

SENATE

Tuesday, January 26, 2016

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I have granted leave of absence to Sen. Sophia Karen Chote SC from today's sitting.

URGENT QUESTIONS**Zika Virus in Trinidad and Tobago****(Preventative Steps Taken)**

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam President. To the hon. Minister of Health: Can the Minister say what steps are being taken to prevent the spread of the Zika virus to Trinidad and Tobago from neighbouring countries in light of the impending carnival season?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you Madam President, and thank you Sen. Mark for the question. None of the countries in the Americas where the Zika virus has now made its unwelcome entry— regardless of size, wealth, robustness of their port surveillance, airport surveillance or any other action—has been able to stop the entry of the Zika virus into their territories. This has mirrored the similar pattern to the Chikungunya virus which made its way into Trinidad officially on July 10, 2014 with the first confirmed case.

We were tracking the Chikungunya virus, which is similar to Zika, from December 2013 when it was first spotted in St. Maarten. The entry of these viruses, whether it is Chikungunya, dengue or Zika, into your country is virtually impossible to stop. The only way to effectively stop it is to build a huge wall

around your country, stop international trade, stop all containerized cargo from coming into your country and stop the movement of people. It is just an impossibility given the fact that international trade and commerce are part of what we now call this global village.

So just like Chikungunya, which made its entry into Trinidad between 2013/2014, similarly, the vector that transmits Chikungunya is the same vector that transmits Zika. So it is next to impossible for any country, whether it is Brazil, Panama, the United States, Suriname, Barbados, St. Maarten, to stop the unwelcome entry of the Zika virus into your country, regardless of whether it is carnival or not.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, through you, could the hon. Minister indicate what steps can the citizens of our country take in order to mitigate the spread of the Zika virus in our country?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you Madam President, and that is an excellent question, Sen. Mark. The Ministry of Health has instituted an integrated management approach to dealing with the Zika virus. To that end, on December 29, 2015, which was just a mere month ago, we held our first stakeholder conference with local government and various other stakeholders to address this. The attack on Zika is basically source reduction. That is, alerting all the agencies that are responsible, for example, insect vector control, local government, but the population has a crucial role to play in source reduction, which means getting rid of potential breeding sites, both inside your house and around your premises.

Madam President, what is also of concern, we grew up in Trinidad thinking that the *Aedes aegypti* would only breed in clear stagnant water. In Puerto Rico, it has now been reported that the *Aedes aegypti* is now breeding in sewer water. So the mosquito has been evolving, its genetic composition has been evolving, and if

there is a sound partnership between the Government of the day and the citizenry to focus on source reduction, we can have a significant impact. The Government will be going all out with fogging, with distribution of nets, zappers and all those measures, but at the end of the day, the main partner in this are the individuals and the communities to help the Government in identifying breeding sites in and around your home and eliminating those. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Madam President, may I ask the hon. Minister of Health whether he is satisfied with the level of fogging that has been executed by the relevant agency in order to address this spread of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you. Sen. Mark, that is a very good question, which also the public asks very often about fogging. Because the public's response is always: how are we going to fog, where are we going to fog? But that is not the sole solution, that is part of the solution, and fogging has to be done in a particular cycle. If you overfog, what you actually end up doing is giving the mosquitoes the chance to develop resistance to the chemical.

So fogging is not the answer, the answer is a combination of all the measures which includes fogging, destruction of breeding sites, using nets, covering your exposed skin; and all those measures, if you put them together, can have a significant impact. But I do not want the population to feel, based on the question, that the be-all and end-all of the control of the *Aedes aegypti* is to be focused on fogging. Fogging is a part of an integrated management approach to it. Thank you very much.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Madam President, the Government, today, would answer Question No. 20 and we kindly ask for a deferral of Question Nos. 21 and 23 for

one week.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, leave is granted for the deferral of Question Nos. 21 and 23 for one week.

The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Sen. Wade Mark:

National Gas Company

(Details of)

- 21.** In light of the recent decision of the Board of the National Gas Company (NGC) to implement a salary, benefits and bonus freeze for 2015 and 2016, could the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries state:
- (i) whether the consent of the Minister was obtained;
 - (ii) whether direction was sought and received from the Chief Personnel Officer in arriving at its decision;
 - (iii) whether there had been any prior consultation with the employees of the NGC Group; and
 - (iv) whether the payment of bonuses for staff was budgeted by NGC in its budget for 2015 and 2016?

White Powdery Substance in Marabella

(Details of)

- 23.** Could the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries state:
- A. Whether a white powdery substance was deposited on the properties of citizens in Marabella in mid-November 2015?
 - B. If the answer to (A) is in the affirmative, could the Minister state the cause, and say whether this was related to the Petrotrin Refinery Cat Cracker?

- C. If the answer to (A) is in the affirmative, could the Minister say whether the powdery substance has been sent for testing at an independent and certified laboratory, and if so, whether the results will be made public;
- D. If the answer to (A) is in the affirmative, could the Minister state whether any threat assessment has been made to determine the risk to the health and safety of the residents of Marabella; and
- E. If the answer to (A) is in the affirmative, could the Minister state if any plans have been put in place to guarantee the health and safety of the affected residents of Marabella?

Questions, by leave, deferred.

Chairman of the Education Commission

(Participation at High-Level Meeting)

20. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister say whether Dr. Kris Rampersad, Chairman of the Education Commission and a member of the Executive Board of UNESCO, was denied participation at a high-level meeting in Paris held recently, and if so, why?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Madam President, it should be noted from the outset that membership of UNESCO is reserved exclusively for States as distinct from individuals. Persons serving on the Executive Board of the organization therefore serve as duly authorized representatives of their country and not in their individual rights or in a personal capacity. As such, it is the country that is elected to serve on the board and not the individual. That is why in the campaign for membership, all countries contest for a seat using the name of the country and not the name of any particular individual. The elected country then

advises the Director General in writing of the identity of the person who will represent it on the Executive Board.

Madam President, the term of office of the last National Commission for UNESCO on which Dr. Kris Rampersad served as Chairman expired on August 17, 2015. The former Cabinet, on August 27, 2015, agreed to the appointment of a new commission with Dr. Rampersad continuing in the position of Chairman. However, letters of appointment were not issued by either the previous or the incumbent Minister of Education to those persons nominated to serve on the commission.

At the time of the 38th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO in Paris in November 2015, the Minister of Education was in the process of reviewing the composition of the national commission as well as making proposals for Trinidad and Tobago's representation at the General Conference. Out of that process, Dr. Rampersad was not nominated to be a member of the delegation.

Accordingly, the official Trinidad and Tobago delegation to the General Conference, as approved by Cabinet, comprised the following persons: Hon. Dr. Lovell Francis, Minister of State in the Ministry of Education for the period November 03 to 07, 2015; Miss Susan Shurland, Secretary General, Trinidad and Tobago Commission for UNESCO, November 02 to 14, 2015; Mariella Fonrose, International Public Relations Officer, Permanent Mission to the United Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, for the period November 03 to 18, 2015.

The guidelines of UNESCO state that no representative can nominate himself for any post at the United Nations. The Government of the member country must approve such appointments consistent with the United Nations rules. Without such approval, therefore, questions arose about the legality of Dr. Rampersad's position on both the Executive Board and the Education Commission,

and also about the legitimacy of any decision taken by these bodies with concomitant embarrassment to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Ministry of Education was, therefore, compelled to take appropriate action on behalf of the Government to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago's representation at the conference was in strict conformity with UNESCO rules and the procedures on the one hand, and to adhere to the decision of the Cabinet on this matter.

The 198th Session of the UNESCO Executive Board which immediately followed the 38th UNESCO General Conference was a one-day meeting usually called to welcome newly elected country representatives, to elect the chairperson and vice persons of its bureau, and elect members of the various commissions and committees. It does not address substantive issues of policy. Trinidad and Tobago's representation at this meeting was, therefore, adjudged not to be crucial. Dr. Rampersad was neither nominated nor approved by Cabinet to attend the General Conference or the meeting of the Executive Board of UNESCO that followed immediately thereafter.

Therefore, if action was taken by an individual to gain nomination to chair the Education Commission at the 38th UNESCO General Conference as the representative of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago without the prior and expressed approval of Cabinet, such action would have been in contravention to the established rules and procedures of UNESCO and a violation of the procedural norms of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

1.45 p.m.

Sen. Mark: Yes. Can I ask the hon. Minister of Education, through you, what if any, is the role of the chairman, whatever he is or her complexion would be at these UNESCO general meetings? I do not know if you would be willing to share

with us, as the Minister of Education, what then is the role of a chairman of the local chapter of UNESCO?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, that does not qualify, you know, based on the question asked and the answer given. The role of the Chairman does not—that is not part of the relevance of this question. Do you have any other supplemental question?

[Sen. Mark indicates negative by wave of hand]

UNITED NATIONS AGENDA 2030 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Order for resuming adjourned debate on question [November 24, 2015]:

Be it resolved that the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago:

1. take stock of Agenda 2030 and attendant Sustainable Development Goals as well as the Declaration of the World Speakers Conference as the main reference point on all policies for sustainable development;
2. commit to help implement this new framework through all acts of legislation, including the budget; and
3. request that the Government table a report on the implementation of the national strategy for the SDGs for a thorough review by Parliament.

Question again proposed.

Madam President: Senators who have already spoken on November 24, 2015 are: Sen. Wade Mark, mover of the Motion; Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan; Sen. David Small; Sen. Khadija Ameen; Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon and Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir, who has eight minutes of speaking time remaining.

Sen. Dr. D. Mahabir: *[Desk thumping]* Thank you very much, Madam President.

Two months and eight minutes later, let me continue with this particular contribution. There is very little in the Sustainable Development Goals that one can take issue with. Therefore I support, in letter and in spirit, the Motion advanced to us by Sen. Mark. My own concern was that we do need to concretize some of our own policy initiatives, to ensure that we could implement these goals. So in the few minutes remaining, let me focus on some of the recommendations that I would place for consideration by the Government, so that at least we could move a step forward in ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago becomes a more sustainable society.

One, we do have a problem with illegal quarrying. All of us I think are in agreement that we simply need to enforce the law. The EMA has some problems with enforcing the law, and I have advanced that the Ministry of National Security, especially the military arm of the Ministry of National Security should be working with the EMA to really ensure that illegal quarrying in the hillsides, can abate.

Second, there is a real need for us to bequeath to the next generation the legacy we have with respect to our stock of historical buildings. We do not wish to see a reoccurrence of what happened to the Greyfriars Church. So I would recommend, Madam President, that whenever there are historical buildings that are owned by private citizens, the Government gives consideration to assisting these citizens with respect to defraying the cost of restoration, as long as the restoration will conform with what the Historical Society approves.

Third, there is an urgent need for us to bring to this Parliament the Beverage Containers Bill. The Beverage Containers Bill appeared before us in the last Parliament, but I think we do need now to look at recycling in an important way, and also to follow the lead from some of the poorer countries in Caricom, in particular Haiti and Guyana. Not only do they have a policy on plastic containers,

but they have moved a step further to actually ban styrofoam containers. That is the “styrotex” cups and plates that we use, because these items really are carcinogenic and detrimental to the environment.

With the eight minutes, I think I can give you eight recommendations. So I hope I have four more minutes left, Madam President.

[Madam President indicates five]

We do need—five minutes? You are generous, Madam President, and I am immensely grateful. I feel your clock is running a bit slow. *[Laughter]*

The fourth recommendation is that we do need to protect our wildlife. It is going to be instrumental not only because it is the right thing to do, but because with the rise of ecotourism and the need to diversify our economy, we need to ensure that in our nature trails, individuals who are walking there simply to enjoy the natural environment, will be able to see the “quenk, the lappe, the tatou” and the local species that we have. Therefore, I would request that the Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries, review the policy on hunting, so that we can work with the Zoological Society to ensure that there is always a sustainable stock of the natural wildlife in Trinidad.

Five, Madam President, we do need to start the process and change the habit of the population on recycling. Recycling, I think, should be taught at the preschool level and at the primary school level. Once we get the habits of the young inculcated, I am sure we should be able to get the young inducing the older people to engage in the habit of recycling paper, plastics and bottles. It is going to go a long way towards the preservation of our environment.

Sixth, we have a problem with flooding and I think we do need to monitor construction on our hillsides, particularly in the Diego Martin area. I am hoping

that the Government will understand that the best agency to monitor illegal construction on the hillsides would be the Diego Martin Regional Corporation. It is in that regard I am saying we need to build these institutions with a capacity to enforce certain building laws, and we can preserve the environment, not only for the current generation, but also for the future as well.

