

**SENATE**

*Tuesday, May 26, 2020*

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Errata re: Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year ended September 30, 2019. [*The Minister of Public Administration and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Allyson West)*]
2. Report on the Trinidad and Tobago Delegation to the Caribbean Stakeholder Meeting ahead of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action held in Barbados on February 10—11, 2020. [*The Vice-President (Sen. Nigel De Freitas)*]
3. Ministerial Response of the Ministry Rural Development and Local Government to the Twelfth Report of the Joint Select Committee on State Enterprises on an inquiry to assess the performance of the Community-based Environmental Protection and Enhancement Programme (CEPEP), and its operations. [*The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein)*]

**URGENT QUESTIONS**

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, I expect all Ministers to be here for Urgent Questions. I am seeing the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance, so I urge you to stand down to

**UNREVISED**

the Minister of Public Utilities for a couple of minutes—[*Crosstalk*] He is here? [*Crosstalk*] Well okay. Well then we will answer all three, but probably not necessarily in that order.

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark, let us treat with question number 2. [*Crosstalk*] All right, Sen. Mark, question number 1.

**Penal/Debe Water Distribution Issue  
(Measures Taken to Address)**

**Sen. Wade Mark:** Thank you, Madam President. To the hon. Minister of Public Utilities: In light of the water distribution issue negatively impacting residents in the Penal/Debe region who have been without pipe-borne water for over 21 days, can the Minister indicate what immediate measures will be taken to address this situation?

**The Minister of Public Utilities and Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds):** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, the country is now coming to the end of a very harsh dry season which negatively impacts WASA's capacity to treat and to produce water for the benefit of the citizens of this Republic. Our reservoirs are very significantly below the long term averages. For example, the Arena Reservoir is 29.43 per cent compared to the national or the long term average of 58.39. That kind of record is consistent across all of our reservoirs, Madam President.

The situation is of course affecting the reliability of supply to various communities including Penal/Debe. Customers at the extremities of our system or on the higher levels of the country are having particular difficulty. The Penal/Debe area primarily gets water from the Caroni Water Treatment Plant and the Desalcott system, and as well the Navet Water Treatment Plant. And there are some localized sources like Clarke Road Water Treatment Plant and Penal Water

Treatment Plant. Production at Caroni has been reduced as a result of this dry season. We had a terrible dry season last, and this one is also very dry with reductions in rainfall and storage, Madam President. For an example, between the 13<sup>th</sup> of May and—the end of April and the 13<sup>th</sup> of May production was reduced from 25 to 28 million gallons a day down to 20 to 25 million gallons a day, closer to 20 million gallons a day, a reduction of five to eight million gallons a day from the Caroni waste water treatment plant.

**Madam President:** Minister, your time is up.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** Thank you.

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, can the Minister indicate what steps are being taken by WASA to have water re-routed or redistributed from areas that are now getting water 24/7 a day, so that those residents in the areas identified can at least receive some water in their taps.

**Hon. F. Hinds:** First of all, it is not correct to say that the areas identified have not been without water supply. That is an exaggeration. And in terms of what is actually being done, we are attempting, over the last 48 hours, to increase our water production and distribution and using the truck borne system to supplement on the extremities and the higher levels, Madam President.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, is the Minister aware that the residents in the community identified have been without water for over 21 days? Is the Minister aware of this?

**Hon. F. Hinds:** That too is grossly exaggerated. I have facts from WASA who is responsible for distributing it and in no case 21 days is a reality.

**Sen. Mark:** Can I go on, Madam President.

**Madam President:** Next question, Sen. Mark.

**Unknown and Unregistered Tobago Hotel Businesses  
(Review of Distribution of Relief Grants)**

**Sen. Wade Mark:** Thank you, Madam President. To the Prime Minister: In light of reports that unknown and unregistered hotel businesses in Tobago are targeted to receive portions of Government's \$50 million bailout, can the Prime Minister indicate whether the THA intends to review the guidelines governing the distribution of relief grants?

**The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young):** Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, the first point to be made, and I know it might be lost on some, is that the Tobago House of Assembly governs the whole of Tobago. The Tobago House of Assembly governance structure is with respect to all of the persons in Tobago. So the Tobago House of Assembly is best suited to decide, to develop and to distribute the policy with respect to the distribution of the \$50 million that is being transferred from central government to help the hotel industry in Tobago.

What has arisen is the Tobago company, the Tobago company set up to deal with Tobago Tourism Agency Limited had done an audit, they have done an audit of—an all-inclusive audit, and that is what is being used by the Tobago House of Assembly who have the duty to deal with all persons. Who the Tobago Hoteliers Association may be dealing with is their membership alone. So this is not even a storm in a tea cup, it is a non-issue and the Tobago House of Assembly in their normal governance structure will decide the allocation policy of this \$50million to assist the hotel industry in Tobago.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, can the Minister indicate in instances where fraud could be involved, where unregistered businesses can receive portion of this \$50 million taxpayers, can the Minister advise what steps will be taken by the THA to avoid fraud in the distribution of funds by the Tobago House of Assembly.

**Hon. S. Young:** Madam President, there is so much supposition in there it is a little difficult to decipher what exactly is the question. First of all, I am certain that no unregistered business would be granted any money by the Tobago House of Assembly in their governance and in their distribution of this \$50 million to the hotel industry in Tobago. So if that is not going to happen, I do not understand how we then jump from there to instances of fraud. But I can say thank God it is a PNM Tobago House of Assembly, so the instances of that would be very, very greatly reduced if none or minimal. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Dr. Dillon-Remy:** Madam President.

**Madam President:** Sen. Dillon-Remy.

**Sen. Dr. Dillon-Remy:** Madam President, could the Minister indicate what is the process for the allocation of these grants?

**Hon. S. Young:** Madam President, thank you very much for that question. The process will be worked out by the Tobago House of Assembly who is in charge of the governance structure in Tobago. They will work out the policy, the procedure and they will be the ones in charge of the distribution and allocation of these moneys.

### **Moody's Report**

#### **(Credit Rating Implications)**

**Sen. Wade Mark:** Madam President, thank you. To the Minister of Finance: In light of Moody's recent report which has changed the country's credit rating from stable to negative, can the Minister indicate whether there are any implications for the national economy in the immediate, short and medium term outlook?

**The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert):** Thank you very much, Madam President. The question is based on a false premise. Trinidad and Tobago's credit rating has not changed. Trinidad and Tobago credit rating remains Ba1 with

Moody's and triple BBB-with Standard & Poor's. The recent publication by Moody's related to the outlook. There is a huge difference between an outlook and a rating. Our rating with Moody's remains exactly as it was one year ago. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, can I ask the hon. Minister who seems to be very optimistic on this negative from stable, can the Minister indicate whether the cost of borrowing on the international capital market by the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago will increase as a result of this change from stable to negative. Can I ask the Minister to clarify for us?

**Hon. C. Imbert:** Madam President, I am not optimistic, I am truthful. I want to repeat that Trinidad and Tobago's credit rating has not changed. All that has changed is the outlook, and the outlook of virtually every single country in the world that has been assessed by Moody's within the last month or two has changed to negative and it is obvious why. We have a global pandemic called COVID-19. If the hon. Senator had read, through you, Madam President, the actual note from Moody's, one would see that the outlook has changed from stable to negative because of the tremendous uncertainty associated with COVID-19 which is only normal. And, no, we do not expect any issue with respect to the interest rate at which we borrow because of this, because our rating remains the same. It has not changed. And I do not appreciate, Madam President, when the hon. Senator keeps pretending that our rating is now negative. Our rating is Ba1.

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, the time for urgent questions has expired.

**Sen. Mark:** You have escaped.

**Hon. C. Imbert:** You have escaped.

**Sen. Mark:** You have escaped. [*Crosstalk and laughter*]

## ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, the Government is pleased to announce that it will be answering questions Nos. 78, 108 and 109. We ask for a two-week deferral of question 110.

**Madam President:** Question No. 110 is deferred for two weeks.

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

### Foreign Direct Investment (Details of)

**110.** In light of the increase in this country's foreign debt obligation, can the hon. Minister of Finance indicate what new sources of foreign direct investment are being attracted by the Government to assist in financing this country's external debt commitment?

*Question, by leave, deferred.*

### Tobago Regional Health Authority

**78. Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Prime Minister:

Given the return to work of seven Tobago Regional Health Authority (TRHA) employees, who were sent on administrative leave in March 2019 pending the completion of an independent payroll audit, can the Prime Minister indicate the following:

- (i) whether the said payroll audit has been completed; and
- (ii) if the answer to (i) is in the affirmative, can the Senate be provided with a copy of the audit report?

**The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young):** Thank you very much, Madam President.

Madam President, the payroll audit has been completed and a copy of the audit report has been circulated to hon. Senators.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, can the hon. Minister indicate some of the implications of this audit?

**Madam President:** No. Sen. Mark, that question does not arise.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, can I ask the hon. Minister, what was the sum of moneys that would have been misallocated in this particular matter.

**Madam President:** That question also does not arise, Sen. Mark, based on the question that has been posed and the response received.

**Hon. S. Young:** He did not expect trans—

**Sen. Mark:** So, Madam President, we are being advised by the hon. Minister on behalf of the Prime Minister that the audit is in our possession. Am I right?

**Hon. S. Young:** Madam President, I repeat. I can understand Sen. Mark's discomfort at the fact that there has been complete transparency and accountability. So I will repeat for his benefit. The payroll audit has been completed and a copy of the audit report has been circulated to hon. Senators.

*Vide end of sitting for written part of the answer.*

**Sen. Mark:** I will go on to the next—

**Madam President:** Next question, Sen. Mark.

**Sen. Mark:** Question No.—is it 108 Madam?

**Madam President:** It is, 108.

### **Red House Restoration Project (Details of Contractors)**

**108. Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Prime Minister:

With regard to the Red House Restoration Project, can the Prime Minister advise as to the following:



- (i) whether all contractors engaged by UDeCOTT on the project have been paid;
- (ii) how many contractors, if any, are still owed as at January 31, 2020; and
- (iii) how much money is owed to each contractor?

**The Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young):** Madam President, the irony of the person asking this question with respect to the Red House should not be lost. Under the previous administration, the then Speaker of the House chaired a committee with respect to the restoration of the Red House and sent up the potential cost for the restoration astronomically, including over \$300 million, close to \$400 million, to be spent on a companion building, gave out a contract for well over \$100 million for the restoration of a roof that was never completed. And that is the legacy of the former Speaker of the House in the previous administration in trying to restore the Red House.

I am happy to say that under this administration, all contractors engaged by UDeCOTT on the Red House Restoration project have been paid. The respective contract sums with the exception of retention sums which will be released upon the expiration of the defects liability period for the respective contracts. And then as at January 31, 2020, which is when this question was dated as at, no contractors were owed and thirdly, at present no money is owed to any contractor. And it should be noted, Madam President, that in addition to the above, claims for variations made by contractors are currently being assessed.

So the contract sums have been settled, save for retention which is in accordance with the contract and any variations that there were, are in the process of being assessed for payment.

**Sen. Mark:** Well first of all, let me remind the hon. Minister of National Security that the former Speaker never gave out any contract—

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark, Sen. Mark.

