

SENATE

Tuesday, February 23, 2016

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

**CONDOLENCES
(MR. WINSTON MOORE)**

Madam President: Hon. Senators, as you are aware, former Senator, Winston Moore passed away on February 21, 2016. I now invite you to pay your respects to the former Senator.

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam President. Winston Steve Moore is best described as a true patriot, having served the country in several capacities, so that his death on Sunday, February 21, 2016, at the age of 76, definitely marked an end of an era of an outstanding citizen.

Mr. Moore was a public servant having worked in the management and formation of the National Insurance Board. Following his long and dedicated service at the NIB, he entered public life when he was appointed as an alderman in the San Fernando City Council at the time in 1981. He was also a strong activist in the People's National Movement where he exhibited self-less service to his community in San Fernando, and the constituency of San Fernando East in particular. He was also known as an eloquent speaker, which he displayed when he chaired many public meetings for his party in the national campaign for both local government and general elections.

Mr. Moore was one of the six Opposition Senators when the PNM lost their first general election in 1986. He served in the Upper House along with such

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celebrities as our new Prime Minister and political leader, the hon. Dr. Keith Rowley, the late Kenneth Valley, Mr. Gus Ramreakersingh, Robin Montano and Donna Prowell—the dream team as I usually like to call them. They were very instrumental in bringing the PNM back into office in 1991. For his hard work at all levels, he was later appointed Ambassador to Brazil where he served in two sessions between the periods 1992—1995 and 2002—2007.

Mr. Moore was undoubtedly a vibrant community leader and mentor to many young people in his community. The party that he faithfully served recognized his contribution and honoured him in 2014, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the People’s National Movement.

An avid reader and teacher, a friend to many, Mr. Moore’s service and contribution will be etched in the annals of this country among the outstanding citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. His daughter, Nicole, in paying tribute to him said that he was a man who understood very clearly that being a patriot did not just mean singing the National Anthem or waving the national flag, but it meant looking at the country with a forensic eye, seeing its problems and talking and crafting solutions to solve them. Simply put, Winston Steve Moore loved Trinidad and Tobago. He was a father of four, grandfather of four and great grandfather of one.

On behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, on behalf of the Executive, General Council, Central Executive and members of the People’s National Movement and to all citizens which we represent, all of Trinidad and Tobago, we want to wish our deepest condolences to his family. May his soul rest in eternal peace.

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam President. I take the opportunity to honour the distinguished life of a former Senator, ambassador plenipotentiary, councillor,

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father and dedicated countryman, former Senator, Winston Steve Moore.

Mr. Moore, formerly served the City of San Fernando as an alderman and as an advisor, personal assistant and speech writer to His Worship the Mayor, Alderman Haji Kasim Hosein. He also served the nation of Trinidad and Tobago as Senator and ambassador to Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay.

Mr. Moore will be remembered as an excellent orator and student of the art of communication. In some circles he was known as “the voice”, owing to his distinguished and commanding introduction of prominent political figures, and his pivotal role in managing the PNM’s political campaigns of the 1980s, more so in 1986. Mr. Moore’s legacy of excellence will never be forgotten by the political community and also by his family, who describes him as a great communicator, writer, loyalist, lover of protocol and dedicated father.

The fact that we have lost an extraordinary civil servant, a breed of which is all so rare, still seems to present us with a positive message through its mask of obscurity. That message is one of hope and aspiration, faith and morality, which are all virtues of an existence characterized by duty, diligence, morality, efficacy, strength, integrity, perseverance and a thirst and hunger for legacy that leaves its name on the tongues of even those who, like myself, were unable to know Mr. Moore on a personal level.

Let us not forget, but forward his legacy by setting an example for the citizenry of this great nation, especially in these trying and challenging times, where good manners, proper communication and love of country seem to be holistically lost upon today’s society.

Madam President, please allow me on behalf of the Opposition Bench to send sincere support to the late Winston Steve Moore’s family and loved ones, as they grieve his loss. May his soul rest in perpetual peace.

Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir: Thank you very much. Madam President, on behalf of the Independent Bench, I too would like to join with my colleagues in this honourable Senate in extending deep and sincere condolences to the family of the late Sen. Moore. The family of the late Sen. Moore would be closest to him with respect to loss, but his loss is a loss not only to the family, it is a loss to the country as well.

As a former colleague in the Senate, I could not help but think at the time when Sen. Moore served during the late 1980s, early 1990s, this was a time that is very similar to the period that we are now looking at, a time of economic decline. When we examine the contributions of the Senators at that time, including Sen. Moore, we saw that those who were Members of the Senate really discharged their functions at a time that the country needed honesty, integrity, commitment and devotion to the cause of Trinidad and Tobago.

The hon. Sen. Moore was someone who served the Senate with distinction and with a commitment, not only to his political party, but to the general cause of Trinidad and Tobago, and for that he has left for us a lasting legacy. Therefore, I think, we in this Senate can learn a great deal from the demeanour of the hon. Senator, the manner in which he conducted himself, the content of his speeches to this honourable Senate and, really, his overall commitment to economic development, at a time of economic decline. This is something that we would have to remember, revisit, go back to the records in those days, to gain some inspiration on what the stalwarts at that time did, so that we can continue to enhance the work of the Senate.

So in memory of the hon. Sen. Moore, I would like to express deepest condolences once again, and to express on behalf of the Independent Bench to his family, the gratitude of the bench for the contribution he has made, not only to the

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Senate, but also to the wider Republic as an ambassador and as an alderman, as a council member of the San Fernando City Corporation, as an advisor and as a speech writer. His life is an indication to us that there is reward in public service, and the reward in public service is not really the gain that we obtain monetarily, but really the knowledge that we secure in ourselves that somehow we have been able to do good work on behalf of others.

Condolences to the entire family and condolences from the Independent Bench on his passing. Thank you.

Madam President: Hon. Members, we in this honourable Chamber, and by extension the national community, have been privileged to hear this afternoon the tributes that have been paid to our friend, our mentor and our erstwhile parliamentary colleague, former Sen. Winston Moore.

I wish wholeheartedly to associate myself with the tributes and the acclamations that have been bestowed upon former Sen. Moore here today. They have been fully earned, and they are indisputably deserved.

Former Sen. Moore's life clearly epitomized service. He lived his life selflessly and with a grace that sadly has become increasingly rare in modern times. Our generation and the ones to follow would do extremely well to take even just a single page out of the book of his life, and apply its lessons to ours.

In joining my voice to the chorus of accolades we have quite rightly heard this afternoon, I am proud to say that I remember former Sen. Moore as a well-known San Fernandian, as a selfless man who gave away in his life all that he received in the way of knowledge, and who lived his life fully, impactfully and meaningfully.

May his soul rest in peace.

I have directed the Clerk of the Senate to deliver to former Sen. Moore's

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family, a copy of the transcript of today's tributes. In them may they find consolation and peace in this difficult time.

Hon. Senators, may we now all join in observing a minute of silence.

The Senate stood.

1.45 p.m.

PAPERS LAID

1. Annual Report of the Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago for the period October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Arima Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2005. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Arima Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Arima Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2007. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
5. Value Added Tax (Amendment to Schedule 2) Order, 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
6. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Affairs for the fiscal year 2012. [*The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan)*]
7. Annual Report of the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) for the year 2006. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]

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8. Annual Report of the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) for the year 2007. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
9. Annual Report of the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) for the year 2008. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
10. Annual Report of the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) for the year 2009. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
11. Annual Report of the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) for the year 2010. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
12. Annual Report of the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) for the year 2011. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]
13. Annual Report of the Environmental Management Authority (EMA) for the year 2012. [*Sen. The Hon. F. Khan*]

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT
(Presentation)**

Government Assurances

Sen. Foster Cummings: Madam President, I have the honour to present the following report as listed on the Supplemental Order Paper in my name:

The First Report of the Joint Select Committee on Government Assurances.

URGENT QUESTIONS

**CDAP Programme
(Withholding of Services)**

Sen. Wayne Sturge: Thank you kindly. To the Minister of Health: In light of the statement by the President of the Pharmacy Board regarding the stated intention of a growing number of pharmacies to “withhold” CDAP services, can the Minister indicate what will be done in the short term to alleviate the obvious hardships to vulnerable citizens?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, Madam

President. Madam President, the CDAP programme was the initiative of the People's National Movement under the prime ministership of the former Prime Minister, the hon. Patrick Manning and executed by my colleague the hon. Minister of Finance then Minister of Health Colm Imbert.

That programme was supposed to and continues to be a mainstay in the public health system. As far as the non-payment of fees to pharmacies, I can report to the House as follows: for the period July to August 2015, payment has already been processed via the automatic clearing house and will be credited to the accounts of respective pharmacies by this afternoon or tomorrow for the latest, and this was already in the cards.

For September 2015, payment has already been processed and will be received. For the period October 15 to January 2016, this has been signed off by NIPDEC to be submitted to the Ministry of Health by this afternoon for release of funds.

I want to categorically state that the reason for non-payment has nothing to do with lack of funds or lack of advances. It has to do with, one, problems with the private sector firm which is charged with the responsibility of converting the actual prescriptions into a dollar value which then goes to NIPDEC. Part of the reason also had to do with a late reading of the budget due to a late election, something which we had advised the then Government not to do. And these are some of the major reasons because a budget was read on October 05. The clearing house had some problems. So these are the issues, Madam President.

Sen. Sturge: Through you, Madam President, can the Minister answer why as line Minister this was allowed, this situation was allowed to develop over so many months?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Because you, your side, did not pay the bills for July,

August, September. That is the main reason why it was not paid. [*Desk thumping*]
And the main reason why it was not paid, we told you when we were in Opposition not to rundown the Constitution, to have the election so late because any incoming Government will be posed with challenges to bring a budget in time to do the things that it has to do. [*Desk thumping*] And those were the main reasons why so.

Sen. Sturge: Supplemental. So how long before we can expect these hardships to be alleviated?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Apparently, the hon. Senator did not hear what I just said. Do I have to repeat myself, Madam President?

Sen. Sturge: Can we have a specific time?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam President, I think I stated quite clearly, obviously honourable Senator does not listen.

Sen. Sturge: I have listened and I am yet to hear a time frame.

Madam President: Sen. Sturge, we will move on to the next question now.

**St. James Medical Facility and Sangre Grande Hospital
(Supply of Critical Life-Saving Drugs)**

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam President. To the hon. Minister of Health: Can the Minister say when the St. James Medical Facility and the Sangre Grande Hospital will be supplied with sufficient quantities of critical life-saving drugs for the treatment of cancer patients?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, Madam President, for another opportunity. I will say categorically, having spoken to the oncologist, that no cancer patient is being unfairly disadvantaged due the shortage of any life-saving drugs. Where drugs are in short supply, they have adjusted the treatment protocol to go to a number two choice. So no cancer patient is being unfairly or unjustly treated. Treatments are going on according to protocol.

And the reasons for these shortages again have to do with the fact that we had a late election, a late budget, poor procurement practices by the former administration in taking away the yearly contract from NIPDEC and putting NIPDEC on a month-to-month contract to purchase drugs. And after September 07 when NIPDEC was already purchasing drugs happily for the last administration on a month-to-month contract from 2013, they suddenly decided that they will no longer do so after September 07; for what reasons I do not know, Senator. I had to seek the intervention of the Minister of Finance under whose portfolio NIPDEC falls, to ask NIPDEC to please continue what you were doing before September 07 so that these situations would not arise. So all these factors have led to these two questions being asked. It was not because of any incompetence by the Ministry of Health or NIPDEC. All of these had to do with political bad decisions being made by the last administration. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Mark: Could the hon. Minister indicate what steps or actions he has taken to ensure that in the future these situations do not arise?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: For the first thing is a change of government which we have. [*Desk thumping*] Second, putting NIPDEC back on a yearly contract which we are now doing. And third, what we did in the short-term was to ask the suppliers, the private sector suppliers, to lend us some pharmaceuticals from their private stock, put it into the public system which they have done and then when the contracts are being fulfilled we will replace it. So, we did short-term actions and the long-term action is to reverse a bad political decision to take away the yearly contract from NIPDEC, take them away from this month-to-month contract, fix the problems at NIPDEC, fix the problems at C40 and then we will have a proper procurement and distribution system.

Sen. Ameen: Madam President, at present we have a situation where a number of

surgeries at the public hospitals have been postponed and patients are being told that it is because of lack of pharmaceuticals, lack of drugs. Can you say whether this measure you mentioned will correct that situation, and how soon surgeries can begin again at the nation's hospitals?

Madam President: Sen. Ameen, a supplementary question must be on one point. You have asked several issues there. [*Crosstalk*] Yes. Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam President, nothing in these urgent questions speaks to surgeries, absolutely nothing, but I will still answer. I will still answer. We are correcting the mistakes that you left behind and we are doing so one by one. Maybe for Sangre Grande, over the Christmas period, some elective surgeries were postponed to have routine cleaning of the operating theatres. And I answered that same question in the Senate. Maybe you are sitting too close to Sen. Sturge, but that is not on the Order Paper. If you want to ask it, please file a question. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Sen. Mark, you have another question for Urgent Question. Hon. Senators, Sen. Mark has posed a question and it has been allowed to be posed as an Urgent Question to the hon. Minister of Education who is not here. I understand that discussions have taken place and with your leave the question will be answered later in the proceedings.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Fiscal 2015/2016 Budget Deficit (Details of)

14. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Could the Minister say how does the Government intend to finance the budget deficit for fiscal 2015/2016 and whether it intends to raise external finance to achieve same?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): [*Desk thumping*] You just love to have me here eh. Madam President, response to question 14. The Government intends to finance the budget deficit for fiscal 2016 using a combination of local and external borrowing.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, may I?

Madam President: Yes.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, could the hon. Minister of Finance elaborate for this honourable House the local and external borrowings that he intends to engage in and the sums involved?

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam President. At present the Ministry of Finance is looking at a matrix of financing options and has not yet finalised the quantum that will be borrowed on the local market and the quantum that will be borrowed externally. We should finalize this within the next month or so.

**Chairman of Deposit Insurance Corporation
(Appointment of)**

15. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Could the Minister state whether the term of the Chairman of the Deposit Insurance Corporation has expired, and if so, who has been appointed as the new Chairman of the Deposit Insurance Corporation?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam President, the answer to question 15. The term of office of the Chairman of the Deposit Insurance Corporation expired in August 2015. The Governor of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Alvin Hilaire has since been appointed as the new chairman of the corporation.

2.00 p.m.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, could the hon. Minister indicate why—whether a

chairman or why a chairman was not appointed when the term of the previous chairman expired in August of 2015?

Hon. C. Imbert: I suggest you ask yourself, because your party was in Government then. [*Laughter*]

**Trinidad Generation Unlimited
(Details of Repayment of Moneys)**

16. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Could the Minister of Finance advise the Senate whether Trinidad Generation Unlimited has repaid the Government for monies advanced for the construction of the power plant at La Brea?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you very much, Madam President. [*Crosstalk*] I must laugh, you ask me about August 2015.

Madam President: The Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam President. The answer to question 16. Trinidad Generation Unlimited has partially repaid the government for sums advanced for the construction of the power plant at La Brea. To date, in fiscal 2016, Trinidad Generation Unlimited, or TGU, has repaid the equivalent of US \$300 million comprising a payment of TT \$962 million in October 2015 and a payment of US \$150 million in December 2015 leaving a balance of US \$254 million.

**Housing Development Corporation
(Details of Qualifying Income Ceiling)**

19. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

In light of the Government's decision to lower the qualifying income ceiling in order to access HDC homes from \$45,000 to \$25,000, could the Minister indicate

to the Senate whether it is the intention of this PNM Administration to revisit and/or review this policy decision?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Marlene Mc Donald):

Thank you, Madam President. The Trinidad and Tobago Development Corporation, HDC, was incorporated under the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation Act, No. 24 of 2005, and is mandated to provide affordable shelter and associated community facilities for low and middle income persons and to carry out the broad policies of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. To ensure equity in the allocation process, transparency in the system and to remove loopholes that may encourage corruption, the 2004 allocation policy was updated in 2008. The selection criteria of the said policy states that potential beneficiaries of the programme must:

1. Be citizens of Trinidad and Tobago and have been residing here for the last five years preceding the date of signing a statutory declaration.
2. Be 21 years and over.
3. Not be owner, part owner of property or land in Trinidad and Tobago.
4. Be first time homeowners.
5. The monthly combined income of the applicant or applicants must not exceed \$25,000.

