

SENATE

Tuesday, March 28, 2017

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

**PAPERS LAID**

1. A Green Paper on the Draft National Parenting Policy of Trinidad and Tobago. [*The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon)*]
2. Annual Audited Financial Statements of the Vehicle Management Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited (VMCOTT) for the financial year ended September 30, 2013. [*Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2004. [*Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon*]
4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2005. [*Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon*]
5. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2006. [*Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon*]
6. Second Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Sangre Grande Regional Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2007. [*Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon*]

7. Second Report of the Committee to Review the levels of Health Care Delivery by the Regional Health Authorities and to rationalize the system of Public Sector Doctors in Private Practice. [*Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon*]
8. Annual Report on the Administration of the Dangerous Drugs Act, Chap. 11:25 as amended for the years 2015 and 2016. [*Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon*]
9. Annual Administrative Report of the National Information and Communication Technology Company Limited (iGovTT) for the period October 01, 2014 to September 30, 2015. [*Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon*]
10. Administrative Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Free Zones Company Limited for the year ended December 31, 2015. [*Sen. The Hon. P. Gopee-Scoon*]
11. Annual Report of the Public Service Commission for the year 2015. [*The Vice-President (Nigel De Freitas)*]

URGENT QUESTIONS

Children's Life Fund

(Assistance for Shannen Luke)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Minister of Health: Could the Minister state what efforts are being made through the Children's Life Fund to assist Shannen Luke who requires urgent treatment at a specialist children's hospital in Italy.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Children's Life Fund Act, Chap. 29:01, section 4, sets up the Children's Life Fund. Sections 18 to 21 set out the procedure and section 3 stipulates that there is a limit of TT \$1 million. Section 19 identifies that funds can be allocated for life-threatening illnesses. I can tell this honourable Chamber that as of today for Shannen Luke, there is no application before the Children's Life

Fund today, last year or the year before, or since the birth of this child. There is no application before the Children's Life Fund.

What I can tell this honourable House is that a letter was sent to the Chief Medical Officer, received in February 2017, asking for assistance under the Medical Aid Programme which is distinct from the Children's Life Fund. Unfortunately, accompanying that letter was a dated outdated medical report, and the Chief Medical Officer on the same day wrote back and requested an up-to-date medical report so that assistance could be rendered under the medical aid. But there is no application before the Children's Life Fund, and I will urge the parents to do so. Once they qualify they can access the Children's Life Fund, which is well funded to the tune of \$55 million. This administration to date has approved 40 applications to the Children's Life Fund. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Ramdeen: Through you, Madam President. Having regard to the public nature of this particular child and the headline in the *Express* today, apart from indicating to the honourable House that an application ought to be made, this matter having been brought into the public domain, have any steps been taken by the Ministry of Health on its own to contact this family and to ensure that assistance is given to the family, notwithstanding that an application has not been made pursuant to the Act?

Madam President: Before I call on the Minister to reply, may I just point out to Members—have a seat, please—that when you are asking a question, ask the question. You need to edit it a little bit. The Minister of Health.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: As I indicated in my answer, we received a letter addressed to the Chief Medical Officer and he replied on the same day, contacting the parents requesting an up-to-date medical report. The medical report that was submitted was one year old. We received a letter on January 2017, accompanying that was a

medical report of March 2016. So to make a determination we need an up-to-date medical report, whether it is for the Children's Life Fund or the medical aid. Also we have to go through the process of getting the social workers' report. They were advised of these twin requirements. I think recently, last week, we got the up-to-date medical report but we are still awaiting from the parents or guardians, the other report to do the means test. So we have contacted the parents with alacrity to try to resolve and try to assist these parents. [*Desk thumping*]

Non-Functioning CT Scanners

(Measures to Remedy Situation)

Sen. Wade Mark: To the hon. Minister of health: In light of non-functioning CT Scanners at the nation's three major hospitals, what measures are being taken to immediately remedy this situation?

Madam President: Minister of Health, you have two minutes.

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Madam President, on coming into office on September 2015, the CT scanner at the ERHA Sangre Grande Hospital was already down for six months. In looking at that machine we have determined the machine should have been replaced many years ago. You would have seen, hon. Senator, request for proposals in the daily newspapers about two months ago for that particular facility, so we are intent on replacing that machine.

Regarding the machine at Port of Spain, there was an internal UPS problem, not the UPS that drives the entire machine, an internal UPS inside the machine that regulates voltage to the internal computer. That internal UPS went down. It is now in Tennessee being flown into Trinidad tonight. By this afternoon they are going to bypass the internal UPS and connect the software to the external UPS. So the machine should be up and running by this afternoon, with the permanent fix

replacing the UPS tomorrow and the machine would be operational on its own steam on Thursday.

The San Fernando CT machine needed a new tube. The new tube was ordered, was shipped, was received in Trinidad. Unfortunately the base of the tube could not fit the machine. The wrong part was shipped; no fault of the RHA. The tube, through the local distributors, was shipped back and a new tube is coming in which should arrive sometime next week.

So those are the updates on the CT scanners at the three major hospitals. Port of Spain will be up and running this afternoon. We have RFPs for a new one in Sangre Grande, and the one in San Fernando should have been up, but the wrong part was shipped.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, could the hon. Minister indicate, given the population sizes involved in those catchment areas, where those hospitals are located, what he would consider to be the quantum of CT scanners that ought to be made available at those hospitals?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, I will not allow that question. That is not a proper supplementary question.

Sen. Ramdeen: Madam President, through you, could the Minister indicate whether the CT scanners at the Children's Hospital could be used while these CT scanners are down at these different regional health authorities?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam President, as the hon. Member would know, if we are attempt to move a CT scanner under warranty, we would void the warranty. Also, because we are going into a public/private partnership to operationalize the Couva facility, anyone having seen the facility and made an offer would have made an offer based on equipment they would have seen. So to remove equipment from Couva will do several things, one, void the warranty and probably jeopardize

the long-term vision to have that facility managed by a public/private partnership.

Camp Cumuto Incident

(Tabling of Report in Senate)

Sen. Wade Mark: To the hon. Minister of National Security: Is the investigation into the circumstances surrounding two children posing with high-powered weapons at Camp Cumuto completed, and if so, will the report be tabled in the Senate?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Madam President. I am aware that the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force conducted a board of enquiry into the matter. I am also aware that the report has been completed. However, I am not aware of any practice to lay a board of enquiry, which is an internal enquiry into the Defence Force, that should be laid in the House. I am aware from the media however that Opposition Senator Wayne Sturge has in fact sought to obtain information on the board of enquiry through the Freedom of Information Act.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, may I ask the hon. Minister, given the public nature of this particular matter and concern, whether the hon. Minister as the person in charge of the Defence Force for policy purposes, would the hon. Minister not see it necessary at this time to make such a report available, even though it has not been a common practice?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam President, the board of enquiry was an internal matter with respect to the Defence Force which I have not participated in nor have I seen the board of enquiry and therefore it remains a matter of security insofar as the Defence Force is concerned.

Sen. Sturge: Madam President, through you, can the Minister therefore, having regard to his answer, indicate how the contents of this report ended up in the hands

of the media?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam President, I have no idea how that happened.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, the time for Urgent Questions has expired. There is one more question that remains to be answered. Is it the will of the Senate that the question be answered?

Hon. Senators: Yes.

Lifeguard Protest

(Measures to Address Plight)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you very much, Madam President. To the hon. Minister of National Security. In light of the recent protest by lifeguards to highlight their deteriorating working conditions, including outdated equipment, can the Minister indicate what measures are being effected to address their plight?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Madam President. The Ministry of National Security has been meeting and will continue to meet with lifeguards and their association, the National Union of Government and Federated Workers, on all matters affecting the lifeguard services. A plan of action has already been set in train, with visits to sites at Las Cuevas and Maracas by the human resource and project management team to address concerns, whether resourcing or infrastructural. These visits will continue along the north coast in the next month.

A review of working conditions has shown that accommodation arrangements for lifeguards are quite comfortable. Some infrastructural work is needed at the Salybia post, and this is being vigorously pursued. Additionally, I met with the president of the union and we have arranged to have a meeting on Monday afternoon next to deal with other matters.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, through you, could the hon. Minister indicate to

this Senate whether the union had made requests to your good self for meetings, and having not had those meetings they had to engage in protest action outside of the Ministry of National Security before you were able to respond?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, I will not allow that question.

Sen. Mark: May I ask the hon. Minister, what steps he intends to take in the future to avoid protest action that would encourage him to have meetings with trade unions?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, I will not allow that question.

Sen. Mark: Do I have anymore?

Madam President: You have two more.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, may I ask the hon. Minister whether a thorough assessment has been made concerning the inadequacy of equipment and other working conditions that seem to be in short supply, as it relates to the lifeguards performing their duties efficiently and effectively, has some kind of audit been done on that particular question?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, I will not allow that question. The Minister already answered the question that was posed to him. One more.

Sen. Mark: I have one more. [*Laughter*]

Madam President, may I ask the hon. Minister whether it is the intention of his Ministry to establish regular meetings with the trade unions in an effort to avoid any recurrence of what took place recently outside the Ministry of National Security?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, not only you have been making mistakes, I just made a mistake. You were only allowed two supplementary questions, and you have now arrived at four. It is my bad and I take responsibility. So I will not call on the Minister. [*Laughter*]

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):

Madam President, the Government is in a position to answer questions 34 and 35—67 per cent. We are however asking a deferral on question 36 for two weeks.

Madam President: Question No. 36 is deferred for two weeks.

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

Contraction of Economy

(Government Measures to Improve)

36. Could the hon. Minister of Finance state:

Having recorded an economic contraction of -8 per cent in the second quarter of 2016, what specific measures are being taken by the Government to improve the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and economic situation?

Question, by leave, deferred.

Alutrint Smelter

(Reasons for Pursuing)

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

In light of the current state of the global oil and gas markets, can the Minister state the reasons for pursuing the Alutrint smelter?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam President. Contrary to the inference in the question, the Alutrint smelter is not being pursued. However, the Government is actively pursuing a key aspect of the original project, Alutech. The Alutech plant will focus on the production of high-quality aluminium downstream products, including pressed aluminium, coils, billets and wheel rims.

The Alutrint smelter would have initially produced a hot metal for the downstream aluminium products; however, ingots will now be imported and combined with state-of-the-art technology to manufacture cast aluminium products.

The Alutech plant will be the first of its kind in the Caribbean and will provide the opportunity to further diversify Trinidad and Tobago's economy. Alutech will also play a key role in generating revenue, earning foreign exchange and creating employment.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, could the hon. Minister indicate to us what is the projected cost of this particular plant Alutech, that the Government anticipates for its full operations or has that not been arrived at, at this time?

Madam President: You asked two questions there.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes, Madam President, therefore he is out of questions.

The Government is presently meeting with representatives of Alutech to firm up the projects. There are several of them. They involve wheel rims as I have indicated, but also aluminium sheets for use in the motor car industry and, therefore, the cost is not fixed at this point in time.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, given the crisis in natural gas supply in Trinidad and Tobago, can the hon. Minister indicate that once that project gets off the ground how will the Government be able through NGC to supply gas to this very important project?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam President, although the original question was about the smelter and I certainly would not have known that Sen. Mark would go on an adventure with respect to products produced from aluminium, the fact of the matter is that these are products produced by electricity. They are not produced by gas.

In the case of the smelter, natural gas was a key component of the process. In the case of these products, electricity is the main source of energy, not gas.

Sen. Mark: Could the hon. Minister indicate to this Senate what is the anticipated employment levels, given the fact that this plant will be established, will become operational and the Government is in discussion with the investors? The Government should be in a position to indicate to us what the anticipated employment levels are when that plant gets going, properly speaking.

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam President, again, the question was about the smelter, but to use a phrase coined by a former colleague of hon. Sen. Mark—thousands.

[Sen. Mark rises]

Madam President: Sen. Mark, no, you are only allowed four supplementary questions under the Standing Orders.

Sen. Mark: Not five? *[Laughter]*

China Exim Bank

(Credit Facility)

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

What is the status of the US \$66.6 million credit facility obtained through the China Exim Bank to finance the aluminium smelter project?

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam President, there is no such facility with the Export-Import Bank of China.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, if there is no such facility, could the hon. Minister indicate whether there is in fact a US \$66 million facility with the Chinese Government?

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam President, there is no such facility.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, does the Government intend to establish such a facility with the Exim Bank, as it relates to this particular project that we have just identified?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, that question does not arise.

Unacceptable Levels of Violent Crime
(Government Steps to Deal With)
Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon

2017.03.28

**Unacceptable Levels of Violent Crime
(Government Steps to Deal With)**

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [February 14, 2017]:

Be it resolved that this Senate take note of the increasing and unacceptable levels of violent crimes in Trinidad and Tobago.

And be it further resolved that this Senate call on the Government to take all immediate and necessary steps in the shortest possible time to deal with the unacceptable crime level facing the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago.

Question again proposed.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, one person has spoken on the Motion already and that is Sen. Wayne Sturge who was the mover of the Motion.

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon):

Thank you very much, Madam President. The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is not comfortable with the current state of murders in Trinidad and Tobago, in particular what is happening in the Enterprise area.

Within recent times the Ministry of National Security has in fact established a forward base comprising of both soldiers and police in the Lions Gate area, which is adjacent to the Enterprise area. However, based on present assessment and present analysis, the Government believes that a more direct and specific approach is required, in particular, dealing with what is going on presently in the Enterprise area.

To that end, the National Security Council has in fact taken a decision to construct a police station in the middle of the Enterprise area in the shortest possible time. This we believe would pay particular attention to what is happening

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in Enterprise within the last couple of weeks, within the last couple of months. That decision would see a police station occupied by both members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and members of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force to deal with the issues of gang warfare in the Enterprise area.

Madam President, there is a principle of war that is called “concentration of force at the right time and place”. This Government believes that the time is now, the place is Enterprise and the force will be one of utilizing all the agencies of national security to deal with the issues in the Enterprise area.

Madam President, the Motion refers to the increase in crime. Crime is not new to Trinidad and Tobago. When we look at the very development of crime, we see that it continues to increase over time. There was a time when murder was 100 and it was alarming at that time. There was a time when it got to 200, and it was alarming at that time. We believe that the initiatives that we are currently doing will redound to a reduction in the crime in Trinidad and Tobago.

2.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker, but let us step back for a moment because where we are today did not happen overnight. To a large extent it was based on some of the inaction or lack of action on behalf of the previous administration. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, one can recall in 2010 the murder rate had reached to 500. That was alarming, 500. But when we step back and we look at what has happened and what this Government has had to face with was, in fact, an almost destruction of the institutions that were there created to deal with crime in Trinidad and Tobago. We saw the institution being dismantled.

We can talk about the special anti-crime unit and I heard this morning a former Attorney General mentioning in the news media—the former Attorney

General mentioned on the news media: the importance of that institution in the crime fighting; the development of crime scene investigators, for instance; the capacity to treat with murders and kidnapping that was dealt with in that special anti-crime unit of Trinidad and Tobago. He mentioned that destroying that very institution has created a gap in the ability to fight crime in Trinidad and Tobago. And this was the former Attorney General, today, on the radio, Madam President.

So when we look at the dismantling of those institutions, that is just one of many institutions that were dismantled between 2010 and 2015, we put that together with the absence of the offshore patrol vessels. You see, Madam President, what I am creating is the gap, some of the causal factors of where we are today. The dismantling of the institutions; the non-acceptance and the subsequent sale of the offshore patrol vessels that left us with open borders. It left us with the movement of guns and ammunition coming into our borders because they were, in fact to a large extent, it was unmanned and unguarded, Madam President. And we are suffering today based on those decisions that were made between 2010 and 2015. Notwithstanding that, Madam President, this Government will not shun its responsibility. This Government will stand up for its responsibility and do all that is required to treat with the issues of crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]*

We are going to rebuild the institutions, Madam President. We are going to rebuild those institutions and we are going to equip the forces of national security to do their job effectively and efficiently. And so this Government has taken three strands: administrative reform, operational reform and legislative reform to treat with crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago.

And so, when we look at the administrative reform, Madam President, we

have seen this Government has made a very direct attempt to treat with governance of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, governance with respect to leadership of the police service. This Government went about with treating with the issues of selecting a Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police. What has happened? What did the Opposition do? They stalled the process, Madam President. They stalled the process so that to date, to date—and this is an exercise that started in 2016, January 2016 when, as Minister of National Security I issued a letter at that time which was required to appoint the Commissioner of Police and the Deputy Commissioner of Police—to date, that exercise has not been completed because of the stalling tactics of the Opposition. [*Desk thumping*] So, we deal with the governance of the very force that is mandated to deal with the issues of crime in Trinidad and Tobago.

Administratively, again, we looked at rebuilding the institutions and so when we looked at the Strategic Services Agency, another agency that was dismantled—disparaging institutions by the last administration— [*Desk Thumping*]—one in which there was an amalgam of different institutions with no direct leadership. This Government has taken a definite stance to make it a legal agency, one that has within its powers the National Intelligence Agency, the National Training Academy, the National Operations Centre, all legally placed, and that institution is working together with law enforcement to treat with the issues of crime and criminality.

Madam President, again, the Government said, let us look at the operational aspect, and government is about policy and strategy, because by definition national security is about the issues faced by nations. It is about the policies and strategies determined by the Government to treat with those security issues and it is about the

people, processes and techniques adopted to treat with those issues.

So this Government is dealing with policy and strategy. It is said, our policy is anchored in the whole-of-government approach and our strategies are based on five strong pillars. These pillars are prediction, deterrence, detection, prosecution and rehabilitation, Madam President. And so we continue to align those strategies, those strategic pillars to our development of the very agencies for our operational imperatives.

And so we strengthened, for instance, the predictive pillar which is about intelligence gathering. We continue to train and reinforce our intelligence gathering mechanism through technology and through the development of the human resources. So, we have strengthened the National Intelligence Agency. We have strengthened the Defence Force Intelligence Agency, the Criminal Gang and Intelligence Unit, the Special Branch through training and technology, Madam President. Again, it is strengthening that prediction pillar.

We continue to strengthen the deterrence pillar. The deterrence pillar speaks a lot to, first and foremost, presence as a presence. Take for instance, we saw what has happened in Soogrim Trace in Laventille. We established a presence there, Madam President, a joint presence of army and police. And what has happened? We have seen a strong reduction of violence in that area. [*Desk thumping*] We have seen that strong reduction.

But deterrence goes more than that, and I will come to Enterprise in a while. Because deterrence also means you have seen an increase in the presence of police vehicles on the road; you have seen an increase in police presence in terms of road blocks and searches and so on the roads, on the highways in Trinidad and Tobago. Deterrence also means a number of operations requirements and there has been an

increase in operations by the defence force and the police in a number of areas. We have targeted responses, targeted operations in areas such as Sea Lots, in Enterprise, in Point Fortin and in the south-western peninsula, in Cedros, in Moruga, in Tobago—that acts as a deterrence pillar.

