluated, but a medical plan will continue for retirees post the two years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, according to the Standing Orders, only two supplemental questions are allowed and two have been asked and answered. Question No. 2, Member for Oropouche West—well, Chief Whip.

Tulsa Trace Flood Gates

(Commencement of Repair Works)

Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Oropouche West, with regard to reports indicating that

the Tulsa Trace flood gates are dysfunctional and contributed to the massive devastation to both livestock and properties, could the Minister indicate when urgent repair works will be commenced on these same flood gates?

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Tulsa Trace gates are a seven-flap gate system built by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries for irrigation purposes on the Caura River. They were originally designed for the prevention of saltwater intrusion into inland areas. These have not been functional for a very long period of time and have been earmarked for removal by the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. However, in the interim, the flaps of the gate system were removed and they are causing no restriction to the flow of the water.

Over the weekend of 16th to 18th November, 2018, the flooding at Tulsa Trace area and the surrounding areas was not as a result of malfunctioning gates but as a result of the extreme rainfall event. The run-off was beyond the regular storage of the currently existing watercourses. Thank you very kindly.

Dr. Rambachan: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to place the following supplemental. The hon. Minister said that the gates were originally placed there to avoid saltwater coming into the agricultural areas. Now that the Minister is announcing that the gates are to be removed, does this mean that the agricultural areas and fields will now be subject to saltwater, and what will that mean for crop production?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House, are you in a position?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would mean that the gates will be removed and replaced by a system that will ensure that we continue to ensure that saltwater does not intrude into the agricultural areas. But the gates, as I said, have not been functioning for some time and it means that they need to be removed and replaced.

Demolition of Homes in Santa Flora**(Authorization by State Agency)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: In light of the fact that several citizens have been dislocated through demolition action to their respective properties, could the Minister state which state agency authorized the demolition of these homes in Santa Flora?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the lands in question are owned by Trintopec and they are being managed by PSAEL, the Palo Seco Agricultural Enterprises Limited. The board of Trintopec gave instructions for the demolition for the following reasons: One, the structures are located in La Victoria Trace in Santa Flora, all within an oil-producing area within the set-back distance, which means that those structures are perilously close to producing oil wells. Three out of nine structures have been demolished after the owners were served notice for almost a year and did not comply. We were left with no other choice but to effect the law and the demolition.

Mr. Charles: Did the state agency act on its own or was it subject to ministerial or Cabinet review?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Obviously, an action like that does not need ministerial nor Cabinet approval.

Mr. Charles: Could the Minister state why the decision was taken to demolish just before the celebration of the birth of Christ?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I will not entertain that question. [*Crosstalk*] Members, I have ruled. Question No. 4, I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

Forensic Science Centre**(Measures to Facilitate Autopsies)**

Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Continuous crosstalk*] To the Minister of National Security: Could the Minister state what urgent measures—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second, Fyzabad. Members, I need to hear the question. Continue.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Minister of National Security: Could the Minister state what urgent measures are in place at the Forensic Science Centre to facilitate autopsies in light of the report that pathologist Dr. Hughvon des Vignes is on six weeks' vacation.

The Minister of National Security, Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There was no need to put any urgent measure in place. As it is known and I am sure as is known by the Member for Fyzabad, Dr. Borris has been granted an extension of her contract as a forensic pathologist and she is on call and on duty. What happened is, unfortunately, she had a pre-scheduled procedure yesterday and today and she was not able to be there to do the work while Dr. des Vignes was on leave.

Dr. Bodoë: Minister, can you indicate to us at this point in time how many bodies are currently awaiting autopsy at the Forensic Science Centre?

Hon. S. Young: Sorry. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I do not have that information available. I am sure that it can be made available.

Dr. Rambachan: Would Minister kindly tell us what has been done within the last 12 months following announcements made by the Government that they were going to increase the number of pathologists? What has been done to recruit new

pathologists and add to the bank of pathologists available at the Forensic Science Centre?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have engaged the UNDP and they have a programme where they internationally seek forensic pathologists; that process is ongoing. We have made the initial down payment to be able to access this plan. As a Cabinet, what we have also done is look at the granting of scholarships and, in particular, scholarships offered by the United Kingdom in the field of forensic pathology and we have asked for that to be done as well—[*Interruption*—]and the United States.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Homes for the Elderly
(Urgent Steps to Avert Abuse)**

Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To the Minister of Social Development and Family Services: Could the Minister indicate what urgent steps are being taken to avert the abuse of senior citizens at the homes for the elderly?

The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Ministry continues its ongoing public awareness initiatives aimed at building a heightened awareness as well as encouraging attitudes and behaviours consistent with respect for protection of and the advancement of the human rights of our senior citizens. The Ministry has also established an Older Persons Information Centre. This centre provides all information relevant to older persons in Trinidad and Tobago and it also receives complaints of abuse on older persons.

The Inspectorate Division of the Division of Ageing is responsible for

investigating all reports of elder abuse, both at geriatric homes and private residences, and this is with respect to whether it is physical, psychological or financial abuse and action is taken to resolve those issues. This, oftentimes, involves a collaboration with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and the Ministry of Health. The Ministry is also seeking to expedite the proclamation of The Homes for Older Persons Act, 2007 as this Act will provide for the licensing, regulation and control of homes for older persons and we are working with a time frame of June 2019. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Dr. Khan: Minister, I know it might be a little difficult, but how many of these homes have been investigated and any penalty given to those homes as of today?

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Over the last 12 months or so, we would have investigated abuse at 30 geriatric homes and 40 private residences. We would have taken action to remove some persons and other matters would have been reported to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. As it stands now, the Ministry does not have the authority to take action against these homes.

Dr. Khan: Last one. Minister, would you be considering a Cabinet Note for early drafting so the Ministry will be able to take action and penalize these homes that are abusing the elderly citizens?

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a Homes for Older Persons Act, 2007. The Act remains to be proclaimed. We are working with a deadline of June 2019. Once that Act is proclaimed, we will then be able to take relevant action.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Planning and Environment (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We will be answering all questions

on notice.

Circulation of Illegal Firearms

(Prevention of)

- 1. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan** (*Tabaquite*) on behalf of Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the Minister of National Security:

Given the increased level of gun violence in the committal of robberies and home invasions, could the Minister indicate the measures in place to prevent the circulation of illegal firearms?

The Minister of National Security, Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Over the past five years plus, there has been an increased level of gun violence in the committal of robberies and home invasions. The increase in these gun-related offences is due to a number of factors, including the previously porous state of our borders. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and other law enforcement arms are working on a number of intelligence-driven initiatives to retrieve illegal firearms and reduce the circulation of same. This is combined with efforts being made to secure our borders thereby reducing the potential for illegal firearms coming in the country.

Specific intelligence-driven operations aimed at locating and reducing the availability of illegal firearms for use in criminal activity are being implemented at this time and would include inter alia the use of provisions of the anti-gang legislation. Recent finds of illegal arms and narcotics are an indication of the effectiveness of the implementation of these plans. The recent launch of the Emergency Response Unit in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is another initiative aimed at increasing police presence, making the police more visible and

ensuring that the police are able to respond to reports of criminal activity in a quicker time which should assist in reducing the incidence of criminals committing these gun-related offences and when they do, lead to a higher likelihood of their apprehension.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Tabaquite.

Dr. Rambachan: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Minister, you have made reference in your answer to the porous borders and earlier you had admitted that there are number of fast-patrol boats, almost 19, that are not serviceable at the moment, 14 of which you are trying to service. What has been done since that announcement, which was about six weeks ago to now, to even put in place some of those fast-patrol boats in the areas where we know and are generally known by the people that guns are coming into the country?

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What has taken place in the last two weeks is we have actually located one of the fast-patrol vessels in the south-western peninsula and that vessel has actually been patrolling and prevented the incursion of a number of illegal immigrants even before they reach the shores. On the north coast, we had also put a vessel there and have also stopped a number of incursions on the north coast.

Whilst the Coast Guard has been doing this, they have been working along with the TTPS and Immigration and we have increased the number of Trinidad and Tobago Police Service patrols in areas which intelligence suggests are places where illegal immigrants were landing and there has actually been the apprehension, I would say, of between—I think the figures are between 50 to 70 illegal immigrants on shore and we have prevented a number from getting there. So the borders have actually been hardened up over the last two-week period.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, would you be kind enough to give an idea of how many possible entry points are there when you said that you are looking at the borders around Trinidad and Tobago?

Hon. S. Young: It is well known that they are both legal entry points and illegal entry points. The illegal entry points, I think, number, when they had done a study of the coastline—that is a study done many years ago—is about 190; 214 is the last but that is between Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could the hon. Minister state how many guns have been intercepted upon entering the country and the source, where did they come from or did you find them from?

Hon. S. Young: Those statistics have been released by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service over a period of time. They actually do tally them. I do not have that figure here today and the source seems to be from a number of different countries. For example, some of the firearms seem to be coming from the North American market and some from the South American market, but it is also something we are working with our international partners on tracing.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, in the detection of the source of the firearms, has there been any additional work done at the Forensic Science Centre to help you in this analysis?

Hon. S. Young: The Forensic Science Centre does have a backlog so what has been used is the armourer at the Police Academy to assist with some of them. There is also a special unit set up that has the connections with the international partners like the ATF in the United States, et cetera, that assist with the tracing of these firearms.

Violent Crimes Against Women
(Strategies to Address)

2. **Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan** (*Tabaquite*) on behalf of Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the Minister of National Security:

Given the upsurge in the number of kidnappings involving women and missing person cases involving women, could the Minister provide the strategies to address the upsurge of violent crimes against women?

The Minister of National Security, Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Commissioner of Police has reported that within the last two months, the five reported kidnappings, including those that were deemed fake, have all been returned safely with no ransom being paid. Notwithstanding this, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has not classified these incidents as an upsurge in kidnappings of either men or women. Specific emphasis is being given to the missing persons cases, and intelligence-driven investigations are ongoing.

With respect to a number of the missing persons reports, what is not being extensively reported to the public is that quite a few of these alleged missing persons are being found having left home and running off to get away from certain circumstances or to spend time with persons surreptitiously. Many of these matters result in the use of significant state resources to locate the individuals. Thankfully, in the vast majority of the cases, the missing persons are either found or turn up unharmed.

We are concerned about any crimes committed against our females. The TTPS continues to treat all kidnappings and missing persons, both male and female, with the highest level of priority and does not discriminate against one

gender or the other. In the cases of kidnappings and missing persons, the TTPS, through its Anti-Kidnapping Unit, provides specific assistance to the families of missing persons, including kidnappings, for the duration and following the incidents.

In the case of violent crimes against women, particularly domestic violence, I am very concerned about same and advised that the TTPS has clear procedures that guide its approach to addressing any type of violence, domestic violence situation. Additionally, the Domestic Violence Procedural Manual as well as Standing Order No. 53, Domestic Violence Procedures, provide step-by-step guidelines on the approaches.

Finally, the TTPS has intensified the training of officers with an aim of better equipping them to handle all cases, including those of domestic violence.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, could you, if you happen to have the information, indicate how many citizens are missing for 2018 and how many have been unaccounted for?

Hon. S. Young: I will be pleased to provide that. I do not have those statistics here.

Security of Nation's Borders

(Details of)

3. Dr. Surujrattan Rambachan (*Tabaquite*) on behalf of Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the Minister of National Security:

Given reports that animals are being used to smuggle guns, drugs and ammunition from Venezuela, could the Minister provide the measures in place to secure the nation's borders?

The Minister of National Security, Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Ministry of National Security, through the coordination of its divisions and agencies, in particular the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Immigration Division and the Strategic Services Agency, continues to work assiduously to implement enhanced border protection strategies to curtail the events of an ever-evolving threat, smuggling of guns, drugs and ammunition through our borders.

For security reasons, the Ministry is unable to divulge all the measures implemented to secure the nation's borders. However, the following are some key measures in place:

1. The Defence Force collaborates with key national stakeholders to embark on both routine and incident-specific intelligence-driven operations to enhance border protection. These operations are conducted through the use of contemporary risk-based techniques in conjunction with up-to-date surveillance equipment to include image detection systems from static and mobile platforms. Additionally, the joint border security elements of the TTDF conduct frequent three-dimensional patrols to detect, deter and prevent incursions and to provide early warnings and indicators of potential threats to our borders.
2. The Defence Force, through the Coast Guard and the Air Guard conducts numerous maritime and aerial operations aimed at strengthening border control and protection using a risk-based approach to secure our borders, focusing their enhanced capabilities against the highest levels of threat and rapidly responding along the vulnerable south-western and north-western borders—and I referred to two of them a short while ago.