Data trends stemming from the Ministry's Home Application and Fulfillment System database indicate that only 0.7 per cent or 1,176 of the 168,065 applicants for housing earn salaries over \$25,000 per month. The remaining 99.3 per cent or 166,889 applicants who meet the criteria outlined above are thus eligible to access the HDC homes.

In light of the fact that the majority of the applicants for homes earn salaries below \$25,000, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has no intentions of

reviewing the existing policy as it is committed to providing affordable homes to low and middle income families. Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Khan: Madam President, I crave your indulgence. I omitted to state this at the beginning of oral answers, but we will like a deferral for two weeks of question no. 21 and question no. 26. But we will answer all others.

Madam President: Hon. Leader of Government Business, these two questions that you are seeking leave for another deferral they had already been deferred for seven days. The Standing Orders provide for two weeks. So I will grant a one week deferral.

Sen. Khan: That is fine, Madam President.

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?

**US Dollar Accounts at Commercial Banks
(Owners' Access to)**

26. A. Could the hon. Minister of Finance inform this Senate whether persons who have maintained US dollar accounts at the commercial banks are able to fully access their accounts?
- B. If the answer to (A) is in the negative, could the Minister state what steps are being taken by the Central Bank to address this?

Questions, by leave, deferred.

**Petrotrin Refinery Cat Cracker
(Details of)**

23. **Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:
- A. Could the Minister state 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?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Nicole Olivierre): Thank

you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Senators, on November 20, 2015 there was an unexpected release of catalyst which was confined to some portions of West Marabella closest to the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery. This was as a result of an upset condition during the start-up of the Fluidized Catalytic Cracking Unit, the FCCU. FCCU catalyst is an essential part of the refining process and is procured from suppliers who are certified for the sale of this product in accordance with international specifications. Internal test work was conducted and it was varied that FCCU catalyst was deposited in the Marabella community.

As part of the incident management system, Petrotrin's health impact assessment was conducted and it was established that components of the catalyst presented a low health risk for short-term exposure. Petrotrin's Pointe-a-Pierre refinery operates under unique circumstances given the rise of communities on the fenceline of its operations. Over the years the company has had to strive to balance its operations taking into consideration the implications for those persons who set up residences on its borders.

With regard to this matter, Petrotrin devised a three-part response strategy comprising the medical response, a clean-up plan and a communication plan.

The medical response entailed:

- Provision of health care at Petrotrin's medical facility in Pointe-a-Pierre. That will be the Augustus Long Hospital.
- Provision of an ambulance service;
- Use of a 24-hour emergency hotline; and
- Personal house visits by Petrotrin's medical doctors as required.

The clean-up plan comprised:

- An impact assessment to determine which homes were affected.

- The use of clean-up crews to clean interior and exterior of affected homes in Marabella.
- A post clean-up assessment.

The communication plan included:

- Interaction with affected residents before, during and after clean-up activities.
- Media releases.
- Provision of updates to residents.

Petrotrin has indicated that all affected persons have been documented and provision has been made for them to avail themselves of a surveillance check within one year at the Augustus Long Hospital. Thank you.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, could the hon. Minister indicate how many citizens were affected by this particular development?

Hon. N. Olivierre: I suggest you file another question if you want that detail.
 [*Crosstalk*]

Madam President: Clearly, the hon. Minister does not have that information.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, may I also enquire, arising out of her answer whether the Minister can share with us, how many homes were affected by this particular development?

Hon. N. Olivierre: I can provide that answer at a subsequent time.

NGC Officials (Details of)

24. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

Could the Minister inform the Senate with regard to the following:

- a) the names of the Chairmen of each NGC subsidiary; and
- b) the name of the NGC representative on the Board of Directors of the

National Enterprises Limited (NEL)?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Nicole Olivierre): Thank you, Madam President. The NGC Group of Companies comprises of 23 companies which comprise the parent company, NGC, 17 subsidiaries and minority shareholdings in five companies. In keeping with best practice the NGC board agreed to have the chairman of the parent company serve as the chairman of the subsidiary companies as this promotes efficient integration, optimizes co-ordination of strategic planning and business execution and facilitates alignment across the group of companies, thereby creating synergies resulting in cost savings, efficiencies, increased profitability and added value to the shareholder.

The Chairman of NGC, Mr. Gerry C. Brooks, is the chairman of eight subsidiary companies. Mr. Sham Mahabir, board member of NGC is the Chairman of two subsidiary companies. There is currently no appointed chairmen on the boards of seven subsidiaries. The subsidiaries under the chairmanship of Mr. Brooks are:

- National Energy Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago
- Phoenix Park Gas Processors Limited
- La Brea Industrial Development Company Limited
- NGC CNG Company Limited
- NGC NGL Company Limited
- Trinidad and Tobago NGL Limited
- NGC Petrochemicals Limited
- NGC Pipeline Company Limited

Subsidiaries under the Chairmanship of Mr. Sham Mahabir are:

- NGC Trinidad and Tobago LNG Limited

- Trinidad and Tobago LNG Limited

NGC's representative on the board of the National Energy Limited, NEL, is the Chairman, Mr. Brooks.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, may I, through you, is this a normal practice for the Chairman for the substantive parent company to be the Chairman of so many subsidiary companies? Is that a normal policy practice of the NGC?

Hon. N. Olivierre: As I indicated in my preempt to the answer, I did say that it is in keeping with best practice as it affords greater efficient integration. It optimizes coordination of strategic planning and business execution and facilitates alignment across the group of companies.

Gas Exporting Countries Forum (Attendees Cost Details)

25. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: With regard to the recently concluded Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) meeting which was held in Tehran, Iran in November, 2015, could the Minister state:

- a) the names and offices of such persons who constituted the Trinidad and Tobago delegation at the Seventeenth Ministerial Meeting of the GECF and the Third Gas Summit meeting;
- b) the role of each member of the delegation as it relates to the Seventeenth Ministerial Meeting of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum and the Third Gas Summit;
- c) a breakdown of the cost incurred by the Ministry of Energy and or State Companies for each member of the delegation listed at (a); and
- d) the total cost incurred as a result of attendance by a delegation from Trinidad and Tobago at the Third Gas Summit meeting and Seventeenth

Ministerial Meeting of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Hon. Nicole Olivierre): Thank you, Madam President. The Gas Exporting Countries Forum is an internationally recognized organization comprised of the world's leading gas producers aimed at representing and promoting their mutual interest. GECF members and observer countries account for 68per cent of global natural gas reserves and 64per cent of the global natural gas trade.

As Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, I led the Trinidad and Tobago delegation which participated in the Third Gas Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum and its related meetings which were held in Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran in November 2015.

Heads of State of the following countries were also in attendance:

- Algeria
- Bolivia
- Equatorial Guinea
- Iraq
- Nigeria
- Russian Federation
- Turkmenistan
- Venezuela

The remaining GECF member countries were represented by their Ministers of energy.

During the plenary session, I presented a statement to the Third GECF Gas Summit indicating our commitment to the ideals and objectives of the GECF and our continued collaboration as we grow the forum's capacity to strengthen its level

of influence as a valuable and respected voice of the natural gas exporters.

The GECF summit allowed Trinidad and Tobago to engage in bilateral talks with other Ministers of energy of the GECF and their respective experts, thereby enabling us to build partnerships and enhance collaboration on matters of mutual interest. The Trinidad and Tobago delegation comprised the following persons representing the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries:

- Myself as the Minister.
- Mr. Selwyn Lashley, Permanent Secretary.
- Ms. Olivia Bertrand, Policy and International Relations Officer.

Representing the National Gas Company:

- Mr. Gerry Brooks, Chairman.
- Professor Andrew Jupiter, Board Member.
- Mr. Frank Look Kin, Technical Advisor.

The role of each member at the meeting is as follows:

Myself as head of delegation and the country representative at the ministerial meetings and the summit.

Mr. Selwyn Lashley, he is the Executive Board Member for Trinidad and Tobago on the GECF and a subject matter expert on all GECF activities and procedures at the ministerial meetings and the summit.

Ms. Olivia Bertrand, Industrial Relation Support with respect to energy sector requirements of various countries and international organizations participating in the ministerial meetings and the summit.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Brooks, Prof. Jupiter and Mr. Look Kin, they were executive, technical and commercial support on specific state company interventions.

They participated in the summit, the ministerial meetings and bilateral meetings with other gas exporting countries on the potential for partnership and joint venturing on energy-related opportunities.

The duration of the trip was from the period from November 17 to 25. The cost of the individual members of the delegation were as follows:

Hon. Minister: \$171,191.75

Mr. Selwyn Lashley: \$118,876.75

Ms. Olivia Bertrand: \$45,981.75

Mr. Gerry Brooks: \$156,728.00

Prof. Jupiter: \$156,728.00

Mr. Look Kin: \$88,123.00

Total cost for the attendance of the delegation at the meeting was \$737,629.25. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Before we move on, I would like to point out that when the Leader of Government Business had asked for a deferral, Question No. 26, you sought leave for Question No. 26 to be deferred?

Mr. Khan: Yes.

Madam President: That question had not been deferred previously, so it was my error. But it will be deferred for seven days.

DEFINITE URGENT MATTER

Non Payment to Pharmacists

Sen. Wade Mark: Madam President, in accordance with Standing Order 16 I seek leave to move the adjournment of the Senate for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, the implications for the public in terms of not being able to access Chronic Disease Assistance Programme drugs at 290 pharmacies which have not received payments for services rendered.

The matter is definite as it concerns the medical health support needs of thousands of persons who suffer with chronic disease. The matter is urgent because the pharmacists are threatening to withhold these critical drugs from patients because of the moneys owed to them by the National Insurance Property Development Company (NIPDEC) and this can have serious consequences if not effectively addressed.

The matter is of public importance because the programme is in danger of collapse and this negatively affects the health and well-being of thousands of citizens who cannot otherwise access these essential medicines.

I thank you, Madam President.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, I am not satisfied that this matter, as presented, qualifies under this Standing Order. I do wish to point out that it should be noted that information on this very issue was sought by Sen. Sturge in his questions posed earlier.

**UNITED NATIONS AGENDA 2030
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

Order read 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 spoken on this Motion are as follows: on November 24, 2015, Sen. Wade Mark who moved the Motion, Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan, Sen. David Small, Sen. Khadija Ameen, Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon, Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir. On January 26, 2016, the speakers were: Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir who concluded his contribution, Sen. Gerard Hadeed, Sen. Foster Cummings, Sen. Melissa Ramkissoon, Sen. Wayne Sturge, Sen. Nigel De Freitas, Sen. Jennifer Raffoul, Sen. Allyson Baksh.

Sen. Daniel Dookie: Thank you very much, Madam President, and I am very delighted to have this opportunity to participate in this very meaningful debate that centres on the issue of sustainable development. The body of literature on this topic is extremely wide, and there is no agreement regarding a best-fit model for sustainable development. What you would find in the body of literature is a multiplicity of independent variables that impact sustainable development.

In my contribution I propose to examine some of these variables, acknowledging that other speakers would have done so in an expert manner, and I will also try to align these variables to our local context. Before I get into that, Madam President, let me take a few comments on the contribution of the very distinguished Sen. Wayne Sturge. He told this honourable institution and the country some of the UNC's proposed policy regarding taxation and I would just like to refresh our memories. He told us that it is his position—and I gather the position of his party as an alternative government—that we should consider increasing corporation taxes to 35 per cent. He also told this honourable institution that he proposed for

our consideration on behalf of his political party, to increase value added taxes to 17½ per cent on non-food items.

I find it a bit troubling, Madam President, after condemning the Government for its minor adjustments to the Business Levy and Green Fund to propose such drastic increases in corporation taxes and value added taxes. I find it a bit troubling, after condemning the Minister of Finance for making those minor adjustments to the Business Levy and Green Fund, to tell us that what they are proposing as an alternative is a significant increase in corporation taxes to 35 per cent, and an increase in value added taxes to 17½ per cent on non-food items.

The very distinguished Senator also told this institution that he basically condemned the Government for reducing expenditure on a particular line item in education. He told us, the Government, that we have a mixed-up priority. He said our priorities are wrong because we cut expenditure on this particular item on education.

The point I wish to make is that we can achieve more with spending less. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago can achieve more with spending less. [*Desk thumping*] It is called efficiency. It is called value for money. It is called productivity. It is called optimum production. You do it by eliminating wastage, mismanagement, inefficiency and [*Desk thumping*] deliberate inefficiency. And the very distinguished Senator also told us about those who have computers and laptops, and those who do not have. He said if you do not have access to computers, you have no access to the World Wide Web. Of course, that is so. But I propose a better way to examine it is to state, but if you have computers but no access to the One World Information Space, you have little access to information.

The point is, a classroom with one computer with access to the One World

Information Space is better off than a classroom with 100 computers but no access to the One World Information Space. The point is that we do not need thousands of computers to access the One World Information Space.

So, Madam President, let me now highlight some of the variables that I was able to point out when I would have examined some of the literature on sustainable development. One of the fundamental variables that impacts sustainable development is that of accountability. Accountability promotes efficiency, productivity and transparency, and in doing so, it helps us to ensure that corrupt public officials are kept away from the public purse. In doing so, it helps to ensure that these officials do not build their personal clientelistic network, and it causes and impacts the Government to have greater control on the usage of Government resources.

And as a result, clientelism does not become the way a government conducts its business. Accordingly, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has proposed to institutionalize, to a large extent, the function of accountability, of course recognizing the fact that it promotes sustainability. And the Government, as we are aware, would have proposed the development of institutions such as the general accounting office, the statistical institute, much needed institution in this country.

You see, Madam President, if we examine accountability regarding some of the most recent major projects in our country—if I were to use the Point Fortin Highway as an example—we would recall that there was no proper reporting mechanism. We would recall regarding this project that the information that we had was vague, unreliable, and in some cases, ambiguous.

2.30 p.m.

Consequently, the outcome of that was an uninformed public. Uninformed

public, Madam President, that led to a series of allegations of corruption, a lack of trust and confidence in the public or by the public, opportunities for wastage and mismanagement that some were happy to take, poor financial decisions. That is what you had regarding that project. Contributing to that was a lack of accountability. That is not what you want. What you want is an independent auditor, an independent institution.

You want an informed public, a public that is participating in the affairs of the State, a public that would develop high morale due to the confidence gained from proper accountability standards and reporting. This would be achieved, Madam President, through the independent function of accountability institutionalized through a general accounting office. What we need in this regard is accountability and reporting that connects to performance outcome. We need accountability if we are serious about sustainability that connects to performance outcomes. What you do not need is inappropriate quantification, meaningless in accurate data. I wish to state that this country today is living the consequences of this in appropriate quantification through goal displacement.

If we examine another major project in recent times, such as the Children's Hospital, you would realize that there was no proper reporting or inappropriate reporting on issues such as staffing, planning, imperatives such as, for example, interfaces and exchanges, or the correlation with our existing hospital network. Hence, Madam President, what you got for accountability was absolutely no reporting, no accountability regarding value. The point is, Madam President, regarding sustainable development, accountability is not about how much money you spend or how fast the building went up. It is about value reporting, value attainment and value spread.

So, Madam President, as we engage the goal of sustainable development, it is important that we engage accountability in a serious manner. Three major variables are very important in this regard—as I would have alluded to some—data, technology and independent institutions. Data, technology and independent institutions. I am convinced that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is making progressive strides in ensuring that these come to the fore.

Again I would repeat, with regard to independent institutions, the Government would have proposed the General Accounting Office, the Statistical Institute, the Revenue Authority; and these independent institutions would provide credible data driven and assisted and enabled by ICT, promoting greater citizen participation, greater public trust. The result of that is that we would be able to realize to a large extent value for money spent on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Another important variable as we engage the discourse on sustainable development—something I feel we often put on the back burner—is the value of our senior citizens towards development, or the contribution that they can make towards sustainable development. I know Sen. Creese, I believe, in his contribution alluded to this: if you engage the study of gerontology, it teaches us about the benefits of intergenerational relationships. What it tells us, Madam President, is that we must promote the sustained mobility of our senior citizens because it enhances their social participation in society, it improves their well-being and it creates generativity, which is the transmitting of knowledge to the next generation. What is important and fundamental is that we must build a network of interrelated benefits to enhance the value added of our senior citizens.

