

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 27, 2020

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following, the hon. Penelope Beckles, MP, Member for Arima, and Mr. Rushton Paray, MP, Member for Mayaro, who have requested leave of absence from today's sitting. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Labour to the Fourteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an Inquiry into the Challenges of Prisoner Re-entry into Society and Prisoner Reintegration Services in Trinidad and Tobago. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
2. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development to the Sixteenth Report (Interim) of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an Inquiry into the System of Rent Regulation for Housing Accommodation in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
3. Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Extension of Period for Payment of Fifty Percent of Fixed Penalty) Order, 2020. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
4. Audited Financial Statements of Portfolio Credit Management Limited for the year ended December 31, 2018. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

UNREVISED

URGENT QUESTIONS**Migrant/Refugee Policy****(Revision of)**

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Member for Naparima—he is caught in some traffic—I would ask the first question on Urgent to the Minister of National Security. [*Crosstalk*] To the Minister of National Security: Could the Prime Minister state when will the Government revise its migrant/refugee policy inclusive of a legislative framework?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, it appears as though the Member for Naparima is somewhat confused because on one arm he is saying and trying to mislead the population and the world at large that the Government has no policy and now he comes here today to ask the question, “When will the Government revise its policy?” So to clarify it and to make sure that there is no further misinformation, the Government has a migrant/refugee policy. The Government’s migrant/refugee policy is currently sub judice and currently before the courts as a substantial action and core matter to be determined before the courts, and we can say nothing further at this stage.

COVID-19 in the Prison System**(Testing of Prison Officers and Prisoners)**

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the Minister of National Security: Given that the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service has reported that a total of 255 cases of COVID-19 in the prison system and that 175 of these are currently in the care of

the prison system, could the Minister inform this House if the Government has instituted widespread testing of prison officers and prisoners?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, from March 12th of 2020 the Government, and in fact the people of Trinidad and Tobago, have been dealing with the first—that was when we had the first positive COVID case in Trinidad and Tobago. From that date to this date the Government continues to be guided by the sound scientific and medical advice of our medical health care professionals under the Chief Medical Officer and the Minister of Health. Their sound advice has been and continues to be, and is adopted by this Government that with respect to testing, testing will be done in certain circumstances. The prison system is no different. I hasten to add that as the Minister of National Security, I remain concerned and I understand the anxiety of prison officers as well as inmates at the prison system and give them the assurance that we, as we have been working with the Ministry of Health and their professionals and experts, will continue to do so.

Whoever needs to be tested within the prison system has been tested. It is not about just going and testing everyone. As we all know, the science is when you present symptoms you will be tested. We have also begun testing those who have been in primary contact with positive cases. And lest there be any trying or any attempt, and I am not suggesting that is what is happening here, to create a scare, we have built out parallel systems in the prison system and we are able at this stage to remove those who are positive to put persons in quarantine to isolate others. The testing will continue to be done in full accordance with the advice of the Chief Medical Officer and his staff who I thank for working with the prison and the

prison system.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, while the Minister has not provided the statistics, I would ask the Minister to provide details of the parallel health care system in the prison service, taking into consideration that a recent survey conducted by the—

Madam Speaker: You want details of the parallel service—system. Yes, Minister.

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, that is something that we have provided information in every step of the way, and I will do so and repeat again. Just to clarify, I was not asked to provide any statistics so I do not know why the Member is saying I did not provide statistics. The parallel health care system, which was built out before the first positive COVID case in the prison system, has two sides of it separate to the existing prison system. The first is we built out a system where persons who are now entering the prison system, so those who may now be charged and sent to prison are kept isolated from the general population; a different venue. That is one. Two, prisoners who test positive in the prison system are then extracted on some occasions. But one must remember, in the prison system there are different levels of risk when dealing with prisoners, so those levels of risk then also play in. So those who cannot be taken out of the physical prison system, we have had space in the prison system, in particular the Maximum Security Prison, and other areas where we have isolated, and that is where those positive prisoners are being kept.

Expulsion of Venezuelan Refugees

(Circumstances into)

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Member for Naparima, Question No. 3 to the Minister of National Security. Could

the Minister explain the circumstances concerning the expulsion of the Venezuelan refugees including a four-month-old baby while the matter was being actively pursued in the High Court?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Again, Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to clarify or attempt to clarify once more, even though it may suit some to try and muddy these waters. Assuming that this question is related to a matter that is currently before the High Court and being pursued, and it has to do with Venezuelans on Sunday gone, what my instructions are that by the time the attorneys got to court at midday on Sunday, Venezuelans had already been escorted out of the borders of Trinidad and Tobago. So there was—and the application was being pursued ex parte initially.

So there was no matter being argued in court whilst the Venezuelans were in our jurisdiction. They were already outside of the jurisdiction. I use this opportunity as well, Madam Speaker, to again put on the record that we question and we have concerns about how things are just being floated, including in the courts, how many children, who are the parents, et cetera, how do we know it is a four-month-old baby, what are the documents, where is the authentication for it as opposed to anecdotal questions?

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Thank you, Minister. Minister, could you just clarify a statement you made that those persons were escorted out of the waters, could you indicate whether they were deported, yes or no?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, the immigration law and the law surrounding

immigration matters is very, very clear. I used the word “escorted”. Escorted does not mean deported.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of National Security: Minister, were you aware prior to Sunday that these migrants or refugees were in the country and if you were aware of them prior to Sunday?

Hon. S. Young: No.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Meeting with President Nicolas Maduro

(Government’s Intention to Attend)

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Question No. 4 to the Prime Minister on behalf of the Member for Naparima: Could the Government state whether it intends to attend a meeting purportedly summoned by President Nicolas Maduro to discuss significant security issues among other matters?

Madam Speaker: Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister.

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I smile at the use of the “summoned”. I assume this question derives from a social media tweet that is attributed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Venezuela. A proper conversion of the particular word is not “summoned”. The Venezuelan authorities have asked for the convening of a meeting with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. And I take the opportunity to repeat, as I have said on many occasions, including this week in a press conference, months ago I held a meeting; I led a delegation on behalf of National Security with the equivalent Minister of Internal Security Affairs in Venezuela, who is their equivalent of National Security and his team and that we continue those

discussions.

So this meeting is yet another one of those meetings. We have had many of those meetings. The last meeting was a virtual meeting because of COVID. This meeting will be a virtual meeting. We have now received a diplomatic note as is required from the Venezuelan authorities asking that I meet with the Venezuelan equivalent Minister of National Security, and I will do so, virtually, along with our National Security personnel.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, as you have just mentioned, the meeting will be virtual, do you have a time/date when this will happen?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. S. Young: That is to be determined.

Madam Speaker: Thank you.

**Registration of Venezuelan Migrants
(Government's Intention to Regularize)**

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the Minister of National Security: Could the Minister inform this House whether it is the intention of the Government to embark on another registration exercise to regularize the status of thousands of illegal Venezuelan migrants?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the size of Trinidad and Tobago is something that this Government is very conscious of. This Government's first duty is to protect and secure the people of Trinidad and Tobago. In 2019 we carried out an exercise, we invited all

Venezuelans, whether here legally or illegally, to come forward and register with us. We now know that out of that registration process, 16,523 Venezuelans were registered regardless of their prior status. We also made it very clear, abundantly clear, and I repeated it, at that time those who did not register, how we would be dealing with it.

At this stage I cannot state what is the intention of the Government with respect to the future. That may change, and at this stage there is no plan for us to carry out another registration exercise. As I have said before and as I repeated this week, we will be—I will be seeking Cabinet's permission to extend the period for those who are currently registered and to extend that courtesy that is being offered to them under the Immigration Act.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, given the events of the 22nd of November, 2020, and the fact that Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory to a number of international treaties and conventions, can you give this House an undertaking that another fiasco as it relates to the treatment of children with respect to migrants will not occur in Trinidad? [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: I will not allow that as a supplemental question.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 29(14), questions 23 and 24 are withdrawn. Leader of the House.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, which are the questions, 23? Sorry.

Madam Speaker: 23 and 24.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, we will

therefore be answering the other nine questions that are for oral answer.

Madam Speaker: And, Leader of the House, written? You have written questions too?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, Ma'am. And with regard to the written, we have the answer to Question No. 43, and we are asking for a two-week deferral for Question No. 4.

WRITTEN ANSWER TO QUESTION

List of CEPEP Contractors/Contract Commencement Dates

(Constituency of Naparima)

43. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:

Could the Minister provide the list of Community-Based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) contractors within the constituency of Naparima and the commencement date of their contracts?

Vide end of sitting for written answer.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro):

Street Lighting Requests

(Issuance of Letters by Constituency Offices)

23. Could the hon. Minister of Public Utilities explain why is it necessary that constituency offices must issue letters to Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission for street lighting requests?

Trinidad and Tobago Meteorological Service

(Update on Operational Effectiveness)

24. Given the highly active hurricane season, could the hon. Minister of Public Utilities provide an update on the current operational effectiveness of the Trinidad and Tobago Meteorological Service?

Questions, by leave, withdrawn.

Government's Refugee/Migrant Policy

(Specific Measures in)

41. **Mr. Rodney Charles** (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister state the specific measures in the Government's refugee/migrant policy that provide for the humane treatment of refugees/migrants in relation to Trinidad and Tobago's:

- (a) international commitments;
- (b) absorptive capacity; and
- (c) global best practices?

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Madam Speaker, this question, the answer to this question—and this question is now captured by sub judice. The matter is currently before the court and to be determined by the court.

Efforts to Rectify Water Shortage

(Naparima Constituency)

42. **Mr. Rodney Charles** (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Public Utilities:

Could the Minister provide reasons for the lengthy water shortages in the Naparima constituency, specifically in the Barrackpore area and the efforts being taken to rectify this issue?

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very

much. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, the constituency of Naparima is supplied with water from the Naparima—from the Navet Water Treatment Plant. I am sorry. At present the Navet reservoir has attained storage level of 80.5 per cent compared to the long-term average of 81.4 percentage capacity. In recognition of the improved storage status, production at the facility was increased from 17 million gallons daily to 19.8 million gallons daily as part of the management of the water resources for the balance of the year 2020 and in preparation for the dry season 2021.

With particular reference to Barrackpore, Madam Speaker, contact was made to the office of the Member of Parliament for the constituency of Naparima and the area of concern was identified as being Papourie Road, Monkey Town and Barrackpore. The supply to the area was affected by a broken 400 millimetre diameter pipeline which was replaced on October 10, 2020, and the pipe-borne service was restored to the affected community.

CEPEP's Executive Members

(Details of)

44. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:

Could the Minister provide the names and monthly salaries of CEPEP's executive members?

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

Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, in February 2002, Cabinet agreed to the establishment of the Community-Based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP) in all the communities. Subsequently in April, 2008, CEPEP was incorporated as a limited liability company to carry out the mandate of the

Government of Trinidad and Tobago. Cabinet initially set out three objectives for the programme, including: the empowerment of communities to improve the conditions of the local physical environment, the expansion of employment opportunities for the benefit of semi-skilled and unskilled persons within the communities, the creation of opportunities for the establishment and development of small businesses.

Beautification and landscaping are now provided by this company which objectives have been expanded, and these include: beautification and landscaping, coastal maintenance, dead animal removal, disaster and emergency response projects, waste removal at eco-sites. The CEPEP Company Limited as a special purpose state company had two objectives; one, to improve corporate governance and, two, to ensure public accountability developed around the clear understanding by all parties that the Minister of Finance, Corporation Sole, has a responsibility to ensure that all investments and expenditure generate optimal returns.

Subsequently the management team headed by the Chief Executive Officer is accountable to the board of directors to ensure these objectives are achieved. The executive members of the company are responsible for the general and overall supervision of the company.

The names and monthly salaries of CEPEP's executive members are as follows:

- Keith Eddy, Chief Executive Officer; base salary, \$40,000; allowances, entertainment allowance, \$2,500, and a company vehicle for a total of \$42,500.
- Nicole Gopaulsingh, Corporation Secretary; base salary, \$20,000; transportation allowance, \$2,500, a company mobile phone for a total of \$22,500.

- Alicia Austin, Senior Internal Auditor; base salary, \$25,000; transport allowance, \$2,500, for a total of \$27,500. And this officer is also entitled to a company mobile phone.
- Matthew Kailah, Senior Operations Officer; base salary, \$18,000; a company vehicle and a company mobile phone for a total of \$18,000.
- Gary Stoddard, Chief Financial Officer; base salary, \$24,500; transport allowance of \$2,500, a company mobile phone for a total of \$27,000.
- Sherry-Ann Lawrence, Senior Marketing and Communications Officer; base salary, \$17,500; a transport allowance of \$2,500, and a company mobile phone for a total of \$20,000.
- Willa Guy-Straker, Senior Human Resource Officer; base salary, \$12,500; a transport allowance of \$2,500, for a total of \$15,000.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Naparima Mayaro Road Rehabilitation Works

(Commencement Date for)

56. Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

In light of the deteriorating road conditions and numerous landslips along the Naparima Mayaro Road, could the Minister state the expected commencement date for rehabilitation works from Princes Town to Naparima?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, rehabilitation work from Princes Town to Naparima commenced in fiscal 2020 and will continue in fiscal 2021. The following projects were contracted out by the Highways Division and completed in

fiscal 2019/2020. The construction of the cylinder crossing at the Naparima Mayaro Road, 60.5 kilometers. Sectional road rehabilitation works were done at the Naparima Mayaro Road from 22 kilometre, New Grant, to 31 kilometre, Poole Village. Contracts awarded for the following projects are expected to commence between December 2020 and January 2021. Sectional road rehabilitation work on the Naparima Mayaro Road, 35.5 kilometre to 46.3 kilometres. Sectional road rehabilitation work on the Naparima Mayaro Road, 47 kilometre to 64 kilometre mark. Sectional road rehabilitation work on the Naparima Mayaro Road, 32 kilometre to 35.5 kilometre.

Proposed projects in the design phase to be contracted out in fiscal 2021. Construction to commence in late 2021 are phase one under Phase IIA of the bridge and landslip programme. There are two projects anticipated for construction along the Naparima Mayaro Road; Naparima Mayaro Road, 14.5 kilometre to 15 kilometre, LP 353, Princes Town constituency; Naparima Mayaro Road, house No. 2246 at LP A10, 38.7 kilometre, Mayaro constituency. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Princes Town Presbyterian No. 1 School

(Details of Construction)

- 57. Mr. Barry Padarath** (*Princes Town*) asked the hon. Minister of Education: With regard to the construction of Princes Town Presbyterian #1 School, could the Minister state:
- (a) whether the construction of this school will be a priority in fiscal 2021;
 - (b) whether funds will be allocated in fiscal 2021; and
 - (c) the projected commencement date for construction?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Princes Town Presbyterian No. 1 Primary School, having been

declared and fit for occupation by the Ministry of Works and Transport has been sharing accommodations with the Princes Town Presbyterian No. 2 Primary School. This has necessitated placing the operations of both schools on a shift system. The Ministry of Education acknowledges that the situation is an inconvenience for parents, teachers and students of those schools.

(a) The Ministry of Education has been constrained by severe financial limitations compounded by contractual and legal issues arising from the fact that during the period 2010 to 2015 over 100 contracts for new schools were awarded with no source of funds whatsoever. The Ministry is currently in the process of completing 24 of these schools and settling the huge unpaid multibillion-dollar debt for school construction that was left when the former Government demitted office in 2015.

Therefore, as the construction of the Princes Town Presbyterian No. 1 Primary School never started, it is not carded to begin in fiscal 2021. Schools which were closer to completion are currently being worked on. Discussions are ongoing with the Presbyterian board of management to examine the feasibility of various options to eliminate the shift system.

(b) Funds have not been allocated in fiscal 2021 for this project.

(c) In the circumstances, Madam Speaker, I am unable to provide a projected commencement date for reconstruction of the Princes Town Presbyterian No. 1 Primary School.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the hon. Minister, in light of the answer you would have provided with respect to the Presbyterian board and those discussions, can you indicate whether or not your discussions with the Presbyterian board, whether you all have come to any sort of

agreement in terms of the way forward of whether or not the school—should it be rebuilt, that it would remain at that location?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Education.

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Madam Speaker, I do not have that information before me at this time.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, supplemental.

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much. Madam Minister, Member, you indicated that the emphasis would be on schools that were almost complete. Could you indicate whether or not the Ramai Trace Hindu School would be so fortunate enough to be completed on that list?

Madam Speaker: I would not allow that as a supplemental question even though the Minister said, generally not specifically. Member for Princes Town, supplemental?

Mr. Padarath: Madam, thank you. To the hon. Minister, in light of the policy that has been taken by the Ministry to complete schools that have a certain percentage outstanding, could the hon. Minister give us an update therefore with respect to the Shiva Boys' and Parvati Girls' Hindu College as well?

Madam Speaker: That question is similar in nature to the one asked by Oropouche East which I will refuse on the same basis.

2.00 p.m.

Cape Class Patrol Vessels

(Arrival Date)

8. Mr. Saddam Hosein (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister provide the expected arrival date for the two Cape Class Patrol vessels in Trinidad and Tobago?

Madam Speaker: The Minister of National Security.

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime

Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, due to the unforeseen working conditions and supply chain disruptions created by the COVID-19 pandemic, which is a global pandemic, the supplier has invoked certain force majeure clauses and requested a variation of the delivery date. In this regard, it is expected that these vessels will be delivered in 2021.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in light of the limited border protection that we currently have, can the Minister indicate whether it will be delivered in the first half or the second half of 2021?

Madam Speaker: Minister of National Security.

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, the vessels will be delivered in 2021.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

COVID-19 Swab/Test

(Details of Results)

9. **Mr. Saddam Hosein** (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of Health: Could the Minister state the average time frames for:

- (1) a COVID-19 swab sample to be tested; and
- (2) the test results to be transmitted to the patient?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The average time for a COVID-19 PCR swab sample to be tested is between 48 to 72 hours.

And for part two: the average time for PCR test results to be transmitted to the patient is between three to five days. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, several persons have complained that sometimes the tests take at least two weeks for them to receive the results. Can the Minister indicate whether or not this has been—if he is aware of these complaints?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, that did occur at the height of community spread which we admitted at press conferences. And I personally apologized to the nation and to those patients who were taking long to get their tests. We admitted it simply because the demand for testing, as the CMO said, outstripped our ability to test. It is a global pandemic, all countries are going through this thing.

Since then, Madam Speaker, we have more or less stuck faithfully and now we are even turning around tests in under a day to two days right now. We even installed what is called GeneXpert machines at Sangre Grande, in Tobago, where those tests do not have to come to a central lab, and those tests are turned around same day. So almost all the tests are turned around in a shorter time frame now. But I will imagine, like in any system with thousands and thousands, there will be one or two cases but that is not the norm. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you, Minister, for those answers. In a previous press conference you had mentioned some challenges with the GeneXpert machines. Can you indicate whether those have been overcome?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes. So the GeneXpert machines use test kits supplied through UNDP and/or PAHO. We got an initial order shipment of 5,000. Since

then, Trinidad and Tobago has been classified as a high-income country and therefore, the policy of UNDP is to shift those tests to low and middle-income countries, especially Africa that was going through their own community spread. So we started to reorder as early as March/April.

However, I got notice from UNDP just two days ago that they are able to give us 1,050 tests. We have ordered it, and those will come in now and those will be used mainly in Tobago, Sangre Grande and TPHL lab in Port of Spain. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental? Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Use of Rapid-Tests for COVID-19

(Change in Position)

10. Mr. Saddam Hosein (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister provide the rationale for the change in his position from March 2020 to present on the use of “rapid-tests” for COVID-19 cases?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Health.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, again, very much, Madam Speaker. The use of the rapid test has always been considered to be an additional option within our testing regime for COVID-19 cases.

In first instance, the WHO recommends the use of antibody rapid tests for its research regime. These tests usually pick up past infections ranging from 10 to 30 days as a result and will not aid significantly within an acute clinical setting for past infections.

Over the last month, the availability of a new testing method, the rapid antigen test, for active diseases within zero to 10 days has been tested and approved by PAHO for sensitivity, specificity and quality assurance and control.

Patients will be able to obtain their results within 30 minutes with an accuracy of 84 to 99 per cent. As a result, an order was placed with PAHO for 190,000 kits, and upon completion of the verification process, these kits will be available for distribution at the end of December 2020 at major accident and emergency departments, district health facilities and other primary health care institutions. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Member for Mayaro, Question No. 23 to the Minister of Public Utilities.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So I will take it if you will move to Question No. 25.

Disaster Management Units at Municipal Corporations

(Status of)

25. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) on behalf of Mr. Rushton Paray (*Mayaro*) asked the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:

Could the Minister state whether:

- a) additional resources have been provided to municipal corporations for the highly active hurricane season; and
- b) Disaster Management Units at municipal corporations are appropriately staffed with first responders and physical resources to assist citizens impacted by inclement weather and other natural disasters?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Rural Development and Local Government.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you, Madam Speaker. On behalf of the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, at the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government, the Disaster Management Unit has been building capacity to respond to any hazard

to which the citizens are exposed and its impact, especially any hydrometeorological hazards posed by hurricanes.