**Sen. Mark:**—to anybody.

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark.

**Sen. Mark:** So I think I need to put that on the record.

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark.

**Sen. Mark:** Yes, I am going to ask my question.

**Madam President:** No, hold on. You asked a question. You are not here at this stage to be making any speeches. So ask the question please, Sen. Mark.

**Sen. Mark:** He made a statement.

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark.

**Sen. Mark:** Yes.

**Madam President:** Please take your seat. I ask you to remember at what stage of the Order Paper we are at and I ask you, please, to conform to my rulings. Please ask your supplementary question.

**Sen. Mark:** Can this beleaguered Minister—

**Madam President:** No. Sen. Mark, pose your supplemental question and no more.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, through you, I am guided accordingly. Can this outgoing Minister—

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark, this is the second time, I ask you, please, please, put your question only to this Minister.

**Sen. Mark:** Yes. Madam President, can I ask, through you, if the Minister can share with this honourable Senate the actual value of the claims of variation that is now being addressed by UDeCOTT in respect of the contractors identified and/or

outlined.

**Hon. S. Young:** Thank you very much, Madam President. I understand the difficulties that Sen. Mark just found himself in, hundreds of millions dissipating—

**Sen. Mark:** I found myself in no—

**Hon. S. Young:** So, Madam President, the answer—

**Sen. Mark:** [*Inaudible*]

**Hon. S. Young:** Wow.

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark! Minister. Please! Let this be the last time that I have to say anything or we will move on to the next question. Minister, please answer the question.

**Hon. S. Young:** Madam President, I am certain that I heard Sen. Mark make a comment a short while ago calling me an “ole tief”, and I would like that moved from the *Hansard*, please.

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark, please withdraw and apologize for that statement.

**Sen. Mark:** I withdraw at this time. I apologize at this time but, Madam President, could you guide this gentleman, this Minister, from imputing improper motive to my good name and character.

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark, in light of the fact that I am making numerous rulings on this question, I will ask you to move on to the next question.

**Sen. Mark:** Yeah, no problem. I will defend my good name against him.

**Madam President:** And Sen. Mark, I will ask you to move on to the next question without any more—

**Sen. Mark:** Thank you, thank you, thank you, Madam President.

**Justice Rolston Nelson Investigation  
(Award of Automated Passport Kiosks Contract)**

**109. Sen. Wade Mark** asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

In light of the investigation by retired Justice Rolston Nelson into the circumstances surrounding the award of a contract for automated passport kiosks at the Piarco and ANR Robinson International Airports, can the Minister advise as to the following:

- (i) whether the investigation has been completed;
- (ii) if the answer to (i) is in the affirmative, has the management of the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago been found to be derelict in their responsibilities;
- (iii) if the answer to (ii) is in the affirmative, what action, if any, will be taken against said management; and
- (iv) are the automated passport kiosks at both airports operational?

**The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan):**

Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, with regard to the investigation by retired Justice Rolston Nelson into the circumstances surrounding the award of a contract for automated passport kiosks at the Piarco International Airport and the ANR International Airport, I wish to advise as follows:

1. The investigation has been completed;
2. The report identified serious corporate governance issues and related issues regarding the procurement of the Automated Passport Control Kiosks. These issues are under review at this time;
3. The report with its findings has been referred to the Board of the Airports Authority and the Office of the Attorney General for legal advice on the appropriate course of action to be taken that are in the best interest of the Airports Authority and the State; and
4. The Automated Passport Control Kiosk are not operational at the airport at this time since there are a number legal issues that are being

examined at this time.

In any event with the closure of our borders there is no passenger traffic through our airports at this time. I thank you.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, may I ask, through you, if the Minister can identify some of the serious governance issues surrounding this entire award as he outlined a short while ago.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam President, at this point in time there is an ongoing investigation and I am unable to answer that question. However, if the Member poses the question in the appropriate way and the legal team at the Ministry gives the okay, I will be able to answer the question. Thank you.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, can the Minister indicate whether the Government is taking a decision to terminate the contract between NOVO and the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago given these irregularity and governance issues identified.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam President, again there is an ongoing investigation at the Airports Authority. The Airports Authority is an authority that has the purview to sign and terminate contracts without the guidance of the Government. At this point in time the Government is waiting for a report from the Airports Authority. And again, if the Member poses that question through the right channels I will be able to seek the information and submit.

**Sen. Mark:** Madam President, may I also ask the hon. Minister, how long does the Minister envisage this matter to last given the importance of it and over \$300 million is involved. So can the Minister indicate whether he can share with this Parliament a time frame for concluding this very important matter?

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Madam President, again there is an ongoing investigation. The report has been sent to the Airports Authority and the Attorney

General and the Minister is not getting involved in that aspect of investigation. Immediately upon receiving a report from the Airports Authority it will be laid in the Cabinet, it will move on to the Cabinet and only then will the Minister be able to give any timeline as to the conclusion of this investigation.

**Sen. Mark:** Can the Minister indicate, Madam President, whether the contractor, the award of that contract, is intact as we speak. Can the Minister advise whether the contract between NOVO and the Airports Authority of Trinidad and Tobago is fully intact?

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

**Sen. Mark:** Well, Madam President—

**Madam President:** That is it Sen. Mark, you have utilized all your supplemental—

**Sen. Mark:** I have any further questions, Ma'am?

**Madam President:** No.

**Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan:** Thank you. [*Crosstalk*]

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER  
(LEAVE)**

**Water Shortage Crisis  
(Government's Failure to Address)**

**Sen. Saddam Hosein:** [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, in accordance with Standing Order 16, I hereby seek your leave to move the adjournment of the Senate for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent public importance, that is, the failure of the Government to address the ongoing water shortage crisis and the dreadful impacts that it will have on its citizenry if not addressed urgently.

The matter is definite because it pertains specifically to thousands of citizens from central, south and parts of east and north Trinidad who have been suffering due to the water shortage crisis that they have been experiencing for over four weeks.

The matter is definite as the Government has failed to take any adequate measures to bring relief to the citizens who are suffering as a result of the water shortage crisis. The matter is urgent because it is an ongoing issue which has been affecting citizens for weeks. The matter, if not addressed immediately, will bring more hardship to the affected citizens.

The matter is of public importance as the failure of the Government to provide an essential commodity such as water to the population will have a dire consequence. Water is essential for sanitation and personal hygiene which are core features in the new guidelines issued by the Ministry of Health for reopening business facilities and institutions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The failure of the Government to act swiftly and competently to address the worsening situation will lead to a national water crisis with attendant social and economic turmoil. I thank you very much, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, I am not satisfied that this matter as presented qualifies under the Standing Order. As I have ruled in earlier matters, the threshold required has not been met to have this matter approved. I also wish to point out that this matter was dealt with as an urgent question.

**2.00 p.m.**

**SERIOUS CRIME  
(CONDEMNATION OF GOVERNMENT)**

[Second Day]

*Order for resuming adjourned debate on question* [February 04, 2020]:

*Be it resolved* that this Senate condemn the Government for its failure to effectively deal with the unacceptable and serious crime situation affecting law-abiding citizens.

*Question again proposed.*

**UNREVISED**

**Madam President:** Members who have spoken on this matter already are Sen. Saddam Hosein, who moved the Motion; the hon. Stuart Young, MP, Minister of National Security and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister; Sen. Paul Richards; Sen. Sean Sobers; Sen. the Hon. Clarence Rambharat, Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. Sen. Haynes. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Anita Haynes:** Thank you, Madam President. I thank you for the opportunity to join in this debate on a Motion:

*Be it resolved* that this Senate condemn the Government for its failure to effectively deal with the unacceptable and serious crime situation affecting law-abiding citizens

I wish to thank my Senate colleague, Sen. Saddam Hosein for bringing a very important and critical Motion that is grounded in facts, Madam President. It is a fact that it is the Government's responsibility to ensure public safety and security of the citizenry. That is an undeniable fact. It is also a fact that thousands of citizens and businesses have been negatively affected by the high levels of crime in Trinidad and Tobago. And, Madam President, it is most definitely a fact that the Government, the present Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago ought to be resoundingly condemned for its failure to effectively deal with the crime situation, which remains both unacceptable and serious.

In revising the earlier speakers, Madam President, as I prepared for the debate, it showed very clearly why we are in the situation that we are in. A Senator proposes a Motion for debate that speaks to a Government that has not been able to effectively address a crime situation and two of the Members of the Government Bench, in addressing this important and critical Motion talking about the safety and security of our citizens, a primary role of the Government, sought instead of highlighting what they would have or have done in what is almost their



full term in office, Madam President, they sought to continue and perpetuate a blame game, an old narrative, Madam President, of whose fault is it, pointing fingers, Madam President. And Trinidad and Tobago looked on then and they will look on today, as we discuss a number one issue facing the people of our country that we do not feel safe in our homes, we do not feel safe leaving our homes, and it is the responsibility of the Government to address those concerns.

What is needed, Madam President, is a holistic approach, a holistic approach to dealing with the situation that we have found ourselves in as a nation. I wish to remind Members of the Government Bench who would speak today on this Motion, of a quote by their political leader and the Prime Minister of this country, Dr. Keith Rowley, who said:

Anytime the Government resorts to blaming the Opposition for its failure to deliver on its mandate and their responsibilities to the people, it is a clear sign that they have accepted and outlived their usefulness to the people of this country.

Madam President, I have no doubt that as we have heard on the last occasion and we will hear again today a continuation of blame, finger pointing, and what we will absolutely not hear is any sort of solution or progressive policies and progressive reforms or proposals coming from this PNM Government, Madam President.

Recently, the Attorney General held a press conference. This press conference, Madam President, that I had to watch the replay of, showed exactly what I am talking about. It is taking what happened in the Parliament and pushing it to create a narrative, a narrative that they hoped I am sure, to distract from the issues of the day, that they hoped would propel the people of Trinidad and Tobago into a line of thinking that would only benefit them. Instead of stating to the

people of Trinidad and Tobago clearly and distinctly what the merits of the legislation that they were seeking to produce to put forward as a solution meant, they sought instead, the Attorney General, Madam President, in particular, sought instead to—I cannot even find the words to describe the display that I saw for that particular press conference. But suffice it to say, Madam President, I know that the Attorney General is yet to speak in this debate and it is my hope that as the people of Trinidad and Tobago look on, and look on at our debate at the hope that we as a Parliament can come together and discuss solutions; that we as a Parliament and we as leaders in society can speak to issues facing our country, critical issues facing our country, that we would be able to do so in a manner that takes our country forward, that takes Trinidad and Tobago as a nation forward.

In that regard, Madam President, I have stated before that the Motion laid by my Senate colleague is in fact—is grounded in facts and so, there is no need to go through the crime data and the statistics which show that this Government has failed to effectively deal with the crime situation, but it allows us to talk, Madam President, about what would a different government do? What would somebody who has or a group of persons who have given a lot of thought to the situation that is facing us, and put all politics aside, and all political rhetoric aside, who saw it fit to propose very early on, Madam President, a plan of action? What we intend to do—should the people of Trinidad and Tobago ensure us with the mandate to protecting their safety and security?