This, I believe, is important in our local context because we have somewhat

of a large baby boomer population, we have a growing trend for people to work longer and, probably more importantly, we have a growing need for some people to work longer. There is also an increase in life expectancy and coupled with a reduction in the number of children per woman. What this means is that there would be a reduction in the number of young people to take care of the elderly. So there is much need to keep our senior citizens mobile, active and well, which would in turn reduce the public cost of taking care of them as well as further expenditure on welfare. The result of that is more money to spend on development activities.

So, Madam President, as we engage development as a nation, it is important to promote the social network of our senior citizens, to promote their mobility so that there would be an increased opportunity to transfer their knowledge, in particular their tacit knowledge to the next generation. We paid tribute today to the late Sen. Winston Moore, but the question in this regard that comes to mind: How much of his learning would have been passed on to our generation? I propose that that is critical in our developmental agenda.

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago would have highlighted in the budget presentation most recently its commitment to our senior citizens. Indeed, the presentation would have highlighted some of the immediate interventions to assist and those proposed for the future. Most recently, the Government would have identified the benefit of free driver's permits to our senior citizens, free passport for our retirees. What the Government, in fact, in my view is pursuing is the philosophy that recognizes the value of our senior citizens. What the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is pursuing in my view is a development of a programme to benefit our retirees and give them an increased opportunity to

contribute towards our nation.

I believe, Madam President, that successive PNM administrations of the past would have pursued this with a great deal of success. I believe that it is not wise to look at the benefits being offered to our senior citizens in isolation, but rather to examine it in the wider context of a programme designed to assist them, to keep them more mobile, so that they would be able to participate more meaningfully in the affairs of the State. Many countries today, Madam President, are engaging more and more in these interventions to assist our senior citizens, recognizing the value of transmitting their knowledge and their learnings to the next generation. So I certainly support the Government in continuing to promote the well-being of our senior citizens so that they would continue to have the opportunity to play a value-added role in the development of our country.

Another variable that I found very, very present in the body of literature on sustainable development is the role of ICT. You see, ICT is a major enabling tool; enabling tool as it provides significant benefits at the level of the individual, the level of the firm and the level of the nation; enabling because it helps in transitioning to a knowledge-based society. As we would very well be aware of the experience of Singapore, it aids in the business development or the business intelligence development of our firms, and it also assists because it improves the ease of doing business.

ICT, Madam President, as it relates to development would have had a significant and positive impact on nations regarding employment, competitiveness, poverty reduction, women development and the development of the differently abled. ICT would have also been found to have a significant and positive impact because it brings Government, citizens and businesses closer which aids

development.

The question that arises is where we are today as a nation. Prior to 2010, there were some strategic platform technologies available to our country. We had the e-Government portal which was the Government's gateway to information that was supposed to provide e-Government information and services and promote e-inclusion. We also had the e-Government backbone system which was supposed to be Government's broadband network, which was designed to connect Government Ministries and agencies to promote data sharing.

I do not think, Madam President, in recent times, we were able to leverage and use these technologies to their full advantage. As a matter of fact, if you engage the literature on this topic you will find that it has been noted that poor ICT usage is a major barrier to development, and I think we have not utilized what was available to us regarding ICT properly in recent times. So, however, we now have the opportunity to utilize ICT, and what we can expect and look forward to if we do this with a measure of success, is an array of e-Government services available to our people without our people having to leave their remote location to access government goods and services. This saving in transactional cost, I believe, Madam President, would be very beneficial to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

The world today through the use of ICT is now graduating innovators and technopreneurs. What are we graduating? I think this discussion is ongoing. I think this discussion is current. The world today through ICT is graduating knowledge workers.

Are we, as a nation, graduating knowledge workers? Can we say that? Can we say, Madam President, that we are graduating knowledge workers? Can we say that we are graduating innovators? Very, very important questions to answer, in

my respectful view.

2.45 p.m.

In our local context, Madam President, ICT also requires a suitable regulatory framework. We also had the Data Protection Bill and the Electronic Transactions Bill, both passed in 2011 on the foundational work done by the Government prior to that. However, the subsidiary work and the regulations needed to give life to these Bills were not done and pursued with success. I believe that this Government is committing to putting a framework in place but would maximize the use and consequently benefits of ICT.

You see, Madam President, we live in a world where there is a radical reorientation in customer demands and I believe ICT is pivotal in developing innovation to meet the requirement of this new world. So, Madam President, ICT drives sustainable development. It is an enabling variable in dealing with spatial and dispersion challenges and I believe ICT would be used by this Government to boost its developmental agenda. ICT is definitely included in our plans.

Let me move on to another important driver to sustainable development, and I believe it is a significant opportunity that is available to us as a nation because I believe there are significant opportunities today for the internationalization of our SMEs. I believe this is a gold mine that our country is sitting on. Of course, it would require some changes to the individual international posture of our SMEs leader, changes to their risk perception, but I believe, incrementally, our SMEs must promote their internationalization agenda.

One way I propose, in terms of a recommendation for their consideration, is to suggest that our SMEs can pursue non-equity modes of internationalization which have been proven to be less costly and which have been proven to bring

significant cross-border success. I know that institutions such as NEDCO and the Ministry of Trade and Industry are very poised in this dispensation to do that.

You see, Madam President, I believe it is critical and important for us to get out of the resource curse. Yes, we may have suffered from the enclave effect because our wider economy may not have been strategically connected to our resourced industry, oil and gas, but I know this Government plans to take this country out of this resource curse situation because I know, even in this honourable institution, they would have identified priority areas. Of course, we would have heard the Minister of Trade and Industry address the real issue of diversification and the role of eTecK and InvesTT. We would have heard, in this honourable institution, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries address the role of agriculture in development in a meaningful way. We would have also heard the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development address the issues of SMEs as we engage the future.

So certainly, sectors have been identified by this Government for growth and this gives rise regarding SMEs to the issue of clustering for growth of the small business sector and, as I said a while ago, the Minister of Trade and Industry would have examined the role of eTecK in this regard. Also, Madam President, the issue of clustering, I believe, is critical for our small business because of the strong synergies that exist among SMEs. And what research has told us is that clustering among SMEs in the sector of tourism, arts and the food sector has proven to be extremely successful, more so in the start-up phase. And yes, we would have heard the plans of the Government for these sectors and I endorse the work that is being done through the various Ministries. Small business—I believe, we are sitting on a major opportunity.

You see, the world is witnessing a decline in the mass production paradigm. Today, it is all about the federated concept of business. Today, it is all about the Mc Donaldization of society. Today, in business, it is all about business model innovation. Today, there is a marked reduction in firm size in the manufacturing sector in our developed world, and since the 1980s, SMEs contribution to GDP has been increasing very steadily.

A country, Madam President, can become more competitive by focusing its innovation policy on SMEs. Why? Because the literature teaches us that they are more flexible and because of that, they have a behavioural advantage; they can adjust faster. Why? Because the research teaches us that they operate in niches, they have greater motivation in their workforce and they have greater inter-firm collaboration. In this regard, the study tells us that their network includes universities, financial institutions, technology experts, consulting firms, collaborating to a high level that promotes the concept among SMEs of co-opetition which is, Madam President, these SMEs working together, cooperating with each other but competing with each other at the same time. Major, major opportunity available for the development of our small business sector as we engage our developmental agenda.

So, Madam President, I believe we are filled with opportunities as we endorse the laudable goal of sustainable development. Leadership, strategic thinking are required and I would have respectfully put forward the role that accountability has to play in our developmental path; the role that the use and strategic use of ICT, the role that our small business sector has to play and the role that our senior citizens must play as we engage development. All proven, all found in the literature on sustainable development and all part of this Government's

action towards sustainable development. So the future is bright; a positive mindset is required. New approaches are required and together, Madam President, I believe we are all committed to the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, it is with much sincerity that I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Rodger Samuel: Madam President, I consider it a tremendous honour to take part in this debate as it was raised by Sen. Mark and I want to congratulate him for reminding us of the importance of us, as a nation, pursuing these development goals vigorously, and ensuring that we match up to international standards as we exist in Trinidad and Tobago. Two of these goals I am quite concerned about and my little discourse today will deal with two of them and the adverse effects if we do not meet them, and that is number six which has to do with clean water and sanitation and number seven that has to do with affordable and clean energy.

Madam President, while we, in Trinidad and Tobago, seem to have the benefits and the pleasure of having pipe-borne water in our houses, I questioned tremendously why is there an increase in bottle water on the market. If there is an increase in bottle drinking water, then it would suggest that the nation, at large, is not comfortable with consuming the water that comes out of their taps. [*Interruption*] As a matter of fact, every day, we have been told and encouraged and even as we sit in the Parliament, we are consuming marketing bottled water, Minister of—Franklin Khan, sorry to call your name.

Sen. Khan: Speak to the Clerk of the House.

Sen. R. Samuel: No, and I am saying this not to criticize the thing, but really, it sends a message that even the Parliament is suggesting that it is wiser to consume or probably more convenient to consume bottled water as opposed to normal tap

water.

But that being the case, I want to talk a bit about the quality of water from the standpoint, Madam President, of the waste disposal sites that we have in our country. There is a site in Guanapo that, years ago, was a valley but that site is now a mountain, and just below that site in Guanapo is the Guanapo Water Treatment Plant. Something that I have been quite concerned about tremendously because I am not too sure or certain that we have taken seriously the deposits that we have made by means of garbage disposal to those waste disposal sites over the many years that the site existed. We have been, as a country, not paying much attention to how we dispose of different types of waste and First World countries are quite concerned about that. They have banned the open disposal of motherboards and hard drives and washing machine motors and all of these different things that emit a high percentage of toxicity when they are dumped.

I am not too sure if in the testing of our waters, if those things are taken into serious consideration, if the testing that is being done at Guanapo is different to the testing that is being done on any other water treatment plant; if they are paying particular attention to the carcinogens that are exposed and emitted from those kinds of materials. If that is taken into consideration and that WASA can now put the public at large, tell them at large, that hear what, the testing that we are doing in those areas are absolutely different from the testing that we are doing in the other treatment plants in Trinidad and Tobago; something that we must take heed of.

3.00 p.m.

As a matter of fact, Madam President, it is important for us to note that there has been a lot of study going on with regard to communities that exist close and in

close proximity to waste disposal sites, and the Minister of Local Government and Rural Development would know that.

Sen. Khan: You are pushing against an open door. WASA does in fact test for heavy metals throughout its portfolio of plants. I am not sure what those test results show. But with regard to garbage disposal, I have been saying all along that we are disposing garbage the same way we have disposed of it in the 50s and in the 60s and it is an area that falls under the Ministry of Local Government, which we plan to bring some measure of modernization to. A lot of studies have taken place in the past but again the inertia of Trinidad and Tobago, nothing fundamental seems to happen to change what is wrong. But, you are pushing against an open door.

Sen. R. Samuel: Thank you. But I am still quite concerned, if the same testing that is being done in Guanapo or it is just the normal testing that is being done in other areas because of the waste disposal site. I personally visit sites and I remember one period of time we journeyed to the heights of the disposal site and there is a spring. There is water. The further we journeyed, the clearer the water was. Then as we began coming back downhill we found that it got murky and dark, until it was black. But this same water flows back into the watercourses, and I am concerned if it is the same treatment being handed out to water throughout the country because the other areas do not have disposal sites in close proximity to the water treatment plants.

It is important for us to be aware of that, and if possible do the kind of toxicology studies and epidemiology studies in communities that exist close to these disposal sites and what impact these sites would have on the communities, on their health, doing individual testing for chemical residues. All of these things

have to be done for us to be clear in our minds, Madam President, that these waste disposal sites are not having adverse effects upon communities within close proximity and the wider society at large. It is important for us to do that, seeing that these water treatment plants and this one in particular is being affected by a waste disposal site that has now become mountainous. I could imagine the magnitude of toxicity that is emitted from that waste disposal site.

So I just felt it was necessary to do that and to highlight that as we talk about clean water and sanitation and the Minister has already talked about it is something that he has spoken about—how we dispose of waste and stuff like that. But it is something, in the interim, I would love to see the kind of reports from the Guanapo treatment site and to see if it is the same testing that is going on because that demands a different approach to testing and I would love to see that. And if that is the case and the testing has not been done, I wonder the impact it has had and the effects it has had on the immediate communities, as well as those people that are consuming water that is being treated by the Guanapo site.

I would love to see the report. I would love for us to look at it seriously because I attended a function with WASA some years ago in the Arima Town Hall, where they came to present their clean water plan, and when I began to challenge them about the testing they were doing, the entire session shut down and they had to ask—they were not able to answer the kind of questions about the kind of toxins that are emitted from the stuff that we have been dumping for years in this country, that is naturally flowing.

You know, just by way of information, a couple of us decided that we would then journey up the river leading to the Guanapo site. Do you know what we found? “No wabeen in the water, no river fish, nothing in the water. It is dead.” It

said to us tremendously—as a matter of fact it is on that same journey we ended up under the double bridge in Arima, as you go into Valencia, and we recognized that the bridge was about to collapse early, early in 2010 and I reported that to the Ministry of Works, and fortunately for us they closed off that bridge and then we built a bridge subsequent to that, under the last regime. [*Desk thumping*]

So I am quite concerned about the social impact that the leach has on the communities and I am quite concerned about the impact it has upon the health of the people, psychologically, socially, every aspect of the health. How has this impacted upon the community? Have we studied the culture of communities that dwell around waste disposal sites to see if there is some impact, because in many instances—I am not trying to stigmatize communities—but it is a certain kind of culture that comes out. Is it because of the impact chemical-wise?

We have to be very, very concerned, Madam President, about that impact, because when we talk about landfill sites we talk about air pollution and we also talk about ground pollution, emission into the water, emissions into the environment. We are talking about that kind of pollution because it is important. Are we mature enough to demand air pollution testing in these sites? Are we mature enough to demand emission testing in the sites? What kind of emission testing is being done at this Guanapo site? How far have they tested? Have they drilled it? Have they gone down? How far? What are they doing to show the impact or the effects of the leach and then determine how are we going to solve these problems? I wonder if that is what is causing some chemical imbalances in some environments. I wonder if that is what is causing the social problems in some environments. It is something we have to seriously look at because landfill sites emit a great deal of toxins into the atmosphere.

As a matter of fact, I remember oftentimes, I do not know if it is wilfully done or if it is accidentally done, or it just happens by nature, but every year around a certain time, the Guanapo site in Arima is burnt, and for miles, all to Tunapuna, Curepe, people are affected by it and it tells us that something is wrong; something is wrong.

While we talk about clean water and sanitation we have to think about this seriously. I mean, the gases that naturally build up at landfill sites, something that we have to take cognizance of and make sure that we are doing it right and then ensure.

I mean, there are carcinogens, Minister, that just little drops of it in a pool of 20,000 gallons can make that—you cannot consume that water; little drops of it, four drops of it.

Sen. Sturge: You know the Beetham landfill is burning as we speak.

Sen. R. Samuel: The Beetham burning as we speak?

Sen. Sturge: Yes.

Sen. R. Samuel: My goodness! The idea about it, those are the things that we have to seriously consider because this can become a serious health hazard in this country. It is not just H1N1 and all these things. These are long-term effects on the society and it changes the psyche of a society and impacts upon the social structure of the society. This is not something you can just give an antidote to and inoculate them and say well it is over, we have covered it. This is deeper than that, Madam President, and it might have been affecting all of us here. That is why sometimes the behaviour in Parliament is so terrible. Maybe we are living too close to the dump. Maybe Parliament is too close to the dump. [*Laughter*] Oh my goodness, yes Minister Khan.

Along with that—and we are talking about affordable and clean energy—I am quite concerned and it was the Canadian Parliament, I think somewhere in 2015, that had a committee calling for protection of vulnerable groups with regard to radiation and dirty current. We have found ourselves over the years—and T&TEC and all of the electrical companies have been every day putting all our electrical lines overhead and not studying the effects and the impact all of these high-tension wires have upon the human being and it is an environmental problem.

And all of these emissions from overhead electrical high-tension wires and dirty current and leakages in the system—based upon the standard of electrical wiring that we have in Trinidad and Tobago—impact upon the human being tremendously because electricity is a natural part of our existence, and it is not often we give thought to, if all of these high-tension wires that are criss-crossing across the nation are affecting the human being, affecting life. Because we are talking about clean energy. And if in fact the dirty current or the EMRs are affecting us in Trinidad and Tobago, then what kind of testing has been done to ease our minds that we are living in an EMR-free environment? Because electromagnetic radiation is serious.