In fiscal 2018/2019, the Ministry purchased an excavator and a skid steer to assist the corporations in cleaning waterways in order to reduce flooding in vulnerable areas.

In fiscal 2019/2020, precautionary measures, including the purchasing of goods and equipment such as tarpaulins, mattresses, a 30-foot container, chainsaws, shovels and water pumps occurred.

Under the Public Sector Investment Programme, the disaster management allocation for the Ministry for fiscal 2018 and 2019, and 2019 and 2020 are as follows: the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government head office, \$2 million between 2018 and 2019, and the allocation for 2019/2020, \$2.5 million; Port of Spain City Corporation, \$800,000, 2018/2019; \$925,000, 2019/2020; Arima Borough Corporation, \$500,000 and \$470,000. San Fernando City Corporation \$340,000 and \$859,000; Point Fortin Borough Corporation, \$400,000 and 446,000; Chaguanas Borough Corporation, \$500,000 and \$600,000; Diego Martin Regional Corporation, \$500,000 and \$300,000; San Juan/Laventille Regional Corporation, \$500,000 and \$730,000; Tunapuna/Piarco Regional Corporation, \$1 million and \$700,000; Sangre Grande Regional Corporation, \$1 million and \$211,000; Couva/Tabaquite/Talparo Regional Corporation, \$800,000 and \$855,000; Mayaro/Rio Claro Regional Corporation, \$200,00 and \$550,00; Siparia Regional Corporation, \$500,000 and \$537,000; Penal/Debe Regional Corporation, \$300,000 and \$900,000; Princes Town Regional Corporation, \$200,000 and \$600,000. For a total, Madam Speaker, of \$9,540,000 in 2018/2019 and \$11,183,000 in 2019/2020.

Cabinet also agreed in 2008 to the employment of one chief disaster

management coordinator at head office; 14 disaster management coordinators, one per municipal corporation; 15 communication technicians, one in each of the 14 corporations and one at head office; 28 field officers, two within each of the 14 corporations.

Consequently, the Disaster Management Unit in the 14 corporations has a staff of four members consisting of one disaster coordinator, two field officers and one communication technician. All the corporations supplement the staff at the disaster unit by providing a clerical officer. In the event of a natural disaster or emergency, an all-of-corporation approach is adopted whereby technical personnel from the corporation as well as members of the executive meet and decide on effective and timely solutions to the situation.

We have over 2,000 CERT volunteers across the 14 municipalities, trained in responding to disasters in their communities. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes. Just on a point of clarification and guidance. Minister, with respect to the statistics from a staffing point of view, you indicated that Cabinet has agreed to in the respective regional corporations, have they actually been—have these vacancies or the staffing levels—have they been filled at the respective regional corporation?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, as I said previously, this was done since 2008, and yes they have. And I would like to indicate that apart from what we have already have done in the corporations, there is a request for approval for two additional field officers in each of the Disaster Management Units in each of the corporation; that is a recent request but all the other positions have been filled.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: So, Minister, could you inform this House when the field officers, in terms of their positions in the respective regional corporations, will be filled during this financial year?

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a request of the 2020/2021 year.

Madam Speaker: You have supplemental, Member for Barataria/San Juan?

Mr. Hosein: Madam Speaker, I am just raising—I know this is the end of question time and I am raising Standing Order 29(13) with respect to Written Question No. 4, that was already deferred. So I believe Madam Speaker will have to invoke 29(13).

Madam Speaker: So that— what the Member is asking is, under Standing Order 29(13), the matter having been deferred for two weeks previously and therefore—I therefore will then write the requisite letter to the Minister.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Certainly, Madam Speaker, we have no difficulty with that.

UNACCEPTABLE CRIME LEVELS (GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO ADDRESS)

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Saddam Hosein (*Barataria/san Juan*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas it is the Government's responsibility to ensure the public safety and security of the citizenry;

And whereas the Government has failed in its management of the organs

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responsible for intelligence, under-resourced the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution and cut the budget of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service which led to low detection and conviction rates;

And whereas thousands of citizens and businesses have been negatively affected by the high level of crime in Trinidad and Tobago;

And whereas as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown, there has been an increase in the number of cases of domestic violence:

Be it resolved that this House condemn the Government for its failure to effectively address the unacceptable and serious crime level affecting law-abiding citizens.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, today I wish to raise this Motion on behalf of all of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago regardless of their colour, creed, race and status in society.

This Motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, deals with crime and the effect that it has on the citizenry. And while I raise this Motions on behalf of the citizens, it brings me no joy as I am sure that crime has affected every Member of this Chamber.

And I begin this Motion by outlining the responsibility and the duty of care that the Government owes the citizens to keep them safe and secure. It was Thomas Hobbes who said that:

“The oldest and simplest justification for government is as”—the—
“protector...”—for the citizens. [*Desk thumping*] I would like to also quote the Member for Diego Martin West who is absent, the then Leader of the Opposition, now Prime Minister, in 2012 when he said that if a government cannot deal with crime, well then the Government itself is part of the problem. [*Desk thumping*]

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So the Member for Diego Martin West acknowledged the role and the responsibility that the Government has when it comes to crime. And eight years later since he made that statement, crime has gone from bad to worse. And it is by this pronouncement that this Government has to be responsible for the 2,000 murders from 2015 to today. [*Desk thumping*] It is by that pronouncement that this Government itself is part of the problem. [*Desk thumping*] And today the Government expects to deal with crime but having in its custody a police service that is under-resourced, a DPP Office that is lacking, a court system that is on the brink of collapse and a prison service that is in itself serving a sentence. [*Desk thumping*] So how do you expect to fix crime when the organs responsible for churning out the criminal elements are non-functional? Today, the nation is plagued with a high level of insecurity. There is a cloud of depression and a stagnant feeling of hopelessness in Trinidad and Tobago.

Today, I reflect on the recent killing of Sandy Khan and her daughter Stephanie Khan, a small business owner who had big dreams but her life was taken away too early. She ran a small flower shop in Cunupia where she sold flowers. She had plans to extend her business to sell food. She put everything in place but had no idea that her life was about to be cut short. A woman who had dedicated her life and her business to bring joy to others by ensuring that they received flowers on that special occasion, who provided that warmth to others, felt the cold, hard bullet that removed her life from her body. And while she is just one person, one lady with a small dream and big plans, there are thousands more like her who have been affected by crime.

None of us in this Chamber can understand the pain and the suffering that family is going through. When the daughter who saw her mother on the day of the funeral exclaimed that “mami sleeping”. How can you explain to that child what

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has happened? Will that family be able to get justice or the perpetrators be brought to justice? When we look at the state of our criminal justice system, the answer is clear, that Sandy may not get justice in this world but maybe in another.

The nation went into mourning when one of the happiest day in a child's life, when he graduated from primary school, had to tragically witness his mother being killed in front of his eye. Can that child lead a normal life? When young Videsh Subar was brutally killed, will those perpetrators be brought to justice? Will the parents of Videsh Subar ever be able to get justice? We are currently in a state of anguish with no action. They have said that they felt abandoned and they are calling for action; these are the citizens. And now I want to move to something very disturbing.

Last night on CCN TV6 news we heard that there is only one— one coast guard vessel that is operational; one. And you ordered two more vessels but you have 12 vessels not working. So out of the 13 vessels you have currently in Trinidad and Tobago, you have one coast guard vessel that is currently working in Trinidad and Tobago. Totally unacceptable. [*Desk thumping*] There must be an immediate investigation into this matter. You have thousands of persons entering our shores illegally and you have one vessel.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence, please.

Mr. S. Hosein: One single coast guard vessel protecting the borders. The Prime Minister, the Minister of National Security and then Minister Moses went to a trip to Australia—Minister Moses probably did not know where he was. They had no intention to go to Australia to buy any boats but all of a sudden they reached Trinidad and announced to the country that they are buying two boats. You know what the problem is? The problem is not to buy more boats, it is to fix the 13 vessels that we currently have. [*Desk thumping*] That is not the solution. You buy

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Mr. Hosein (cont'd)

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two more and you are going to run it down just like to ran down the last 13 and then complain that there are issues with maintenance. Give the coast guard diesel and feed the coast guard officers, [*Desk thumping*] that is what you have to do. Maintain the current assets that we currently have.

And they will complain. One of them on that side will get up, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and complain that, well, we cancelled the OPV contract. Yeah. We cancel that. You will hear that song and dance, you know. But I would like to remind them, that it is under the leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar Trinidad and Tobago recovered \$1 billion through the arbitration. [*Desk thumping*] And on top of that purchased 12 Damen vessels which are currently in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what that last government did. What this Government do? Run down the 12 vessels and have one coast guard vessel currently working; one. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, guns and drugs are no longer coming into our country alone. You now have humans and animals coming through. So you have pirogues coming through by Cedros with man, woman, children, goat, cow coming through our shores and the Government is not doing anything to stop it; nothing. And it is because of the porous borders we currently have this situation regarding these illegal immigrants from Venezuela entering Trinidad and Tobago. You have no detection, you have no vessels or proper maintenance of the borders, how can you then stop them from coming in?

We have persons in our country right now, we do not even know their names, where they are from, if they have a criminal record, if they have a passport but they are in Trinidad and Tobago because of the mismanagement of this Government through the border security. [*Desk thumping*]

I am told that there are over 5,000 permanent resident applications awaiting action at the Immigration Division and that is under the purview of the Ministry of

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National Security. Since 2015, we on this side have been advocating and asking the Government, what is their policy with regard to Venezuela? This situation regarding the deportation of Venezuelan children has now attracted international attention. This Government has embarrassed our country again.

You will remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2018, when they repatriated 82 Venezuelan nationals, and Trinidad and Tobago came in for international condemnation. [*Desk thumping*] Today, we learned that they put women and children in a pirogue and set them to sail in Venezuela. They escorted them out of Trinidad and Tobago; escorted.

So I want to ask really, what law were these children and these women escorted out of Trinidad and Tobago? The Minister confirmed that today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when he said that they were not deported but they were escorted. They were here on land in Trinidad and Tobago. They were in police cells. How could you escort them out? There is law to deal with deportation. What law did you use to escort them out? [*Desk thumping*] The Minister must answer. And what we also have to ask the Government is that, we heard that there is a refugee policy is now sub judice or some—as the Minister answered earlier on. But what about the international laws and conventions that Trinidad and Tobago signed onto? [*Desk thumping*] What about those? We—this Government is running afoul of international law, so that is why today they will have no moral authority to speak on crime because they themselves are breaking the law. [*Desk thumping*] They break the law.

Now we on this side, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we understand Trinidad and Tobago is in a state where there are limited resources. We cannot open our borders to everybody but the problem and the solution lies at the feet of the Government. You protect the borders and you give us your policy with regard to Venezuela. It is

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either you are accepting the refugees or you are not. [*Desk thumping*]

And because of their nonsense that they did earlier on in 2018, that they did not have a policy, that is why today we in this mess again, and this problem will keep recurring because the Government is not coming clean with Venezuela. Because we probably know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are other interests that is operating—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second, Member. Chief Whip, please. You are in an important position there, act as—Member, fix your chair properly to start with. Right? This is the third time—since the Member started his discourse, you have been making some little outbursts, so I decided that I need to draw it to your attention. Proceed.

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you. And when they give us the policy, we call on this Government to immediately enact legislation to deal with the issue regarding the Venezuelan immigrants. [*Desk thumping*] You must bring the law to the Parliament. Do not bring no failed law for us in the Parliament. Bring relevant laws to protect our citizens and also to protect our reputation from international embarrassment that this Government has caused us.

Imagine about 13 organizations condemned the Government—Amnesty International, the OAS. And you know what the Prime Minister's response is? To “buff” up everybody. To “buff” them up. To “buff” them up. He “buff up” the OAS, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is who he “buffed”. But you know who he did not “buff”? Maduro. [*Desk thumping*] And to show how this Government has this hodgepodge policy with respect to Venezuela is that, the same Venezuelans that you are loading up in boat and sending back to Venezuela—escorted, sorry, you now have 16,000 Venezuelans in the country who entered illegally but you made them legal; you made them legal. So this policy with respect to Venezuela, Mr.

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Deputy Speaker, respectfully is a pot, a melting pot of nonsense, hodgepodge and it is not thought out carefully, it is inconsistent, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Government has no idea what they are doing with respect to Venezuela because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you would remember, as I said earlier on, there are other interests. Maybe there is another conga dance in the pipeline that will come soon and we will learn about it. [*Desk thumping*]

Now, I also want to anticipate the Members on the Government Bench that all of them will stand up in this Parliament and talk about the anti-gang law. They will say that because we did not support the anti-gang law, blood is on the hands of the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] Well, let me make something clear. Let me make something clear. The Minister—the Member for Laventille West should not be beating his desks because I will get to him soon. [*Crosstalk*]

Fact number one is that no person charged will be set free under the law.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members, please. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 53—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second, Member. Members, please. Please, no outbursts. And what is your comment—what is your point of order, Couva South?

Mr. Indarsingh: 53(1)(e) and (f).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Mr. Hinds: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(6). The Member for Baratavia/San Juan said, “He will get me”. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please. Again, Member, retract and just say it over in a more appropriate fashion, please. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: I do not know what I am retracting but if that is—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. [*Crosstalk*] Member, I think you knew what you said and I think the Member also mentioned it. I will prefer not to make mention of

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the statement. So just retract and I am giving you the opportunity to say it over or you can move on.

Mr. S. Hosein: I retract.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

2.30 p.m.

Mr. S. Hosein: You see, the Member for Laventille will get up like that, because if his only achievement is to open a bus shed—*[Interruption]* If his only achievement as the Minister is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. *[Interruption]* Okay, hold on. Hold on, Members. Again, Member for Barataria/San Juan, I have given you the opportunity. You are just to retract and you can move on accordingly, right, rather than, you know, the added comment with your retraction.

Mr. S. Hosein: Let me state the first fact and let me start over, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Speaking on the anti-gang law. The first fact is that the Government is going and telling everyone in this country that criminals will be set free under the anti-gang law. No person will be set free under the anti-gang law. Any person charged under the anti-gang law currently will be prosecuted in the courts. *[Desk thumping]* Imagine you had to have the DPP come out to this country and tell them that no prosecutions will be in jeopardy. He had to completely debunk what the Attorney General and the Minister of National Security were saying. And he is the one who is constitutionally responsible for prosecutions, so I take his guidance. I take his guidance.

Fact number two: Persons can still be charged if they are involved in a gang. You do not need the anti-gang law to do that. Because persons who commit serious crimes such as murder, kidnapping, firearm offences, drug offences, robbery, can still be charged and prosecuted without anti-gang laws. Those laws are already on

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the book. The Government behaves as though like there is no other law in this country to charge criminals.

Fact number three: The Anti-Gang Act did not reduce the number of murders. [*Desk thumping*] In 2019, when the law was there for one complete year we had 538 murders, the highest ever—second highest ever in the history of our country. Compare that to 2016, there were 463 murders, and 2017 with 494 murders. Which had lower murder tolls, while the Anti-Gang Act was not law.

Fact number four: Not a single person charged, arrested and charged as a gang member in 2020, since the debate last Friday. And this is data coming out from the TTPS. So you lock up no gang members and you lock up no gang leaders, and you say that this thing is working.

Fact number five: The anti-gang law does not work. Because the Attorney General said we had about 2,400 gang members and he knew them by name, by address, by location, by association. In 2020, he did not arrest, they did not lock up any of them, but you come to tell the country that you have a 1,000 gang members left. “Where dey gone, in space?” You reduced the number of gangs by 100 but you eh lock up no gang leaders. Where are those gang leaders? And that is the nonsense that they keep pushing and the false narrative to the population.

Fact number six is that the anti-gang law violates constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms. To lock up someone without a warrant and keep them in the police station for 72 hours and then further detain them by another 14 days. Fourteen days! So, this completely shows the facts that are on the table with regard to anti-gang law. Now, I did not say this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the other person who said this was in fact a renowned criminologist known as Darius Figuera, and I want to quote him. He was quoted to say on CCN TV6:

I simply could not understand how you can say gang registration has

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reduced as the size of the gang population has been reduced. Are they in jail? Because you simply cannot walk away from the life like that. The estimate was either too high or you are giving us a manufactured reality.

And I want to agree with that criminologist that the Government is giving this country a manufactured reality when it comes to the success of the anti-gang law. [*Desk thumping*] And on top of that, you had the Trinidad *Express* editorial saying that:

“It was simply not enough to argue, as Attorney General Faris Al-Rawi did, that gang activity had declined over the past two years with a reduction in the number of gangs from 211 to 129, and in gang memberships from 2,400 to 1,014. Without context and details, these are empty statistics.”

So this is not me saying this, this is the *Express* that is saying this. So one tells him that he manufactured a reality, the other is saying that you have empty statistics, and then you come to the population and say, “well, the anti-gang is the saviour for Trinidad and Tobago”. And that is the narrative that this Government continues to push. Then I went on, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to look at what the academics are saying. You know, there is this paper called, “Antigang Legislation and its Potential Impact: The Promises and the Pitfalls”. It is done by the University of North Carolina. And what they say in that report, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that when they look at laws, similar-type anti-gang legislation, they found when they examine the statistics to the court, that the anti-gang provisions are rarely and sometimes never used. Does that sound familiar? That happens right here in Trinidad and Tobago. And then you have them saying that:

“Although the stated intent behind the antigang statutes is admirable, the swift reaction of the legislatures and the lack of reliance on established criminological theory and research leaves open the possibility that such

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legislation will ultimately fail in achieving its purpose.”

So I am not saying that. This is what the academic research is saying. So you have the lawyers, the criminologists, the media, the researchers all saying that the law does not work, but the AG is saying it does. This reminds me of when the President of the Prison Association, Mr. Ceron Richards said that he believes that the Attorney General has spoken some untruths. And when you deal with gangs in this country, Mr. Vice-President—Mr. Deputy Speaker, sorry, and you look at what happens all over the world, there are three strategies. You look at prevention, you look at intervention and then you look at suppression. The Government has taken no steps to firstly prevent gang formation, instead they create the environment for it to flourish. When you take away opportunities from young people what do you expect? When you cut GATE by \$33 million and you cut SERVOL, you closed down UTT campuses, you cut social services, what do you expect?

I went on this programme hosted by the US Embassy. It is a visitor's programme, and we looked at gangs in Washington and we looked at gangs in Los Angeles, and what we saw was the real systems in place that will work for at-risk youths. You had the Homeboy Industries and the Homegirl Cafe, and it provides an exit for persons outside of that—for those in that life of crime. It gives them the opportunity to work. That one, it is a bakery, it allowed 120,000 gang members out of that life. Can this Government boast of that? They can boast that because of their economic policies today we have over 2,400 gang members in Trinidad and Tobago. What measures have they taken for gang prevention? The very experienced Minister of Youth Development and National Service, where was your voice? Where was his voice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when these programmes were being cut? Was he busy opening a bus shed that they call a transport hub? [*Desk*

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thumping] Where was your voice? The answer cannot be building a swimming pool to end gang culture. The second approach is gang intervention, which is to push persons away involved in that life of crime. Will the anti-gang legislation do that? The answer is, no.

There must be programmes in place to make that gang life unattractive, so that you take away the youths away from that life. Dancing to left foot, right foot is not going to do that. There must be a holistic development working together with the business sector, NGOs, CBOs, to remove these individuals from a life of crime. Gang suppression, this deals with the stage of law enforcement and the criminal justice system. It is currently working? The answer is clearly, no. You continue to pass laws in this Parliament and we are seeing no results. No one in this country is feeling safer. Imagine, we pass laws that relate to tax evasion, the global forum laws, but today we are on a blacklist by the EU. We passed the Interception of Communications (Amdt.) Act to stop communication from the prison, but when you go on Facebook it is flooded with videos being filmed inside of the prison. We passed the Miscellaneous Provisions Act to deal with the appointment of judges but there is still a major backlog of cases in the courts. We passed the Criminal Division and District Criminal and Traffic Courts Act, and today we do not even have a building to put the magistrates. You passed the Trespass Act to stop home invasion, but every single night people in this country's homes are being invaded by the criminal element. You passed the unexplained wealth Act. How many persons explained their wealth under that law? Remember the mess of the demonetization exercise? The Attorney General was throwing a line to catch a big fish and did not even catch a wabeen. And these are just a few examples of laws that do not work in Trinidad and Tobago.