I will start, Madam President, with the Bail (Amdt.) Bill, which I am sure the press conference I referred to dealt with, but which I am sure the Attorney General is coming here today to speak of. As it stands, Madam President, the United National Congress, our political leader, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, on

speaking on the bail legislation and on why the United National Congress opted not to support the bail legislation in its form at this time, Madam President, we—it was not as anybody on the Government side sought to say that we are in favour of higher crime, or that we were obstructionists, because the record will show, Madam President, that when the legislation is good, when it is intending to benefit all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, that they will get the Opposition's support and where we believe the legislation is in fact too draconian, and it has a negative impact on the rights of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that we will withhold our support.

And so, in speaking on bail reform as a whole, Madam President, Mrs. Persad-Bissessar is and our team, the United National Congress as a team is proposing a totality of bail reform, or indeed ways in which we can look at our system and ensure that it is equitable and that we can preserve rights without being too draconian, and have an equitable approach, Madam President. And these include systems that would allow persons—in our proposed bail reform package, we will look at establishing a minimum security detention centre in south, central, north and east Trinidad and Tobago. These will look to house nonviolent offenders closest to their addresses making it easier for family visits.

Madam President, when we seek to approach the people of Trinidad and Tobago and we say to them, if you trust us, if you trust us with your safety and security, we would not only propose legislative reforms, but we understand that the Executive, any executive, any government, has a certain amount of power to deal with the situations that face the country. We would say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and I say to them today that, we know you are worried about your safety and security, about your family's safety and your family's security. And

that no government, no government should seek to weaponize that fear, and seek to weaponize that fear in a way that would allow you to give up your rights in exchange for safety and security. We understand the social contract and we understand that there is the responsibility of the Government, and what we have seen, Madam President, is a Government right now that has thrown their hands in the air said, "It is not our job. It is the job of the police service to reduce the crime statistics. It is the job of the Opposition to support any piece of legislation that we bring forward." It is the job of everybody else but it is not their job. And this is why the Motion I think is very correct to condemn the Government for effectively dealing with the crime situation simply because they have told us time and time again that it is not their job to do this.

Any government seeking to create a safe and secure environment for our citizens, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, must, Madam President, and I do mean must, empower the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. In empowering the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the proposals in our crime plan for Trinidad and Tobago and our plan to return safety and security to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we would work with the TTPS and empower the TTPS to improve crime detection in ensuring crime prevention, so that our citizens can feel safer in their homes, schools, workplaces, and daily activities.

Madam President, we are not about wild accusations or promises that are without detail. When we talk about how we would do this, we would look at the root causes of crime: poverty, inequality, lack of opportunity. Madam President, these are critical elements that play into the crime situation that is currently plaguing our society. A common thread you would find running through all of the plans that a United National Congress is proposing, would be investing in our

people through education and training.

Madam President, there were a number of initiatives and programmes set to create an equitable society, a space for all of us in Trinidad and Tobago where equity of opportunity would have transformed Trinidad and Tobago and you would not get that sense. I think Dr. Rowley in a speech in 2016, spoke about an angry population, that there are pockets of violence in society where people felt angry, and that led to the kind of criminality that we were seeing nationwide. Where is this anger coming from, Madam President? This anger could only come from a feeling of being left out by society. A feeling that there are some people who can make it while some of us, despite our best efforts, may not be able to access the same kind of opportunities that our fellow Trinidadians and Tobagonians may be able to.

And so, Madam President, we would look at the programmes and initiatives started before in the period 2010 to 2015, that were dedicated towards transforming all levels of our education sector. The reason, Madam President, that education is important in any debate discussing crime and criminality is because that is how you can move an entire generation out of the abyss that we have found ourselves in. Equality in opportunity and expanding educational opportunities that would offer opportunities in skill training and trade qualifications, Madam President, would be essential in tackling the crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago. The goal is inclusive and it is equitable. Our goals are an inclusive and equitable society.

Now, Madam President, I know that Members of the Government have said time and time again that they did not have money, that there simply was not enough money to do these things, but their spending pattern would show, Madam

President, that is quite simply not true. It is a question of priorities and if you prioritize investing in the people of Trinidad and Tobago, you would definitely have seen the rewards of that investment. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, in dealing with hotspots we would look to create safe zones, reintroduce community policing, and ensuring police presence, traffic management, and other strategic actions for systematic and drastic reduction in crime within defined time frames. The statistics are on our side, Madam President. Between 2010 to 2015, we saw a decline in the numbers. When this Government came into power and sought to enact whatever policies or dismantle the policies they thought were not working and enact new policies, we saw in this five-year period, two years, Madam President, of murders crossing the 500 mark. We have not seen that in 10 years, so the numbers are on our side when we say what they have attempted to do, quite simply did not work.

Madam President, we will also, as I said, provide resources to rebuild trust between law enforcement and the community. This goes across all of our policies, Madam President. All of the policies that we propose are looking at community building and ensuring—

**Madam President:** Sen. Haynes, you have five more minutes.

**Sen. A. Haynes:** Thank you, Madam President—and ensuring that Trinidad and Tobago, how we build our nation is by ensuring that we build each community up. Every community is different, every community has its different needs, different desires, and the only way you can know that is through effective representation. So we would take tackling the crime situation from a top-down approach, to a bottom-up approach, Madam President. By looking at our communities in their individual needs, we propose the introduction of community and village

coordinator officer programmes, whereby officers return to walk and talk with members of the communities. This will serve not only for the purpose of intelligence gathering and crime detection, but for building trust within the communities that they serve.

Madam President, we have thought long and hard about this crime situation. Despite what the Government has done for almost five years now which is find ways, new and novel ways to point fingers and find anybody else to blame for their failures and blatant incompetence, we set to work, Madam President. We set to work to ensure that we had a detailed plan, grounded in fact, grounded in data, grounded in solutions. We have disaggregated into short-term, medium-term and long-term solutions. We have put these plans, Madam President, for public consumption earlier on because the time has gone, Madam President, the time is over for propaganda, blame game, finger pointing. The time to get to work is now. Trinidad and Tobago is depending on all of us, Madam President, all of us as leaders in society, as persons who seek to hold office, who may not seek to hold office, but also have an interest in the development of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam President, they are depending on us to look at these plans, to discuss these plans with some semblance of logic, of critique, and come up with something, a workable solution, Madam President, that we can all get behind to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago is once again a safe paradise. Thank you, Madam President.

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

**Sen. Anthony Vieira:** Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, prior this COVID-19 and the COVID-19 stay home regulations, crime was rampant and at an all-time high. The stay home regulations have slowed down gun battles between

rival gangs but crime remains a real and present danger. I agree, it is the Government's responsibility to ensure public safety and security of the citizenry, and that thousands of citizens have been negatively impacted by the high levels of crime in Trinidad and Tobago. This Motion challenges us to reflect on crime and the policies used by Government in combating crime. Crime is a multi-headed hydra which requires a multipronged approach, and there are as many views on what needs to be done to solve crime as there are citizens in this country.

It reminds me of the Indian folk tale about the six blind men and the elephant. Not knowing what an elephant was, they argued day and night on the subject. When they eventually encountered the animal, each had his own interpretation depending on the part he touched. If you recall the story, the first, touching the side of the animal declared it was like a wall; the second, touching the trunk was convinced it was like a large snake; the third, touching the tusks, felt the creature was as sharp and deadly as a spear; the fourth, touching one of the legs proclaimed it was an extremely large cow; the fifth, feeling an ear, believed it was like a large fan; the sixth, holding the tail, declared it was a little more than a piece of rope. Each though partly right, was very wrong and it was only by putting all the parts together that a true picture could emerge, and like the proverbial elephant, there are many parts to crime. There is violent crime: rape, murder, robbery, kidnapping. There is hidden crime: incest child abuse, domestic violence. There is organized crime: counterfeiting, illegal quarrying, drugs, arms, human trafficking. There is cybercrime, and there is white collar crime: embezzlement, fraud, tax evasion, money laundering and intellectual property offences. So, we should not be like the six blind men, certain and strident about one part of the elephant while missing the bigger picture. Charging in with guns blazing and sirens blaring is



counterproductive when you are treating with incest and child abuse. Capturing or killing the foot soldiers of organized crime is little cause for celebration.

The other day one of my neighbours cut down a mango tree in his yard notwithstanding my appeals to the contrary. He did not do the actual cutting, he used a work crew. Now, getting angry or upset or pleading with his workers would have been an exercise in futility because each of them was easily replaceable and none of them were the directing minds, and it is the same with organized crime. Going behind minions is ineffective. One must follow the money, use intelligence, and exercise patience in snaring the directing minds.

Again, urban methods and approaches will not be appropriate when tackling predial larceny, illegal quarrying, wildlife traffickers. So, militarizing law enforcement and imprisonment must not and cannot be the only tools in our anti-crime toolkit. And focusing on the symptoms without understanding or treating with the causes will never solve the problem. Implicit in this Motion is the assumption that the Government can fix crime but I think that is idealistic and simplistic.

In order to tackle crime effectively we need to understand the drivers of crime and the organization of crime. We need the right tools and to shore up our systems which are already under great pressure, by providing them with the right support, by plugging the gaps, and by ensuring that our law enforcement agencies do not operate in silos. Most importantly, we need to recognize that tackling crime is everybody's business, not just the responsibility of government and law enforcement. Whether it is this Government or any other administration, piecemeal and ad hoc measures would not work, plaster and Scotch tape would not hold. I agree with Sen. Haynes that long-term holistic solutions are necessary. I

agree with her that resolving the crime situation is ultimately about shaping our society into a kinder, fairer and better place. Drastic social and economic changes will be needed.

Consider too, the needs and motivations of people who engage in crime. These can be biological in origin, they can be psychological in nature, or they can be socially induced. The causes of crime may include, for example, mental illness, drug addiction, crimes of passion because someone could not handle their emotions, poverty, social inequality, a breakdown of family and breakdowns in community, poorly designed housing projects and slums, and the fact that Trinidad and Tobago is in the middle of a global supply chain for organized crime. Each aspect has its own unique challenges which requires it being dealt with in a certain way. Law enforcement has its place but it also has its limits.

I am concerned for example, about our vulnerable young men, many of whom are less educated and will never earn as much as their female counterparts. This inequality between the sexes is a recipe for all kinds of societal problems. We should be asking, “Why our boys are not doing as well as our girls in school? Where are the male teachers, the absent fathers, the male role models?” When men are not socialized into becoming responsible, respectful, and internally strong, they are susceptible to the wrong types of peer pressure and to the influence of gangs. Getting tougher on crime per se will not solve this. In fact, it may even aggravate the situation. So, we as a society need to devise appropriate policies and programmes towards addressing the social conditions which create the catalyst for crime.

We cannot ignore the rising unemployment and the lack of opportunities, the low-end, dead end jobs with frequent periods of unemployment contributing to low

self-esteem. It is already hard for young graduates, far less for young people with poor educational backgrounds. And do not get me wrong, I do not want to associate criminality with being poor, because there are many poor who never commit crime, no matter how desperate their circumstances. Conversely, there are many well-off people who engage in criminal activity by non-physical and covert means, crooks and criminals in every sense of the word, but when we concentrate people who are already at risk in poorly designed housing projects, we create conditions for certain types of crime. No one subculture should be allowed to dominate a physical space. We need to structure housing in a way that mitigates against subcultures forming, especially those that are antisocial.