But more importantly, the deterrence pillar goes beyond even operational requirements, the deterrence pillar is also targeting our youths; as part of our deterrence pillar, involve in certain programmes such as the MiLAT, the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Cadet Force, the youth clubs. Those are also deterrents, Madam President, deterring the young people from a life of crime.

A deterrence pillar is something—again, we are emphasizing across the broad spectrum from operations to softer approaches as the youth involvement and so on, Madam President. But more importantly the deterrent pillar is an operational deterrent also, where we have seen operations taking place in the Enterprise area, where we are again, as I said, I mentioned a while ago, we have established that firm base, and we feel that is not sufficient.

So we are going to establish that permanent police station in that Enterprise area. [*Desk thumping*] And we are going to take the fight to those people who consider themselves as unruly or whatever they want to call their names to deal with the issues in the central area. I can guarantee, Madam President, the concentration of force at the right time and place, all legally done, will treat with those issues.

And then we look at the detection pillar. In terms of the detection pillar, we continue, again, it is an area where we have to rebuild because it was destroyed to a large extent by the last Government. [*Desk thumping*] When they destroyed our capacity, our whole crime scene investigators, when they disbanded the special

anti-crime unit, those people who were almost, some of them were sent home because they were most, and I mean, civilians who were trained in crime scene investigation. So we are rebuilding the capacity insofar as the detection is concerned.

In terms of training, in terms of exposure, we continue to build the capacity for detection because, again, we realize, detection again, it is low, it is not where we want it to be. It is not where we want it to be, where we expect it to be and we are building that capacity. We are rebuilding that capacity to treat with the detection pillar, Madam President, because it is crucial, it is important.

And as we talk about detection, again, you have seen, we have moved the process that had started some time in 2012 or 2013, the question of the DNA custodian and the DNA lab, Madam President. What this Government has done is moved something that was never touched for about two years, and we have now appointed a DNA custodian. [*Desk thumping*] And he is right now setting up his shop to deal with the DNA database, to deal with the management of that database, Madam President, and that would be done in the shortest possible time. That was left unattended. It was talk, talk, talk for two years. This Government has activated that. It has activated the DNA custodian and a DNA bank, and that is also part of the detection pillar that we are working on because DNA will help a lot in the area of detection.

Madam President, we also look at the prosecution pillar. The prosecution pillar, again, you will see certain kinds of interventions in terms of the amount of arrests that have been made within recent times. In this year alone over 100, roughly over about 175 persons have been arrested within the last three months. If you check back between last year to now it is over 1,000 that have been arrested,

and that is based on the diligent work of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Madam President, we also look at the rehabilitation pillar and that has to do now with the area of prison and prison reform, because we believe that the chain continues into incarceration, into the areas of remand and so on. The construction of the videoconferencing centre, for instance, is almost 78 per cent complete and that, again, would be a sort of a game changer in the way we do business with respect to that.

We continue to work with Vision on Mission in terms of prisoner reform rehabilitation restoration. Those are initiatives that would help in terms of the fight against crime. In addition to the operational requirements, Madam President, you would have seen also a legislative drive. Because, as I mentioned before, one of the policies of the Government is what we call a whole-of-government approach and their interventions. [*Desk thumping*] Their intervention by various Ministries of Government, Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, but what you are seeing now, Madam President, is that directly joint effort between the office of the Attorney General and the Ministry of National Security. And you would have seen within recent times a suite of legislation in support of the fight against crime. Madam President, I can list but some of them.

The whole question of—I want to back up again a bit because one of the things that, again, in our fight against crime that was not supported by the Opposition that has a direct effect on crime right now is the Bail Bill. I have to go back to it because it has a direct effect on the crime right now with respect to repeat offenders. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, Madam President, we brought that Bill expecting the support.

Because if they are really concerned about crime, if they are really concerned about crime in Trinidad and Tobago they would have supported that Bill. [*Desk thumping*] Because what happened in the aftermath with that Bill, as soon as the Bill was no longer relevant and important, we saw people coming out on bail. And I refer again, to the famous “Miceman” just released on bail, big gangster in St. Joseph, he was killed recently, he among others because of the failure of the Opposition to support what was a very important initiative, a very important drive by the Government with respect to the Bail Bill.

We see the same thing with the anti-gang, we see the same thing with anti-gang, we can no longer arrest persons based on the Anti-Gang Act. Now again, if the Opposition was truly mindful of what is going on in this country as opposed to only talking and talking and talking, then would have seen the importance of that Bill.

You know, one could recall, Madam President, one could recall there was a meeting in San Juan, I think, just around 2010 leading up to the 2015 elections, the Leader of Opposition once said, and she said, “if the PP Government is not voted into power, the street would be covered in blood, the street going to be covered in blood if they were not voted into power. And they lost the election. You know, I have heard several Opposition Senators in the other place talking that, “when the PNM is in power, crime goes up”. Well there are different perspectives to that. There is a different perspective to that. When the PP is in Opposition, crime goes up.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: That is right. No support.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Crime goes up. Not only support, it might be something else, but I cannot say. Crime goes up, not only the lack of support. But

what do they do to support the fight against crime?

Madam President, as I said, the legislative attack on crime continues to be led by the Attorney General together with the Ministry of National Security, and we have seen several such initiatives, several such areas being placed on the agenda and the legislative agenda. We have seen amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Act, for instance. We have seen attempts, again, with the Bail (Amdt.) Bill. We have seen the Proceeds of Crime Act; the finance intelligence, Customs (Amdt.) Bill, soon to come with the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Bill; the abolition of trial by jury; the Indictable Offences (Pre-Trial Procedure) Bill; the Cybercrime Bill, Gambling and Betting Bill. A number of legislative Bills that would be coming to support the fight against crime, Madam President. And we hope, we hope that the Opposition would see what is being done and understand the benefit to the people of Trinidad and Tobago and support these measures.

Madam President, this Government will not bend, would not fade from its responsibilities. The responsibility is on us to deal with crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And we will, we will, Madam President, do all that is required even if we have to do it alone, we will do what is required to treat with crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*].

You see, the electorate has given us, has charged us with that responsibility when they voted in 2015 in September, they gave us that responsibility and we will take that responsibility very seriously. We will involve all agencies of the State, give them the necessary strategy, provide them with the necessary equipment, provide them with the necessary tools. Whatever is required, this Government is prepared to treat with that in a manner that will results to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, we will continue to do, as I said, a number of approaches. We will continue to look at it in a legislative way, in an operational and, of course, administrative. And, it is several initiatives that are coming together that will treat with the issues of crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, as the Minister of National Security I can tell this House and I want to, again, implore the use of the members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and they are coming to work, they continue to work assiduously. Members of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force continue to work in support of them. Members of the Trinidad and Tobago Prison Service, collectively, we are coming together to treat with the issues of crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago. The agencies of the State have been and will be employed to treat with the issues of crime and criminality.

We have seen a strengthening of a number of different areas: The Cold Case Unit, for instance, has been strengthened by the Commissioner of Police to deal with issues of prolonged cases that have been there for some time. We have seen specialized training taking place in a number of the various agencies to build the capacity.

We have also seen, Madam President, the arrangement against something that has left for some time, the whole question of the electronic magnetic bracelet. We have already taken that on board, we have now appointed a manager, we have now engaged certain service providers, are in the process of selecting a service provider to set up the necessary mechanism to treat with the electronic magnetic bracelet. Again, it would be a game changer in the way in which our prisons are housed which, again, form the bedrock of crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago.

So there are several initiatives, Madam President, that have been undertaken by this Government, when collectively would treat with the issues of crime and criminality in Trinidad and Tobago. And we continue, we continue to build the institutions, we continue to reinforce what is required in terms of equipment, in terms of human resource, in terms of strategic direction to treat with those issues.

We have seen, for instance, a game changer in the way we introduced the speed guns and we are in the process to procuring additional speed guns, Madam President, which was a game changer. It changed our habits, it changed the way we do things. We want to reinforce that by putting additional measures on the roadways and so on. So, you will see coming on stream the whole question of the licensing office and licence plates in Trinidad and Tobago with the introduction of radio frequency identification tags where we can monitor and treat with issues insofar as traffic and traffic offences are concerned. But additionally, we realize that movements around a roadway is one way in which criminals use to move from point A to point B to transport certain things.

So that we are going to play a very important role in looking at what moves across our streets, what moves across our highways. We continue to place a presence in our maritime security environment. The Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard continues to work by themselves and also in cooperation with the Venezuelan authority, the Guardia Nacional, to deal with issues on the maritime security environment.

We continue, again, to close those gaps that were created over the last five years before we got into power, to close those gaps to shut down our borders. And you have seen within recent times, Madam President, the coast guard, working in partnership with our international partners in the United States, had one of the

biggest busts in the history of Trinidad and Tobago, but not only in Trinidad and Tobago, one the largest busts in 1999, millions of dollars' worth of cocaine was stopped. [*Crosstalk*]

You see, the question is that this Government is a responsible Government, we utilize what we have. We do not disband and throw away what is important, and this is what you all have done.

Sen. Ameen: Even for the OPVs.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: You see, it was the State's own, and it was not OPVs neither. But that is not to say, listen, we will use what is required, we are not an irresponsible Government. We are not an irresponsible Government [*Desk thumping*] to disband and open our door.

And therefore, we will continue, as I was saying, we continue to also look at the maritime environment because we realize that one of our vulnerabilities is the maritime security environment. And so we are going to be strengthening, we will continue to strengthen that because we have established, realizing our proximity by Venezuela, of course, and the movement of goods and whatever commodities from the South American mainland. We have partnered with Venezuela at the highest level. At the national security level, at the level of the commander of the coast guard and the commander of the Guardia Nacional, Guardia Costa. So, we have direct contact almost on a one-to-one contact to treat, again, with the issues. So, we are looking at not only the internal aspect of security, but also the maritime aspect.

But also we are looking at the aerial aspect also so that we continue to employ the aircraft of the Trinidad and Tobago Air Guard to do aerial surveillance. That is a combination, Madam President, of air, land and sea to look at issues insofar as security is concerned, both within and without the State of Trinidad and

Tobago. And this establishment took place under this Government. It did not take place under the last administration because they did not recognize and realize that one of the most vulnerable areas of maritime security. You recall statements such as, “we doh need any vessels; the fight is on land, it is not on sea”.

So, how can you make such a statement when we are an island country? We are surrounded by waters. Where does it come from? You see that is the absence—that is why, unthinkingly, they got rid of the offshore patrol vessel until they realized in 2015 just before election the importance for maritime security and rushed to purchase some vessels which, I might say, compares apple and cheese if you compare them to the offshore patrol vessels.

Offshore patrol vessels would have given you a 28-day presence in any one month outside in our waters especially in the Atlantic and sea states 4 and 5. These vessels can give us about 14 and they cannot stay out in the sea states 4 and 5. There is a difference. The offshore patrol vessels was a platform, a platform from which operations could be launched. So that it was based on helicopters moving on those vessels and extending their reach beyond our economic exclusive zone. We cannot do the same, so it is chalk and cheese. But as a responsible Government we will use what we have to do what we have to do. [*Desk thumping*]

And so, Madam President, this Government will bring all the resources. As I mentioned, we will do the operation imperatives, we will strengthen the operational remit. We will do our legislative framework. We will strengthen the legislative framework. Administratively, we will deal with the institution rebuilding. And I believe, Madam President, we are well on our way to seeing results, to bring the crime down in Trinidad and Tobago, because collectively our initiatives, when seen together, will redound to the benefit of the people and deal

with the security in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam President. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir: [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam President. First, let me commend my colleague Sen. Sturge for bringing to the attention of this honourable Senate [*Desk thumping*] this critical issue of crime and crime fighting in Trinidad and Tobago. I want to commend him for the manner in which the Motion was framed and in particular the very last position, the last articles:

“Be it further resolved that this Senate call on the Government to take all immediate and necessary steps in the shortest possible time to deal with the unacceptable crime level facing the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago.”

I think that is the crux of the matter.

But, Madam President, as I studied the Motion I realized that maybe it is incumbent upon me, sitting on the Independent Bench, to make some recommendations to the Government on what some of these steps might be so that we can work together to maybe arrest this runaway problem of crime.

And at the outset, Madam President, let me say that Sen. Sturge forced me to think. This is not an easy subject to grapple with. I am much more comfortable with addressing the problem of what might be the best mechanism for allocating foreign exchange at a time of declining commodity prices. I could speak for hours on that, but on this one I had to really do some serious thinking.

And at the outset let me also commend the Minister of National Security for his contribution, and I want to build upon what the Minister of National Security has said.

First, the Minister of National Security as a military trained ex-officer, I am

sure can handle all types of equipment—all air equipment, ground equipment, AK-47—but it is not his function to fight criminals, to find them and to prosecute them. It is his function to administer a Ministry with many departments and, of course, to come to the Senate and the other place, sit in the Cabinet and to provide for us policies which might be, in some way, positive with respect to the problems at hand. And maybe I could somehow try to influence policy.

When I looked at the problem, Madam President, I see that it is not the Minister or even the Ministry of National Security that is charged with crime fighting in Trinidad and Tobago, it is rather the police service of which there are other services in the Ministry of National Security that the Minister must administer.

And there is a problem, wherever we sit in this Chamber, we have to recognize that there is a problem to which the hon. Minister has alluded with respect to detection. We know that the detection rate of crime is particularly maybe abysmally low in Trinidad and Tobago. When we look at the most heinous crime of all, which is murder, the detection rate at best may be around 20 per cent.

Let us, for ease of computation, say that there are 400 murders per annum in Trinidad and Tobago—and I understand there are more on an annual basis—but for 400, and the detection rate of, let us be safe, 10 per cent, we are sure. What that means by a simple arithmetic is that the police service as currently constituted would be able to identify who the murderers were for 40 of our deceased citizens, leaving 360 undetected.

2.30 p.m.

This has to be worrying to the Minister, it is worrying to me, and worrying to all Members of this Chamber, and the worry is, Madam President, is that if out

of every 400 murders we are able to identify who did the crime for 40 of them, we know that there are, perhaps, 360 murderers, if we can link one murderer with one murder, there are perhaps 360 murderers walking the streets to do the crime over and over again. Or, it could very well be that there may be some persons out there who are skilled at killing our citizens, and they may be able to murder five in a year. If we have a number of them, let us say 10 of these individuals murdering five each in a year, and we could identify these 10, immediately we are able to detect and solve 50 more murders, and we add 50 to the 40, so the detection rate will come up to around 25 per cent. But how are we to do that, and why is the police not increasing its detection rate? That seems to be the crux of the problem with respect to murder.

And when I look, Madam President, at how the police service is constructed, I somehow suspect that maybe police officers are being promoted in Trinidad and Tobago regularly based, not on what—from an economic angle—would be their ability to detect crime, but perhaps based on seniority. What we need is a police force which will reward its officers and promote them to higher and higher ranks based upon, at the outset, at least in my mind, from a public interest perspective, their ability when they come to be assessed, an ability to demonstrate, “I have been able to detect this amount this year, this amount last year, and I can show an increase in my capability to solve this particular aspect of crime, knowing that murder is not the only type of crime we have in Trinidad and Tobago”.

But, Madam President, recently, and I think the situation is so grave that I will be pointing blame to no one, because, as I said, Sen. Sturge has forced me to think, and I have seen some things in thinking that go beyond the politics of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And what I have seen, Madam President, is

this. We have a certain structure in which police officers are going to be promoted; there is an agency known as the Police Service Commission, but recently it was advanced in this honorable Chamber that the Police Service Commission could not acquire the necessary wherewithal to recruit a commissioner and hence we needed to go outside. Madam President, the first solution I want to advance to the hon. Minister and to this House in general is that all the service commissions are enshrined in the Constitution. It is a sad state of affairs when, over time, regardless of who is in office, the service commissions are under-resourced so that at some time we have to come and say we need to bypass them.

Let us, as the hon. Minister of National Security indicated, build institutions, and I want to emphasize, that all wisdom does not lie in the executive branch of Government. There is wisdom in the public service, in the service commissions, wisdom in the Senate, wisdom in the Lower House, wisdom in civil society, and once we draw upon this collective pool of wisdom we will know that maybe we can make some headway in this intractable problem.

So, let us commit to building up the institutions of State so that an institution such as the Police Service Commission will be able to recruit a commissioner and at the same time oversee a process whereby of the 8,000-plus police officers in Trinidad and Tobago currently, they are able to assess and implement performance criteria based upon crime-fighting, problem-solving detection, and a well-functioning Police Service Commission which facilitates the promotion of these high-performing officers will result to the benefit of the executive arm.

It is in the interest of Government and Opposition to have these commissions functioning efficiently so that when policy is set we know we are setting policy with strong institutions, institution building. And if we can do that,

work with these commissions, get the police officers promoted according to their ability to detect, I am sure within the police service we might be able to build a level of morale in my mind which is not now in existence. So let us aim as a target—it is okay to say we are working on it—that if this year the detection rate is 15 per cent of murders, could we over the next three years bring the detection rate up to 25 per cent. We cannot, as it is said, by Alfred Marshall, that great economist, *natura non facit saltum*, we cannot make immediate and sudden leaps, but we can move incrementally if we implement incremental improvements. So, first concrete recommendation: promote police officers based upon crime detection so that our ratio currently can increase, measurable, objective and transparent.

Madam President, second recommendation: in addition to murder there is a problem with missing persons. [*Desk thumping*] Missing persons, we do not collect or have the statistics so I am shooting in the dark, but we have a problem, and we have a problem—so the first problem is murder, Asami Nagakiya, Japanese pan player, murdered, yet the murderer not yet found. We have gotten rid of a mayor, I do not know if firing a mayor is ever going to solve a murder, but we have gotten rid of a mayor, that murderer is still walking free. The case is still pending.

Let us look at human trafficking, or missing persons. I cannot prejudge the issue, persons are missing: Ria Sookdeo, young mother, from deep south, went to do things that mothers do on a daily basis, drop the child to school and go and pick him up in the evening, somebody took her and we do not know where this lady is. Recently, in this Chamber we debated the SSA Bill. I voted against the SSA Bill, not because I do not want intelligence to be obtained by the arms of the State. But I voted against the SSA Bill—the SSA now, it was passed, so it is functioning, it cannot be that there is an inability to detect because the SSA Bill was not passed. It

was passed, but my concern then was that there was an agency charged initially with identifying narco-traffickers, did not have a history of success in that field and now we were going to add to that agency the additional task of intelligence gathering.