3. The Immigration Division continues to promote national security by monitoring and controlling the movements of persons into, within, and out of the country by utilizing certain systems including an integrated border management systems. These strategies, amongst others, have allowed the Ministry of National Security to achieve greater situational awareness which has led to a quicker and more appropriate response to evolving threats.

2.15 p.m.

Further, the coast guard recently intercepted 15 vessels attempting to transport Venezuelan nationals into Trinidad as they made their way to the coast of Matelot on the 14th of November, 2018. This is one example of intelligence-led operations. This operation led to the arrest of six Venezuelans who were then handed over to the TTPS and Immigration.

And with respect to the suggestion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that animals are being used to smuggle guns, drugs and ammunition from Venezuela, there is no evidence of animals being used to smuggle. What we have had are incidents of animals being brought into our borders illegally from Venezuela, but not being used to smuggle arms and ammunition.

Dr. Rambachan: Minister, these animals that are coming into the country particularly in the Cedros area and south areas, are you seizing these animals and quarantining them, given that they might be carrying diseases of one kind or the other?

Hon. S. Young: That actually falls under the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and the answer is, yes. Once illegal animals are found being smuggled in, I think they are actually destroyed and not being quarantined because we cannot take the risk that it then populates our population with disease, et cetera.

Dr. Rambachan: Minister, can you say with certainty that the animals in fact have been caught and slaughtered or quarantined? Can you say that with certainty that the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has in fact done that?

Hon. S. Young: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Are you okay?

Dr. Rambachan: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed, Clerk.

COMPANIES (AMDT.) BILL, 2018

Bill to amend the Companies Act [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

THE PLANNING AND FACILITATION OF DEVELOPMENT

(AMDT.) BILL, 2018

Order for second reading read.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very kindly. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move:

That a Bill to amend the Planning and Facilitation of Development Act, 2014 and to consequentially amend the Environmental Management Act, Chap. 35:05, be now read a second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will crave your indulgence and ask for Standing Order 44(10) to be invoked.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Planning and Facilitation Bill or the Act was originally designed to reform the Town and Country Planning laws of Trinidad and Tobago by establishing:

- (1) a system for the preparation and approval of national and sub-national development plans; and

- (2) a system of planning and development approvals which are designed to secure predictability, simplicity, promptness and transparency in the treatment of development applications.

To that extent that was achieved, we would have ensured that the systems, processes and tools necessary to ensure a properly spatially planned and modernized Trinidad and Tobago were in place. It is noteworthy, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that when the Planning and Facilitation of Development Bill was originally presented to this house by the now Member of Parliament for Caroni Central, we were in Opposition at the time, and we expressed some very grave concerns over several portions of that Bill. We articulated those concerns and in the main our concerns fell on deaf ears, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and the Bill was passed in both Houses.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the main things that we had concern about was the fact that we felt that the qualification requirements for the Director of the National Planning Authority were very nebulous. We were also concerned, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the inconsistency in the definition of “simple development” which led to an inconsistency in the definition of “complex development”. We also expressed concern about the ambiguity with respect to the role and involvement of the Tobago House of Assembly, and the absence of a Chief Executive Officer to manage the day-to-day operations with regard to the National Planning Authority.

And one of the other major concerns that we expressed was the absence of a requirement that an urban planner be one of the persons required to sit on the Environmental Commission.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these concerns were genuine, these concerns were heartfelt, but still they were not taken on board by the last administration. Mr.

The Planning and Facilitation of Development
(Amdt.) Bill, 2018
Hon. C. Robinson-Regis (cont'd)

2018.11.23

Deputy Speaker, under this current administration, we established a committee to review the Act and this committee was convened and chaired by Dr. James Armstrong to ascertain whether the Act could be fully proclaimed in its existing form. The committee held its inaugural meeting on July 18, 2016 and submitted its recommendations in September 2016.

The Ministry of Planning and Development continued to review the legislation with a focus on ensuring that the legislation could be operationalized. The review resulted in the amendments that are being presented here today, which are the amendments that we find in the Bill before this House.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the partial proclamation was of the following sections of the Act, and those were: sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5(1), 6, 13, 31(1), 31(3), 31(4)(a), 31(4)(b), 33(1), 107 and the first Schedule with the exception of clause 14. And these were the sections that were proclaimed. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to place on record the concern that we had at that time, with regard to the sections that were proclaimed and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to also indicate that the proclamation took place on July 29, 2015.

And one of the main concerns that we had at the time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that because of the way that the qualifications for the Director of the NPA were described, it appeared to those of us who sat in Opposition at the time that the qualifications seemed to be for one particular person, one particular person. And so we were concerned that the Bill as it was then was being skewed to ensure that one person got the position of Director of the National Planning Authority.

And our concerns seemed to have been justified because the proclamation also dealt with just the development of the National Planning Authority in terms of the person who would be the Director and the other positions in that regard. And

so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we heard the date of July 29th and the proclamation of those specific clauses, it also raised our concerns because it was clearly felt that it was being done in time to ensure that prior to the elections, this particular person would have been appointed. And so, we felt that our concerns were justified.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this partial proclamation, allowed mainly for the establishment, as I said, and appointment of the members of the National Planning Authority and the hiring of staff accordingly.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, to execute this mandate, PricewaterhouseCoopers was formally retained by the Ministry of Planning and Development in July 2015, and their mandate was to design the organizational structure of the NPA, specifying job descriptions, job positions, grading, within the overall context for the administration of the system to be established under the Act. They were also mandated to conduct an executive search and assist in the recruitment and selection of persons to fill the following key executive positions: Chief Executive Officer, Chief Enforcement Officer, Chief Building Officer, Corporate Secretary and Director of Planning. Further mandate was to provide strategic recommendations on the salary structure of the NPA.

Prior to the elections, two deliverables were completed and paid for before the consultancy was interrupted by the change in administration in September 2015. The two deliverables were: (1), the inception report and (2), the preparation of a draft value chain for the NPA with a proposed comparator organization for compensation survey, the draft job descriptions for inclusion in recruitment advertisements, the preparation of preliminary advertisements inviting applications for NPA executive staff. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the consultancy subsequently lapsed when a review of the Act and the Town and the Country Planning Act, as I said

before, were requested in 2016.

Due to the length of time that the consultancy had been paused, the cost and work schedule have now been adjusted. In fact, in August 2018, we resumed the work of Pricewaterhouse and the original cost of the consultancy which was at \$351,258 has been adjusted and this adjustment in cost is due to the need for Pricewaterhouse to update its research data since the existing data collected stems from a 2015 date and is now outdated. And the consultancy is to be completed in two months and that is to say it is anticipated to be completed in early December 2018. The new cost is \$339,061.88.

In October 2018, a Planning and Facilitation of Development Act Implementation Committee was developed in the Ministry of Planning and Development to support full implementation of the Act. To this end, a Cabinet Note for this committee has been prepared for formal submission to the Cabinet. The Implementation Committee will devise a plan of action to support the full proclamation of the Act and the establishment of the National Planning Authority.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, additionally, a skills gap analysis has been completed for the implementation of the local government reform and meetings are ongoing between both Ministries. Mr. Deputy Speaker, because of the way that this Act has been crafted it includes the Municipal Development Authorities and the National Planning Authority. As you well know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, during the period 2007—2010, the then Government had developed local area plans for the 14 municipal corporations.

In addition, the THA has its own development plan and as a consequence of that this particular piece of legislation will ensure that the national plan and the area plans work in sync. So that the development or the further development of the

local government reform takes place with a national plan and a local area development plan. Mr. Deputy Speaker, a work breakdown structure was also completed to provide a global view of the components necessary for the successful implementation of the Planning and Facilitation of Development Act.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Bill before us is very specific. It is a precursor to the full implementation of the Act. It is necessary for amendments to be made to correct identified omissions, to clarify and streamline positions and institutional arrangements and alignments. And it therefore seeks to ensure the alignment with local government reform and the suite of amendments that must be addressed to empower the local authorities to meet the needs of the citizens of this country.

It also seeks to provide definitions such as “simple development” that hitherto were not included and without which operationalization of the Act could be impeded. It also seeks to clarify key institutional structures and key positions which are fundamental to the full proclamation of the Act. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with your permission I will take you through the amendments.

Clause 1 is the short title and this would provide for the short title as it says, which is the Planning and Facilitation of Development (Amdt.) Act, 2018.

Clause 2 is the interpretation of the Act, which would provide for the Act to mean the “Planning and Facilitation of Development Act, 2014”.

Clause 3, this is the insertion of the definition of “simple development”. This clause amends section 3 of the Act, by inserting a new definition of “simple development” after the definition of “road”, and that simple development definition, which was not previously defined by the Act, means that now the Act will clearly state what a “simple development” means; and that is, the matters defined as “simple development” would be consistent with those matters that

would mainly comprise simple development applications. “Complex development” therefore would be implied to be those developments not falling within the definition of simple development. Applications relating to simple development will all be determined at the level of the planning authorities, and the proposed definition is as follows:

“‘simple development’ means development for which an application is made for—

- (a) billboards or advertising signs;
- (b) outline or final planning permission not requiring a certificate of environmental clearance;
- (c) change of use, residential or building developments or any additions thereto where the cumulative floor area with additions, if any, does not exceed a gross floor area of 500m²; or
- (d) land subdivisions, including engineering operations, comprising less than twenty plots, provided that each plot falls within the range of 465m² and 800 m² inclusive;”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this definition seeks to ensure that simple developments, which would be the developments that would take place under the municipal corporations is clearly spelt out and there is no ambiguity as it relates as to what is a simple development.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, clause 4: This clause seeks to amend section 11 of the Act by the removal and replacement of certain representatives on the development control committee. The Development Control Committee will consider complex applications. Those applications with national significance, as is referred to it by the Director of Planning and the Chief Building Officer.

Upon review of the Act, it was recommended that a representative from the municipal or regional corporations and a representative from the line Ministry with responsibility for physical planning be included in the development control committee. The municipal corporations would have jurisdiction, as I said before, over simple applications but will have to pass complex matters in their jurisdiction to the National Planning Authority. They, we felt, should therefore be part of the deliberations of such matters by the committee and the representative, in addition, should be technically sound.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, clause 4, therefore would be amended as follows: Section 11(2)(b) of the Act would be amended to include representatives from the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Local Government Authorities. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have said that local government reform is an important part of the policy of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. We have also said that it is imperative that if there is development to take place in any municipality, the local government representatives must form part and parcel of any development that must take place in their jurisdiction. And as a consequence of that, we felt that it was necessary for a representative of TTALGA, which is the Association of Local Government Authorities, to be part of this body that will be looking at development.

Please note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, even if it is not a simple development but a complex development, once the development was taking place within the electoral district, or within the municipal corporation, or the regional corporation, or the city, it was imperative, we felt—given the importance of local government reform and given the importance of the local government representatives—that the local government authority should sit on the committee that looked at the

development.

In addition to that, we also are of the view that the Ministry with responsibility for physical planning and development of land be a part of the committee; also, representatives from the Occupational Safety and Health Agency and the Chief Medical Officer in the Ministry with responsibility for health.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I point out that at this present moment, in the absence of this grouping within the Ministry of Planning and Development now, there is a committee that looks at these complex developments to ensure that they are in keeping with government policy to ensure that they are in keeping with the national policy for what we want to take place in Trinidad and Tobago at this time. And that committee that sits now includes representatives from the Town and Country Planning Division; representatives from the EMA, sometimes from the IMA depending on if it is a coastal development; representatives from the Ministry of Works and Transport from the Transport Division in particular, and from the Drainage Division. We also sometimes include a representative from the Ministry of Health because it is for most developments, if not all, we do need approval from the Chief Medical Officer or representative. So, this will mirror what takes place now which is new to the Ministry of Planning and Development.

Clause 5 amends section 13 of the Act and this is the one where we had some very major concerns. Section 13 of the Act deals with the qualifications of the Director of Planning, and post-qualification experience of the Director of Planning, and the qualifications of the Chief Building Officer and the Chief Enforcement Officer. Mr. Deputy Speaker, clause 5 of the Bill would amend section 13(2) of the Act by providing additional qualifications for a person employed as the Director of Planning. It would also specify the type of engineering

post-qualification experience required for the Chief Building Officer and revise the post-qualification experience required for the Director of Planning, the Chief Building Officer and the Chief Enforcement Officer.