Seven, we do have a financial constraint in the country, that is realistic, but also the foresight of previous legislators in this country created the Green Fund. We have had a Green Fund being pledged against an overdraft. Let us commit to the goals and use the Green Fund for the purpose to which it was designed, assisting companies which are in the recycling business, the solar business, the business of wind energy, and companies which would simply like to produce napkins and writing paper from recycling paper. The Green Fund should be the seed capital for that, and if we are going to really be committed to these goals, this particular fund, Madam President, offers us an opportunity to avoid the financial constraint.

I started my contribution, Madam President, with an understanding of what happened in 1494, with Pope Alexander. Pope Alexander divided the world between the rich countries and the not so rich countries, and we have seen that division since. What we are observing now is the growth of the developing world who have the responsibility for looking after their own sustainability.

I will close by looking at the view of Pope Francis, current pope, who said that:

We have to pursue these sustainable development goals, in a manner where poor people across the world will “be dignified agents of their own destiny.”

Madam President, in being a dignified agent of our own destiny, I want to

advance to the Parliament that we must do that which is right for us, then we will have the moral authority to let the developed world know that they must do what is right for the rest of the world. I think we will have the moral authority to say, we are well advanced on achieving the objectives of the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals 2030. Madam President, I thank you kindly for this opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Gerald Hadeed: [*Desk thumping*] Good afternoon, Madam President, fellow Senators. It is a great pleasure today to be able to contribute to this debate, this very important debate on the attainment of the millennium Sustainable Development Goals that are set by the United Nations.

Madam President, in September of 2000, the leaders of 198 countries at the United Nations in New York endorsed the Millennium Declaration, a commitment to work together to build a safer, more prosperous and equitable world. The declaration has transcended into a road map setting out eight time bound and measurable goals to be reached by 2015.

In addressing the United Nations in September of 2013, our former Prime Minister, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, made the comment that progress in achieving these goals was uneven, but that she was proud to report that our country, Trinidad and Tobago, had made tremendous strides in achieving the goals, and in some cases surpassing them.

I will point out in my contribution today, for the benefit of our colleagues and the country, what the Government had achieved during its term of office to attain these goals. The goals that were set:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.
2. Achieve universal primary education.

3. Promote gender equality and empower women.
4. Reduce child mortality.
5. Improve maternal health.
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.
7. Ensure environmental sustainability.
8. Develop a global partnership of development.

At the onset it was recognized that for any country, region and the world to achieve these goals, it required a collective effort. All sectors of our society working together, public, private, voluntary or NGOs, must be involved as well as the international organizations, especially those linked to the United Nations.

2.00 p.m.

A comment made by the hon. Ban Ki-moon on page 4 of the 2015 UN Report indicated:

“The MDGs helped to lift more than one billion people out of extreme poverty, to make inroads against hunger, to enable more girls to attend school than ever before and to protect our planet. They generated new and innovative partnerships, galvanized public opinion and showed the immense value of setting ambitious goals.

Yet for all the remarkable gains, I am keenly aware that inequalities persist and that progress has been uneven. The world’s poor remain overwhelmingly”—poor—“concentrated in some parts of the world. In 2011, nearly 60 per cent of the world’s one billion extremely poor people lived in just five countries. Too many women continue to die during pregnancy or from childbirth-related complications. Progress tends to bypass women and those who are lowest on the economic ladder or are

disadvantaged because of their age, disability or ethnicity. Disparities between rural and urban areas remain pronounced.”

I was very happy, Madam President, when I learned that the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government indicated that he was touring the rural areas to try to improve the lives of all of our citizens.

You see, Madam President, what has happened in the world today is more people are moving away from the rural areas into the urban areas, and this is causing a lot of contraction in the rural areas, the family lives are not what it was. If we can encourage and improve the lives in the rural areas, Senator, it will allow the citizens in the areas to live in harmony and in blessings with their brothers and sisters, and their villagers. We must work together, all of us, to ensure that we develop the rural areas to stop the transition into the urban areas. A lot of people would come into the urban areas where it is more expensive, it is difficult for them to get jobs and it is easy for them to fall prey to the wrong things. So I am very pleased that you have indicated, hon. Minister, that that is part of your mandate.

In terms of Latin America and the Caribbean Region in which Trinidad and Tobago is grouped, there is some good news and some bad news, Madam President. Let me identify first the good news; health, Madam President, page 14 of the United Nations on MDGs says:

“...geospatial information was used to support health care and design social intervention measures during the chikungunya virus...outbreak across the Caribbean.”—In particular, they singled out—“Trinidad and Tobago, geospatial applications for smart phones assisted the Ministry of Health to identify the location of infected persons and use the information to contain the outbreak.”

On page 47 of the United Nations Report we find also:

“New HIV infections fell most rapidly in the Caribbean—a decline of 56 per cent—”

It means to say, fellow Senators, Members of the Government, that there are areas that have been in place that we can still use in the event of the new Zika virus. We must keep what we have that is good and ensure that wherever we have an outbreak of any of those diseases that could cause harm and mayhem to the society that the infrastructure that is there that it is maintained and it is constantly upgraded. The utilization of all the technologies that we put in place during the last Government, the infrastructure for ICT; those are areas that we must build on and continue to build on to ensure wherever there are viruses taking place that we can deal with it effectively.

Madam President, this is not all that we did in health. During our tenure in office we started and completed the construction of the Couva Children’s Hospital, which I would respectfully ask the Government that, with the goodwill of everybody, the hospital needs to be opened, it needs to be serviced. The problem, as I have heard, is that there is a cash flow problem for the opening of the hospital. But I am sure now that money would become available to the Government, with the loans that you can attain from the various organizations, that you will open the Children’s Hospital for the people. [*Desk thumping*] An abandoned hospital— [*Interruption*]

Sen. Khan: We would not treat it like Brian Lara.

Sen. G. Hadeed: Brian Lara was not the problem that we could not open Brian Lara; the information from the consultants, McAfee, said that the structure was not good. And if that is what we were told and you know better than that, then go

ahead with it, but if you have \$98 million I think the first thing you should try to do is open the hospital and then, a little bit more money, open something else. [*Desk thumping*]

The Teaching Hospital in San Fernando was built from an abandoned building that was left there quite a while, Madam President. There is a Cardiology Unit and Oncology Department down in San Fernando. We have put in place more than a dozen ambulances to be able to transport the people to and from accidents and emergencies. Testing in schools for hearing and visual problems, as well as dyslexia, autism and Down's syndrome, these are things that were put in place. With regard to health, with regard to the health sector, Madam President, the health sector is such an important area in the development and the maintenance of good health for the citizens, especially children and the elderly.

We must always, at all times, pay attention to that part of our needs. It is not who built what or when they built it, or how much it cost to build; if there are things to be done to improve the health of the citizens of the country, all areas of that part of it, including the health centres—there were maybe 80 or 90 health centres that were renovated, quite a lot of them open 24/7. These are the things that make the Millennium Goals attainable, so I am asking the Government to please look at these areas and where they can—they have the cash flow to do it, do it.

On education, where the Millennium Goals are very, very strong in favour of Trinidad and Tobago, I will like to congratulate our former Minister of Energy and Energy Affairs and our former Prime Minister in their term, and they deserve credit for the findings on page 31 of the United Nations Report, Madam President:

“The greatest improvements”—in the MDGs—“have been made in primary education. Today, five of the nine developing regions have achieved parity:

the Caucasus and Central Asia, Eastern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, South-Eastern Asia and Southern Asia...”

Of the 467 principals and 4,000 teachers who received laptops during the term of office, this infusion of information and communication technologies into the curriculum, Madam President, goes a long way in assisting the development of education.

During the term of office of the former Government, 50 primary schools and 130 secondary schools had Internet connectivity. The e-Card programme expansion project included a portal to facilitate teacher training, connectivity amongst schools and information sharing. Computer labs were built in 300 primary schools and 134 secondary schools. The primary school curriculum was restructured to include continuous assessment and courses in critical life areas, like values, ethics and morals, family life, education and agricultural science. We have been able as a country to harness the ICTs in the development of the human mind, the human capacity. With the ICTs, the learning can become much more streamlined. We need to continuously assess what we are doing, where we are and how we are headed in comparison to what the world is doing.

Madam President, the Caribbean is doing well; however, what about Trinidad and Tobago in the next five years? While the other countries will strive to do even better we have to ask ourselves, what will be the impact of increased poverty and various different things that can happen if we do not revisit certain items that have been put in place by this Government with regard to food and VAT on food? Food takes up approximately 50 per cent of a poor person's budget. If we can just change some of the staples that are now on VAT, put the VAT on the luxury items where people could afford to pay it, but not on staples. I am only

asking, but as I see, it is now cast in stone, and I hope that it is not there forever. It is possible that our gains in the past five years can be squandered with regard to all of these sort of taxation issues that are harming the poor.

Here is another recognition on page 58 of the 2015 MDGs. There is a positive report about our management of our natural environmental resources. The report states:

“Latin America and the Caribbean, Oceania and Western Asia lead the way in protecting land and marine areas...

Terrestrial and marine protected areas...in many regions have substantially increased...since 1990. In Latin America and the Caribbean, coverage of terrestrial protected areas rose from 8.8 per cent to 23.4 per cent between 1990 and 2014.”

Let me give you a sense of some of the things that our Government did during our term of office. We established the Fondes Amandes Community Reforestation programme; we worked with the community on a sustainable community forestation initiative; we worked with the EMA on the Nariva Swamp reforestation, harbour and sequentialization and livelihood project; the Toco Foundation on a water harvesting project; nature seekers in Matura on an awareness management and eco-tourism project; Draft Air Pollution Rules was approved by Cabinet in 2013; the National Reforestation and Watershed Rehabilitation Programme produced over 20,000 seedlings for replanting in about 1,500 acres of forested area; the 2011 Cabinet approved a new National Forestry Policy and a new Protected Areas Policy.

2.15 p.m.

Madam President, these are things that the former Government did that also

assisted this country to get the status and the approval of the United Nations to where our attainment was. It goes to show with a strong foundation there is room also to be building on that foundation. I am asking the Government to please look at all the other areas that we may not have been able to achieve, that you will be in a position to do. [*Interruption*]

I quite understand that. One Government builds, leaves, another Government comes, build and go. I am not condemning your Government in anything. I am just saying that this Government left something, do not destroy, just continue to build. Again, this shows how much our Government did together with other Latin American and Caribbean Governments to manage our national resources.

The report states on page 6 about water:

“Since 1990, the proportion of the population without access to improved drinking water has been cut in half in Eastern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, South-Eastern Asia...and Western Asia.”

Just a few things that were done by our Government to improve the lives to allow a lot of people in Trinidad and Tobago to attain supply of 24/7 clean water. Under the People’s Partnership Government and the Minister of the Environment and Water Resources, hon. Ganga Singh, a total of 752 projects in the entire country, all 41 constituencies, with an estimated 564 kilometres of water mains, replacement of 28 kilometres of the Navet trunk main and the pipeline in Mayaro, and we put a new transmission pipeline between Buccoo and Courland Bay—every part of the country. We were an important contribution to this finding, we ensured that most of the people of this country had access to improved drinking water, pipe-borne water and water for all.

There is just a small amount of pipe work to be done, where you would be in

a position to move water all over Trinidad and Tobago. That is for the establishment of a trunk between Valencia and Moruga. If that is built, we would be in a position to shift water at all times where there is need for water when the dry season comes. There is also something that can be done for the dry season when the rivers are a little low. We need to establish more wells. Drill a few more wells in areas that are short of water, that will assist, and in other areas small desalination plants. We are coming into a very bad dry season, and the advice I can give is ensure that we have the necessary new wells drilled and, if necessary, small desalination plants in areas that need the water, but also do look at moving water all through Trinidad and Tobago with the establishment of that last piece of work that needs to be done.

On page 18 of the 2015 MDG report, it states:

“In Latin America and the Caribbean, the ratio of women to men in poor households increased from 108 women for every 100 men in 1997 to 117 women for every 100 men in 2012, despite declining poverty rates for the whole region.”

We did a lot in Trinidad and Tobago to improve the situation, but plenty more can be done.

Women are the salt of every family. A lot of our women maintain their children on a single basis. It is important that we take cognizance of the fact that helping people who need the help, especially single mothers. If we can find ways and means to assist them, it means that along the line their children will be beneficiaries of the assistance that we give as a people and as a government. I ask the Government to look at ways and means that they can assist the poor and the vulnerable in whatever way and whatever fashion you may find in your budgets to

deal with the areas.

We must at all times find ways and means to reduce hunger in our society. To me, nobody should go without a square meal. We did wonderful as a country and as a people in feeding the children with the School Feeding Programme. We could find a way to increase the School Feeding Programme to assist mothers and fathers who may need to get a meal or two meals every day. It should be through the same mechanism of school feeding to try and at least do this.