Emissions are serious. I was privileged recently to sit in a home and a gentleman came in from Australia to show us the extent of dirty current in the very house that I was sitting in. He took out this unit. There is a name for it. I am not going to market it, and he just put it in the centre of the room and we turned off all the lights and it was like lightning. Emissions were coming out of the plugs, the bulbs. I mean, the same bulbs we discarded. We discarded a certain type of bulb at one time. Yeah, I ran. I got out of the house. The same bulbs we discarded some time ago and we said that now is a good time for us to start to use a different

type of bulb, even that new fluorescent twist bulb, they say it is dangerous likewise. As a matter of fact, it is said that some of these new bulbs are even more dangerous than the incandescent bulbs that we were using before.

So we have shifted from one thing and we have gone into another thing and it is even more dangerous than before, and it is something that we have to seriously consider, Madam President. Why? Because it is marketed that those old incandescent bulbs, a 60-watt bulb is now just equivalent to a 15-watt compact fluorescent bulb.

Madam President: Sen. Samuel, can you look this way, please?

Sen. R. Samuel: Sorry, I apologize Ma'am. It is said, Madam President, that—and it is marketed that way so people feel we are burning less current. So 60 watts from before is now 15 watts of these fluorescent compact bulbs. But, in burning less current are we burning away our lives likewise? Is it doing more harm than good to us? What are the kinds of studies that are done in Trinidad and Tobago to ease the tension of concerned citizens concerning dirty current and the emissions that are taking place around the country?

3.15 p.m.

All of these high-tension wires, what really is the mechanism used for measuring high-frequency waves that are generated across the country? What is the mechanism that is used for measuring that? Have they been measured? Are they consistently being measured, because we are talking about a clean and safe environment, not only for water, but an environment that is safe across the board? How is it measured? How come we are not getting the kind of reports necessary, Madam President, that would now say to this nation: “Hear what is going on, that these high-tension wires are not affecting you”. They are not?—because we have

measured it and we are using this instrument to measure it, and this technology to measure it. How come?

And what about the high-frequency-voltage transients that are created in our homes? What is going on with that? Many a times we talk, Sen. Sturge, about, you know, there was a surge in current. Is that a surge? Or is it that the surge is affecting you more? If it can blow your appliances, [*Laughter*] if it can destroy your refrigerators and televisions, Sen. Gerald, if it can do that, Sen. Hadeed, I wonder what it can do to us.

As a matter of fact, in many instances it blows your voltage regulators out of the door. Is it a surge? Or is it really affecting our homes? And when there is this surge, Madam President, what is the residue? What is the residual impact on the human body when you rest, when you sleep, when you take a nap? What is it saying to all of us as we talk about achieving these development goals, and clean energy and clean environment, and all of these kinds of things? I am quite concerned about all of this. I was very, very glad when Sen. Mark raised this issue.

So, Madam President, the Canadian Parliament was looking at radio frequencies, and I remember speaking to Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat concerning the radio frequencies. This was a big thing when the Canadian Parliament established a committee on health, and there were tremendous recommendations by that committee to the Canadian Parliament. I just want to reiterate some of them because the concerns are real. The recommendations were:

“Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada, in collaboration with the health departments of the provinces and territories, examine existing cancer data collection methods to improve the collection of information

relating to wireless device use and cancer.

Recommendation 2: That Statistics Canada consider including questions related to...

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada, through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, consider funding research into electromagnetic hypersensitivity testing, diagnosis and treatment, and its possible impacts on health in the workplace.

Recommendation 4: That the Canadian Medical Association, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons, the College of Family Physicians of Canada and the World Health Organization consider updating their guidelines and continuing education materials regarding the diagnosis and treatment of electromagnetic hypersensitivity to ensure they are based on the latest scientific evidence and reflect the symptoms of affected Canadians.

Recommendation 5: That the Government of Canada continue to provide reasonable accommodations for environmental sensitivities, including electromagnetic hypersensitivity, as required under the Canadian Human Rights Act.

Recommendation 6: That Health Canada ensure the openness and transparency of its processes for the review of Safety Code..."

—that is their Safety Code—regard to radio frequencies:

"...so that all Canadians have an opportunity to be informed about the evidence considered or excluded in such reviews, that outside experts are provided full information when doing independent reviews, and that the scientific rationale for any change is clearly communicated."

So they are asking for transparency because, you know, there can be a

tremendous cover-up. The moment business feels that this is going to affect us tremendously, Madam President, there is always—they send their own research and their research will now always support their position.

“Recommendation 10: That Health Canada conduct a comprehensive review of all existing literature relating to radiofrequency fields and carcinogenicity based on international best practices.

Recommendation 11: That the Government of Canada, through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, consider funding research into the link between radiofrequency fields and potential health effects such as cancer, genetic damage, infertility, impairment to development and behaviour, harmful effects to eyes and on the brain, cardiovascular, biological and biochemical effects.”

—the Canadian Parliament. It is so important for us to look at this, Madam President, because I am not too sure what we have in Trinidad and Tobago. And if we are going to meet these development goals, then we will have to seriously consider that impact on all of these things that I am discussing here on the environment, and on the lives of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

I was saying to Sen. The Hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development that when I saw all the electricity, I got out of the house, and the guy said to me: “It has already affected you.” [*Laughter*] “Your presence, you are sleeping in it. You are living in it.” I want to know, how are we going to deal with things of this matter in Trinidad and Tobago in order that we are not impacted? We are not having a drive to clean up the physical environment from bottles and things that collect water that would affect the mosquito situation, but that now we deal with all of this that affects the human body; something to think about.

Something to seriously investigate. Something to get consistent reports over and over published to the nation that: “Ay, we are living in a healthy environment”, not just healthy from what you can get at the health centres and CDAP and all these things. Maybe if we had been studying all of this all of the time, the CDAP bill might be less because the impact all of this seems to have on the society, and many a time although they are conflicting views with regard to scientific studies based upon the slant from which the scientists and the researchers have done, because many of them are paid by industries to protect the industries’ views, but there will always be conflict. And while, Madam President, there would be conflict, the human being is still being affected.

Have we done testing in this Parliament to see if these lights are affecting us? Somebody might say, but “dat is kinda” getting funny, but it is serious business. Are there electrical leaks in this building? Who has done the testing for dirty current in here? We sit here for hours and I wonder if that is why we fall asleep sometimes—[*Laughter*]—but long hours, and we are subject to all of this. Are these the right kind of lights that are good for the human body? Does it affect your mind? Does it affect you socially? Does it affect your attitude? Because sometimes the same people who will smile at you walking down the steps, when they get out of the building, you cannot believe it is the same person that was here before. [*Laughter*] It may be that, I do not know, but we may laugh at it, but this is a serious problem. This is a serious thing; [*Laughter*] maybe, maybe, and whatever effects.

Madam President, I thought it wise to bring this up with regard to the landfill site as it affects our watercourses, and the kind of chemical reactions it would have upon the human body, especially the one in Guanapo—[*Laughter*]

Sen. Roach, and then the serious impact, if there is any, that all of these high-tension wires and the criss-cross that we have across the networks of Trinidad and Tobago have upon the society. And if, in fact, all of these things have changed the culture of Trinidad and Tobago because it has affected the mindset of the country, and that is why other things are on the increase, and it could be because of a lot of the impacts and effects that these things are having on all of us.

The levels of tolerance and all of these things that we think about. Why are people so angry? Why are people so affected? Why are people—is it that we need to seriously—and I would love Sen. The Hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government to seriously look at some of the questions I am asking, especially with the landfill site and the criss-cross of high-tension wires that are—that, together with radio frequencies that we have in the country, and to really begin to do the kind of scientific testing to see what impact they are having on the human being socially and psychologically and all things. Because all of sudden we have an increase in certain types of diseases, and it is not because of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito. There is an increase in certain NCDs and it says that something is happening in our society, and we may not really be looking at the cause, and the cause might just be running all over the country.

Last but not least, Madam President, when we talk about the environment, I am quite concerned about the sulphur and lead content we have in the atmosphere, based upon the lead content of our fuel, and the sulphur content in our fuel, and the impact that it is having on us as human beings. The lead content and the sulphur content of our fuel in Trinidad and Tobago are probably among the highest in the world, and it is dangerous, Madam President, for all of us. We walk the streets, we are impacted by it. We drive our vehicles. We are impacted by it. It is high. I

would love some kind of environmental testing to be done in the atmosphere to prove to citizens like myself that that extent and magnitude of lead and sulphur in the atmosphere is not killing us slowly. And it is!

So, Minister, a lot of stuff seems to be affecting us, you know—RF, dirty current, frequencies from high-tension wires, pollution in the atmosphere from the lead content and sulphur content that we have in our fuel, and we are breathing it in, “sleeping it in, walking it in”. Every single day, Minister Khan, we are impacted. And you know something? Nobody is saying anything to bring any kind of comfort to our minds. Nobody is saying: “Okay, we have significantly reduced this by such and such per cent. The world’s standards are so and we are here”. Nobody—it is “ah kinda hush, hush, kill dem slowly with lead. Kill dem slowly with sulphur and yuh know someting?”—the next generation may just be imbalanced. I am concerned.

We are talking about it, achieving these goals. I know Petrotrin and these places would take me to task because, Madam President, every time we walk out of here—lead. Every time we walk out of here—sulphur. What is happening to us? Trucks are passing, vehicles are passing. It is a mess in the society, and they expect that we would just smile and be happy. I am saying I will continue to speak about it, and I will go publicly and begin to speak about it until places like Petrotrin and all of these people begin to take note of the fact that we are fed up with a dirty and polluted atmosphere.

Madam President, I thought it wise to bring it up. I will continue to talk about it, and I hope that in future, my colleagues will realize the seriousness of this and begin to speak about it likewise. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

3.30 p.m.

Sen. Taurel Shrikissoon: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, it gives me great joy as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago to enter into this debate as it pertains to the adoption and implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals as prescribed by the UN. I would like to pay tribute to Sen. Wade Mark and his team for bringing this Motion before this honourable Senate. They know how to appease me in this Senate. *[Laughter]* So, thank you friends. I would really like to thank Sen. Wade Mark and his team for bringing this Motion before this honourable Senate as it demonstrates a concern for the well-being and health of our land and its people.

I would also like to commend the Government for their spirited involvement during this debate, and adopting a general direction for our country as they seek to create and lead the path for the next four and a half years ahead of us.

Sen. Khan: I thought was five.

Sen. T. Shrikissoon: But it is now four and a half. *[Laughter]* If you would allow me, Madam President, I would not like to go through the 17 goals because it has been spoken of so many times, but I would like to quote from the UN document that says:

“Never before have world leaders pledged common action and endeavour across such a broad and universal policy agenda. We are setting out together on the path towards sustainable development, devoting ourselves collectively to the pursuit of global development and of ‘win-win’ cooperation which can bring huge gains to all countries and all parts of the world.”

While I can identify with this holistic approach taken it means to say that what is presented before us here is a general prescriptive framework across territories.

That is to say, Madam President, that a wholesale adoption of all of these goals may not necessarily be relevant to all member nations with the same priority, as each nation would have to consider their own stage of development with some of the goals more urgent than others.

It is in this light that I would like to suggest to this honourable Senate that we carefully evaluate the status of our development as it pertains to each of these goals and indicate our level of progress or status of each one, so as to provide a general position of where we are at before embarking on a developmental or implementation programme. This would highlight those areas where we are advanced in our development while simultaneously identifying the areas that are critical. A blanket approach to these goals is certainly not recommended.

While a global framework is presented, we must not be consumed by the goals and ideals of an external body as powerful and as real as their research may be to dictate the pace and areas of development of our country, and that we must pursue as so addressed by Sen. Mahabir.

We live here. We in this Senate as well as those in the other place are responsible for the governance of our land. As citizens of our beloved country, while we are grateful for the research and policy agenda of the UN, we must determine, we must determine, what we want for our country, and our people are depending on us. I am saying this to say, let us not be misguided towards compliance or pursuance of externally generated goals and policies, but let our developmental agenda be determined by what is needed for our people; both now and into the future.

Madam President, over the past 30 years, we have seen successive administrations come into office, and for each term each political party or each

administration governs this land, and that is an example of democracy at work. And while we appreciate the freedom of democracy and the voice of the people, successive administrations have different differing ideals. Each political party seeks to pursue the goals and objectives of their manifesto, and it appears as though policies of a manifesto are mutually exclusive to a political party. While I agree that is what makes a manifesto a manifesto, the successive changes in administrations make the development of Trinidad and Tobago more difficult, retards the progress and pace of development, denying the people of Trinidad and Tobago any development with a long-term orientation.

If we consider the aluminium smelter and the Labidco Industrial Estate and the Power Generation Plant, we saw a vision of the last administration completely halted by another administration, and today we are hearing of the debt of T&TEC through a take-or-pay arrangement because of the inability to utilize the electricity produced by TGU. Who pays that bill? The people of Trinidad and Tobago with no benefit to them, not to mention the loss of revenue from the smelter, which would have complemented our existing revenue stream at a time of falling commodity prices.

However, when we look at the Children's Hospital or even the proposed change from the building for tertiary education now being reassigned to agriculture, we are seeing a shift of policy here again with a new governing body. My point here is this: that the development of Trinidad and Tobago does not have a long-term strategy and is being performed within a five-year window and is susceptible to the plans or the development agenda of a political party. [*Desk thumping*] This, Madam President, is a myopic view of the development of Trinidad and Tobago.

I would like to say on hearing of a developmental plan as referred to by Sen. Baksh, my colleague, in her contribution of the PNM's 2030 vision of Trinidad and Tobago, it is certainly an exciting time before us when a government can chart a developmental plan for the next 15 years. But I ask the question: is this a plan of the PNM or is it a plan that consulted with the stakeholders of Trinidad and Tobago? Is it a strategic plan or is it a developmental plan? I was not consulted, my friends, the NGOs, the corporations, the stakeholders which I know, they were not consulted, so I am leaning towards the fact that it was a PNM plan or it is a PNM plan.

My issue is this: what happens if that political party does not serve two consecutive terms as history would show that it is a bit challenging? Do the people of Trinidad and Tobago have to await a new plan? What happens with the framework and infrastructure and investment that would have been made to facilitate the first five years of this plan? And I just remind you of, on one hand, the Labidco Estate and, on the other, the Children's Hospital.

While political parties aspire for governance and seek to outplay each other through their own developmental agenda, there must be some common ground which the nation would agree to. That must be done irrespective of which political party enters office to assure and ensure continuity of projects and policies that are essential to the development of our land.

I stand here today in this august Senate and amidst a call for a bipartisan approach to these developmental goals of the UN, but to my knowledge we do not have a strategic plan of our own for Trinidad and Tobago achieved through a consultative process with key stakeholders. In the absence of a comprehensive developmental agenda that fits the need of the people of Trinidad and Tobago,

acceptance of an externally developed agenda is a direction we should not be going in.

Madam President, allow me to move away from this macro perspective on these developmental goals, and to focus on the developmental goals brought before us here today as it pertains to Trinidad and Tobago. While the last goal, Goal 17 of the agenda, speaks of implementation of these goals, the penultimate goal, Goal 16, is the heartbeat of the assessment of our country's status while providing the mechanism through which development can be achieved.

Madam President, Goal 16 and I quote it. It says:

“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”

I would like to repeat the latter part of this goal, Madam President:

“...build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”

The key word being here “institutions”. Institutions are what give us the capacity to get things done.

According to the World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report and I quote:

“The institutional environment of a country depends on the efficiency and the behaviour of both public and private stakeholders. The legal and administrative framework within which individuals, firms, and governments interact determines the quality of the public institutions of a country and has a strong bearing on competitiveness and growth.”

The role and function of institutions.

Madam President, we are seeing here two international organizations—first

the UN, second the World Economic Forum—highlighting the role of institutions in the development of a country. It burdens me here to say today that according to the Global Competitiveness Report 2015—2016 that our institutions, which is the first pillar of assessment of this report, are ranked 108 out of 144; institutions.

What is even worse, Madam President, is that while Trinidad and Tobago has an overall rank of 89th in the world, our score for institutions which is 108 is the lowest among the 14 pillars of development and competitiveness—the lowest—even lower than innovation.

According to this report which is published annually, our weakest area is institutions, and it is institutions that are required for the development of a nation. How can we advance this country if our nation is “sick”, meaning ill, as it pertains to the performance of institutions? So here we are debating an implementation of a UN determined developmental agenda and expressing a willingness to do so while the institutions that we are hoping through which implementation can occur are actually ill or underperforming.