It is now law, there is an SSA, but really, with an SSA in place, should we not have been able to use the facilities of surveillance to track who the known culprits are? Many of us have seen the movie *Casablanca* where in the last scene Claude, the general, said, “A man has been shot, round up the usual suspects”. Well, in human trafficking, I would imagine that the arms of the State should know who perhaps are the individuals most likely to be involved in the trade for missing persons. And SSA is in place, we hear that there is collaboration, but we are not seeing the results of it.

My recommendation is this, why do we not, in addition to murder, look at human trafficking as our second—or missing persons, let me be precise, missing persons as our second most important high-priority area, and we have the intelligence gathering of the State, SSA, we have the expertise of the police in their network of informants, that is what they are supposed to do on the ground. I do not know who they are, that is pure policing work, but we also have a military in Trinidad and Tobago of which the Minister of National Security, at one time was the head. And in the military we have trained individuals in the Coast Guard, despite the limitations of our hardware, we have a Coast Guard which has performed admirably in the past, and we have Air Guard with respect to helicopter services. I would recommend that within the military we look at the following: the United States Navy Seals; the Israeli Commandos; the Russian Commandos; and in the Indian Army there is a unit called MARCOS, trained to rescue people who are

held as hostages by the perpetrators of crime, by individuals who are hell-bent on causing problems.

I think if we could, Madam President, have within the military of Trinidad and Tobago a very efficient highly trained search and rescue team using the resources of the police and the equipment of the military, as soon as we get a missing person's report, I would imagine that that particular team will work collaboratively, and within the first 24 hours we should be able to see a network coming together, using the helicopter, the Coast Guard, the SSA, and the police to search for that individual assiduously, whether the person is in north, south, central, or Tobago, that team gets into operation, and if we could do that, then we would see the military having a valuable place in solving one of the most pressing problems in Trinidad and Tobago.

And I tell you, if there is a missing person's report, and that highly trained squad is able to demonstrate to the citizenry that we have been able to search and to rescue, commando style, that person from the perpetrators, it would bring a lot of calm to the population, and it will generate fear for those individuals who feel that they can take our citizens with immunity. And I think we just need to look at some of those outfits in some of those militaries and I am sure we would even be able to get the necessary assistance.

Our problem in Trinidad is not hostage taking via terrorists as it is, say, for the Indian army, or the commando-style type of activity of the Israeli and Russian armies, but really it is missing persons who have been taken, no actual sign of any ransom, so they are taken for some other nefarious act, and I think our military, immense military capability can be put to use. That will be, in my mind something that we can do over the next few months to make a dent in human trafficking.

Madam President, third: Having thought through the problem, I ask myself, we have a problem despite the best efforts of the Government, and the Opposition when they were in Government, and Governments before, individuals can condemn Governments for many things but they can never condemn any Government of Trinidad and Tobago for failing to provide opportunities to all citizens, to secure economic advance via education, training, technical vocational opportunities. Why is it that despite all the opportunities—it started way back when with John Donaldson Technical Institute over 50 years ago. Why, despite all of these opportunities, young men 15—or maybe younger—to 25, still think that the best option for them is to join a criminal gang and engage in activities which can cause them serious harm—and the society?

Madam President, I researched this and I came upon, a while back, an individual, few of us would have heard of in Trinidad, Sudhir Venkatesh, now a Professor of Sociology, I think at Columbia University. Who is he? He was someone who, as a PhD student, embedded himself with a criminal crack cocaine gang in South Chicago, and he lived with them for four years. How he was able to live with them and escape intact is another story, how he was able to cultivate their friendship is another story, but from his research on the sociology of a gang, we learn things, and one of those is this: by far and away, 99 per cent of all the young men who find themselves in criminal gangs doing a range of activities remain poor. They earn less than minimum wage, they remain poor. And the minimum wage he calculated was something like half the minimum wage of what they could have earned flipping burgers at McDonald's.

Why, the question was asked, would these young men earn half the McDonald's wage, where working in McDonald's was much more secure to life

and limb, and yet become a member of this gang? And what he found was this: That in that world all the young men see, they do not see our world, they do not see this Chamber, they do not trust us, they have never been exposed, their world is a very narrow world, and all they see on a daily basis is this person who drives around in a fancy automobile, has all money to spend, the nice clothes, and can afford a restaurant meal for all of them.

He, that individual—there are occasional “she’s”, but that individual is, Madam President, the person to whom they want to anchor their life around. But the problem is that in trying to emulate him, the risk of dying, the odds of dying before they reach age 25 is one in four—that is, it has the highest mortality rate of any profession—and the chance of becoming the leader is almost one in a thousand. It means 999 of them will fail, only one will emerge as the leader with all the fancy cars, and homes, and money, and restaurant meals and things, and the odds are stacked against them.

And the problem, Madam President, is this, they are no different from an individual who tries to become a star in Hollywood. Out of every thousand who wishes to make it on the screen only one will survive, 999 of them will have to be content, after a while, with some other menial job. And so the odds are stacked against these young men, and they do not know it. They see a story that is a misleading story. What is the solution here? The solution, Madam President, is this, I would recommend to the hon. Minister, since he is indicating that they are doing things, I would recommend that these young men be told a story that is different from the story of the man with the gun and the car, the leader.

And I think in our prison system there must have been young men who at one time, at age 20, held the view that if they stayed in that organization they too

could rise through the ranks and become a leader one day, but they would have been caught, incarcerated and would have been spending maybe two decades in prison. I think we should give consideration to some of them who lost their lives. Well, those who died at 25 have no story to tell, but someone in prison at age 50 has a lot of stories to tell. Can we identify some of those who know that they really made a bad choice by trying to follow this one leader with the gun and they wasted 25 years? Can we consider a system of parole for these gentlemen, or these people? And have them come and integrate with our young men in the places where the young men seem hell-bent on going into this direction, although we do whatever we can to prevent them from going there.

Could we now have a system of parole where we get an agreement with these 50-year-old-plus prisoners? They may have done some seriously harmful things in the past, having been reformed could they come now and tell a different story? And that will broaden the frame of experience of these young men, seeing one story, the glamour and the glitz of the individual with everything, who is their leader, and the other an individual who did not make it and wasted all his life in prison. I think if we do that we will be able to open the vista, following Venkatesh again, opening the vista of the experience of these gentlemen.

But, the question is why stop there? Why do we just want reformed ex-convicts to also tell a different story? The non-glamorous side of the activities which are causing problems for Trinidad and Tobago. Why do we not consider telling them the glamorous side of what we in this Chamber tried to do? And, in this regard, again I refer to the work of Sudhir Venkatesh, having lived with a criminal gang for four years, having held them when they got shot, and babysat their children knowing that they all lived very poor, not one of them became a

leader in the four years that he was there, they all were living in abject poverty in South Chicago side, I think we need to tell the people stories.

Storytelling is a way that communities pass on norms from one generation to the next. We have heard—for those of us who read the book *Roots*—in West Africa there is a tradition where there are these people called the Griots. The Griots hold the history of the community for centuries, and they were able to tell their young people what the history of the community is. Let me tell a story, and in telling the story I remember the words of Stephen Hymer. Stephen Hymer, an economist, who unfortunately died young, gave us the first recognition of the power of the multinational corporation. What Stephen Hymer said was that “We can never develop people or appreciate the problems of underdevelopment unless we tell the story of Friday and his grandchildren.” Well, we know the story of Robinson Crusoe; he is the man with the gun. How many of us know the story of Friday? Friday was not his name. Friday was the day of the week in which he was found. You know, Friday had a story, Friday had a name, Friday had a culture, Friday had a tradition, Friday had fears, hopes and aspirations, but Hymer said none of us ever focused on Friday. We focused on Robinson, the man with the gun. Let us tell the story of Friday.

And, Madam President, if I am permitted I will tell a little story about an individual. For 25 years—you see, these are the stories our young men do not know—I taught Economics, University of the West Indies. Sen. Henry is not here, we taught the anchor course. One course I taught, Intermediate Micro Theory—Sen. Ayanna Lewis was a student. I do not know, Micro or Macro, Senator? Both?
Sen. Lewis: Both.

Sen. Dr. D. Mahabir: She did both. She suffered through both of my courses. She suffered through both—compulsory. And, Madam President, they are not easy courses to pass. And the story is this: One year I am going through the list of 300 students and I saw someone getting a big “A”. So, normally a big “A” is rare, 80-plus. The student came to see me, interesting student, she is from Laventille Road. “Ah ha”, she did not go to any of the convents or anything, she went to a school close by. Topped Mahabir’s course, Sen. Mahabir, Dr. Mahabir in those days, was not an easy thing, and I thought it was an interesting story, but then I realized she was bright, and she was going to go real far, you would not even know subsequently that she came from Laventille Road, hearing gunshots every day to and from school.

What I thought was important, Madam President, was the story of her parents. Despite the circumstances in which she lived, her parents held the view that our world, the world that we legislate for, is going to be the world in which their daughter had to participate, and they did with their limited resources what they could to give the child the best chance in the world. There are benefits to the GATE programme, especially for students like that. [*Desk thumping*] And we need to ensure that they can rise.

And when I see that story, Madam President—I saw the stories last night on Enterprise, that the Minister of National Security mentioned, and Enterprise is an area that is familiar to me. Growing up in Cunupia, going to school in Chaguanas for seven years, you passed Enterprise. Tonight on the media you are going to hear about some action that is happening. Some things undesirable. But, I will want to invite the media, and this is where storytelling is important. For every young

person who is being killed in that community or in the other communities, can you tell me a story of someone who is living in that neighbourhood?

Because, Madam President, we get the view that everybody is, in that area, up to no good, and that the area is seething with this kind of distrust, and disharmony, and disrespect for law and order; it is not so. We continue to tell the story of the man with the gun, we continue to tell the story of the boy who is dead. We never ever tell the story. So, I think it is important for the media when they go to Crown Trace, Bhagaloo Trace or Railway Road, all these places, I know. Go to the nearest mechanic shop and talk to the people there, and find out, parents, your son lived in this area, how come he has this thriving mechanic shop?

There are mechanic shops, plumbing businesses, there are people with their pluck shops, there are people who went to school with me, outstanding engineers; one who went with me is a high-ranking officer in the military. These are the superstars, and across these communities we have families, we have regular people, they cannot make it to university, GATE does not apply, but really they are doing what they can. But, the problem, Madam President, in Trinidad and Tobago, it is sensational to speak about a body on the street and this group fighting this group. We never ever see individuals in these areas, hard-working people, salt of the earth people, decent people, good people, we have a tendency of calling the people with the guns community leaders, they are not.

I heard it last night on TV, and I still am shocked. The community leaders are those parents, we do not see them, but those parents who, every day, look out for their children in school. The community leaders are the teachers, retired, who are giving lessons in those communities, we do not see them but they are there. The individual who gives assistance on the football field, in the pan yard, or

everywhere they are acting as exemplars, we must tell the story. Why? Because unless we tell this story about what is happening to people who are going to participate in our part of the economy, the young men who are prone to the glitz and the glamour of the gun will not know.

Let us, Madam President, use this Chamber—I would exhort all Members, we have creativity, imagination, we absolutely need our police force and our police service to detect more crime. Let us compensate and reward them based upon detection. We would be able to see some kind of change. A unit on search and rescue in the military using the police and getting results, and displaying the results for the population to see, will eliminate or reduce the fear of crime in a measurable way. This will benefit the Government. It will benefit us on this bench and in the Opposition.

We need our young men, who are so enamoured by the other forces, to hear from those who have failed to make it to the top in the gang world, what really a wasted life is all about. And, they would not listen to me, Madam President. You see, according to Venkatesh, they do not see me, they do not know me, they do not hear me, their world is a very narrow one. That is the socialization process that we need to change. And we need to consider these individuals who will reach those individuals. The Minister of National Security said that he is engaging the group of Vision on Mission. I think an extension of that will work. Let us get these guys who have rank in their world. I have no rank in their world. I am easily—well, they do not see me, that is a good thing, I am happy. They do not see me at all. But the person who has rank in their world, and the Minister of National Security knows that.

3.00 p.m.

Madam President: Senator, you have five more minutes.

Sen. Dr. D. Mahabir: Thank you very much, Madam President. The individual who has rank in that world is not someone who went to university. The individual with rank is the person who has gone to prison. And I think the highest-ranking officer would be someone who has gone to prison and who has stayed 25 years, he has 25 years of experience, that is the man or woman who will reach those guys to tell them of the other side. And that is, all three of those positions can be considered by the Government as possible policy positions to take.

But the last one is this, crime is not Government nor Opposition nor Independent. Somewhere along the line, the society, Madam President, did not regenerate itself in certain places and stories were not told. The griots are long gone; the grandparents are no longer there; the older people who told about the successes—in fact, it might very well be that we live two houses away and we do not know what is happening next door. How many people in Laventille Road knew that there was a superstar two houses away, an ordinary-looking girl? I tell you, you might see her in the Senate soon and then I will leave because she is far brighter than I was.

But, Madam President, we need to engage now, the media, front page of the media and I think if we can negotiate with them for every blood and gore, go down to Crown Trace, knock on a gate, interview an ordinary citizen and tell that story too. And I think if we do that we may very well, we would not solve the crime, but we may very well see a turning of the tide. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you very much. Madam President, it is my privilege, honour and pleasure to rise to contribute to this Private Members' Motion in the name of my colleague, Sen. Wayne Sturge. I want to put on record my appreciation

for his excellent contribution and his rich recommendations concerning the way forward dealing with crime and violence in our country.

Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago is under siege. We are in a state of war. The ordinary citizens are living in complete fear and trepidation on a daily basis. Even in today's papers, Bartlett from south—that is, the south businesses or businessmen association—is talking about businesses wanting to close on a Saturday. And the reason for that, Madam President, people have imposed a curfew on their movements in this country because of the fear of crime. [*Desk thumping*] So there is no need for the Minister of National Security to declare a state of emergency. A state of emergency [*Desk thumping*] now exists in Trinidad and Tobago. The citizens have imposed curfews.

Madam President, I want to show in my contribution today the social cost, the socio-economic cost of crime and violence in our country. But, Madam President, wherever we go the atmosphere is punctuated with the pungent smell, almost of blood, like if you can smell the blood in the atmosphere in our country.

Madam President, as we speak today, over 120 citizens have been slaughtered, have been murdered in this country. Many are young, many are women, they have perished. More murders than days of the year thus far. And we have to deal with the realities of our country. There are many factors that may be giving rise to this scourge in our country, but I want to indicate that the human rights, the fundamental freedoms of our citizens are not being upheld, are not being protected, the Government is not ensuring that people in this country are able to enjoy their fundamental human rights and freedoms. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, I have learnt from a very long time ago that the purpose of life is happiness; the purpose of living is to achieve happiness. But, Madam

President, you cannot achieve happiness if you are dead. You cannot achieve happiness if your family is ripped apart because two of its members have been murdered. You cannot be happy when young people die on a daily basis in a hail of bullets in our country. How can we be happy?

Madam President, if I go to the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on dealing with the enshrined rights. The first right in our Constitution says:

“4 (a) the right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law;”

Madam President, how many of our citizens are being deprived of their lives without due process of law. Hundreds of citizens. In fact, since the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, “red and ready crew” came to office, over 500 murders have taken place in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Ramdeen: About 600.

Sen. W. Mark: In fact, 600 I am told. Where are we going—and you have a Minister of National Security come to this Parliament, the Motion asked the hon. Minister and his Government to give this Parliament a clear appreciation of what immediate and necessary steps in the shortest possible time to deal with the unacceptable crime level facing the citizenry of T&T and all we get from the Minister is the blame game. The blame game, essentially, “is dey,” it is the UNC, it is the Partnership that did, X, Y and Z. Well I have a list here which I will share with you, Madam President, of very important measures to deal with security in Trinidad and Tobago under the People’s Partnership that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago under that Minister of National Security [*Desk thumping*]

have dismantled and have brought about more insecurity in this nation than ever before.

So we will talk about that. And I am happy today that he took responsibility for his office, because the PNM has developed a habit of just blaming others, but the buck, as your new attorney general says, stops with you, the Government.
[*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, why has Trinidad and Tobago become such a violent country? I want to take you back in time to tell you how the society was run and even though we had challenges we did not experience the horrific increases in crime and violence, particularly murders, as we are experiencing today. Even when Arthur Napoleon Raymond Robinson—may his soul rest in peace—even when he was the Prime Minister of this country murders during the 1986 to 1991 period would have been around 86, 87, 88. That was where murder was. Mr. Manning came to power, it went up to 120, 130, 140, 160. The UNC came into office, Madam President, it went down to 96, 95, 99. The PNM came back to office under the late Patrick Manning—and may God also have peace and mercy on his soul—it went up to the point where in 2008 we had over 550 murders in this country; 550 murders in 2008 under the PNM.

So, Madam President, I want to tell you, between 1990 and 2000, in terms of per capita 100,000 inhabitants in this country. Do you know what was the percentage? Do you know what was the number, if you want to put it that way? Madam President, the percentage rather was 10 per cent per 100,000 inhabitants. That was the rate between 1990 and 2000. Then, when we went to 550 murders in 2008, it peaked to 41.5 per cent per 100,000.

Today, Trinidad and Tobago is about 30 per cent per 100,000, that is where

we are today. Costa Rica is about just under 9 per cent per 100,000. Of course, Jamaica and Haiti are closer to the 40 percentage point, maybe about 38, 39 around 40. And therefore what we have in our country today is a situation where crime is out of control and sometimes one wonders whether there is a policy on the part of the Government to instruct the security forces to have a hands-off approach in areas where criminal gangs operate in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, nobody could tell me that after the murders in Enterprise, the police and the army could not have anticipated that there would have been reprisals. [*Desk thumping*] You could imagine in a wake last night, 10.30 p.m. a gunman invaded a wake, “kill ah man and injured three others, just so”. So where was the police?

Hon. Senator: Where was the army?

Sen. W. Mark: Where was the army, the so-called post that you established in Enterprise, where were the officers?

Sen. Ramdeen: In a lamp post.

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen.

Sen. Ramdeen: Sorry.

Sen. W. Mark: So, Madam President, the question has to be asked, does the Government—is there a policy being promoted by this Government to allow gangs to kill out gangs in this country or whether, for instance, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is just totally, completely and absolutely incompetent. [*Desk thumping*] What is it? What is it? Because I do not understand a first-standard-year child would be able to understand the ABC of security matters like these. How come you have security personnel, army and police, defence force and nobody could anticipate that there would have been reprisals in Enterprise and do nothing

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and you have about, how many people died? Three persons have died.

[*Interruption*]

Hon. Senator: Four.