Another critical interplay, another critical factor is the interplay of the criminal justice system, the police, the DPP's department, legal aid, the courts, the prisons, as what criminals do and how criminal careers develop, can be influenced by the agents of criminal justice. Research suggests that reform of the criminal justice system is one of the best ways to reducing crime. The reactions of the criminal justice system can push suspects and first time offenders into criminal careers, or it can deter them from further crime. Promptness and certainty of punishment also affects criminal behaviour. If an offender is punished soon after committing a crime, both the specific deterrents of the individual concerned and general deterrence of the public tends to be greater than if the offender is not punished until years after.

Similarly, potential offenders think twice when they know they are not just facing a fine or going to get a slap on the wrist. The sentence should always fit the crime. Our courts must use the widest array of sentencing options, not just fine and imprisonment, but the ability to impose restitution orders, community service

orders, orders requiring offenders to attend educational programmes, vocational training, counselling, medical treatment, and also, to confiscate the proceeds of crime.

**2.30 p.m.**

We can pass all the laws we want and pontificate about zero crime tolerance, but if the criminal justice system is not working as a properly functioning ecosystem, we would not win the war against crime. [*Desk thumping*] One of the reasons people fall in line in Singapore is because there is a physical consequence for anti-social behaviour. So, perhaps, we should follow Singapore in making greater use of the Corporal Punishment (Offenders over Eighteen) Act which allows High Court judges to impose sentences of flogging to any male offender over 18 on being convicted, and maybe we can extend the jurisdiction to magistrates and include environmental offences, child abuse, domestic violence, licks for anybody who wants to lash women, who robs and beats old people or who sexually molests a child. But punishment cannot be the be all and end all. There must also be an emphasis on crime prevention, restorative justice and social rehabilitation.

Is it time to consider national service for our young men who are not studying or in full-time employment? [*Desk thumping*] Should we have boot camps designed to get offenders away from crime, gangs, and bad influencers by subjecting them to discipline, rigorous exercise, civics appreciation and strenuous work?

I sit behind Sen. Hosein. We serve together on committees. He is a hard-working, articulate and bright man. He is a man of faith and principle. His Motion is well-intentioned and I understand the sentiments behind it, but I think it misses

the mark. Can Government do better? Certainly, yes. But we have considered legislation brought by Government to tackle all manner of crime—bail, firearm, sexual offences, money laundering, white collar crime and we are also aware of important work being done with the Judiciary, the DPP's department and other stakeholders towards improving the criminal justice system and towards updating justice delivery to better suit the needs and circumstances of this time.

This Motion has generated and will generate useful ideas and incites, but the criminals will win when we get stuck in partisan politics, when we only engage in subjective objections and defensive posturing. We must find common ground. All things considered, while crime remains a cause for concern, I am not persuaded that there has been a failure on Government's part in tackling the scourge of crime.

Effectively dealing with crime can only be achieved by a combination of deterrence, enforcement and rehabilitation under an effective criminal justice system and this is a work in progress. We must be strategic. Dealing with the causes of crime and not just the results of crime cannot fall to government alone. It is our collective responsibility. It involves addressing the inequities in society, and I think it requires us as a people to transition from a spectator democracy to one that is a participatory democracy. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi):** Thank you, Madam President. I thank hon. Senators for, again, through you, Madam President, allowing me the opportunity to contribute to yet another debate in the Senate. Madam President, I want to pick up where Sen. Vieira just left off, and I would like to use this opportunity to connect dots. You see, Sen. Haynes in her submissions sought to anticipate some contribution that I, in her mind, was going to make to attribute a blame game. I do not need to address a blame game. Sen. Vieira is absolutely

correct. Crime is where it is because there are many parts to the equation. And I dare say now from this position, in this Senate today, that previous Governments have not addressed a holistic, articulating vision, and it is not called a crime plan as my opponents opposite often referred to it. It is called an anti-crime plan, an ACP if you want, that has the constituent elements.

I will speak today as a Government representative who can attest to what was done under my hand as Attorney General, our hand as Government, because we are a collective whole with many different parts working through many different Ministers; and permit me to address eight layers of work in addressing crime. Now, is crime a major issue in this country? Yes. Is it a major issue today? Has it been a major issue on years past agenda? Yes, it has been. The question is, can you acquit yourself as a Government in proffering a solution with the resources that you have? You see, resources in a governmental context include legislation, administrative reform, societal reform, and then a combination of hope based upon performance, vision informing progress, and permit me to dive directly into that.

So, we know in Trinidad and Tobago, we are roughly 1.3 million people. As Attorney General, the record shows the first place I started was in the prisons, a national dialogue on prisons. How much it costs? How many people were there? How long it took for matters to go ahead? Because that is the litmus test. If you got a prisoner incarcerated in pre-trial incarceration for 20 years then something is wrong in your society. You are spending billions of dollars in that condition, but there is no consequence to crime, therefore, there is no deterrent, therefore the justice system is not working, therefore the victim is not looked after, the innocent person is not acquitted and, therefore, society has no consequence and, therefore,

Sen. Vieira was absolutely right. One must address the criminal justice system.

So let me build out these eight layers and connect the work that this Government has done. Number one, at our core level first layer, we know that preliminary enquiries were up to 20 years in running. We know that the backlog is 43,000 indictable cases in arrears. We know that the disposition rate is at best 40 per cent per year with 60 per cent going into the backlog. We know that there is a high volume in the Magistracy, 146,000 cases per annum. We know that there is overcrowding of the near 4,000 prisoners incarceration. Do they all need to be there? Are they best accommodated? Are you creating criminals in the prisons?

We know that our courts were not developed for years. Madam President, 1985 was the last time we had a major court development in this country when we opened the Hall of Justice. We know that the Criminal Courts operated with no rules, no procedures, no technology, no staff. We know that there were no masters of court, we know that there were no registrars. We know that you had a Clerk of the Peace effectively running the entire Magistracy from an administrative level. So what did we do in the first layer? In the first layer, what we did was to address the court system. Let us talk about that.

We looked to the courts, we looked to the judicial officers and staff in the courts, we looked to the court personnel, we looked to the prosecutor who appears in court, we looked to the defence attorney who appears in court, we looked to forensics, intelligence, evidence; we looked to the police that managed 95 per cent of our prosecution and we looked to the prisons, because in that first layer you cannot talk about stamping out crime and passing laws only, as we saw the Opposition do in their five years prior to this, without addressing the system where that law must go to work. So here is what we did.

We created two Children Courts, one in Fyzabad, one in Port of Spain, borne out of the Children Division. We are at the cusp of opening new civil courts where the Parliament was at the Waterfront. We will save \$6 million in rent. We will have 12 Civil High Courts, two Appeal Courts, 32 judges' chambers occupying 13 floors. We will finish those projects in the month of June and when we do that, we open 64 new Criminal Courts under a Criminal Division at the Hall of Justice. When we do that, sorry, 69 courts—five mediation rooms, 40 courtrooms, 24 hearing rooms. Let me repeat that. By a simple move of renovating this Red House, moving the civil courts to the Waterfront, we are allowed the privilege of opening 69 new Criminal Courts in Port of Spain alone.

In San Fernando, we have already started the Magistrates' Court. That ground should break very shortly at Irvin Street. In Princes Town and Rio Claro, we have already allocated those courts for construction. The Siparia court expansion, the Arima court expansion. So we are adding beyond that new pool of courts across the rest of the country. We have created in this tenure, under this Government, 12 courts at the Remand Yard and Golden Grove.

In a three-month period alone, March 16, 2020, to May 13, 2020, thanks to opening these courts, we have stopped moving prisoners and we have had, in had period, 1,450 matters heard with the prisoner at the prison, the judge at the court and the lawyers at home. In that, we have had the implementation of electronic filing. Electronic filing was born by way of Practice Direction, April 02, 2020, but it was borne out of the payment into and out of court legislation that we did in 2018. It was borne out of section 24 in the Criminal Division and Traffic Courts Act which we did in 2017.

Judicial officers: your criminal justice system has to have people working in



the system. We move from 36 judges to 64 judges in the High Court in terms of legislative capacity. We did that in the Family and Children Division Act, 2016, the Miscellaneous Provisions (Supreme Court of Judicature) Act, 2018. We moved from 12 Court of Appeal judges to 15 Court of Appeal judges via the Miscellaneous Provisions (Supreme Court of Judicature) Act. In 2015, there were two Masters in the court, people who deal with the case preparation. We are now moving our way to 25 Masters, having appointed nine Children Court Masters, five Family Court Masters, five Criminal Court Masters, another 10 Masters to be appointed in a matter of weeks. You see, Masters prepare the cases for trial.

Cabinet then went and we legislatively moved the judicial age of retirement from 65 to 70 so our judges stop going abroad to carry out the rest of their career. They stay right here and work five more years of judicial tenure and expertise born and kept in Trinidad and Tobago.

Five temporary judges were appointed only on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, 2020. We increased the judicial allowances for retirement. You remember the Opposition said no? The Government said yes, the Independent said yes. We raised judicial pension to keep judges on the bench so they would not go to greener pastures. What did we do with magistrates? You remember the Magistrates Protection Act? We did stage one. Stage two, we just came back a couple of weeks ago and we dealt with full immunity for magistrates because we gave magistrates more judicial power and, therefore, they needed more protection.

What do we do in court personnel? How are you going to make the courts work if you do not have people to support the judges? Madam President, 217 non-standardized contract positions, 84 standardized positions, 93 new classes of assistants, 25 officers for judges' and masters' support, teams of five officers in

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each criminal master, five divisional secretaries, five divisional JSOs, five divisional assistants and five divisional orderlies. You see, you have to have judicial research officers as well. The judge does not work to do everything, we replicated the work we had in the Civil Division, we applied it in Criminal Division. This is not what we are going to do, you know. This is what has been done. Madam President, 64 unutilized positions brought back up, redeployed 22 vacant positions, Witness Support Unit, bail management unit, all installed and up and working.

You need a prosecutor to do the job, which is why the DPP in conducting 5 per cent prosecution in the TTPS in managing 95 per cent prosecution, the DPP's Office in Tobago opened. The DPP's Office at Port of Spain to be opened in the month of June. The DPP's Office at Gulf City in San Fernando in the course of being constructed out now having been secured. DPP personnel: we moved from 27 per cent occupancy to 40 per cent filled. We will take all of the vacant positions and fill them as soon as we open the Port of Spain office. Further staffing to be done, scanning positions.

We amended the law to allow the prosecutor to also include officially under law, the police prosecutors. That was done in the Indictable Proceedings (Amdt.) Act, 2019. What about the defence attorney? You got more judges, you have more prosecutors, you have courts, where are you getting a defence attorney from where 20 defence attorney controlled the bar? We passed administratively and birthed the public defenders system. We took a UNC Senator. The Senator then appeared, Hasine Shaikh, qualified as number one in the interviews and this Attorney General hired a UNC Senator to be the Chief Public Defender, up and running already. That building at Stanmore Avenue is weeks away from

completion where 30 new officers complement the Criminal Bar.