As you see, the world economy today is not what it was some time ago. We are going into hard times and the hard times will become even harder for the poor and for the dispossessed. We must find ways and means of assisting them. We have to create and be innovative in trying to establish systems that where poor people require to get a good meal, a sustainable meal, a nutritious meal, they can find somewhere to go to get this.

Most of our young boys and men are at risk. On page 31, they talked about secondary education and they made the point that in secondary education in Latin America and in the Caribbean, boys are at a disadvantage. Again, I do not want to bemoan the point of what has happened and what is happening with our young children. We must find ways of encouraging and getting those young children into a more productive way of life.

I remember passing through some bad areas, and I am not calling where, and when I saw the posters “Join a gang, it is better than a family”, I was flabbergasted. [Interruption] Yes, yes, yes. To me, when I saw that, I was with my deceased friend, Rev. Fabister David, and I said “Chubb, you see what I saw there?” He said, “Dat dere so long”. What we need to do, we have got to engage the youth. We have got to find things for them. Could we not have a national service for children

who may want to go into the various arms of law enforcement, and have service for them, first maybe doing work in reforestation, doing work in anything that could get them involved in being part of the society? If we do this it means simply that we would at least take one, five, 10, 15 out of the system and try to give them the opportunity.

Opportunity is all people look for. If we give the opportunity to these children, we may save a lot of them. We just cannot continue allowing them to pass through a system and fall through the cracks, and then where do they end up? You see it in the newspapers; it is a sad sight. At least to me it is, and I know to everybody here. We are all Trinidadians and Tobagonians; we all love our people. Let us try and work together, not work against each other.

I listened to Sen. Al-Rawi speaking about working together when it came to the areas of national security, education, health. I think it is a wonderful idea. We need to work together and not be against each other, because what would happen? A division would happen, and if the division is inside of this House or in the lower place, the division is going to be outside. Let us all try to put our collective minds together to be able to help our citizens, who surely need it.

In conclusion, Madam President, I want to again refer to this statement made by hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar when as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago she addressed the United Nations in September 2013. She strongly supported the call for collective action made by the Secretary General, hon. Ban Ki-moon. She emphasized:

We recognize the shortcomings of the MDG process and the need to embrace a new partnership involving governments, the private sector, civil society, the multilateral banks, amongst others, to advance action on

sustainable development.

I have some closing advice for the Government. I believe that this Government has important lessons to learn from the report. If it is to increase the national and regional contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals for the year 2013. First, this cannot be achieved by the Government working alone or trying to take all the credit for improvements for itself.

Like all good leaders, I must give credit where credit is due and take responsibility when things go wrong. The Government must also communicate with all of the stakeholders. It has started on a path of confrontation and government by decree rather than by dialogue. This will not help us. It will not help the people and certainly it will not help Trinidad and Tobago. The Government needs to build on the positives, not seek to destroy what could be a foundation for peace and prosperity. You cannot just toss aside all of the good things that we did and try to reinvent the wheel. The foundation for the future is in the place in water, education, health, infrastructure, poverty reduction, housing, social services, just to mention a few.

Build on them, do not discard them, because we put them there; most of all, we are in this together. At some point, and it will be very soon, the people will not listen to your present chorus of blaming us for everything that is wrong. They will say, "If there are things that are wrong, fix them. That is why we put you in power. Stop the excuses and do your job." In the end, the people will judge you by your actions and not your communication—I keep saying this all the time. The most important thing is to stay true to your promise to be a national government. Represent all the people and not a chosen few. However, the signs are ominous and the people are already suspicious; be careful, a hungry man or woman is an angry

man or woman.

I close by thanking you, Madam President, for giving me the opportunity to speak here today on this Motion that I support fully. Thank you very much.

2.30 p.m.

Sen. Foster Cummings: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to join this debate on this Motion which deals with Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations on September 25, 2015.

These goals, Madam President, flow from the Millennium Development Goals of 2000 which dealt with the eradication of extreme hunger and poverty, the achievement of universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, the reduction in child mortality, improvement in maternal health, to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, environmental sustainability and global partnership for development.

And coming out of that, Madam President, in 2015 on September 25, the UN agreed to 17 Sustainable Development Goals. These goals include some of what was mentioned in the Millennium Development, but there are some additional ones. I will just, for the purpose of the record, go through the 17 Sustainable Development Goals: no poverty; zero hunger; good health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry innovation and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on land; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnership for goals.

Madam President, this Motion is one that really should cut across all political lines.

So I think it is appropriate to commend the mover of the Motion for introducing this Motion [*Desk thumping*] so that we can engage in some discussion that would force the Opposition into a position of supporting some of the government programmes geared towards achieving these objectives. [*Desk thumping*]

On my own part, I wait to see whether having introduced such a Motion, that some of the actions that the Government will have to take would require support of the Opposition, whether we would return to this place to old talk and rhetoric from the Opposition when time comes to support the Government and its agenda. [*Desk thumping*] And that is not something that is being said for old talk because we see it over and over again and it is time that we get serious about the people's business.

When I think about the Sustainable Development Goals, Madam President, my mind goes back to these fictional characters, a cartoon on a planet called Pakaskas. It was a planet full of mountains of jellies, and seas and rivers of milk and chocolate. Some of you may be familiar with it. Yes? Inhabited by some fictional characters called the nguyamyams . They were the citizens of this planet. And essentially what they did is that they ate all day, they ate the mountains, they ate the rivers that were made of milk and chocolate, they ate the houses that were made of bread, the roads were made of cake and they just had a good meal eating none stop. They ate day in and day out. And then this nguyamyam called Inggolok warned the citizens that if they continued to eat the planet, eventually the natural resources will no longer be available and they would, of course, all die. Of course, they did not listen to Inggolok and they ate the planet away.

And therefore, Madam President, what it speaks to is responsible consumption and production in a time when we are experiencing low oil prices and when our economy is experiencing some difficulties. And whatever approach we

take must, of course, be driven by data. It is high time that the approach that we take to the development must be guided by sound information. [*Desk thumping*]

And so I was quite pleased when I looked at the website of the Ministry of Planning and Development to see that some emphasis is being given to modernizing the Central Statistical Office. And if I can just read part of what is said here by the Minister of Planning and Development, Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis, where she pledged that the Central Statistical Office will be modernized and that:

“Cabinet has approved a committee to guide the restructuring and transition of the CSO to the National Statistical Institute.”

And therefore, we can expect that the plans that we have put out in terms of our policy document, which again I recommend as good reading, [*Desk thumping*] as well as the budget presentation given by the hon. Minister of Finance that, as you see the Government plans roll out, you will know that these projects are not just being pulled out of the sky, but that it is data-driven and will be targeting specific areas within the community for development towards the achievement of the goals mentioned earlier.

Madam President, let me just spend a little time dealing with the first Sustainable Development Goal and that deals with poverty. And a lot of times when we speak about poverty we seek to look outside of our space. In looking at television we link poverty with the pictures that we see from documentaries on television, hungry children in Asia or Africa. But in terms of these goals and the partnership with the UNDP and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, I want to bring our minds to our local situation and to look at the communities at risk within Trinidad and Tobago, Madam President.

We were all taken aback earlier this week or last week I think it was when we lost two young boys on the outskirts of Port of Spain and the national discussion started. Finger pointing took place, everybody attempting to cast some blame as to how something like this could happen in Trinidad and Tobago.

And I want to lay on the table today, Madam President, that it all points right back to the question of poverty and education. All points right back there. And maybe it is time because sometime in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago somebody made a suggestion and the suggestion received severe criticism, but the suggestion had to do with whether it was not time for us to pay particular attention to at-risk youth in Trinidad and Tobago, in particular in certain urban centres in Trinidad. And whether it was not time for a national discussion on a development plan specifically targeting the areas that every report—the UN report continually year after year referred to these at-risk areas.

So on the one hand we give a lot of attention in the media to the negatives and the issues of crime coming out of these areas, but when it comes to discussing how do we treat with it, then you find that you get criticism if there is some focus on how do we specifically target to treat with that problem. And everybody knows that there is a problem.

So maybe, Madam President, it is time for us to engage, and with the support of the media, discussion on how do we target and deal with the specific problems in certain urban centres in Trinidad and Tobago. Am I talking about at Sea Lots and Katanga? Am I talking about Laventille? Am I talking about Morvant? I think that we can all answer that question.

Madam President, the question of hunger and good health and well-being, we need not look very far. Let me draw our attention—because good health and

well-being, Madam President, is of course, necessary if we are to have a very productive nation. But before I go to that item, let me just deal with the question of education.

Now it is no secret—and I am not trying to score political points here—but the fact is, it is the history of our country that the education foundation in this country was laid by the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] It was a vision of Dr. Eric Williams, the founder of the PNM and the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, who for some reason we do not give enough credit and in the curriculum in the schools we find that, in terms of our history, enough is not said about where we came from. Who are people who initiated the foundation for the education system that we now have?

I was looking at a report and the report compliments Trinidad and Tobago on its literacy rate. Now that could not have happened by accident, Madam President. It is because of the sound principles of the PNM that were put in place [*Desk thumping*] where special emphasis was placed on education. And the PNM pledges in this current dispensation to develop a culture of discipline, production and tolerance. Do you remember those words? For those of us who recall, discipline, tolerance and production, we were taught that in primary school, as the watchwords that we should follow as young children.

2.45 p.m.

And these core values, it is time for us to go back to these core values. And so a large part of the budget, you would realize, I think it is the second or third largest chunk of the budget, will be going towards education. Early Childhood Centres, construction of new primary schools, construction and expansion of existing secondary schools, the maintenance of the GATE Programme to allow

tertiary students to continue to access assistance from the Government. [*Desk thumping*] And this is all the initiative of the People's National Movement Government. [*Desk thumping*]

I listened to the previous speaker, because one of the Sustainable Development Goals deals with clean water, and I know from the other side there is always this talk about water for all and I know that our friends from the rural communities, deep-south Trinidad and other areas will know that water for all that was promised never materialized, and mention was made of the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources. But I pass through Chaguanas from time to time on that back road just around by the police station that takes you in the direction of the court house, and there is a massive warehouse facility, not a warehouse, a storage facility, it is open, it is not covered. And over the last four or five years I have noticed several piles of PVC pipes stocked there for the last four or five years. It must be millions of dollars in pipe. How does that translate into water for the citizen in Moruga and in Guayaguayare and in Cedros and in Toco? So it is not—somebody said pipe for all. If you are saying water for all—what I want to say is that, yes we tried to look, the Senator spoke about looking at the good and we will always try to look at the good, but every time you try to examine one of the policies you must be sidetracked by the corruption involved in the process.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Inescapable.

Sen. F. Cummings: Inescapable to every issue, every programme, every plan that you try to look at to say okay, well here they may have been trying to do something worthwhile for the country. The first thing that hits you in your face is the corrupt practices that were involved. What is that pipe doing in Chaguanas in

that facility for the last four or five years? Millions of dollars in pipe and I understand from somebody who knows better than me, that is substandard. But the reason it is still there is because it cannot be used. Because money was paid for it but it is bad pipe. Not surprising, not surprising at all. Lots of bad pipe. So somebody needs to check how all that pipe got there and the procedure and the process that led for that pipe being stored there, millions of dollars.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: And whether it was good or bad.

Sen. F. Cummings: And whether the pipe is actually good or bad pipe.

Madam President, somebody mentioned health care. And, in fact, when we speak about health care it is not about building white elephants. And let me just say in response to a concern by the previous speaker, that this Government is not about abandoning projects and leaving projects where public money was spent, incomplete for four and five years because you did not like the idea or because you are trying to score a political point.

When we speak about health care we speak about making sure the system is efficient so that when the citizen requires care and attention they do not have to spend 12 hours waiting at emergency to get to see a doctor or to get attended to. Of course, there are significant problems in the health care system but before we move to taking staff from existing facilities to place them in a new facility just so that we can say we have opened a Children's Hospital, we need to first fix the problem in the existing facilities. And so do not expect to see the building standing there for five years as the Brian Lara Stadium was left to stand. It is not the PNM way of doing business. We value the people's money and at the appropriate time the building will be put to suitable use for the use of the citizens of central Trinidad and for the use of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, I looked at some information from the nation's encyclopedia and here is what it had to say. I am going to just read part of it:

“The richest citizens of Trinidad are to be seen in the hillside suburbs of Port of Spain, where large villas boast satellite dishes and swimming pools. Trinidad and Tobago's rich tend to live a transnational lifestyle, with assets and interests in the United States. Shopping trips to Miami or Caracas are commonplace, and some upper-class families prefer to send their children abroad for education rather than to the local University of the West Indies.

The other extreme is to be found in deprived inner-city ghettos such as Laventille, where the poorest members of society live. It is here, in areas of ramshackle shacks and self-built cinder-block houses, that the worst problems of poverty, unemployment, and crime grow unabated.”