Madam President, through you, I wish to discuss Goals 11 and 16 together. Goal 11 states:

“Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”—Goal 11, safety.

Goal 16:

“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice...”

Goal 11, safety; Goal 16, Justice. Let us see what happens.

According to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service website, crimes reported in 2013: 13,147, crimes detected, 2,365; 2014: 12,055 crimes, crimes

detected, 2,765; 2015: 11,135 crimes reported, detected, 2,542. Madam President, it is to say that, on average, 10,000 crimes or 80 per cent of crimes in this country go undetected, and that is the performance that we have.

3.45 p.m.

That is to say that 20 per cent of the reported crimes, reported, because there are those that are unreported, 20 per cent of the reported crimes are the crimes that have been detected. So we lost about 80 per cent of criminal activity which would have offended or infringed the rights of our citizens, 80 per cent lost; we have only maintained 20 per cent. Now we seek to discuss Goal 16, which is justice. Of this 20 per cent of cases detected, it says that the 20 per cent detected now forms the input into the judicial system because it is only when a crime is detected a charge could be laid and then filed in the courts.

[MR. VICE-PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

So of that 20 per cent now that is what forms the entry level or the information, or the data and cases for the Judiciary to deal with. And with all respect to the Judiciary—we are not here to cast aspersions but just address the issue—of the 20 per cent of cases reported, according to the Chief Justice's Opening Address of the Law Term 2015, the Magistrates' Court, or the court which criminal charges must first be laid, has a disposal to filing ratio of .67. What does that mean? It simply means that the number of cases filed as compared to the number of cases disposed of in a particular year was 67 per cent. That is to say that more cases were filed than resolved, so that there is a backlog of cases immediately. Remember 20 per cent of the detected crimes going in and we are now speaking of a backlog.

So in my year we have more cases filed than disposed of. If we bring both

services together now, justice—safety first and justice, toward 20 per cent of the crimes detected, 80 per cent of our citizens, no recourse, and now, when that 20 per cent enters the judicial system wishing access to justice, being prolonged well beyond a year. Here is the challenge now, if we compare how long it takes to settle a case in the Judiciary now we are hearing—and if we use the data from the High Court, because the data from the Magistrates' Court was not available, the Chief Justice in his opening address says:

“When we consider the time to disposal from filing, 57% of the matters were disposed of within three years...from filing...67%...four years...86%...five years.”

So the 20 per cent of our population that has a chance of being vindicated or being justified, or being compensated for an offence that has occurred it is now taking three to five years for us to get a verdict to them. Safety and justice, goals we are pursuing.

I would like to say, according to a report published by ISSAT, Institute of Strategic Studies and Training, it says, and this may interest you:

“...71 per cent of respondents in 2010 stated that the crime situation ‘very much’—that was the measure—“represents a threat to the future well-being... According to the results of the United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP)...Citizen Security Survey, the percentage of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago who fear becoming a victim of crime (55.9 percent) is higher than...any other English-speaking Caribbean country, even though crime is higher in Jamaica.”

The article continues to say:

“Trinidad and Tobago’s judicial system suffers from corruption and

inefficiency. In September 2011, the justice minister stated that there was a backlog of 100,000 criminal cases in the Magistrates' Courts and 1,000 cases in the High Courts, adding that it would take 10 years to clear the backlog of existing murder cases. One Justice of the Peace has cited this backlog as being 'a danger to the country', and said more judges and magistrates were needed if this was ever going to be cleared."

I ask the question, how realistic is Goal 11 making our settlement safe and Goal 16, justice for all?

Mr. Vice-President, I wish to extend this point with one additional issue by introducing the Police Complaints Authority, and if we examine what went on with the Police Complaints Authority, the Authority responsible for investigating allegations against police officers, the officers which we depend on to protect and serve, it is saying to us, in 2010, 2011, 245 complaints were made against our police officers; 2012, 340; 2013, 470; 2014, 491. That is to say over a four-year period there was a doubling of complaints against our own police officers by the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Vice-President, of the 491 cases filed in 2014, 155 were class 4, meaning police corruption; of the 491 complaints made only 45 have been completed in that year, leaving well over 400 remaining unresolved.

What is it that is going on in our police service in terms of safety, in providing safety, and what is it that is going on in our police service with respect to the complaints when a citizen feels that his right or her right has been infringed by an officer. I can share a personal example of that, being interrogated and being verbally assaulted and abused by a police officer who pulled me over to give me a breathalyzer. And the thing is, I do not consume alcohol so how am I to know how

to use a breathalyzer, and then he yells at me and levels an allegation to tell me, after I blew into this thing the first time, if I do not give him a good sample he will charge me. How am I supposed to know how hard to blow in a breathalyzer, but the police officer, instead of seeking to inform and guide through a cordial manner to arrive at a decision, abuses me in the process at midnight.

How can that be an example? How can that be the quality and level of service as citizens, law-abiding citizens, that we are exposed to, and we are dependent on this service for the same level, or a level of security that makes us feel safe. Mr. Vice-President, I am citing metrics here to demonstrate that the police service and the Judiciary in their current state cannot provide the level of protection and justice required as requested by the UN's goal in its developmental goals. I am very much concerned.

Mr. Vice-President, Goal 2, "End hunger, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture". Let us focus on the words "food security and sustainable agriculture". When we consider the data on the *Review of the Economy 2015*, it states, and I really like this, it says:

"According to the latest GDP estimates from the CSO, the Agriculture sector is expected to expand by 4.4 percent in real terms in calendar 2015, following its growth of 2.9 percent in calendar 2014. The outturn...for 2015 reflects an expected robust performance"—and is expected—"to expand by 10.4 percent."

Anybody reading that in the *Review of the Economy* would say, well, Trinidad and Tobago is well on their way for food security and sustainable agriculture, but if we push back that data one year, from 2012 to 2011, what we would find is that in 2012 the contribution was 400.4 million—that was in 2012 sorry. However, if we

go back to 2011, the reported contribution in 2011 was 458 million, so the contribution in 2015 was a 6 per cent decline over 2011, our agricultural sector, a decline of 6 per cent if we use 2011 data.

So, Mr. Vice-President, one may wish to say that that decline occurred under the last administration and abused my friends in front of me, but let us go back now a little bit to 2008 where the contribution of the agricultural sector was 511.4 million in real terms. So while we saw a 6 per cent decline over the last four or five years, we are seeing a 16 per cent decline over the last eight years. That is alarmingly correct, *Review of the Economy*. So the question is, how can we be on a downward path with 2008 and 2011 reflecting higher values, or a higher contribution, and today we speak of sustainable development? The path is downward.

Goal 8 and Goal 12, promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full productive employment and decent work—that is Goal 8; Goal 12, ensure sustainable consumption, Mr. Vice-President, for the past eight years our country has reported continuous and persistent budget deficits, and that is to say that if we are reporting a deficit we are consuming more than we are earning, but Goal 12 speaks of sustainable consumption. How can we say that we are on a path of sustainable consumption when the Government of Trinidad and Tobago prescribes a policy or a budget that has been characterized by deficit financing?—consuming more than we are earning.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

When we consume more than we earn, we have to pay it. Where is that coming from? It is coming from a level of debt. What was our debt? It says here that in 2000 our debt stood at \$29.75 billion; 2008, eight years later, \$40 billion, an

increase of 33 per cent, but by 2015 our debt level rose to \$76 billion, which was an expansion over the period 2008 to 2015 of 87 per cent. Debt expansion over the last eight years was 87 per cent. Madam President, as you have returned, amidst continuous budget deficits we have a debt portfolio that is running away from us at a very fast rate, and, just to give you an idea, Moody's in their report in April 2014 says that as at 2013 the debt burden in Trinidad is at its highest in 10 years. And out of the February 2015, Economic Outlook, it is saying here that total public sector debt, total, no longer net, has increased to \$111.6 billion debt—\$111.6 billion total. And if you want to say, just to give you an idea of how grave this situation is, you may want to say, “Well, Senator, you are speaking about debt, and the debt level of 2015, what is the revenue of 2015?—or 2016? Our projected revenue for 2016 is just about \$40 billion, if all assumptions are met.

Our revenue in 2007 was approximately \$40 billion when our debt was around the same. Today we are seeing \$40 billion in revenue, net public sector debt over \$76 billion. What is worse is that this honourable House just approved access to \$50 billion more for the Government. Where are we going? How can we speak of economic development, sustainable consumption when our debt level is shooting through the roof, our revenues are down, and there is no corresponding increase in GDP? GDP over the last four to five years relatively stable, what are we spending on?—because our revenue streams are not sustainable. What are we spending on?

4.00 p.m.

Madam President, Goal 6:

“Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”.

According to a publication by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in 2011 we had 94 per cent of the total population receiving water, and 92 per cent having access to sanitation. But if we look at the Human Development Atlas with data from 2006, areas in our country that did not have access to clean drinking water: Diego Martin, 7.3 per cent; San Juan/Laventille, 6.1 per cent; Sangre Grande, 6.4 per cent; Penal/Debe, 8.4 per cent; and Princes Town, 8.1 per cent. You know the areas that there is little access to a water supply, yet in the Public Sector Investment Programme, between 2010 to 2014 there were no significant projects to really address this concern. There were some, but the bulk of the expenditure being given to WASA is for upgrades. Now I am trying to figure out why Sen. Cummings was speaking to a yard filled with inferior pipe. What is it that is going on that upgrades are so required? Why can quality material not be used in the first place, so as to prevent the expenditure on upgrades?

And last, Madam President, education, Goal 4:

“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities...”

There is no doubt that successive administrations spent billions of dollars on education to ensure equal opportunity and access. There are those who question the laptop initiative and ask for the data: Where is the data that supports that this initiative provided a greater quality of an educated person? Today I ask the question: Where is the data to show that after billions of dollars have been spent on GATE funding, a corresponding increase in GDP was achieved? [*Desk thumping*] We are educating our people, an investment in academics and intellect, and it should deliver some benefit to our country. Are we educating for educating sake or are we educating to lift the productivity of our country?

According to Appendix 11 of the *Review of the Economy*, it said productivity for the period January to March 2014 was -0.7, and 2015, -2.0. The alarming statistic is that it was referring to productivity in 1995. So that while we spend billions on education, our productivity level is falling lower than that of 1995, output per employee.

So, Madam President, as I close, I would like to say that first I have shown that 80 per cent of our reported crimes go undetected, leaving our citizens exposed to the wiles of criminals. Further, there are increasing complaints against the Police Complaints Authority, yet today we are considering accepting a goal of a safer community.

Our Judiciary, our justice system is plagued with a backlog of cases which increases the time taken to bring timely verdicts, yet we are considering Goal 16: "...justice for all...".

The Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries and NAMDEVCO: our agricultural sector is producing at a rate lower than that of our production of 2008, yet we speak of food security.

Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank, institutions: Goal 12 speaks of "sustainable consumption", yet as a nation we produce deficit budgets. Goal 8 speaks of "sustainable economic growth", but we have high levels of debt and no increases in GDP.

WASA: we are concerned about water for all, having identified the areas of greatest need, but projects are not being undertaken in that area, but we speak of "sustainable management of water and sanitation", Goal 6. Goal 4: Ministry of Education, something is wrong there in terms of it being unregulated and unchecked, having produced certificates without corresponding increases in

productivity and GDP. Goal 9, "...innovation...": We are ranked 101 out of 144 in that index, yet we do not have public and private sector partnerships developing a research agenda for charting a way forward for Trinidad and Tobago.

It is clear, Madam President, as I wrap up, that our institutions are unwell, are ill. The performance indicators of key institutions, not exhausted in this contribution due to time, demonstrates some sub-optimal performance, negative performance trends, shrinkage, inefficiencies and undeliverables. If we are to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals as proposed by the UN, we must first take a comprehensive look at our institutions; correct the shortcomings; stop the downward trends; create a pathway of established goals, both in the short, medium and long term. Return our country to a positive direction. The adoption of these goals is untimely, as our nation is ill. We need to take corrective action before we can be the recipients of growth, and continuous growth can be achieved. It is only when continuous growth is achieved we can speak of sustainability.

I thank you, Madam President.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, we shall now revert to Item 8 on the Order Paper.

URGENT QUESTION

Chaguanas North Secondary School (Measures to Restore Normalcy after Threat)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam President. Minister of Education, what measures are being taken to restore normalcy to Chaguanas North Secondary School after the foiled plot of violence against the lives of teachers and students?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam President. Officials of the Ministry of Education, the Minister of National

Security, the Mayor of Chaguanas and other officers of the Defence Force all visited the school today. We met with the principal, we met with members of staff and we addressed the student body.

Coming out of these discussions, certain decisions have been taken. No. 1, 24 students have been identified who have been the perpetrators of violence and indiscipline in schools. In fact, a large number of those persons are now before the courts for various charges. In one case, one student has four pending charges against him before the courts. We have decided that those 24 students will be removed from the school immediately. We are not going to leave them out to pasture, but we are having discussions how we are going to deal with them.

The security in the school has been beefed up. Instead of four security officers, there are now eight MTS security officers. Instead of one safety officer, there are now two safety officers. We have taken other decisions. We have deemed the school to be a place that must be safe and, as a result, there will be zero tolerance where violence and indiscipline are concerned. [*Desk thumping*]

The police have agreed to have constant patrols in and around the school on a daily basis. Tomorrow we are meeting with the Teaching Service Commission to impress upon them the need to fill the vacancies, because at the school we have the situation where the principal is acting; the vice-principal is acting. There are nine positions of deans, eight of those persons are acting. There are seven positions of heads of department, four of those persons are acting. [*Interruption*] Yes, it seems as though it is Hollywood. Tomorrow we are going to impress upon the Teaching Service Commission, the need to appoint those persons with dispatch, instead of having them act.

We have also recognized that within the school itself there is—
[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Minister, your time has expired.

Sen. Mark: Through you, Madam President, may I ask the hon. Minister of Education whether counselling services have been offered to both teachers and students who may have been affected by this development occurring at the Chaguanas North Secondary School?

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam President, yes. As part of our team this morning there were persons from the Student Support Services, and they have been providing counselling services for both teachers and the students. The teachers are scared in some instances to even interact with the students, and the students are also scared. There is one student who suffered injury on Monday last. His mother was there with us today, and they have requested a transfer. But we are having discussions at that level to ensure that everything is okay at the school, and that the school returns to a state of normalcy.

Sen. Mark: May I also ask the hon. Minister whether action is being taken to secure the perimeter of the school, since I understand there are areas available for intruders into the school compound on a daily basis.

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam President, yes there are certain breaches in the perimeter walls. In fact, there are occasions where students themselves have been using desks and tables where they could gain easy access out and into the school and measures are being taken to heal those breaches and to ensure that we have proper patrols throughout the school compound. May I add that we were told this morning that the school resides on 11 acres and therefore it is somewhat difficult to ensure that we have security all the time, but, again, we are working assiduously to ensure that our students and teachers and all those who operate in that school are safe.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, we will now revert to the Private Members' Motion.

**UNITED NATIONS AGENDA 2030
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

Sen. Nadine Stewart: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to join this debate on a Motion put forward by my colleague, Sen. Mark, which deals with the United Nations Agenda 2030 and its sustainable development goals which have already been adopted on September 25, 2015. As parliamentarians, as policymakers and as legislators, we all have a role to play in ensuring that these goals are implemented. They may not all be attainable, but every effort must be made to ensure we do what is necessary for effective implementation of this UN agenda.

Madam President, the only way we can protect and preserve this standard of living which we now enjoy as a country, not only for this present generation, but for future generations, is to ensure our development occurs in a manner that is sustainable.

This quest to ensure development occurs in a sustainable manner is not the sole responsibility of the Government. This is our business and we must all accept the responsibility and stand ready to be part of this process. In view of this fact, as a country, we derive our economic livelihood primarily from the exploitation of non-renewable national resources, issues of sustainable development assume added importance, and this is why the issues we debate in this Motion are so fundamental to our national development.

It is at this juncture that I will commend Sen. Mark for again bringing this important Motion forward. Madam President, this may be one of the very few times that I would go on record as actually commending Sen. Mark for anything that he would bring to this House, and I think he deserves some kudos.