They are passing laws applicable in 2020, but working with a system from

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1920. That is what this Government is doing. And all they come to this Parliament is to show a PR exercise. When you look at what is happening in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, there is a low detection rate. In 2019, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there were 536 murders with only 46 murders detected. That means 419 murders remain undetected. That is simply unacceptable. [*Desk thumping*] You have criminals in this country committing murder in broad daylight. There is no regard anymore for law and order. They have no fear that they would be caught and brought to justice. Just recently I saw a video, that is on the Croisee right in San Juan, with a gunman running down a man right—a stone's throw away from the police station. And that is what Trinidad and Tobago has been reduced to, and then the Government will stand up and say that we are doing the best that we can. Well, if that is the best that you can do, well, you have failed. [*Desk thumping*]

And when at a time you should be resourcing the TTPS to give them enough resources in order to really do the work, they have spent \$40 billion, but yet we still have over 2,300 murders happening in our country. Imagine they cut the TTPS budget by over \$261 million, but gave millions of dollars to vanity projects like the construction of the PM residence in Tobago, White Hall, Stollmeyer's Castle, Mille Fleurs building, while police in this country have no money to buy cars. How do you expect the police to function if you are setting them up for failure? You throw all of the burden on the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service but you give them no resources.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you look at the Ministry of National Security, you have all of these various arms of national security under the Minister of National Security, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, but yet he is more taken up with matters of energy. He is the de facto Minister of Energy. When you have a Ministry like the Ministry of National Security you should be

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devoting all of your time to that Ministry, because what will happen is what is happening right now. There is an entire mismanagement of all of the systems of national security. If the Minister can get up and tell me one organ that is properly functioning, then I will be very happy. You have the men and women of the protective services working day and night risking their lives to protect ours, while the Minister of National Security is not giving them back the same in return. That, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is why we are in this situation. Because the Government has decided to do everything else. They decide to go on trips, to deal with dragon gas and buy boats, but not stay right here and tour what is happening with the coast guard. To go and visit the police stations to see what is happening, to go and visit the fire stations to see what is happening. They are not doing that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And who faces the brunt and consequences of this? It is the citizenry.

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

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you very much. When you look at the prison service, the prison service is also on the brink of collapse. You had an entire statement being issued by the president of the Prison Service Association, talking about the budget cuts. And he was so bold enough to say that they are setting up the prisons for a systematic dismantling. And this is a trademark of this Government, that they set up institutions to fail so that they can privatize. Just like what they did with Petrotrin. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are in a crisis zone right now. The Government has to take decisive action. The Prime Minister needs to stop being the country's best salesman and be the Prime Minister. The Minister of National Security should stop trying to be in everybody's Ministry and focus on the Ministry of National Security. The AG needs to stop using the Parliament as a PR tool, and the Government must take steps to properly deal with this situation, and I beg to move. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I second this Motion and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Chief Whip, proceed.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I second this Motion and I reserve my right to speak.

Question proposed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I will now recognize the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West. Hon. Member, you have 30 minutes.

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it gives me no pleasure here today to have to utilize the House's important time to respond to what is an obviously misconceived Motion by the Member for Barataria/San Juan. [*Desk thumping*]

A Motion where, despite his attempts to put it on paper as to what we were coming here today to debate about, he drifted all over the place, and did not address even his Motion. It sounded like a defence—and I will get to it in a short while—to the population who looked on exactly a week ago, at the business that took place in this Chamber, and coming out of that, we are in absolute shock. A population that was forced to see the irresponsible behaviour of a UNC Opposition once again in their failure to support the anti-gang legislation that they first introduced in 2011. [*Desk thumping*] But, you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, to the population, I remind them and all looking on, that we are dealing with a wounded UNC that has lost two elections in the last four months. A UNC Opposition that lost an election on the 10th of August, and lost another election on the 3rd of November.

We have come here today once again to deal with a misconceived Motion by

the UNC that does nothing more than attempt to politicize crime. Politicize crime at a time when we have been calling on all involved for their support. Because you see, all we are doing today is trying to mask, trying to change, trying to convert the behaviour of a most irresponsible amalgamation of elected Members of Parliament, who, one week ago told this country, despite the pleas of the police services—this has nothing to do with the Government on this side. It was the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service that requested exactly a week ago, in this Parliament, the support of all parliamentarians for the passage of the anti-gang legislation. And the population took note of it. And we have heard what the population has been saying. We have heard what the police has been saying. So you can read from Figuera, you can read from textbooks, you could read all of the theory you want in the world. The persons who are constitutionally charged with the responsibility to protect and serve us, and to deal with crime, asked for the passage of the anti-gang legislation. The UNC has gone down for the third time in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, in failing to provide the police service with what they requested to fight gangs and gang criminality in Trinidad and Tobago.

And I want to use this opportunity, Mr. Deputy Speaker, through you, to also remind the population, that not too long ago, the UNC Opposition also failed to support the bail amendment, and all the bail amendment was, again requested by the police service, and I have seen the Commissioner of Police time and time again go to the population, holding up heavy arms, let the population understand that they also refused to support a bail amendment that said anyone held with an automatic firearm which is built only to kill people, and built for war, will be denied bail for 120 days. In Barbados if you are held with an illegal revolver with one round of ammunition, you do not get bail for two years. That is how you deal

with

it.

In Trinidad we cannot even get a UNC Opposition to agree that anyone held with a bomb, a hand grenade, or an automatic firearm, should not be out on the streets of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the UNC. [*Desk thumping*] So failed to support, failed to support anti-gang legislation, but come here every Friday to talk about the state of crime. It is the police that asked for the anti-gang legislation. Failed to support a bail amendment that says if you are held with an automatic firearm or a hand grenade or bomb, an incendiary device, you should not be on the streets. But it is the UNC Opposition who want that. And let the people of Trinidad and Tobago take note yet again as they are doing. So what you heard today, a short while ago, was a plea by a young man who is being misled, that is Barataria/San Juan, and I will come to why I say he is being misled. A plea by him to the population, please forgive us. The UNC Opposition will not be forgiven. [*Desk thumping*] And yes, and yes, I say it on the *Hansard* here today, gang and criminal activity, and every time someone, unfortunately, meets their fate at the end of an automatic weapon in Trinidad and Tobago, it rests solely on the doorstep of the UNC. A most irresponsible Opposition. He had the audacity, he being the Member for Barataria/San Juan who has run out of the Chamber now, had the audacity to say that they supported the Interception of Communication amendments. They did not. The Interception of Communication amendments, to which the Member for Barataria/San Juan was just referring, was to allow us to use intercepted conversations, et cetera, by persons who are inmates in a prison with persons on the outside. To use that as evidence. To bug them. To use that as evidence, again, to go to the heart of criminality.

And the Attorney General could correct me if I am wrong. But they failed to

support it in the Senate, and the Member for Barataria/San Juan was there at the time. [*Desk thumping*] And you know, I wonder why. Is it because there were certain other Members in the Senate at the time, who are now in House, but not here in the Chamber right now, who were busy having those conversations up and down with people on the inside of the prisons? Is that the reason why? Is everything that the Opposition does always self-serving? And then they want to come here today and talk about crime. On his Motion, the Member for Barataria/San Juan, one of the things he said, and he touched on it a short while ago, about us under-resourcing. And then the Leader of the Opposition, who again is not here today, has been in the public domain saying, about state contracts, and where state contracts are going, and how money is being spent. And the Member for Barataria/San Juan's Motion that we are here to deal with today, talks about us under-resourcing the police service, under-resourcing the office of the DPP.

I want to take the opportunity, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to remind the population of Trinidad and Tobago, who are no fools, that this country is dealing with a reduced revenue stream. That is our reality. And thank God it is a PNM administration managing the economy during this time of crisis. [*Desk thumping*] Because I will remind the population now just using four examples, Mr. Deputy Speaker, of how it would have happened. This is not supposition, this is not hypothetical. How it happened, I should say. Previously there was an OAS contract to build a highway from San Fernando to Point Fortin. The day before a general election, the last working day, after the UNC took a decision to use cash to build the highway. To make sure that no lending agency had oversight on where the money went, they awarded the contract to OAS under dubious circumstances, did not borrow money but did it from alleged cash flow, and then on the last

working day before an election, amended the contract to take out a clause that allowed the people of Trinidad and Tobago to terminate OAS who were not performing, because they were the bankrupt in Brazil and accused of corruption in Brazil. We had to go all over, up to the Supreme Court of the United Kingdom to recover a billion dollars for Trinidad and Tobago.

Another example: The Beetham Waste Water Plant. Let the population remember, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, over a billion dollars of a contract given to “Mamoo”. A billion dollars in cash, again. No borrowing. I believe there was a debate or an attempt to debate it in the House when the PNM was in Opposition. Of course, it struck down. But I want to tell the population how this PNM administration is looking after its interest. Because people should not forget, over a billion dollars in cash given to “Mamoo” to build a waste water plant that is a waste, and used NGC money to do it. Well, you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what the population will hear here today, is that once again the parties involved in that came up with a sham transaction, “Mamoo”. “Mamoo” had a sham transaction to try and prevent the NGC from getting to the money. Right? And I will read the decision. It is no longer sub judice because the court decided that what “Mamoo” was doing with the money given to him by the UNC was a sham transaction.

So to come here—and the reason I am referring to it is to let the people know what the PNM Government did. Because immediately on us coming into office, it was one of the first things we tackled, white collar corruption. [*Desk thumping*] So do not say we did not take it on. Do not try to mislead the population and say that we did not go after the corruption. It is right here. This is the decision, Mr. Deputy Speaker, before Madam Justice Joan Charles, the 20th of February this year. The 20th of February this year. Because when we came in as a Government,

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immediately we froze the assets of “Mamoo”, by December of 2015. But let me just quickly tell the country about the case of NGC, *National Gas Company of Trinidad and Tobago v Superior Industrial Services Limited*, SIS, owned by “Mamoo”, who is in Panama now. The NGC has made a claim under this Government in the pursuit—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. Member for Laventille West, please. I am hearing you making some little overturns. Please, silence. Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I could understand why the Member for Laventille West is becoming emotional. Because we have to sit here and listen to those who may have participated in corruption lecture the country. [*Desk thumping*]

The NGC, and I want to let the people of Trinidad and Tobago know here today, that this Government directed the NGC, and the NGC has brought a claim against “Mamoo’s” company, SIS, for over \$436 million for the Beetham Waste Water Plant. And what was found on the 20th of February of this year, by a High Court judge, is that “Mamoo” engaged—the SIS engaged in the Beetham Waste Water Plant in sham transactions with a company that was incorporated by the then chairman of NGC, under them. Under them the then chairman of NGC facilitated it, and now we have in black and white by a High Court judge of Trinidad and Tobago, saying and finding, making declarations, that SIS made deeds of mortgage to delay, hinder and/or defraud the NGC.

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a point of Standing Order 48(1).

Mr. Al-Rawi: Oh, come on.

Hon. Members: Oh Lord.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

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Hon. S. Young: You see, the relevance of this, Member for Couva South, is this Government does its work. This Government fights corruption. [*Desk thumping*] And this is one example. I am coming to more. So the court has declared that SIS made deeds of mortgage to delay, hinder or defraud the NGC, and it set aside these mortgages. So the NGC is pursuing a claim for over, almost half a billion dollars for the Beetham Waste Water Plant. That is number one. You want to talk about how you should use resources?

3.00 p.m.

I remind the country again, through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that in August of 2015, just about a month before a general election, close to \$500 million were borrowed by the EMBD; close to \$500 million not only borrowed but disbursed to certain people under the direction of the Member for Oropouche East. And I will read two decisions of the High Court, one of the High Court and one of the Court of Appeal with respect to that. So I am telling the country here again today, I am not going to sit down here as the Minister of National Security and hear somebody—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, one second. Again, Member for Naparima, please. I just spoke about the slight outburst from Members. I am not tolerating it today. Proceed.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You see because this seemed to have slipped under the radar, how we are dealing with and dealt with corruption, that \$500 million borrowed and disbursed in the space of a month is their actions in the High Court that are being pursued. But as part of it we followed the money, we followed the money and there is now a Court of Appeal decision that the population deserves to know about, because they need to know that this

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Government is not only fighting the gangs, fighting the crime and criminality, we are also pursuing white collar crime.

There is a Court of Appeal decision, *Civil Appeal No. P16 of 2018 between Ravin Ramkissoon and EMBD* again and a number of banks. So a civil appeal determined by a three court panel, three experienced Court of Appeal judges, *Ravin Ramkissoon and EMBD*, Bank of Baroda, First Citizens Bank, First Citizens Investment Services Limited, RBC, JMMB and Republic Bank Limited. And the population needs to know what happened in this. Paragraph 3:

“EMBD is involved in litigation with a number of contractors concerning civil engineering works. Its case is that certain contractors and other persons, conspired to form a cartel that dishonestly manipulated the tendering process so that contracts were awarded to predetermined contractors at inflated prices and that these contractors engaged in other acts of dishonesty and impropriety.

4. As part of its investigations EMBD sought and obtained its first Norwich Pharmacal”—from a judge in—“May 2017.”

A Norwich Pharmacal order is to pursue and follow the money in the civil courts. This gentleman, Ravin Ramkissoon, received a sum from contractors coming out of that same \$500 million of \$13 million. So EMBD went following the money, right. And what the Court of Appeal found—before I get to that, at paragraph 16, the evidence before the Court of Appeal was the case for EMBD which is that, certain named contractors, quote:

“...with the intention of enriching themselves and injuring EMBD, knowingly procured and/or obtained the EMBD contracts, certifications and payments from EMBD, by reason of collusion between themselves and

others that was designed to ensure that specific companies....by a wrongful and unlawful agreement or combination, were awarded specific contracts at inflated amounts and received payments that were not due (the 'Cartel Arrangements')'. Further, it was EMBD's case that the then Minister of Housing and Urban Development and certain representatives of EMBD 'participated in the Cartel Arrangements and/or inappropriately sought to favour the EMBD contractors for the purpose of giving effect to the Cartel Arrangements.'"

That is what the court is saying. It then goes on to say at paragraph 21:

"Mr. Rudder refers in his affidavit to SMS messages between GP, the Minister, and one TR of TNR, a company which received contracts and is alleged to be one of the companies involved..."

And he refers to the SMS messages, the text messages and the interventions made by TR and the Minister. And this is the important part, this is not me saying this, this is the Court of Appeal of Trinidad and Tobago unanimous decision by three judges, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Paragraph 22:

"This court has carefully examined the affidavit evidence that was before Mohammed J. On this evidence we are unable to conclude that the judge was plainly wrong in finding that a wrong has been carried out or arguably carried out by an ultimate wrongdoer..."

Because you see the person whose account the money was followed into appealed to the Court of Appeal and said you should not do this. This is now the Court of Appeal saying that the judge was not wrong. He should have made the order, he could have made the order and he should have made the order and they go on to say:

“The evidence before the judge, in our view, went beyond ‘mere suspicion’ and provided an evidential basis for at least an arguable case that a wrong has been carried out against EMBD.”

So you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is easy to come in here and try to create clouds of doubt in the minds of the public that this is not a Government that is serious and this is not a Government that for this first time is actively pursuing white collar corruption, but that is happening. And I came to give the assurance to the population today, amongst others, that that is taking place.

There is another decision, but I am running out of time. This was given by Justice Aboud a week before elections in August of this year and I will find the opportunity on another occasion to read excerpts of that decision, 124 pages by Justice Aboud. Again a certain a Member of Parliament who is not here in the Chamber is a defendant in there. But ultimately what the judge found when they tried to have the case thrown out, preliminarily, is, “aye”, these serious allegations is sufficient evidence here to support that there is an arguable case to be made and these need to be determined on the merit. In other words, you have a case to answer [*Desk thumping*] and that too is being pursued. So do not come here and try to fool the people.

Another thing I have taken an affront to, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in this Motion, and I am going to tell the population today, it starts off, the second paragraph:

“...*Whereas* the Government has failed in its management of the organs responsible for intelligence...”

Because you see I have realized there is a concerted effort and attack all of the time by the UNC Opposition on the intelligence services of Trinidad and Tobago. And

as the Minister of National Security I cannot allow that to continue because it is unfounded and it is unjust.

So I stand here today as the Minister of National Security and as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago who has been given an opportunity and a privilege to work with certain people, to tell the country, fear not, your intelligent services under this administration are independent and they are doing their job. [*Desk thumping*] Because you see, there has been a proper appointment of directors of intelligence in Trinidad since 2015 and I keep watching the attacks and I keep watching the attacks and I understand why they are attacking that particular organ of intelligence in this country. But today I thank all of the intelligence officers, all of the persons in the SSA and other intelligence officers who are giving on a daily basis yeoman service, because under this administration it has been properly rebuilt.

There is no Resmi Ramnarine who used to answer telephones heading it. [*Desk thumping*] There is no dismantling of facial recognition, there is no destruction and stealing of servers being used by intelligence. So stop attacking the intelligence services. I thank them for their work. [*Desk thumping*] And through you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to put on the *Hansard* one small example, but the population will understand how important the example is of how functional our intelligence services are, how well they are working.

Last year when there was no COVID and we were travelling I was on business in Tobago and as I was waiting to leave the hotel a taxi driver asked to speak to me. He said, "Sir"; I said, "Yes"; he said, "I would like to thank you". So I said, "Okay, well it is nice to get thanked. What are you thanking me for?" He said, "My son is a prison officer", he said, "and you all saved his life". Immediately I knew exactly who this gentleman was talking about and I told him, I

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called his name. He did not introduce himself by name. He was shocked. I said, “It is not only once, Mr. J, it was on two occasions your son’s life was saved as a prison officer”. And you know why? Is because the hard work of the Intelligence Services of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And I thank them for continuing to do that work, because they do it, they are attacked, they constantly hear and see the attacks in this Chamber and in the next Chamber, but they do their job and they do it properly under this administration because there is no interference under this administration. [*Desk thumping*]

I just want to clarify, because I do not have enough time unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I cannot let some of what was said by the previous speaker sit unopposed. The first is give the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard diesel and feed officers. Complete hogwash. There is no shortage of diesel with the coast guard. The officers are being properly fed. This talk about one vessel. There is not only one vessel working in the coast guard, but it continues to be in the UNC Opposition’s way a concerted effort, on one hand they attack the organs that are performing national security duties relentlessly and then on the other hand scream about no proper border patrol. They are the ones attacking the police, they are the ones attacking the coast guard and the defence force. They are relentless in their attack on the intelligence services. Let the population take note but I, not as the Minister, as a citizen, thank every single one of the officers in the police service, in the fire service, in the prison service, in the defence force, in our immigration, in customs, even the life guards, all of them are playing an important role. Can they always get what they want? The answer is, no. But we will do what we have to.

Talk about recovering a billion dollars for the OPVs. He knew we were—I am not talking about the OPVs anymore, and then trying to water down after

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having the audacity to ask a question before about the two Cape Class vessels. Yes, the Prime Minister led a delegation on the invitation of the Prime Minister of Australia and the Australian Government and the people through a defence fund are helping us to fund those two Cape Class vessels. And I look forward to them getting here. [*Desk thumping*]

The Damen vessels that maybe down, it is because of COVID that the shipyards in Damen, in Holland and I am going to call in the Ambassador of the Netherlands next week to meet with him, because the Damen persons do not want to fly to this side of the world to do what needs to be done with some of the vessels. But do not stand here and mislead the people and stop coming and exposing what may be a perceived weakness. Is it because there are ties with the human traffickers? Is that what they are trying to promote?

Another point that was made, do not “bouf”—the Prime Minister did not “bouf” Maduro. Everything for them in this House is about Maduro and about Delcy. But you know what, this side, this Government, this administration, does things on principle. And what is the applicable principle? We followed the UN Charter to the T. The UN Charter I, is recognize the elective government. As the Prime Minister tells us constantly, who will pick up the phone when you call. Who will pick up the phone when you call. So that is the Government that we deal with. If it ever changes we deal with the next government. But we do things on principle. For months, for months you heard those on the other side screaming for the fella who lost on the 3rd of November. That is the other election they lost, on the 3rd of November in the United States, that is the one the UNC lost. [*Desk thumping*]

Another loose statement made from the Member for Barataria/San Juan before he ran out the Chamber, 16,000 Venezuelans who entered illegally. Again,

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they do this thing intentionally, try to mislead the population. Where he got 16,000? That might be by one of their Members who is associated with illegal Venezuelans, but not by the immigration. Immigration registered 16,523 Venezuelans both who came in legally and those who came in illegally. And all of them now have legal status and we will continue to protect Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Again—

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

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. I just want to—the anti-gang, he continues, this young man who represents Barataria/San Juan continues to mislead the population. There are and I will repeat it, certain offences under the anti-gang legislation that comes to an end in three days' time that do not exist anywhere else in law. There is no other law to charge somebody for being a gang leader, there is no other law to charge somebody for harbouring a gang member. [*Desk thumping*] There is no other law anywhere for all of the offences that are found in the legislation that was the anti-gang legislation.