Sen. W. Mark: Four of them, I understand, thus far.

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

So, Mr. Vice-President, the question here, the Minister—and I want to go to a document here, it is dealing with the United States Department of State, Bureau of Diplomatic Security. They are saying that based on their research there are approximately 100 criminal gangs in this country. These gangs are linked to crimes, including weapons smuggling, fraud and other organized criminal activities. [*Interruption*] This is a report coming from the United States Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security. And we were told just last week by the distinguished Minister of National Security that there are between 92 and 179. The Minister cannot even give us a number, a specific number of gangs in this country. And what is even more frightening, Mr. Vice-President, is that we are told by the Minister of National Security that the membership of those gangs ranged between 1,500 and 1,600 per gang.

Hon. Maj. Gen. Dillon: I never said that.

Sen. W. Mark: Well that is what the papers reported and up to now you have never corrected yourself. You have never corrected yourself. I was not in the south—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Vice-President: Take your seat please. Take your seat, take your seat. When making your contribution you are to refer to the Chair and not to the Minister. Secondary to that, you are not to point at the Minister and address him.

Sen. W. Mark: Tell him do not address me.

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Mr. Vice-President: Address the Chair. [*Crosstalk*] Sen. Mark, I am on my feet, I am speaking to you, please listen to what I have to say.

Sen. W. Mark: Yes.

Mr. Vice-President: Address the Chair when making your contribution. Thank you.

Sen. W. Mark: And I ask you, do not allow anyone to disturb me when I am making my contribution. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, when I have made a ruling it is not for a response. I have ruled. Continue your contribution.

Sen. W. Mark: So, Mr. Vice-President, I am saying that the Minister has not corrected the records and if he is saying to us today that that is wrong then he must rise and tell us what is the correct figure. And may I indicate to you what I read and this is in the newspapers. It is on Saturday March 25:

“Dillon: 179 gangs between 2011-2017”

It goes, Gail Alexander is the writer. Page 5 of the *Guardian*:

“Between September 2011 and January 2017, the number of gangs in T&T ranged between 92 to 179 with approximately 1,500 to 1,600 members, National Security Minister Edmund Dillon has confirmed.” [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, it is here. I am saying that this is in the *Guardian* and the hon. Minister never denied it. [*Crosstalk*] Yes, you said that. Anyway, Sir, I am addressing you.

Hon. Maj. Gen. Dillon: Speak the truth.

Sen. W. Mark: No, you see—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Vice-President: Continue, continue, continue.

Sen. W. Mark: You have to protect me. So, Mr. Vice-President, this incompetent

Minister has to go. [*Desk thumping*] This incompetent Minister has to go; totally incompetent Minister has to go. As far as we are concerned, the Minister has failed miserably in carrying out his responsibility [*Desk thumping*] to protect the citizens of this country. And, Mr. Vice-President, if I may take you to 85(1) of the Constitution, if the Minister did not read that part of the Constitution, may I read it for you. It says, 85(1):

“Where any Minister has been assigned responsibility for any department of government, he shall exercise general direction and control over that department...”

You are in charge.

I think the Minister of Tourism told us some time ago, that “we in charge, deal with that”. And I am saying that the Minister of National Security is in charge of his Ministry and he must take responsibility for what is happening in the—strickening the country. [*Desk thumping*] And as the Attorney General told them, their new attorney general, Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj, as he told them recently, the people did not vote or elect the Commissioner of Police.

Hon. Senator: Correct. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. W. Mark: The people in this country did not vote for the police service. They vote for a team saying, they red and they ready and they had all the answers for Trinidad and Tobago. That is who they voted for, the PNM. [*Interruption*] And they told us about the so-called 10-point crime plan which has turned out to be a total failure.

So, Mr. Vice-President, how can you have a situation where we are talking about crime in this country? I read in the papers on Saturday where, apart from the Integrity Commission talking about a number of people who did not file their

assets and income and liabilities statement with them, I have also read in the newspapers and the Minister apparently and his people and the army, and Mr. Vice-President, may I ask, I am challenging the Chief of Defence Staff who is on public record saying that when this probe is completed that that probe will be made public, the investigation will be made public.

And now we are hearing from the Minister that it is a matter of national security and therefore they cannot make it public. Well I agree with the *Trinidad Express*. I agree with the *Trinidad Express*. This is an attempt by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to cover up the wrongdoing that went down at the defence force. [*Desk thumping*] I am in support of the *Express* editorial that says, those children who belong to this person who has denied ownership of those children did a wrong, broke the Firearms Act, violated the Children Act and shall be brought to justice in those circumstances. [*Desk thumping*]

And, Mr. Vice-President, I am also saying to this honourable Senate that the Minister of National Security must account for that debacle that took place on that day as well, because the Minister of National Security is responsible for the army—for the defence force and he must have known or he should have known that something was going on down at that Camp Cumuto and therefore he must rise in this Senate and tell this Senate what he knows about that event involving the children of an unknown attorney general in this country.

So, Mr. Vice-President, we want to see changes, we talked about crime. I am looking at the International Narcotics Control Strategy Report issued by the United States, March 2017. And in this report, on page 5:

“Major Money Laundering Countries”

Trinidad and Tobago’s name is there as a major money laundering country.

And you know what they described money laundering as:

“...statute as one ‘whose financial institutions engage in currency transactions involving significant amounts of proceeds from international narcotics’—trade or—“trafficking.””

So we have institutions in this country, Mr. Vice-President, who are involved in activities that the United States Government views as money laundering and that is a crime and we would like to know what the Government is doing about it, because in that said report on page 268 they talked about, for instance, a number of reports have been produced in the newspapers, talking about corruption in the defence force, in the police, in the Customs and Excise Division of our country and these are the people who are supposed to be protecting. And as I am on this point, may I, and on behalf of the Opposition, extend to the family of the soldier who I understand from reports in the news today, committed suicide.

Sen. Ameen: He is still alive.

Sen. W. Mark: The soldier is not dead?

Sen. Ameen: No, no.

Sen. W. Mark: Okay. Well I am happy that he is not dead. [*Crosstalk*] No, I am happy he is not dead. I hope that he lives and I hope the hon. Minister of National Security will get to the bottom of this development [*Desk thumping*] that has happened there. I am happy that the soldier is alive, very happy.

So, Mr. Vice-President, I want to let you know that in doing some research on this matter we have been able to establish that the social costs to our country are extremely high when it comes to crime and violence. There are what are called direct costs and there are also indirect costs and there are also intangible consequences. When we talk about direct costs, we are talking about crime,

injuries, damage, loss of life, as the case may be. We are also talking about costs in anticipation of crime, such as public and private expenditure on security, costs in response to crime, Mr. Vice-President.

Then when we talk about the indirect cost or what is called the intangible cost, we are talking about changes in the behaviour due to the fear of crime or the cost to the victims' families. And what we are seeing is that in Trinidad and Tobago people are not venturing out after six in the evening. And this is affecting a lot of entertainment houses, restaurants included, Mr. Vice-President, and now we are being told by Daphne Bartlett that San Fernando, where the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government is from, businesses are now talking about closing shop on a Saturday because of the fear of crime. That is what is taking place and the Minister comes today, offers nothing except a lot of cheap talk, old talk and misinformation.

The hon. Minister went in the other place and made the same grievous error [*Desk thumping*] saying and claiming that we are responsible for prisoners applying for bail, criminals applying for bail and going free. So he, the hon. Minister, and the security services cannot do their job, so he is blaming us. But the very Attorney General of our country who is to be replaced shortly, that Attorney General also told this country that there were over 2,300 persons in Remand Yard and over 1,300 applied for bail and they did not get bail; and 393 did not qualify for bail and 1,000 are on murder charges. So I want to ask the hon. Minister, talk is cheap. I challenge you to bring the evidence. [*Desk thumping*] I challenge you to bring the evidence to show this Parliament that as a result of the Bail (Amdt.) Bill going out that we have had an avalanche of prisoners and criminals being let loose in this country.

3.30 p.m.

He cannot bring the evidence because the Attorney General of this country contradicted exactly what he is saying. So he is misleading the country, he is misleading the Parliament, and I am ashamed that a [*Desk thumping*] former Chief of Defence Staff, who now turned politician, can come to this Parliament and mislead this Parliament in the way that he has attempted to do so, Mr. Vice-President. Totally unacceptable behaviour.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: A point of order on a statement just made. 46(6), misleading the House.

Mr. Vice-President: On the point of order raised 46(6), Sen. Mark I would just ask you to be very careful in imputing improper motives in terms of misleading the Parliament and misleading the nation in that statement that you made. Continue.

Sen. W. Mark: So, Mr. Vice-President, I want to say that we have to deal with the real issues that are faced by the people. I do not agree that doing the same thing over and over you are going to get different results. We would have thought that the Minister of National Security and the Government would have come with fresh ideas, fresh strategies, new approaches to deal with crime. They have come with the same old, same old ideas, and you expect to make a dent on crime?

Mr. Vice-President, I would like the Minister to tell this country, and I would like you, Mr. Vice-President, based on the research that I have been looking at, what impact does the continuous decline in school activities by children who are supposed to be in school and they are popularly called dropouts, they have fallen through the cracks in this country, in terms of the education system, what impact that is having on the crime situation in this country?

Mr. Vice-President, there are thousands and thousands of children who leave

the secondary school system at an early age—they have dropped out—who is catching them, who is looking after them? They go all over the place and they are vulnerable at that age of 14 and 15 and 16. So that is an issue we have to pay attention to. And you know in the literature it is now revealing rather than law and order being promoted, the literature is showing that we need less law and more order. [*Desk thumping*] The literature is revealing that we need to deal with more primary preventive strategies than to deal with this high-handed approach in terms of incarceration.

We were told by the Attorney General that there are close to 4,000 people in this country incarcerated in prisons in this land. It costs us, according to the Attorney General, \$50 million a month. So look at how many prisoners you have here. Look what it is costing this country, close to \$600 million a year, over half a billion dollars. Could we not take half of that and start focusing on preventive measures in our communities? [*Desk thumping*] What about the children in at-risk communities? Parents who give birth to children, but they come in an environment where the cycle of violence is real, what kind of help do we have for those kids and for the families of those children? So I do not believe that the Government is thinking outside of the box.

The Minister is only on this high—well I should say his focus as a military man is law and order, and that is why the only military man I know that went into Government and made an impact on crime was the hon. late Joseph Theodore. He is the only Minister I know—[*Interruption*]

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Not Gary Griffith.

Sen. W. Mark: Well, Gary did a very excellent job too, but Joseph Theodore and Gary Griffith were the two former military people who did a very good job when

coming to that. The rest of them have been complete failures, especially the—I believe it is only a matter of time before the current Minister of National Security is replaced.

Mr. Vice-President, I want to share with you some information as it relates to—you know, we have been told by the hon. Minister, OPVs, we stopped them, and therefore, that caused crime to increase. The Minister says we stopped SAUTT, and their new Attorney General says SAUTT is critical, bring it back. But when Manning was in power in 2008 we had SAUTT but the murder rate went to 550. [*Desk thumping*] So, what SAUTT did to deal with the issue? It was not about SAUTT. It is about not really tackling the real issues affecting. You know what a report coming out of the World Bank Group is revealing? It is entitled:

“Stop the Violence in Latin America”—and the Caribbean—

“A look at Prevention from Cradle to Adulthood”.

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Who did that report?

Sen. W. Mark: The World Bank, I said, did a report on the Caribbean and Latin America insofar as crime is concerned and they are looking at stopping crime from the cradle to adulthood. So they say look at children before they are born.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you have five minutes.

Sen. W. Mark: Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, may I also indicate some of the institutions that they shut down, that is this inept, incompetent, backward and reactionary Government called the PNM. We established something called the National Operations Centre. The Government of the PNM shut it down. Shut it down. They shut it down and that was doing excellent work. The Rapid Response Unit, they shut it down. We established a Counter Human Trafficking Unit doing excellent work. They slowed down things

till they were downgraded to Tier No. 2 on the watch list by the United States.

We established the National Security Training Academy, what is going on with that? Nothing! They put it in the SSA. We established something called the Energy Sector Security Initiative, where is that? It has died. They shut it down. The PNM shut it down. We established something called the Community Comfort Patrol, where is it today? They shut it down and the PNM talking about crime and they want to solve crime.

Mr. Vice-President, we established, under Gary Griffith, the Special Operations Group to deal with counterterrorism. You know, we have ISIS fighters coming back home and they learn all the tricks from ISIS, well we established a special operations group under the former Minister of National Security; it was in operation. Do you know what the PNM did? They shut it down so we do not have that counterterrorism group any longer, or anymore.

We established something called the Transnational Organized Crime Unit, where is it today? We also established improved visibility operations and response of law enforcement agency; that has ended. I do not agree with the Minister. I do not find I am seeing any police vehicles about the place again as how I saw them when we were in charge, when the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar was Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*] We had a highway patrol established and you could have gone on the highway and see police, and anywhere you go in Trinidad people say, "Oh God boy, we getting tired of the blue lights." Where are the blue lights today? They gone dim. They dim, Mr. Vice-President.

We had something called the national security alert system. Gary Griffith established that. Again, where is that? They shut it down. So you know what is green, orange, red, depending on the circumstances. We prevented the UK from

issuing an order where we would now need visas to go to England. They gave us 12 policy matters to deal with. We dealt with it and we prevented the United Kingdom from imposing a visa on citizens of this country. [*Desk thumping*] The way how this Government is going, Mr. Vice-President, I will not be surprised if that is imposed on Trinidad and Tobago shortly.

So there are several areas that we dealt with. We approved the establishment of an indoor range to train police officers, they shut that down. We established training of crime scene investigators on an ongoing basis at the National Security Training Academy, they shut that down. We approved the acquisition of armoured, personnel carriers—they shut that down—[*Desk thumping*]—to fight terrorism. We approved the acquisition of new helicopters to replace the SAUTT helicopters, they shut down that as well. And that is what Government has been doing.

We took a decision to acquire high-tech interceptors to assist the coast guard in border patrol, they shut that down. We also took a decision to acquire hovercraft for the army, they shut that down. We took a decision, and supported by the police welfare, to change the uniform in the police service, that has been shut down too. We took a decision to establish a counter-intelligence unit, they shut that down too. Overt operative unit, that gone. Mr. Vice-President, even the radar, we wanted to upgrade the radar system, that shut down too. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President, I thank you for allowing me to make my contribution.
[*Desk-thumping*]

Sen. W. Michael Coppin: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for the opportunity to contribute to this Motion. This Motion is named to deal with unacceptable crime level in Trinidad and Tobago, and it was brought to this hon. House by Sen. Sturge, seconded by Sen. Ameen. I believe it was on February 14, 2017. Now, for

the listening public, for their edification because they may have just joined us and they may have missed Sen. Sturge's contribution on the last occasion, I would like to read into the record again the substance of this Motion and it begins:

Whereas the responsibility of a Government is to ensure the public safety and security through the maintenance of law and order;

And whereas the Government has failed to address the extraordinary increase in the level of crime in Trinidad and Tobago;

Be it resolved that this Senate take note of the increasing and unacceptable levels of violent crimes in Trinidad and Tobago;

And be it further resolved that this Senate call on the Government to take all immediate and necessary steps in the shortest possible time to deal with the unacceptable crime level facing the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Vice-President, the Motion, as crafted, is crafted very craftily [Laughter] It is crafted craftily. I say that because it is very difficult, on the face, to disagree with the conclusion as Sen. Mahabir would have begun his contribution by stating. It is in fact appropriate, I would say, for any Senate, whether it be in the time of the PNM, UNC, to call on any Government to take all necessary and immediate steps to deal with a crime, or crime, or unacceptable levels of crime. The Motion is crafty because we need in this country, we all agree that the level of crime is in fact unacceptable. That is trite; we all agree on it. So the issue I have is not necessarily with the conclusion, but what I have an issue with is the premises upon which this Motion is built

Mr. Vice-President, in my estimation the words "the premises" are meant to entrap, to ensnare. It is goading the Government almost to say we have no responsibility for crime, but yet—and I will get to the substance of Sen. Sturge's

contribution—if one looks at the recommendations, it centralizes power. It calls upon the Government, I think, to exceed a lot of its powers, and we know what happens when this Government, or any Government, decides to centralize, or to take powers into their own hands, or powers that they do not have into their own hands.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

And it is interesting because, Madam President, the Opposition—and it was referred to by the hon. Minister of National Security—notwithstanding the fact that this Senate came and debated the Motion on the selection of the Police Commissioner, notwithstanding we had an overwhelming support for that Bill—21, I think it was, to eight, with one abstention being Sen. Mahabir—lo and behold we had Senior Counsels, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, Anand Ramlogan—they did not carry my good friend to court.

Sen. Ramdeen: I was there.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: You were there? Oh sorry.

Sen. Sturge: I was there.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: You were there as well? Okay. All right. Well, for some reason your names are not listed in the transcript. I do not know why. It says here:

“Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar S.C

Mr. Anand Ramlogan SC

Ms. Jiyanti Lutchmedial

Mr. A. Pariagsingh

Mr. Bayley for the Claimant”

There is no mention of my good friend. So perhaps [*Interruption*] they were observing that day, yes, they were observing.

Lo and behold, despite the overwhelming support of this House to deal with something, to give the Minister the ability to trigger because we know there is a separation of powers—Sen. Mahabir would have mentioned it. Section 123A of the Constitution clearly states that the powers for the selection of the police commissioner and deputy commissioner lie within the hands of the Police Service Commission. Notwithstanding that fact, Madam President, the Senate came together, and the Parliament, and we all said that maybe it is not such a bad thing for the Minister to be able to trigger, and lo and behold the United National Congress, as they always do, decided to thwart the will of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and we had it such that the Minister can no longer intervene, to trigger that process of appointing the police commissioner.

So, Madam President, I say all that to say that if we observe the Opposition and the way they operate, they like to goad. They bring Motions into this honourable House and they object for objecting sake, and they call upon the Government to do a lot of things and then when we do it they run to the courts and they say, “Eh heh, there they are, draconian. They like to abuse power. They like to concentrate the powers in their hands.” And that is why I began by saying that this particular Motion, although the conclusion I have no problem or no issue with it, it is built on a premise that blame the Government. You have the power, you alone bear the sole responsibility for crime and criminality in this country, and therefore, if there is a problem it must be with the Government. That is the problem that I have with this particular Motion.

Madam President, if we look at the substance of the hon. Sen. Sturge’s comments—because the proof of the pudding really is within the substantive, what he says in his Motion—he bases it on an evidential fallacy that somehow when the

People's National Movement comes into power crime goes up, and I heard that mantra being repeated in the media over and over by none less than the Opposition Leader. And if one carefully looks at the statistic that was brought to this honourable House by the hon. Sen. Sturge, one will realize that in fact that is a fallacy. I do not know where he got his statistics from because I looked on CAPA, I called, and in fact the only time I could see those statistics is when I went on to a website by the name of TTCrime.com. I do not know where that site came from.