This debate commenced in November 2015 and would have fielded a lot of speakers on all benches, and I would not want to take up too much time with repetition. I will therefore be bringing the Tobago perspective to this contribution and focus on the plans, programmes and initiatives of the Tobago House of Assembly to develop Tobago in a sustainable manner, a manner that is congruent and highly consistent with the United Nations Developmental Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The leadership of the Tobago House of Assembly must be highly commended for the vision and foresight in setting out the road map for Tobago's development in a formal developmental plan. [*Desk thumping*] I say this because over the last five years, under the former administration, the central government had no clear plan for the development of this country. As we would say in Tobago, they were operating by "vaps" and guesswork.

4.15 p.m.

And I could recall one of the factors cited by Moody's accounting for the downgrade of the national economy from BAA1 to BAA2 was the lack of a proper planning framework to guide this country's development.

And, Madam President, while the planning process at the national level was incoherent, at the level of the Tobago House of Assembly there was a clearly articulated development plan. This is the Comprehensive Economic Development Plan for Tobago which provides a road map for the sustainable development of Tobago for the period 2013 to 2017.

And I have taken the time, Madam President, to carefully peruse this Comprehensive Economic Development Plan for Tobago and I can state without fear of contradiction that the plans and programmes set out by the assembly in this

CEDP are highly consistent with the aspirations of the United Nations for sustainable development. And I encourage my colleague Sen. Mark to please take some time himself to have a look at this document.

Madam President, when one examines the assembly's plans for the development of Tobago, it immediately strikes you as a plan that is holistic and very comprehensive. In this regard all aspects of development are given due consideration—economic, social, physical, environmental as well as technological. And the primary goal of the CEDP is to achieve increased and sustained growth, diversification and revitalization of the Tobago economy through private sector development and transformation of its people.

Madam President, please permit me to elaborate on some of the critical aspects of the CEDP and to demonstrate to this House and to the national community how these key aspects run congruent to the Sustainable Development Goals as set out by the UN.

Madam President, one of the critical priority areas in a comprehensive economic development plan pertains to improving infrastructure and utilities, and this strategic priority area falls directly in line with SDG number 9 which relates to investment in infrastructure and building resilient infrastructure. The assembly in its plans for Tobago has clearly recognized and accepted the need to continuously improve the physical infrastructure and utilities in Tobago to support and promote economic activities on the island.

And, Madam President, in this plan for Tobago, the assembly has clearly identified several pieces of strategic infrastructural projects to propel the island's development, which regrettably did not find favour with the past UNC administration to which Sen. Mark is associated.

One critical project that immediately comes to mind was the new airport terminal for Tobago, a project to support the island's tourism industry. And, Madam President, beyond some patchwork on the existing terminal and empty promises, the former administration really showed no interest in this project that is really critical to our island's tourism industry. And I could cite many more examples of critical infrastructural projects for Tobago. I can speak about the desilting of the Hillsborough Dam to improve water supply in Tobago that did not find favour with the UNC administration. But in the interest of time, Madam President, I will move on.

Another critical strategic priority area in the Comprehensive Economic Development Plan for Tobago pertains to the issue of environmental sustainability. And this specific priority area links directly to SDGs 11, 14 and 15 which relate to building sustainable communities and sustainable use of our ecosystems. And, Madam President, the Tobago House of Assembly, again, clearly recognizes the need to protect and preserve the island's environment. And indeed, one of the critical pillars on which the Tobago Development Plan is built is the need to keep Tobago clean, green, safe and serene. And the assembly clearly recognizes this and ultimately the continued prosperity of the Tobago economy and society depends on the health and integrity of its environment. And addressing these issues along with natural hazards and climate change are critical aspects of this island's developmental thrust.

Madam President, many times I sit in my chair and I listen to the contributions and the statements being made by the Members of the Opposition and it leaves me in awe most times, Madam President, because I ask—but these people have no shame? All six Senators sitting in Opposition were a part of an

administration that mortgaged the Green Fund. Madam President, the very same Green Fund that was supposed to fund our environment and maintain the integrity of development.

And I know personally there were a number of very good projects coming out of the Tobago House of Assembly that could have contributed to enhancing Tobago's pristine environment. But this Government has recognized that development must be integrated and it must take into account the preservation of the environment, the preservation of the people and the social activities of the people, which are the tripod on which sustainable development stands.

Madam President, another critical area of this development plan for Tobago relates to the critical issue of human capital development. And again, this priority area is linked directly to SDG 4 which speaks to quality education. And the Tobago House of Assembly has developed a number of innovative programmes to improve the quality of education in Tobago for Tobagonians. For instance, one of the flagship educational projects of the assembly is the Financial Assistance Programme, a programme which I myself benefited from a few years ago. And through this financial assistance programme administered by the Department of Advanced Training and Advisory Services, the assembly currently spends approximately \$8 million on an annual basis to support Tobagonians pursuing tertiary education in a range of disciplines.

And, Madam President, as result of this direct strategic intervention of the assembly, the latest information available from the Central Statistical Office suggests that for the second quarter of 2015 the proportion of the labour force in Tobago with tertiary education has risen to about 17 per cent of the labour on the island. This is a figure, Madam President, that compares favourably with many of

our Caribbean neighbours.

In addition to this programme, the assembly has devised a number of other initiatives geared towards improving educational performance at all levels in Tobago. Furthermore, teachers at all primary schools in Tobago are exposed to training in continuous assessment components of the SEA.

So, Madam President, no doubt education continues to be critical for the assembly and I am confident that with greater collaboration between the Division of Education in the Tobago House of Assembly and the Ministry of Education a lot more will be done to support education in Tobago. And it is only yesterday we had the Ministry of Education collaborating with the Division of Education in hosting a very successful and insightful education consultation in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And I am confident that arising from this consultation there will be many initiatives and programmes to improve the quality of education on our island.

Madam President, another priority area in the CEDP speaks to social development and building resilience. And again, this strategic priority area is closely linked to SDGs 1 and 2 that treat with the elimination of poverty and hunger, and there are a number of social safety net programmes that have been developed to protect the vulnerable groups in Tobago. And some of these programmes include the child and family development programme, the programme for adolescent mothers, the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Programme, various programmes of the Economic and Technological Empowerment Centre (WETEC), and the Tobago Rehabilitation and Empowerment Centre. And the assembly is committed to ensuring that all members of society are empowered to function to the best of their ability and vulnerable groups in society receive protection consistent with their needs.

Madam President, the assembly continues to view entrepreneurship and business development as core elements of its developmental thrust and this strategic priority area can be closely linked to SDG number 8 which relates to the promotion of economic growth and employment. And to illustrate through the Division of Finance and Enterprise Development, two signature programmes are available—the Enterprise Assistance Loan Programme and the Enterprise Assistance Grant Programme. And Tobagonians have been given financial assistance—sorry, as well as technical advice to start, operate and expand their businesses.

And, Madam President, in respect of the loan programme since its introduction in 2003, loans totalling \$27.1 million have been disbursed to 262 Tobagonians to facilitate entrepreneurial activities. And this grant programme since its introduction in 2011, grants totalling \$11.8 million have been disbursed to 688 Tobagonians. And, Madam President, what is interesting is that more than 40 per cent of the recipients of the grant programme are young adults and 44 per cent of these recipients are females.

Beyond this financial assistance, the Business Development Unit provides basic training to its clients in core areas of entrepreneurship such as customer service, marketing and bookkeeping. The unit also facilitates the participation of Tobago entrepreneurs and their products in several national, regional and international trade shows and investment conventions including the trade and investment convention in Trinidad, the Caribbean Fashion Week in Jamaica, the specialty food Summer Fancy Food show in New York, the Toronto Waterfront Festival in Canada and the Commonwealth Countries League Fair in London.

So, Madam President, these opportunities were crafted with the intention of

improving Tobago's business models by providing the following: exposure to clients in external markets, prospects for securing foreign contracts, opportunities for networking with other stakeholders in preparation for export and providing opportunities to gain insight into external markets and the trends that influence their businesses.

Madam President, the final strategic priority area of the assembly I would like to mention relates to fostering good governance and institutional reform. And this strategic priority of the assembly clearly relates to SDG numbers 16 and 17, building institutional framework and enhancing partnerships.

Madam President, critical to improving the governance arrangements in Trinidad and Tobago is improving the legislative arrangements between the central government and the Tobago House of Assembly. For instance, the assembly currently does not have the authority and the flexibility to engage in certain financial transactions and to source funding to facilitate its developmental agenda based on its own financial credibility.

Madam President, also under this existing legislative arrangement, the assembly cannot make laws on matters directly affecting Tobago. But I am heartened by the assurances that the hon. Prime Minister gave to Tobagonians that this issue of internal self-governance for Tobago will be treated with urgency once and for all. And this PNM administration will respect the wishes and aspirations of the people of Tobago for self-government. And it is my hope that when this Motion comes to this honourable House that my colleagues sitting in Opposition will also respect the wishes of Tobagonians for self-determination.

So, let me wind up by saying: these goals, we can look at them as the future for us all and our planet, and this Government is prepared and committed to shift

Trinidad and Tobago onto a sustainable path as we take stock of Agenda 2030 and its 17 identifiable goals. However, Madam President, this will require a strong commitment not only from the Government, but local communities, the NGOs, the private sector and the international community through information sharing, consultations and decision-making.

So, Madam President, all hands on deck as remains this administration's motto: we are doing this together. It is with these few words, I thank you for the opportunity. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Hon. Senators, at this juncture we shall take the tea break and this sitting is suspended until 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of National Security (Sen. The Hon. Dennis Moses): Thank you very much, Madam President, for the opportunity afforded to be part of this debate. It is indeed timely that the Parliament should engage in debate on an issue of such global import as the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development which came into effect in January of this year following the expiration of the predecessor, Millennium Development Goal Framework in December of last year. The 2030 agenda prioritizes inter alia eradication of poverty including extreme poverty by 2030. As the central precondition for the realization of a global sustainable development it also prioritizes, in no particular order, the need for all citizens to have access to quality education, health care and to live in safe, secure communities. It is an all-encompassing plan to lift society out of poverty and promote higher standards of living and welfare and to increase

economic output and provide decent work for all, though in a manner that does not threaten or undermine the natural ecosystems of the planet.

The philosophy of Agenda 2030 is that development must not be achieved at the expense of or to the detriment of the very ecosystems that sustain life on the planet and that, in fact, through astute adaptation of technology and production systems to ensure that they do not exceed environmental limits, mankind can still achieve high standards of living and welfare to meet their ever rising expectations of the world's population.

The 2030 agenda should not therefore be interpreted simply as the next phase in the trajectory of the global development, but rather should be seen as being indicative of the consensus appreciation by all members of the international community of the need to depart from the business as usual economic centric quantitative approach of development, to instead adopt a more universal transformative and integrated approach that places the concept of sustainability as the nucleus of national development policy.

As such, Agenda 2030 seeks to establish a balance between the economic social and environmental aspects of development that together define the quality of life not only for our generation in this planet but no less importantly the quality of life for generations to come to which we will bequeath this planet. It is important to understand, Madam President, that the Sustainable Development Goals are not simply about our own lives and welfare, it is as much about the obligation that we share as an international community, to ensure that we transfer to our children and to their progeny a form of civilization that does not imperil its own survival.

In no uncertain terms therefore, the Sustainable Development Goals are about the future, our future and that of the planet. Robust international cooperation

and coordination are therefore central to the attainment of these Sustainable Development Goals. Trinidad and Tobago, small though it may be, has committed itself to playing its part in the full implementation of this pioneering strategy for global development and transformation. The importance of a balanced approach to development is critical to the success of all nations. It is particularly applicable to small island developing states such as Trinidad and Tobago and the members of the Caribbean community whose standard of living ability to participate in global wealth creating commercial networks and ability to sustain life is inextricably linked to the natural environment, and to our ability to weather economic and other shocks over which we have little or no control.

The current conditions in global energy markets constitute just such a shock in that as a small economy and producer, Trinidad and Tobago cannot influence the world price of either gas or oil though the prices in the international marketplace in large measure influence the quality of our life.

Madam President, successive Governments formed by the People's National Movement have prudently sought to always stay within the established limits of sound macro-economic management to keep the reins on the level of debt, foreign and domestic carried by the Government and to ensure that projects undertaken met the requisite criteria for funding from relevant international lending agencies.

In so doing, we were always careful to ensure that the domestic budget did not place undue stress of having to finance expensive projects, such as the extension of the Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway to Point Fortin. I welcome the opportunity to be able to contribute to the substantive discussion on how this global transformative agenda can be translated meaningfully into the Trinidad and Tobago context to the full benefit of all citizens. The mainstreaming and

implementation of the 2030 agenda within the national context warrants an approach anchored in co-operation and partnership, both intra nationally through a whole of government approach that draws upon the expertise of various public sector entities as well as through consultation with non-governmental organizations.

There will, in parallel, be a need for international and regional partnerships that will play an important role in resource mobilization capacity building to ensure the delivery of the 17 development goals and 169 targets. Five months ago, on September 25 of last year, 193 Heads of State in government formally adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the high level Sustainable Development Summit which was convened by the Secretary General of the United Nations in New York. Since the commencement of the period of the SDGs in January of this year, the Government has lost no time in commissioning and initiating the planning process for the development for the new national development plan, Vision 2030, which will be grounded on the principle of inclusion and will essentially constitute this country's sustainable development strategy in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Bearing in mind, that Agenda 2030 is of recent vintage and that the international community as a whole is actively giving considerable attention to this matter and strategizing as to the modalities of converting the 17 SDGs and 169 targets for practical measures for implementation of the national framework, the government itself is seized of the finding of a strategy to give effect on the ground for those important objectives. Certain things are already quite clear, including, one, that while the Government must be at the forefront of this transformative process, successful implementation must be a joint collaborative multi-stakeholder

engagement drawing upon the respective strengths and capacities of the state, civil society, private sector, the labour unions, research institutions as well as international and regional partners.

Two, ownership of the process and other projects and programmes developed to give life and practical meaning to Agenda 2030 must be home grown and therefore national. There can be no foreign or external impositions of any kind as it is the people of Trinidad and Tobago alone, in concert with those with the privilege of governing them who will determine what ought to be Trinidad and Tobago's development priorities and the strategy for achieving them within the framework of Agenda 2030. This will have to be done in a collaborative and consultative manner.

In recognition of this, plans have already been made for widespread consultation on various aspects of Agenda 2030 as they relate to particular sections of the economy on the various aspects of national life. In the interest of the efficiency of the debate I will avoid repetition of those aspects of Government strategy on the requirements for implementation of Agenda 2030 and instead, Madam President, focus on how the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs in its tentacles spread far and wide externally and gives support and further the impetus of implementation in order to benefit the work of the relevant line Ministries and departments and their ability to efficiently deliver quality services that lift national well-being and welfare.

Bearing in mind that Agenda 2030 is, in fact, a global agenda with established global benchmarks and that Trinidad and Tobago cannot afford to fall behind in this campaign to substantially raise living and welfare standards, it will be the role of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs to carry the message

externally to the international community and to the international development partners that Trinidad and Tobago is fully committed to this agenda.

In this regard, we must demonstrate to them as a matter of credibility and indeed of confidence that we have designed a number of sectoral and cross-cutting plans and the strategies that integrate sustainable development agenda to national planning skills of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Adequate measures to measure results and track progress vis-à-vis the 169 targets. This will be a critically important dimension of the mechanics of the implementation because an understanding among the international community is that countries with proven expertise in particular areas should offer assistance and support where they can to those with identifiable needs in those areas.

It will therefore be the purpose of the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs working in close collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and Development and with such coordinating mechanisms for Agenda 2030 that the Government intends to establish, to be proactive in cultivating the support and cooperation of key international partners for Agenda 2030. This implies, Madam President, more than routine outreach potential partners and collaborators. Certainly, it would require clarity of purpose and must reflect a larger strategy of positioning Trinidad and Tobago externally as an ardent and respected voice for ensuring that no one is left behind as is the mantra for achieving sustainable development by 2030—no man, no women, no child left behind. The orderly and stable development of Trinidad and Tobago must integrate the full participation in all aspects and at all levels of national development. It is only by doing so that we can achieve balanced national development that is self-sustaining.

Agenda 2030 and indeed Vision 2030 will move the country forward to

create a just fair, equitable egalitarian society with the opportunity for all and exclusion of none. That is the platform on which this administration assumed office and that will be our unwavering focus for the people of Trinidad and Tobago in freeing their creative talent and innovative spirit, in creating jobs that satisfy the principles of decent work, in making our streets and communities safe for all, but especially our women, children and young people, and in freeing them to live out their lives as healthy productive citizens of this republic.