So in our discussion on dealing with poverty, Madam President, we have to take into consideration how we are viewed by those who do not reside on our shores. It goes further to state that—to give a geographic distribution of how poverty is viewed throughout the island. It says that:

“Most of the country's poor can be located in”—deep south. Areas of La Brea—“Siparia, Princes Town”—and other areas north of—“San Juan/Laventille and Tunapuna/Piarco.”

I want to say, Madam President, that wherever it exists in Trinidad and Tobago it is the objective of this Government to touch every life, every 1.3 million citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Our programmes will be geared towards ensuring that, and even our development plan which is the 2030 development plan which is an improvement on the 2020 development plan, speaks towards a developed society by the year

2030 and certainly in keeping with all of the Sustainable Development Goals.

So many times, Madam President, in the rural communities we find that the programmes of central government does not adequately respond to the needs of our citizens in the rural communities. And for those of us who come from far-flung areas we will understand that priority sometimes would be given to the issues that affect the urban centres. And that is why the policy of this Government and you would have realized that in the formation of the Cabinet and the Government, that there is a Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government. [*Desk thumping*]

What is the intention of this Ministry? When the Minister spoke he did mention that it is the intention to decentralize some of the services of the central government and put those responsibilities with the regional corporations so that in areas that fall outside of the urban centres services of central government will be more accessible because they will be handled by the regional corporation instead of coming directly from a central Ministry of Government. So for instance, if there is a bridge broken down in Mayaro, whereas before it would be the Ministry of Works and Transport headquartered in Port of Spain that would have to take that on as a project to bring relief to the citizens out in Mayaro and Guayaguayare. Now you will have a situation where the regional corporation will take the lead in providing that infrastructural development. [*Desk thumping*] And that is the kind of Government that this new PNM administration, that is the kind of governance that we will give to Trinidad and Tobago to ensure that we give good service to the people. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, we all know that one of the basic needs of human existence is shelter and providing housing and adequate accommodation for our citizens. It is a matter of record and it is noted in the manifesto which is now

government policy, that the PNM has always placed a lot of emphasis on the provision of housing.

As a matter of fact, during the period 2002 to 2010 the PNM constructed over 25,000 housing units for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It is the only government that has placed significant emphasis on housing and at every occasion that the PNM has been in government we have always emphasized the need for public housing and partnering also with the private sector.

In this term, Madam President, the Government will focus on the accelerated high density housing programme and for those citizens who ordinarily would not be able to qualify for a mortgage, the issue of housing is still a very important one for them. So the programme of the rent-to-own has been introduced to assist low income households to start, of course, with paying a rental, a small rental for the property and over time as circumstances improve and the household income increases they will then be able to, it is expected of course, qualify for a mortgage and move on to home ownership as circumstances improve.

Another programme under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development is the subsidized mortgage loans. And so someone interested in owning a home in the public sector will be entitled to pay the lowest interest rates on the market which is just 2 per cent, PNM policy, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*] There is also the facility of the housing grant so that those persons who already own their homes and would need to do some sort of improvement and cannot afford to do it can access a housing grant, and I think the maximum is about \$15,000 to do some improvements in terms of the infrastructure in which they reside.

3.00 p.m.

I want to speak also to the National Settlements Programme, because we know that it had become a norm for the previous government to issue what many in the regularized squatting developments would know as a Certificate of Comfort. But, of course, with this Certificate of Comfort all you were assured of is that you would not be put out of the premises. You could not go to the bank, you could not access a loan to do much needed improvements to your house constructed on this regularized lot. The PNM Government will ensure that all these communities are regularized and that in these regularized areas, that squatters are given proper titles to the space that they occupy, and this, of course, will allow them to live a much better quality of life.

Madam President, one of the Sustainable Development Goals speaks to peace, justice and strong institutions, and I want to spend a couple minutes on that mainly because a speaker earlier on—it would have been this week or last week—mentioned that as long as the current Opposition remains in the Opposition, that they will not lend any support to the acceptance of the CCJ as the final appellate court for Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Senator: Shameful. Shame.

Sen. F. Cummings: And that startled me, especially because, one, the CCJ was established—the headquarters was established here based on agreement by a UNC administration. It was the Basdeo Panday administration that lobbied for, and got Port of Spain as the headquarters of the CCJ. [*Interruption*] And immediately upon assuming the role of Opposition when the PNM was swept into Government to rescue Trinidad and Tobago, the song changed, and all of a sudden, the UNC fell out of love with the CCJ.

No longer was the CCJ good. In Opposition, you want CCJ; in government, CCJ is not good. When you get back into government, you say that, “Okay, yes CCJ, but only for civil matters”.

You know, it is just a kind of uncertainty as to what the real policy is. But let us ask ourselves a question: How many of our citizens can really access the services of the Privy Council situated in London? If we are speaking about justice for all, how many of our citizens—

Madam President: Senator, you have five more minutes.

Sen. F. Cummings: Thank you, Madam President. How many of our citizens requiring justice from the final court of appeal of the land can afford to pay a high-priced lawyer, airfare to London, accommodation, pay a Queen’s Counsel? If you feel that you are aggrieved and you really want to get justice, how many of our citizens can really afford to do that?

Well, we are certain about a couple citizens who have been able to go there quite often, but for the regular man in the street, how many can really afford that? And so, I was taken aback to hear that statement, that even before any discussion is taken between Government and Opposition to agree on a way forward, the UNC says, “We are not supporting that at all”, and we have to accept the word of the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate because, of course, he is a senior Member of the Opposition. The poor man on the street would hope that the UNC would have a change of heart with respect to its position on the CCJ.

So, Madam President, in closing, I started off by saying that it was a very good initiative for the mover of this Motion, having attended on September 25, to come back to Trinidad and Tobago and to initiate

discussion in this regard, but it is our hope on this side that as the Government rolls out its agenda and its plans for the development of Trinidad and Tobago, and to ensure the achievement of these Sustainable Development Goals, that the required support from the Opposition will be forthcoming if they are serious about working towards the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Sen. Ramkissoon. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Melissa Ramkissoon: Madam President, I rise to join in this debate related to the Private Motion brought forward on the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals which we seek to achieve within the next 15 years, so by 2030. For the interest of time and to avoid excess repetition of other Members' contributions—as on the first day of the debate the hon. Franklin Khan listed the 17 Sustainable Development Goals so I will not be listing or covering all the goals in this debate, but highlighting the goals I believe Trinidad and Tobago can achieve.

In relation to the sustainable development, many may have these questions: What are our priorities? What does the world, the next or a future generation want to see? Most importantly, how are we to achieve an income that is in excess or is more than our expenses? This is, to ensure our country's sustainability.

This debate comes at an opportune time as our country faces a financial crisis with falling oil prices and we seek to venture into other areas of diversification for our survival. But we need to diversify in line with our global commitments to save our planet. We are given the opportunity to set

our economic goals while ensuring a people-centred involvement and environmental preservation. We, as our country leaders, need to decide if we will adhere to these 17 Sustainable Development Goals as our strategic objectives, as this would lead to modifying our legislation and this will impact on the operations of our businesses, such as our industrialized estates.

Madam President, I must say I find these goals very ambitious and covers all the areas we, as a nation, would like to improve in. But how do we achieve the goals is the most important question. And is it the best way forward as it not only affects us today but it affects the future generation and the leaders of tomorrow? So let me take a moment, Madam President. What is sustainability and what does it mean to us? There is a very good explanation of this in the Brundtland Commission Report that states:

“...sustainable development: ‘Development that meets the needs of’—the present—‘without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’.”

So, Madam President, why is this debate important? How does this affect us today? How does this affect our laws? What is our responsibility here in relation to these Sustainable Development Goals? Parliamentarians are responsible for legislation, policy oversight and budget approval. We can influence the shape and content in policy formulation, the development of legislation and the implementation at a national level. New, tailored legislation is needed in most developing countries such as ours to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy development, to create regulatory frameworks and potential financial investments.

Parliamentarians’ leadership role will be critical to support sustainable

development and energy efficiency as well as in defining the budgetary requirements needed to mobilize our national resources towards financing these Sustainable Development Goals. So parliamentarians have the means to ensure robust oversight, accountability, transparency and strengthening of the institutes of good governance at country level. We are responsible for developing policies and promoting public and private investment in projects to ensure achievement of these Sustainable Development Goals.

So let us look at us, Trinidad and Tobago. *The Environmental Sustainability Index*, 2005, Trinidad and Tobago was ranked 139 of 146 countries. In 2013, the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness—Trinidad and Tobago's human, cultural and natural resources ranked 95th out of 140 countries. This is not favourable. But let us look at what James Baldwin said:

“Not everything that is faced could be changed;”—not everything—
“but nothing can be changed until we face it.”

So I would like to now look at some of these Sustainable Development Goals that were developed by the UN. In relation to Goal 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Trinidad and Tobago has received a favourable ranking in this, and I was very proud. It was 49th in 142 countries, according to the Gender Gap Index, 2015, which shows that Trinidad and Tobago ranked high in equality amongst men and women for the categories of health and survival, education attainment in the secondary and tertiary level, and this is, indeed, applaudable, as every child is entitled to an education, despite the fact that we still live in a country where some organizations are a bit archaic, where we believe that some professions

should be more done by a male as opposed to a female.

Despite the ranking, we also know that in certain fields it is most alarming in this day and age. Being a mechanical engineer, I was once told by my supervisor that—after being hired as an engineer—I should not look at this field in inspection because I have to climb ladders. That was appalling. How is it that you are hiring me as an engineer and then telling me I cannot do the job? I do not understand this. I went to school to do engineering. I expect to climb a ladder. I expect to go into equipment. So, again, it is a thinking. Well, fortunately, this person has retired so we may have that out of the system now. But persons should not have this archaic age of thinking, because this is not what we want to see. We are educating all, we expect equal opportunities for all.

3.15 p.m.

Madam President, one way to achieve all these goals that were spoken about earlier is to set out to accomplish proper documented consultations, and this was started by our very own, Trinidad and Tobago, by hosting the Regional Workshop on Sustainability, Energy and Development which was held from December 07—10, 2015. This workshop was held in Trinidad, which sought to bring countries and citizens of the world together to embark on new paths to improve the lives of their people.

So one method to ensure we accomplish our set goals is to engage key stakeholders to develop a strategic plan in segments of five years—as we have a Government change every five years—with clear annual milestones or growth indicators to quantitatively measure our growth in the areas we have targeted to achieve. By engaging NGOs, private parties and public stakeholders, you will be

motivating persons to develop an action plan within their various social circles. These action plans can vary from simple measures such as recycling, waste reduction, teaching their communities to keep their surroundings clean by not littering, or even actively achieving Goal No. 3, which is, “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”.

There are many health fairs held throughout Trinidad and Tobago and various health walks to educate and promote healthy living especially now in the Carnival season it is on everyone’s agenda to get fit, but healthy living or healthy lifestyle is not just a one-month programme. It is a lifestyle change. A group of persons who I work with, we believe in this healthy lifestyle, Goal No. 3, and every month we get our cholesterol checked, our sugar checked, our body mass index checked to keep in part with monitoring yourself and your achievements as you go by. So this is definitely something that we can all do as individuals.

Madam President, Goal No. 1, “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”. In September 2015, countries took the opportunity to set an ambitious framework to end global poverty. Building on the progress made towards the eight millennium development goals, Trinidad and Tobago’s most recent indicators said that poverty levels of 16.7 per cent which was stated in 2005 survey of living conditions, and it was 14.8 per cent that was published in the 2008/2009 household budgetary survey. One way to curb poverty is through education. You teach a man to fish, you feed him for a lifetime. I am a strong believer of this. Education is the way.
[Desk thumping]

There are many areas with limited skilled professionals, hence creating a more educated nation bears more fruitfulness and alleviates poverty, even addictions and depressions, because you give the person a new meaning to live. So

by educating people you can prevent child birth, deaths; you can prevent persons dying from curable diseases because you teach them, you educate them, they know about clinics, they know about going and getting themselves checked out. They are now empowered because of education.

Madam President, from the Central Statistical Office, 2011, it states that Trinidad and Tobago has approximately 534 street dwellers—street dwellers, persons living on the street. That accounts for approximately less than 1 per cent of our population, but how do we propose to deal with these individuals? We cannot send them to institutions because these are not permanent facilities for these persons. Yes, education empowers these persons, but who is responsible for empowering this group of persons; or are we to ignore them and only remember them during Christmas time? Goal No. 1 seeks to leave no person behind.

By accomplishing Goal No. 8 which states “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment by providing jobs for all”, and how do we do this? By training persons, equipping them with skills. In Trinidad, we have many skilled centres available throughout. Even the community centres have programmes like drapery courses, cooking, floral arrangements, even basic computer training, and we can conduct a needs assessment in the different areas to find out if we want to sustain jobs like in woodworking or in our textile industry. All these are jobs and can reduce this poverty rating and unemployment rating.