And I will end by saying this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and they know it. The population has judged on August 10th and will continue to judge the UNC Opposition. And as a citizen it pains me that they continue not to support legislation that the police service has asked for, those charged with the responsibility of law enforcement and every single criminal activity linked to gang behaviour in Trinidad and Tobago and every single death on the end of an automatic weapon in Trinidad and Tobago is solely the responsibility of the UNC Opposition [*Desk thumping*] because they refuse to do what is right thinking that a scorch and burn attitude will get them into office. They were rejected on August 10th and I plead with them going forward, support the legislation that the police

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asked for to fight crime, because it is not this Government, that the blood rests on the hands of the UNC Opposition and the population knows that. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Dinesh Rambally (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, all Members speaking now is 20 minutes.

Mr. D. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me say that I want to commend the Member for Barataria/San Juan for bringing this Motion. [*Desk thumping*] You see this Motion was not brought by vaps. We have a very serious issue of increasing crime, increased crime rates, deaths, murders in the country and what we are hearing is a lot of rhetoric. I am surprised that, you know, let me start with the last speaker, a colleague of mine at the Bar and someone who I have some respect for, but I am surprised that he spent a lot of time in his contribution dealing with reading from judgments which essentially have only to date dealt with procedural matters. There have been no affirmative determinations on matters of fact. So those cases that have been cited they are only matters of procedural issues. [*Desk thumping*] So I do not know that you could go fighting crime and in mounting your whole campaign that you are effectively fighting crime you are referring to two authorities in which they have dealt with essentially procedural issues in the court.

So I want to tell him that when he refers to the Member for Barataria/San Juan's Motion as being misconceived, it is no defence to the population of what is occurring in the country. You cannot say it is misconceived, it is most appropriate. Now this is the difference between Members on that side and Members on this side. The UNC does not politicize crime. We do not politicize crime. What we have on the other side, however, is you have a Government that only does public

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relations when they come to the Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] So do not argue about when we exercise a democratic oversight on this side and we say that on our view legislation is not [*Crosstalk*] proper to become law.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence please.

Mr. D. Rambally: This is not—sorry.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. D. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You have to bring legislation, not as a PR exercise, bring legislation that will translate into results for the citizens of this country. So I want to deal with one issue of this Anti-Gang Bill. The Anti-Gang Bill, the last Bill, we still have law, but the Bill that was brought and sought to increase the sunset clause, our position was very clear, there was nothing difficult in understanding our position. None other than the political leader said that we have to examine the efficacy of the law. We come back to the point that what was brought before the Parliament is the sunset clause. So we had to see whether it was working and working in a manner where you have legislation which is—it potentially infringes on the individual rights, whether it is worth keeping on the books and the question is, was it working? But that was not only all.

The political leader also indicated, the Member for Siparia, that you cannot deal with crime in a piecemeal fashion, you have to deal with it in a holistic way. And therefore if you are talking about dealing with crime in one aspect of the country you have to also take on board that you have white collar crimes, you have some things that are taking place that fund gangs and therefore why not implement, bring legislation, fully implement the procurement legislation. And that was the point that was being made.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, since that was done, not last week Friday, that was

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done since the week before, once the Bill was laid in the Parliament the political leader, the Member for Siparia, indicated that that was the Opposition's position. Do you know, and this is the point that is being missed, the anti-gang legislation continues to be effective? So what is the delay in coming to the Parliament and saying, hey, we want to fully implement the procurement legislation?—and therefore we can take steps to say okay we will support you on that. There is nothing absolutely wrong with taking such a position that as an Opposition we are asking you to bring certain laws and we will lend our support because it will now be a holistic approach in legislating. So we still have that law on the books.

We have one Member on the other side who went away and it is cited in one of the daily newspapers, criminal prosecutions will fall apart, and immediately the DPP had to come out and say that is not so. So where are we really going with all of this, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I noticed and I do not want to belittle anyone and it does not serve as any disrespect to anyone on the other side. It does not serve as any disrespect to the other side. So I will not seek and I am not in any way belittling any member of the population who comes forward and they feel that some good work was done and therefore they are praising a Minister. But I want to say that that same prisons—when we are dealing with prison officers, the Prison Officers Association led by the president of that association had some very stinging remarks to make about the Government. And I do not want to identify any individual but that the language used, and it is on the public record, they did not say that there was positive reform taking place by the Government, they did not praise the Government like what the Government is doing and patting itself on the back, they said that with respect of any claim to positive reform in prisons reform they made it clear that that was a lie. That was stated on the record, Mr. Deputy

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Speaker.

So in respect of when Members on that side like to pat themselves when they state that—they want to claim their own fame, that prison reform is on the rise and there are positive effects taking place, that is not so, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And we have heard it from the prison officers themselves that the Members of the Government are lying. So are their words.

Now, I just want to quote something before I go further. And this is an international acclaimed journal:

“Professor Christopher Blakesley”—in reviewing—“several national studies, presented”—in the general report the criminal justice system facing the challenge of organized crime. The citation is 1998, 69 International Report of Penal Law No. 4—“...the dangers of adopting ill-considered criminal legislation on organized crime.”

And this is what he had to say about that. And I quote:

“It is easy to fall into the trap: politicians gain popularity and votes by looking ‘tough on crime,’ especially organised crime.”

And I say that—I stop there with the quotation. This is why I started off, you cannot do a public relation exercise in the Parliament when you are dealing with crime. I continue with the quote:

“They become even more popular when they are able to say bad things about courts that try to rectify the constitutional problems created by bad laws.”

And we have had instances where the courts have pronounced that legislation arising from this Government that they have constitutional flaws. And in certain instances, very recently during the pandemic, there was a decision where the court had to indicate why not bring legislation to be scrutinized by the Parliament:

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“Sadly, often the news media exacerbate the problem by pandering to public fear and appetite for salacious material. Outcries from interest groups are shrill, raising the cost to anyone who wishes to promote reasoned and constitutional laws.”

And this is the point I want to make and I end with this, this is the penultimate part of the quotation:

“This all creates an atmosphere that tends to ignore the larger picture and which may actually hurt the battle against crime, while damaging human rights and democracy.”

And that is what we stand for on this side here, ensuring that the citizens’ rights are not damaged and that they have full access to the courts.

Can you imagine that you are talking about people who come ashore whether by pirogue or fishing boat or whatever you want to call it and you have language—wishing to sound diplomatic—these people were escorted back into the ocean. How are you escorted back, somebody has broken your borders, reached the shores and your defence to that is that, no, they were not deported they were escorted back. I wonder how is that possible that you just hold the boat, like how we pull seine in Mayaro or on other parts of the country and we just push the boat back into the ocean and gently help them paddle back out. So this is what we are dealing with and we are being criticized on an international scale now because of how it is we are treating with human rights. So I say that just to deal with the last speaker.

Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in dealing with crime, and again I want to commend the Member for Barataria/San Juan, this is an appropriate Motion, it is appropriate because in certain constituencies right now, I do not wish to say all, but

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I certainly want to speak for mine, that you have increased criminal activities in the last month. In my last contribution to this House I made mention of it and it continues unabated. It continues where you have persons who are running amok in the society. They do not have care for whether it is elderly people you are dealing with, whether it is there are children involved, whether persons who are, they are robbed in their vehicles leaving children behind, in the vehicles alone and they are therefore in a perilous position. So we have instances of crime that are very serious on the books and in reality.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the things is that I do not want, having made reference before in this House to what was taking place, and in particular in the area of Felicity in my own constituency of Chaguanas West, I do not wish today to speak to too much statistics. Too much dry statistics, Mr. Deputy Speaker, tends to dehumanize what is actually taking place in reality. If we think of the number of persons murdered or missing as merely a bundle of statistics we would never be able to appreciate the full agony of what those family members are going through. Numbers, Mr. Deputy Speaker, slip out of our minds very easily. In fact the number of patients suffering from COVID-19 when we look at the recital of this particular Motion as well even those statistics now have made us numb to an extent of the—and it desensitizes us to the full horror of what is presented to the population.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in dealing with what has taken place I want to say that in terms of the Government what we have heard so far is that you are ill-prioritizing matters when it comes to crime. What you are in effect doing, you have cut funding, you are spending moneys on vanity projects. I will not repeat what the Member had said before. So to support this position, I know a lot of

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information is being put out from the other side that we have to support law enforcement and we agree, you have to support law enforcement. But how do you properly support law enforcement? Do you cut their funding? The ultimate test of supporting law enforcement at a time when you have increased crime is to give them the tools that they need to make sure that they have ample funding available to them and give them the tools that they need.

If they are under resourced, how are they going to tackle the problems of the country? And what we have seen is that the budgetary allocation for 2020 for the police service was just over 550 million. And the TTPS, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service only received releases of around 400 million. So there was in that budgetary allocation, that fiscal year, you had a shortfall of over 100 million. Then when you look again, you have to look at it from the point of view that when we are talking about drones that the TTPS were to acquire to assist in the patrolling of the coastline, I have heard from the other side, intelligence gathering, and that there is praise for the intelligence agencies. We are not attacking them nor do we want to dismantle them. But we need to have these things and they have to be properly funded.

When we talk about, ultimately, the man on the street, when you talk about police vehicles the TTPS was allocated just about 40 million in fiscal 2020 and however in 2021 this figure has been reduced outright. So you are talking about fighting crime, you are going back to the days when people will pick up the phone and call and say there is a crime being committed by my neighbour or downstairs of my home or somewhere close by, it is immediate, I need your help and you know what they are going to say, we do not have a vehicle by which we can come or we do not have a functional vehicle, everybody is out, we do not have a working

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vehicle. We are going back to those days.

3.30 p.m.

Now, in fiscal 2020, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the TTPS was allocated 39 million for vehicle maintenance, but this figure was reduced to 19 million— just over 19 million for fiscal 2021, a reduction of just over 19.5 million. So with zero allocation for the purchase of new vehicles, the Government has reduced, again, an allocation. You are talking about law enforcement. So we have to get our priorities right, and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Members to follow will cite more of the statistics— not statistics sorry, some of the figures.

But I want to say something just before my time is up, that if it is you believe that you have lost your magic wand in terms of fighting crime, you have not. The anti-gang law is still in place and nothing has come forward to say, “Well okay, we will meet you, Members of the Opposition, halfway. We will ensure that the procurement legislation is fully implemented by a date certain, and therefore, let us move forward.” But you know that is all—as I started off by saying it is all rhetoric. If you had so much faith in this anti-gang legislation, how is it that the head of the National Security Council did not see it fit to be here to support that said Bill that we are being accused on this side of not supporting. [*Desk thumping*] It is all rhetoric, all rhetoric. So you did not even believe in the efficacy of that piece of legislation, that it needed to be continued. So you can say all that you want, but we on the side here, and as Member for Barataria/San Juan has said before, really and truly the crime in this country, it is way too high. It does not matter if election was on the 10th of August and who won the election. When you say things like that, you are giving a clear indication of who politicizes crime in this country.

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On this side, we really do not believe on who has won the election on the 10th of August. What we believe in is whether we on this side, we will still continue to work for the population and for the citizenry, and this is a Bill— this Motion sorry, is one that was not misconceived, as is being alleged by the other side. It is most appropriate. It would do Members on the other side well to take heed of some of the suggestions that are being made, to try and meet us in a sort of bipartisan way and let us work towards ensuring that crime is reduced in this country.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for this opportunity to address the Parliament. I want to endorse what the Member for Barataria/San Juan has said before and I want to commend him for this Motion, and I would urge all Members on that side as well to pay heed to the crime situation that the population continues to suffer from. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. Attorney General.

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I acknowledge that the role of Chaguanas West in the contribution just made was an extremely difficult one. It was difficult because it is hard to stand with a sincere tone, let alone facts, to really support the contribution from Barataria/San Juan. I say that most respectfully because if one reflects upon the content of what Chaguanas West just spoke to, most respectfully, I could not grasp a solid point which can be backed up by facts and let me demonstrate why.

The Motion before us, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is one that has been curiously piloted by the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan who, for the first time, I think, in my going on 11th year in Parliament, stood as a Member that piloted a Bill and

then promptly left the debate. I have never seen a debate piloted by an hon. Member and seen that Member leave the Chamber, because that Member is required to respond to the debate. So the first point that I find curious is that missing in action by the piloter of the Motion. The second point that I want to note is that this Motion says that:

“...the Government”—ought to be condemned—“for its failure to effectively address the unacceptable and serious crime level affecting law-abiding citizens.”

The hon. Member posits in his preamble that the Government has a responsibility to ensure public safety; that the Government has allegedly failed in its management of intelligence. The hon. Member says that there is an allegation that we have under-resourced the Office of the DPP and cut the budget of the TTPS, and that that has led to low detection and conviction rates. The hon. Member then goes to say that there has been an increase in domestic violence in the COVID lockdown and that citizens are reeling under crime. The Member in his contribution sets out statements such as, the Interception of Communications Act was passed and that there has been nothing as a result of it, giving the impression that there was support for that legislation. The hon. Member says that there has been no reduction in the backlog in the courts. The hon. Member says that there are no buildings for Magistrates' Courts. The hon. Member said that with respect to the unexplained wealth order, factors that come out of the civil asset forfeiture legislation, that there was nothing to show, and the hon. Member referred to the demonetization legislation and that exercise as a royal mess.

Let me ask this question on behalf of all of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to the hon. Member: It is a mess for who? [*Desk thumping*] Let me say

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why I have put that on the record. When we looked to the public domain on the Interception of Communications Act, it is a matter of record that the Interception of Communications Act that we brought to this Parliament was a three-fifths majority legislation which sought to allow for the bugging, recording of prisoner conversations when they are not talking to their lawyer or on approved devices which have legal professional privilege. That is a concept which is accepted in the entire Commonwealth, the United States, the United Kingdom. It was upheld in the European Court of Human Rights. It was upheld in the United Kingdom in the Supreme Court in what is referred to as the Bailey case where the Bailey principles were set out.

The only democratic entity in a Parliament, such as this, that has not supported law such as that is the United National Congress Opposition. [*Desk thumping*] And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member says that they supported the legislation. I read from *CNC3* editor, published March 09, 2020, headline:

“Opposition prepared to go to court to stop Interception Bill - Senator Saddam Hosein.”

Now surely, the hon. Member must know that the research that is permitted by just a quick check online must reveal that the hon. Member has been presented to the nation as somebody that speaks on both sides of his mouth. On the left hand, the hon. Member comes today and pretends and attempts to revise history by saying that the Opposition supported the interception of communications amendments, and then, in the public domain, the newspapers are quoting Sen. Saddam Hosein saying and I quote:

“UNC Senator Saddam Hosein says the Opposition is prepared to go to the courts, to stop government’s proposed Interception of Communications Bill

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becoming law in this country.”

Now let us connect the dots. The anti-gang legislation which—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—the Member for Barataria/San Juan has put forward as something that the Leader of the Opposition could not support, when I last checked my own memory, and let alone the *Hansard* record, the Member for Siparia—again, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask you to notice—did not speak in the debate. So when the hon. Member comes here to quote the Leader of the Opposition as having concerns on the law, there was not a concern as to constitutionality of a single provision raised in the debate on the anti-gang legislation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is material to note that the Anti-Gang Act, in its Schedule, refers to white collar crimes, including prevention of corruption, including money laundering and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a matter of record that this Government has passed in its tenure, in the period 2015—2020, the greatest number of white collar crime laws [*Desk thumping*] in the history of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, all of which are operational.

And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when one reflects upon the fact that we have passed laws to remove secret ownership, otherwise referred to as beneficial ownership; we have passed laws to refer the hidden ownership in bearer share warrants, et cetera, into the public light by removing bearer share warrants, by removing share warrants, which do not have names; we have passed law to compel the disclosure of shareholding by the issuance of legal shares; we passed law to treat with the Financial Action Tack Force recommendations; we passed the civil asset forfeiture explain your wealth legislation and permit me to say this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the population is apparently not aware, certainly the Opposition,

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that there are several unexplained wealth orders matters before the courts of Trinidad and Tobago as we speak, and that that legislation feeds into the Anti-Gang Act in its Schedule.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was the UNC Opposition that refused to support the recommendations put forward for the registration of deeds package. We have said repeatedly that you hide the proceeds of crime in cash, in land and in businesses, and when we brought forward for debate the registration of deeds, miscellaneous provisions Bill to put into law the anchored protection to remove what we call “top drawer deeds” or “hidden instruments” from the top drawer and to put it in the registry, it was the UNC Opposition that said no to that. It was the UNC Opposition that refused to support the amendments to the Income Tax Act to allow the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service to a line of sight into matters at the Board of Inland Revenue. It is the UNC Opposition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that refused to support the Criminal Division and District Criminal and Traffic Courts Bill which birthed the Criminal Division. It is a matter of the fact on the record, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that contrary to the allegations made by the Member for Barataria/San Juan, that there are no Magistrates’ Court in this country, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will, with the opening of the Port of Spain Civil Courts at the Waterfront Towers, without counting the courts that are being constructed in San Fernando as we speak, 75,000 square feet of Magistrates’ Court in San Fernando, the Family Court in San Fernando, without counting those two, without counting the jury court that is under construction right now at COSTAATT building along the East-West Corridor to handle jury trials, without counting the courts that we have installed in the prisons themselves, we will have over 129 courtrooms, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in existence. And Barataria/San Juan, absent in the Chamber, piloted of this Motion,

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comes to pretend that there are no courts.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Barataria/San Juan could not have the courage to say that the fight against crime involves going to a courtroom, and in that courtroom that it is this Government that implemented the electronic attendances in court. In our Family and Children Division and in our Criminal Division, we passed the law to allow for virtual appearances. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the report which is of relevance is that coming from the Chief Justice in the annual report delivered just recently where the hon. Chief Justice has told the country the opposite of what Barataria/San Juan has said. We have done 15,000-plus matters in the virtual environment. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is this Government, in the fight against crime, that has seen the doubling of judicial capacity, the number of judges legislatively going from 36 to 64 in the High Court; from 12 to 15 in the Court of Appeal; the number of judicial officers to case manage criminal matters have gone from two, when the UNC was in Government, to 25; the number of magisterial districts have gone from 12 to three so that you can actually attend by way of virtual hearings. The full grant of judicial immunity from prosecution was granted by this Government to the magistrates. The ability for prosecutors to be in law managed in the court process was introduced by this Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, you cannot tackle crime if you do have a courtroom, a judge, a case management system via a process, and that process was the introduction of Criminal Procedure Rules; the introduction of guilty pleas via plea bargaining arrangements; the introduction of maximum sentencing indications; the introduction of the entire concept of management of caseload, and it is the hon. Chief Justice who on the record has spoken to this Government's fight in the criminal arena, finding itself by way of evidence in the report of the hon. Chief

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Justice where a near 40 per cent reduction in caseload in the courts has been achieved. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, after you deal with the judges and the courtrooms, who is going to defend you is a material issue. Barataria/San Juan apparently could not contemplate the immense importance of the Public Defenders Division, spoken about for decades, delivered by this Government.

In outfitting the building which was rented for the public defenders at Stanmore Avenue, the Government undertook an expenditure of \$24 million, achieved \$2 million in savings, and that entire Division is working. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is surely important to look at the prosecutorial factors. In looking at the number of prosecutions in Trinidad and Tobago, you must reflect upon the capacity, as this Motion, does of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Director of Public Prosecutions has received a significant improvement. We have delivered the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in Lowlands, Tobago—opened. [*Desk thumping*] We opened, Mr. Deputy Speaker—we handed over 75,000 square feet of rented space for the Director of Public Prosecutions at Park Street, outfitting that building for nearly \$30 million, if I recall the number. We have added, at the request of the Director of Public Prosecutions Office, the Lowlands, Tobago, and the Port of Spain office has now been added by the San Fernando offices for the DPP at Gulf City, at the request of the Office of the DPP, and that is being built out as we speak.

The Judicial and Legal Service Commission has made appointments—nearly a 40 per cent increase in appointments at the Office of the DPP; promotions of senior officers. The Office of the Attorney General has added information technology capacity to the Director of Public Prosecutions. All of its virtual hearings are being done by way of that. On most occasions, the Office of the DPP

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has received year-to-year—anywhere between 40 to 80 per cent of the legal fees given to the Office of the Attorney General, we have spent at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Barataria/San Juan did not have courage to tell this country, in relation to white collar crime, that it was as a result of the plea bargaining legislation passed by this Government that a landmark conviction for money laundering has been achieved by this Government's legislation, where a Queen's Counsel admitted to guilt in plea bargaining arrangement in Trinidad and Tobago, and has been sentenced for money laundering in that matter, that being a feature inside of the anti-gang legislation.

Mr. Charles: Standing order 48(2).