I call upon the national community, including our colleagues opposite, to contribute to the formulation of national strategies to guide Agenda 2030. It is in the people's interest to ensure that they have a say in the type of society that they want to live in so that together we can build the Trinidad and Tobago we want, one that is strong, safe, dynamic, prosperous, just, fair and respect for and protective of the human rights of all the citizens without discrimination. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

5.15p.m.

WELCOME

CHARLES RAMSON
(Member of Parliament Guyana)

Madam President: Before I call on Sen. Mark to wind up the debate, I would just like to welcome Mr. Charles Ramson, Member of Parliament who is visiting from the National Assembly of the Parliament of Guyana. [*Desk thumping*]

UNITED NATIONS AGENDA 2030 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam

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President, may I, from the very outset, expressly and sincerely thank my colleagues and record my profound appreciation and gratitude for the support extended by all who have spoken on this very important post-2015 development agenda. This universal agenda took effect, as the hon. Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs and the Minister in the Ministry of National Security alluded to earlier, on January 01, 2016 and will expire in 2030. It is an ambitious set of goals and targets but all designed to achieve sustainable development, and in the process transform the world in which we inhabit.

Madam President, it will engage and it will involve trillions of dollars to have this effort realized. It will require domestic mobilization of financial resources. It will call upon the international community, and I think that in Addis Ababa, there is an Addis Ababa action agenda dealing with financing and the mobilization of same in order to assist in the achievement. It will call not only for Government and Opposition, but it will call on civil society, the private sector, the trade union movement, non-governmental organizations. All would have to participate in this mobilization effort if we are to realize this goal and the goals, 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Madam President, over the past four months we have had contributions by nine Government Members, five Opposition Members, including the mover of Motion and five Independent Senators, giving us a grand total of 18 contributors to this very important Motion seeking to address this universal agenda for transformation in the world.

This Parliament may have turned out to be—but history will judge us—as being one of the first of maybe a few Parliaments throughout the world to have taken the time off to debate this global agenda for transformation through these 17

Sustainable Development Goals, and if all goes well, at the end of this debate we will be able to generate universal approval by all our colleagues which, again, would be recorded as a major achievement if that were to take place at the end of this debate and when the question is put to this House. So I think that this Parliament is making history on this particular matter that we are about to conclude this evening after four months of intense discussions albeit once every month in accordance with our Standing Orders.

I would like to just indicate—because I cannot respond to all the remarks and contributions that were made during this period under consideration. But I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs who was the last speaker on the Government Bench, because it was the hon. Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs who signed on the dotted line between the period 25 and 27 of September, 2015, our support for this post-2015 development agenda, and he has come today and has identified with the efforts of this Parliament in seeking to, not only adopt at our level, but to play a very critical role in developing and formulating national strategies for development and for transformation of our economy and society, so that we can make this place a better place, make this world a kinder world and make the universe a more gentle universe.

But I could not help but take note of some of the contributions made. And I think somebody talked about hyperbole some time. I think my friend, Sen. Copper, and I would refer to—[*Interruption*] Coppin, rather; not “Copper”, Coppin. He did indicate to me in a discussion that language that is used at times, you know, by all of us. But my colleague from Tobago, the hon. Nadine Stewart—Sen. Nadine Stewart—I want to agree with her, and I hope I get a copy of that plan that was—

Sen. Stewart: It is online.

Sen. W. Mark: It is online. I will download it. But reference was made to good governance and institutional reform, and the hon. Member went on to talk about the Tobago House of Assembly seeking to get more authority to borrow, to engage in certain financial transactions and to source their own income or revenue to achieve that objective.

I would like to advise the hon. Nadine Stewart that one of the fundamental responsibilities of any institution that is utilizing public moneys is accountability. [*Desk thumping*] It is accountability. And we have something called International Financial Reporting Standards that seem to be very weak in this country. And, Madam President, after approving in this Parliament, year in, year out, billions of dollars to the Tobago House of Assembly, the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago—we have last seen consolidated financial accounts from that body called Tobago House of Assembly, 2007.

Madam President, 2007 is the last time I put my eyes on the consolidated financial statements coming from the Tobago House of Assembly. What is the accountability? You talk about governance. And that whole team on the other side, Madam President, they behave and carried on about waste, squandermania in terms of the last administration. And all I ask my good friend, Sen. Nadine Stewart: clean up your house. Clean up your backyard before you come and attack anybody. Make sure that when you go back to Tobago, you tell the Chief Secretary, his first responsibility in 2016 before the end of August or before the end of this session of Parliament, he should have available all those financial reports—audited financial statements for 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and then you can speak to me. [*Desk thumping*] Before that, I would not

say what we would say, although she told us a short while ago we should be “shame, yuh know. Buh ah would not tell yuh cool yuh herbs. “

Hon. Senator: You know about herbs. That side knows about herbs. [*Laughter*]

Sen. W. Mark: No, not that kind of herbs, eh. I am talking about herb tea. [*Crosstalk*]

So, Madam President, that is all I would like to say insofar as the young Senator, in terms of her contribution. Get your house in order. And one other thing, you must show respect for this Opposition. You want support for the Tobago House of Assembly for independence or for autonomy for Tobago? You show respect for us. [*Desk thumping*] Then we would show respect for you. Otherwise, if you do not show respect to us, we shall not return that favour.

Madam President: Sen. Mark, just on that note with “respect”, could we not have all that finger pointing?

Sen. W. Mark: I am sorry, I am sorry. You know, as a politician, I have this tendency to point fingers. But you must forgive me. It is part of my DNA, so to speak. But no problem, I shall withdraw the drawing.

Hon. Senator: I thought you were the former Speaker.

Sen. W. Mark: Former Speaker, of course, but I have already left that garment about. That garment is no longer on me. I have new garments now. I am the political Wade Mark now, no longer Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Political Wade Mark; that is what I am. But you are my friend, right? [*Crosstalk*] Anyway, Madam President, may I address you on these matters? And I am being disturbed by the hon. Senator. [*Laughter*]

Madam President, I also want to refer to my hon. friend, the Leader of Government Business, who supported the Motion but he, too, got involved in a lot

of hyperbole, you know, a lot of wild statements, ramblings, no evidence to support. I have a quote here: “The squandermania and waste and leakage and haemorrhaging of state resources.” What is that about?

Hon. Senator: Theft.

Sen. W. Mark: No, you should know about that theft, you know.

Madam President: No, no, Sen. Mark.

Sen. W. Mark: Sorry, sorry. Madam President. I want to warn this Senator called Sen. Clarence Rambharat—

5.30 p.m.

Madam President: No, Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: All right.

Madam President: I want to warn everyone here, let us just listen to Sen. Mark in silence please. Sen. Mark, direct your comments to the—

Sen. W. Mark: Yes, Madam President. I want to advise my good Senator colleague Clarence Rambharat, Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, that I intend to approach the police on a matter involving somebody that he is very familiar with, in which, Madam President, illegal gambling is taking place in a certain part of this island and I shall give you more details on that as I proceed. Not now, at the appropriate time. So I ask him to be very careful.

Be very careful. Sorry for pointing, Madam President. [*Laughter*]

So, Madam President, I return to my colleague, the hon. Leader of the Senate, who as I said made some interesting remarks, but at the end of the day we are politicians and I know he has to put in his piece and I understand what he did, but I just want to advise him as well bring the evidence, bring the proof. Do not just make statements, and it goes for Sen. Nadine Stewart and Sen. Allyson Baksh

making wild statements. [*Interruption*] No, no. I have evidence—oh sorry, Madam President. Let me not be disturbed. Let me stay put. So, Madam President, I want to associate myself because 90 per cent of his contribution was in support of the measure, but, of course, as I said, as politician he has to say his piece.

The hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon, the hon. Minister of Trade and Industry, also recorded her full commitment to sustainable development, but, of course, within the framework of the PNM's manifesto and development plans and that sort of thing. I also followed the interest, Sen. Foster Cummings, my good colleague of not now—we go back for some time now—and again, fully in support of the measure and spoke about the mandate of the PNM and how they engaged in early childhood education, primary education, secondary, tertiary, et cetera, et cetera, which is very good. But what I want to let him know, Madam President, the international community has recorded the People's Partnership, under the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, former Prime Minister, as being the Prime Minister who was able to achieve under her watch universal early childhood education for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

The hon. Ban Ki Moon, the Secretary General, when he went to Barbados some time ago, I think that was in 2014 or 2015, made it very clear that they wanted to identify with the efforts made by Trinidad and Tobago for achieving that important goal. But, of course, as I said, everyone would have made their contribution during that process, but at the end of the day it was under our watch that we were able to realize that goal of early childhood education.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Not true.

Sen. W. Mark: No problem. Some people like to live the la-la land and deny

things.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Hazel Manning.

Sen. W. Mark: No problem. Hazel Manning?

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Go and check the records.

Sen. W. Mark: I think you are living in a dream world.

Sen. Hadeed: That was a Korean company—[*Interruption*]

Sen. W. Mark: Oh, there was a Korean company that Hazel Manning could tell us about. A Korean company. I am sure she could tell us about that Korean company. I want to go to my good friend, Sen. Nigel De Freitas. Very excellent contribution, but, of course, as usual strayed and sought to attack the PP and talked about there is a difference between them. Of course, there is a difference. We know that. And, of course, the hon. Senator, my good friend, talked about the PNM being committed to free primary and secondary education, and tertiary education and so on.

I want to say, Madam President, that we too are concerned about these things, and we are concerned about how we as a nation will be addressing some very important issues because the goals that we have to achieve between now and 2030, really we are talking about the next generation and we have to be concerned about the children. Even the Prime Minister of the country is now recognizing, or stated I should say, that the education system is not working. He described children and students as monsters—

Sen. Hadeed: Some of them.

Sen. W. Mark: Some of them I should say—just as how he described some children earlier on in his earlier incarnation as Opposition Leader, as hyenas in the African jungle. I remember that statement being made. I understand the concern

not only of him, but of many of our citizens in this country in terms of what is happening at the educational level in our country, what is taking place. So, all that is part of the effort at reforming.

I want to remind this honourable Senate, Madam President, that when we talk about education and we talk about the future generation we have to look at what the Government is doing in practice, and as we look at our 17 Sustainable Development Goals we have to take into account that there appears to be a schizophrenic personality at work here, a dual personality. On the one hand they are committed to one thing, on the other hand they are doing something else.

So they are committed to the children of our nation and they have signed on to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and we were part of the millennium development goals, but yet still, Madam President, the Government cannot make up its mind as to what to do with the Couva Children's Hospital. Cannot make up their mind. On the one hand we hear the hon. Sen. Foster Cummings saying that, "No, it will not remain like Tarouba. It will be commissioned." Then we understand some work was taking place next to the hospital and some excavation, and all of a sudden there was a caving in. We do not know if it was sabotaged by that contractor in order to embarrass—*[Interruption]*

Hon. Senator: What?

Sen. W. Mark:—the PP. We do not know. I do not know. We do not know if it was a sabotage in order to detain the opening of the Couva Children's Hospital. Madam President, we would like to know what—if we are talking about the future generation in the context of these development goals, we also have to take into account the need to get the Children's Life Fund going. That is very important for the kids.

Another area that we are concerned about is the laptops for our young people. What is taking place? That is the future generation of our country. We want the Government to look at that in the context of both primary and secondary students. What about the textbook programme which I understand is undergoing some challenges at this time? What about the scholarship programme where we are told this year, and no one has denied it, Madam President, that the UK scholarship programme has been suspended? So students who are interested in going and do scholarly work as they normally would do on a yearly basis, through the UK programme, they can no longer access that. When it is going to be resumed we do not know, but when we talk about education for our children, when we talk about a better future for the kids of our nation, these are issues that are very close to their hearts.

Madam President, do not talk about the imposition of value added tax on books, 12.5 per cent. Although we were told by the hon. Prime Minister people do not like to read, but whether people do not like to read or not there must be an inspiration and a motivation to encourage them to read. Do not tax books. Tax alcohol more, do not tax books. Tax cigarettes more, do not tax books.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Legalize marijuana and tax it too?

Sen. W. Mark: I do not know what you are talking about. You must be a specialist in that field. I am not a specialist in that field.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: No, no. Your former Prime Minister.

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, I want her to withdraw that statement. You are referring to a Member of Parliament. [*Crosstalk*]

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Denied. Denied any plant-like substance in her residence. Denied any plant-like substance which is under investigation.

Sen. Hadeed: Whatever, but “doh” say that.

Sen. W. Mark: You must be careful, eh. If you repeat that outside—

Madam President: Sen. Mark, please take your seat.

Sen. W. Mark: Yes, Madam President.

Madam President: Could we please listen to Sen. Mark in silence, and could we desist from some of the comments that are being, you know, exchanged across the floor. All right? Let us listen to Sen. Mark.

Sen. W. Mark: You must be careful—

Madam President: No, Sen. Mark.

Sen. W. Mark: All right. Sorry. Sorry. Yeah, I am calm. I am calm. I am calm. Madam President, I am talking about value added tax on textbooks, on books generally. It is something that the Government should revisit and remove. We call on the PNM Government to remove the 12.5 per cent on books for children [*Desk thumping*] and for people in this country, and if we are talking about the future generation of this nation, we have to deal with computers. Apart from denying children the right of laptops, they are now imposing a tax on computers and the accessories to computers. We say remove that. Allow people to have access to computers.

Sen. Dookie: One minute 17 1/2 per cent on it now—[*Interruption*]

Sen. W. Mark: No, you “doh” worry about that, Dookie. [*Laughter*] Let the People’s Partnership deal with that. I think you want to want to come across here, you know. Madam President, sorry. I am wondering if he wants to come and join us.

Hon. Senator: No!

Sen. W. Mark: Okay, sorry. Well ask him to be peaceful, please.

Madam President, the School Feeding Programme. We talk about food security to end hunger as Goal No. 2, achieve food security and improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. How are we going to achieve that goal when the Government reduced the allocation to the School Feeding Programme by \$15 million in order to give to their friends in the trade union movement?

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: What?

Sen. W. Mark: I am just asking? Fifteen million dollars for our children and we do not know what is going to be the result of that if the quality is going to be reduced. I do not know. An assessment and an evaluation has to be done on this matter.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Once your friends.

Sen. W. Mark: They are still my friends.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: “Ah tall”.

Sen. W. Mark: “Yuh bad talking meh?” [*Laughter*]

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Every opportunity.

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, let me continue. So these are some of the issues we would like to address.

As we go to the other areas, I have noted the contribution of Sen. Allyson Baksh, again talked about unscrupulously squandered, irresponsible governance. My hon. friend, Leader of Government Business, talked about the undermining of independent institutions. Who undermined institutions more than this PNM Government, Madam President? What is being said by my honourable friend is that they have taken painstaking efforts to build those institutions since '62 and they have been undermined. By whom? The People's Partnership. Where is the evidence? Where is the evidence? Where is the evidence? There is none.

We know of efforts to undermine the Judiciary in this country when the former Chief Justice was put under house arrest and charged. We know about that. We know about when a Speaker was put under house arrest. The institution of speakership was under threat. We know about that. We know about when the Police Service Commission was being undermined by a former administration, PNM. We know about that. And the police had to march around the Red House for the first time in their history against the Patrick Manning administration. We know about that.

So do not tell us about “we undermining institution”; we are strengthening institutions. We strengthened the institutions. The Central Bank has been undermined by your actions and we have a Motion to deal with that.

5.45 p.m.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: No confidence, lack of confidence.

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, why this lady cannot just keep still? The hon. Senator.

Hon. Senator: “Ah ha”, she is affecting you.

Sen. W. Mark: No, she has always affected me.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: [*Inaudible*]

Sen. W. Mark: No, no, no.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: “And yuh tie look like one.” [*Laughter*]

Sen. W. Mark: Madam President, I mean to say, I could take jokes eh, but I think she is going too far [*Interruption and laughter*] and if I go to tell you something here today, you will tell me to leave this Parliament, you know. So tell this lady and so on—warn this lady, eh. Yes, warn her.

Madam President: Sen. Mark, have a seat, please.

Sen. W. Mark: Sorry, sorry, Madam President.

Madam President: You know there is a light-heartedness which can be encouraged a little bit in the exchanges, but this is the Parliament. I do not want to hear a Minister or any Senator being referred to as “that lady”. That is just unparliamentary so could you continue with your contribution, Sen. Mark. Focus on the Chair, zone out of everything else and continue with your contribution.