Madam President, our developing country also faces a challenge where many persons in society look only for high income jobs, in construction or in the oil and gas sector. I am sure—well, maybe the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries might answer better than I, but persons are not willing to go into farming

because they do not want to do the work. They only want to harvest or reap. This is not an advertised job or a job that many young persons want to achieve. So how can we help the situation? If one takes a look or walk through the mechanical workshop at the University of the West Indies, one would see a sorrel picker, peas splitter, an automatic coconut water extractor, and I am sure there are many more projects since I have been there and I am sure there is much merit to implementing these projects.

Every year one student has to do a workshop course, and every student has to make by themselves a project such as—well mine was a bearing puller, and with much fear for my fingers I successfully made the bearing puller that works. So this empowered me to make something locally. The point I am trying to make is, we can empower our students by actually signing on with them when they do these final year projects, to introduce them into agriculture society or our agriculture industry so we can use the machinery or the technology, because if they do not want to toil and be in the sun, well there are technologies that we could use now in our day and age that we are building here to use in the field, and this is something easily available.

So, Madam President, information technology infrastructure also has a risk of being outdated in next 15 years. However, with technology, you can engage international participation and you can even achieve foreign investments. I brought to this honourable Senate before the example of our public systems using very outdated systems that are very slow—for example, filling out for your permit a form that should be online—and it seems every time we ask for more transparency we introduce more paperwork, but not in this day and age. We need to embrace our technology. We have programmes teaching persons to use basic computer skills

and we also have hotspots available throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Why are we not using this to achieve our Sustainable Development Goals and to even assist our dying industries?

Madam President, another area where Trinidad and Tobago can benefit is from the projects outlined in the budget documents 2016, laid before this Senate. In the *State Enterprises' Investment Programme Booklet 2016*, on page 67 it states:

“A Market Study for LABIDCO’s Administrative Complex”—which should—“cost”—approximately—“\$0.2 million; and
A Strategic Study for New LABIDCO Growth Model...estimated cost”—about—“\$2.0 million;”

These projects, instead of being done, they have been deferred, and I think there is a lot of merit in conducting these studies as it can utilize the resources we have available in LABIDCO because we do receive goods at LABIDCO port, we do have many contractors set up at this port, and we need to see what areas we can explore to create jobs as well as to see how we could even achieve some foreign exchange in this area. So I would like to urge the Government to look at those studies in the LABIDCO facility.

Madam President, goal 13 states, “Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impact”. In December 2015, 25,000 representatives of Government’s Intergovernmental Organizations, NGOs and civil society met in Paris for the 21st Conference of the Parties to reach a legally binding global agreement to tackle climate change. The use of fossil fuels has significant health environmental impacts, and from their report at the Conference they stated that more than five million premature deaths annually are attributed by the air pollution and other energy related effects. Our choice of energy sources has a clear impact

on the life support capacity of our planet and our climate.

Madam President, our industry has flares that emits multiple gases. How do we reduce these gas emissions as this is part of the system? We have laws but we do not enforce them in reusing this burning—well okay. The flares are used to burn off excess gases when there is a plant offset or upset; or there is some shutdown that is going to take place, they will vent the excess gases and burn them. So, one, you are wasting and, two, you are not being very environmentally friendly.

We allow this in a lot of our industries, offshore and onshore. Now how are we, the parliamentarians, going to legislate against this? There are systems that can be placed in to reroute these gas emissions to make sure we reuse them and not vent excessively in the environment, but we need to figure out if this is the way we want to go. Do we want to have control of our climate change; is Trinidad and Tobago really being impacted on by this; and do we want to make a better tomorrow by regulating it?

In 2010 Trinidad and Tobago adapted a National Climate Change Policy. One of the challenges outlined that was highlighted in November 2011 report, by the NGOs, was lack of legislation and enforcement for industries that are contributing to these gas emissions. So again, we need to legislate in order to get a better tomorrow.

Madam President, a sustainable stronghold such as Europe—France, they significantly reduced their country's greenhouse gases by having aggressive legislation that helps to keep the air quality high for humans and active fisheries management programme. This was a success. So we can see from our worldwide neighbours that this works. Aggressive legislation does work. I do understand there are many challenges to us achieving these Sustainable Development Goals.

3.30 p.m.

Some constraints and challenges listed were: uncertainties in present assessment of climate change and sea level rise impacts in Trinidad and Tobago is unknown; the inability of absence of data relevant to climate change, particularly historical data. So, Madam President, we do have challenges to address before we could legislate.

From the reports of the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States 2015, National Report, Trinidad and Tobago shared its commitment to playing its part as a responsible member of the global community by continuing efforts geared towards pursuing policy and development of initiatives to increase the use of new and innovative technologies that have lower levels of emissions, encouraging the use of clean energy technologies such as natural gas and clean production technology, encouraging the use of renewable energies that have zero emissions and adopting more energy efficient technologies and practices. So we spoke it, we wrote it, now let us do it.

So, Madam President, let me just touch briefly on waste management. There exists—and Sen. Mahabir spoke about it earlier—the Beverage Containers Bill that was amended in 2011 and the Draft Waste Prevention and Recycling Policy 2010. Slow implementation of our waste initiatives and poor legal framework for legislating support. Our country has a national environment policy since 2006 but our biggest flaw—not only in the Sustainable Development Goals but at all levels—is enforcement of our laws.

Madam President, Goal 11:

“Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe...and sustainable” We here, in Trinidad and Tobago, do not face population challenges like some

countries in the world such as China and India and we should be very grateful for this. Because these countries may limit their family sizes and some may say that is very infringement of human rights. Well, one lesson than can be learnt from looking at the top sustainable countries in the world, such as Costa Rica which is known for their ecotourism, for their dense rainforests and their beautiful beaches, the environmental performance of their sustainability in their country is driven through both the Ministry of environment, energy and telecommunication and the Government's mass conservation efforts under their national park programme. So we saw that not only do they have strong legislation, but they have a designated group that studies and monitors the sustainable development and its achievements.

Another method of achieving sustainable development is by selling our human resource internationally. I spoke about this before in this honourable House in relation to using the retirees' skills and experience to support our industry. We tend to use consultants internationally, we hire them and we pay top dollar for— [Interruption] Sen. Small is saying he is one of them. [Laughter] We pay top dollar for their skills. Why can the Government not look at putting together a skill-based organization, a group and contract out the services internationally? Shell does it; Exxon does it. Many companies do it. So why can we not look at this to achieve revenue for our country? And there are many persons who are available or willing to give more and they are not being used and they might have to go into other— they tend to leave the country eventually.

So, Madam President, in conclusion, these Sustainable Development Goals emphasize the importance of socioeconomic and environmental aspects in our developing country. These United Nations developed goals can assist our country, Trinidad and Tobago, in developing our own agenda to meet our needs without

harming the environment or society in which we live and by including more technology, we can keep the future generations in our plans. As Albert Einstein said, once we accept our limits, we go beyond them.

So, Madam President, I urge you all to go beyond our bound limits and I look forward to seeing the implementation and the rollout of the Sustainable Development Goals. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Wayne Sturge: Madam President, thank you for the opportunity to join this debate. I intend to use my limited time to deal with four of the Goals, more particularly Goal No. 4 which, in essence, states “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”; No. 10 which deals with reducing “inequality within and among countries”; No. 11 which deals with making “human settlements inclusive” and safe and so on, and No. 16 which deals with “access to justice”.

Now, if I may deal with the last sustainable goal first and make reference to a misleading impression given by the speaker on the other side. In an effort to deal with the CCJ and the Privy Council, the Senator on the other side gave the impression that somehow only a select few can afford or have access to justice at the level of the Privy Council. That statement is indicative of a level of ignorance because that is not the case.

When the speaker made reference to replacing the Privy Council with the CCJ and when he gave the impression that only a select few would have access to that kind of quality justice, he made that statement in the context of former Prime Minister, Basdeo Panday, signing an agreement to have the CCJ headquartered in Trinidad and Tobago, and gave the impression that by dint of sour grapes alone, he sought to renege on that agreement or on that directive. But he then went on to

regale us about an initiative sought by the last administration where we pursued an accommodation whereby we would have limited membership of the CCJ but with respect to civil matters only.

Now, let me make this quite clear because this misinformation is extremely dangerous. You do not give the impression that it is expensive for the ordinary man to use the CCJ when quite clearly it is not. What the last Prime Minister sought to indicate is, in civil cases, quite clearly, what one has to lose—so that I do not speak over anyone's head—what you stand to lose in the civil arena is very different from what you stand to lose in the criminal arena. So, in the criminal arena, you stand to lose your life, you stand to go to jail for life, you can be hanged. And for the most vulnerable of our society, the last Prime Minister, hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, was in essence saying that the most vulnerable should have access to the Privy Council, because, at the end of the day, there are very different issues in the civil jurisdiction as opposed to the criminal jurisdiction.

What the speaker did not tell this country is that when vulnerable persons approach the Privy Council, they pay not one red cent. [*Desk thumping*] He does not know. “He red and he ready and doh know.” But he gave the impression that there is a cost so that only Ish and Steve could afford but the ordinary man cannot. That is not true. Totally false. What he did not go on to say—and for the sake of fairness, he should have gone on to say that—there is a cost attached to using the Caribbean Court of Justice. What he did not go on to say is that we are actually members of the CCJ in the sense that we use it in its original jurisdiction. What we were simply seeking to do is have access to justice for the most vulnerable in matters where they can lose their life or liberty. So I simply wanted to correct that. I do intend before the debate ends to make reference to access to justice once more,

but I want to deal with other pressing matters.

You see, Madam President, when we say or when they say that they intend to pursue these laudable objectives, one of them, objective No. 11, make settlements inclusive and safe and so on, that has to be taken with a pinch of salt and no more because if we use anymore salt, it might be VAT inclusive. *[Laughter]* You cannot take them seriously. They say one thing and do something totally different. The PNM is a well-oiled propaganda machine. So in order to make settlements inclusive and safe and let us deal with the safety aspect because safety is a right guaranteed by our Constitution and we ought to take that Sustainable Development Goal seriously. Are we anymore safe? Because they gave us the impression, when they were in Opposition, that they had all the answers. Now we see that they are not just clueless, they are arrogant and clueless and they are plagiarizing initiatives used in the past and not using the law to legitimize their procedures.

When the People's Partnership decided to introduce into the Parliament the—what we called loosely the soldier Bill in 2013, they vehemently voted against it. They said soldiers were killing machines. They sought to demonize them that they had no other brain but to follow instructions and kill. What we were simply seeking, in order to supplement a shortage of personnel on the grounds, was to give them powers of arrest where it made sense. Because if you do not give them powers of arrest and they do not have now, they are simply on the ground posing. So that is what we have now, a Government that would, in order to comply with Sustainable Development Goal No. 11, put soldiers on the ground to pose. The same thing they objected to in 2013, they now want to come and do without the cover of law. *[Desk thumping]*

Then “dey doh want to tell yuh it have ah spike”. Be honest with the population. If there is a murder every day, and then one day you get five, and next day you get seven, then what do you call it? Is that not a spike? If that is not a spike, I do not know what is.

3.45 p.m.

So when they say that they intend to make human settlements safe, they cannot be taken seriously because under their watch, bloody September 2015, the highest murder rates. They prevailed over the highest murder rates in our country’s history. Then they come to the Parliament and give the impression that the appointment of a substantive Commissioner of Police would be the panacea, that just by appointing a Commissioner of Police to act, not just to act, to be substantive, somehow crime would go down. You know what that is—I almost said members of the jury. You know what that is, Madam President?—that is simply blame game.

So when the murders continue unabated, they say, “Well blame he, the Commissioner of Police”. Let me tell you why it is disingenuous to give the impression that a Commissioner of Police would make all the difference. In 2008 we had a substantive Commissioner of Police in the person of Trevor Paul, and that was the highest number of murders ever.

But, Madam President, I can say where I live, I am safe. Where I used to live, I am not safe. In fact, a couple years ago I journeyed into Serraneau Road, Belmont and my friend Dr. Henry knows where that is, because he lives not too far. He hails from Gonzales—and thinking I was born and bred in Serraneau Road, I will be welcomed. It is only because of absent mindedness I did not freeze, but whilst I was driving off, and the car was rolling with its own momentum, looking

in the wing mirror, “ah gun man sneaking up on meh and I from Serraneau Road”.

I feel it. You know why? Because when I get to Sustainable Development Goal No. 4, you will see why we have reached where we have reached, and that is education. So I have seen so many primary school classmates go to either, well, one is in Rikers Island serving life. I have a couple others serving life, a couple others serving long sentences. A good deal of them dead and the others, well, they are in the police service. *[Laughter]* So they have told me when they went to Belmont Secondary, you all went there to play “police and tief”. *[Laughter]* You went Belmont too?