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I may assist, there is no reference so as to prejudice a matter already completed. Sentenced, convicted, completed, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Overruled.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you. You see when you get afraid of the truth in this Parliament, [*Desk thumping*] you stand up the way the hon. Member does on a Standing Order to hide the facts from the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I mentioned the question of the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan referring to the demonetization as a mess and I asked for who. Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know that in the exercise of that demonetization, nearly half a billion dollars of \$100 notes did not come back into the system? That is what the Member for Barataria/San Juan calls a mess? I certainly could not agree with that hon. Member. It is a mess for the people who did not have the legitimacy

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to bring in the half a billion dollars, it is a mess for money launderers, it is a mess for drug traffickers, it is a mess for people engaged in the trafficking in human beings and children. So when Barataria/San Juan says that is a mess, I wonder who he is the advocate for in this country. It certainly cannot be the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

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

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the fact is if you looked to the record of this Government on the delivery of plant and machinery, people, processes and law, and you look to our white collar crime attack, and you look to the UNC's consistent resistance to the laws on white collar criminals, you look at the statement of the Member for Barataria/San Juan that we have a mess in the demonetization, I think that the Member for Barataria/San Juan is batting on the wrong side on a number of issues.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we can say with certainty, the backlog in the courts have been attended to, look to the report of the Chief Justice, the massive expansion of hundreds of courtrooms, the massive expansion of prosecutors, the tackle against criminality, and I say in conclusion, shame on the UNC for failing to support the anti-gang law. On behalf of the citizens of this country, who are crying out for justice and laws for the peace, order and good governance of this country, I say shame on the UNC and I reject this Motion. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Naparima.

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, first let me congratulate my colleague, my esteemed colleague, the Member for Barataria/San Juan, the hon. Saddam Hosein, for bringing this most relevant Motion to the House:

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“...that this House condemn the Government for its failure to effectively address the unacceptable and serious crime level affecting law-abiding citizens.” Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was surprised to hear both the Members for Port of Spain/St. Ann’s West and San Fernando West sanctimoniously addressing this House this afternoon, when in fact they have nothing to be proud about in terms of their tenure in this House and in this Government. We have, Mr. Deputy Speaker, persons— a Government, they are part of a Government that in fact has broken international law. I refer, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the Article 22 of the Convention of the Rights of a Child and its states and I quote:

“1. States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that a child”— may I repeat—“a child who is seeking refugee status or who is considered a refugee in accordance with applicable international or domestic law and procedures shall, whether unaccompanied or accompanied by his or her parents or by any other person, receive appropriate protection and humanitarian assistance in the enjoyment of applicable rights...”

International law speaks about the need of a States Party, in this case Trinidad and Tobago, to protect the rights of a child seeking refugee status. International law, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Article 33 of the Refugee Convention:

“1. No Contracting State shall expel or return...a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom...”—shall—“be threatened...”

Two instances of laws to which we are signatories, and we have this Government

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running afoul and nobody on that side having the strength to stand up and say this is wrong. [*Desk thumping*] This is bringing our country into disrepute.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, but we have both the Members for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and San Fernando West, they are not persons who are without sin. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West had to recuse himself from a 52 Cabinet meetings— [*Desk thumping*] 57 sorry, and we know that the principle of recusal is where there is a conflict of interest. And San Fernando West for all his sanctimoniousness—

Mr. Gonzales: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), please.

Hon. Member: That is insulting.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, please, please. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. R. Charles: We were accused. I did not start it. They called us—sorry.

Ms. Ameen: Let the Speaker rule.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, again, I need no assistance. Overruled. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Charles: They do not like to hear it but these are facts in the public domain.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), please. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Members! Members, please!

Mr. R. Charles: Yes, 17—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, hold on, hold on, hold on, hold on. Overruled. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Charles: You see, scripture says, not all who cry Lord, Lord shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. Seventeen out of 37 meetings, the Member for San

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Fernando West had to disqualify himself because it had to do with properties in which he had an interest. These are factual statements. These are bearing no assertions on your creditability. [*Desk thumping*] All it says is do not come with your sanctimonious self to lecture us on the corruption.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in terms of the vessels, I heard no rebuttal to the statement that only one of the 13 coast vessels is operational at this time, and that speaks to incompetence [*Desk thumping*] of the highest order. And if not incompetence, you are putting the country's border security at risk and that is immoral, that is incompetent, that is slothful, that is lazy, that is embarrassing. [*Desk thumping*]

4.00 p.m.

Councillor Shankar Teelucksingh tells us that there is a taxi service between Cedros and Venezuela and we are told sanctimoniously the borders are closed. Closed my foot. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had a family that was refoulement. They were repatriated in a situation that was inconsistent with international law. They left one day and came back the next but we have a closed border. How could they leave one day and come back the next? This is embarrassing. This is disgraceful. And then we hear sanctimonious talk from the Member for San Fernando West, "Where is Sen. Saddam Hosein"? Well, according to the rules of this House, he is in the rooms adjoining the Chamber. That is allowed and you know it. [*Desk thumping*] You know it. It is—"ah doh wanna" use the word "dishonest" but you know the rules. You know he is entitled to that and you come sanctimoniously reprimanding the esteemed MP, Saddam Hosein. Esteemed. You cannot fool everybody all the time with pretty talk. At some time, facts matter. [*Desk thumping*]

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the Member for Port of Spain North/St Ann's West came with a plethora of corrupt tax. That is the totality of his contribution. Instead of telling us his plans to secure our safety and our security, he comes pointing fingers at the Opposition bringing up all "kinda" deadbeat arguments from five years' old. In fact, I heard this speech before. But if they want to go on corruption, we could play ball too. We could play ball too. [*Desk thumping*]

You want to tell me about AV Drilling, Vidya Deokiesingh? You want to tell me about Malcolm Jones, \$13 billion GTL losses written off by the PNM? [*Desk thumping*] One of the first acts of the Attorney General and Member for San Fernando West. You want to tell me about Calder Hart and the Commission of Enquiry? The sea bridge fiasco? Manzanilla highway, \$400 million spent for five miles. I could go on and on, on and on. "We paying for rent in ah building that is not ah priority in Trinidad and Tobago at this time." [*Desk thumping*] How could you cut maintenance of vehicles for the police service and pay \$1.6 million per month, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when world over, companies including BP are reducing in their COVID environment and work-from-home requirements, they are cutting rental of buildings. But you see, "dey doh want to hear when we talk". Shameful. Shameful.

The other point when we speak about crime, there is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a nexus, a nexus between the lack of procurement oversight and corruption. We have examples where battles for URP contracts have turned deadly. Academics: Maguire, et al, 2008 and 2010; Maguire and Choate, 2011. They have spoken how government contracts, especially this Government, their contracts have been used to finance the gangs where they can now purchase arms, ammunition, weapons and engage in human trafficking. But they do not want to hear that. Procurement has a

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nexus with crime and that is why my political leader, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Member for Siparia has said no procurement legislation, no support from the United National Congress Opposition. [*Desk thumping*] We will isolate them. We will teach them that you cannot come and lecture us and play sanctimonious when your righteousness, according to my Lord, is like filthy rags in his sight. I am not anymore in this House taking any lectures from that side on what is appropriate behaviour and what is not. None! None! [*Desk thumping*]

I have sat in this House and I have 10 reasons, more than that, 15 but I will give 10 reasons why they do not have a handle on crime. One, lack of convictions. They have confused arrest with convictions. But in our jurisprudence and I am not a lawyer, everybody is innocent until proven guilty so all the people you have arrested are presumed innocent. In the fire of the judicial system, you have to convict. Do we have to wait for the colonial master to tell us in a Pratt and Morgan style that keeping people in Remand Yard without a determination of their crime is a crime against humanity in words to that effect, keeping somebody for five years in a murder trial is inhumane? That Government is doing a series of inhumane acts by keeping young males in prison without trial. And do not come and tell me at all that the Judiciary is working. Do not come, San Fernando West—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I would like you to rephrase the comment you have just made please. Retract it and rephrase.

Mr. R. Charles: Okay. Right. With respect to convictions, the Judiciary is not performing as it should.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second. Retract first please then you—

Mr. R. Charles: I retract, I retract.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. R. Charles: I want to quote from the *Express* online October 7th, updated October 19, 2020. This is not Rodney Charles talking, this is not Siparia talking, this is the hon. Chief Justice and hear what he said:

The system, the judicial system is on the verge of collapse.

“...the criminal justice system is near collapse owing to factors beyond...”—its—“control.”

Who is he talking about? The Opposition? He is talking about the inability of the Government to provide the wherewithal and the context to make the judicial system function in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

So “hear how they laughable”, Mr. Deputy Speaker, “they laughable”. I could not believe the TTPS target for arrest leading to convictions, you know what it is? 2 per cent. That is the target set by that Government’s agencies, 2 per cent. We have poor detection rates, I would not get into that. The Forensic Science Centre, totally above its head. The centre is not accredited. They do not like to hear about Singapore but the equivalent in Singapore is fully accredited internationally; ours, “we get talk every time yuh come here”. They do not understand the link between increased poverty, high unemployment and increased crime. That is above their heads. Trinidad and Tobago, the rich get richer and the poor go to prison and even the prison officers, the head of the organization is telling us joining the prison service is like a death warrant.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have not balanced the focus on white and blue collar crime. The Government needs to understand that whilst violent crime physically threatens our citizens daily, fraud, corruption and money laundering happen and slip between the cracks without repercussions in Trinidad. No wonder

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Sparrow said in his song:

“When does someone really become a good citizen?”

Because we are praising the good citizen and they are white collar criminals. Sparrow said so, not me.

The DPP’s office is under-resourced, I would not go there. Prison reform, recidivism rates and poor rehabilitation. In Trinidad and Tobago, we need to provide a proper restorative justice and rehabilitative system so that we can facilitate inmates engaging society in a productive manner. How could they, when if you have a conviction, you cannot get a Government job 40 years after, you cannot get a US visa? So you are doomed. Their emphasis is on crime suppression. There is crime prevention, crime suppression and crime rehabilitation. But an IDB report entitled “Crime and Violence in Trinidad and Tobago” stated:

“...crime prevention is now recognized...”—to be—“an indispensable component of any meaningful approach to dealing of crime.”

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

Mr. R. Charles: Yes, Sir. Thanks. That Government, no emphasis on catching the big fish. What did Minister Manning say? *El capo di tutti*—what? Or some words to that effect. The big fish walk freely. The big fish recuse and the poor go to prison, the cockroaches go to prison.

We have an incompetent Minister of National Security. How can we combat crime when our Minister of National Security’s answer to any question is: I do not have the information, I do not know at this time? Sergeant Schultz of *Hogan’s Heroes*. [*Desk thumping*] When will he know? Crime is out of control and continues to worsen. We need a Minister who is capable of dealing with it frontally. We have porous borders. I spoke to that.

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It is sad, it is sad, it is sad where my great country has reached. This Government is a joke. All they are concerned is winning elections, fooling people, keeping supporters in a state of penury so that they feel that they have power but they do not. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we were campaigning, people said, “we know they bad, we know the PNM is de worse but is de only thing we have”. The only thing that poor black people have is the PNM, a mirage of power but they have none and that is why I feel sorry for them. I am a Baptist and 90 per cent of the Baptists support the PNM even though they will tell you quietly they are underperforming.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with those words, those words of this incompetent Government, I take my leave. Shame on you, shame on all of you all. [*Desk thumping*] You all are incompetent and incapable of taking my great country and making a Singapore out of it. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy):
Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for this opportunity to contribute. Before I go into the substance of my contribution, I wish to just respond to something the hon. Member for Naparima said, and while I do enjoy listening to my very good friend, the Member for Naparima, sometimes I just have to sit back and smile and wonder. He reminds me of a newly ordained leader at the pulpit trying to evoke the emotions of the congregation but on many occasions, failing and on some instances, not telling the truth. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for Naparima is playing smart with foolishness. The Member is fully aware that the Article in the convention he referenced was not brought into law. The particular section of the convention was not ratified when the then AG Ramlogan under former Prime Minister Kamla

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Persad-Bissessar drafted and enacted the law. So he is playing smart with foolishness. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am appalled at the audacity of the Member for Barataria/San Juan. The Motion references failure. Failure is having responsibility but doing nothing, saying nothing and supporting nothing. Failure in the circumstances speaks to the MO of the Opposition. They have the audacity to support the Motion by the Member for Barataria/San Juan given their track record. When it matters most, they abstain. If they do support legislation, they do so begrudgingly. Unlike the band of failures we have passing for an Opposition Bench, this Government led by our hon. Prime Minister is not only saying but is doing and supporting all that is right and in the interest of our citizens in these difficult times unlike our colleagues on the other side and this is what sets us apart from the Opposition and distinguishes the success of our Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, gender-based violence in its various manifestations is deeply rooted in discriminatory practices, discrimination, cultural beliefs and attitudes that perpetuate inequality and powerlessness. Over the years, the Gender Affairs Division of the Office of the Prime Minister has worked with the NGOs and UN agencies to change the norms and stereotypes in an effort to modify behaviour surrounding domestic violence and gender-based violence on the whole. In developing our work programme and strategy on gender-based violence and domestic violence, we recognize the importance of continuous public education and sensitization and the need to collaborate so that our awareness efforts reach the widest possible audience.

On two occasions, we partnered with a mobile carrier to send information out to the public and to send important reminders to help bring about the behaviour

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change that we want to see in our society and to help to change those factors that contribute to gender-based violence and domestic violence. So we were sending out information such as the contact details for various hotline numbers, sending out reminders to the public about what is domestic violence, what is gender-based violence and how to respond.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I remember when we first did this initiative, we got remarkable acclamation from the public. People were excited that the Gender Affairs Division of the Office of the Prime Minister was trying to find innovative ways to get our communication out to them and to raise awareness. The second occasion we tried to do that same programme, leading up to Carnival, we partnered again with the mobile carrier and while members of the public would have reached out to the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs, to the Permanent Secretary, to me as Minister, to my team at the Office of the Prime Minister to commend us, ensuring that our public education and sensitization efforts were ongoing, I was appalled when I received a call from a reporter that said to me, “Have you seen social media today”? And I said, “No, I have not been following social media”. “Well, you need to check Facebook because we have an Opposition Senator saying that the Government is harassing the public.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, what the then Opposition Senator, now the Member for St. Augustine, was calling “harassing the public” was our attempt to bring meaningful information out in terms of hotline numbers. We would have partnered in an attempt to find an innovative way to get our messages out to as many people as possible to help to bring about the change in mindset that would help us to reduce the instances of gender-based violence. We would have partnered with a mobile carrier asking them to help us get the message out there. And in her normal

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fashion of going on Facebook to laugh and criticize everything, the then Senator would have gone on social media to say the Office of the Prime Minister is harassing people on their cell phones.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we understand that for us to tackle such issues as gender-based violence, domestic violence, we must first change mindsets and attitudes and for us to change mindsets and attitudes, it means that we must constantly bring information to the public. It means the public must understand what resources are available, it means the public must be able to buy-in to our strategy and support us along the way. Building a safe house would not end domestic violence. Building prisons would not end crime. In order for us to address those matters, we have to look at the core, the root, what is causing those things to happen and address it from that angle and to do that, we must constantly ensure that we provide information and education to the public.

We all know the nexus between child marriage and domestic violence. Thank goodness for the public outcry and pressure, the Opposition relented and supported Government when we were trying to end child marriage. I remember when we initially started the discussion and debate, I thought from the offset, we will get the support of the Opposition Leader being a woman but I was appalled when I recognized that we were not getting the kind of traction that I was expecting. But because the public came out and the public was very vociferous, we got the Opposition coming on board finally to support. They will say that yes, they voted, yes, they voted, yes, they voted, they voted after creating some mischief that we had to deal with.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when talking about failure, failure is not the Government, failure is looking across at those on the Opposition Benches. [*Desk*

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thumping] I wish to caution the Opposition, if they are not actively contributing to solving the core issues which contribute to a rise in crime and criminality, they are part of the problem.

Notwithstanding a lack of support from the Opposition and our current socio-economic circumstances, we have continued to fund the domestic violence hotline and operationalize two state shelters with a view of bringing on stream at least three more. For the next three years, the Government plans to scale up all its activities in order to deliver on the goal of gender equality and empower our women.

Internally, the Gender Affairs Division has commenced its push to have Ministries and Departments deliver on areas where they have the lead and responsibility under the National Policy on Gender and Development. We have seen the efforts and commitment of Ministries, for example, the Ministry of Trade and Industry launched the SheTrades initiative in September to empower and encourage women into production and trade and build their capacity in the productive sectors. The Office of the Attorney General has now made it a requirement for a gender analysis to be undertaken when formulating policy and legislation. This forms part of the manual which will see improved access to justice.

Advancement in the legislation continues. The most recent being the amendment to the Domestic Violence Act to offer greater protection to victims of such violence. Mr. Deputy Speaker, with Government's continuing efforts to create the structures to support victims via policy and services, coupled with programmes to build the awareness on domestic violence and discuss the core issues driving such violence within our families, the issue of failure cannot arise. This effort is

well supported by the NGO community as is evident during these 16 days of activism which commenced on November 19th.

More recently, the Government has partnered with the United Nations and the European Union to promote a comprehensive scaled-up approach to preventing and eliminating all forms of family violence by not only raising awareness of the problem of family violence but also establishing those social norms that make such violence unacceptable, making services and institutions more accountable to survivors by building positive community response. The initiative builds upon the existing architecture of our policy, laws and services to prioritize the implementation of integrated services, prevention approaches and a first responder system to family violence.

One of the key activities of this initiative is to review the draft plan of action to address gender-based violence with a view of having a more comprehensive plan and programmes which address all forms of family violence. This initiative dubbed the Spotlight Initiative was launched in July. While this will impact residents, men, women, children and youth in the communities of Tobago, Tunapuna and Mayaro initially, it will eventually transcend all communities nationwide. More importantly, it will impact the health care system, the Judiciary, police service, the data management systems to name a few as we move forward with strategies and measures to eliminate all forms of family violence and most certainly violence against women and girls.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it does not end there. As this Government continues to collaborate with our international partners such as the UN and the Commonwealth to share experiences in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and the far-reaching impact and consequences on gender, this will allow us to gain a deeper

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understanding of the good practices and successes in overcoming challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and to consider individual and joint action that could be taken to mitigate negative impacts of the pandemic and strengthen positive responses.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, for us to truly address violence, for us to truly end gender-based violence, for us to reduce instances of domestic violence, we need all hands on deck, we need all parties involved. [*Desk thumping*] What we do not need is for Opposition colleagues to meet us in the corridors and whisper, “We understand what yuh doing, we like what yuh doing but for the sake ah politics, ah cannot say that on the inside”. [*Desk thumping*] We have to speak in one united voice and send one message to the public to show that we are all, [*Crosstalk*] we are all serious about collaborating for the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We cannot continue to politicize issues around domestic violence and gender-based violence. So do not give me the mamaguy talk in the corridors that we agree with what you all are doing, [*Desk thumping*] be man and woman enough to do it in here and let the public recognize that we are working together to stamp out this very, very, very serious societal issue.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, during this 16 days of activism, I want to once again remind and caution the Opposition, if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem. [*Desk thumping*] And when the time comes for society to evaluate us and for the pages of history to reflect on us, you will get a failing grade. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

4.30 p.m.

Ms. Khadijah Ameen (*St. Augustine*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was anxiously awaiting the Member who spoke before me to call

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names; making an allegation that Members on this side are meeting you in the corridor, and so on, is not sufficient. We will not allow you or anyone else to drive any wedge of division between the Opposition Members on this side. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I sat and I was appalled at the audacity of the Member for Tobago East. I was appalled, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that a Member of the Government could boldly boast of the Government accessing citizens' phone numbers without their permission and sending messages all hours of the day and night and that you think that is acceptable. That is not acceptable. [*Desk thumping*]

And I know my social media might bother Members of the Government because I continue to be outspoken. But that indication is a reflection of how many people in this country feel receiving messages they never asked to receive from people who they never gave their numbers to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government Members seem to think that the Opposition should not express different views and that if the Government proposes legislation, that we should simply agree because the intention is good. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I would like you to retract that statement please. That last statement you made, I would like you to retract it.

Ms. K. Ameen: Yeah, retracted, retracted.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, Member, hold on. Actions speak louder than words. I would like you to retract the statement please.