Sen. W. Mark: Well, I need to get a hearing aid like Dr. Eric Williams to switch off.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: Especially with ladies.

Sen. W. Mark: Orrrrr!

Madam President: Sen. Mark, just—

Sen. W. Mark: Yes, yes, yes. I do not want to talk about housing at Long Circular.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: “Tory could jump out, yuh know. Mouth open and tory could jump out, yuh know.”

Sen. W. Mark: And I do not want to talk about domestic violence either. But, anyway, let me continue. [*Interruption*] Madam President, may I continue, please?

Madam President, we should not tax—[*Continuous interruption*] We should tax, as I said, alcohol. Imagine it is cheaper to buy alcohol in Trinidad than it is to buy, let us say, juices. That is unfair. Beverages for the ordinary people and juices are more expensive today than alcoholic beverages. So it is better you can get drunk faster and it is cheaper to get drunk than it is to have a light average beverage in this country. I can tell you, we would prefer to tax the rich than to punish the poor. [*Desk thumping*]

You know, there was a great writer called Victor Hugo and maybe he was

thinking about Trinidad and Tobago in the 21st Century when he wrote:

“There is always more misery among the lower classes than there is humanity in the higher.”—classes.

Sen. Khan: That is true anywhere in the world.

Sen. W. Mark: So, Madam President, what we have to do is to ensure that whatever policies that are pursued, policies are pursued in the interest of the poor and the vulnerable, the middle classes, the working classes. Those classes should be uppermost in our minds given the nature of the society that we live in. And what the United Nations is attempting to do through these 17 Sustainable Development Goals is bring about a greater balance between the poor and the rich, to close the gap, to bring about more equity, more decency, more dignity, more civility in the world.

They want to ensure that every human being has three square meals a day; that they enjoy freedom and dignity for their spirit and they enjoy education and culture so that they can have fertile minds. That is what these goals are about and all of us, regardless of the political picong that we engage in from time to time, all of us should be committed to achieving these goals for the people of our nation and our country; all of us.

And therefore, I look forward to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, through their national development plans, through their national strategies—of course, as the people’s alternative, we are waiting and ready to assume power at a short call, short notice.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Dream!

Sen. W. Mark: But at the same time, whilst we are here, we are prepared to play our role, we are prepared to make our contribution, and as Sen. The Hon. Dennis

Moses, Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs and Minister in the Ministry of National Security has so eloquently stated, in your contribution, that we should be playing a very pivotal role in the formulation of national development strategies in our country.

You cannot leave out the Opposition that represents over 340,000 citizens in the country and you cannot just use us when it is convenient. So when you wanted the Tobago House of Assembly Act to pass, because you know it requires a special constitutional majority, you will come and try to play us. You will try to see if you could encourage us, inspire us, be good towards us, but other than that, Madam President, they do not care about the Opposition.

So, Madam President, nobody could disagree and all of us must be in agreement with that Goal No. 1, to end poverty in all its forms everywhere and injustice anywhere, as Martin Luther King Jr said, is a threat to justice everywhere. And therefore, we cannot be against Goal No. 1, to:

“End poverty in all its forms everywhere”.

Goal No. 2:

“End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”.

That is the role of my dear friend, Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat.

Sen. Rambharat: “Dats right.”

Sen. W. Mark: And my colleague, Sen. Avinash Singh, Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

Madam President, we must all be in support of ensuring healthy lives and to promote well-being for all at all ages of our nation. Who can be opposed to that? We are all together on this particular goal. Goal No. 4, to:

“Ensure inclusive and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

Goal No. 5, to:

“Achieve gender equality...”

My good honourable colleague, Sen. Nigel De Freitas, made mention of that.

Achieving “...gender equality and empower all women and girls”.

That is a goal that we must all support. We must ensure—and the hon. Senator, the Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development, you must support achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.

Sen. Baptiste-Primus: I will do much more than the former Prime Minister. Much more than that.

Sen. W. Mark: I support that. Goal No. 6:

“Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”.

We must support that. Goal No. 7:

“Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all”.

Goal No. 8:

“Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”.

That is the agenda of the hon. Minister of Labour and Small Enterprise Development and I know that she is going to do her best and you can count on my support in terms of that because we all want to give a better life to the working class of Trinidad and Tobago.

Goal No. 9:

“Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation”.

Goal No.10, to:

“Reduce inequality within and among countries”.

You have to deal with that.

Madam President, in the United States, 1 per cent of the population controls a large amount of wealth and income.

Madam President: Sen. Mark, you have five more minutes.

Sen. W. Mark: Yes, thank you very much, Madam President. Right. Goal No. 11:

“Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”.

Goal No. 12:

“Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns”.

Goal No. 13:

“Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts”.

Goal No. 14:

“Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development”.

Goal No. 15:

“Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial eco-systems, sustainably manage forest, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss”.

Goal No. 16:

“Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development,

provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”.

Goal No. 17, and finally:

“Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development”.

Madam President, we are all in favour of these measures and as Sen. Jennifer Raffoul said, there is need for us to deal with this thing in a scientific way. We must measure these things and we must gain all the support from the United Nations while we build our own capacity in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam President, to realize these objectives. It is a tall order but we have to stand tall in this world even though we are a small nation and we must do what is necessary to ensure that there is justice, there is fair play, there is equity, there is inclusiveness in our society, and no one must be left behind, regardless of race, colour, creed, class, ethnicity, gender, political opinion or religion. We must all work together to ensure that every single citizen realizes his or her worth and the personality is very important as we talk about dignity. Every human being has personality and dignity and we must respect those traits of the human being.

Madam President, I want to thank, once again, in wrapping up, my colleagues for their support. We did have some healthy exchanges, we call it political picong; that is all part of it. I want to thank them for their contributions and I look forward with some degree of optimism that this Parliament will, in fact, give support to this particular Motion so we can telegraph to the world that we have taken the leadership role in ensuring that the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago has taken the lead in ensuring that the UN Post-2015 Development Agenda has been debated, discussed; there is a resolution to keep this

Parliament informed and abreast of development and to ensure that we participate, in as far as is practically possible, in the formulation of national development strategies and policies so that these 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets can be realized in the interest of the people and, by extension, the interest of the people of the world. I beg to move, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

6.00 p.m.

Question put.

Sen. Mark: Could we have a division on this one? This is a very important matter, Madam President.

Sen. Khan: You want it on record.

Sen. Mark: Yes.

The Senate voted: Ayes 27

AYES

Khan, Hon. F.

Gopee-Scoon, Hon. P.

Baptiste-Primus, Hon. J.

Rambharat, Hon. C.

Henry, Dr. L.

Moses, Hon. D.

Singh, A.

Budhu, Miss S.

Coppin, W.

Cummings, F.

De Freitas, N.

Baksh, Miss A.

Dookie, D.

Stewart, Miss N.

Mark, W.

Hadeed, G.

Solomon, D.

Sturge, W.

Samuel, R.

Mahabir, Dr. D.

Roach, HRI

Small, D.

Shrikissoon, T.

Ramkissoon, Miss M.

Creese, S.

Raffoul, Miss J.

Richards, P.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, the results of the division are as follows: 27 Senators voted in favour of the Motion. No one voted against it and there were no abstentions. [*Desk thumping*] This Motion has therefore been passed.

Question agreed to.

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.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made, That this Senate do now adjourn to a date to be fixed. [*Hon. F. Khan*]

Madam President: Hon. Senators, before I put the question on the adjournment, leave has been granted for one matter to be raised on the Motion for the adjournment of the Senate.

Comptroller of Accounts Staff Shortage (Government's Failure to Address)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, I take the opportunity to raise a matter of very grave importance, dealing with the issue of the failure of the Government to address the critical staff shortage at the Comptroller of Accounts, Pensions Division, and its negative impact on the livelihoods of hundreds of prospective pensioners and persons entitled to pensions and gratuity payments.

Madam President, it has come to my attention that there appears to be a major crisis at the Comptroller of Accounts, Pensions Division Unit, in which the average time it normally takes when somebody retires from the public service to receive their payment and their gratuity cheque is normally three months. If you are lucky and you have recognition and you have contacts, you may get that within one month.

Madam President, it is not only workers who are monthly-rated and retired from the service who are experiencing this embarrassment, but even workers who

are on contract and they have served their time, two years or three years, and they are entitled to one-twentieth of their gross earnings during that period, they too are experiencing no end of trouble in accessing their well-earned gratuities.

Madam President, this is becoming very, very disturbing. I have been informed that this situation has reached a point where you can take up to a year now, to just receive your pension. Some people are even so ill, they may even expire before they receive their pensions. Now, I am not blaming the Government of Trinidad and Tobago for this. What I am saying, the time has come for us to examine whether there was a failure of succession planning within the Comptroller of Accounts Department/Division because there seems to be a paucity of skilled personnel.

My understanding is that there is a process. Phase one would be the Ministry internal audit section/pension section dealing with your documents and what you are entitled to. Then it leaves the Ministry and it goes to the Comptroller of Accounts, what is called computation section. They compute what you are entitled to. I understand there are eight to nine people computing but there is only one supervisor checking. Then after that is done, it is sent to the Auditor General's Office to ensure that you do not owe the State any moneys. When that returns to the computation division of the pensions office they sign off and check it and sign again. Then it goes to the hon. Minister of Finance desk. It is his responsibility to sign off on all pension cheques in this country. I understand it goes to the Minister of Finance. That is what I have been informed. I may be wrong. But I have been informed that it goes to the Minister of Finance or some section of the Ministry of Finance. Madam President, after it returns from his desk, if that is so, it goes back to the Comptroller, they do what they have to do and then they issue the payment

to you, via a cheque.

Madam President, this is unbearable. It is untenable. It is inexcusable. It is unacceptable. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago must take urgent steps to investigate and to take prompt action to ensure that all payments that are owed to legitimate retirees and workers on contract are paid. And if it means that the Government has to employ workers on contract for a period of time, allowing people to work night and day, Saturday and Sunday, to get rid of the backlog so we can come back to the stage where, when somebody retires they can receive their pension within three months. In fact, Madam President, when you work hard and you retire from the service it should not take you more than a month to get your pension. Why three months? But that is what we have grown accustomed to—to three months.

But now I understand there are hundreds of files mounting daily in the Comptroller of Accounts office, Pensions Division, and you do not know when you are going to get your pension. You do not know when you are going to get your gratuity cheques. This is unacceptable and we must take action as a Parliament to ensure that whatever the entitlements are, that action is taken to satisfy those requirements.

There are many problems that may be affecting this whole process. The whole record management system could be a problem there. The interpretation of circulars could also be a problem. I mentioned, Madam President, succession planning could also be a problem. Human resource practices could be another problem that is holding up this process. There is need for a central database. I do not believe there is a central database in the system right now.

Madam President, it is painful but it is true that people have approached me

on this matter and I told them I will take it to the Parliament and bring it to the attention of the hon. Minister of Finance, who may not be fully aware of what is taking place in the Comptroller of Accounts, Pensions Division Unit, and the hundreds and hundreds, if not thousands, of citizens who are entitled to pensions are not being able to access their pensions.

Madam President, I only have 10 minutes. I think I have made my point. The point simply is, there is a crisis in the pensions unit of the Comptroller of Accounts. There are hundreds, if not thousands of people who cannot get their cheques and the average time used to be three months. It is taking six months, up to a year and a half, even up to two years. This cannot continue and I call on the hon. Minister of Finance, if he is not aware, to kindly investigate this matter and give this Parliament the assurance that the backlog that they have there could be cleared within a relatively short period of time so people who are entitled to pensions and gratuity, whether you are a contract worker or you are a retired public officer, are given their entitlement. I thank you, Madam President.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam President. As I indicated earlier today, Sen. Mark seems to love having me here. Now, having listened to his discourse, the only factual element in anything that he said was the fact that there is a delay in the payment of gratuity and pensions. However, a former Minister of Public Administration, as he is, should know that cheques are not approved by Ministers, and I am shocked that he would say in this House that the pension cheques have to be approved by the Minister of Finance. They arrive on my desk and I have to approve every single one, because I take my time. That is implicit in what he is saying; the cheques just stand up there on my desk and then after I deal with them they go back to wherever. That is an

absurdity. Ministers in this Government, and in all previous governments that I am aware of, have no association with cheques in any form or fashion. So, for the record, pension cheques are not sent to me. Gratuity payment cheques are not sent to me.

In addition, I am a bit taken aback that the hon. Senator was a member of a political party that ran this country for five years and three months. There is nothing new about this. The problem with delay in payment of gratuity and pension is something that has been there for quite a while. The staff shortages at the Pension Division in the Treasury have been there for a long time.

For the five whole years that the PP was in office they did nothing. So that we had an accumulation of delays/backlog being created. Worse still, in 2015, in the early part of 2015, there was industrial action. You will recall, Madam President, at that time the Public Services Association was being quite aggressive, in terms of shutting down government buildings because they did not meet the requirements of the Occupational Safety and Health Authority and you had several departments of Government such as Immigration, working half day, sometimes not working at all because the Public Services Association was enforcing aspects of the OSH law and as a consequence people just were not there, and the Treasury Division was one of these, and this happened under your Government's tenure.

6.15 p.m.

So that in early 2015, one of the departments that was affected was the Pensions Division because they shut down, because the building that they were in and everybody knows where the Treasury building is. It is on the corner of Independence Square and Edward Street. It is an old building. It probably was part of our colonial, not was part, is part of our colonial heritage. The former

administration allowed that building to deteriorate over the 2010—2015 period, to the point where the working conditions were just not good enough, and the PSA shut down the building. So as a result of the fact that the former Government did nothing to deal with the staff shortages in the Pensions Division, allowed the Treasury building to deteriorate, a backlog was created when there was industrial action. We now come to the present day, and I read this Motion:

The failure of the Government to address the critical staff shortage at the Comptroller of Accounts/Pension Division.

This Government has been in office for five months. The first three months was dealing with budgetary matters, but notwithstanding all of that, I am very well aware of the issues with the Pensions Division, and unlike the last administration, we are doing something about it. [*Desk thumping*] We will not allow five years to pass without accommodation needs of the Treasury being addressed, and without the staff needs of the Pensions Division in particular being addressed.

There are also a number of issues. There is an increasing number of the officers retiring from the public service. In 2014, there were approximately 825 retirees; 2015, 972. In 2016, it will be 843 and these statistics do not include persons who retire voluntary, deceased, medically unfit, judges, legislators and so on. But from these figures I have just given, in 2014—2015, almost 2,000 persons retired from the public service, and this year we may have almost another 1,000 in 2016.

The number of staff at the branch is not eight. It is 81 and that is why I said that very little of what the Senator said was factual. However, over the period as the number of public servants who are retiring has increased, the number of staff at the Pensions Management Branch has remained constant more or less at 80/81,

although the volume of work has increased.

So the way this Government is dealing with this matter, because I am myself very dissatisfied, and I can speak on behalf of legislators, that I have been chasing gratuity payments to legislators. I thought you would bring that up, but the hon. Senator did not. I have asked the Parliament to check the flow of information from the Parliament to the Treasury Division, to ensure that the records have been sent to the Treasury Division. So that persons who retired or were retired as legislators, whether in this place or the other place in June 2015 when the Parliament was dissolved, can receive their gratuities.

I am completely unsatisfied or totally dissatisfied with the pace at which that is going. In fact, I met with the Treasury just last week, and urged them to ensure that legislators and other pensioners, public servants, daily-paid workers in terms of gratuity and so on, that we do something. I am of the view, and this is the only part of the presentation from Sen. Mark that was factual, that the delay is intolerable. The way we are going to deal with it is that we are increasing the establishment, this is the permanent establishment in the Pensions Division by at least 20 additional persons, taking the staff up to 100, but that will have to go through all its paces, in terms of the service commission recruiting and so on. That will take a very long time.

So in the interim, we are going to increase the staffing in the Treasury Division to deal with this particular issue by at least 25 contract officers. So that we will be able to clear the backlog, and we will return to the situation where persons can get their gratuity and their pension within one to three months. This is what I am doing as Minister, and this is what this Government is doing. This is not a political thing. This is something that affects everyone and I want to give this

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Senate an assurance that I am proactively dealing with this matter. I am well aware. It is unacceptable. It is intolerable, and we are going to deal with it decisively and firmly. I thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Hon. Senators, the question is that this House do adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.20 p.m.