Sen. Samuel: Careful.

Sen. W. Sturge: Wow! Now, Madam President, there is something to be said about whether they are serious about reducing inequality within our country. The goal says within and among, so as a collective, we will seek to reduce inequality between or among first of all Caricom Member States and so on. Well, a good start would be doing what Antigua and Barbuda did, which is forget about income tax entirely; personal income tax. If Antigua and Barbuda can decide they do not need personal income tax, they do not need to tax the average man, and they have no fossil fuels, then why can we not? That is a very good start.

Now, let me tell you why this is important, Madam President, why I speak about reducing inequality, because during the day you pass people on the street, and you do not know where they are going to. They are dressed up, they look nice, and then eventually you find out they are going to a place with no electricity, no running water. Again, I am going to bring Serraneau Road. Sen. Solomon would know, during the local government we campaigned there. Imagine in this day and age you have persons in Serraneau Road, not many, but it is wrong to have three or

four families with no running water, no electricity and now—that is a PNM stronghold. If you look at all the PNM strongholds, is only one song “ah could sing for yuh, yuh know”. It brings to mind—“becau ah pass through Belmont” last night, knowing that this was coming up today.

As God would have it, God works in mysterious ways. The song that comes to mind for this debate is a song by Burning Spear, which I heard last night. “If ah did not hear it, ah wudden tink about it”. It happened while I was having a conversation with a resident. He was speaking about the state in which we find ourselves in this country, and the fact that the Government has its priorities wrong. He was speaking about not just VAT on school books, not just the fact that they stopped free school books, he was talking about two other things that, one, somebody wants to rewrite his own history book, because there is this plan, they need to rewrite history. He was talking about how the Prime Minister said, “Well, this is not a reading country”.

Well, immediately when I thought about this, I said to myself, if you want to realize revenue from VAT, and you increase it on books, and people do not read, then what revenue do you really expect to get? If people do not read, they are not going to buy the books to read it. It is not like long ago people use to buy *Encyclopædia Britannica* and just “puh it up on dey space saver, so dey look good. People doh have time. Ain’t nobody got time for dat”, as the youths would say.

He was telling me about one of the persons—and I deliberately made mention of Jimmy Aboud the other day. I would not make mention of it today. Simply to say that he was telling me, “Listen, you were talking about persons with \$6,000. Why do you not talk about the persons earning \$3,000 and less?” He said, “\$3,000 is a joke”. He sought to tell me what you get for cutting cloth in Jimmy

About. When he told me, I said: “That has to be slavery”.

So, when you consider the inequality that exists in this country, and you consider what the opportunities are for the ordinary man to get out of that rut, because make no bones about it, all of my friends, although we had book grant long time, I did not know how it used to work, but somehow they used to come to school without books. I used to wonder if the book grant was something you could cash and spend, because they were really hard up. I reflect on them all now. Mervyn Seebaran, now dead. I reflect on their opportunities, those who were able to make use of an education, those who could not because when “dey reach home, dey hah to tote water” and a whole lot of other burdens. So that the time to do homework is by candle light, and then they cannot even do it, because they do not have the books, think of them when we think about the Sustainable Goals listed here.

So you know what the Burning Spear song is? “Ah cyar sing, and ah would not sing, and ah doh know de lyrics too much, but ah hear it last night”, in the context of the PNM: “*Like dey want we to be stupid*. Da’is de name ah de song”. [Desk thumping] “*Like dey want we to be stupid*” [Sen. Sturge sings the lyrics], and I felt after that, the only other tune I could think of, because I really do not know anything about Burning Spear, Madam President.

I was actually thinking about when I am cogitating this thing in my mind, about how they are treating with education and the pressures they are going to put on the ordinary man, with respect to education, and wanting to write their own history books. I could only come up with a different song, which we will do in five years to “*chase de crazy bald head out ah town*”, but it was a song about brainwashed education, making them fools, and that is what they are going to

ensure, because if you keep them as fools, they will not vote for you.

The demographics are changing and what helps people, is access to information, access to the world stage, and when people—education is not teaching them what to think, but how to think and providing them with all of the information, so they can make choices, but this Government is going to ensure that that does not happen. This Government is not serious about Development Goal No. 4. Madam President, can I ask, with your kind leave, how I am doing with time?

Madam President: Twenty more minutes.

Hon. Senator: Oooooohhh! [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. W. Sturge: “Allyuh bawling?” [*Crosstalk*] “Dey begging for mercy”.

Sen. Ameen: They will cry “yuh” know.

Sen. W. Sturge: No, she would not cry. Obama did not cry this week. So she would not cry this week.

Madam President: Sen. Sturge, no, address the Chair. Continue please.

Sen. W. Sturge: I am sorry, but they are disturbing me. I am sorry. Yes. Now, Madam President, I am lucky to be where I am, and my uncle who is a hard-core PNM—[*Interruption and laughter*] no, he is a hard-core PNM, who the only place he reached, was to run a URP gang. So “he eh dat smart. He telling me”, Madam President, “that I am ungrateful for PNM education”. So I say to him, “Ah say but listen, look at Pinhead and all de others who had PNM education, dey dead”. Sen. Solomon would bear me out; “dey dead”.

Sen. Solomon: Sean Price.

Sen. W. Sturge: Sean Price, Pinhead and the list could go on; dead. And few people in that neighbourhood could make a difference because they had an opportunity, and there is a difference that you can see between those who really

have it hard, and those who have at least an extended family, in the sense of a parent or a grandparent in terms of support; family support. So what we have to do is strengthen the family.

Let me regale you, Madam President, with some differences that I see. We heard in the budget free Wi-Fi, but how does that make sense if you do not have a computer? How does that make sense? That makes absolutely no sense. I feel like I am in the *Twilight*—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: Access.

Sen. W. Sturge: I feel—access? Well, yes, you can have access to Wi-Fi. There is Wi-Fi right here, but my iPad cannot log on to it. In fact, I have to go to the officer after to put in a different SIM, so I could get logged on. So the short point is, at least I have an iPad or a computer to log on to Wi-Fi. So when you take away laptops, what you do?

Let me tell you, Madam President, there is a difference between the schools that the poor people go to, and the schools that—not rich, but well off people go to. So whereas in Maria Regina where my daughter goes to, and the other one went to. I am not going to send my sons there. I want them to grow up fighting in St Margaret's Boys and so on. But when you look at the difference, one school before the laptop initiative, one school had access to computers, the others did not. One school whether “mommy and daddy fighting and ting, is not good home”—had religious instructions and Civics, the other schools do not.

4.00 p.m.

So, however you “fight up” home, when you come to school you “fight up”, and if you have no access to computers you have no access to the World Wide Web. You have no access to information, and in this information epoch—not age,

epoch—those with information are those who would have the cutting edge and those who would succeed.

Regrettably, I heard the—sorry, I do not want to go into the Minister who lamented, but a Minister lamented about the fact that the prestige schools are doing better in terms of getting scholarships, and he lamented that. I have to ask, why would you lament that? There must be a reason why the prestige schools are getting scholarships and the others are not. Is it that the better teachers are at Maria Regina, and Bryn Mawr, and so on, and we send the riff-raff to the ordinary primary schools? That is not true, ordinary primary schools have very good teachers, Miss Robinson, Mr. De Leon, who taught me in primary school, very good. But if you do not have access to information, “if I have to run home by some other friend and hope he home, and then when I run Saturday morning and realize he is a Seventh-Day Adventist, then I did not do homework”, and so on.

Then you are in for a hard time, and, again, education is what will get the ordinary man out of poverty. So if education is the vehicle which would take the ordinary man out of poverty then you must be getting your priorities wrong. If you cut, you claim to save \$100 million by dealing with the textbook issue, and out of that \$100 million you take 90 and send it down Tarouba, your priorities must be wrong, because education [*Desk thumping*] is an investment that will reap rewards, not just for the person or his family, but for the wider population as a whole. That is what makes the difference. So I am lamenting how this Government is treating poor people, cutting expenditure in one way and “bigging up” the contractors down in Tarouba the next way, and, “when you hear de shout, dey tief out de material”, if what I read in papers is true.

Now, I want to almost wrap up with a nice one that I heard last night, and I

was tempted to say, Madam President, that Trinidadians really have some sort of—I do not want to say—the word is spelt penchant, but then if I say “penchant” most people would know what I am speaking about—predilection—is there another word?—proclivity, a liking; people love conspiracy theories. But “de more ah drive, and ah didn have meh Burning Spear CD so ah almost feel like ah wanted to cry”, and they were playing soft music on 97.1, and I had to turn it off to “rejigger”—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Dr. Henry: No plot. No plot. [*Laughter*]

Hon. Senator: Belmont, Belmont.

Sen. W. Sturge: It must be a Belmont man. He almost made me lose my trend in thought. That is the one man I love on that side. [*Laughter*]

Madam President, it sounded a bit bizarre but the more I thought about it, it made perfect sense in the context of already—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: Penchant?

Sen. W. Sturge: Not the penchant, in the context of him saying, well, they want to write their own history books for the primary schools so that whatever they say is history is the history. But he was talking about, not just brainwashed education but brainwashing everyone, and he was saying in context, “watch and see who going to own the last media house of mainstream media, CNMG”, which is now loosely referred to as “PNMG”. He said, “watch and see if another one of the financiers ent buy that”. So when you want mainstream news it is only what they want you to hear, and when you want the real news and you want to feel the pulse, it is social media, but if you do not have a laptop, then no social media for you.

So as he was saying, it is brainwashed education and they are going to own all the mainstream media, and they already own the two major ones, so when they

own “PNMG” it would be three.

Hon. Senator: “PNMG?” [*Laughter*]

Sen. W. Sturge: “PNMG.” Then you start to wonder if the population, when the time comes, would really be making an informed decision or not. So I am grateful to my Rastafarian friend for enlightening me, because before him I was thinking I could stand up here, pretend I was a contestant on Auntie Hazel and read out some nice development goals, and read a sociology book and come and talk and sound impressive; I am sorry but I cannot do that today. Well, I am not very impressive; I am told I am the worstdressed Senator, they say; apparently they did not see Sen. Imbert.

Sen. Ameen: He is not a Senator again, you know.

Sen. Samuel: He is not a Senator.

Sen. W. Sturge: Oh, he is not a Senator, sorry.

Madam President: Just a quick thing, Sen. Sturge. When, according to the Standing Orders, if you are referring to a Government Minister, you refer to the Minister by his designation. If you are referring to Senators in this Chamber, you refer to them by “Senator” and their name. Just a quick intervention.

Sen. W. Sturge: Yes, I am sorry, and it was a genuine mistake, because he was here last week and it is just I have gotten accustomed to him.

Madam President, as I wrap up, I am not going to even talk about VAT, simply to say that if we are going to achieve these Sustainable Development Goals, then, inherent and running through all of them is the concept of quality standard of living. Now, 1991 was the third time I was interested in politics in my young life; I loved NJAC in '81, NAR in '86, but in 1991 I heard for the first time, referring to the introduction of VAT on food by the PNM, they said it was wicked and

vindictive, callous and uncaring, and now they are the ones wicked and vindictive, callous and uncaring. [*Desk thumping*] And to say simply that, with respect to food, well, the most basic items will not be subject to VAT but the others will be subject to VAT, Madam President, that does not take account of one's quality of life and the happiness index, and so on. Because, whereas you could fit a little Cadbury chocolate, or chocolate chip cookies, or a little Haagen-Dazs into your budget on a week and your children could feel nice and sweet, because Haagen-Dazs nicer than Flavorite Ice Cream, now you cannot fit none. So the general happiness, the quality of life of these citizens is going down under this administration.

I want to give one last anecdote, and I refer to, in essence, something which I noticed in the Sustainable Development Goals with respect to pregnant women and lactating mothers, and so on; and I surmise that lactating means breastfeeding. But we have gotten rid of the baby grant, and that is another initiative that helped the vulnerable, and let me tell you why. Whilst the first two children had good births and they were born in nice places, and so on, on January 22, 2014, I was here in this Parliament at 5.00 a.m. debating the Bail (Amdt.) Act, 2014, when “mini-me” crawled out into the world, my two-year old son, who turned two years old. Oh, it was last week Friday; I forgot to buy him something. He came into this world whilst I was here doing the people's business, and I had to leave from here and go to where?—Port of Spain General Hospital, because the Chief Whip then, and now Leader of Opposition Business in the Lower House, Ganga Singh, told me, “You cannot leave, the vote might come at any time”. So my girlfriend made the trek to the Port of Spain General Hospital, and I turned up there—and, again, God works in mysterious ways, because if I did not have that experience I would

not have appreciated how important the baby grant, and such initiatives are.