Hon. Senator: It is fake news.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: Some people say it is fake news. The official statistics of the police service do not have those statistics, but lo and behold we have a site, TTCrime.com, that has statistics that go all the way back to 1994. Very coincidentally, nothing before 1994. Just in time for the arrival of the People's National Movement into power where there was a sudden drop in the number of murders. If one looks at that website, Madam President, one sees more curiously that from 2001 onward there are no statistics as it relates to serious crime. So we have to be very careful in how we interpret and what facts we take from the Opposition.

Madam President, if we look at those particular stats brought by Sen. Sturge, what we would see is that in the year 2000 to 2009—that is during the Manning administration, as I think Sen. Wade Mark just pointed out. Sen. Sturge was very careful in his last contribution to leave out altogether statistics from 2010—we see that, in fact, murders—and murders is the only statistic he has brought to this House even though his Motion is crafted on violent crime—between the period 2002 to 2009, we have the average murder rate during the Manning administration at 331 murders per year. Using Sen. Sturge's own statistics and CAPA—because

he left out particular periods so I had to go on to CAPA and to fill in the blanks—what we have during the United National Congress’s administration in the year 2011—because he left out 2010—to 2015 was murders averaging 392 per year.

So 331 PNM versus 392—and I do not want to make this into a PNM/UNC because really that helps not. The murderer does not care who is in power. The same way that sufferers do not care whose is from country and sufferers do not care who is from town, murderers do not care whether or not the PNM is in power or the UNC is in power. But I brought this, Madam President, to lay on the table, for those who are interested in statistics and in facts, that notwithstanding the fact that the Opposition Leader and Sen. Sturge—and I do not know if Sen. Ramdeen would want to weigh in on it—and Sen. Mark comes to this honourable House and lays particular statistics on the table, you have a duty to fact-check and the media has a duty as well, being the fourth estate, to do some fact-checking.

So there has been no increase. In fact, there has been no decrease in crime levels from the Manning administration to the United National Congress’s administration 2011 to 2015. In fact, crime has gone up. The average murder has gone up by 60 murders per year. I just wanted to put that.

As it relates to serious crime—[*Interruption*]—under the UNC. As it relates to serious crime, Madam President, I went on to CAPA’s website. Again, Sen. Sturge could have done that. In fact, he can go now, it is online. If he will just type it in, serious crimes, he says the UNC, crime goes down and it does not go up. It goes up when the PNM is in power. Serious crime: 2013, 13,147; 2014, 12,055. This is serious crime as reported by CAPA, “eh”, the police official statistics.

3.55 p.m.

And during 2016, when the PNM arrived, 11,393. So there is no validity in

your argument. The statistics that you have brought in support of your argument simply failed. So to say in this Motion that there has been an extraordinary increase in crime and to base your argument on some premise that when the PNM comes to power, crime goes up—*[Interruption]*

Sen. Sturge: The statistics say.

Madam President: Continue, Sen. Coppin.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: And, Madam President, they have a problem with the truth you know. When you debunk their misinformation, they like to disturb. *[Laughter]* But he who has ears, let him hear and who he has eyes, let him see. The statistics are there for everyone to see. So I hope that when Sen. Ramdeen gets up, perhaps he can correct the misinformation of his goodly friend.

Sen. Ramdeen: I will deal with it, “doh worry”. I will deal with you, too.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: Great. Madam President, I want to dissect Sen. Sturge’s arguments because it is really what he has said and the recommendation he has made which really, for me, tip the balance into whether or not I supported this Motion or not. Believe it or not. The crux of his arguments, he has come to this honourable House with three short-term, medium- and, if time permits, he says, long-term solutions. The long-term solution is that religious instruction be mandatory in schools. I have no problem with that. As a religious man myself, I welcome that.

However, if one looks at the short term, he begins by saying, first recommendation: fire all three Ministers. Madam President, I know Sen. Sturge is a very clever man. I will give Jack his jacket. I sit in two committees with him: Finance and Legal Affairs and National Security and he makes very good suggestions—

Hon. Senator: Sometimes.

Sen. W. M. Coppin:—sometimes. But firing Ministers of National Security is not going to be the solution to this problem. In fact, had it been so, the UNC had what? Six different National Security Ministers and every single year, crime went up: 2011, murders, 354; 383 in 2012, 408 and 403. So if firing Government Ministers was a panacea, was a solution to a problem, then crime would have gone down because as the rate of changing Ministers increased, well you should have a decrease in crime but that did not happen.

Second recommendation: pass legislation to have firearm-related offences heard within three months of charge. The Government has published a legislative agenda for everyone to see, it is here and there are several items that deal with firearm-related offences. In fact, on the legislative agenda, there is Miscellaneous Provisions (Firearms, Interception of Communication). There is on the legislative agenda, a Bill calling for the abolition of jury trial for firearm offences. So it is not that the Government has sat down and decided to do nothing about firearm offences.

In fact, on our legislative agenda, we have two pieces of crucial legislation which Jamaica—in Jamaica, they have abolished and I do not want to pre-empt but it is enough to say that these are on the legislative agenda. And when they come to Parliament, Sen. Sturge and Sen. Ramdeen, they can all give their contributions.

But what we know, in Jamaica, for instance, where there is a firearms court, there has been a significant increase in the disposition of—and a reduction in time spent in the disposition of an offence from charging to prosecution. I think the rate is now at two years, whereas in Trinidad, it is eight years as elucidated or expressed in the Joint Select Committee Report on the case-flow management in

Trinidad and Tobago.

So I do not believe that it is realistic to dispose of or to compel the disposition of firearm-related offences in three months. I think it is unrealistic. I think that we are going to try to set the pace for the Judiciary even though they are supposed to be in charge of their own case-flow management, their own case management, and that is a dangerous thing. And it would feed into the argument that this Government, the Executive, tries to get involved in the administration of justice, that we do not recognize the separation of powers. And then you know what is going to happen? The UNC is going to take the argument to court and say, Mr. Chief Justice or whoever, who is presiding, this is unconstitutional. So, Madam President, I do not think that is a very good solution.

He calls as well for the establishment of a database for firearms and I know Sen. Sturge must know that there is a Firearms Act and 21C of the said Firearms Act establishes or calls for the establishment of a database for firearms.

Hon. Senator: It calls for.

Sen. W. M. Coppin: And he says “it calls for” but if he was present at our last Joint Select Committee where we invited the police commissioner to attend, he would know because he said that there are, in fact, two registries. There is a registry maintained by the police and there is another one maintained under 26A of the Firearms Act for unlicensed firearms, so it already exists. So the recommendation you bring is nothing novel, it exists. So, as again, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Sen. Sturge, he does not bring anything in his Motion and that is really disappointing.

He calls as well for a deadline of one month to bring the necessary legislation to amend the strictures of *Pratt and Morgan*. A lot has been said about

Pratt and Morgan. It is a case that has been waved up in the air every time you hear a story about the death penalty. But if one really reads *Pratt and Morgan*, there is nothing wrong with what *Pratt and Morgan* says, you know. Having a five-year limit or any limit that tries to prevent cruel and unusual punishment, it is fundamental. The issue in *Pratt and Morgan* is not whether Trinidad and Tobago should carry out the death penalty, it is the time limit in which we should, when a person is prosecuted, carry out the death penalty. And I have *Pratt and Morgan* here and it dealt with the Jamaican Constitution and we have a similar provision in our Constitution which cannot be abrogated. It speaks to section 5 of our Constitution and I want to quote it. It says:

“Except as is otherwise expressly provided in this Chapter and in section 54, no law may abrogate, abridge or infringe or authorise the abrogation, abridgment or infringement of any...rights...freedoms hereinbefore recognised...”

And it speaks to: it shall not abrogate or:

- “(a) authorise or effect the arbitrary detention, imprisonment or exile of any person;
- (b) impose or authorise the imposition of cruel and unusual treatment or punishment;”

And (iii): to give or to abrogate:

“of the right to be brought promptly before an appropriate judicial authority;”

So I know Sen. Sturge “is joining bandwagon”, you know, he is saying let us do something to bring back the hanging but the issue is not *Pratt and Morgan*. In fact, if we abrogate from these rights, we will put ourselves in a lot of problems with

international conventions that we have already signed on to.

And in fact, if one looks at *Pratt and Morgan*, the Privy Council would have referred to a lot of those conventions and in fact, two important institutions that were mentioned in *Pratt and Morgan* were the Inter-American Human Rights Council and, I believe at the UNHRC. Those are two institutions to which Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory and we have been signatories to United Nations Human Rights Committee since 1978, I think December.

So we have obligations and in fact, it would be inhumane, it would be against our existence as human beings, to say that let us legislate away *Pratt and Morgan*, there is nothing wrong with that. What we need to do is to find a way to increase the flow to limit the time that persons spend from being charged to being prosecuted. That is a more viable solution, a more viable proposal to bring to this honourable House and to use in support of this Motion and had he brought that, I would have supported him, but instead, what he has brought is quite short-sighted and I think for a man of his intelligence, it is very disappointing.

And Madam President, I want to go on because Sen. Sturge does not end there in his short-term solutions. He speaks about earmarking a team of lawyers to deal with death penalty cases. Now, is it the role of the Executive to go to the DPP and tell him how to discharge his functions? "I doh understand." Who is going to prosecute these cases? I do not know if he is speaking about the defence. I know he is a defence attorney. I know a reduction in crime might not necessarily be good for business. But I do not think we can go in to the DPP and tell him, you know, select these attorneys or go to the State, the Attorney General or whoever, and say let us get a team of lawyers. That would be overreaching the role of the Executive, the Government.

So, again, that just feeds into the trap that they are trying to ensnare this Government with to say, “yuh doing nothing about crime”, but then when you try to overreach your powers, they take you to the courts so I do not think that is a viable solution.

He speaks about court—doubling the complement of court transcriptionists and there is no reason why trial notes cannot be available for appeal in six months. But if one reads *Pratt and Morgan*, it was clearly stated that that is not a reason for—the lack of written reasons does not prevent someone from being able to appeal to the Privy Council, for instance. So I do not know that an increase in transcriptionists is going to assist in any way to help to deal with *Pratt and Morgan* and the limitations therein. So I would like to say that also is a matter for the DPP or those who are in charge of the administration of justice. It is not for the Government to say who should be a transcriptionist. So, Madam President, that point I also did not agree with.

He also calls for the return of the SSA to its original remit and if one remembers Sen. Sturge in the SSA Bill when it was being debated, he had a scathing attack on the SSA. In fact, he said they should be disbanded. So for him to come now and say we should return them, it is totally contradictory. We should just get rid of them, if we follow his logic from the SSA Bill to now. So, again, I do not agree with what he is saying there. He says double the capacity of existing court facilities. Again, if we are going towards financial autonomy for the Judiciary, how could we go to the Judiciary and say, “here is your money, but build courts”. The administration of justice, again, is for the Chief Justice who is constitutionally charged with that responsibility. So, again, I do not agree.

He speaks about hiring foreign experts to analyze the strength of the police.

Again, that is dealing manpower audits and I think the Attorney General has sufficiently dealt with that. He has written to us and he has said that a manpower audit—and Maj. Dillon was here, Minister, and he would have spoken about there being a joint enterprise between the Attorney General, the Minister of National Security and that is on the way. In fact, I think Prof. Deosaran is in charge of dealing with that. So, again, he brings nothing new to this debate and he comes across as if, wow, the United National Congress Opposition, we have all the answers, but as I can see, as I have demonstrated so far, factually they have brought nothing new and he betrays his ignorance for a lot of provisions of the law.

There is another point he raised about license plates and, somehow, that CCTV cameras track license plates. I do not know where in the world he got that idea from because there is something called RFID. I think the Minister just stood up and spoke about that. You know, it is a radio frequency. You do not need a CCTV camera. How is that even effective? How is that efficient? I mean so many things could go wrong and I am really disappointed that a man of Sen. Sturge's intelligence would bring such a preposterous suggestion to this honourable House. And that was the short-term solutions. So the short-term solutions, they failed abysmally, they were terrible.

And he went on to medium-term solutions and interestingly, Madam President, because this is a matter that will be raised. In fact, has been raised in the other place about the abolition of preliminary enquiries. And I know they flip-flop because I suspect somewhere, maybe Sen. Ramdeen is going to be scratching off now. He is going to say, "I told you we should not abolish preliminary enquiries because look the DPP say so" but I have him on record, in fact, in this Motion, saying abolish preliminary enquiries. So the UNC has supported the abolition of

preliminary enquiries. I do not want to pre-empt the debate but I hope they are not coming now and say that we should keep the preliminary enquiries because the DPP says it is going to be a problem.

In fact, in my own estimation, if there are two sources of flooding, one in the roof and you have a burst main, then not because the burst main is continuing that you are going to say you are not going to fix your roof if you have the resources. We should fix both the burst main and the roof. They are two sources of clogging up the system, you know what I mean. They are two independent sources. So with all due respect to the DPP, and I do not want to bring him into this debate, I do not believe that that is a viable explanation or a solution as to why we should not fix one source of clogging up the system.

Madam President, I want also to deal with another problem. Sen. Sturge, he speaks about implement full disclosure but it goes hand in hand with the abolition of preliminary enquiries. In fact, if you look and if you read, as he had quoted Madam Pamela Elder, Senior Counsel, if you quote her, you should also look at Dana Seetahal. In fact, in her book, she speaks about preliminary enquiries being in existence because there is a lack of full disclosure in this jurisdiction. And when I looked at the Bill very cursory, because I do not want to pre-empt the debate, it speaks in that Bill, laid in the Lower House, clauses 14, 15 and 16 speaks about bringing full disclosure into the system, into the criminal justice system.

So had Sen. Sturge the benefit—and he has the benefit of the Bill because it was all presented to us in this House, we all have a copy—he would know that there is currently before the other place, a system with the abolition of preliminary enquiries to bring about a system of full disclosure. So, again, he betrays an ignorance of his surroundings and he really should take a little more time before he

comes to this honourable House and tries to obfuscate the issues before us. So he should just withdraw this Motion, in fact, just withdraw it.

And, Madam President, he says further we should reduce the numbers of matters that can be tried either way, imagine that. Last week, or two weeks ago, he said we are trying to take away the sanctity of juries but here he is saying, reduce the number of trials that are tried either way and try them summarily. So, in fact, he is saying here, in this Motion, bring it before a magistrate, forget that jury thing. “Doh” allow them to elect, make it mandatory that persons must go before a magistrate. Madam President, if that is not the height of hypocrisy, I do not know what that is. One week, jury trials, next week, make it mandatory, take away from them the rights to elect. I really do not know what to say, you know, maybe Sen. Sturge is—“hah”.

He says to strengthen the Witness Protection Programme and, Madam President, Sen. Sturge is a member of the Joint Select Committee, Finance and Legal Affairs, and he would have had the benefit of the AG, in responding to the first report on the criminal case-flow management, he would have sent in to us a number of initiatives in response to the recommendation. And one of those recommendations was about witness protection and he says that there are currently initiatives on the way to deal with that. So it is not that the PNM has abrogated, has thrown away its responsibility, has not recognized the importance of witness protection; we are, in fact, engaging the matter expeditiously. So to call on the Government to do all that is necessary, it is like saying that we are not doing anything, contrary and he knows. There are a lot of initiatives in the pipeline that this Government is currently undertaking which will deal with the issue of criminal and criminality in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

And he says further to incentivize the criminal bar and I do not know if he read the papers recently but he would have seen that there is the appointment of 33 new attorneys, state counsels. He would have seen that. The DPP would have spoken about it at the last national security briefing we had, Joint Select Committee, and it was live, in public, and he would have spoken about that so it is no secret that the DPP's complement is being improved. Right, it is clear.

But Sen. Sturge was not at that committee so perhaps he was—and he probably was not following at home because had he seen that, he would have known that a number of initiatives are being conducted by the Attorney General's office. And in fact, the papers commended the Attorney General for making the funds available for the JLSC to be able to employ these individuals. So to say that nothing is being done and the responsibility of the Government and the Government to blame simply does not accord with the facts as they are and efforts that are being undertaken.

And he calls again for more courts so I dealt with that point again. So it is a short- and a medium-term point. Again, it is the Judiciary's role. If we go into financial autonomy for the Judiciary, we cannot be going and trying to interfere and tell them, well, what to build. The Judiciary has an understanding of where the shortfalls are, what needs to be done, where the courts need to be built and therefore, let us allow them to do their work. It is in line with financial autonomy which this Government has committed itself to.

And Madam President, he speaks about the police service and being subjected to integrity checks and I believe at the last occasion when we had the Commissioner of Police before us, he says that there are a number of background checks and the like happening. But, again, as Sen. Mahabir would have mentioned,

Unacceptable Levels of Violent Crime
 (Government Steps to Deal With) (cont'd)
 Sen. Coppin (cont'd)

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the management of the police service is a function—[*Interruption*]

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

Sen. W. M. Coppin: Yeah. It is a function, Madam President, of the Commissioner of Police. The provision is clear and if I can read it into the record because it deals with effectively monitoring and performance monitoring. I know Sen. Mahabir would have spoken about it. But it is tried law that, in 123A:

“...the Commissioner of Police shall have...complete power to manage the Police Service and is required to ensure...the human, financial and material resources available to the”—Police—“Service are used in an efficient and effective manner.”

So the Constitution is clear. It is not for the Executive, it is not for us as legislators to come now unless we are amending the Constitution and to provide—you know, make it mandatory that certain things being done. So to call on the Government, the Executive arm, or the Legislature, demanding of the Executive to do something about the police, who have constitutionally enshrined powers, is a recipe for disaster and it would only lead to what happened in the case of Harridath Maharaj where my two learned friends went and observe Opposition Leader, Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC, and Anand Ramlogan SC, arguing that this Government is draconian and somehow likes to centralize power.

So, Madam President, in short, I would have liked to support this Motion. I mean any Motion that comes to this honourable House to deal with crime is laudable. If it redounds to the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago, I have no problem with supporting it. But as framed, Madam President, it is dangerous. As I said, it is craftily crafted with an intention for us, for in one minute, blame the Government and if we overreach and if we decide to take “chain-up” and we decide to interfere

with the role and the responsibilities of the DPP, the Judiciary and the police, they are going to take us to court. So I will not be goaded into supporting this Motion.