What do we have apart from public defenders? Well, you know that we did the \$100 million forensic lab with the Chinese Government to be built next to Mount Hope. You know that we operationalized the DNA position. We ordered the 15,000 DNA kits. They are in the system. We introduced the custodian, the custodian is at work. We allowed for the armourers to be improved. We dealt with intelligence, SSA (Amdt.) Act, Interception of Communications Act which was passed in this Senate already, is landmark intelligence; not what we are going to do but what has been done.

Madam President, what time is full time?

**Madam President:** You finish at 2.53.

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** 2.53?

**Madam President:** Yes.

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** Madam President, we dealt with witness anonymity in the evidence Bill. We dealt with the police service. We introduced new units, white collar units and prosecutorial units. We then go, if we take quickly in the couple of minutes—I wish I had time to explain it all. Let us go to layer two. You forget that there were no divisions of court prior to this Government. We birthed the Family and Children Division, the Criminal Division, the Road Traffic Division. We prepared the legislation for the e-probate, structures for the civil probate and other divisions; three divisions of court.

We brought in rules of court. How do you get the quickening of justice without rules? When we came in, we only had the Civil Proceedings Rules, the Maintenance Rules and the Family Proceedings Rules. Today, we have the Probate Rules, e-probate rules, CPR Amendments to 2019, Criminal Procedure

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Rules 2016 to 2019, Family and Children Division Rules, Child Rules, the Community Residence Rules, the Rehabilitation Centres Rules, the Judges Rules for children. None of those existed prior to my tenure as Attorney General.

We did legislative and process reform. There was no criminal case-flow management before this Government. There were no Masters of the Criminal Court preparing trials. There was no child management arena. There were no Registrars in the Magistrates' Court. For those of us who are practising attorneys, you have to understand a court requires a registrar. Can you imagine a Magistrates' Court with no structure and no registrar?

**Madam President:** Attorney General, you have five more minutes.

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, in the process reform we have included e-payment and e-filing. That is up and running and real in Trinidad and Tobago right now, not speculation. We have added in the motor vehicles and road traffic amendments. Those will de-clog the system to remove—By the time you count the removal of marijuana matters, motor vehicle and road traffic offences and preliminary enquiries, as tomorrow we go live with the motor vehicles and road traffic amendments, you are taking the magisterial case load down from 146,000 cases to 8,500 cases per year with 43 magistrates in a better reformed system, with process reform and rules, et cetera.

Madam President, we introduced court IT. Right now, lawyers are living in a First World environment where we are appearing in court virtually. Madam President, let us get to the fact that we introduced hard-crime measures. Let this Senate remember the Anti-Terrorism Act, the bail amendments, the anti-gang Act, the non-profit organizations, the economic sanctions Orders, the animal welfare, the sexual offences amendments, the firearm amendments, the cybercrime Bill, the

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sexual offences, other amendments that we did, the law enforcement officers Bill to create crimes for tipping off, et cetera, and protections; the Private Security Bill, the Trespass Act, the Interception of Communications Act, the SSA regs and SSA Act, hard crime being managed, but we did not stop there.

We went on to following the money. We did FATCA; we did Global Forum, we did civil asset forfeiture and explain your wealth; we did proceeds of crime. We amended the money laundering offences. We did amendments to the Income Tax Act, the Customs Act, the Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters Act. We did amendments in all of those structures so that we could take the profit out of crime. Who can forget that crime exists in companies, land and cash? Does this Senate recall the demonetization of the \$100 note? Madam President, \$500 million did not come back into the system. We killed \$500 million of corrupt money and several billion dollars are under suspicious activity investigation.

We have today the first two explain your wealth legislation matters in the courts as we speak. [*Desk thumping*] We have money laundering. But, Madam President, can you forget plea bargaining? MSI matters? Judge only trials? These are not hypothetical matters. These are all up and running. We have done judge-only matters for murder, one by way of acquittal, one by way of conviction which did not go to appeal. We dealt with 400 MSI matters over one long vacation period alone. Madam President, who can forget the gaming legislation killed by the UNC? Who can forget the financial obligations review, the Revenue Authority?

Madam President, this Government introduced campaign finance reform laid in the House of Representatives and put to a joint select committee. The motor vehicles and road traffic includes eyes everywhere: cameras, spot speed

enforcement, RF tag IDs. Madam President, we do not need to blame the UNC for anything. We need only look at our track record of what has been done. Relatively speaking, in a five-year period, we have taken 40 years of reform and brought them to life. Can we do more? Yes, and we will in the next five years in Government that we have. [*Desk thumping*] Can we ensure that the process is interrupted? Yes. But I can say here today, without doubt in my mind, that the reform that this Government has birthed is exponentially excellent, and I take pleasure in saying that, Madam President. I reject the Motion on behalf of the Government that Sen. Hosein has brought and I thank you for the opportunity to contribute. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Khadijah Ameen:** Madam President, I thank you for this opportunity, and I want to thank Sen. Saddam Hosein for bringing this Motion to the Parliament to discuss this Government's failure to address crime in Trinidad and Tobago. Further, Madam President, this Motion is also to discuss the increase in crime under this PNM administration. They have not only failed to address crime or to reduce crime, they are responsible for an increase in murders, a record number of murders being committed in this country.

Madam President, the first failure of this Government is that it does not have a plan to fight crime. [*Desk thumping*] The fact that no one, let us take the politics out of it, forget what the UNC is saying for now, no one is civil society, no one in the legal fraternity, no one in crime fighting, could clearly identify what the Government's plan for crime is.

The Government has continued to say that it has a plan. It is clearly a very secret plan. It is clearly not well articulated at all if it exists. We have heard members of the Government tell us that it is secret for security reasons that they

cannot reveal the measures they are taking to fight crime because the criminals will be aware and will take in front. Well, apparently, Madam President, the results of their crime-fighting initiatives are also secret. It is not being reflected in the murder rate in this country. It is not being reflected in the feeling of safety and security that the citizens have. Surely, the fact that more people are living in fear under this PNM Government is an indication of their failure to deal with crime.

The Attorney General who spoke before me, Madam President, listed bills that have been passed, a number of legislative measures. I appreciate that the Attorney General's portfolio is to bring legislation to Parliament and to advise the Government on same. So, of course, his list of achievements would be Bills, legislative measures, steps within the Judiciary and, unfortunately, Madam President, those exist on paper. I have been a part of the Opposition Bench in this Senate and I have participated in a number of debates on some of the Bills mentioned by the Attorney General. Many of those things have not borne fruit yet.

The PNM spoke on their platform in their campaign in 2015 about campaign reform, campaign finance reform, and you come here 4<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> years after to tell us that you have just laid the Bill in the Lower House and it has gone to a joint select committee. If you were so ready when you promised this nation campaign finance reform in 2015, it would have happened already, but you clearly lack the political will. The results on the ground from all the pieces of legislation listed by the Attorney General is not showing.

Madam President, amongst those listed included measures in the Magistrates' Court, bail and so on. The Attorney General spoke about the construction of the court in San Fernando. At present, on Irvin Street, there is a site surrounded by galvanize, a galvanize fence. There has been no construction

activity there. You have some stray dogs around the place. That is the only activity that is taking place. Madam President, the fact that the Government has allocated money, has identified a project is one thing—they come and they boast about it—but the fact is, what is happening on the ground is inactivity. The Government has to answer for that.

**3.00 p.m.**

The Attorney General would have also spoken about a DPP's office being constructed in San Fernando. For more than five years this situation has existed. The Attorney General himself is the Member of Parliament for San Fernando West and he would be familiar or should be familiar with the needs and the happenings in south Trinidad if he spends a lot of time there. But the truth is that office is nowhere close to being opened and turning the sod is not an achievement. So if a person does not see for themselves on the ground what is happening and they believe the Attorney General they would think that this Government has achieved a lot, but the truth is that on the ground now there it is just not happening. The DNA legislation that the Attorney General mentioned, I remember when the Attorney General spoke in the Parliament, he indicated that the Government was ready to operationalize this thing, that there were DNA kits in the port waiting to be cleared and waiting to come in. The regulations—I do not believe the regulations have even been finalized for the DNA Act.

There was talk about construction of a Forensic Science Centre. Nothing has come out of that yet. I am sure the Government will tell us that they are working on it. If this is a priority, why 4¾ years later you have not made any achievements? There is no tangible result. You are not closer to achieving this promise, so you come now on the eve of a general election to say, "In five more



years we will get it done.” It appears, Madam President, that that is going to be the narrative for this Government to answer for their lack of achievement, for their empty promises. The Minister of Works and Transport was quoted in a newspaper as saying that he needs five more years to stop all flooding in Trinidad and Tobago completely, so it seems to be a common thread in their bid to explain their lack of achievement.

Madam President, the staffing of the court system is also something that the Government has spoken a lot about. There is agreement within society and within the political parties that our justice system is just too slow. Victims of crime have their trauma dragged on because court cases take so long. You took four years to hire staff for the court system and yet you still have courts that are dilapidated, some that are completely closed, operating on shift, no paper to print, to print a judgment, to photocopy a document. I mentioned no air condition already but dilapidated conditions in general. So is it that the four years you took to hire staff, and you now have improper conditions for them to work in or in fact no space at all, that does not make the court system more efficient. There has been no reduction in the times for trials. There has been no increase in the sense of justice in this country based on the slow pace of court cases.

Passing Bills is not an achievement if there are no results in the statistics, the number of crimes committed, in the swiftness of justice. This Government has presided over the highest number of murders and every week there is a new explanation. Madam President, I think the country has had 4¾ years to judge. You have presided over terror in this country. You have no moral authority to ask for five more years. Madam President, we have spoken at different debates about measures to reach the root of crime within communities, the empowerment of

young people of at-risk sectors of society through education, through culture, through sports. The Government has bashed programmes that existed under the People's Partnership Government but they have not sought to replace that with anything to reach these at-risk young people.

Madam President, those at-risk groups—it is not only youth, I do not want us to tarnish our young people. Many young people are at risk but they are not the only demographic group at risk. But I want to ask Trinidad and Tobago, do you believe that these at-risk youths who are dying, who are making up numbers with our murder rate own the boats to bring in \$6 million in drugs in this country? Do those young people, or do those at-risk people, however you want to call it, who are arrested for criminal activities have the resources to bring guns into this country?

Madam President, we come back to the “big fish” theory and who is protecting the real doers of crime in Trinidad and Tobago. This Government has, on more than one occasion, shown to be closely affiliated to those elements, and if they continue to be in charge they will not be able to put a dent in crime. The results, the facts are that the murder rate was decreased when the People's Partnership was in Government. It was decreased when Mr. Basdeo Panday was Prime Minister, and the number of murders increased exponentially when the PNM is in Government. They are responsible.