Next to my girlfriend's bed was this lady from Laventille and she had no supplies, came to the hospital, had no supplies. She is not dressed properly, she is going to make the baby sometime in the next few hours, no supplies whatsoever, and—well, women tend to get upset so I had to get permission of the girlfriend to go speak with the lady to see how I can assuage. [*Laughter*] No, there was no benefit for me, but what I did, Madam President, seeing—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Five more minutes, Sen. Sturge.

Sen. W. Sturge: Thank you kindly. I really do appreciate that. I am looking forward to the end; that is why I am finishing off with this anecdote. I got to interact with her and we exchanged numbers, and so on, and tried to ensure that this newborn, as far as I can reach, would have a comfortable passage into life, a comfortable existence, and one of the nurses pulled me aside and said, “Mr. Sturge, if you do that, it is a good thing you do not have children regularly because if you come here every week there is three or four cases per ward like that”. Right there and then I felt—well, I know breast milk is the best milk, and so on, but sometimes breastfeeding from what I have seen in my own home is a burdensome loving task, but burdensome, tiresome, and so on. [*Interruption*]

Sen. Ameen: Some mothers do not lactate.

Sen. W. Sturge: Yes. I felt, without even talking to the then Prime Minister, I felt, well, there must be something we can do for mothers like this. I do not know if by osmosis, if that is the correct term, the then Prime Minister picked up on it, and I was heartened to hear that there would be a baby grant, and it would not apply across the board, but it would apply to those in need. [*Interruption*]

I see, Madam President, I am being interrupted by the laughter of Sen.

Gopee-Scoon. It really is distracting—because she would never be placed in that position. But the short point is, if we are going to achieve these Sustainable Development Goals, I am going to ask the Government to rethink when mid-year review comes, to rethink some of its policies, and when they sit in the Cabinet to come up with new policies, and thinking about new expenditure cuts and new measures to pump revenue, and so on, to have the Sustainable Development Goals with them, go through it with a fine-tooth comb and try to address the citizens of the most vulnerable in our society, because they have not done so. They have waged war on the most vulnerable in our society. [*Desk thumping*]

So in closing—I am not very good at mathematics, in fact, I have an ABS on my certificate, which I am told meant “absent”, and I remember not being there. But I tried calculating it so I will—I almost said I will rely on Lieutenant Dan; I am sorry, that is from *Forrest Gump*—Sen. Mahabir to do the maths. But I am asking if the Government can consider, since we are seeing hard times, if the Government would consider no VAT on foods, zero per cent, perhaps raising VAT on everything else to 17.5 per cent, and perhaps raising corporation tax from 25 per cent, a low of 25 per cent, if we can get back to 35 per cent where it was. I am quite certain if you raise it to 35 per cent we may be able to bridge the deficit in terms of what we collect in VAT. So unless I can be of further assistance—well, I am not in court—Madam President, this is my contribution, and I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

4.15 p.m.

Sen. Nigel De Freitas: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the United Nations Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals. I do not purport to take too much time, because I see we are

fast approaching the tea time at 4.30, but nonetheless I shall continue. I also wish to join with my colleagues who have already contributed in this debate in November of last year, in saying that this Motion brought by the Leader of Opposition Business in this House is a good one. It highlights what I believe to be the ambition and purpose of any government, regardless of country, which is to develop a nation for the betterment of its people.

This Agenda 2030 as laid out, provides not only goals, 17 of them to be exact, but targets which, when met, should inevitably lead to the kind of country and society that can be proudly passed on to future generations. These 17 goals are ambitious at best and achievable at least. They speak to execution on a global scale to the local implementation of no poverty, and specifically ending poverty in all of its form for everyone; zero hunger, specifically ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition and also promoting sustainable agriculture; good health and well-being, specifically ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being at all ages; quality education, specifically ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all; gender equality, specifically achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls; clean water and sanitation, specifically ensuring the availability, sustainability and management of water and sanitation for all; affordable and clean energy, specifically ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all; decent work and economic growth, specifically promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

Madam President, industry, innovation and infrastructure, specifically building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable

industrialization and fostering innovation; reduce inequalities, specifically reducing inequality within and among countries; sustainable cities and communities, specifically making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; responsible consumption and production, specifically ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns; climate action, taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, life below water, conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; life on land, protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss; peace, justice and strong institutions, promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all and building effective and accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels, and finally partnerships for the goals, strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development.

Madam President, as you have surely realized that as I indicated earlier, these goals do subscribe to the notion of a better life for all, a notion that those on the other side would have attempted to achieve through their manifesto, policies and programmes when they were in government, and so too as the hon. Leader of Government Business indicated in his contribution, this administration also subscribes to that notion. However, there is a fundamental difference between those on the other side and those on this side. [*Desk thumping*] That difference is that the notion of a better life for the people of Trinidad and Tobago is not simply an intention of any PNM administration, because sometimes, especially in the case of the previous administration, the best of intentions can lead to the worst of

actions. No, Madam President, it is not simply intention. It is not just the song you sing around election time on a platform or something you get up and say in this honourable House after the fact, like my colleagues on the other side who have long since lost the moral authority to speak on the topic.

As all on this side would agree, it is in the DNA of this administration, it is in the DNA of the PNM and most importantly it is in the DNA of all those who sit on this side. My point is simple. Although these Sustainable Development Goals were agreed to in 2015 across countries, and are actually an expansion of the Millennium Development Goals of the 1990s, we on this side know that the vision, the purpose and the driving force behind the PNM has always been, since January 24, 1956, to elevate the moral and material standards of the people of Trinidad and Tobago within the rule of law. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, those last three words are important; let me repeat them: within the rule of law. That is the major difference between the execution of the notion mentioned earlier by those sitting here and those opposite. It is the reason why on Sunday we can celebrate 60 years of existence, where other institutions can only last weeks in some cases. It is the reason that I say here today we will last 60 years more and beyond. [*Desk thumping*]

As I move forward I shall go through some of the goals, not all, because time is against us, and that would take too long. But nonetheless I shall go through some of the key goals and show where we on this side have always been moving the country towards the Agenda 2030 set out by the United Nations and where we continue to do so under this administration.

For example, under Goal 4, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. This is the most

profound example of this. Within the last 40 years we on this side in other incarnations of the PNM Government have had free primary and secondary education. In the last 20 years, free tertiary education under the GATE programme. All of these would have been initiatives under a People's National Movement administration. That is what we have been doing on this side in terms of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Under Goal No. 5, achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. I will look at the Parliament as a representation of commitment to this goal. Also I do so because the point was raised by Sen. Ameen in her contribution to this Motion in relation to this goal and the previous administration milestone of having the first female Prime Minister in Trinidad and Tobago, an achievement that truly cannot be downplayed and, yes, it did contribute to progress as it relates to this goal. As a matter of fact, I will also add—and correct me if I am wrong, Members opposite—she was also the first female Attorney General, first female Opposition Leader, first female political leader of a party in Trinidad and Tobago. All great achievements, all which contribute to gender equality for Trinidad and Tobago.

However, Madam President, you would think that someone having achieved these things would have done more. One person holding these titles alone can only do so much. As a matter of fact, it is the mark of a true leader that once you have attained these titles, you help others to do so, that in a nutshell, you empower more women to become leaders.

Madam President, I draw your attention to the following report conducted by the International Development Research Centre in conjunction with the Institute

for Gender and Development Studies, St. Augustine Campus, University of the West Indies. The report is an assessment of the previous administration's legacy as it relates to this Sustainable Development Goal. The report is titled, "IDRC Research Report 106430-001 Women's Political Leadership in Trinidad and Tobago: Understandings, Experiences and Negotiations": I quote:

"Three years into her first term, Persad-Bissessar's record on promoting gender equality and women's rights remains uneven. Appointments of women to political and decision-making positions, including ministerial posts and state boards, remains low under her leadership. Women comprise 28.6% and 19.4% of parliamentarians in the House of Representatives and Senate respectively. While this is a slight increase from prior administration, it falls below the 30% critical mass for national parliaments. The increase in the number of women on state boards is attributed to feminists' interventions in the country, not her leadership."

I now compare it to this administration.

As the entity that has the most Senators in this honourable House, I am pleased to say that we lead the way with six women of 16 appointed Senators being women, [*Desk thumping*] a 37.5% representation for Government; this seconded by the Independent Bench, with three women of nine appointed being women, a 33.33% representation and, lastly, the so-called People's Partnership with one of six, only 16 per cent, and they claim to have a female leader.

Madam President, when all are added together, this honourable House currently has 32 per cent representation by women, 2 per cent above the internationally recognized threshold for Parliaments and 13 per cent above the previous administration who boast of the first female political leader and the first

female Prime Minister. That is how you begin to reach the goal of gender equality in Trinidad and Tobago.

I will like now to address briefly, comments made by Sen. Small in his contribution, specifically in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals 12 and 16. For the purposes of refreshing memories, I will quote from the *Hansard* record of November 24, 2015:

“So, I want to look at SDG 12.7 which says:

‘Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities.’

Mr. Vice-President, I have to ask a question and that question is this: is it sustainable that public procurement seems to have become a feeding trough for those who have access to those resources? Is it sustainable that legislation for public procurement is taking so long to be implemented after already taking several years to get through the Parliament? On this note, I am aware that moves are being made to make some amendments to that Bill, and I hope to play a part in getting this critical piece of legislation, not only through the Parliament, but actually up and working. We need to have public procurement legislation working properly in this country.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to look at SDG 16.4 and that has to do with:

‘By 2030, significantly reduce illicit financial and arms flows, strengthen the recovery and return of stolen assets and combat all forms of organized crime.’

I ask, is it sustainable to continue with the endless talk about corruption? And yet no action is taken to conduct real investigations, pursue prosecutions and ensure that those who steal from the public purse and then

openly parade their ill-gotten gains in the face of citizens are punished for their crimes.”

To this, Sen. Small, I just want to draw your attention, because sometimes you contribute to debates and there is not much follow up after.

But I want to draw your attention to yesterday's sitting where the Leader of Government Business would have laid in this Parliament, the Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property (Amdt.) Bill, 2015, and the Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on Whistleblower Protection Bill, 2015, laid by Sen. Cummings.

Madam President, both of these, in conjunction with the adjustments made to streamline the appointment of a Police Commissioner and Deputy Police Commissioner recently debated in both Houses, deal directly with the issues outlined by Sen. Small in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals 12 and 16. I just want to say at this point that these were done during the period between Christmas and Carnival, a period known to be of low productivity in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, this shows that we are committed to the initiatives outlined in the Manifesto made policy and to the goals outlined by the United Nations.

Like I said, I will not take long in this contribution, as we are fast approaching tea time. In conclusion, therefore, I wish to join with my colleagues who have contributed before me in saying that this administration is committed to achieving these goals as outlined by the United Nations, and to go as far as to say we have already begun to do so. Although achieving fruition of these goals are set

in the future, when the time comes and we are asked perhaps by future leaders, how, given the current economic climate did we maintain our resolve and determination to better the lives of the people of this country, we can proudly say: But for the grace of God and true leadership we knew, great is the people of Trinidad and Tobago and we will prevail.

Madam President, it is my pleasure to contribute to this debate, and as always, may God continue to bless our nation. I thank you.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, it is now an appropriate time to take the tea break. So we will suspend until five o'clock. We are now suspended until 5.00p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Sen. Jennifer Raffoul: Apologies for the delay. Is it possible that I can request the stand? Thank you. Madam President, thank you for the opportunity to speak. Colleagues, as usual, I would be succinct and constructive in my contribution, and I thank you for your time and attention.

Sen. Mark, I thank you for bringing forward this ready topic of discussion. Indeed, I think it is the most critical issue we have had the opportunity to discuss here. I listened intently to all the contributions made on this topic today and in November when we began debating it.

Sen. Khan, I loved what you said about big buildings not being a marker of development. To me, that is what this topic today is all about. It is about how we measure development and what we aim to achieve as a nation. This topic is about the quality of life of citizens and how we assess that. Once we know what we are aiming for and critically how we measure it, we can make an informed plan to achieve it.

Sen. Cummings, I thank you for bringing up the terrible incident that occurred last week with the murder of the two school boys from Success Laventille Secondary School. I have been working with this school for several years through my previous work at the Inter-American Development Bank and my ongoing work with the World Economic Forum Global Shapers Community. And this school and its principal, Miss Hamida Baksh, and teachers, are shining examples of leadership and dedication that we can all learn from.

Their staff office is riddled with trophies from national steel pan competitions. The students won the prestigious RBC Young Leaders award twice within the last five years. A past pupil of the school is the President's Medal winner for placing first in the country in O level examinations. Parents and community members urge the students to be proud of their community and of themselves and not to internalize the negative stigmas of them in the media. Again, thank you, Sen. Cummings.