In fact, I think it should be withdrawn immediately. [*Desk thumping*] I think Sen. Sturge should apologize for the misinformation that he has fed this House. [*Desk thumping*] Sen. Ramdeen should apologize on his behalf when he rises to speak and we ought not to be wasting our time with frivolous and vexatious Motions. I think in the interest of Trinidad and Tobago, we have a lot more serious issues to deal with so—[*Crosstalk*] To deal with frivolous and vexatious Motions, Madam President; not the issue of crime. When we have important measures, I hope that you will support. I hope that you will not call for a joint select committee to slow down the work of this Government but that you will join and unite for what is right in the interest of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. And, Madam President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Stephen Creese: Thank you, Madam President. Of course, I could not agree more with Sen. Sturge for introducing this Motion and disagree with my colleague [*Desk thumping*] for seeing it as a frivolous and vexatious Motion, but it is all a matter of perception and I hope that in my address, I would be able to see how the question of perception historically has bedevilled us.

But I also have to say thanks to Sen. Mark for the perspective that he has brought to this and the whole question as to statistics, and at a later point in my contribution, I will deal more with the question as to statistics. And as I am referring to previous speakers and giving thanks, I also have to recognize Sen. Dr. Mahabir with regard to the notion of a priority list of crime that the authorities should have so that whether it is legislation or budgetary expenditure, that priority list should guide those discussions and those deliberations. But I disagree with my

good friend as to how that list should be structured and for me, a crime priority list would clearly have heading it up “white-collar crime”.

I know there is a passion, almost an obsession, for crimes of violence and in most of the discussion here, as I listened to speaker after speaker, they seem almost to be assuming that we all respond to crime as though it was a crime of violence and crimes are not necessarily all crimes of violence. And some might argue that there are some white-collar crimes that are even more violent in that generations yet unborn are going to suffer. They almost border sometimes on suicide and certainly those of us who are familiar with the history of slavery in the Americas would know of infanticide as a technique of resistance on the plantation. But not all crimes are necessarily crimes of physical violence. There are crimes of emotional violence as well, and domestic abuse falls under either category.

So we need to be a little more discerning in drawing up that list of criminal activity to be pursued by the Attorney General, the police, the Minister of Finance in terms of the allocation of funds in the national budget. But white-collar crime, certainly, we should be paying attention to, within the course of this debate. And one might want to add, other than white-collar crime, the distribution of narco, drugs, and where that stands in all of this and how that is to be addressed in the context of this debate, of this Motion brought by Sen. Sturge.

4.25 p.m.

And there is a third category before I get to the standard classifications, you know, in crime, in terms of violence, and so on, acts that are not yet a crime. And I will return to that. And I keep making the point that in a post-slavery society, in a post-indentureship society, we should be particularly sensitive to acts that are not yet a crime. Because the holding of slaves and the beating of slaves and the

punishment meted out to indentured persons were acts, at their point in time, not yet a crime. And in a society where hangings and brutal slave punishments and putting dynamite, you know where, used to take place around Queen's Park, acts not yet a crime. It is something we should always keep at the back of our minds when the subject is crime and punishment.

You see, there is an ease with which we like to look on yesterday as being some kind of paradise under the sun, and it really was not. I am not necessarily talking about the heinous acts under slavery, and so on, even after that. Indentureship was not a Sunday picnic, not by any means. And the major events along the pathway for the East Indian community—I remember as a young child hearing the phrase “when Captain Baker kill Coolie” as a reference to the Mohammedan Riots in San Fernando, and workers telling me, old workers telling me, that when they were constructing the San Fernando Market, beras, and so on, that were found, and skeletons. So, it being that East Indians were buried there, who were massacred in the Mohammedan Riots. I remember reading Dennis Singh's book about that. So that, that you will not find in any history of crime in Trinidad and Tobago, because Captain Baker, in the records of Trinidad and Tobago, was not a criminal.

So we need to be careful about how crime is perceived. We need to be very careful. And in that context, you know, we need to distinguish between crimes of passion, where violence is committed, even if we are talking violence and crimes where murder is a tool in the execution of the crime, you know. “Leh we pop one” or we need to shoot the guard on the way into the bank.

So we have to be very careful when we are categorizing crime because of its implications for how the rest of the society is socialized. And there is a big

difference, because until the particular act is listed on our law books as a crime, there will be no statistics. So as I listened to Sen. Mark and others relay the statistics on murders and the history of that, you know, I wondered before the thing is declared a crime it will not be on the records in any police station. So, how do we treat with that and are we in fact living in a better time or a worst time using the crime statistics as a barometer? It depends on which side of the fence you reside.

Madam President: Sen. Creese.

Sen. S. Creese: Because if you are—[*Interruption*]

Madam President: Hon. Senators, at this time we will suspend for half an hour and we will return at 5.00 p.m. So this sitting is suspended until 5.00p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

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

Sen. S. Creese: Thank you Mr. Vice-President. I was referring, just before we took the break, to the whole question of crimes not yet a crime, or activities not yet officially recognized as crimes, and the implications for statistics and there are statistical reviews against that background, and I was thinking of things like domestic abuse and the standard treatment in the past when people reported domestic abuse in the police stations. And then you get into the broader question of unreported crimes. To what extent would abused male spouses report their abuse in the police station? Good. So, we have to be careful with the use of statistics, in terms of appreciating how endemic any activity is in the society.

And, of course, what is the situation with children before the advent of the Children's Authority, how accurate are the statistics with regard to the abuse/brutalization of children in a society filled with Old Testament values, good,

where corporal punishment is historically entrenched, that coupled with Old Testament views. What was the situation before the records, which the Children's Authority might be able to capture, so that we can appreciate the extent to which that type of violence and that type of crime is pervasive, and I always contend that the final frontier of democracy and the winning of rights for any particular group is really the final frontier's liberation of children from the tyranny of adults.

But moving beyond that, the whole question of perception, of seeing of how the mind's eye is framed in a post-colonial polity is critical, because it is how we see things allows us and frames us for appreciating the need for new initiatives and new perceptions about what constitutes crime in our society, and human trafficking, of course, although it is an age-old crime in the Caribbean because the transatlantic slave trade, human trafficking.

The arrival of indentured, some of whom were captured in the streets of Bombay and so on, again human trafficking. So that there is the need to understand all that took place in our past and all that we are predisposed to accepting.

I remember seeing, and I think I have said it in here already, on television a then Commissioner of Police being interviewed on national TV and he was denying that human trafficking exists and I am talking about within the last 15 to 20 years, and I found that, quite frankly, amazing. I said he "cyah be fuh real". He cannot be for real to say that there is no human trafficking in Trinidad and Tobago anywhere after the 80s.

The term "blue note queen", to those of the relevant generation, only refers to one thing, the traffic in human flesh from the Dominican Republic and Colombia to Trinidad and Tobago. Those of us in-the-know, know that is what it means, and that these people are brought here and their passports held. What is

that, if not human trafficking? And if a Commissioner of Police is denying the existence of human trafficking, “we in serious trouble” and I saw that on national television, right here in Trinidad and Tobago within the lifetime of everybody present in this Senate, human trafficking.

I suppose, you know, life is full of ironies because the only person or persons I know to have been charged with human trafficking is a member of the police service. I think we are all familiar with that incident on the plane. So, a fitting piece of irony that a Commissioner of Police denies the existence of human trafficking and a policeman is the first to be charged for human trafficking, and in the context in which I was describing.

So that perception is important. I do know what he perceived human trafficking to be. But as I keep saying in this Senate the culture of the West Indies is to smuggle and grumble, and grumble and smuggle. And that is as old as human trafficking is in this part of the woods because that is a description that records Roget and Gordon gives to the planter class during the 16th and 17th Century in the early days of sugar cane plantocracy, smuggled and grumbled, grumbled and smuggled. That is the dominant culture, not only in Trinidad but across the Caribbean, and I do not mean Anglophone Caribbean, the entire Francophone, Spanish-speaking, Dutch-speaking, smuggled and grumbled, grumbled and smuggled. So there is no idyllic past to the criminal situation in the Caribbean, far less Trinidad.

But among those things that are not yet a crime, because I think that is the biggest and most important category, not yet a crime, child abuse. And I think it is on page 5 of today's *Express*. It is quite instructive, and if I may, I want to quote from an article by Renuka Singh on page 5 of today's *Express*. It is really ironical.

I quote from the article, which, apparently, is quoting from a UNC Senator by the name of Wayne Sturge:

“‘This matter is one of grave and serious concern and a matter of great public interest having regard to the seriousness of the allegation that children of the Attorney General attended an army base under the jurisdiction of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force in the presence of the Attorney General and members of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force,’ Sturge said in the letter.”

Quote again:

“‘It raises serious concerns about whether persons belonging to the Defence Force were complicit in the execution of their duties. Whether persons in the Defence Force were coerced into breaching settled practice and procedure because of the individuals involved.’”

Today’s *Express*, question of children. In this article, they are referring to pictures widely distributed of children under the legal age in possession of automatic assault rifles.

I keep saying that the final frontier is not the liberation of Africans. It is not the liberation of East Indians. It is not the freedom from the confines of reservations of the original settlers/developers of the Americas, the Amerindians. The final frontier liberation is that of children oppressed by adults. Things fall apart on the one hand and things come together uniquely on the other, things that are not yet a crime.

Listed at the top of my list, to get back to the question of the prioritization of crime and Government’s attempts to address it, either budgetarily or in terms of policing, is the whole question of campaign fund financing. We had one

Government in power from 1956 to 1986, then another from 1986 to 1991, then a reversion and then a new Government, and then a reversion, then another Government under the People's Partnership, and the PNM is back in power again, and the only consistent factor on the question of political party financing, campaign fund financing, is the Representation of the People Act (ROPA) where I think there is some limit of \$50,000. We all know that cannot reach very far. The cost of sound systems for your average political gathering, the hiring of trucks, and so on, the maxi taxis and buses that we see ferreting people to various locations. Are we all in this Chamber satisfied that what exists, the little that exists on our law books pertaining to political party financing, is truly and honestly observed?

And are we satisfied, after all of us watched the Hillary Clinton and the Trump and the Bernie Sanders campaigns and the implications of the analysis of MSNBC and CNN that Bernie Sanders was an average \$27 a head by the Americans who supported him, that now-President Trump donated how much millions from his own money and how many more millions were in the Clinton campaign, millions of dollars, I am talking now. And what position did we take on that, viewing it from afar, looking at the Americans? Did we feel in our gut, yes something is wrong here? Something is wrong with Hillary's financing?

Well, what about our local situation? What about our campaign fund financing? Because I could tell you what is in the popular culture, you know. The popular culture says the big donors have two pockets and they have two jerseys. [*Desk thumping*] And nobody spends under \$50,000 unless—I was about to say, unless it is an Independent and I cannot say that. And we all know why “ah cyah say dat”, because we all know why. “Dey have dis miserable untruthful rumour about somebody in some campaign at the last turn of the Century going around

with a suitcase full ah money.” We know that to be totally untrue. That could never happen in Trinidad and Tobago. It could never have been somebody with a suitcase full “ah” money financing campaigns. Somewhere in the States that happened, surely not here. I do not believe that. I would never believe that. So perception, we see ourselves as clean.

When we look at Sanders, Hillary and Trump, which one, any of us would more liken ourselves to be? Sanders, Hillary or Trump? You know, during the campaign I felt that Trump was probably the cleanest. It was his own money. But with the parliamentary congressional committee’s investigations that are rolling out, at least we know where Hillary’s money came from.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Creese, I have allowed you a lot of leeway with regard to the topic that you are on. We are dealing with a Motion on crime in Trinidad and Tobago. So could you please tighten this up and bring it back in and deal with the Motion? As much as the Motion is wide-ranging let us deal with crime in Trinidad and Tobago.

Sen. S. Creese: Thank you Mr. Vice-President. My subject was undue influence, and I am saying that there are activities that are not yet declared as a crime but are soon to be, given the right changes in the society, and I was just giving a classic example of something that is a crime in the United States but it is not a crime here and human trafficking was not a crime here for centuries and I will leave it at that. They say that history is the best judge and no matter what we say or do, it will be written in history about us. I am making sure that the *Hansard* would record me as condemning the absence of campaign fund legislation. [*Desk thumping*] I move on, as guided. Undue influence will prevail.

The other aspect of this subject is the question of whether judicial reform is

the approach that could take us, because the focus so far has been on policing to deal with the whole question of crime. But there is the question of judicial reform and the extent to which the lack thereof has impacted the crime situation. And in that regard, what we have on the table thus far is the question of trial by judge, or trial by judge and jury. And I think we all would have heard what the learned attorneys had to say about the efficacy of that.

All I wanted to point out is that across the range, because there is an obsession with violent crime, particularly with murders. Right? So, what concerned me was the extent to which the judicial reform approach has the capacity or even the need to impact on murders or violent crime.

And what I discovered in a review of the biggest cases, the most classical cases that we have had, the ones all of us would remember quite easily, and in going through that what I came across that in terms of crimes of passion, murders by passion, the most celebrated people were put behind bars. Just think about it. Look at the names, and they were put behind bars by juries. Just think of any name, any crime of passion. The killer went on death row, was found guilty.

Political crime, now we have had our share of political crime. I mean it was in Trinidad and Tobago. That is why I have a problem when people keep talking about yesterday being some paradise island. Right? National United Freedom Fighters existed in Trinidad and Tobago. Good? And two of their greatest celebrants, Kirkland Paul and Andy Thomas aka Umawali who were found guilty by Trinidad juries. HiLo robbery in Point, shot the policeman, PC Sankar. They were put on death row by juries. It is there I met them, actually. So, political crime, violent political crime, our juries have delivered.

What about narco-crime, drug-related crime, crimes coming out of the world

of coke and so on? Well the hanging spree, that famous weekend. Right? Dole Chadee and his accomplices? Our juries put them there. So the question of judicial reform still looms large, but it is not a question to be resolved by removing juries and replacing them with judges alone. That is not the aspect of judicial reform that is required to deal with that aspect, the burgeoning crime situation. So, I do not know where that would take us.

5.25 p.m.

Finally, I wanted to deal with the question of penal reform, because I think in all of this, we lose sight of the fact that because we have not had any really in-depth approach to penal reform, what has developed is the university of the correctional institutes of T&T to the extent that Frederick Street, “dem boys jail”, Golden Grove and Carrera have become learning institutes. I say that after having for seven years served as an investigator at the Office of the Ombudsman where I was able to visit these institutions and to have private conversations with inmates. To bear that point home as to the extent that these are learning institutions, one of the things the fellas do when they meet there is they share information about their respective villages all over Trinidad as to who has a thriving little business, and the operations of that thriving little business and how much cash it handles and who carries it home and who carries it to what credit union or what bank or what have you.

So they will set up the play, even tell them where to get the gun locally, for a fee. That is how that operates. So when the police looking for the usual suspects, there are no usual suspects. There are informants who tell people how to put down “ah wuk” in the village. That is why some of the fellas could come into the village, as they say, “put down de wuk with no mask on” because nobody around there

really know them. So they are not afraid of being identified, especially in the era before cameras—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Vice-President: Senator you have five minutes.

Sen. S. Creese: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. So for most of the '90s they had a good time, and into the early part of this century until cameras became cheap and people start putting in cameras. At the heart of the problem is not just the question of the prisons being overcrowded, and if you know when Frederick Street Prison was built, you know it has to be overcrowded because it has not been expanded an inch because the walls are there on the same block.

We have to look at the question of disaggregating the prison system. It is the same mistake we made with the massive junior secs and senior secs in which children got lost, it is the same mistake that is going on in the prisons where we have these general prison systems and we ferry people, and that creates other problems. So every morning they are racing up and down the highway with the police dipping in and out with an entourage of prisoners. So two sets of people get blue-light treatment on the highway: Ministers running late and prisoners. Something has to be wrong. Something has to be seriously wrong with us.

I am saying that we need to disaggregate the prison system. We need to have community prisons and, in that context, we need to have community sentencing—that is, that people in their local areas for the lesser offences, and even in the later part of more serious offences, to be allowed to return to their workplaces to function and retire for the night in the local police station cell or make local arrangements, but that central prison system is just not working in our favour. We are just training and breeding another round of criminal elements as they wait, frustrated, for their day in court to come. Inside that environment, in case you do

not know, let me tell you the highest form of currency there now is phone cards. The days when I used to visit, it was cigarettes and so on and alcohol. Now it is phone cards, the highest form of currency. So if you want to raise revenue for the Government, go by the prison and sell phone cards, and the officers there will tell you how to do it. [*Desk thumping*] It is a thriving business.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

The bottom line in all of this is that we need to relook at the penal reform system. If we do not we will just be breeding another generation of criminals in there and we will be going nowhere with the rest of our crime initiatives. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Gerald Ramdeen: Thank you, Madam President. It is a privilege for me to join this debate on this Motion, Madam President, which we on this side consider to be the most important issue that our country is faced with today, the issue of crime. Madam President, I must start off by saying that if there is one thing that I must respond to Sen. Coppin by saying is that we on this side consider that the safety and security of our citizens is the most important issue that our country has to deal with. [*Desk thumping*] The Government may consider that they have more important things to deal with, as Sen. Coppin has said, but the fact that our citizens are being killed, murdered, raped, robbed and kidnapped every day is the most important thing for us on this side. [*Desk thumping*]

If any of the Senators on the other side understood the pain that families have gone through since this year has started but, more so, since the PNM has taken over the governance of this country since September 07, 2015, none of us would sit here in this Senate and smile or laugh at the issue of crime. We should have a little more respect for the families that have lost their loved ones during the

Unacceptable Levels of Violent Crime
(Government Steps to Deal With) (cont'd)
Sen. Ramdeen (cont'd)

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last 18 months under the PNM. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: On a point of order, 46(6).

Madam President: No. Continue, Sen. Ramdeen. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. G. Ramdeen: Madam President, I do not think that any of us can comprehend what our country has been transformed into. Between September 07, 2015 and the 31st of December, there were more than 100 people murdered in this country. September was the bloodiest month of 2015. Between January 1st and December 31, 2016, 463 people lost their lives; and between January 1st and March 28th, the number of murdered citizens that we have in this country has crossed 122 as we speak. So when you add up the number of persons that have lost their lives since the People's National Movement has taken over the governance of this country, we are rapidly approaching 700 people who have lost their lives.

Madam President, let me put in perspective for the people, through you, Madam President, of this country, where we are at in terms of crime. I am only going to recite the figures for the first three months of 2017. These are not figures that have come from CAPA and figures that have come from the Internet and figures that have come from the Opposition. What I am going to quote from is the commissioner's CompStat figures that were given out to the heads of division of the police service one week ago on the 21st of March, 2017.