It is the view of the Government that the qualifications of the Director of Planning need to be raised to be consistent with the requirements of eligibility to register as an Urban and Regional Planner under the proposed Urban and Regional Planning Bill. Failing this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Director of Planning cannot be considered as a listed professional in accordance with Part VII of the existing Act.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was therefore incongruous that somebody who would be the Director of Planning could not qualify—given the qualifications that were required by the Act—could not qualify to be one of the listed professionals in the very Act that they would be overseeing. And this was one of the major points that we raised when we were in Opposition. It would have been incongruous, it would have been totally unfair, and that particular person could not have even been listed as a professional in the profession that the person was supposed to be directing all the planning for Trinidad and Tobago.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, come hell or high water we could not convince the then Minister or the other Members that it was incongruous and made absolutely no sense. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will repeat what the current requirement is for the Director of Planning, which is in the Act, and that is and I quote: Qualifications—and “qualifications” was not even qualified, just “qualifications”.

“...and at least ten years’ post-qualification experience in urban and regional planning...”

Very vague, very broad, qualifications in what? Just qualifications.

And certainly it did not point to the significant competence required of a person who was to be in the role of Director of Planning, who would be responsible for development planning and development control for Trinidad and Tobago. As a consequence of this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we propose that the qualifications of the Director of Planning should be as follows; and this is the same proposal we made then and we are saying that this is the amendment that we have brought to the House. And that is that:

“...the Director of Planning...shall have—

- (i) an undergraduate degree in the field of planning and a post-graduate qualification in...planning or a related field, both of which are to have accredited status and have been granted by an institution accredited under the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago Act; and
- (ii) at least seven years' post-qualification experience in urban and regional planning;”

2.45 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I make the point that this was the concern that we had and this is the amendment that we have brought in the Bill; however, on further examination we are proposing a further amendment. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will ensure that this further amendment is distributed, and the further amendment is again in relation to the qualifications of the Director of Planning.

What we had found after we placed this Bill before the House is that members of that field, that is, the field of urban planning, have indicated that there could be some further concerns. As a consequence of that, I am proposing a further amendment, and that is the original amendment may exclude candidates who may

not a have a degree in planning but who possess some other approximate undergraduate degree and a postgraduate qualification in planning. The information that has come to us is that many of the urban and regional planners have obtained master's degrees in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of the West Indies and from other universities for which the matriculation requirement was an undergraduate degree in an appropriate social, environmental or design science, and it is felt that these persons should not be eliminated from consideration as Director of Planning. Examples of design science include engineering, architectural, an architectural degree, or surveying.

The final amendment that we are proposing therefore would—*[Interruption]*
The final amendment would therefore read:

The Director of Planning who shall have—

- (i) an undergraduate degree in the field of urban and regional planning and a postgraduate qualification in urban and regional planning or a related field; or
- (ii) an undergraduate degree in social, environmental, or design science and a postgraduate degree in urban and regional planning.

So, therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that nebulous “qualifications” is totally eliminated because, in fact, it meant absolutely nothing, and the urban and regional planners were up in arms against that definition.

Dr. Khan: I just want to ask one question: Why then have an undergraduate degree if the both postgraduate degrees are what you are asking for?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: The undergraduate degree we felt would not be enough.
[Interruption] Yes, you need to have—you see, that would bring us back to

qualifications. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, the post-qualification experience of the three positions therefore—Director of Planning, the Chief Building Officer and the Chief Enforcement Officer—is revised from 10 years to seven years to make it easier to fill the post.

Clause 6 of the Bill would repeal and replace subsections (2) and (3) of section 15, and that is the functions of the Chief Building Officer and the Chief Enforcement Officer. So the Chief Building Officer shall—this is substituting the following subsections:

“(2) The Chief Building Officer shall—

- (a) establish inspection procedures for building and engineering operations;
- (b) forward breaches of”—planning—“regulations referred to him from the National Planning Authority, or a planning authority, to the Chief Enforcement Officer; and
- (c) perform the functions under sections 62, 66, 67, 68 and 70 of the Act.”

Regarding the Chief Enforcement Officer:

“(3) The Chief Enforcement Officer shall take action against—

- (a) breaches of building regulations referred to him by the Chief Building Officer; and
- (b) breaches of planning control referred to him by the Director of Planning.”

The amendments suggested in clause 7 are as follows, and these amendments would repeal subsection (4) of section 31 of the Act, and that deals with Development Order. Clause 7 indicates that this provision is no longer

necessary because it is already provided under subsection (3), that development allowed by a Development Order may be subject to such conditions and limitations as may be specified in the Development Order. So what we found is that there was superfluity, and consequently this can be removed.

Additionally in clause 8, which is an amendment to section 60, this clause would amend the Act by providing a person with the right to appeal to the Environmental Commission against a tree preservation order. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Act as it exists now does not have the right of appeal. The Act allows specifically for the preservation and protection of trees, but it did not allow for a right of appeal once you got an Order to protect a tree and that you could not cut the tree. So clause 8 would amend section 60 to allow for a right of appeal.

Clause 9, again, returned to the issue of the simple development application, and because clause 3 of the Bill where we have inserted the definition, there will be no need for this particular section. There will be an additional amendment to this clause to amend paragraph (d) in the definition of professional governing body. In that definition the governing body, under the proposed Urban and Regional Planning Profession Act, was not mentioned, and that was clearly an oversight. So we are amending it further to mention the Trinidad and Tobago Council for Urban and Regional Planners.

Clause 10 amends section 89, and that refers to appeals to the Environmental Commission. Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the power to exercise jurisdiction over appeals of decisions made by the planning authority, the Environmental Commission is the authority that would now deal with any issues of appeals, and the reference to planning authorities was inadvertently left out in the section of the original Act. It is clear that planning authorities make all decisions, except those

related to complex matters, and it is also clear that appeals would therefore arise from those decisions.

So in tidying up the Act we needed to ensure that planning authorities, which would be the municipal authorities or the regional authorities, that appeals could stem from those authorities to the Environmental Commission; that was not part of the Act that was brought. Clause 11, again there is an issue of tidying up, and this is an amendment to section 90. It deals with appeals against development repair orders, compliance notices, immediate compliance orders and tree preservation orders. As I said, it is a tidying up clause, and what it seeks to do is insert after the words, “planning control”, the words, “or have been complied with”. And in (b), in subsection (4), by deleting the words, “altered or revoked”, and substituting the words, “varied or set aside”, and this more clearly reflects the relationship between appeals and the Environmental Commission and how they should be effectively stated.

With regard to clause 12, this is a repeal of subsection 1(g) and (h) of section 95, and it deals with offences. Mr. Deputy Speaker, these provisions we found, after careful examination of the Act, we found that these provisions were not necessary because failure to comply with the requirements of any compliance notice, any compliance order or a development repair order is already extensively addressed under sections 54 and 57 of the Act. So we were of the firm view that these sections were again superfluous. With regard to clause 13 of the Bill before us, and this is the amendment of the First Schedule, these amendments provide inter alia for the appointment of a Chief Executive Officer of the National Planning Authority, the secondment of officers to the service of the National Planning Authority, and extends the period of the exercise of options available to public

officers upon the full proclamation of the Act from three months to six months.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, from several examples where we have had to deal with secondment of public officers to newly formed authorities, we have found that the three-month period is never enough time for these officers to make their decision and move over to the statutory authority. So this amendment would ensure that enough time, or more time than three months is given. The amendment is very specific, in clause 1 it says, we are deleting the words, “sectoral interests”, and substituting the words, “sectoral private interests”. We are inserting, after subclause (3), the following subclause, (3A).

“(3A) The National Planning Authority shall appoint a Chief Executive Officer who shall—

(a) be an ex officio member”—of the Authority; “and

(b) be responsible for the day to day management of the National Planning Authority.”

Further, in clause 14(2), we are deleting the words, “three months”, and substituting the words, “six months”, and as I said, this provides a more practical time frame for the exercise of the options available to public officers.

We are also, by deleting paragraph (b) and substituting the following paragraph, and I quote:

“(b) be employed with the National Planning Authority on terms and conditions no less favourable than those enjoyed by him in the Public Service; or’;”

And the amendment ends there because it continues as it is in the Act. Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, having spoken to the PSA we felt it was important to ensure that the Authority did not negatively affect persons who wanted to move over to the

service from the public service into the Authority. The Public Service Commission has indicated to the Ministry of Planning and Development that it has no power to transfer persons out of the service and into an independent organization, as we well know, and the Public Service Commission can merely note the movement from the service into the independent organization, and therefore it was clear that the Act, which said, with the approval of the Public Service Commission, was incorrect, and consequently we have removed that because it was not possible for the commission to give approval or disapproval. So it was incorrect.

With regard to paragraph (c), the Bill amends by stating that the “date of the assent of this Act” and substituting, “the date of commencement of this Act”, and as I said initially, the Act requires proclamation. There was the proclamation of the sections, as I said, previously, and there would have to be proclamation of the further sections once the Parliament approves. We also are inserting, after clause 14, the following clause which provides for transfer on secondment to the National Planning Authority, and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I quote:

“14A. (1) An officer or employee in the public service, a statutory authority, any domestic or foreign public or private body may, with the consent of the National Planning Authority and the approval of the appropriate service commission or the relevant body, consent to be transferred on secondment to the service of the National Planning Authority.

(2) Where a transfer on”—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two more minutes to complete.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:

“Where a transfer on secondment is effected, such arrangements as may be necessary, shall be made to preserve the rights of the officer...”

And clause 14, there is a consequential amendment to the Environmental Management Act and that is to provide for the members of the Environmental Commission to be expanded to include persons who have knowledge and experience in urban and regional planning. That does not exist at present, and that is important if they have to deal with planning issues.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, these therefore are the amendments that this Government is proposing to the Act. We are firm in the knowledge that this Act, working in conjunction with local government reform, will make major changes to how the development takes place in Trinidad and Tobago. The concerns that we had when we were in Opposition we have made an effort to make the amendments that deal with those concerns. We have started the automation of the Town and Country Planning Division so that development control and development planning can take place more effectively. I have got several complaints from the Member for Tabaquite, and from other Members, even Members on my own side regarding how effectively the Town and Country Planning Division operates, but we understand their concerns, and we know that with the automation and these amendments that we will be effectively able to do proper planning in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are other things that I will indicate but I await my colleagues, and with those words, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Caroni Central. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy

Speaker. I take this opportunity to respond to the Member for Arouca/Maloney and Minister of Planning and Development, and to raise a few issues in relation to the Planning and Facilitation of Development (Amdt.) Bill, 2018, before the House. I started to take some notes when the Minister was speaking and then I stopped, and the reason I stopped is because I could not believe the presentation. The more the Minister proceeded, the more confusing the presentation became, in my view.

With all due respect to the Members, citizens who might be listening and watching, I am sure that the citizens are none the wiser in understanding anything that the Minister said [*Desk thumping*] having to do with what were the changes that were being made, what were their implications, why these things were necessary and what is the significant difference that it will make to the quality of service to the citizenry. [*Desk thumping*] Remember, Town and Country Planning, the Ministry of Planning and Development, and the matters related to approvals for buildings and land development, and so on, have to do with the citizens of this country. They have to do with people building a home. They have to do with people facilitating a development, making an entrepreneurial investment in a development, and it also has to do with order and system to make sure that is efficient and transparent, and I do not think the citizen is better off in understanding anything that the Minister said here as making a difference to their lives. But I will address some of the issues by going directly to the Bill.

On page 2 of the amendment Bill, “simple development”, is moved from page 277 of the Act that was passed in 2014, Part IV, section 73, and it is then inserted in section 3 under the definitions; the text and substance are exactly the same. So what the Minister has done and what she has come here in the amendment to do is simply to take a part of the Bill that already exists and put it in the definition

section, and she has not changed a single word in anything that she has transferred to the definition section. I have to ask myself, well, why was this necessary? So the issue here is, is this better suited in what is called the definition section—it is really actually called interpretation and purpose section—or in the original place which it was located where the definition of “simple development” is followed by a definition of “complex development”? And when you look at page 277 in the Act, what you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is in fact that you have simple development and you then have complex development, so that anyone reading the Act will be able to see very clearly what simple development is and what complex development is, and they are located in the same place.