Ms. K. Ameen: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I retract. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is an important tenet of democracy for the Opposition to put forward views and to contribute to legislation. That is why we have committee stage and we have

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amendments. The UNC has indicated we are committed to passing good law in the Parliament. [*Desk thumping*] And in fact, some of the successes of the Government led by Kamla Persad-Bissessar, even though that Government had the majority in Parliament and could have passed these Bills, was the fact that there was collaboration with Members of Opposition, then Opposition, and some of them are sitting in Government. Now they are on the other side. And you must remember to tell the public that you were allowed a voice when we were in Government. So please, Member for Tobago East, do not buy-in to the narrative, the propaganda, that any disagreement with Government is unpatriotic. [*Desk thumping*] Elected or not, my name is Khadijah Ameen and I am a patriot of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] I will not be bullied or intimidated in my duties. I will continue to speak out against injustice and unfairness and if it falls against the Government then so be it. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is the Government's responsibility to ensure public safety and security for citizens. It is a fact that this Government has failed in its management of the organs responsible for intelligence, for detection, for prosecution, for conviction and crime fighting in general. There are thousands of citizens and businesses that have been affected. There has been an increase in domestic violence and it is my honour to join in support of the Member of Parliament for Baratavia/San Juan, my colleague Saddam Hosein, my Opposition colleagues and citizens at large to condemn this Government for its failure to effectively address crime.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Motion was an opportunity for the Government to indicate to the citizens, not to us. I think sometimes we sit in this House and we get involved in crosstalk and banter and you forget that you are elected. Each one of

us, we speak in here, but we speak on behalf of and we speak to the Members of the public. And this was an opportune time for the Members of Government to indicate what they are doing and what they plan to do when it comes to the fight against crime. But they have so little that maybe that is why most on the Members thus far have filled up their speaking time with attacks on the Government, attacks on the Opposition, attacks on the Members on the other side, bringing up things from years ago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is Members on the other side who like to remind us that they are in charge and they are responsible; and if a Government cannot take responsibility then they are failing, and this PNM Government has failed in the fight against crime. [*Desk thumping*]

I just, Mr. Deputy Speaker, want to bring into the debate a reminder for Members opposite, as well as to citizens in general that the fight against crime includes the harder strategies, the harder methods and the softer strategies. Yes, when we were in Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we had boots on the ground. We had police patrols. We had joint army and police exercises. We had arrests. You must support the agencies responsible for arrest, for intelligence gathering, for efficiently collecting and analyzing evidence, for effective prosecution and conviction. And these things often comprise the bulk of discussion on crime.

But there is a softer side to crime fighting and it is important for us to appreciate that. The provision of opportunities, facilitating local economic activities, giving those vulnerable to criminal activities, at-risk groups, the support required, rather than pouncing on them when they fall through the cracks. And you know, it is very sad, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that many of the at-risk groups, many of the at-risk persons identified in studies in Trinidad and Tobago where criminality

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is concerned, fall into areas represented by those on the other side. The PNM has failed our at-risk youths in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

I want to share, Mr. Deputy Speaker, some of the things I would like us to remind ourselves have an impact on reduction of crime. Higher education in all its forms, skills training, technical and vocational, tertiary education; these things are instrumental in fostering growth, in reducing poverty, in reducing crime and in boosting shared prosperity. A highly-skilled work force with a solid post-secondary education is a pre-requisite for innovation and growth. Well-educated people are more employable, earn higher wages and cope better with economic shocks.

This Government is not doing anything to really empower the citizens of this country through education. Higher education benefits not just an individual but society as well and it contributes to a reduction in crime.

The World Bank, in a report said that:

“Graduates of higher education are”—and I quote—“ more environmentally conscious, have healthier habits and have a higher level of civic participation.”

It also indicates that:

“...increased tax revenues from higher earnings”—benefits the State—
“healthier children and reduced family size all build stronger nations. In short, higher education institutions prepare individuals not only for providing them with adequate and relevant job skills, but also by preparing them to be active members of their community and society.”

This is according to the World Bank.

But what is this Government’s take on higher education? You want to talk

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about crime. You have cut training. You have cut technical and vocational skills. You have been subjecting the at-risk people who you are elected to represent by cutting funding for tertiary education, cutting funding for schools, putting your at-risk youth even more at risk where they fall through the cracks and then wait to pounce on them and you are allowing problems to fester.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government has failed to articulate a clear strategy when it comes to higher education as a critical element in fighting crime and creating opportunities for those at risk. Higher education is critical. We must enhance primary and secondary education, tertiary education institutions must prepare teachers, administrator, leaders and other educational professional who staff schools; from our young children to graduate and post graduate. Cutting GATE for Master's programme should never have happened and I condemn the Government for that today. [*Desk thumping*] Kamla Persad-Bissessar as Prime Minister was recognized by the United Nations for being a leader from one of the countries who implemented universal free pre-school education. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the programmes that are created, whether they are social programmes, education programmes, must also connect with the labour market. Not all students who seek tertiary education should or want to enroll in a traditional university. It is not always about academics, and many programmes confer degrees that may not be relevant to the labour market and frustrated young people who find them qualified and unable to get jobs, "dey bright, dey smart" and they end up in some activity that leads to criminal activity later on, because they are on a hustle. They want to make money and they have the brain to do something entrepreneurial and sometimes it borders, Mr. Deputy, on criminal activity and then it goes into full-fledged crime.

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So, I want to implore that the Ministry of Education and the Government as a whole must reassess its strategies to ensure that young people—and in fact I should not say young people alone because there are people of all ages who pursue education and that this must continue. It must be realigned, given the current COVID pandemic and your cuts in revenue. And you must reassess your priorities but you must not forget that the creation of opportunities that tertiary education, that skills training play a critical role in the reduction of crime.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I also want to take the opportunity to bring to your attention that—just to share some information. In South Africa 50 per cent of students enrolled in tertiary education institutions drop out in their first three years and many of the dropouts are high achievers in secondary school. But you know what? They come from poor families and they are indebted to the national student financial aid programmes that support their studies. So like in many other countries—I have a few other examples but I would not go into all of them—but like in other countries the reasons for dropping out of training, and so on, would include academic unpreparedness due in part a low quality secondary education, due to financial difficulty and due to the long duration of some of these programme and the lack of flexibility.

This Government has moved us away from participation to oppression. The PNM has not only broken promises and failed delivery when it comes to tertiary education in this country. The GATE programme was introduced in 2004 as a replacement for the UNC's dollar for dollar plan, a plan which started in 2001 when oil was \$9.00 a barrel and up to 2015, successive governments recognized the value of education to our nation, whether it is primary—well I want to start from early childhood—primary, secondary, tertiary, or technical and vocational

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skills. And similar to other countries, the major barrier for accessing education in Trinidad and Tobago remains the prohibitive direct and indirect cost of tertiary education. This Government's policy on GATE is oppressive and it must be changed. The highhanded nature of the PNM's decisions and actions contribute to the frustration, to the lack of opportunities amongst our young people and out at-risk persons and contribute to an atmosphere that encourages crime. Decisions are simply taken and the education system is just tossed in a tailspin. The previous Government moved participation in tertiary education to 65 per cent. And today "what yuh have? Ah 100 per cent oppression under the PNM."

So I want to plead with those on the other side, as you contemplate, you play politics if you feel that it is an appropriate platform, but I want to urge you that the Parliament is a place where you speak on behalf of all off our citizens. And I want to take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague young Senator, Saddam Hosein for bringing this Motion. [*Desk thumping*]

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

Ms. K. Ameen: And I want to condemn the Members on the other side who are criticizing MP Saddam Hosein for bringing this Motion. You know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, sometimes it is the ones that cause them the most heartache are the ones that they—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members, Members. Members on both sides. Members on both sides. Member. Proceed, you have just a couple more seconds.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I just want to say that I know that Saddam Hosein is a very outspoken representative. Like me, I know he will not be intimidated by those on the other side who want to condemn him for speaking out and standing up for the rights of the citizens of this country. Thank

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you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Arima. [*Desk thumping*] My apologies, the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara; former Mayor of Arima. Sorry about that. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Ministry of Education (Hon. Lisa Morris-Julian): Thank you Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you for this opportunity to contribute to this Motion, a Motion brought to this honourable House by the Member for Barataria/San Juan and fully supported by all his colleagues, the Opposition 19, that have chosen to falsely and foolishly accuse this Government of Trinidad and Tobago of failure to address the issue of crime in our nation. [*Desk thumping*] It is ridiculous, Mr. Deputy Speaker, ludicrous, outright laughable; as my children would say L-O-L. In fact, I find it quite unbelievable that any Member from the Opposition 19 that sits on the other side would even present such a Motion for debate in any serious or credible manner.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, please allow me to declare that we in this honourable House are fully aware of our God-given responsibility as elected leaders. We have all been voted in by a democratic process that mandates each and every one to uphold the safety and security of every citizen of this blessed nation, and that includes the Opposition, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is extremely important to emphasize once more, each elected Member is obligated to represent the people of Trinidad and Tobago. We must discharge our duties and do right to all manner of people without fear or favour, affection or ill-will.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2011, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the Opposition Leader, spoke about bipartisan cooperation, whole government approach, in her anxious manner to get the then Opposition to support the Anti-Gang Bill.

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Ironically, the then Attorney General Anand Ramlogan also championed that very same Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I truly wish, as I stand here in this honourable House, I can confidently say that every Member of this House has remained true to our solemn oath and promise. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you were here just a few weeks ago when every single Member on the other side of this House, all of the Opposition 19, left this nation in horror when they deliberately chose to support the illegal activities of all gang leaders and its members holding this country to ransom.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, when this country witnessed the 19 UNC Members of this House abstain from voting on the extension of the Anti-Gang Bill, it was equivalent to the signing of an open death warrant by these 19 elected members of the United National Congress, all united in one voice, as if to say: We choose party politics over Government's responsibility to ensure the public safety and security of its citizens.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, many of our goodly citizens from all various walks of life have shared their grave concern and disappointment, many asking: Why would any God-fearing Member with a heart and soul for country sacrifice the security and the safety for the people that entrusted them with a place in this Parliament?

In the *Guardian* newspaper, Mr. Deputy Speaker, dated Saturday 21st, it reads:

“The failure of the Government and the Opposition to come to a middle ground and extend the life of the Anti-Gang (Amendment) Bill 2020, could only lead to higher levels of crime in T&T says Senior Counsel attorney Israel Khan.”

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Khan is further quoted:

“Crime will get worse.”

And he goes on:

“...in this country”—people—“would not vote for a party that is indirectly supporting crime.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the question then must be asked: Why would these 19 elected Members not seek to protect the lives, interest, homes, families, children, loved ones, businesses and communities of this beloved country?

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I say it with extremely sad realization and backdrop. As I make my contribution to this Motion lead by the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan, it is truly bewildering to us on this side that after such a blatant collective act of treason, the 19 UNC Members on the other side that make up this Opposition will willingly choose to not support the passing of the Anti-Gang Bill and bring a Motion today about crime.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is clear to me, and to the nation, a responsible Opposition is needed for this country to move forward, where we put the means, we put the needs of the people first. I wish to remind the Opposition, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that one of the roles of the Opposition is to be a watchdog, yes, but to act responsibly and always in the best interest of the country at large. We are supposed to offer credible alternatives. Instead of this, the Opposition criticizes and obstructs every single crime-fighting initiative without providing one single credible alternative to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

This PNM administration has always supported the anti-gang legislation, even when we were in Opposition, yet now, when the tables are turned, the UNC Opposition, they are showing concern. They are saying it is not working. How

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petty and disloyal would that be, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we should put the common good of this country first?

I would like to invite the Member for Barataria/San Juan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to come into the light. Come into the sunlight. Open his eyes and be honestly led by his own convictions that he would recognize the high level of performance and management, as it relates to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the immense commitment and dedication that is placed in our nation's safety by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to highlight and congratulate the astute leadership by the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, the hon. Minister of National Security, Stuart Young, especially during this challenging time. In the midst of a global COVID-19 led pandemic, he is doing the absolute best by the nation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as citizens we must join together in extending gratitude to the entire Trinidad and Tobago Police Service for going that extra mile, in keeping us safe and secure from an invisible enemy that cannot be stopped by guns and bullets. We must recognize our police force as a major part of our essential first responders, and that they place their lives daily at risk for our safety. And the very least we can do, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is to support our police and to give them the laws that they need to move forward.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has partnered with the Ministry of Health by ensuring that all citizens uphold our Public Health Regulations on a daily basis, which has clearly contributed to the successful management of drastically limiting the spread of the virus. Unlike many of the so-called First World countries that are struggling to control, because of the

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combined efforts of our Minister of Health, our Minister of National Security, and led of course by our Prime Minister, Trinidad and Tobago, we are doing well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I hope that the Member Barataria/San Juan has not inherited and embraced usual UNC curse of believing big, bad spending will fix it; with the fallacy of assuming that big spending and enormous budgets equates to results, along with the misconception that the more you spend the smaller the problem becomes. Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is this warped and misguided philosophy that brought this country to its financial knees between the years 2010 and 2015. We in this twin-island state, Mr. Deputy Speaker, stood in disbelief at the reckless spending spree of our hardworking taxpayers' dollars.

I can speak with integrity, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] I can remind. I have not forgotten, as the Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara, the damage that was created by the gentleman who now sits in Senate, with LIFEsport. [*Desk thumping*] It is a constituency that has survived the scourge of that vain philosophy.

Mr. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, on a point of order, 48(4); not 48(4), sorry. Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(6).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. L. Morris-Julian: Now I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it might be so painful for some people for me to bring up the past, but I am given no choice because those who cannot learn from history are doomed to repeat it, and we will not repeat this mistake on this side. There will be no LIFEsport point 3-0. [*Desk thumping*]

5.00 p.m.

I am forced to recall the havoc and devastation that was brought upon us and my constituency because of the LIFEsport Programme. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the

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Member for Barataria/San Juan brought up the Subar family. I know too well. I was there. I was the councilor for the area. I was the Mayor of Arima. I saw the Opposition Leader there and I never saw her there again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And if you know the story, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it was a family conflict that led to the loss of this young one's life; not his family but the family of his babysitter. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would you believe that the men held for the murder, quickly held I might add, they were linked to the LIFEsport Programme. Mr. Deputy Speaker, seven young men died. I myself went to a wake; the entire wake was sprayed with bullets, again, because of LIFEsport. Extravagant budgets, spending, becoming the largest debt trap for the most vulnerable for youths of that particular area. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am dismayed that anyone from the United National Congress would dare to speak about crime. [*Desk thumping*].

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I listened to my colleague from St. Augustine speak about GATE and moneys for masters and postgraduate programmes. Let me remind my honorable colleague in LIFEsport the infamous \$34 million we can certainly use in the Ministry of Education today. Not one day of service and not one single cent returned.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to applaud the efforts of my colleague, the hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy in the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs, for their good work with domestic violence. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the concern with COVID-19 and domestic violence I am sorry to say there is another 19 doing far more damage to Trinidad and Tobago than COVID-19. We applaud the astute work of our law enforcement agency, we applaud the astute work of all the people involved in helping vulnerable women and vulnerable children.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a mother I listened carefully about the issue with the

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migrants, the illegal immigrants who attempted to come across to Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am concerned about my children and if my children were to come in a strange country and I had no idea that where they would go and who would take them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would be very upset. And I think we are obligated to make sure that our children are protected too.

Mr. Deputy Speaker I wish to close my contribution by reminding the Opposition that this Government is indeed doing the work. Working towards making Trinidad and Tobago a safer place, I want to implore the Opposition that they would better serve the country if they stop their obstructionist behaviour and work with the Government, strengthen the laws, so we can keep our citizens safe. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you want to fix crime I suggest my colleagues fix themselves first. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Vandana Mohit (*Chaguanas East*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I rise to contribute on this Motion not with my usual exuberance that is concomitant with my youth and newness as an MP. Mr. Deputy Speaker, since my success at the polls in August of 2020, I am inundated and at times beseeched by my constituents with the crime situation that has plagued sweet T&T for quite some time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have sat and listened all afternoon and I have heard persons or Members on the other side stating in their contributions that the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan seems to be in defence. Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me state that we on this side, have nothing to defend, because if you look at our Government from 2010 to 2015, we are about results.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to sit in awe and look at the Government,

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because they seem to look at all that Opposition does wrong and not themselves. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we must state that self-praise is no praise when there are real issues out there. And I wish to commend my colleague for Barataria/San Juan for bringing this Motion to the House because of the fact that this Motion outlines real issues affecting citizens of this country. And there is a reason why the Member for Barataria/San Juan sits in this House, because Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are here to focus on the present and the future, not on the past.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, crime cannot be eradicated in its entirety. The organs of state such as the Government, courts and police cannot eliminate crime by themselves. What these organs, which includes the Government must achieve, is that the population feels a sense of comfort, security and enjoyment as they proceed about their daily routine activities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I have stated earlier, my constituents are aggrieved and traumatized and have lost hope. My colleague for Barataria/San Juan mentioned Sandy Khan. In the constituency of Chaguanas East during the last month, Mr. Deputy Speaker, four residents—citizens—would have fallen victims of murder in areas that are not usually affected by crime. Some good friends, some good constituents, indeed very sad. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to ask, what measure of relief, comfort, and/or assurance can I provide, or can some of us as MPs provide to allay the concerns or the plight, or as we would say, the distress of citizens of this country? Mr. Deputy Speaker, this is not about the blame game, however, persons and institutions must own up to their inability to address the substantive issues raised in this Motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have heard so much on the anti-gang Bill, and what the Opposition did not do and so on and the Opposition Leader did not speak and

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so on. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Members of the other side must remember that our leader did not speak but she was present. Where was your Prime Minister? Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is the duty, responsibility and mandate of the Government to provide a safe and secure environment for the citizens to work, play and socialize as well as move about freely without self-incarceration, as we are witnessing at this present time in sweet T&T.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, why should law-abiding citizens who pay income tax, who pay VAT and all the burdensome and onerous charges be restricted in their daily lives, thus denying themselves opportunities of enjoyment, and further, creating their homes into forts? Mr. Deputy Speaker, has this Government calculated the cost to law abiding citizens relative to fencing of their properties, burglar proofing of their properties, security systems, guard dogs, and the host of—myriad protection devices and systems? Mr. Speaker, we want to come and speak about contracts and this and that and the other but Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Motion speaks to real issues affecting citizens. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when we speak about these types of burglar proofing, fencing, et cetera which poses to be an additional cost to the citizens, we ask: Are there tax rebates? Are these expenses zero rated? What can we offer to such citizens? The answer is, Mr. Deputy Speaker, absolutely nothing, no intrinsic support or extrinsic value.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, a while aback a previous Prime Minister, and may God rest his soul, stood in this august Chamber and elucidated under sophisticated modern high tech equipment procured by his regime to garner intelligence, which we all recognized as the platform to prevent and solve crime and to address criminality. How many of us can remember the eye in the sky—the blimp—and other such acquisitions? I believe these things were procured somewhere in Israel,

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from Israel. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to ask the question: Where are these devices at present? Did our citizens receive any value from for taxpayers' dollars? Were citizens informed of the cost benefit analyses of these previous initiatives? Can the present regime pronounce on the outcome? Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want you to know that I am asking for—not for one moment I am asking the Government to divulge specifics or information that potentially compromises national security or any investigation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we ask this Government: Are they willing to review their operation, or can they pronounce on intelligence gathering agencies effectiveness? Mr. Deputy Speaker, I ask because what can I say to my constituents, or what can other MPs say to their constituents to lessen their misery, disorientation and renew their belief that this body, the Parliament, can improve their lives as it pertains to crime and criminality? Mr. Deputy Speaker this time, we urge the Government to review their strategies, measures in their intelligence services with a recommendation to my colleague for D'Abadie/O'Meara for a bipartisan approach.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, crime is all of our business and we understand that. It cannot be politicized or seemed to be political, which has been happening over the last few days. Bring the results, bring the results and we will support.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would now address a salient aspect of this Motion, that is detection, which falls squarely to the enforcement arm of which there is one overarching agency that is the police service. And Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me preface what I am about to advocate with the reality that you cannot have a police officer at each incident immediately and/or whilst the criminal act is in progress. No administration, no Commissioner of Police can foresee this situation and there

will always be undetected crimes. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you are to look at other developed countries, or where crime levels are reasonably low, the statistics would reflect in sweet Trinidad and Tobago an extremely low detection rate and answers must be advanced as to why is this.