Madam President, one week ago, the murder figure was 105. Today it is 122—122. But everybody says we talk about murders, so let me go down the list. For the last two and a half months—it is not even three months because this is up to the 21st of March—we have had 125 woundings and shootings. Do you know what that comes up to, Madam President? Fifty people in this country are wounded and shot every month. We have had 22 kidnappings in two and a half months in this

country—22. That is nine per month. We have had 460 burglaries and break-ins. That works out to 184 burglaries and break-ins per month. Robberies: we have had 494 in two and a half months. That works out to 200 robberies a month. That is where we at. [*Crosstalk*] I am coming to that.

Larceny of motor vehicle in this country in two and a half months reported, 152 vehicles stolen. That is approximately 50 vehicles being stolen every month. Possession of firearms and ammunition, 179 reported. That is 71 per month. Where are we really going, Madam President? I would have thought that this Government, with these figures, should have held their head in collective shame for what they have brought our country to. [*Desk thumping*] In the Southern Division, five kidnappings; 28 vehicles stolen. Right? You want figures.

In Tobago—they want to bring Sandals in Tobago—do you know what the crime figures in Tobago are, Madam President? Last year, at this time, there were no murders in Tobago. This year they have four already. Right? So everybody wants to play with the figures. That has gone up by 400 per cent. So burglaries and break-ins in Tobago, in two and a half months, 49, but bring Sandals, and we expect the tourism industry will grow in Tobago.

Madam President, it is deplorable when you see the state of safety and security of our citizens in this country. I would have thought that a responsible Minister of National Security would have come today and answer this Motion and tell this country and the people of this country that they will be safe and secure at some time soon. [*Desk thumping*] But, you see, this boils down to two things, Madam President. It is two things that have our country in the position that it is in today. It is a crisis of competence and it is a crisis of leadership. [*Desk thumping*] We have absolutely no leadership. To quote someone who is very familiar in the

news these days, the former Attorney General, Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj, the latest advisor to the PNM, “the buck stops with the Prime Minister”. [*Desk thumping*]

The PNM, the People’s National Movement, were elected in this country on the 7th of September 2015. They were elected to govern into the future. They were not elected to govern in a rear-view mirror and talk about what happened in the last five years. [*Desk thumping*] That is what has us in the position that we are in today, because the Minister of National Security will come to the Senate answering a Motion on crime, and tell us about the last five years. Well, the people do not want to know about the last five years. They want to know about the five years from 2015 to 2020, if they last that long. We have to stop looking in the rear-view mirror and start looking in the windshield and tell us what you are going to do.

Today we hear that the Government is going to build a police station in Enterprise, and the slogan of the Minister of National Security is: the time is now, the place is Enterprise and the force would be used. If the Minister of National Security and the Prime Minister who is the head of the National Security Council understood what was going on in Enterprise, he would never make a statement like that, because on Friday night Enterprise was a war zone. I was on the phone and I went down to Joseph Street on Friday night. A vehicle could not come out of Enterprise. When you go along the Jerningham Junction Road to go into Enterprise, you had four and five police vehicles coming from every different division to go into Enterprise because Enterprise was a war zone on Friday night.

When you call people and people calling for your assistance, you are hearing like if it is a movie in the background with bullets. Do you know what the police saw? The Minister of National Security wants to come today and tell this Senate

and tell, more importantly, the people of Enterprise that there is a Police Post and an Army Post. The Police Post and the Army Post is 100 feet away from where five people have been killed since Friday. So tell the people of Trinidad and Tobago when you set up the police station, what is going to happen in Enterprise? By the time you build the police station it might have nobody left in Enterprise.

Friday night, the brother of Robocop was killed, Selvon Alexis. Sunday night, a reprisal killing. Monday night, last night, armed bandits ran into a wake and started to shoot like they are in the Wild Wild West and the Minister of National Security comes to the Senate today and tells us the solution to that is that we are going to build a police station. That is the solution, we are going to build a police station. I wonder if the Minister of National Security and the other Minister, Sen. Dennis Moses, the Minister in the Ministry of National Security, and the OJT Minister who calls herself an OJT Parliamentary Secretary—*[Interruption]*

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, in your reference to Members of Parliament, please be respectful.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: Madam President, I apologize, but in referring to the Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of National Security, Madam President, it is the Member—*[Interruption]*

Madam President: Senator, may I just ask that you move on? I have made a ruling. I have asked you—do not go back to justify what you have said. Okay? Thanks.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: As you please, Madam President. There have been almost 12 murders in one week in our country and what have we heard from the Prime Minister? What have we heard? It makes you wonder, do we have a Prime Minister? One week ago, six days ago—not one week ago, six days ago—there

was an incident in London. An Islamic terrorist drove a car into the bridge at Westminster and then proceeded to Parliament. I want to make the point to the people of Trinidad and Tobago so they understand what we are dealing with. When that incident took place, it took place at 2.40 English time. At seven o'clock, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Mrs. Theresa May held a meeting with the National Security Council. After that meeting, she stood on the steps of No. 10 Downing Street and reassured the people of the United Kingdom that they would be safe and secure. The next day she was in Parliament.

If anybody wants to understand how a Prime Minister acts in a situation of crisis, a proper Prime Minister, go on to the *Daily Telegraph* site and look at the speech that was delivered by Mrs. Theresa May to the Parliament, the House of Commons, accounting for her Government taking responsibility for what took place and reassuring the people of the United Kingdom that her Government will keep them safe and secure and they will understand that they will fight for the freedoms that they enjoy. [*Desk thumping*] That is what a Prime Minister does. [*Desk thumping*]

Do you know that what happened in London happens in Trinidad on a weekly basis? But we have a Prime Minister—when last did you hear the Prime Minister account to the country about what is happening in our country with safety and security? You could imagine that on Friday night you had police officers and army officers running for their life in Enterprise? Running for their life in Enterprise while two gangs were shooting at each other in open. in the streets. We did not hear about the Minister of National Security then.

Madam President, Friday's headline on the *Trinidad Guardian* was a headline that says:

“MAYHEM

- Businesswoman suffocated
- Pensioner choked to death
- Limer shot dead inside bar
- Bullets for man on barber’s chair
- Boy, 13, woman, 22, missing”

In yesterday’s newspaper, the family of Jesse Beephan, a child who was going to school whose body was found behind a school, who was bludgeoned to death with a piece of iron had one thing they asked for, they wanted justice. After we had bloodshed in Enterprise on Friday night, and you had a headline like this in our national newspaper: do you know what the headline was on the Office of the Prime Minister’s website? The Office of the Prime Minister was opening the Prime Minister’s Golf Tournament on Saturday. That is what we have. Theresa May can hold a national security council meeting within hours, account to the people of her country, account to the Parliament of her country and make sure that her people understand that they will be secure when four people have died. Do you know what our Prime Minister was doing? He was smiling: Prime Minister the hon. Keith Rowley and his wife Sharon Rowley are pictured here with the new board of the Prime Minister’s Charity Golf Tournament.

This is the concern that the Prime Minister has for the people in Enterprise. This is the response of the leader of our country after more than 12 people have been murdered in one week. That is the response—do not address the nation; do not let your Minister of National Security and your second Minister of National Security and your Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of National Security come out and speak to the nation and tell them that they will be safe, we have put

things in place, the army will go down to Enterprise.

But, you know what I find very, very ironic, is this. When the People's Partnership were in Government, the present Attorney General, being the PRO of the PNM, at that time, would go up and down the country and do you know what he would say? He had a standard line. When Rome is burning, where is the Prime Minister? Well I want to ask today: when Enterprise is burning, where is the Prime Minister? [*Desk thumping*] When Arima is burning: where is the Prime Minister? [*Desk thumping*] When Port of Spain is burning: where is the Prime Minister? [*Desk thumping*] But I will answer it ironically. The Prime Minister is on his way to Houston. When I was growing up my parents had a saying, and I am sure all of us in here know it: "Who doh hear does feel". Do you know why our country is in the state it in? It is because we did not hear, so now we have to feel. I will go through when we were told about what will happen.

With respect to the same incident that I spoke about, Madam President, that happened on the 22nd at Westminster, our hon. Prime Minister saw it fit to dispatch on the 23rd—this is from the Office of the Prime Minister, 23rd of March, 2017. Within 24 hours, a letter was dispatched to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and Great Britain and Northern Ireland—the Rt. Hon. Theresa May from Prime Minister Dr. the hon. Keith Rowley, yesterday 22nd of March, 2017. We live in a world, Madam President, where at the touch of a button you are able to go on the World Wide Web and either make our country proud or make our country ashamed.

So I want to read into the *Hansard* today what was put up on the Internet by Rachael Walker, a British citizen writing to the hon. Prime Minister and this is what Miss Walker said: As a British citizen, I am always grateful—I am sorry, let

me start over.

Dear Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley

As a British citizen, I am always grateful for condolences to my country. However, in your case Mr. Rowley, you can take back your condolences and give it to the Trinidad people who have lost loved ones in circumstances just as horrific as we have here in England. Pay respects to your own people of whom you serve before you worry about other countries. People are unhappy with your service. I know it is none of my business as I am not a Trinidadian, but I follow the news and I cannot help but feel it for the people. Show empathy for your people first. I am sure they feel a raw insult by this piece of news here. Get your act together.

You see, I say, when you listen to the comments on the other side, they do not understand the pain of the families that are suffering as a result of the crime situation in this country. They do not. That is why we can have a Prime Minister who can do what we are seeing happening in our country. “Who doh hear does feel”, Madam President, because I can tell you from my experience that when you look at what is happening in our country today, and you go into the areas like Enterprise, which was pointed out by the Minister of National Security, do you know what you see when you look at those families and those warring gangs? Your see hate, you see bitterness, you see acrimony and you see animosity. That is what you see. [*Desk thumping*] It is an area completely out of control.

And do you know what? When I go and witness that I remember the warning that was given, prophetically it may have been, by the late great Patrick Augustus Mervyn Manning—God bless his soul—[*Desk thumping*] Because you see, Madam President, I said at the beginning we have a crisis in leadership,

because when the young ones see what is demonstrated by our leaders, they act it out because they learn by example. Everyone will tell you that.

Look at what our schools have been turned into. Every single day—when have we ever experienced—whether it be under the PNM in their previous incarnation or under the People’s Partnership—that you will turn on your television almost every day and you hear about violence in schools? Every single day, Madam President. Today, the Minister of Education says, I am not going to visit Santa Margarita RC because I am not expected to out every fire. The Minister of Education is saying that. A child was killed this week in a school. Do you all realize how serious that is? That is why I say we have a crisis in leadership. Do you know why “Who doh hear does feel”? Because we were warned about this and nobody took heed.

So I want to read into *Hansard* today from the Commission of Enquiry Bill, Wednesday, October 21, 2009. It was the Commission of Enquiry (Validation and Immunity from Proceedings) Bill, 2009. That was eight years ago. I want to read what the late Prime Minister, Patrick Augustus Mervyn Manning said, and I am quoting from the *Hansard*:

When he cannot have his way, his method is to bully.

Madam President: No, Sen. Ramdeen, please. Please have a seat. Sen. Ramdeen, you need to get back to the Motion. The Motion is not a Motion on the Prime Minister. So you have made reference to the Prime Minister, but it is not to now be focusing on all of this. Okay? So please come back to what you were talking about, refer to the Motion at hand.

5.55 p.m.

Madam President, the Government was elected to govern this country and

the reason why we find ourselves in the position that we find ourselves in today, is because there is a lack of competence on the part of the Government. It starts with the Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

I cannot stand here and listen to two Government Senators chastise the Opposition Leader for going to court, number one, to represent someone who was exercising their right to the protection of law that is guaranteed under the Constitution. That was going to court to represent an individual pro bono, who wanted to exercise his right to uphold the rule of law and the Constitution. I cannot stand here and listen to the Minister of National Security chastise the Opposition, when every Member of this House took an oath to uphold the Constitution and the law. [*Desk thumping*] Chastise the Opposition for the Government not being able to appoint a Commissioner of Police.

Unlawfulness breeds unlawfulness. This Government is chastising the Opposition for shutting down an illegal organization called SAUTT. They chastise the Opposition for going to court and striking down two orders that were unlawful and unconstitutional. Well, I will take no criticism from this Government because the reason why the orders were struck down is because they do not have a proper legal advisor on that side. On this side we have many proper legal advisors, led by the Leader of the Opposition.

You bring three pieces of legislation and boasting that you have a suite of legislation—and soon what sweet will soon turn sour. The Criminal Procedure (Plea Discussion and Plea Agreement) Bill, the Miscellaneous Provisions (Trial by Judge Alone) Bill, the Indictable Offences (Pre-Trial Procedure) Bill—three pieces of legislation, not worth the paper they are written on. It is not Gerald Ramdeen saying so, the man who is advising the Government now has told you that the

Government has a duty to withdraw those two Bills from the Parliament.

The Government makes it seem as though the Opposition is opposing for opposing sake. The Opposition is opposing because the Opposition stands by the rule of law and the Constitution. We understand what it is on this side to protect the rights of citizens. It is not good enough for you to come and parade through the Parliament that you have parliamentary agenda. A parliamentary agenda to do what? A parliamentary agenda to enact what? The Government has absolutely no idea how to solve the crime problem in this country—absolutely none.

The Minister of National Security quoted today that they arrested 175 people. Just imagine this, 175 people arrested and that is something that the Minister of National Security is boasting about, as if it is an accomplishment—arrested, not charged, arrested. On this side we do the research. Madam President, 175, right? You know how many serious crimes have been committed in this country since the beginning of this year, Madam President?—2,356.

So when you come here and talk about 175 arrested, that has nothing to do with the detection rate, you know, because that is people you are picking up when you go down in Enterprise and you go down in Rich Plain, and you go up Arima, and you go up Laventille, you are picking them up and you are letting them go. What we want to know is how many are charged for the 2,356. Commissioner of Police, do you know how much that is? Seven per cent, that is who are arrested, not charged, you know, arrested. You do not even get to conviction. So let the Minister of National Security come and tell the House that 175 people have been arrested, as though that is some kind of accomplishment.

Madam President, do you think that if this had occurred in the private sector, and a private sector firm had been contracted to secure the people of this country,

and 700 people had been murdered in 18 months they could have continued to keep their position? The problem with this Government is that they simply have no competence to do anything. The former UNC Attorney General, who is now advising the Government, has given them a plan, but even that is not going to help them, because the plan—there is nobody to implement it.

I want to deal with one matter before the time runs out, and it is this. Madam President, on May 15, 2006—I remember it very carefully—a child was murdered in this country, four years old at the time. Her name was Amy Annamunthodo; that was on May 15, 2006. Amy Annamunthodo when she was murdered was four years old. She was lifted by the person who murdered her and placed on a door and hanged by her neck. She was then beaten, 20 to 30 cuffs, where her atrium was ruptured, her ribs were broken, and she died. Her body was in rigor mortis by the time it reached from Marabella to San Fernando. She was four years old.

Marlon King was charged for that murder. He was convicted on March 01, 2012, six years after. As I stand and speak here in the Senate today, I heard Sen. Coppin talk about Sen. Sturge and about transcriptions. Marlon King was convicted and sentenced to death for the murder of Amy Annamunthodo on March 01, 2012. I stand here on March 28, 2017, the notes in the appeal of Marlon King have not been prepared by the court as yet—six years after. And they want to talk about financial autonomy to the Judiciary. Let the Judiciary tell you how it is that a man has expired the five year deadline in *Pratt and Morgan*.

Madam President: Senator, do not bring the administration of justice into this debate in the manner that you are doing. Okay? Proceed.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: I always hear the mumbling going on, on that side when I start to talk about the prison. The facts always bother the PNM. A 10-point crime plan

“dey fool de country with in 2015”. Before 2015 they had the solution to crime with their 10-point crime plan. Sen. Sturge has already gone through it, so I am not going to go through it. What I am going to go through is what they promised the people of Trinidad and Tobago—the deceit of the PNM.

Do you know what they promised the people? They promised the people that they would set up a police management agency. I am reading from the 2015 manifesto, Let's Do This Together, the People's National Movement manifesto. This is what they rolled out and fooled the country with. They setting up a police management agency. Where is that 18 months on? They setting up a joint border protection agency for the porous borders. The budget documents will show that this Government spent \$500,000 out of \$7.6billion on a border protection agency. They setting up a disaster risk management policy, where is that after 18 months? A scientific investigation strategy—where is that after 18 months? A police service inspectorate—where is that after 18 months? Just imagine this PNM Government told the people as part of their manifesto on crime that they are going to have community safety partnerships, but they shut down community policing.

They are going to have intelligence-led national security model. Where is that after 18 months? You are going to have a policy on prison management; all of this was told and promised to the people of this country, as part of the crime plan, because before 2015 you had the solution for everything. Lo and behold, when they were elected after September 07, 2015 they had the answers for nothing.

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

Sen. G. Ramdeen: I am obliged. Madam President, we are in a very, very sad place in this country. If the Minister of National Security had cared for the lives of the people in Enterprise we would have heard today that there would have been a

limited state of emergency in Enterprise for two nights.

Madam President: Sen. Ramdeen, you are in your last five minutes, try not to make what you are saying so personal to the Minister and to Members. So you can put that a different way, that last sentence.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: If the Government, led by the Prime Minister, had cared about the lives of the people who have lost their lives, the 122 of them, for the year thus far, we would not have a letter being written to the people of the UK. We would have letters going out to the citizens of our country who have lost their lives, whose families have lost their children, whose children have lost their fathers.

Under this Government three persons lost their lives in one night—in one night—in Debe: Terry Edwards, Sanjay Mahabir and Kevin Fuller. Can you imagine that the wife of one of those people had to go on the headline on the *Express* and beg the Government for therapy for her 11-year-old and her 14-year-old who could not live without their father? This Government comes to this Parliament and tells us about what took place under the Partnership—that is your answer?—and about withdraw the Motion on crime.

Under the SSA, do you know what the Attorney General has told us? “He say, ‘We de-siloing’.” Under the preliminary enquiry, do you know what he told us? “We de-clogging.” You know what I want to tell the Government? “Start demitting.” [*Laughter*]

Sen. Sturge: Start with the Minister of Labour.

Madam President: Sen. Sturge, please.

Sen. G. Ramdeen: It is time that the Government understands their responsibility is the people of this country. It is time that they understand that they have a duty to secure and provide safety and security to the people of this country. It is about time that the Prime Minister does what is right and removes the Minister of National

Security.

I thank you, Madam President.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Trade and Industry (Sen. The Hon. Paula Gopee-Scoon):

Madam President, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Tuesday, April 04, at 1.30 in the afternoon, when we shall deal with Government Business, Bill No. 3. Thank you.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, before I put the question on the adjournment, leave has been granted for a matter to be raised on the Motion for the adjournment of the Senate. Sen. Ameen you have 10 minutes.