What has happened now is that they have pulled simple development in the definition section and I do not know the rationale. The Minister had an explanation but it does not seem to make good sense to me or it does not seem to be meaningful enough to justify the movement. Now, in other words the original Act locates simple and complex development together in sequence. The other issue is there is a deletion of a subclause (e), “engineering operations” as are described, I do not know why that particular clause has been deleted. I do not know what value it adds when you delete it, and I really do not know what is lost by the deletion. So maybe the Minister in her winding-up can explain a little bit, but I really cannot understand the reason for the deletion and I cannot understand the reason for the movement.

Now, the Minister talks about the fact that they have removed the Bill—she did not say this, you know; she did not say this, she spoke around the issue, but what they have done is they have taken out OSHA from the complex, from the National Planning Authority roundtable, so to speak, for decision-making, and they

have taken out the CMO, the Chief Medical Officer. And by her own admission, the Minister indicated that in almost every decision you need to have the health official express a point of view or make a contribution, or to be present to make an input. I cannot understand why they would take away OSHA because that really has to do with health and safety matters, having to do with development planning, having to do with land and drainage, and related matters, and it also has to do with the buildings themselves, and I do not know why they would take out the Chief Medical Officer.

What is even more mindboggling, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that I cannot understand the rationale for the inclusion of the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Local Government Authorities. Why would you want to do that? The Trinidad and Tobago Association of Local Government Authorities really consists of a cross-political representation of local government authorities in the country, and generally what that does is to discuss issues in relation to local government, and of course they represent Trinidad and Tobago in relation to local government issues and local government conferences abroad. I find it very hard to justify the legitimacy of this organization, taking the place especially of an OSHA representative and the Chief Medical Officer. So it seems to me a kind of political input, all right? It seems to me a political intervention here.

The second thing is that, what is the rationale for the inclusion of the—sorry, I said that. Why include a Ministry of Planning and Development official when the idea behind the establishment of the National Planning Authority is to establish an arm's-length relationship between the planning authority and the Ministry? Now, this Bill was very thoughtfully conceived, and if you read some of the *Hansard* reports—and this Bill dates back, and as I have said when I was Minister, dates

back to 1988, I think, if I am not mistaken, when the reform process began, and several administrations have looked at this. There was a conceptual frame for it, and the idea was, as this Bill was passed in 2014, that there would be a certain kind of power in the hands of the Minister, what you might call, residual power, the power of recall; the Minister had the ability to intervene, but you gave a lot of the authority to the National Planning Authority and the other authorities that had jurisdiction to give approval for plans, and so on. Okay?

And the question is: Why do you want to insert now, a Ministry of Planning and Development official into the National Planning Authority when there is already a relationship established between the Minister of Planning and Development and the Director of Planning, and there is a procedure by which the one engages the other?

And as I said there are residual powers for the Minister of Planning, including the right to recall if he or she does not agree with a decision, and then there is a process by which you engage to deal with certain things afterwards.

3.15 p.m.

So, I find that the deletion of OSHA, the elimination of the CMO, I do not find it to be justifiable, and I do not find the inclusion of the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Local Government Authorities, and the inclusion of a ministerial functionary from Planning, as being justifiable either. I would ask the Minister to reconsider, understanding the philosophical underpinnings of the Bill.

On page 3 of the Bill before us, these have to do with the structure of the National Planning Authority, which calls for three heads: the Director of Planning, the Chief Building Officer and the Chief Enforcement Officer. In each and every case the post-qualification experience has been reduced from 10 years to seven

years. It may be argued that 10 years are too many, and it may be argued that seven years of experience are adequate, I do not have any problem with that. But given the way the Minister did the presentation, I feel that they have a candidate in mind for one of these posts, [*Desk thumping*] if not three, and when the information becomes clear in the public domain, I think we will find out that the person or the persons only have seven years of qualifications. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: Less than 10.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Now, let us follow this thing carefully, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Why are the qualifications of the Chief Building Officer and Chief Enforcement Officer so clear, so simple, so “uncumbersome”, so straightforward, and the qualifications of the Director of Planning so meticulously elaborated and drawn out? Let me read it. Remember, the Minister came here with amendments, right? So let us look at the qualifications for the Chief Building Officer based on the amendments. This is the Minister’s amendment before us in this Bill now. For the Chief Building Officer—oh, it is not in here. It is in the original Bill, because she makes no amendments in these matters—just one second.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Chief Enforcement Officer, this is what it reads now:

“the Chief Enforcement Officer who shall—

- (i) have qualifications and at least”—seven, with the amendment—
“years’ post-qualification experience in a profession relating to the built environment;”

That is what the existing law says, and the Minister brings no amendment for this, except to change 10 years to seven years. The Minister also in the other one:

“be an Attorney-at-law of at least”—seven years’ standing with the

amendment—“and have experience in law relating to the built environment...”

“(b) the Chief Building Officer who shall have qualifications and at least”—seven—“years’ post-qualification experience in...”—and the one amendment is “civil engineering”.

So they have changed “engineering” to “civil engineering”. But the most convoluted amendments are really left for the Director of Planning. This is the Director of Planning, separate and distinct from the Chief Building Officer and the Chief Enforcement Officer, for which there are no elaborate requirements and only one simple amendment, in the case of the change of engineering only to civil engineering.

For the Director of Planning, you have now:

“(i) an undergraduate degree in the field of planning and a post-graduate qualification in planning or a related field, both of which are to have accredited status and have been granted by an institution accredited under the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago Act; and”—then it goes to the—“seven years’ post-qualification experience in urban and regional planning;”

I am not surprised that she came with a further amendment, the Minister of Planning and Development came with a further amendment today on this very clause, because when I read it, I said, “But how could you single out this thing like that? What is the problem that they have?” You know, there is a saying that when you are accustomed to expropriating things everywhere you see it, when you see bad, “you does get confuse”. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] So I am not surprised at what has happened here.

We will look at some of the other amendments, and really there seems to be the establishment here of a kind of capacity for—I do not want to use the word “‘gangsterism’, nah”—but there seems to be a capacity being built up here that is not nice.

So my summary position on this thing, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that in the case certainly of the Director of Planning, this piece of amendment here together with the further amendments that have been brought today, have been designed *ad hominem*. They have been designed for two purposes: one, to include and the other to exclude. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a direct imputation of improper purpose, that *ad hominem* legislation is constitutionally improper, Sir. So I take strong objection to the argument of my learned friend. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, hold on. Member, again, it is either you be specific if you want to go down that road, or if not you retract and move on accordingly. You are given the option to be more specific if you care to.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Well, I ask it as a question then. [*Desk thumping*] Has this amendment—

Mr. Al-Rawi: I rise on Standing Order 48(6). There is no way to describe something which is improper by way of asking a question, Sir. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hinds: There is no right way of doing the wrong thing!

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: You would know about that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. Members, please. Member for Siparia and Member for Laventille West, if you care to continue the dialogue you all are free to exit the Chamber and proceed. Other than that, hold on—

Hon. Member: “Doh go nowhere with he.”

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Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Sorry, Sir, I withdraw.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, kindly retract the statement totally please.
[*Crosstalk*]

Dr. B. Tewarie: Minister—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member—Siparia and Naparima, I need no echo.
I have ruled; proceed.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Mr. Deputy Speaker, on your instructions I retract the statement.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Kindly proceed.

Dr. B. Tewarie: But I ask the question, might this amendment have been designed either to favour or to exclude? [*Desk thumping*] The roles of the Director of Planning, the Chief Building Officer and the Chief Enforcement Officer have been altered. The issue is whether the changes make for more bureaucracy or greater clarity and precision. I see things have to be referred now to the Chief Building Inspector by the Director of Planning, whereas the Chief Building Inspector would have been able to act on the basis of any matter that came before the chief building officer from any authority, or may have been able to act in his own or her own stead. So I do not know if we have created more bureaucracy or greater clarity and precision. I will not fight or argue about that.

Most of the other elements are not contentious. We have the provision of a Chief Executive Officer. The Member for Arouca/Maloney and Minister of Planning and Development said that there was a big issue about that, I do not remember it, I will be quite frank. It may have come up but I do not remember it as a big issue, and certainly there could be no real objection to something like that.

But the real question, given these amendments which the Minister took time to go through and some of which I have addressed here, and it is clear that the only

real amendment that the Minister was interested in here is a reduction of the 10 years to seven years, and the redefinition of the terms and the framework for the hiring of the Director of Planning. Everything else here is not really—nothing here is of any real great substance.

But having said that, the real question is: Did you need three years, Minister, to bring these amendments here? [*Desk thumping*] You spent three years, did not do anything more, did not add any value to the legislation, did not proclaim the legislation, and after three years you bring these amendments here focused, by and large, on the job and the job specifications and the legislative basis on which the Director of Planning is going to be hired. Three years for that.

Hon. Member: You had four years' experience three years ago; makes sense. [*Laughter*]

Dr. B. Tewarie: My colleague is saying that maybe the person—anyway, I will be asked again to withdraw, [*Laughter*] so I better not say it.

Anyway, most of the other amendments are neither here nor there, and I continue. I raise some of the issues here now which I think are worthy of raising.

Now, the purpose of the parent Act, Mr. Deputy Speaker, was first of all to reform Town and Country Planning Division and process. The Minister herself admits that people are not very pleased with what is happening now. I think we had made good progress when I was there. [*Desk thumping*] Within 60 days you could get an approval. For a more complex approval maybe 90 days, 120 days. I do not remember the exact times now, but those things were very much—and the complex committee that she talks about was established in my time. I spoke about them in the ministerial— [*Desk thumping*] In the 2014 *Hansard* you will see that I mentioned that they were already established.

They were meant to strengthen the building laws in Trinidad and Tobago, this Bill. It was meant also to establish a system for the preparation and approval of national and subnational development plans—the Minister admitted that. And it was supposed to make things more transparent and predictable for the ordinary citizen, because the Bill was done with the citizen in mind, you know. As I said, it was not just my idea, we had inputs. This Bill has been in process since 1988. In from about 2001—2010, this Bill sat there and lapsed. Yes, 1999—2010 it lapsed, and nothing was done all of those years. And if you look at the process for the passage of this Bill you will see how the Opposition at the time helped to drag this Bill along and to extend the time, which is why we did not pass this Bill maybe in 2013 or 2012.

When the Minister of Planning and Development talks about the fact that we brought something in July 2015, it was because the Bill had been passed in 2014, and you had to do the preparatory things. If you are going to set up a planning authority, what do you do first? Do you not get to the point where you can, in fact, establish the institutions so you can get the job going? We did what was required. So, I want to ask the Minister, you know, you have not really done anything under this really valuable Bill, if you had brought it to fruition.

What is happening for instance too, you know these permissions have a lot to do with construction. If you look at cement sales for instance, which is a good indicator of what is happening in construction, you will see that between January and September of this year, you have less cement being sold than January and September, even last year 2017, which was not a great year for construction. So, all of these issues of Town and Country, the issues related to the Planning and Facilitation Bill, not just the passage of the amendments or the making of the

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amendments, but the proclamation of the Bill, really have to do with development issues. They have to do with the citizen getting permission, building a house. Yes?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Your initial speaking time has expired. You have an additional 15. You care to avail?

Dr. B. Tewarie: I shall be grateful.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

Dr. B. Tewarie: And I say these things, understanding of course that they have implications for other things, because we have a falling labour force in this country. We have a rising economically inactive population, that is, problems of the labour force participation rate. We have declining gross capital formation, which is to say, the GDP is moving down. We have an expenditure bias towards imports, and the murders in this country alone have reduced the labour force by 1 per cent.

In that kind of situation, the Planning and Facilitation Bill—[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: “Continue, doh take dem on.”

Dr. B. Tewarie: What it says to us is that this business of development, construction, home construction, et cetera, is very important. Also you have—and the Minister is Minister of Planning and Development—a problem with agriculture—[*Crosstalk*]

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am having great difficulty in hearing our colleague, please.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, Members, according to the Standing Orders we are supposed to listen in silence. So again, I would also like to hear the Member, so please Members on both sides listen in silence, please. Proceed.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Thank you very much. So not only in housing but in agriculture,

and the reason I raise that is because agricultural lands and the movement of agricultural lands, passage of approvals and also movement of agricultural lands to housing, et cetera, that is also related to her. But there is a real reduction in the production process in agriculture as well. I might ask, is the State building any houses? Are there any public or private partnerships in housing? Are there any State-constructed houses going up? Is any housing construction going up that will make a difference to the 140,000 applicants—I think the Minister of Finance told us in the budget—were waiting for houses? The Minister of Planning and Development should keep her eyes on some of these things.