Madam President, I remember at one time there was an argument where the Government, in seeking to defend its incompetence, was trying to link the Opposition to these elements of crime. In fact, the Minister of National Security said in the public domain that there were Members of the UNC tied to some murders that took place in Port of Spain. He made that statement, and when he

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was pressed to call names, he withdrew that statement and started to say something else that the Opposition Members were affiliated to the criminal element in Trinidad and Tobago. Well, I do not think any Member of the Opposition had their stepdaughter arrested for any drug charges. But the fact is—

**Madam President:** Sen. Ameen, I will ask you now, please, just to withdraw that last statement.

**Sen. K. Ameen:** That no Opposition Member—

**Madam President:** Withdraw your last statement.

**Sen. K. Ameen:** The statement that no Opposition Member—

**Madam President:** Do not repeat it, you know.

**Sen. K. Ameen:** No, I want to clarify it because I—

**Madam President:** No, I did not ask you to repeat it, I asked you to withdraw it. You should know what you have said.

**Sen. K. Ameen:** Well, I am not sure exactly which part of the statement, Madam President, you wanted me to withdraw.

**Madam President:** Take a guess, Sen. Ameen, just take a guess. Take a guess.

**Sen. K. Ameen:** I am just stating something on behalf of my colleagues. I am not, Madam President—so with your guidance, Madam President—

**Madam President:** Sen. Ameen—

**Sen. K. Ameen:** Pardon?

**Madam President:**—you have not withdrawn your statement.

**Sen. K. Ameen:** I am not clear, Madam President, on which part of the statement you would like me to withdraw.

**Madam President:** That very last statement that you made is what I am asking you to withdraw.

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**Sen. K. Ameen:** And I just want to confirm whether it is the statement that no Member of the Opposition had their stepdaughter on any arrest.

**Madam President:** That is the statement.

**Sen. K. Ameen:** All right. But that is a statement of fact, but, Madam President, if you—

**Madam President:** Sen. Ameen, it is either you withdraw it now or you take your seat, so take your choice. Make it right now.

**Sen. K. Ameen:** Madam President, I will withdraw that on your request. But, Madam President—

**Madam President:** Sen. Ameen, just move on.

**Sen. K. Ameen:** Madam President, on your request I withdraw that statement.

**Madam President:** Sen. Ameen, you have five more minutes.

**Sen. K. Ameen:** Thank you. The fact is that as a part of the Opposition I can say categorically that I have had no affiliation to any criminal element in this country and none of my colleagues as well.

Madam President, in spite of the insinuations of the Government, I think the population knows the truth, and when we make promises on political platforms, when we campaign and ask to represent and govern this country, you govern for all. Madam President, this Government has already started to try to reach out to those groups they have neglected. There are sections of society who, if they begin to speak, Members of this Government will run and hide. Madam President, the thing is that as much as they say, as much as they speak, as much as they try to blame the Opposition which seems to be in their mantra, the country will judge for itself. Madam President, I want to remind this population of the terror they have lived under for the past 4¾ years. I want to remind the population that murders

were at a record low under the People's Partnership and it has increased tremendously under this Government. I want to remind the population not to fall for the mamaguy and the "sweet talk" that will come on the campaign trail. The PNM has a pattern of neglecting people, of taking away from people.

They will literally take bread from your mouth and give you a crumb and tell you that you should be grateful, and that is what we have been seeing for the last few months. And I want to remind you that as the election comes around, paving roads in not going to help you, making more promises is not going to help you; asking for five more years to do what you have failed to do in the last five years is not going to help you. If any of the Members of the Government have any conscience they will not ask this population to vote for them. Madam President, the Government is responsible for crime and I take this opportunity to condemn their failure, their incompetence, their lack of political will when it comes to dealing with crime. I thank you, Madam President.

**Madam President:** Sen. Thompson-Ahye. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Hazel Thompson-Ahye:** Thank you, Madam President. I am pleased to speak on this Private Members' Motion. I am less likely to be constrained by a charge of irrelevance justifying my being shut down to the ground when in full flight, and if I am to mix metaphors, I have to fold my tent like the Arabs and quietly steal away to return and debate another day. I am glad that the CPC is getting a break though, they must be tired of my giving them a hard time. It is really the Attorney General's fault. I must agree with Sen. Hosein when he said that thousands of citizens and businesses have been negatively affected by high levels of crime in Trinidad and Tobago. Crime is a matter of grave concern to our citizenry, no pun intended. However, when I examine the first clause of the

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Motion:

“...it is the Government’s responsibility to ensure public safety and security of the citizenry;”

I detect an erroneous assumption. The underlying premise is that it is Government’s sole responsibility to ensure public safety and security of its citizens; that is incorrect.

While Government has a broad overall role and a serious responsibility, the citizenry and the corporate sector must play their respective roles. We speak of a war against crime but from where must the soldiers come? Where must they be recruited the fight this war? Government cannot do it alone. If we are not prepared to play our role in this theatre of life, which is akin to the wild Wild West, we might as well hang up our boots and sing, “Hang Down Your Head Tom Dooley”, “Oh boy, yuh gonna die.” Is the mover of the Motion saying that the criminals are in charge, that Government is hopeless and we are helpless? Sad am I that Sen. Saddam, pun intended, thinks so, but I cannot play in that carnival band of pessimism. The costume just will not fit. If we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem.

The United Nations guidelines for the prevention of crime outlined the role of Government in a collective approach to crime, and with your permission, Madam President, I quote:

“It is the responsibility of all levels of government to create, maintain and promote a context within which relevant governmental institutions and all segments of civil society, including the corporate sector, can better play their part in preventing crime.”

These guidelines state the factors which cause crime and violence to increase or

decline are closely linked to many social, economic and environmental issues and governments cannot rely solely on the criminal law and justice systems to ensure safety. Multi-sector partnership between Ministries, such as housing, health, education and employment, recreation, social service and environmental and the police and justice sector can only make a significant difference to crime levels and by establishing proactive rather than reactive strategies to prevent crime and victimization.

Now, these guidelines set out eight principles which govern prevention, government leadership, socioeconomic development and inclusion, cooperation and partnership, sustainability and accountability, use of a knowledge base, human rights, rule of law, culture of lawfulness, interdependency, meaning the links between local crime and international organized crime and differentiation, meaning recognizing the different needs of men, women and vulnerable groups. Now more needs to be done to integrate crime prevention strategies into social and economic policies in at-risk communities. And we have heard that before in this debate, large low-income housing estates are breeding grounds for criminality; recreational facilities are few and far between and take too long to be put in place, inadequate lighting in common areas create opportunities for crime, and you have suffocating concrete roofs at times which make for discomfort, short tempers and family discourse, and may even cause domestic violence.

The New Zealand Catholic bishops in a pastoral letter entitled, “Creating New Hearts: Moving From Retributive to Restorative Justice”, and if I may quote, Madam President, they stated:

“Crime...escalates most where social injustice prevails.

In particular, there is a desperate need to provide affordable housing,

adequate benefits, good health care and more employment. Deprivation in these areas forms a type of structural violence against the poor who are often left inadequately fed and in poor health, with little by way of shelter, money or hope. These are all areas the government should tackle as a priority.”

The words are as relevant to New Zealand as it is to Trinidad and Tobago, and the bishops cautioned that social deprivation should not be a cause for personal lawlessness and crimes; it is not a cop-out.

“Poverty may provide the environment for some crime, but should not provide an excuse. Greed and selfishness are also principal causes.”

Now, we have heard in this debate about the corporate sector complaining about crime and often it is their greed and their selfishness that have brought us to this sorry pass.

Corporate responsibility must not only be visibly manifested around carnival time, sponsorships of fetes, and so on. During the year many NGOs are struggling with token assistance, and they are doing great social work. Even so I welcome Government oversight of NGOs, some of whose activities and members should be closely scrutinized to ensure personal gain is not part of their game. There are many areas in need of reform. Some persons involved in crime have mental illnesses. And I speak particularly about child offenders, early detection and treatment, you know, can be a problem here, and in fact there is no hospital still dedicated to care of such children. Many children drop out of school every year and that is always—school is a protective factor so that creates a problem. The curriculum does not suit their needs; they have learning disabilities which are not addressed, some are pushed out of school because of their antisocial behaviour, and it is thought that that warrants zero tolerance rather than our using restorative



justice practices which will actually get to the root causes of their behaviour.

Now, my personal intervention with certain social welfare agencies in Trinidad and Tobago on behalf of clients and members of my church community have led me to appreciate Stalin's words, "Black man got to keep on jamming. Black man to get ah little something. Black man doh get nothing easy." It is sad but true, but I see that the new Minister is really trying to make a difference so maybe COVID has produced something. The initial cooperation between Government and civil society groups may unravel in times of austerity, funding may become scarce and you have excellent programmes that are being scuttled, and this is in fact in opposition to proven practice as the basis for policies and programmes. If something is working well what we should do is work and encourage it, yet what we have today is some of the Servol Life Centers which have served us well have had to be closed. Some of their vital parenting programmes have had to be curtailed because they have been sacrificed on the altar of other competing interests.

We will receive good marks for taking cognizance of the links between local crime and international organized crime, and putting laws in place, we have heard a lot of laws spoken about by the Attorney General to eradicate this plague from our society. The Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs has been working hard with the Children's Authority to try to save those at-risk children, however, we will receive a failing grade with respect to our promotion of the culture of lawfulness. We are a lawless society. Before "Mr. COVID" came and took up temporary residence in our land I will see scores of cars lined up in the night along the Priority Bus Route as the police busily engage themselves in increasing Government coffers.

On my way to the Senate one day I saw two high schools boys risking their lives, dodging fast-moving cars instead of using the Sea Lots flyover built at considerable expense to save lives. I observed a parent walking his daughter and as he passed the car I asked him, “Why those boys not using the walkover?” In my naivety I hoped he would admonish them. To my shock the man turned to me angrily and say, “Why yuh doh mine yuh business.” As he walked away, his daughter about seven years kept looking at me in bewilderment. I was grateful he did not prefix the word “business” with “damn”. The child protection and domestic violence units are welcomed initiatives to the police service in the fight against crime, and we trust they will continue to go strength from strength, but the police need our help in both crime prevention and detection. Are there opportunities to pass on information to the police? You have heard time and again if you see something say something. If you tell it to a friend who cannot help, it is mere gossip. If as head of an institution your charges tell you they have to sign as receiving a stipend in a programme and then hand over a portion to a supervisor, “Why tell Ahye? Tell de Fraud Squad, not me.”

If someone hides guns in your yard, it is not enough to relocate post-haste, saying the police are a waste, call 800-TIPS, Crime Stoppers will fix. There are good citizens, not of the kind Sparrow sarcastically sang, but many who are prepared to assist the police in their fight against crime. But as a businessman if you visit a Government office and you are told that this will take a long time, that should not be translated to mean, “If you bribe me the waiting period will miraculously disappear”, and successive Registrar Generals have lamented their anguish over the level of corruption in the department. I even heard an employee saying he could make any certificate, but in those days certificates were

handwritten and having the new technology has really helped. More recently the introduction of the new hundred dollar bill stimulated creative explanations in some. Others were left counting their losses, as you have heard.