When we take these discussions in this House and connect them to the real issues they impact, we are more motivated to work together on the issue before us at hand, and we are more likely to talk to the heart of the issue rather than just talk fluff around the issue.

My contribution today would be divided into two parts. First, I am going to give a short explanation of why the conventional method of using GDP as a measure of well-being is inherently flawed. And second, I am going to briefly give my policy advice on how we orient ourselves nationally to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

First, on the issue of the inadequacy of GDP as a measure of well-being: For the last several decades in economics, GDP has been used as the measure of well-being. We can see that GDP is not an accurate indicator of well-being both

using anecdotal observations, as well as using statistical methods based on an understanding of how the measure is computed.

In terms of anecdotal observations, as a Trinbagonian who saw GDP climb and climb in the 2000s and yet saw a climb in kidnappings, murders and reports of all segments of the population living in fear, we can certainly observe that an increase in GDP is not commensurate with an increase in well-being.

From a statistical perspective, if you look at how GDP is computed it is quite revealing. GDP has several problems associated with it in this regard. One, is this: GDP does not include household production, it only includes monetary transactions. According to the economist and Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz who spoke on this issue when he was here in Trinidad for CHOGM 2009 and for other events, it is not that early economists did not agree on the need to include household production in GDP, it is that they could not figure out how to do so in terms of what methodology to use.

The category of household production includes products and services made in or performed within the household such as growing your own food or having family members assist with taking care of children or the elderly within your family. These examples and others within the category of household production are not included within the measure of GDP. However, if these products and services could no longer be provided for within the household and had to be outsourced, then they would be counted in GDP and GDP will increase even if one's well-being might not.

GDP is also difficult to interpret when it comes to price changes of technology. For example, when technology advances and the cost of products decrease, if the same quantity of that product was bought year on year, then GDP

would go down. So for example, if the price of laptops and iPads goes down, GDP goes down. It is hard to associate this with a decrease in well-being.

Another problematic issue with using GDP as a measure of well-being is that GDP includes government expenditure. So if crime goes up and government spends more on crime-fighting or on prisons, then GDP increases even if the quality of life might decrease. If government spending on hospitals goes up, GDP goes up even if overall health and wellness does not improve. If the population spends more time in traffic, then consumption of gasoline increases and GDP increases. So GDP itself has several problems in how it is calculated which leads to difficulty in using it as a proxy for well-being. The Sustainable Development Goals were specifically designed to measure well-being. They are multidimensional indicators of well-being and progress.

Second, please permit me to share my experience working in development in Trinidad and Tobago and my policy recommendations as a result. I have two critical observations and some subsequent recommendations.

My first observation is this: the biggest thing I took away from my experience working in development in Trinidad and Tobago was that we often did not know what goals we were focusing on. The Vision 2020 policy document listed so many goals that it was extremely well-intentioned, but unfortunately came across more like a wish list that had no focus area and because of this it was difficult to implement. And then the last administration announced that they wanted to reduce poverty by 2 per cent per year. Our goals as a nation keep changing.

My second critical observation is this: we do not know how to measure our goals. Our last survey of living conditions was published in 2007 based on 2005

data. This publication noted that it was difficult to track declines or increases in poverty since every study that has been conducted in Trinidad and Tobago's history has used different methodology to measure poverty. Since that time, another survey of living conditions was done but the data has not yet been published.

Let me give you an example of how changing methodology for measuring poverty can be a problem. Our last published poverty data is from a 2005 SLC which says that we have a 16.7 per cent poverty rate. This definition of poverty is based on the cost of a mixed food basket that is deemed to be enough for basic health needs.

So in 2005 our poverty rate was deemed to be 16.7 per cent based on this methodology. At that time, the Ministry of Social Development pointed out significant poverty reduction gains since the last published survey done in 1986 pointed to a 36 per cent poverty rate at that time. So it appeared that Trinidad and Tobago had a decline in poverty from 36 per cent in 1986 to 16.7 per cent in 2005.

But here is the thing. The methodology by which the data in these two studies was analysed was different. The World Bank did a subsequent assessment where they took the 1986 data and assessed it using the same methodology that was used for the 2005 data. They found that the 1986 poverty data using this methodology was 21 per cent. So from 1986 to 2005, our poverty rate only declined from 21 per cent to 16.7 per cent.

My point is, how we measure things is absolutely critical. What I observed working in development was that in high-level meetings on critical issues like poverty reduction, social sector spending and targeting social programmes, we were always limited by an absence of a clear methodology on how to measure

poverty. If we do not know how to measure poverty, then we do not know how to design programmes effectively. If 37 per cent of our government expenditure goes into social spending, then it is critical that we have better methodology for measuring poverty and other indicators of human well-being so we can design more effective programmes to reduce it.

Based on these observations from my experience working in development, please permit me to make the following recommendations: I recommend that we adopt the Sustainable Development Goals as our national development goals as a country. And furthermore, I recommend that we adopt the methodology and measurement indicators of the SDGs as our national measurement indicators. This has several advantages. The first, because they are internationally supported we will have a wealth of expertise and professionals who could interpret our local data and understand where we are at in terms of achieving the goals.

Second, if we have a consistent methodology for assessing our objectives, then we will be able to track our own development on an ongoing basis in the future.

Finally and most importantly, once we understand our goals, and particularly once we have consensus on how we measure them, then we can stop wasting so much time and opportunity in high-level meetings discussing the methodology and we can redirect this expertise to now focus on policies and activities to take our country forward.

Finally, even though the Vision 2020 goals and objectives were lengthy and thus difficult to implement, despite this, the processes and national consultations that were a part of this process were invaluable. But I do recommend that we forego the Vision 2020 goals in favour of the Sustainable Development Goals

since they are focused, comparable and measurable. I do recommend that we maintain the Vision 2020 process of national and community-based consultations for issues of national importance.

Madam President, I thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to this discussion. Colleagues, thank you again for your time and attention. As always I am here to give my constructive feedback in service of our country.

5.15 p.m.

Sen. Allyson Baksh: Madam President, I thank you for the opportunity to join in this debate today on the Agenda 2030 of Sustainable Development which was adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on September 25, 2015. This agenda is a plan of action of people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. It recognizes that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.

All countries and stakeholders acting in collaborative partnership will implement this plan. It results to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and to heal and secure our planet. Its determination is to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. It aims to embark on a collective journey and pledges that no one will be left behind. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets which were enunciated, demonstrated the scale and ambition of this new universal agenda. It seeks to build on the millennium development goals and complete what these did not achieve. It seeks to realize the human rights of all and to achieve gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. They are integrated and indivisible and balanced, the three dimensions of sustainable

development—the economic, social and environmental.

The goals and targets will stimulate action over the next 15 years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet, namely, people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership. The interlinkages and integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals are of crucial importance in ensuring that the purpose of the new agenda is realized. If we realize the ambitions across the full extent of the agenda, the lives of all will profoundly improve and our world will be transformed for the better. The current PNM administration wholly reaffirmed our unwavering commitment to achieving this SDG Agenda and utilizing it to achieving in full, [*Desk thumping*] the transformation of our country for the better by 2030. In fact, the 17 goals of the SDG Agenda are part of the election manifesto and our PNM 2030 vision for Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, the present Motion brought by my colleague on the opposite bench might be well intended, but what has been the empirical results of actions of his PP administration relative to the issues inherent to the SDG Agenda. For most of the five years in Government, the PP administration rode very high oil prices. However, instead of paying heed to the old cliché, “what goes up must come down,” and taking advantage of the windfall by investing the extra dollar in some form of sustainable and profitable diversification that will carry us when the oil prices dropped, they squandered it.

Now we have low oil prices and empty purse and no developed alternatives to carry ourselves without borrowing, raising taxes and looking towards private sector investment. This however is a double edged sword, because the present world’s economy really diminishes our options for borrowing. People are losing their buying power and potential to pay taxes, and investors’ confidence is at an

all-time low because in most cases the PP Government did not honour the commitments and pay their bills. There are many financial institutions, public service workers and contractors lined up at the door asking for money that we do not have. Money that should have been committed and put aside to honour obligations for these things was unscrupulously squandered elsewhere. They can say what they want.

They can make all sorts of excuses but they will never fool the people for everyone is seeing and realizing that our present situation is a consequence of their irresponsible governance. The cat is out of the bag and they have lost the opportunity to try to blame the present Government. People are looking on and saying that four months have passed and we have done nothing. But what they have to understand is that we are so far behind that we first have to play catch-up before we can move ahead with our plans.

The PP Government stripped the country of its wealth of the jewel of the Caribbean and not only left us in a sad state of poverty but continues to try to block our revenue generators with their false impression that they care about the people. What they fail to understand, however, is the fact that we are all in this together and with or without their support this nation will unite and ban our bellies as we dig ourselves out of the hole and plunge forward to recovery and success.

In the PP Government, the idea of sustainable diversification and development was limited to grass cutting, box drains and road paving. Their idea of fixing the health system was investing in a shell that they called a Children's Hospital while all the other health institutions suffer from a sad state of disrepair. We have a fire station in Mayaro that suffers the same downfall as the Children's Hospital because it was never populated with a staff or fire engines. It is nothing

but an empty shell.

We have an incomplete highway to nowhere and an incomplete and abandoned Beetham waste water reuse project that was plagued by auto-corruption and tremendous financial loss. There is nothing of real substance to show for the money spent but the purse is empty and our revenue stream has now diminished. Nevertheless, we have to pick up the chips and chart a new road forward. We have to be visionaries. We have to be innovative and we have to be strong that we move forward in getting out of the hole in which we were placed and commence our recovery process as a nation. If we have to rely on the local business community for public investment in government projects we will have to first regain and secure their trust and confidence by easing the payment process and paying on time. We will have to strongly deliver the message that we will not govern by the same policy of accepting work without pay.

Right now there are lots of businessmen who do not have the faith and confidence to take the leap. We will change that by good governance. We will govern by example. We will not find ourselves retrenching people in the public service, on one hand, and be asking private enterprises not to lay off, on the other hand. We will be good soldiers fighting the recession and creating growth by a professional management and purposeful but strategic planning. Strength in leadership and success against the odds is what we will display in an attempt to quell the storm and create a private sector confidence while encouraging and persuading others to follow.

This Government will quell the storm because we are trustworthy and an honest government with a vision, dedication and commitment. [*Desk thumping*] We will use this time of diminished growth to train and reorient our workforce and

spend on other forms of development in preparation as we build the foundation for the change to come. We will not downsize and add fuel to the fire. We will ensure that companies put aside a fund to quell the storm and save jobs during a recession. What has happened to us today will not happen to us again. When companies make big profits they must also keep big hearts towards their most valuable resource and secure the future of their workforce. We will be our brother's keeper.

Our future must not depend on oil price. It must be dependent on resourceful governance, reliability, vision, strength and strategic planning. I know we have a capable Government and I know we can make it happen. We won in the 80s and we can win again. We will do it. People do not know the fire that burns within our bellies. We will show them what we mean when we say we can do this, we can make it happen. There will be no room for failure. We will unlock farming and agriculture; we will fix our crime situation; we will unlock tourism; we will emphasize infrastructure development and make this country a better place to live and work [*Desk thumping*] and we will encourage and support downstream businesses that feed and survive on the changes we make.

We will learn from the errors of our past leaders and we will build a better future that is not dependent on fragile oil prices or the control and manipulations of First World countries. By increasing our farming and agriculture we will reduce unemployment and increase jobs, produce food and feed our people at lower cost. We will provide better opportunities for the private sector to get into processing and packaging; we will increase our GDP and export market; we will manage and decrease our imports; we will decrease the drain on our foreign reserves and increase our foreign reserves and we will make full and profitable use of rural areas.

To unlock farming and agriculture we will unlock water, energy communication,

transportation, the market for produce, the difficulty of exportation, access to land, access to raw materials and supplies and access to training, support and development. By fixing the crime situation we will make our country a safer place to live, increase the attraction for foreign investors and tourism. This will dovetail into increased growth and development and increased foreign reserves. By emphasizing on infrastructure development we will make this country a better place to live and work. The lifeblood of a real civilization is communication and transportation. By increasing these two basic needs we will increase the comfort of living, ease frustration, ease productivity and accelerate the ease and speed by which things happen. We will conserve our energy consumption and ensure that we never become a net buyer of fuel for our domestic consumption. It is this vision that has made us a world leader in the supply of methanol and it will be the same vision that will foster growth in our country and anchor us in a strong foundation of sustainable diversification and profitable development as we ride the tides of the world's economic downturn.

Madam President, this PNM administration, mindful of its commitment to the present and future generations of this country, will introduce laws, policies and programmes to ensure that the laudable objectives of this UN Agenda, 2030 Sustainable Development Goals are attained. Long live the PNM and long live Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made and question proposed: That the Senate do now adjourn to a date to be fixed. [*Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon*]

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 5.27 p.m.