I want to deal with this question of qualifications. You see, the undergraduate degree in Urban Planning that the amendment calls for is not available at UWI.

Hon Member: What?

Dr. Moonilal: “So we making law for what?”

Dr. B. Tewarie: And there are very few urban planners in the world who did an undergraduate degree in urban planning. [*Desk thumping*] Most people will do their degree in sociology, geography, the environment, engineering, whatever, and they go for a post. It is like an MBA, you go for a postgraduate qualification in the field. [*Desk thumping*] It is no wonder that they hustle to make this amendment, because “somebody must be whisper it in their ears”. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I again rise on 48(6).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, before I rule, I heard your statement. Kindly retract it please, Member.

[*Dr. Tewarie remains seated*]

Dr. B. Tewarie: Yes I do, Sir.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker: Stand and do it in the appropriate fashion please.

Dr. B. Tewarie: I stand and retract.

Dr. Moonilal: “Or sitting and say it.”

Mr. Indarsingh: “It looking like Wiley number two.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. AG, 48(6), expound please.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member stood and came with the same conclusion that he did a while ago, which he retreated from, which is that something is being created in an ad hominem fashion. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please.

Mr. Al-Rawi: It is the way that it came across from the hon. Member’s return to the issue, Sir. So I rise for consistency.

Mr. Imbert: Somebody whispered it in his ears.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again, hon. Member, just be careful in the road that you are going down, again, because it was highlighted earlier.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Thank you. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you can—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hold on. Members, I continue to rule and Members continue to make statements after I rule, please. Naparima, I am hearing you, I am hearing you. Member, proceed.

Dr. B. Tewarie: So given this situation with undergraduate degrees and postgraduate degrees in Urban and Regional Planning, should we not be doing something in terms of manpower planning in the role of scholarships, et cetera, alignment of human capital with economic, environmental and developmental issues, and the diversification agenda? Should we not be doing that, rather than trying to come and prepare the text of an amendment in order to deal with a reality you wish to create?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are some other outstanding issues that I would like to raise. What about building and land subdivision codes? Are all of these things settled now? I am asking questions. What about the physical, financial and human resources to put this Bill into effect? Does the proposal of the new THA legislation—I am not sure if it has left the JSC yet, I know it went to the JSC—will that have any effect on this particular Bill here, the Planning and Facilitation Bill? Because we do not know finally what is going to be in the Bill.

Since 2015, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and given that the Minister herself said that local government was very important in their position as a Government, that these things were very important, and given that we had consultations in 2016 on devolution and decentralization and transfer of power to local government, what progress has been on the simple devolution that is called for here in this particular Bill, and which was started? The process had started. The process of consultation between local government and planning had started since 2014, while the Bill was being discussed in Parliament. Has there been any revision or reflection or update of any of the policies in relation to this Bill and how it might be effective? Has the PSA and other unions been engaged properly? I know that there are clauses here which I have no problem with, that have to do with the movement of people from the public service into these new institutions that are going to be created.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is only one consequential amendment to the EMA Act, but what about the Municipal Corporations Act, are we going to have consequential amendments there? The implications for local government reform, would we not have a legislative requirement in order to effect that? Is there any need for adjustment of the Public Health Act, for instance? And what is the role of enforcement in this? Enforcement is now empowered in this legislation, and

there is a reason for that. You have to deal with the realities of Trinidad and Tobago, of people doing things that they are not supposed to do, breaking the law.

But what is the role of enforcement for an unauthorized state development for instance? How is this going to be attended to? What are the implications for a policy if you have a quasi-independent institution, which is why I raised the issue of Planning being represented on the committee, when the Minister already has residual powers and jurisdiction? What is the value of the independence, the quasi-independence, that this institution has, and what is the significance of that for the amendments that we are making in the legislation?

The Minister mentioned automation. What is happening in automation? Is the Ministry via the Town and Country Planning, automating old processes that exist now, or are they automating new processes as envisaged under this plan which needs to be proclaimed? Now, this is a very important question, because if you do the wrong thing, you are going to have to do it all over again if you are to effect it under the Bill. I am not saying that they are doing the wrong thing, and they are probably doing the right thing, but I would like clarification on it.

The ICT system in Ministries is a problem, that is according to the Auditor General's Report. It says here in one chapter, the top of page 73:

“The Ministry of Public Administration and Communications in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and Development should address the IT needs of Ministries and Departments in a holistic manner to achieve effective systems interoperability.”

So they are basically saying you have a dysfunctional ICT system. Planning should have a key role in it. Public Administration should have a key role in it.

3.45 p.m.

So when I am asking this question about automation, and whether it is proceeding as it should, and addressing the realities of the new Bill, it is a serious question. Okay? Because in the ICT we have not solved the IHRIS problem, the Integrated Financial Management Information System, public administration issues, customer service issues remain, interministerial collaboration remains an issue.

And part of this, for instance, one of the reasons we have gone so low—from 79, I believe, to 105 in Ease of Doing Business—is because of the relationship between the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Planning and Development that these two Ministries must do something together in order to advance the case for a more competitive country.

So, we also have the implementation delay. I mentioned, why three years?—I asked the question. I asked the question about the small building code, there are built heritage regulations and other things that we need to know about in relation to this.

And I want that say that when I left the Ministry, a Cabinet Note under the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government and administration was approved for the transition process. So that was there; how to make the transition. A detailed implementation strategy. We withheld that from going to Cabinet, but it was there in the Ministry, it was done. We felt perhaps we had not been enough prepared to do that detailed implementation strategy, but it was there in Ministry. I do not know if that is the detailed strategy that the Minister mentioned too. And note a detailed action required was left on local government and its requirements as well. A municipal planning committee was also established and we had engaged and

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begun five pilots—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, you have two more minutes.

Dr. B. Tewarie: Yes. Thank you, Sir. We had done five pilots, one in Tobago, Port of Spain, Chaguanas, Tunapuna and San Fernando because we felt that you did not have to do all the local government areas at once, but if you did these pilots for five and you used the planning offices that were in different places whether they were San Fernando, and we were doing something with Chaguanas, et cetera, that that would be enough to start the process, and over time we would be able to deal with everything else. Everything we did was based on a realistic assessment of what was on the ground and what needed to be done.

So, I just probably have one minute, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I simply want to say that we welcome the Minister coming to speak to this Bill. We are most concerned about the proclamation. We are concerned about the thinking behind some of these amendments here, and the fact that new amendments had to be brought after the old amendments were circulated tells us that things were not properly thought through, and perhaps they need to reconsider. And having said that, I want to say that we await the Minister's response to hear some of the responses to what I have said here. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

PROCEDURAL MOTION

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in accordance to Standing Order 53, I beg to move that the debate on the Planning and Facilitation of Development (Amdt.) Bill be adjourned.

Question put and agreed to.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will move on now to the committee stage of Income Tax Bill.

INCOME TAX (AMDT.) BILL, 2018

[Second Day]

The committee of the whole House resumed its deliberations on the Bill.

[Chairman: Mr. Forde]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, we would like now to convene, reconvene the committee of the whole. Welcome to the technocrats from the Ministry of Finance and the AG's office.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Chairman: One second. Hon Members, the committee stage of the following Bill which was adjourned on Friday, November 2nd will be resumed.

Hon. Members, on Friday 2nd November 2018, clauses 1 to 4 of the Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, 2018 were considered in the committee of the whole and approved without amendments. We now resume the committee of the whole, and I ask the Minister of Finance to make a statement as identified.

Mr. Imbert: Thank very much, Mr. Chairman. What I would ask the House to do is, since the clause that we stopped at is the clause that is attracting the attention of both sides of the House, and the clause that is substantive to the discussion between both sides, there other clauses in this Bill, namely 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10, several of which provide protection for citizens. And I would like to go straight to 6 and deal with 6 down to the last one, 10, and then we can go back to 5 which is the one that is attracting attention.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Could I get the agreement of the House based on the recommendation of the Minister of Finance?

Assent indicated.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Proceed.

Clause 6.

Question proposed: That clause 6 stand part of the Bill.

- A. In proposed section 4B –
- (a) “delete the words” “4(6)(a) and (b)” and substitute the words “4(6)”;
 - (b) in paragraph (c) by deleting –
 - (i) the words “of collection” and substituting the words “for which it was collected”; and
 - (ii) the words “taxpayer” and substituting the word “Board”;
- B. In proposed section 4C delete the words “or 4A”;
- C. In proposed section 4D in the definition of “taxpayer information” by inserting after the word after the word “individual” the words “entity or legal arrangement”.

Mr. Imbert: Sorry. Mr. Chairman, my apologies. On the last—is this circulated today or was it circulated on the last occasion? I am being told that—

Mr. Chairman: One second. There is a mobile phone, this is about third time when we were in the House, you know, we are getting some vibrations. So, please, make sure it is on silent or switched off, please. It now went off again.

Mr. Imbert: Can I just confirm whether this list of amendments that was to be moved by me was circulated to Members on the last occasion? I do not know if Members walked with it today.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Members of the House, the circulation with regard to all the clauses or just 6 alone?

Mr. Imbert: It is just 6 and 8.

Mr. Chairman: 6 and 8. Chief Whip, your Bench has—

Mr. Imbert: Sure.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Chair, if I could just—

Mr. Chairman: One second. Could you provide the copies, please?

Mr. Al-Rawi: It is just a reminder. We traversed it in the debate. It was the recommendations from the Global Forum which were the very innocuous ones, just adding in “individual or”. So, clauses 6 and 8 were direct recommendations coming from the Global Forum itself as communicated to all of us.

Mr. Imbert: They were very minor amendments.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Mr. Chairman, could we have it in front of us before the AG attempts to give us—

Mr. Chairman: Fair enough. So it is being circulated at this time and—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Yeah. We do not have it.

Mr. Chairman: AG, one second. All right. It is being passed on.

Mr. Imbert: You have enough there. Right? You have enough for them? Right?

[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: We now have it before us. Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. So, Mr. Chairman, the amendments that have been circulated to clause 6 are really making some very minor stylistic amendments to clause 6 in the proposed section 4B. So in clause 4B, it is just to correct some typographical— it is typographical.

In 4C, again, typographical. And in D, this is the one where the Global Forum had asked us to include after the word “individual” the words “entity or legal arrangement”. They were trying to capture everything, whether it was a

person, a legal person, an individual person or a partnership, a joint venture, that sort of thing. So, the Global Forum just asked us to add after the word “individual” in 4 C, the words “entity or legal arrangement”, so it is not a big deal. Okay? Mr. Chairman, that is it.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Sure. Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I just want to respond to the Minister on this specific matter and be allowed to just make a very brief statement on the proceedings. And a statement made by the Minister a couple seconds ago led me here, in that the Minister is indicating that the Global Forum asked the Government to do something, and the Government is making the amendment to facilitate that request from the Global Forum.

Mr. Chairman, when on the last occasion, myself and other colleagues on this side took a position on this matter, and I just wanted to remind the Minister of Finance, for the record, as we restart the process that the Opposition has been in touch with the Government and has responded in writing to our proceedings this afternoon. And we want to reiterate and strongly commend the Minister to adopt the view as outlined by the Leader of the Opposition and Members on this side that this entire process should be recommitted to a joint select committee—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Dr. Moonilal:—to look at all the amendments.

Mr. Imbert: We are dealing with clause 6 of the Bill. This is not a debate, we are not engaging in debate.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Chairman, this comment that I am making will be relevant to every clause, so I may have to repeat it at every clause, and I prefer not to do that, but to indicate the position generally and from the start, so that we are not accused

in any way of misleading the Government or participating in this process or ambushing them, and the process is very clear. We stated on the last occasion, if you will just give me a minute to indicate that there are other complex issues—

Mr. Chairman: I need to hear the Member.

Dr. Moonilal:—there are other complex issues that have been raised in the public domain by the Leader of the Opposition in a comprehensive response of the Government that took the form of a press release and a letter sent to the Minister of Finance. That letter and the press release states in detail the concerns of the Opposition.

And apart from the specifics, we are very concerned that we ought not to come to the floor on such a serious matter and attempt to make law on the hoof. [*Desk thumping*] Because we are hearing the Minister even now with this clause, I come back to the clause, saying that we are making a change, whether it is minor or major, because Global Forum tells us to do that. Now, we have no evidence on this side, we have no information as to what the Global Forum is telling us.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman.