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Looking on, some may surmise or ask: Is it due to inadequate numerical strength of the police service? Meaning, is it in sync with other countries where the ratio of police officer to population is in the approximate bandwidth? Some may ask, the quality of staff, training and expertise of the officers: Is there any empirical data or studies that demonstrate the training, qualification and competency levels against detection rates in this country? Some may also ask, entry qualification and criteria for upward mobility, meaning, is this in tandem to what is required to detect crimes and criminal activity? Some may even ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, equipment and resources: Does the police service have requirements and tools to detect crime and reduce the levels? Mr. Deputy Speaker, we all know the answer to that. I would have held a meeting with the Cunupia police reps yesterday, and in that meeting we learnt that that station has half of a vehicle attached to the Charge Room, the most important—one of the most important departments of any station, half of a vehicle existing in the Charge Room.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, if the answer is yes to the above questions to what have been stated so far, it begs the question: What is the true and underlying factors affecting the police service and the low detection rates? Mr. Deputy Speaker, let us say by some quirk of faith a magic wand is waved by the body, meaning the police, and the detection rate significantly rises to 75 per cent, our crime problems would

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not be solved, because whilst we have low detection rates, we have equally low conviction rates. Therefore, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a twin-barrel shotgun aimed at the population of this country as it pertains to the fight of crime.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is common knowledge that the Office of the DPP is replete with a plethora of challenges that inhibits its ability to prosecute cases. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have to ask: Has there been a review of the caseload at the DPP's Office? Are there sanctions for other agencies who have to lend support to the DPP Office? Let us not delude ourselves that the DPP Office in its present configuration, having considered the technical, financial and human resource capacities cannot deliver to sweet TT the quantity, quality and timeliness of effective convictions to pacify and lend hope to citizens of this country.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, has this Government considered approaching the law society to render assistance to the DPP Office to stem the current tidal wave of lack of convictions? Mr. Deputy Speaker, we say again, there must be collaboration and consultation and, again, a bipartisan approach to effect added convictions to satisfy the population of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would have listened to the Member for Tobago East and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have a current issue of domestic violence destroying our nation's women. And the Member came here today with no partial solution to this House. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just have one thing to say: Where is your Government's national strategic plan to combat domestic violence? Mr. Deputy Speaker, we say do not tell us about the few, tell us about the many who are seriously affected. We ask your Government, tell us about the electronic monitoring bracelets for domestic violence victims. We ask of you to tell us and remind citizens that it was your Government who deprived, who stripped needy

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mothers of services, social support services, in this country. Do you all remember the baby grant and so on? Yes, let us remember.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government has not addressed the fundamental of the problem or as we would say, the root cause of crimes. And we must always ask ourselves, what are the contributors to crime? The experts would advise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and you do not even need the expert to advise us, education. Is it that our education, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is failing the youths? What adjustment or tinkering has been done to ensure that at the culmination of their educational tenure, those students can adapt to be productive citizens? It is about time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Ministry of Education reviews and implements curriculum that ensures that no youth are left behind to be influenced by the glamour and glitter of criminal life.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is time that the Government engaged the religious leaders in a fight against crime. These elders are closer to the young deviants in society and, therefore, can spread the gospel of good life, the mantra of hard work and reward, the surahs of goodness to fellow men. The Government can engage the religious institutions to develop a plan of action to assist the established organs of state in this battle against crime.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Motion also touched on a current development that is the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on domestic violence levels. Mr. Deputy Speaker, whilst at this point there is no direct data, there is a belief the COVID-19 pandemic and domestic violence are inextricably linked and only time will tell. Mr. Deputy Speaker, only a few days ago, we observed International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Mr. Deputy Speaker, my point being that there is an upsurge in this country in domestic violence crisis in the recent months.

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The household is feeling the brunt of economic and financial downturn; the frustration of males being unable to tend to their families, given the state of job losses and business closure. Mr. Deputy Speaker, citizens are frustrated, stressed and emotionally imbalanced and, therefore, resorting to domestic violence acts. MPs can attest that out of every eight phone calls, six are for some form of social support due to a worsening situation or a loss of an asset.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, citizens are faced with frustrating processes to receive social support. We have been urging the Government to take the direct impact exercises to the communities. Further to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government has announced its intention to launch the Community Response Unit. Mr. Deputy Speaker, to date, citizens are still awaiting. When will this launch occur?

So when you want to come and speak about domestic violence, gender-based violence and the approaches by your Government, we ask, where are the support programmes for children? Where are the mechanisms—explain to us where the mechanisms for women to be able to leave threatening situations? Do not speak only awareness, awareness, awareness, explain to us the sensitizing and informative measures to combat domestic violence at school levels. Mr. Deputy Speaker, because we are in a situation where even if we on the opposing side support, the Government says we do not support.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have one more minute.

Ms. V. Mohit: Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I close, I would just like to remind the Government that there are still good, decent and law-abiding citizens in sweet T&T. Why must they continue to suffer such brutality relative to their quality of life? They deserve a better quality of life. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if a Government cannot deal with crime, they are part of the problem. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Port of Spain South.

Mr. Keith Scotland (*Port of Spain South*): Mr. Deputy Speaker, hon. Members, good afternoon. This Motion, its timing and content, has again reacquainted me with one of the watchwords of our nation “tolerance”. In light of what has transpired in this honourable House within the last week, this is an ironic Motion. But, despite the apparent confabulation that drives the thinking behind this Motion, we on this side welcome this Motion for one reason. This Motion really presents no challenge, it presents no sting, because every Member on this side can answer every single item in this Motion in the positive on behalf of the Government, and I will proceed in the next 15 minutes—I do not think I need 20 minutes—to show this honourable House and by extension the country, how ill-conceived and ill-founded this Motion is.

The hon. Member who piloted this Motion, the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan, he cited Hobbes, and if you are a student of political theory, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will know that the main thrust of the Hobbesian theory which is contained in his major work *The Leviathan* is the social contract that says that human beings by their very nature and their core are selfish and self-serving. [*Desk thumping*] What better example of self-serving selfishness could this House have experienced other than last week Friday when the hon. Members on the other side refused to support a Bill which, in principle, they were the first to pilot in this country. So I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan has cited Hobbes. But, on this Motion, we agree with one main principle. We agree with one part and the part that we agree with is that the Government has the responsibility to ensure public safety of the citizens and, on this side, we say with certainty that the Government has been faithful to that duty and to that responsibility. Other than that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we say that this Motion in all

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its other forms and incarnations is fatally flawed.

Now, the Motion and the first part of the Motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if we look at it, it seems to have a correlation between detection and conviction and funding, and it seems to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that if you cut funding in these areas, then that alone will have a correlation in the increase in crime. On this side, we say that that approach is entirely myopic and it is blinkered. And on this side we say that this Government attempts to have a holistic approach to crime and its reduction, and this approach—and the hon. Member for Chaguanas East who just spoke asked, well what about root causes? This Government, in my respectful view, has attempted by its social programmes to address the root cause of criminal behaviour and it did so and it continues to do so by the policies that it has implemented and the focusing on putting resources into Ministries that deliver social services.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago recognizes that there are root causes in the community of criminal activity: illiteracy, poverty, the lack of proper facilities and amenities. And that is why, even though in light of the decline in revenue over the past five years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government has not reduced the allocation to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. We on this side do not like just to speak, we like to present statistics and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the statistics will show that in 2015, the allocation was \$4.046 billion to this Ministry, that represented 6.5 per cent of the national budget; in 2016, the allocation was \$4.9 billion, that represented 8.8 per cent of the national budget; in 2017, it was one \$4.7 billion, which represented 8.6 per cent of the national budget; in 2018, it was \$4.6 billion, representing 8.7 per cent of the national budget. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2019, it was \$5.1 billion, representing 9.4

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per cent of the national budget and in 2020, it was \$5.5 billion, representing 9.6 per cent of the national budget and the projection for the coming year is that it will be almost \$5 billion, which represents 8.7 per cent of the national budget.

What this shows, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that this Government recognizes that there are vulnerable persons in this society who are susceptible or may be susceptible and lured to a life of crime, and that is why the Government has introduced and has continued to have and create safety nets in the form of a myriad of social programmes in order lure people away from a life of crime. So on the one hand you may say that there has been a reduction in the allocation for one aspect of policing, and one aspect of prosecuting, but on the other hand, the holistic picture, the approach that deals with root causes of crime, the Government has maintained, constantly, the emphasis on putting resources into this area. And this is in consonance with the approach of the Government of a holistic approach to crime. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I say this, this allocation is regardless of race, colour, creed and political affiliation. [*Desk thumping*] Every member of this society can access these programmes and turn away from a life of crime. We are putting that out there as a deterrent, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to criminal activity.

We say that reduction in crime and levels of crime is not only about resources for policing and prosecuting. A holistic approach to Government is the identifying of social factors that lead to crime and implementing strategically social policies geared towards crime reduction and this Government has put its resources where its policy is and that answers the first part of the Motion.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the second part of the Motion indicates that there is a high level of crime. Do you know the fallacy in this, Mr. Deputy Speaker? If you look at the statistics, the statistics available from the Crime and Problem Analysis

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Branch of the police force revealed that there has been a serious and/or a noticeable reduction in serious crimes between 2018 and 2020. I would have thought if the hon. Member for Barataria/San Juan and Members on the other side were serious, they would have brought to this House and to the citizenry statistics, as I am about to do, to show that over the last three years crime is on the rise but, in fact, the statistics show the opposite.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would just look at the three major areas of crime to show the reduction. For murders, because murder seems to be one they have linked up to, one of the serious crimes. In 2018, 474 were reported. Up to November 2020, it has been reduced to 365. I randomly looked at kidnapping. In 2018, there were 127. As of November 2020, 78. I go to robberies. In 2018, 2,971. As of November 2020, 1,806. What the statistics, therefore, what the hard figures show, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that the levels of crime have reduced drastically over the last three years. Those are the facts. Those are the facts. So that answers that aspect of the Motion.

I now come to the third aspect which if I summarize it, it is the increase in the number of cases of domestic violence as a result of COVID-19. What I have to say is that we ought not to politicize domestic violence. And this Motion, without one iota of evidence to support it, seems to be doing this. As early as January 2020, the hon. Prime Minister, in a media release—Mr. Deputy Speaker, check the 10th of January, 2020—and in this media release, it was in response to about five persons who were killed in a week period and they were linked to domestic violence, and here is what the hon. Prime Minister said in this release.

“As a man, I am calling on all the men of our republic to treat all women like the sisters, daughters and mothers who are deserving of our love and

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respect.” [*Desk thumping*]

That is a leader. He went on to say that:

“The Office of the Prime Minister has been working diligently to ensure that acts of domestic violence and all forms of gender-based violence are reduced significantly or eliminated from our country.”

This answers the question asked by the hon. Member for Chaguanas East. And then, a question was asked: Well what is the plan? The hon. Prime Minister went on to say:

“A Community Based Action Plan to end Gender Based Violence in Trinidad and Tobago”—has been implemented, and part of it was:

“Amendments to the Domestic Violence Act to provide greater protection for victims of domestic violence.”

So this comes to the part of this Motion, my contribution that I like, because I like to lawyer. I would say to victims of domestic violence one, there is a Domestic Violence Hotline, 1-800-SAVE. It operates all day, every day, every day of the week. If you are a victim of domestic violence call that hotline. And, by the way, that hotline falls directly under the Office of the hon. Prime Minister and it is funded by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

I also say that even in COVID-19 when there is talk about the collapse of the courts, we say that the courts have been functioning efficiently, vibrantly and electronically, but for domestic violence, the Practice Direction provides for in-person hearing for victims of domestic violence, and that is supported by the resources of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. It means, therefore, that victims of domestic violence, not only have electronic access to the courts, they have direct access to appearances in court, in person, even during these times of

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COVID.

The hon. Member for Chaguanas East asked the question, well, what about the measures that have been put to alleviate hardships that may cause domestic violence during COVID-19? I do not know where the hon. Member was, but did the hon. Member not look at the policies and the financial measures stimuli that were introduced from March to July 2020? Mr. Deputy Speaker, \$1,500 per month with respect to persons who have lost income; \$510 food cards; Government to also give relief for rent and the School Feeding Programme. Mr. Deputy Speaker, in my respectful view, the Government has put its financial resources to support victims of persons who are affected negatively by COVID-19 and to alleviate any stressful situation that may, but ought not to lead to domestic violence in the home.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Motion, therefore, in my respectful view, has failed on every ground due to the empirical evidence. And, therefore, if I were to raise a counter Motion, it would be something as follows: I would ask my colleagues and Trinidad and Tobago to resolve that this House praises the Government for its successes in efficiently [*Desk thumping*] addressing and reducing serious crime levels and for bringing some level of relief to the law-abiding citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Before I go though, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is something I thought I would not address it, but I cannot leave it. The hon. Member for Naparima, he cites that he is a black man, he is a Baptist and then he goes on to say that people who support the People's National Movement are left in penury, in abject penury. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am saddened by this continuous harping by the Member for Naparima. They are proud constituents who are black in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] They may not be rich in money, but they are rich in family, rich

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in community and rich in values. They are hard-working. And I can tell you, as we speak, there are captains of industry in Sea Lots, in John John [*Desk thumping*] and in Piccadilly who are driving programmes and helping the citizenry in that area to lift themselves, and that will be supported by the Government.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the Member for Naparima cited the fact that he is a Baptist, I remember the pilgrimages that I would go to with my grandmother, and I remind him of Psalm 52, boast not, because forever—and he alone harps on it. I want to say nothing more on that, but just caution him. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I say with the greatest of respect, that if ever there was an ill-fated, ill-timed and misconceived Motion, it is this Motion that was brought by the Member for Barataria/San Juan. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, you do not have to tell me two minutes, I am finished. [*Desk thumping and laughter*]

5.45 p.m.

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

Mr. Arnold Ram (*Caroni Central*): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to join in this debate, a private Motion raised by my colleague, the Member for Barataria/San Juan, and he must be congratulated for raising such an important issue facing Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And whilst I am in a congratulatory mode, I must also recognize the contribution of a senior at the Bar in the person of the Member for Port of Spain South. And he has had a distinguished career thus far and I hope that the bus shed is not added to that list. I want to let him know that that may be a dent in his illustrious career thus far.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me state that whilst I wholeheartedly support this Motion raised by my hon. colleague, it gives me no joy to stand here today

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with cause to lament what is certainly the number one issue facing our beautiful twin island Republic and what is certainly the number one failure of the PNM Government over the last five years. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we discuss this first private member's Bill in this House it comes at a time of great confusion and chaos, a nation under siege, criminality and hardship experienced by our citizens under the stewardship of the People's National Movement as they continue to betray the trust the people that voted them and the oath of office they swore to when they first enter these Chambers.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in 2020 thus far there has been 322 murders with a detection rate of only 53. In 2019 there were 536 murders whilst there was 46 detected. Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the past seven months or so the country had been placed under varying forms of lockdown as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, and of course you will be aware of this and the fact that it has a burden on many people in how they manage and carry about their daily lives. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I address this House today I am mindful of the fact that since assuming the offices of Prime Minister and Attorney General over 2,700 murders had taken place in this country. We are averaging approximately 500 murders every year, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and what we are seeing now is that crimes such as burglaries and theft are an issue and on a rise as a result of the stifling of the economy that those lockdown procedures created, highlighting again the deficiencies within the current Government to do anything to prevent crime from taking place. It is as though this country is on autopilot.

This brings me to the Anti-Gang Act, Mr. Deputy Speaker, which was not extended last week beyond November 30, 2020. This Government would have you believe, based on public utterances, that that one piece of legislation was the be all

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and the end all of their fight against crime, and now that this has failed they have no more ammunition on their arsenal to continue the fight and the war on crime. As you might recall, after deliberating on it in the previous session and amending it under the Chair of the Speaker, the Opposition, led by the Member for Siparia, voted unanimously for its ascension as did our colleagues in the other place, and that is why it had now returned on the eve of expiration for an extension. And the question we must now ask yourselves, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is whether the PNM Government of the day has the political will to address crime in a meaningful way in this country.

The reason they have failed under the Anti-Gang Act and the anti-gang war, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is because in order for someone to be charged under the Anti-Gang Act they must first have been implicated in criminal activity and there must be evidence to support that in a court of law. And that has been the ultimate failure of this Government because the Anti-Gang Act works if and only if the person charged can be successively prosecuted for other criminal acts. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issue plaguing crime prevention in this country is the same as every other problem faced by this PNM administration and it is their incompetence and inability to complete the tasks which they swore oaths to uphold.

Statistics reveal that seven of the 10 murders were done with the aid of a gun. More likely these are illegal guns which are used in the commission of robberies for more worrying revenge killings. Illegal guns are everywhere but this Government has done nothing to prevent their importation into this country. They have done nothing to secure our borders. They are living in a bubble. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Attorney General in the last session stated plainly, "The gang-related murders accounted for 30 per cent of the total". So why has the Government not

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prevented 70 per cent from taking place?—one must ask. What new laws must be put in place to prevent murders from happening, Mr. Deputy Speaker? None, because murder is a crime.

You do not need extra laws to prosecute murder. What you need is the competence and the will to go out and prosecute those who are perpetrating these crimes, and that is what this PNM Government has failed to do. If they could not use the Anti-Gang Act in 30 months to clamp down on crime then, they cannot do it now, and I do not know who are they trying to fool, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We all know that the Bill that was piloted last week, the Anti-Gang Bill, was not even supported by their own head of Government in the person of Diego Martin Central, the hon. Member. We must ask, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what has been done to reform our prison system? What policies are in place to reduce the prison population? What we need to recognize is that when in fact there is a seamless interaction between persons on the streets and persons inside the prison, there is a deficiency in the Government in recognizing the walls of the prisons are a mere inconvenience and that criminality operate outside those confines.

I think it is common knowledge that criminal elements operate from behind prison walls and that crimes can be instructed from prison cells, and it is this lack of perspective in the Government's legislative agenda that makes them miss the point and miss the need in terms of the war on criminal activity to be sustained both by the police force as well as those elements who operate behind prison walls. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we witnessed how the PNM have handled the current lockdown and how they have treated law-abiding citizens of this country, what is the justification for treating persons any differently from those attending a wedding to those attending a party? Mr. Deputy Speaker, you might recall in September of

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this year there was an incident that occurred at Bayside Towers in Cocorite where the police service were called in to investigate an alleged party that was taking place that many persons believed to have contravened the Public Health Ordinance in regard to congregation and social distancing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the police officers who arrived at the scene that day determined that the activity taking place did not infringe on the laws, but did attempt to warn persons gathered that they were partaking in an activity which may breach the Public Health Ordinance. As such no tickets or fines were issued, much to the surprise of many persons in this country who disagreed with the decision. Now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether or not you find yourself in agreement with the decision of police, as a nation we must place our trust in their judgment and in their interpretation of the law, and as parliamentarians we must also separate ourselves from those decisions if they are to maintain an image of independence and objectivity. Unfortunately, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I recall then, the Prime Minister of this country and the chair of National Security Council does not have the same respect or appreciation for the separation of powers and had took upon himself to berate and criticize the police service for taking that course of action.

Whilst the Prime Minister did not outright instruct the police to take any action in the matter, it was clear by his words, by his utterances and his tone that he was sending a message to the police service that may sway their decision in certain directions in the future. Under the previous PNM administration, Mr. Deputy Speaker, led by the late Patrick Manning, an Oxford study on crime and conviction rate in this country showed that only 1 per cent of the murders were being successfully prosecuted, Mr. Deputy Speaker; 1 per cent of murderers. And you know that we might not have the figures, I want to believe somehow that this

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current PNM administration has a conviction rate smaller or less than 1 per cent. Mr. Deputy Speaker, all they need is the willpower and ability to carry out successfully any operation and any plan.

The UNC supported the majority of crime legislation brought by the PNM and they were passed in both Houses, and every budget the Prime Minister has promised to deal with crime, yet the murder rate has only increased, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Pretty much everyone knows that someone—know someone who has lost their loved one. Every single citizen lives in fear. This country is traumatized with fear and apprehension. This society remains under siege under this administration and as a people we have been brought down to a decadent society on the verge of total lawlessness and anarchy. Crime is having serious destruction and devastation on the psychological and emotional well-being of citizens of this country. Governments around the world are advising their citizens not to travel to our beautiful twin island, particularly Tobago.

When you look at the expenditure of the Ministry of National Security versus the numbers of murders you will see that the expenditure has been climbing every year and so has the murder rate. That this governance for you. What we find alarming in their sixth year of Government the PNM has done little to address crime. That is appalling. One must ask why, Mr. Deputy Speaker. What are they doing all the time? Mr. Deputy Speaker, this PNM administration has been spending billions of dollars on wasteful projects and the youth are the ones who have been suffering. This is what engenders crime. It is this psychological and emotional impact that is upon the young ones when they see so much waste and expenditure taking place. They feel that everyone else is wealthy, they are poor and why do they have to suffer? So they gun you down because you have something.

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They do not know how hard and how long you have worked for your earnings but the poor innocent ones feel very hurt and angered.

The time for procrastination is gone, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is abundantly clear and obvious that the current regime under the PNM is clueless. It is a national disgrace that the PNM administration after six years begins to feel now they want to talk to the population on crime because they failed to get the anti-gang legislation passed. They only blame Kamla, they blame COVID and now they are blaming Kamla again. They are the ones in charge. They are the Government of this country. They have the resources and they have the legislation—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence please. Go ahead, Member.

Mr. R. Ram: Not a single one of their crime plan has worked. They have all failed and that is entirely the fault of this PNM administration, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So if they want to blame someone, they have to blame themselves, because under the UNC and under the leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar crime was decreasing because the UNC had a plan and we knew exactly what it took to bring down the crime levels and prosecute those responsible for it.

They have no more excuses, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The time for excuses is over. The people want action and they want to feel safe again, and it is the responsibility of the Government to either put things in place to curb the crime problem or leave and let someone with a plan take charge. I thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the hon. Member for Laventille West. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Youth Development and National Services (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the last

speaker made a number of disparate points. I think he as well, like the mover of the Motion, touched on the question of the illegal immigrants flowing into Trinidad and Tobago and he did so with an air of criticism on the Government. Mr. Deputy Speaker, depending on how you see it there is a whole series of complexities around this issue. There is no doubt that the people of Venezuela are having a very difficult time for a number of reasons and Trinidad and Tobago, by virtue of its proximity, is an attractive location for them, but there are people in Trinidad and Tobago who benefit from their presence, the human traffickers, those who are engaged in the business of prostitution and other such illicit conduct. And some people may even have a conflict depending on the way they speak. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will agree with me, we are talking about a Motion here on crime. Bullying and threatening is also severely criminal.