Biometric Smart Card System

(Government's Failure to Continue)

Sen. Khadijah Ameen: Thank you, Madam President. I have brought a Motion entitled the failure of the Government to continue the use of the Biometric Smart Card system which ensures proper service delivery and accountability in the disbursement of social support services to disadvantaged persons.

The use of a highly secure automated method of recognizing each citizen in Trinidad and Tobago, of storing and collaborating information pertaining to their identity was the brainchild of a former Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*] Following the change in government it was the former Prime Minister, hon. Patrick Manning, who began the implementation of this platform during his term in office. However, it was during the term of the People's Partnership that significant cost was taken by the government to purchase these machines, to put in the software, to do the training and to ensure that there were several machines in this country, and it was fully implemented to coordinate the delivery of social services.

Those social services include public assistance grants, disability allowances, food card, the old-age pension, the general assistance grant, which covered victims of natural disasters, the rental assistance for persons who were evicted and needed urgent help to cover three months of their rent, needy persons who needed a one-time assistance, home repairs and the school supplies grant. With this system one's fingerprint is scanned and stored together with their biodata, and it really served to improve the delivery of social benefits to citizens and prevent growing cases of fraud.

At this time I just want to quote from a *Guardian* article of August 25, 2015: "By using the biometric card, eligible citizens of Trinidad and Tobago will be able to access a range of social benefits including social assistance grants, disability grants, food cards and general assistance grants.

The biometric card will ultimately help to lower the administrative costs, abuse of state funds, fraud, and stress upon beneficiaries..."

And they were quoting the Minister at that time, Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein.

"The introduction of the biometric card system had already detected 4,000 dubious applicants, said"—Minister—"Newallo-Hosein."

She continued in this *Guardian* article:

"While we were in the process of enrolling persons for the Biometric Smartcard, four thousand persons were actually removed from the system due to fraudulent activity, hence saving this Government several hundreds of thousands of dollars..."

The biometric cards are now ready to be issued to 8,000 people in the country. Based on early feedback, people were generally excited about the biometric smart card...

They are saying it will make collecting the grants easier for them...”

Madam President, three things I want to stress on that are very critical here, that I will come to later, it is to lower the administrative costs, the abuse of state funds and fraud.

But before I do so I want to state that it was the intention from the very beginning, that was shared over several administration, that this investment and this smart card system, this biometric card would be linked with the Ministry of Legal Affairs where the registration of births and deaths and, of course, name changes and so on would be included on a person's card or electronic file. The Ministry of National Security, where information concerning immigration status and citizen status was stored. Housing, because HDC applicants are not only for ownership of houses but also for rental, and HDC has their own method of assessing income. And of course health, in terms of our public health records, because there was need to, as well, collaborate that with what some of the applicants in the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services would be applying for. Sometimes a client could go to the Ministry and claim to be very ill, when their records at the hospital say something differently. Very often persons who apply for social benefits are asked to bring records from the hospital, and many of them wait for months to get that medical file or a statement from the hospital to verify their position.

Madam President, it was an article in the *Newsday*, Tuesday, April 15th, and it was also on the Ministry's website where the TT Card holders were reminded of the April 15th deadline for biometric enrolment. The *Newsday* indicated that:

“The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services...advised citizens who had difficulties using their Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer

programme TT Card, commonly known as the 'Food Card', in the last week that it was due to technical difficulties.

A statement from the Ministry advised that the problem has been rectified and all systems related to the card continue to function, allowing clients to use their cards to make purchases at affiliated retail outlets and grocery stores throughout the country.”

Persons were advised to call a hotline, and:

“The ministry...reminds TT Card holders to complete their biometric enrolment by April15. Failure to do so, it said, ‘will result in a temporary disruption in the ability to access funds, as accounts will be placed on hold’.”

“The statement”—indicated—“that this exercise is being undertaken to ensure that updates and processing of the...applications, along with the distribution of funds, continue to be managed in an effective manner, to guarantee food support to those who need it most.”

It turned out that even persons, clients, applicants who made that deadline, that April15th deadline, who went to the Ministry, still had their service disrupted.

Madam President: Senator, you have one more minute.

Sen. K. Ameen: What this has led to is that beneficiaries of many of these programmes are now receiving cheques. You threw out the check and balance that the Ministry had to ensure that public assistance or welfare is not being spent to purchase alcohol or cigarettes, as could have been done with the TT Card. This situation is unacceptable. It leads to wastage. It leads to fraud by applicants and it also leads to businesses, given the opportunity again as they used to before the use of the card, to change cheques, to cash cheques that may or may not belong to a

Biometric Smart Card System
(Government's Failure to Continue) (cont'd)
Sen. Ameen (cont'd)

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person, give them cash which they can use for anything, and it could cause, in situations where unfortunate persons, clients, can be defrauded by their relatives, and these things used to happen before the introduction of the card.

Madam President, this is a failure on the part of the Government, and I would appreciate their response in terms of how this system could get back on track to ensure delivery for citizens.

The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn): Thank you, Madam President. In 2010, Cabinet approved the utilization of a multi-application biometric smart card as the payment mechanism for grants administered by the Ministry. These grants would have included the senior citizen pension, disability grant, public assistance grant and the food card. The biometric system, once it was properly implemented and managed, would have allowed for the streamlining of service delivery and the elimination of double-dipping and leakages. The system was comprised of two distinct modules, the identity management module or the biometric platform and the financial platform which supported the transfer of payments to recipients and managed the interface between the bank and the biometric platform. The Ministry of the People and Social Development entered into a one-year contract with the INN Consortium in October 2014, and the initial cost of the system for that one-year period was \$67.4 million. That comprised the biometric system that cost \$34.8 million, the maintenance of the biometric platform, which was \$2.8 million and the financial platform that cost \$29.8 million.

It is important to note that the annual maintenance cost of \$29.8 million for the financial platform was based on the enrolment of all 170,000 grant recipients of the Ministry. Although the biometric system was developed and delivered to the

Ministry of the People and Social Development in October 2014, by February 2015 only 3,000 grant recipients had been enrolled. So staffing was ramped up on the project, because we needed to increase the numbers. By June 2016, however, just approximately 62,000 grant recipients or 35 per cent of all grant recipients had been enrolled, and there were only 3,158 food card recipients or 2 per cent of all grant recipients being transitioned and were being paid via the biometric system.

This meant that there were over 24,000 households who continued to access food support via the debit card system, and there was an additional 5,548 persons who had been assessed and approved for food support, but they could not have been paid. The delay in payment to those persons was due in part to the existing debit card system being deemed obsolete by the bank, and the banks' implementation of its decision to discontinue any further new cards.

I note for this House here today that the financial component of the system which was supposed to facilitate payment of cash via the biometric card was never operationalized because the providers failed to secure all of the necessary approvals from the Central Bank. The absence of this component severely compromised the effectiveness of the system, as it meant that approximately 134,000 persons could not be transitioned to the biometric card. This resulted in the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services having to pay for the maintenance of three support systems of payment, two for the food card and one for the other grants.

It was also determined that the Ministry was in fact expending approximately \$2.7 million monthly to pay \$1.7 million to just 3,158 food card recipients or 2 per cent of all grant recipients. That was a mere fraction of the persons the system was procured to service. It was therefore clear that the Ministry

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Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn (cont'd)

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and citizens of Trinidad and Tobago were not getting value for money. So having regard to the expiration of the contract with INN Consortium in October 2015, the cost of the system, the inherent inefficiencies and effectiveness of the biometric system and our straitened economic circumstances, the Ministry felt compelled to find an alternative method of payment.

Madam President, it cost the Ministry approximately \$274,000 monthly to effect payment to approximately 134,000 grant recipients, utilizing cheques and deposit methods of payment. A decision was therefore taken in August 2016 to discontinue the month to month arrangement with the biometric system providers, and utilize cheques and direct deposit as the method of payment for the 3,158 grant recipients and the 5,548 new food card recipients who were brought on to the system. This resulted in savings of \$2.4 million monthly, and we are still able to curb double-dipping with the continued enrolment on the AFIS identity platform.

6.25 p.m.

Madam President, the Ministry is cognizant of our responsibility to the Ministry's grant recipients and to be accountable to the citizens of this country. As a result, we are in the process of implementing several initiatives to ensure optimal customer service and judicious use of state resources. Most notably are: customer service training has commenced and will be carried out throughout the Ministry; the Ministry is standardizing the processing time for all grants; we have recommenced the direct deposit initiative because we recognize that there could be the issue of fraud with the cheques; and we will be transitioning most of the beneficiaries of the social welfare benefits to the direct deposit; we are also in the process of upgrading the debit card system for recipients of the food support and expect that exercise to be completed by June 2017.

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Madam President, the biometric smart card system was intended to be the payment mechanism for all grants administered by the Ministry, but non-operationalization of the financial component meant that 134,000 or 79 per cent of our grant recipients could not be paid via the biometric smart card. It was also very costly with \$2.4 million being spent monthly to effect payments to just 2 per cent of grant recipients. So contrary to the newspaper article that was made reference to, it did not in any way lower administrative cost, Madam President.

The Government's decision to discontinue the use of the biometric system was therefore considered necessary and in the interest of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Greetings

(Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day)

Madam President: Hon. Senators, before I put the question on the adjournment, I now invite Senators to bring greetings on the occasion of our celebration of Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. Sen. Cummings. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Foster Cummings: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, in November of 1917, almost 100 years ago, an Ordinance No. 27 of 1917 was passed and became known as the Prohibition Ordinance and it prohibited the Spiritual Baptists then known as the Shouters, referred to in St. Vincent as the Shakers, from practising their religion. It would take people like Bishop Elton George Griffith, Tubal Uriah "Buzz" Butler, who was a practising Baptist, Phillip Granger, father of Geddes Granger the late Makandal Daaga, to petition the Legislative Council at the time for the repeal of this legislation.

This legislation put severe strain on the Baptist community and forced them at the time to worship in the jungle, in the forest and to hide to practise their

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Sen. Cummings (cont'd)

religion as they were persecuted and hounded by the police as they fought for 39 years for freedom to worship. They were beaten, arrested, charged, fined and jailed for practising their religion.

In moving the Motion in November of 1917 then Attorney General Sir Henry Gollan said in Parliament:

The Shouters meetings make it impossible for residential occupation. This law was designed to make the practice of the Shouters illegal. They were described as noisy and disturbing the peace. The police had the power to search homes without a warrant and the magistrate had the power to sentence without the possibility of an appeal.

Madam President, in 1951, Act No. 20 of 1951, this law was repealed and taken off the law books in Trinidad and Tobago. Today, Spiritual Baptists worship freely throughout Trinidad and Tobago and the religion has spread to other Caribbean territories and even to North America and the United Kingdom in the diaspora there.

Madam President, on behalf the Government Bench and on my own behalf I wish to extend to all members of the Spiritual Shouter Baptist community a holy and happy Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. May God bless us all.

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, I am very happy to bring greetings to the Spiritual Shouter Baptist community on the occasion of 22nd anniversary of the Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day on behalf of the Opposition Bench in the Senate, on my own behalf and that of my family. The United National Congress pays tribute to the warrior men and women of the Baptist faith who, with resolution and determination, refused to surrender in the face of massive discrimination. Their struggle and eventual victory should

Greetings
Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day (cont'd)
Sen. Mark (cont'd)

serve as an eternal reminder that freedom never rode in on the wheels of inevitability. Freedom must always be fought for, since it is never given.

It was under the former Prime Minister, the hon. Basdeo Panday whose Government granted the very first national holiday in honour of the Spiritual Baptists, a holiday which was promised but never delivered. The United National Congress consolidated this holiday by not only providing lands to the various Baptist faiths at Maloney, but proceeded to construct the first primary Baptist school in Trinidad and Tobago, as well as the first secondary school, both were done under the distinguished leadership of the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, many may recall the part played by Archbishop Elton Griffith who was labelled champion for the cause. He led the campaign for the repeal of the Shouter Prohibition Ordinance. And on March 30th, 1951, members of the Spiritual Shouter Baptist community were allowed to practise their religion freely for the first time after being in a state of oppression and discrimination.

Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago may boast as being the only country globally to celebrate a public holiday for the Spiritual Shouter Baptist community. Locations such as Belmont and Morvant, to name a few, were popular for hosting feasts and thanksgiving as expressions of gratitude to God for his blessings and after special occasions in members' lives such as success in an undertaking or recovery from illness.

So, Madam President, on behalf of the alternative Government, it is indeed an honour and pleasure to extend to all members of the Spiritual Shouter Baptist community warmest blessings of peace and love on this the 22nd anniversary of the celebration of the Spiritual Shouter Baptist community on this very auspicious day

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on Thursday.

I wish, in closing, Madam President, to extend to you and to your family and to all my senatorial colleagues on the three benches, happy Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. I also want to extend to all members of staff of the Parliament and to the parliamentary police and their families, happy Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day. I thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir: Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, we are in 2017, but on Friday, 16th of November 1917, 100 years ago at 10.00 a.m. the Legislative Council met and the protagonists that I would refer to are as follows: Attorney General H. Cowper Gollan, E. Prada, member, and Col. G. H. May, Inspector General of the Constabulary.

Madam President, whenever I see a law that I find very disagreeable, I always like to go back to the thinking of the legislators at the time. And with your leave, Madam President, I would like to read a section of the *Hansard* to indicate exactly what were the thought processes of the lawmakers who administered Trinidad 100 years ago. On page 349 I quote the Attorney General H. Cowper Gollan:

“...a condition of affairs has arisen in the Colony by reason of the practice of a sect or body calling itself the Shouters which has, so far...made it necessary to come to this House and submit proposals for interference in the practices of that body.

Apparently the neighbourhood in which a Shouters' meeting takes place is made almost impossible for residential occupation.”

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 Sen. Mahabir (cont'd)

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So there is a lot of animation.

“I understand that there is or was one meeting place in Belmont, at which their meetings were conducted with such fervour that the shouting”—and the—“singing and”—the—“noise generally could be heard somewhere about the transfer station.”

I am to determine, Madam President, where that transfer station might be.

“It is not only the inconvenience caused by the noise which they make, that has given rise to this legislation, but also the fact that from the information that has been received, the practices which are indulged in are not such as should be tolerated in a well conducted community.”

So that there are two issues here: one is general nuisance and noise; and one is the kind of practices that they are indulged in.

Now, Madam President, right now—there was a committee stage then. In committee stage:

Hon. Dr. Prada: Clause 6, what does it mean?

And may I quote clause 6, Madam President. Before I quote clause 6, I simply would like to refer to Sen. Cummings where he said, that the Shouters had to retire to the forest.

Under clause 3 of the Ordinance it says:

“It shall be an offence against this Ordinance for any person to hold or to take part in or to attend any Shouters’ meeting or for any Shouters’ meeting to be held in any part of the Colony indoors or in the open air at any time of the day or night.”

So, you were not protected even in the forest when this Ordinance was in place.

But the clause 6 that Dr. Prada spoke about was this.

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Sen. Mahabir (cont'd)

“It shall be an offence against this Ordinance for any person at or in the vicinity of any Shouters’ meeting to commit or cause to be committed or to induce or to persuade to be committed any act of indecency.”

So:

Dr. Prada: What does clause 6 mean? Inspector General...

We have to be very careful, Madam President, the committee stage in the Parliament, we recorded—100 years from now someone may very well be recording us.

Inspector General: There is a building in connection with this ceremony which is called the mourners’ house. In this, these being initiated are placed and are not supposed to speak during this period and when they come out they are generally very emaciated.

Dr. Prada: That is hardly indecent.

Inspector General: At the meeting they take their clothes off and commit all sorts of indecent acts when they get to shaking.

Madam President, it is reading the *Hansard* at the time demonstrates how far we in Trinidad and Tobago have come with respect to understanding various beliefs. There is an inter-religious organization. What transpired in 1917, clearly there was no evidence, clearly there was fabrication, there was untruth, it did not happen, it did not occur, but it passed and what occurred was a piece of law which infringed upon a right in a particularly objective way.

And, Madam President, in 1951 the legislators at the time saw it fit, they did not wait until independence to repeal this legislation, they saw it for what it was. It was an oppressive and a discriminatory law. And, Madam President, we tend in this country not to recognize what we have here that is good. We focus a great deal

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Sen. Mahabir (cont'd)

on the negative. And Sen. Mark alluded to a point that we are the only country which celebrates that Spiritual Shouter Baptist holiday. Up in St. Vincent, apparently, as Sen. Cummings had indicated, they outlawed the practice. But when I did my research I discovered that Trinidad and Tobago is one of the few countries if not the only country in the world to celebrate the end of religious persecution.

There was persecution in Europe, the Huguenots, the Jews, the pilgrims leaving England, but we are perhaps the only country in the world which celebrates the end of religious persecution. And Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day defines for us, in my mind, what we are as a people. There is religious acceptance, there is religious tolerance, there is a feeling in Trinidad and Tobago that if you want to be left alone you will be left in the mountain to communicate as you see fit, and if you want to be a bit more vocal, that is your right to so do.

And when, Madam President, we as a people have to discuss with other people, I think, we should let them know that Trinidad and Tobago is a country in which religious rights and freedoms are enshrined so much so, not only in our Constitution, but also in a public holiday.

And, Madam President, on behalf of the Independent Bench, on behalf of all colleagues on my bench, I want to send greetings, sincere greetings, to all members of the Baptist community to let them know that we celebrate with them. We understand the tribulations and the hardships they have had to endure, but after 100 years they are still a vibrant community, a strong community, a progressive community, part of the mosaic of Trinidad and Tobago. They have helped define for us the national psyche on religious tolerance, and I say a happy Baptist day, not only to members of the community, but to all of us in the country and in the Chamber, and I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

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Madam President: Hon. Senators, I too wish to join in congratulating the Spiritual Shouter Baptist community on the celebration this year of Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day.

This holiday, as we have heard, celebrates the repeal on March 30, 1951 of the 1917 Shouter Prohibition Ordinance. That Ordinance, unfairly and unjustifiably, prohibited the celebration of many aspects of the faith of Spiritual Baptists. It stood as an unfortunate example of the intolerance and the prejudice existing at that time. There is much that we as a nation can learn from the triumphant struggle of Spiritual Shouter Baptists to overthrow the shackles of institutionalized intolerance and prejudice that were inflicted upon them for so long. We should learn their self-belief. We should emulate their enduring belief in the goodness of our society as a whole, and we should aspire to work as tirelessly as they did to rid society of all its prejudices towards its constituent parts.

It is my hope that collectively all of us in this Chamber will recommit ourselves and our country to those beliefs and those ideals. I wish the Spiritual Shouter Baptist community and all of Trinidad and Tobago a wonderful and a happy Spiritual Shouter Baptist Liberation Day 2017.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.45p.m.