Dr. Moonilal: Because on the first—

Dr. Rowley: If we are having a debate—

Mr. Imbert: It is not a debate.

Dr. Rowley: I reserve my right—

Mr. Chairman: Okay, hon. Prime Minister. Could you round up your point?

Dr. Moonilal: I will round it up by saying at this stage, the Opposition has no confidence in the Government and the information being provided—[*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. AG or the Prime Minister?

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Chairman—

Dr. Moonilal:—and we need to deal with this matter.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Oropouche East, you have said you will round up. Thank you.

Dr. Rowley: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Prime Minister.

Dr. Rowley:—we are guided in this Chamber by the rules and regulations that we accept. If the Opposition has no confidence in the Government, then you are free to file a vote of no-confidence in such as you have promised, but you cannot convert the committee stage into a one-sided debate. I do not expect you to have confidence in the Government, I know what you have confidence in. Mr. Chairman, I would like the Attorney General to respond to that intervention.

Mr. Chairman: Members, [*Crosstalk*] hold on. Members, hold on. In the committee stage, Members have five minutes, not exceeding five minutes to make their point. So, I now recognize the Attorney General [*Desk thumping*] and I am going by the Standing Orders, for both sides of the House. Member for Oropouche East, [*Crosstalk*] I have ruled; not exceeding five minutes. AG.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Chairman, I thank the honourable—the intervention made by the hon. Prime Minister. I acknowledge receipt of the Leader of the Opposition's letter today at 1.48 p.m. whilst we were sitting in the House. So having received this letter for the first time, it is dated the 22nd of November, 2018, today is the 23rd, we received it at 1.48 p.m. whilst in the House.

Now, I have had the opportunity to peruse the letter, it is not a complicated letter. When you get to the crux of the issue, I can say with absolute certainty that clause 6, clause 7, clause 8, clause 9 and clause 10, are certainly not dealt with in

the manner spoken about by my learned colleague, because I have the Leader of the Opposition's letter here.

Specifically, Sir, the Leader of the Opposition having—well having given us her response for the first time in 21 days, when last we were here, certainly—

Dr. Moonilal: When did you write?

Mr. Al-Rawi:—certainly, Mr. Chairman, certainly—has made no issue at all of the clause that we are on, right down to the end of the Bill. The only issues raised by the Leader of the Opposition in her written correspondence before me now, relate to the clause which we have stood down, Sir. In those circumstances there is nothing that is difficult left to treat with this.

Mr. Chairman, I remind further, we took the step to circulate the comments that came from the Global Forum in the marked-up track- changed version. So the Members opposite have no need to rely only upon what the Government says, they received the document that came from the Global Forum with their commentary attached to it. So it is entirely untrue to make the representation that my learned colleague has.

In those circumstances, Sir, there being no reference to anything other than clause 5 which we have stood down, in the eight pages that the Leader of the Opposition has put writing today, and they having received the commentary coming from the Global Forum itself in writing 21 days ago, I therefore beg to move that we proceed with recording the observations that Members may wish to make on this clause.

Mr. Chairman: Hold one second. Member of Oropouche East, on the—what aspect?

Dr. Moonilal: I just wanted to respond in one minute to what the Attorney General

has said—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, point of order.

Dr. Moonilal: He was responding to me.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Chairman: Is it on clause 6? Okay.

Mr. Imbert: Point of order.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Imbert: It takes precedence, Mr. Chairman, 69(1). We are not allowed to discuss the general merits and principles of the Bill, only the details. So, we are only allowed as a committee to discuss the drafting of this clause and any proposed amendments to it, not the general principles and merits of the Bill of the Bill: 69(1) prohibit that.

Dr. Moonilal: Mr. Chairman, the Attorney General spoke about a process.

Mr. Chairman: The point that you want to make, Oropouche East, is on what?

Dr. Moonilal: In relation to the AG on process.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, 69(1), point of order.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Members, hold on. Oropouche East, you would have made your comment, the AG responded.

Dr. Moonilal: And he responded—

Mr. Chairman: I am not going to accept no more—

Dr. Moonilal: It was inaccurate, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Hold on. I am not going to accept no other point on it. Naparima, what is the point that you want to make.

Mr. Charles: No. It was responded on that side.

Mr. Chairman: Fine. So, Members, at this time in terms of the clause 6 that we

are dealing with, and based on the information on 69(1), we shall proceed. All right? So, Minister of Finance, any—

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: If we cannot speak, let us vote. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Al-Rawi: The debate on the prescription is over, but the committee stage can speak to every word in the lines. And what is put here now, Sir, is open for commentary. So let us be clear, there is no shut-out, it is just keeping the process clear.

Mr. Young: Mr. Chair—

Mr. Chairman: Member for Siparia, you care to make a comment based on my ruling, based on 69(1)?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: We have no further comments to clause 6. No further comment on clause 6.

Mr. Chairman: Right. In terms of the details of the particular clause or if on the amendment.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: No further comments.

Mr. Young: May I?

Mr. Chairman: What aspect Member?

Mr. Young: Clause 6.

Mr. Chairman: Clause 6?

Mr. Young: I am not allowed to speak, Sir?

Mr. Chairman: No. I am not saying that. Clause 6, and then based on the Standing Order, we are not going into the details, right?—if it is that we are going by the books. Right. On the amendment, only on the amendment. Right. So, Members, no further questions on the amendment.

Question put.

Mr. Chairman: I am going to rule.

Clause 6, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 7.

Question proposed: That clause 7 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Imbert: I have no amendments to clause 7.

Clause 7 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 8.

Question proposed: That clause 8 stand part of the Bill.

“In proposed section 93A (2) and (3) insert after the word “individual” the words, “entity or legal arrangement”.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, there is an amendment circulated as there was for clause 6, and that is simply to make a similar change that we made before, after the word “individual” you add the words, “entity or legal arrangement.” And that is after we sent the draft Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, 2018 to the Global Forum. This was one of the recommendations that they requested from us, and this was already stated in the introduction of this Bill and in my winding-up and shared with the Opposition on a previous occasion. So this is just exactly what was done with clause 6 with respect adding the words “entity or legal arrangement” so that you capture every possible; and this is also FATCA cut and paste. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Chief Whip, the clause 8 as amended, do you all have it in your possession?

Mr. Imbert: I am so sorry, Mr. Chairman; I was a little distracted there, I had not finished. This is also taken directly from the FATCA Act which was passed by this House with the support of the Opposition; this wording. And there is a little error in the circulated amendment. It should be 93(2) and 93(3) rather than 93(1) and

93(3). No. I am talking about the words that are the same, we are adding “entity or legal arrangement” after the word “individual”. There is a typo in the amendment, it be 93A (2) and 3, not 93A (1) and (3). So, I asking, Mr. Chairman, that this clause be accepted as amended.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Siparia.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Hon. Chairman, the Minister is saying that this is identical to what we find in the FATCA legislation. But, you see, this is not like the FATCA legislation. That is why you need the other Bill, the one that brings into domestic legislation the Global Forum agreement. It is within that piece of legislation that these things were put in. You are here now amending the Income Tax Act, and it goes back to our general point which I will not make, again, Sir, that the three need to be dealt with together.

Mr. Chairman: AG, Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Yes, Sir, thank you. May I address the proposed amendment? Mr. Chairman, this exemption from the provisions of the Data Protection Act is a necessary requirement to make this law in keeping with the Tax Information Exchange Act for the United States of America which we passed. So the consequential amendment here, the first time that we are considering the Income Tax Act is to simply bring this Act in line with what we did in FATCA.

So, Mr. Chairman, it is not that this is associated with any other piece of law. And, in fact, I should remind something that the Minister of Finance brought to me. There is no Bill in this Parliament other than this Bill. If you look at the Order Paper, something which I find quite curious that my friends have not understood. There is no mutual assistance Bill that was saved or introduced into this Parliament in this session, nor is there is a tax information exchange Act,

amendment which is on this Order Paper. And what drives home, Sir, is that this concept of returning to some JSC is not sensible because it is functus. There is no Bill on the Order Paper; there are no other Bills.

So the only piece of law here is the Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, and the reason, Mr. Chairman, is that the Global Forum has said to us categorically that the key to entering into all of the other pieces, tax information, et cetera, et cetera, flow and spring from the Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill. So this amendment which we are discussing right now is one which comes about because of the FATCA legislation, and it therefore stands on its own that way.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I am more confused, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Caroni Central, hold on. AG.

Dr. Tewarie: Would the AG admit that three Bills were sent to—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, could we deal with clause 7 of the Bill, please?

Mr. Chairman: Caroni Central, again. We have identified in the Standing Order 69(1), we cannot go into the details, we must discuss the clause. [*Crosstalk*] Hold on, one second, Minister of Finance. Okay. So let us be specific. Let me hear your point so that I will be able to determine whether it is the road that you are going down, but go ahead.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Can we respond?

Mr. Chairman: I give you the opportunity.

Dr. Tewarie: Yeah. It is a very precise point which is that, would the AG admit that three Bills were referred to—

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, there is only one Bill before the House. We are dealing with clause 7 of that Bill.

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Finance, hold on. The Attorney General identified

some points, and he spoke about the various Bills. So, I will just like to hear the Member for Caroni Central; it is only fair. Proceed.

Dr. Tewarie: Would the AG admit that—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Members.

Dr. Tewarie:—there were three Bills that were referred to the JSC in the first instance? And that this Bill alone came back to the House for debate without the work of the JSC having been completed?

Mr. Chairman: Attorney General.

Dr. Tewarie: If the AG would agree to that, then perhaps we could have a conversation.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Chairman, I think the hon. Member is perhaps forgetting the facts. The work of the Joint Select Committee was completed on the presentation of the report which we debated on the 2nd of November.

Dr. Rowley: Two reports.

Mr. Al-Rawi: There was a minority report included, in that both were debated. The only piece of legislation in this session of the Parliament is this. So there is no need for admission, it is a matter of fact.

4.15 p.m.

The matter of fact is the Bill before us is the only Bill before us, and it is not an attempt to cause “subterfuge” or to misguide people, but my friends have to know their facts, Mr. Deputy Speaker—Mr. Chairman—and it is clear that they do not.

Mr. Imbert: Can we press on, please? Clause 7?

Mr. Chairman: Oropouche East, what matter, what aspect you want to—on the clause?

Dr. Moonilal: On the clause I would just want to ask the Attorney General—

Mr. Chairman: Because—hold on Member—because if we continue we will go back and forth to debating on what the other individual just said. So I just want to ensure; but I will give you the opportunity. Let me hear you quickly.

Dr. Moonilal: I just want to invite the Attorney General to move his position and do not use formality to defeat principle.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Imbert: Clause 7 please, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: I will move on. Hold on.

Mr. Imbert: You have to vote on this.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, hon. Members. [*Crosstalk*] Hon. Members, to ensure that the records read correctly, the question is that clause 8 be amended as follows:

“In proposed section 93A”

—you said (2) and (3), Minister of Finance?

Mr. Imbert: Instead of 93(1) as circulated it should be 93(2). The officer herself has pointed that out to me. The only change is from 93A(1) to 93A(2). Nothing else.

Mr. Chairman: Right, 93(A)(2), for the records?

Mr. Imbert: Yeah.

Mr. Chairman: As amended as follows. Those in favour—[*Interruption*]

“In proposed section 93A(2) and (3) insert after the word “individual” the words, “entity or legal arrangement”.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 8, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 9 and 10 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Imbert: And, Mr. Chairman, can we go now to clause 5, which is the clause that was referred to in the minority report of Members opposite as being the clause that required adjustment.

Clause 5.

Question proposed: That clause 5 stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I wish to propose that the Bill be referred—

Dr. Rowley: Clause 5.

Mr. Imbert: Clause 5 of the Bill, be referred to a Select Committee of this House, that Committee to report back at the next sitting of the House, which I am told is Friday of next week.

Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Chairman: Confirm that date again, Sir.

Mr. Imbert: [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Chairman, let me just clarify. I am hearing Members opposite speaking about three Bills. There is only one Bill before the House, and there is only one Bill on the Order Paper. The concept of three Bills is misguided because they are not three Bills. It is one Bill. So, I am proposing that this one Bill that is the only Bill on the Order Paper—sorry, clause 5 of this single Bill that is the only Bill on the Order Paper dealing with this matter—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: Three Bills.

Mr. Imbert: There are not three Bills, Mr. Chairman, I want to make this clear.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Calm down.