It is my understanding that on nomination day last, in the run-up to the general election a certain level of bullying and threatening took place among our colleagues. But the Prime Minister and the leader of PNM always told us, when I raised with him some time ago about the criminal conduct that has been alleged and charged, leading a former Member of Parliament to be wanted in the United States of America for white-collar crimes, a person who was in the Cabinet of the Kamla Persad-Bissessar Government, I marveled at how for months he went on attacking her as Prime Minister and nothing was done while he was the subject of criminal investigations in the world. And the leader of the PNM said to me, he said a prime minister must always reserve the right to fire a Minister without fear of him firing back. So as I have made reference to some of the bullying and threatening on nomination day among some of our colleagues, I very well understand that sometimes prime ministers cannot fire back or cannot fire. Rather,

they fear being fired back upon, so to speak.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Motion is essentially about crime and you have heard the mover and you have heard all of my colleagues on the other side tell us about the crime situation in the country and how many murders and how many robberies and firearms coming in, and my colleagues on this side of the House, all of them, the Attorney General, most of all the Minister of National Security who has responsibility for managing the crime situation in the country, they all responded and told us in response what the Government's actions and positions have been in dealing with it. For an example, Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the functions of this Parliament—in fact the primary function—is to make law, and we pass law for the good order and governance of the Republic.

When we come to this Parliament to make law we expect that all parliamentarians, 41 of us in this the House of Representatives, will look at each Bill on its merit, apply intellect, apply experience and the expertise that several Members would have in different areas, whether it is law, in medicine, in accounting, in engineering, and to come up, on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, with the best position as we make this law, and then it goes to the Senate. But there is no gainsaying the fact that the UNC's position has for a long time in this Parliament, from the time in fact when they lost Government, has been to do all that they possibly can to ensure that the Government does not manage the situation effectively as we could or should, hoping that they would get some political benefit out of it.

Now what I have just said is well known to the people of Trinidad and Tobago by now. They have seen enough of them. They have heard them. But what was astounding, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that one of her—the Member for Siparia I

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mean, one of her biggest supporters, one of her attorneys-at-law—because in the Emailgate scandal that has not gone away, in my view, from which they have not been exonerated, in my view, he represented. This lawyer of Senior Counsel, Israel Khan is the man of whom I speak. He represented Kamla Persad-Bissessar in that matter. When they failed to support the anti-gang legislation a few days ago in this House no other person, no lesser person than Israel Khan of Senior Counsel—and I heard the Member for Naparima crying shame on this Government, well that is expected of him. As one colleague told me, the state of affairs on the outside reflects the state of affairs on the inside in relation to that Member.

He cried shame on this Government but Israel Khan, Mr. Deputy Speaker, cried more than shame and he recommended that the UNC pay a heavy political price for its failure to support that piece of legislation in the protection of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And that was not all. The Attorney General went through, and I have a list of all the pieces of legislation that they have caused to be defeated in this House over the last five-plus years. Whether it was the gaming industry Bill and gambling law where we tried to regulate that very money spinning, big money activity, where we pointed out to them that it is a source of laundering money, where we pointed out to them that there are many citizens who get lost in the business of gambling and never find their way; marriages are destroyed, family life is destroyed as gambling addiction takes them over. And had we regulated that industry we would have been able to use some of the tax and other proceeds from it to assist in the rehabilitation and the protection of those who could not resist the urge of going to the casino place.

We pointed out to them, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you might recall, that we are probably the only civilized democracy in the world that has not regulated the

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so-called gaming, gambling industry. They did not hear that. They rejected it. It failed. It is the same position they took in respect of the property tax. Now, they spoke at length about white collar crime and that is what I am addressing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Why are they so stoutly opposed to the property tax? A simple logical position has been offered that you have property, it is on a road; it has to be serviced with that road, with electricity, with water. Whatever happens in there contributes to the economic activity in the country, whether it is by way of rent, commercial or otherwise. It is only logical and sensible and prevalent all over the civilized world that a tax is imposed on those, on property, whether residential, commercial or industrial.

They refuse to support that. They have been going through all the hoops and loops. They have gone to court. They have done everything possible to stop it. A Government that saw SIS, a close friend of the Member for Siparia—a fella who I heard referred today as “Mamoo”—took over a piece of state land, about 35 acres of it, I understand, converted it to his own use, and on the day of the elections in 2015 departed Trinidad and Tobago, never to return. You heard today from the Minister of National Security that action was taken by this Government and to block and seize some of those firms and funds and moneys and assets as the State pursues action to recover what the whole citizenry understand was taken from us. But the property tax they have a problem with, but we understand why, just as Israel Khan understands why because he explained in his letter to the press for the world to see. He said he understands full well and he supports the Member for Arouca/Maloney who had said in a press release that they were hoping to make political mileage out of it.

When the Government fails in managing the gangs and the criminals then

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they would come in and benefit from it like corbeau; “when everybody dead”. We understand why they are resisting the property tax. It is because there are many properties in this country that are supposedly owned by people and they cannot demonstrate how they got it, and then there are some who do not want to demonstrate how they got it. We had a former Attorney General in this House who we know as a fact, because I had in my possession—I still have nine deeds at minimum for properties from Federation Park to Moka, to Philippine, all over the place—a former Attorney General, and when the media approached him and asked him where he was getting all of this wealth that was not consistent with his income as a Minister of Government, he explained that it was money from previous earnings as an attorney-at-law. So there are people who, as the Attorney General today told us, will sign both parties, the vendor and the purchaser, sign the deed but they never register it, which means they never make it public document but they own it. They are the beneficial owners.

So if you engage the property tax every single property in Trinidad and Tobago will have to be identified, “lotified”, identified and has to be subject to ownership by somebody. There are people who do not want us to know what they own and the UNC is obstructing that. They told us that if we must support the anti-gang law we have to pass and proclaim the procurement law, two separate pieces of law. We do not do trade-offs in debates like in the United States. When a piece of law, as I said at the top of my short contribution today, comes to the Parliament, you apply your intellect, your experience, your expertise and all that you have and determine what you will do in respect of that on the face of its merits or demerits. But they out of the blue tell you, “The anti-gang law is bad law but we will support the bad law if you bring the procurement law.”

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And why?—because they understand from reading it, it is very complex and it could make the whole procurement regime a lot more arduous in the spirit of accountability and transparency.

So they continue to take that position of intransigence, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Member for Barataria/San Juan who moved this Motion, well, before him, before him, my friend without the “R” from Naparima, he had a lot to say. He preached, he paraded himself, and as the Member for Port of Spain South pointed out, he went right back on the usual question of race, because we know he is sent to do that, he is sent by his team to do that; and he spoke about these Damen vessels. The Minister of National Security before he spoke, eh, told this Parliament, and by the way, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have been told by our leader that to lie in this Parliament or to lie to the people of this country is a fireable offence. [*Desk thumping*] So when we speak in this Parliament, we come and speak the truth that we could support on the facts and the documents.

The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West tells us that these vessels we found in the business of procurement when we came, they were in the process of being delivered to Trinidad and Tobago, these eight Damen vessels. And today for all kinds of reasons—because I remember in the Cabinet he was asked to provide a report on the condition of those vessels when it began to become known; and he did. But he told us today that in terms of their upgrade and their repair, the Dutch from whom these vessels were—who would repair these vessels, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are unwilling to travel to Trinidad and Tobago given this COVID environment that we now express.

I remember the coast guard obtained a vessel from China, we were in

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Opposition at the time, and we were told deceptively by the Member for Siparia—and I say so without apology or fear of contradiction, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Deceptively we were told that it was a grant from the Chinese Government. You know when we went into Government we discovered it was no grant. That grant cost this country \$1 billion and that vessel made no or makes no contribution to the fight against crime in Trinidad and Tobago. It sluggishly goes out and comes back from time to time but it spends most of its time moored in Staubles. That is a reality, that is what we met and the taxpayers through the Government, of course, paying for that, still paying.

When we decided we will put an OPV programme in place which had helicopter capacity and which had fast-boat interceptor capacity, and when that vessel is out there for a month with all the supplies and with all the men who we sent at great taxpayers' expense to England, they spent a year, nine months, six months to train to operate those vessels, the OPVs, and some of the sailors are traumatized to this very day, feel let down by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago who after all of that, they cancelled the programme. And those vessels, fast patrols—

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

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much. And the helicopters. The idea was, with the radar system, once they saw a boat coming down from Pedernales or Guiria or wherever it is coming from on the Venezuelan coastline, and heading in the 20 or 25 minutes it takes towards our southern coast or wherever they enter, you would have had the ability to launch a helicopter or to launch a fast boat and intercept them. They come here today complaining, they are the ones who destroyed that.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, essentially we have argued all of the recitals put in

this Motion. My colleagues have done particularly well in responding to it. [*Desk thumping*] We are satisfied that the people of Trinidad and Tobago understand quite well that the UNC is the greatest threat to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] We understand and we know that the people of Trinidad and Tobago quite well understand that the UNC is a crime. [*Desk thumping*]

As such this Motion is rejected and we will continue to do our work in the best interest of the people. And they rewarded us a few months ago with another mandate to rule the affairs [*Desk thumping*] of Trinidad and Tobago for five years. And they can do what they want, as Israel Khan warned them, they will pay a heavy political price. [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Couva North. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Ravi Ratiram (*Couva North*): Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to join in this debate on the private Motion raised by my colleague the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I start with my contribution this afternoon in this august Chamber, I want to use this opportunity to congratulate all my colleagues who would have contributed to this Motion this afternoon highlighting the plight, the cries and the issue facing each and every one of our citizens across Trinidad and Tobago, and that is the runaway crime that we are facing in our country today. Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you would permit me, the resolution of this Motion before the House is:

“Be it resolved that this House condemn the Government for its failure to effectively address the unacceptable and serious crime...affecting law-abiding citizens.”

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Motion is about the protection of our hard-working, 1

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law-abiding citizens of this country, not about email-gate and the con-job that has been perpetrated against the public. It is not about failed legislation that has formed part of this Government. No, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is about protecting a safe and a secure society for all the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the far-reaching effect of crime in Trinidad and Tobago is evident through international reports. The United States Overseas Security Advisory Council OSAC, Crime & Safety report on Trinidad and Tobago dated the 6th of May, 2019, advises and I quote:

“There is serious risk from crime in Port of Spain. The government of Trinidad and Tobago...faces numerous challenges in its effort to reduce crime, including an overburdened legal system...”

And it continues. It is important to note that in 2019 the risk from crime in Port of Spain was described as serious, however, in 2020 the report done by the same OSAC stated, again and I quote:

“The U.S. Department of State has assessed Port of Spain as being a CRITICAL-threat location for crime...”

We have moved from “serious risk” to “critical threat”, and this is not the MP for Couva North’s words. This is how the international community is looking at us from outside. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would now like to lend some time addressing the crime situation in my constituency in Couva North. Right now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is a dark cloud looming over Couva North in terms of crime. A constituency where once upon a time persons had slept comfortably in their hammocks. Now Couva North is stained by reports of murders, woundings and shooting, burglaries and break-ins, robberies and larceny of motor vehicles and

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other serious crime.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, only days after residents of Joyce Road, Perseverance celebrated Divail that festival of light representing good over evil and light over darkness, the community was shocked by a double murder where a mother and grandmother were shot and killed inside a vehicle in their driveway by armed assailants. The crime is real and it is affecting every community. Three children in that incident, all under the age of 10, one of whom is just one year old, were also in the vehicle. While the matter is still under police investigation, to date, no arrests have been made.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the past few weeks I have been invited to several meetings by residents of Felicity, Carli Bay, Mc Bean, Waterloo and other areas within Couva North. These meetings were focused on increasing crime levels across central Trinidad. Several incidents of home invasions were highlighted by the residents. As recent as last evening, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I met with residents of lower Brickfield at the home of Mr. Ramsundar. Today I want to share what came out of those discussions. It was highlighted that Mr. Ramnarine Maharaj of Brickfield had his vehicle stolen from his residence approximately six weeks ago. Four weeks ago fisherman Armar Ramsubhag had his 28-foot fishing boat stolen along with his livelihood and that only opportunity, that only ability that he had to provide food for his family. Two weeks ago another fisherman Vinod Rajkumar, his boat was set on fire, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And this is the kind of pain that our constituents and our citizens have to endure under this administration which seems to be asleep when it comes to addressing the issues affecting our country today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, last evening I also had the opportunity to meet with representatives from the Brickfield sports club, Mr. Ajay Lutchman, Mr. Ryan

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Rubin and other members of the sports club. And coming out of those discussions also we spoke about other home invasions. Mr. Sammy of Butler Village, Waterloo Road had his home broken into three weeks ago. Mr. Kimchan Sookraj of Brickfield Village had his home broken into two weeks ago. And while Members on the other side might yawn because of the information being presented here is not numbers and figures and statistics but it is real information, [*Desk thumping*] they yawn because they are sleeping away in fulfilling their responsibility to our country. How disrespectful and how sad.

Mr. Mikey Ramdhanie from Recreation Ground Road, Brickfield, his home was broken into three times in three weeks, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Within the last month there have been reports of drugs being sold in the vicinity of Temple Street in Brickfield. I myself had to call the Freeport Police Station to pass the information on to the police for them to investigate what was happening in those communities.

Just two weeks ago a Mc Bean family was tormented by masked gunmen who forcibly entered their homes in the early hours of the morning. This followed a spate of home invasions in the Mc Bean community with robbery being the main motive, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I have personally spoken to some of the families who have been victims of crime over the past few days, who all are traumatized by the ordeal. The residents of these areas no longer feel safe in their own homes. They cannot sleep at night, and when they do, they are awakened by the slightest noise that they hear. These families are now virtually living in fear, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In the 2021 national budget that was recently passed, approximately over \$4 billion was to national security. This follows a cumulated five-year allocation

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towards national security—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, one second—

ADJOURNMENT

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

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday the fourth day of December. Mr. Deputy Speaker, on that day we will be introducing three or four Bills that we will be taking through all their stages. These Bills will come to Members by Monday latest. So the adjournment is for Friday the 4th of December at 1.30 p.m. Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, there are five matters that qualify to be raised on the Motion for the Adjournment of the House but on agreement only one will be entertained at this time. I now call on the Member for Tabaquite. [*Desk thumping*] Member for Tabaquite, you have 10 minutes.

Former Petrotrin Workers (Status of Medical Plan)

Ms. Anita Haynes (Tabaquite): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to raise this matter on the Adjournment of the House. This matter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am looking to treat with the failure of the Government to account on the status of medical plan to former Petrotrin workers and retirees.

This matter was born out of a meeting that was held approximately two weeks ago with retirees from former Petrotrin workers who would have retired and are now seeking some information on their medical plan which is due to expire on November 30, 2020.

Matter on the Adjournment (cont'd)
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Now, I am bringing this Motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I am hoping that we can return this House to its true meaning as a House of Representatives where issues facing the people of Trinidad and Tobago and in this case the former Petrotrin workers and the retirees, that they can hear their issues heard and questions answered.

When I attended that meeting two weeks ago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would have met with persons who told me a story about dedicating and devoting their life to the energy industry in Trinidad and Tobago, and who would be waiting now to have questions answered about how their medical plan would be treated with going forward. They would have received a letter on or about October 23rd which gave them just a couple of days to respond whether or not they would be taking on new enhanced medical insurance from a Global Financial Brokers Limited. They would have been told that for themselves and their spouse it would be \$770 per month.

The workers asked that I raise here that Petrotrin has a legal obligation or Petrotrin had a legal obligation to provide medical benefits for the rest of the lives of their employees. These retirees would have looked on at what happened in 2018, with the closure of Petrotrin and they would have asked in 2019, about how their medical benefits would be treated with. They would have held a protest regarding their medical plan, and then they would have kept urging dialogue because we are talking, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about human beings. This is a very human story, and if you think about it, how a society treats its pensioners, its elderly, persons who are in need of medical care, it is a reflection on all of us.

So I am urging the Government in responding to this Motion today, please do not attempt to reduce Petrotrin workers to numbers on a paper. Do not reduce this to an issue of cost and benefit but let us look at it as the human beings who

Matter on the Adjournment (cont'd)
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would have, Mr. Deputy Speaker, dedicated their lives to building this nation and they are now looking to us, they are looking to the Government as policymakers to give them information and to fulfil the obligation to them in terms of their medical care.

I have with me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the words from one of the retirees that I would have met with. And he said to be sure to tell the nation that they had given their youth to the refinery, and now they are old and not well and they are seeking answers and they are seeking help, and they are seeking to be represented in the House of Representatives, and I am hoping to do that here today for them.

The medical plan that they held previously under Sagicor which was given to them for two years, they were told that it would be evaluated at the end of the two years. They are still waiting for that evaluation to take place. Instead they just received a letter saying that this new plan was put in place for them. They had a number of questions about the letters that they received which held no Petrotrin or former Petrotrin—any Petrotrin markings at all. So they were not even sure if it was an official document, they just received it and they had a lot of questions. They were given the information and told that they had to sign or they would be cut out of any medical benefits.

The health concerns facing persons who would have worked in a refinery would be unique and costly. And so they are saying to the population of Trinidad and Tobago, while in 2018, we would have been told that to shut down Petrotrin would improve all of our lives, it meant more roads and hospitals, et cetera, that is what we were told; that their lives matter too, and that their medical benefits matter to them, it is very concerning.

There have been—there are a number of unemployed former Petrotrin

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employees, they remain unemployed at this time, and for the pensioners, their pension benefits cannot cover the cost of their medical plan now. And so they are seeking from the Government some sort of recognition that there is an obligation for these medical benefits to be provided, and that as citizens of this country their voices ought to be heard, their issues acknowledged and the dignity be afforded to them that their concerns are heard and they are not afforded useless rhetoric today.

I want to point out, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we cannot be told that for all of us to live a good life, some of us must suffer. There must be some equity when we are discussing the benefits facing the Petrotrin workers. They spent two years hearing that they were the reason this country was in debt, that they were overpaid, that they had gotten enough. And their stories are real stories of persons who are struggling now to afford to survive. And so I raise that here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I hope that their concerns are met with the dignity and respect that they deserve. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I now call on the Minister of National Security. [*Desk thumping*] And you have 10 minutes, hon. Member.

The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I assure the Member for Tabaquite that those on the Government side have heard the submissions made. This is not an issue that arose overnight. This is not an issue that has arisen in the last couple of weeks. This is a matter that was addressed on the restructuring of Petrotrin because I correct the record and just place on the record that Petrotrin has not been shut down. And it was one of the effects of the restructuring of Petrotrin, and I use the opportunity, of course, to remind that even in that difficult period of time, the Government did take the decision, and I think

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we paid out—the Minister of Finance will correct me if I am wrong—approximately \$2.4 billion to former Petrotrin workers at the time.

Nevertheless, on the restructuring of Petrotrin, its medical plans did cease to exist, the pre-existing plans. In an effort to cushion the impact of the terminated medical plans, the services of an insurer to provide group health benefits were engaged for a period of two years. Petrotrin covered the insurance premiums during this two-year period and provided a separate \$20 million in a fund to support critical care patients over and above the continued insurance, health insurance.

To date, 8,038 persons comprising 4,590 retirees and 3,448 ex-employees and their families have utilized the medical plan at a cost of approximately \$93 million to the company. So in the last two years 8,038 persons comprising 4,590 retirees and 3,448 ex-employees and their families utilize a medical plan at a cost of approximately \$93 million in two years to the company. This is in addition to the \$20 million that the Government through Petrotrin put in a separate fund for critical-care patients, for example, cancer, heart and dialysis. So in the last two years alone the taxpayers have put forward 93 plus \$20 million in order \$111 million to fund health insurance for these persons. Both the health, group health plan and the critical-care support end on November 30, 2020. As a Government we gave a commitment to assist the former employees of Petrotrin post-restructuring of the company.

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As such, a new group medical plan was established with another service provider with defined conditions. It provides coverage for pre-existing conditions and critical-care patients among other conditions. I pause, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

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For a plan to take on board new persons and to cover their pre-existing conditions, a medical health care plan, that is a great achievement because normally they would not do such a thing. The premiums on the new plan will be covered by the ex-employees and retirees. The plan is a lifetime plan that renews annually on its anniversary date once premiums are paid. All ex-Petrotrin employees and retirees were notified via home delivery, email and/or via newspaper publication on the next steps along with details regarding coverage, benefits and associated premiums, and given the option to opt into the new plan, medical plan, if they so desire, along with the required steps and timelines to do so. The minimum membership is 5,000 persons. The deadline for enrolment is December 01, 2020, and responses to date have been positive. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.46 p.m.