So white collar crime does give rise to violent crime. The perpetrators of such crime do kill informants whom they suspect will reveal or have revealed their nefarious acts of corruption. Employees of money launderers frequently know what their bosses are doing but they dare not speak because they want to live. Those engaged in human and drug trafficking use Gypsy's little black boys to do their bidding while hiding under the guise of legitimate business. Who is "Mr. Big" of whom PM Manning used to speak? Why can we not name and deal with him? If we do not know who he is, are we not running the risk of holding him up to use as an exemplar and bestowing on him prestigious awards? Government has mounted a multi-pronged attack on crime. Our Commissioner of Police is indefatigable, the police are working hard, more arrests are being made and illegal guns retrieved.

The second limb of the Motion remains valid:

"...thousands of citizens and businesses have been negatively affected by the high levels of crime in Trinidad and Tobago;"

We speak of a war against crime, but what are our weapons? We have heard the Commissioner of Police repeatedly speak of the sophisticated weapons. We do not have mass weapons of destruction but we have weapons of word construction. In the Parliament we use our weapons of word construction to create laws, and we have done a great deal of that over the last few months to the extent that we feel overwhelmed. For the first time there is a concerted attack on white collar crime. The Attorney General has been relentless with his mantra, "Follow the money",

but before we create the law we must be guided by philosophy. If we are not guided by tried and tested principles, our efforts will come to naught.

W.E.B. Du Bois said:

“The chief problem in any community cursed with crime is not the punishment of the criminals, but the preventing of the youth from being trained to crime.”

But unfortunately we spend more money on care than we do on prevention. We must focus on the youths. In 1993 I was attending the Integrity Commission’s symposium at Central Bank. I was accosted by a legal luminary, he said, “I hear yuh going Australia, I hope is not with my taxpayer dollars you know. Yuh have no business going Australia unless I can sleep comfortably in my bed.” I was going to the First World Congress on Family Law and Children’s Rights in Australia. I did attend and I learnt so much about child rights that I brought back to this country, and I have attended dozens of conferences and symposiums, regionally and internationally.

I also learned in Sydney that Trinidad and Tobago was not the land of the hummingbird, nor steel band, nor calypso, nor carnival, nor “chutney”, nor “soca”, but Brian Lara’s country, because every day I travelled to and from Sydney’s convention centre, the taxi driver, on learning I was from Trinidad, would go into ecstasy to meet someone from Brian Lara’s country. Now, the point of my Central Bank encounter is that many learned people do not see the link between child rights and citizens’ security. My mother used to say, “Meekly wait, and murmur not.” So fast-forward to 2015 to then President Obama’s Caribbean Basin Initiative in that year, he saw the need to arrest the spiralling growth in youth crime in the Caribbean which he saw as potentially threatening the security of the United

States. So it was not purely altruistic.

So the Caribbean Basin Initiative which was devoted to juvenile justice, better called child justice, was born, and this involved improving the legal and regulatory framework of the child justice system capacity building for effective administration, modernization of diversion, detention and rehabilitation processes and support for enhanced child justice system to increased linkages with civil society. And our Trinidad and Tobago benefited greatly because the USA money funded the children court project, an impressive development where child rights are recognized. We cannot say we want to do right by children and not believe children are entitled to rights. We must make the link between—

**Madam President:** Sen. Thompson-Ahye, you have five more minutes.

**Sen. H. Thompson-Ahye:**—rights and dignity. I have made no secret of my admiration for the Commissioner of Police. I am impressed with his sincerity of purpose. I know his heart is in the right place but he must work within the rules of international law on child rights. Equally I say to the chairman of the Children's Authority, who also has my unstinting support, when children's rights are wronged, diplomacy is not an option.

A few years ago I did the distinguished lecture in San Fernando and I spoke about children being our sacred trust from the creator and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. If we fail to understand that non-fulfilment of these needs, including their need for belonging, leads to children joining gangs, to their becoming violent, then we are in for problems. Father absence creates no end of problems. We must be tough on the causes of crime more than crime itself. We must not let the crime overshadow the child. We know that hurt people hurt people, but we still do not have in place a proper law dealing with reporting of child physical abuse, and we

need to work on that.

We have increased the penalty for cruelty to animals; \$100,000 in the Summary Offences Bill, we heard about \$200,000 in the disease and importation, health and welfare Act, but under the Children Act cruelty to children attracts the fine of \$5,000 and imprisonment for six years. We have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we have not yet set an age for criminal responsibility. So we are still at seven years of age, even though the child rights committee has told us, time and time again, that we should increase that age, and in fact they have set the age of criminal responsibility now at—first it was in 2005, they set it at 12 years, now increased to 14 years.

What happens between that age—children who are below that age—is that they must be treated and provided with assistance and services according to their needs.

**3.30 p.m.**

Diversion is an important principle of child justice. Early encounter with the law frequently lead to adult criminality. So keep the children out from the court. We talk about evidence-based practices, but restorative justice has proved successful with child and adult offenders and their victims and we still have not included restorative practice in our law.

Judge Eckler said:

If all young people are secured, all the physical, social and economic rights proclaimed in the convention, the lives of millions of adults of the next generation would be transformed. It would be a grievous mistake to see the convention as applying to childhood alone. Childhood is not an end in itself, but part of the process of forming the adults of the next generation. The convention is for all people. It could influence their entire lives if its aims

can be realized. The convention can truly be said to be laying the foundation for a better world.

Gabriela Mistral, first Latin American Noble Prize Winner for Literature said:

“Many things we need can wait. The child cannot. Now is the time his bones are formed, his mind developed. To him we cannot say tomorrow, his name is today.”

At times I get tired of waiting for us to do right by children. But do I condemn this Government for its failure to effectively deal with the unacceptable and serious crime situation affecting law-abiding citizens? Crime will always be with us. But I do see some progress. I will continue to advocate for better laws and hold Government to account where necessary. It is for this reason I took my oath of office. I will continue to act without fear or favour. I thank you, Madam President.

**Sen. Nigel De Freitas:** Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to contribute to this Motion dealing with crime that is engaging the attention of this august House today. Madam President, I could sum up this Motion in two words, hypocritical and contradictory.

Let me begin by stating that this is the third crime Motion brought by the Opposition in the last five years. The first one was brought by Sen. Sturge. The second one was brought by Sen. Obika, and this third one moved by Sen. Hosein. The arguments put forward in each and every Motion have not changed. They have been the same since 2016. The problem with that is that, as the Attorney General has pointed out, a lot has been done over the five years, in relation to increase the number of tools available to the TTPS, increasing the efficiency of the

various arms and organs responsible for treating with crime in this country. But if that is the case, and he went into great detail to point that out, then why is it that the argument remains the same? What is hypocritical, Madam President and contradictory is the fact that Sen. Hosein, in moving his Motion, Sen. Haynes today, and Sen. Ameen all spoke to, agreed by the Independent Senators, and the speakers thus far on the Government Bench, that dealing with crime must require a bipartisan approach. But it is only Members on the opposite side that, after stating that, begin to get extremely political in their contributions, Sen. Ameen, as we have just heard, being the most political in that regard. So how could you speak to having a bipartisan approach? And I think Sen. Ameen, in her contribution indicated that if you are dealing with crime, then you should take politics out of it, and then goes on in the end of her contribution to get extremely political. And that is why I say, Madam President, this Motion, and the contributions by Members opposite, are extremely contradictory.

But let me move forward, Madam President, and just reiterate the points made by the Members opposite for the last three Private Members' crime Motion brought since 2016. Sen. Ameen indicated throughout her entire contribution that in relation to the Government's attempt to deal with crime, that we only pass legislation without any operationalization. The Attorney General dealt with that. She even went on to say that she could not even remember if regulations were passed in relation to the DNA bank. I sat in this Chamber. I contributed to that debate. Sen. Hosein contributed to that debate, and I distinctly remember that we were treating with the regulations in that legislation, dealing with identification, how you collect the DNA, how you store the DNA, how you pass the DNA along with security measures. All of these things were done. And what was said at the



end of that debate, Madam President, was that using DNA, in terms of crime fighting, was a very good tool that would help with the detection rate.

So when Sen. Ameen stands up to say that she cannot even remember, after sitting in this Chamber for five years, that we dealt with that legislation, but stands up to say, that in relation to crime, this Government has done nothing, and all we are doing is passing laws with no operationalization, it tells me that the Senator does not know what is going on when it comes to dealing with crime. So why speak about bipartisanship? Why speak about this Government is doing nothing in relation to crime, if it is that in sitting in this Chamber, you are not even listening when key pieces of legislation and regulations are being passed to treat with crime in this country.

Madam President, other arguments I have heard coming from Sen. Hosein, when he moved his Motion are arguments such as we pass laws when in actuality what we need is more courts. Sen. Ameen spoke to galvanize surrounding an empty lot in San Fernando, and saying that there is no construction taking place. Now everybody in Trinidad and Tobago knows, given the current situation that we are in, we had to shut down construction. The public sector construction and private sector construction was only reopened in phase two recently. So Sen. Ameen speaking to no construction taking place in San Fernando knows fully well that there is a good reason why that may be.

But I will go on to say this, Madam President, all of us in this Chamber are supposed to be submitting our Integrity Commission documents soon, by May 30<sup>th</sup> I think the deadline is, and if anybody is going to submit those documents back where we used to sit at the International Waterfront Complex, the first thing they will notice is that the elevators that we used to take are very different. Madam

President, they are boarded up. Why are the boarded up? Because the construction has begun on the courts that the Attorney General has spoken to, which would now occupy the Chambers that this Senate and the House of Representatives used to occupy.

So when Sen. Ameen and Sen. Hosein and Sen. Haynes speak to the fact that we are not putting in more courts, that is absolutely incorrect. And when you go to file your documents on level 14 of that International Waterfront Complex, you would realize that work is taking place and those courts are being built. So that argument no longer exists. It may have worked in 2016, when Sen. Sturge brought up that crime Motion, but it definitely cannot fly or pass in 2020.

Madam President, the next argument that comes forward over these three Private Members' Motions is that we pass laws when in actuality what we need to do is take action within the system that is set up in Trinidad and Tobago to treat with crime. And they speak specifically to the TTPS needing revamping, and you heard Sen. Ameen speak to the Forensic Science Centre.

Now, the Attorney General went through this in great detail and what I would like to add to what he had said, Madam President, is that anybody looking at the TTPS since the Police Commissioner was appointed, would notice certain subtle changes into the operation of that unit. And some of the things that you would notice, Madam President, is that there is now a rapid response vehicle unit with large cameras on the roof, which is supposed to assist with accountability when dealing with police officers. Madam President, you would also notice that there are badges with IDs for the police officers, which again also assists with accountability, when officers deal with citizens, so that citizens can identify the officer, if it is that something went awry in terms of that interaction.

Madam President, you would also notice since the appointment of the Police Commissioner that there has been a concerted effort to increase the number of promotion of officers in a timely fashion. And what this does, within the TTPS is ensure that the morale of the officers who would have been acting for a large amount of time with no end in sight now can stand up, appointed in the position that they were acting in, and therefore their morale goes up.

Madam President, you heard most recently, within the last two weeks, where the Commissioner of Police would have spoken to dealing with the resistance in the police service, of rogue officers. All of these things are being done. During the 2015 to 2016 period, when we decided to appoint a Police Commissioner because we needed someone in that role who would be able to act confidently instead of having a person in an acting position, which was done under the last administration.