Mr. Imbert: We cannot refer three Bills to a committee that do not exist. Those are two Bills that are not before this House. Those other Bills are not before this House, and therefore the only Bill that we could possibly refer to a committee is this Bill. So, I am asking, Mr. Chairman, that we refer clause 5 of this Bill to a

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Select Committee, to report back to the House next Friday, and that is to accommodate the concerns raised by the Opposition.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Mr. Chairman, am I allowed to respond? The Member has moved a Motion. [*Crosstalk*] It has to be a Motion. You cannot send it to a committee without a Motion. I would wait for the Deputy Speaker to rule. What is it then?

Mr. Imbert: Could we go back to the House and report that we made progress? Chairman, let me go back to the House and report that we have made progress, and then the Leader of Government Business will move.

Hon. Member: Minister of Finance, I have a suggestion that—

[Discussion held]

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I wish to advise it is the intention to refer clause 5 of the Bill to a Select Committee of the House. Therefore, I beg to move that this Committee discontinue consideration of the Bill.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Is that a Motion?

Mr. Imbert: There is no debate on that.

Dr. Tewarie: Is there a precedence for referring one clause to a Select Committee?

Mr. Chairman: Members, one second!

Question put and agreed to: That the Committee discontinue consideration of the Bill.

House resumed.

[Pause]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Chief Whip and Leader of the House please come.

Dr. Moonilal: You all are summoned.

[Discussion held]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This House is resumed.

INCOME TAX (AMDT.) BILL, 2018

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I beg to move that the following Members be appointed to a Special Select Committee of the House. [*Interruption*] Oh, I am so sorry. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Report the Bill.

Hon. C.. Imbert: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to report that clauses 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 of the Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, in addition to clauses that were previously considered, 1 to 4, were considered and approved by the Committee of the whole.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: With amendments.

Hon. C. Imbert: With amendments. In accordance with Standing Order 68(3), I beg to move that Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, 2018, be withdrawn from the Committee of the whole, and the Bill be referred to a Special Select Committee of the House of Representatives hereby established, and that this Committee be mandated to consider the Bill and report on the Bill by Friday the 30th of November, 2018.

[*Pause*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you very much.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Minister of Finance. No. One sec. Hon. Members, I wish to report that clauses—I wish to report—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members, the question is that the Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, 2018 be withdrawn from the Committee of whole, and the Bill be referred to a Special Select Committee of the House of Representatives hereby established, and this

Committee be mandated to consider the report on the Bill and report by Friday the 30th of November, 2018.

Question put and agreed to.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: So, we cannot speak. No input.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House.

SPECIAL SELECT COMMITTEE

(APPOINTMENT OF)

Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, 2018

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that the following Members be appointed to the Special Select Committee of the House of Representatives on the Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, 2018:

Mr. Colm Imbert

Mr. Faris Al-Rawi

Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds

Mr. Randall Mitchell

—and such two other Members to be named by the Members of the Opposition.

Thank you very kindly, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Dr. Moonilal: Put it on record one time.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Can I indicate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Opposition will not be placing any Members on that JSC? [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the following Members be appointed to the Special Select Committee of the House of Representatives on the Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill 2018:

Mr. Colm Imbert

Special Select Committee
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Mr. Faris Al-Rawi

Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds

Mr. Randall Mitchell

—and two Members of the Opposition team.

Mr. Imbert: To be named.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: To be named.

Question put and agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Leader of the House.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that the House do now adjourn to Friday the 30th day of November at 1.30 p.m., at which time we will consider the Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that this House do now adjourn—*[Interruption]*—but before the adjournment we have two matters to be dealt with. At this time—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I indicate that in discussions with the Members opposite, they have decided to deal with Motion 1 and Motion 4, and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I also suggest that the House suspend at this time for tea?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: This House is now suspended until 5.15.

4.35 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.15 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Matters on the adjournment. I recognize Chaguanas West.
[Desk thumping]

Drainage of Caroni River Basin
(Failure to Implement Report)

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to speak on the matter on the adjournment entitled: “The failure of the Government to implement the recommendations of the report done by Royal HaskoningDHV on drainage of the Caroni River Basin.” Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all recognize that floods—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, just for your information, you have 10 minutes, because we have two matters on the adjournment.

Mr. G. Singh: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Matters on the adjournment is a total of 40 minutes, and seeing that we have two, 10 minutes, and then the Minister replies in 10 minutes, and then we go on to the other one.

Mr. G. Singh: So I start at 5.16?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Just for clarity.

Mr. G. Singh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all recognize that floods impact both on individuals and communities, and have social, economic, environmental, infrastructure, agricultural and health consequences.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is fair to state that in Trinidad and Tobago floods are the most expensive natural disasters. A cursory glance at the newspapers over the years would reveal that losses to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars are suffered on an annual basis. Floods, that is, major flooding in Trinidad, generally occurs in the Caroni, Caparo and Santa Cruz river basins. However, flooding can occur with devastating effects on smaller basins such as: Diego Martin, the Diego Martin Valley, San Fernando, Barrackpore, Sangre Grande, Mayaro and Penal. So therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we accept the reality of climate change and its

impact. The People's Partnership Government, under our leader, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, commissioned a study by the over-a-century-old firm Royal HaskoningDHV in 2012.

The objectives of this study—and I would read from the executive summary of that study the final report dated 18 December, 2013. Mr. Deputy Speaker, this study was an entry into the theoretical and conceptual framework for a project to be done in the Caroni—or projects to be done in the Caroni River Basin. It was preceded by studies by Lee Young and Partners in the Nariva River Basin, and also the Royal Haskoning in the Caparo River Basin, and also Royal Haskoning in the South Oropouche area. That South Oropouche study, unfortunately, when the current administration, the PNM administration came into office, they stopped paying the bills and that was abandoned.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, so there are two elements of this study:

- (a) The Caroni River Basin drainage study inclusive of Cunupia and Madame Espanola River catchment, flood mitigation and integrated water shed management project.

It was set out to reduce the frequency and severity of flooding in the basin, thereby reducing the risks to lives and preventing damage to public and private property and infrastructure.

- (b) It reduced the losses to the productive sector as a result of flooding disruption, optimized the use of water resources in the basin, stabilized the riverbanks, mitigated environmental degradation and health hazards caused by floods, and controlled sedimentation and erosion in the rivers.

The objective of the study is to design a suitable watershed management

flood mitigation project for the Caroni River, which is:

- (a) Consistent with Government's strategic and immediate priorities;
- (b) Technically sound and the best available of the alternatives under existing conditions;
- (c) Economically friendly and financially viable;
- (d) Environmentally sound;
- (e) Sustainable; and
- (f) Administratively workable.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would find that in this study, and it evolved over the two-year period that the experts were engaged in, that you had first the initial study, and then you had discussions with the drainage department of the Ministry together with NIDCO. And as a result of the evolution of the process there were four options. Initially three and then a fourth option arrived at in order to deal with the flooding in the Caroni River Basin.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, and what were these options and recommendations?

1. Desilting of the raw Caroni River and estuaries. Diversion of the path of the Caroni River peak flow into the Caroni swamp. Rehabilitation of five pump stations and sediment traps in the sub-catchments.

So that is the whole question of the desilting effective measures.

2. Detention dams; and I will come back to that.
3. And the third element was utilizing lands as flood plains while protecting built-up development areas with dikes.

So that therefore you had, if you look at it conceptually, you had the source—you dealt with at the source, you dealt with the pathway of river with the construction of dikes and berms, and then you dealt with the flooded areas, the

communities that can be flooded.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the study indicated, after some deliberation, that there should be 21 detention dams. Twenty-one dam sites, and these dam sites are situated in the upper, middle, and downstream reaches of nine tributaries of the Caroni River: San Juan, one dam site; St. Joseph, two dam sites; Tacarigua, three dam sites; Arouca, one dam site; Arima, three dam sites; Guanapo, three dam sites; Aripo, two dam sites; Cumuto, three dam sites; and Talparo, three dam sites.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with each extreme rainfall event, each dam creates a temporary storage lake to detain the discharge of the peak river. A design of the dams is made for a flood event occurrence period of 25 years. The dams detain all the water that is running off from the catchment area upstream of the dam during such event. The detained volume is gradually released after the peak flood events. So, you had 21 dams. You had the dredging on desilting of the rivers, and then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, embankments. The level of embankments is to increase by two metres.

What is the current situation, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The river embankments, approximately five kilometres along the north bank of the Tunapuna river; 2.5 kilometres around the Tunapuna and Tacarigua rivers; five kilometres north of the villages of La Paille, Frederick Settlement and Caroni along the south bank of the Caroni river; and approximately 6.1 kilometres south of the villages of La Paille, Frederick Settlement and Caroni; and approximately 2.5 kilometres between the rivers Arouca and Oropune.

What was the cost of this Mr. Deputy Speaker? The cost as contained in the study, the cost was projected for this one-in-25-years occurrence, the principal cost was really the dams themselves. The swamp inlet was projected to cost 28 million;

Drainage of Caroni River Basin
Mr. Singh (cont'd)

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pump stations 22.3 million; sediment traps 17 million; embankments 53 million; and 21 dams \$1.872 billion. So, cumulatively \$1.9 billion to deal with flood prevention and mitigation programme in all these communities.

What has been the allocation? This study, completed in 2014, could not enter the budgetary cycle for 2014/2015. But since then, Mr. Deputy Speaker, nothing has been done. Nothing has been done. So you have a study completed, \$1.9 billion. We have had four budgets over the period, over \$250 billion allocated in budgetary allocation. We cannot find over a 10-year period the projected development of these 21 dams together with the embankments, together with the berm building, together with desilting. It is \$1.9 billion. And what do we have? Nothing. Absolutely no public policy to alleviate the flooding, but we will go on an annual basis and take 47 million from the catastrophe fund.

5.25 p.m.

We will have thousands and thousands of communities, over 30,000 residents are affected—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two minutes.

Mr. G. Singh:—but instead, Mr. Deputy Speaker, “we going to buy plane, we find money for plane”.

I am saying that it is necessary to recognize that Government is a continuum and when you have this study done it is necessary instead of we do this thing on an annual basis, looking for hampers to give to people, we find a public policy solution [*Desk thumping*] for the flooding in this country. And the project is there. What is required is investment by this administration in stopping the flooding in the Caroni River Basin, the Nariva River Basin, the Caparo River Basin, the South Oropouche River Basin, the Diego Martin River Basin and this is a start, Mr.

Drainage of Caroni River Basin
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Deputy Speaker. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Rural Development and Acting Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. On the Motion before us today which seeks to establish whether there is a failure of the Government to implement the recommendations of the report done by Royal HaskoningDHV on the drainage of the Caroni River Basin I am compelled to respond to this honourable House on the concerns expressed. In my response to this Motion I will attempt to show and assure the population that consideration is being given to the recommendations on drainage of the Caroni River Basin.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Royal HaskoningDHV, the consultant engaged on the Caroni River Basin drainage study submitted its final report on December 18, 2013. The study commenced in early 2012 and included the submission of a total of eight reports as required by the terms of reference. Four alternatives were recommended in the report and were explored. However, it was determined that alternative four is expected to provide the most flood reduction. Based on the details of the report, alternative four includes the following:

1. Desilting of the lower reaches of the Caroni River;
2. Swamp inlet regulator. This will allow water from the Caroni River to flow into the swamp;
3. Upgrading of drainage, pump stations at the following locations: Felicity, William Street, Sadoo Trace, Bamboo Nos. 1, 2, 3;
4. Raising and construction of embankments at Tunapuna, St. Joseph, Caroni, Tacarigua and Oropuna Rivers.
5. Sediment traps on the St. Joseph and Arima Rivers.

Permit me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to give an update on each of the areas identified.

1. Desilting of the lower reaches of the Caroni River. The river was last desilted in 2012. This was undertaken on a needed basis under a major desilting programme.
2. Swamp inlet regulator. The Drainage Division and the Institute of Marine Affairs have ongoing discussions on the feasibility and the effects of the ecology of the swamp.
3. Felicity pump station, the upgrade of William Street, Sadoo Trace, Bamboo Nos. 1, 2, 3 pump stations. The upgrade of the Felicity pump station is approximately 75 per cent completed. This project entailed the construction of a new pump facility and an installation of an electric pump. Cabinet in 2018 approved a two-year contract for the upgrade of pumps and gates. The other stations at William Street, Sadoo Trace, Bamboo Nos. 1, 2 and 3 would be considered under the programme commencing in fiscal 2019.
4. Raising and construction of embankments at the Tunapuna, St. Joseph, Caroni, Tacarigua and Oropuna Rivers:
 - i. Desilting works were carried out in 2018 on tributaries to the Caroni River, such as Guanapo, Aripo, Tacarigua, San Juan, St. Joseph and Malick. This increased the waterway capacity in the short term.
 - ii. The Caroni River rehabilitation and improvement works project has been tendered through the Central Tenders Board.
 - iii. A pre-tender meeting was held on Thursday November 15, 2018. The project involves raising the sections of the

embankment of the Caroni River and the installation of sluice gates between St. Helena and El Socorro south. The procurement process has started and works are expected to commence in 2019.

5. Sediment traps at St. Joseph and Arima. The acquisition of lands is required for these projects and has the potential to displace communities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in addition, it is also proposed that smaller detention dams and reservoirs, a total of 21 and a series of embankments to undertake to protect the urban areas. Notwithstanding, there are some key issues in the implementation of the recommendations. They are:

- a) High capital investment;
- b) Land acquisition costs. This will include relocation of communities; and
- c) Low public acceptance.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the overall flood-risk reduction, if all measures were implemented, is 63 per cent. This means, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the flooding would not totally eliminate but minimize. The total estimated cost to implement all of the measures is approximately TT \$2 billion. The costs specified for these recommendations were based on the 2013 figures and are factored for return period of one in the 25-year storm. Based on our reviews, the House is asked to note that the rainfall event which occurred in 2018 may have surpassed the rainfall in one in a 25-year storm. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs

(Dominica OAS Waiver)

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Mr.

Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs
(Dominica OAS Waiver)
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Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, under the Westminster system which we follow, there is a very important principle of ministerial responsibility. This dictates that Ministers are ultimately responsible for each and every decision taken in their respective Ministries whether or not they are involved. When things go right they take the credit and when things go wrong they man up to their responsibilities and resign. Prime Minister Dr. Rowley is clearly not aware of, chooses to ignore or refuses to practise this principle of ministerial responsibility.

Our Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs has a principled duty to resign because of the unfortunate and embarrassing events which took place earlier this year at the OAS. What is worse is that this Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs has failed to advise his Prime Minister and the country that it was under his watch and his leadership that the Ministry developed and implemented the policy which was carried out by the Permanent Secretary, the Deputy Permanent Secretary and Ambassador Anthony Phillips-Spencer, at the OAS meeting in March this year. That year-old and repeatedly articulated policy explicitly stated and I quote:

Trinidad and Tobago is not in a position to facilitate an increase in its assessed contribution in order to accommodate waivers of financial contributions by Member States, given its current fiscal constraints. Accordingly, the Ministry would not support requests for waivers by Member States.

That was the Ministry's policy. Everyone knew it including/except the Minister.

Email correspondence from Foreign Service Officer III, Amy Seales, in the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs in Port of Spain, dated Friday the 23rd of March, to Miss Kanita Shah, First Secretary in our Washington Mission, and she

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clearly outlined this policy. It was the justification used for the directive given to Ambassador Spencer and I quote:

In this regard the Ministry wishes to refer to the position of Trinidad and Tobago at the following meetings in which the issue of the waiver and/or suspension of payments of contribution for countries negatively impacted by the 2017 hurricane season was tabled.

Four meetings, the policy was articulated.

The 41st meeting of the Community Council of Ministers on the 15th of January in Georgetown, Guyana. It was also articulated at the fourth special meeting of the Budget Committee of Caricom on the 2nd of February; Ninth Special Meeting of the Community Council of Ministers of the Caribbean Community on the 6th of February and the Eleventh extraordinary meeting of the special committee on budget administration, the 6th of February, 2018. At all these meetings, Trinidad and Tobago expressed solidarity with Member States negatively impacted by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. However, it did not support the granting of waivers of payments of contributions. Alternatively, Trinidad and Tobago proposed that consideration should be given to deferral of payments of contributions by Member States and the implementation of a payment plan which is subject to annual review.

Trinidad and Tobago's position on not granting waivers to Caricom States was crystal clear, articulated in at least four Caricom meetings. It was a settled policy at the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. If the Minister was unaware that this policy was articulated repeatedly then he has lost control of his Ministry and must resign. Section 85(1) of the Constitution states that:

“Minister...shall exercise general direction and control over”—his Ministry.

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If on the other hand, a Minister was the architect of a policy such as this one and chose to deny paternity by passing blame to his subordinates then he is a very contemptible human being unworthy of holding higher office. I am speaking generally of a person in this situation. As it stands therefore the then Permanent Secretary, the Deputy Permanent Secretary and Ambassador Phillips-Spencer are owed nothing less than a public apology for being made scapegoats, [*Desk thumping*] for carrying out the policy of the Ministry which everyone in Caricom knew and heard about and of which this Minister claims to be unaware.

For the past three years we have had sorry, embarrassing episodes of crises. On reading what is in the public domain about Ambassador Thomas' report on this issue, it is clear that it was primarily due to Minister Moses' incompetence, his sloth in responding to text messages seeking guidance; his refusal, to date, to acknowledge whether he received a text message from our US Ambassador; his clear lack of leadership and his penchant for passing the buck on to his subordinates. And yet, for reasons unknown, and certainly not in the tradition of Eric Williams, this Prime Minister condones incompetence and non-performance.

On September 26th, when asked in Parliament, in this Parliament, if the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs was in any way at fault, the Prime Minister responded that the report made no reference to any wrongdoing on the Minister's part. No mention whatsoever that Ambassador Spencer sent an urgent text message requesting confirmation of a directive with which he was uncomfortable. Nothing about the contents of the text message, nothing about the fact that public servants were carrying out approved policy by the Ministry. Nothing about the principle of ministerial responsibility; nothing about anything except that his anointed Minister and his childhood friend was not responsible.

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Under the watch of this Minister, the UN has listed Trinidad and Tobago as one of 38 “shameful countries” which carried out reprisals or intimidations against people, cooperating with the UN on human rights through killings, torture and arbitrary arrest. Not a word from the Minister on this matter. Trinidad and Tobago has been highlighted in the foreign press multiple times for lack of a policy framework for dealing with Venezuelan refugees fleeing their homeland. This week the *Miami Herald* highlighted the treatment of Venezuelans in Trinidad. The Minister, true to form and in the absence of systems and policies to deal with the matter, has abdicated responsibility to the garrulous, overexposed and underperforming Attorney General. Talk, talk and more talk.

On the 5th of April, three Cedros fishermen were detained by the Guardia Nacional. The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs did not so much as forward a diplomatic note to the Venezuelan authorities protesting this and many other incursions in our territorial waters.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two more minutes.

Mr. R. Charles: When Trinidad and Tobago families, including wives and children were detained in Iraq we did nothing to help them. The Minister has done nothing to address the negative travel advisories. The *Trinidad Newsday* on the 20th of November reported that there is an important meeting being held in Washington. Nearly every Prime Minister is there, not our Prime Minister, not our foreign Minister. The Trinidad and Tobago High Commissioner to India, Dave Persad, resigned following the lack of acknowledgement of many concerns about many issues in the T&T Mission in India. Not a word from the Minister.

Our citizens abroad have complained in vain about endless problems encountered in the Miami Consulate. Not a word, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Our

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Consulates in Miami, New York and Toronto are without Consuls General. A senior highly experienced former Minister, Donna Cox, is being punished by an embarrassingly junior posting in the New York Consulate while a relative junior has been rewarded with a senior posting in Geneva.

Conclusion: Our Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs cannot afford as with this Dominica fiasco to be continually subjected to the competence, lack of leadership and global embarrassment. The Minister has repeatedly failed himself, his country and the office he holds. His utterances in and out of Parliament are pedestrian, incoherent and obfuscatory. Under this Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs our country's foreign policy is in shambles and we are no longer respected. The Prime Minister must do the right thing, the patriotic thing, the honourable thing and put our country's interest above an inexplicable personal friendship. He must fire the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs immediately. Dr. Rowley is doing our country an unforgiveable disservice by refusing to act decisively on this matter. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Trade and Industry and Acting Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am surprised that this Member will stand here to bring a matter on blunders in the international affairs arena, because as you would know, as permanent representative to the United Nations, he chose to dine—the Member chose to dine with Madame Marine Le Pen who was then the head of the FN, the National Front in Paris, known to be of a particular leaning.

And not only that, the coarse remarks about Trinidad and Tobago not being an ATM machine of the Caribbean or the diplomatic fallouts with broken contracts and the protocol blunders of state visits; the unsuitable appointments of UN

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missions both in Geneva and in New York, of course; and the damage to the well-established image and reputation worldwide. All of the bogus international awards, disgraceful. All of the trips to Brazil and India and China, chartered flights with relatives and handbag holders. I will answer the question now.

The Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs has served as this country's key interlocutor with the external environment at the regional, hemispheric and global level since our twin island Republic attained independent status in 1962. It is a role and function to which the Ministry remains dedicated, unwaveringly, particularly in an era that has come to be defined by globalization and its attendant impacts.

I wish to emphasize, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that notwithstanding the recent financial constraints, the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs' commitment to ensuring that priority is given to Trinidad and Tobago foreign representation remains steadfast. Thus, members of staff of the Ministry and headquarters and its 19 overseas missions continue to work assiduously to ensure their highest standards of representation in keeping with our historic, our regional and our global leadership roles within the Caribbean community and at the hemispheric level and beyond. The Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs has therefore always had systems and policies in place that are subject to periodic review to ensure that despite staffing and other constraints Trinidad and Tobago continues to maintain its image and its high profile, in regional, hemispheric and international affairs.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry also remains dedicated to promoting regional and international cooperation in an efficient and effective manner, through among other things our continued active participation in regional and global fora

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and a successful promotion of Trinidad and Tobago's interests around the world. A key element of this cooperation has been our central role in Caricom and our support to our colleagues in the region. The Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs has always played a central role in Caricom-related matters as illustrated by the illustrious cadre of nationals serving at the Secretariat, the overall priority afforded to a variety of issues affecting the community and the country's notable commitment to the cause of deepening and expanding regional integration.

Further evidence may be found in the work the Ministry has undertaken in tandem with other Government Ministries to ensure that all of our structures, all of our systems, all of our policies are in place to facilitate the free movement of skilled nationals under the Caricom Single Market and Economy as the implementation of the CSME remains a top priority for Trinidad and Tobago. Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Caricom Heads of Government are scheduled to meet in Port of Spain for a special meeting of the Caricom Single Market and Economy in December.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, all of the foregoing examples telegraph a strong signal that this country's dedication to the regional cause is not merely nominal but supported by concrete, tangible, policy actions. It would therefore be remiss of me not to draw to the attention of this House the role which Trinidad and Tobago has played in supporting and assisting our regional partners in the aftermath of natural disasters. From the devastation inflicted upon Grenada in 2004 by Hurricane Ivan to flooding in neighbouring Guyana in that same year, this country has always adopted a position of being our brother's keeper and certainly not the "what's in it for me" approach adopted by your Government in the wake of the [*Desk thumping*] severe destruction after a tropical storm Tomas. This principle of brotherhood and

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of neighbourliness has continued to infuse our policies and our commitment to the regional cause as evidenced by the fact that during the very active 2017 hurricane season Trinidad and Tobago did not hesitate to render assistance to our Caricom neighbours in their time of need. And this of course even while our country sought to grapple with its straitened financial circumstances.

I wish to assure this honourable House that there are systems and procedures, which have been in place and which have been mentioned before, which undergo periodic review to ensure sustainability, relevance and practicality and their existence ensures effectiveness in the execution of the Ministry's mandate as well as efficient and timely operation.

I admit, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that any existing deficiencies are being addressed to attain a strengthened foreign service with the capacity to execute its mandate in a manner befitting such an organization and in keeping with the Ministry's operating environment. The particular matter referenced regarding the OAS waiver request of Dominica was investigated within the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs independently and I can give this honourable House all of the assurances that the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago is being well served. [*Desk thumping*]

May I add that our relations with the Government and the people of Dominica remain strong and unshakeable, as it is [*Desk thumping*] with all of our Caricom neighbours. I wish to reaffirm that the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs will continue to advance the Government's development objectives by strengthening and supporting the pillars of good governance, regional integration and sustainable development and these are bedrock principles to which this country has been committed steadfastly and will continue to inform the Ministry's work

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and mandate as we put people first in order to achieve the objectives of Vision 2030. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: Well said! Well said! Well said! [*Crosstalk*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.50 p.m.