Madam President, in relation to the Forensic Science Centre and the argument that the Minister of National Security spoke to building a new centre, which he did, but Madam President, there is not a person in this country that does not know that the economic climate that we are in right now may not lead us to be able to move forward with that in the way that we wanted to. But that does not mean that we cannot engage other activities which would help with the efficiency in the Forensic Science Centre.

We sat in this Chamber last year and we passed laws to decriminalize cannabis. One of the activities that used to clog up the Forensic Science Centre was when you had to process cases dealing with drugs like cannabis, identifying the particular drug so that the case can move forward. And that decriminalization Bill that was put forward, Madam President, and subsequently passed, helped to

remove a certain amount that usually would have gone to the Forensic Science Centre, therefore reducing the caseload in that centre and making the efficiency go up in that sense.

Madam President, one of other arguments put forward by Sen. Hosein in piloting this Motion, he indicated that we need to take steps to deal with domestic violence and its rampant nature in Trinidad and Tobago. And I could understand because when he filed this Motion it was in February and he may not have known at that point in time that the electronic monitoring legislation was going to come. So now I can make the argument, because we had this debate several weeks ago that treats specifically with domestic violence cases and ensuring that we do not have the kind of issues which Sen. Hosein was referring to. It actually goes a step further to protect domestic violence victims in that Bill.

Madam President, the Attorney General spoke to what was done in the Judiciary to ensure that we have maximum efficiency in terms of disposal of cases. So I will not go into reiterating what the Attorney General said, because he spent quite a bit of time in his contribution dealing with that and I think his arguments were profound, they were sound, and they completely refute that argument put forward by the Opposition in that the justice system is slow and will not get any faster.

Madam President, as I indicated before, every single speaker today specifically spoke to crime requiring a bipartisan approach in order to properly deal with it. And I have to say, what we have seen from Members opposite thus far is anything but a bipartisan approach. One hand cannot clap. It will make no sound. How do we know that the Opposition is not serious about this bipartisan approach?

Madam President, the Attorney General also alluded to this. Just last week, the Bail (Amdt.) Bill, they abstained on it. He spoke to the Gambling (Gaming and Betting) Bill, which would have treated with money laundering and corruption, not passed in the House of Representatives.

The idea that it is only the Government must deal with crime has been spoken to by Sen. Thompson-Ahye. Understandably so, the Opposition would have you believe that they have no ability to help affect crime in this country. I disagree with that, because when we pass legislation in this Chamber and the Opposition supports that legislation, that is the bipartisan approach which everybody is speaking to. But I understand when they speak to taking the politics out of crime. So let us take the politics out of crime for a second.

Let us look specifically at another avenue by which the Opposition can contribute in a setting that is set up specifically to be bipartisan. And that is the Joint Select Committee on National Security, Madam President, of which I have been a Member for the last five years. One thing that I have noticed between the previous administration and what is happening now as they are Members opposite and form the Opposition, is that they are incapable of being consistent in any kind of crime plan or approach, using any system set up to do so. What do I mean by that? I indicated, Madam President, that we have a Joint Select Committee on National Security. And I would tell you here today that every single Government Member on that committee has been there for the last five years. Every single Independent Senator on that committee has been there for the last five years. There has been no change. We have done the kind of work in the bipartisan approach that that committee is set up to do, in order to effectively help treat with the scourge that is crime that every single Government needs to deal with.

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Some of the examples of the good work that has been done, Madam President, is the DNA Regulations, which I spoke to earlier. That was followed-up at first on the Joint Select Committee on National Security. Other reports that have come out of that committee is the Electronic Monitoring Bill that was passed, was first followed-up on that committee until it got to the House of Representatives and the Senate. We have done other reports in terms of investigations into the prevalence of illegal firearms in Trinidad and Tobago. We were instrumental in getting the port scanners turned on at the Port of Port of Spain. So when I say that consistency on that Joint Select Committee on National Security—

**Madam President:** Senator, you have five more minutes.

**Sen. N. De Freitas:** Thank you, Madam President—goes a very long way in terms of helping to deal with crime in this country, I know what I am talking about. Let us look at what the Opposition did on that Joint Select Committee on National Security. We started off with Sen. Sturge, did not make five years. We then went to Sen. Hosein, who is the mover of this Motion, and MP Ramadhar was there from the House of Representatives for a while; both of whom were removed eventually from that Joint Select Committee on National Security. Then Sen. Ramdeen and MP Moonilal came onto the committee. Well we all know what happened with Sen. Ramdeen, and he eventually left that committee and the Senate. And then Sen. Hosein was reappointed. So, Madam President, you see, in terms of any kind of commitment to dealing with crime through a bipartisan approach that the Opposition is speaking to that needs to be done, you cannot get it from the Opposition. There is no way that they could have any kind of authority to speak to the Government on what we are doing about crime, when they themselves cannot even put forward a consistent approach by ensuring that Senators remain on

that committee for five years to contribute in a bipartisan manner.

So, Madam President, to end, I will say this. This Motion, again, it is hypocritical. It is contradictory in the way it is being put forward. And what I would say to those listening to my voice in this Chamber and out of this Chamber is this: the disapproval of cowards is praise to the brave. We will move bravely into the future with vision and execution to the benefit of all citizens, including those that oppose. Madam President, with those few words, I thank you.

**Sen. Wade Mark:** Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, I am very happy to speak on this Private Members' Motion in the name of Sen. Saddam Hosein, and I wish to, from the outset, fully support this Motion in which the Senator is seeking to have the Senate condemn the Government as it relates to its failure to effectively deal with the unacceptable and serious crime situation affecting law-abiding citizens.

Madam President, I want to say that crime is extremely serious and has been very, very serious and worsening under this outgoing administration. Madam President, even with COVID and people are being locked down as a result of restrictions, we have a situation where citizens still feel unsafe. Over the last four and a half years, or four years and eight months, the citizens have become extremely scared. No one feels safe anymore. The Government, Madam President, and the citizenry in particular because of crime, the citizenry that is, is in a constant state of fear. They have avoided certain areas. They do not venture beyond their homes—unless they have basic errands to perform—because of the unsafe environment.

Madam President, our women feel hopeless and unprotected, even with restraining orders in place. Since the PNM arrived in Trinidad and Tobago,

particularly when they won “the last election” in 2015, we have witnessed over 2,200 citizens being murdered under their watch. Since the hapless and clueless Minister of National Security arrived on the compound, that is, the current Minister of National Security, we have witnessed over 800 murders in our country. Thirty elderly citizens have been murdered last year. Madam President, sexual violence and domestic violence cases have increased to 757 in 2018. Quiet, serene Tobago has seen seven murders in 2019, nine in 2018, and 13 in 2017. And the situation, as I said, Madam President, just gets worse. Even under COVID, we have had a lot of murders or several murders. The papers testify to this reality only today.

Madam President, I looked at the contribution of the hon. Minister of National Security very carefully. I read his contribution, and there are some areas I would like to respond to in his contribution. Madam President, the Minister of National Security, not once, not twice, but on several occasions, but more so in his contribution to this debate, has accused the United National Congress of what he has described as dismantling the facial recognition system at CCTV cameras. In fact, let me recast that. I want to state that, according to the Minister's statement, and I want to quote:

“...you want to secure your borders at your”—four international airports—  
“...why did the UNC dismantle the facial recognition?”

Now, Madam President, this has been a statement made by the Minister of National Security. I want to state for the public record, that I have a media release before me, dated March of 2017, in which, Madam President, that statement has been debunked. It has been debunked, Madam President, by no other person than the former National Security Advisor and National Security Minister between the period 2010 and 2015. I am talking about the current Commissioner of Police, Mr.



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Gary Griffith.

Madam President, I have a media release, which was issued in March of 2017, in which it is, and I quote:

I have the world of respect for Minister Young but I am obliged to clarify that those comments are totally inaccurate, and I do believe that he may have been misguided by those who are either ignorant of the fact, or had their personal agenda to deliberately embarrass Minister Young.

And that has to do, Madam President, with a statement made by Minister Young at that time, in the Parliament, alluding that the previous PP Government was not in communication with our international allies and also about someone deliberately switching off a security system to pinpoint facial recognition. This statement, as I said, was repeated in the Minister's contribution to this debate on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February, 2020.

So I wanted, Madam President, to put on the record that it is totally wrong and totally misleading for the Minister of National Security to come to this Parliament and make these wild allegations without any proof, not one shred of evidence, but it goes on the record of the *Hansard*, which is wrong.

Madam President, the Minister has always been accusing this Government, that is the last Government, of not being involved and not being engaged in activities to deal with our borders and the effort always has been the cancellation of the OPVs by the last administration. And that is being used as an excuse for the porous borders that we currently have, as well as the infiltration of a lot of arms and ammunition into our country.

Madam President, I have been advised that this very Government was offered three OPV-type US navy vessels, at no cost, but to date this administration

has never taken up that offer by the United States. They will have to explain why they have not done so.

So I want to make it abundantly clear that it is totally wrong, it is totally based on disinformation and misinformation that the Minister of National Security continues to mislead, or misguide I should say, Madam President, the country by making these false allegations against the last administration.

**4.00 p.m.**

Madam President, I have nine projects that the government of Trinidad and Tobago, between 2010 and 2015, left for implementation by this Government, and it is now four years and eight months and they have rejected these nine projects. Madam President, one deals with Rudy Giuliani anti-crime proposal; the second one deals with Hannet & Associates; the third is Carrefour; the fourth is something called I.R. Consilium; the fifth is the new century tap on of the UK project; then there is a Westminster project; PGI project; a K-9 unit project, and a ShotSpotter project.

Madam President, these nine projects were cancelled or dismantled by this Government over the last four years and eight months. So, like my colleague and friend, Sen. Nigel De Freitas, it is highly hypocritical for the Government to come here and claim that they have been fighting porous borders. Madam President, there is evidence to show that the Government has refused assistance from the United States in an effort to deal with some of the very problems that they come here and accuse the UNC of not engaging.

Madam President, I would also like to share with you some information that deals with the whole matter of our helicopters. You know, we read today or we read recently in the Minister's contribution, that the Government has been

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engaged—the last government was engaged in literally not maintaining and because of the overly expensive helicopters that were purchased, they again attributed blame to the last administration for the failure of the air guard and the failure of us not having helicopters in the sky. Madam President, just give me one second, I have a document I want to just—Madam President, I have done some research on this matter and I have come to the conclusion that this Government has literally misled or misguided itself—

**Madam President:** Sen. Mark, can you not use that.

**Sen. W. Mark:** Well, misguided, I beg your pardon, Madam President. Madam President, the reality is that the Government has been accusing us—

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

**Sen. W. Mark:** The Government has been accusing us of not being able to address crime in a serious way. I want to tell you today, Madam President, that when the Government of the PNM, led by Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley, the Prime Minister, came into office, there were 10 helicopters; they met 10 helicopters. Today, we only have two helicopters. This is the so-called new air unit that the Minister of National Security has spoken to. The Government of this regime, this regime, the PNM regime grounded the air guard, AW139 helicopters, on the grounds of its inability to pay for maintenance. This resulted in all our airlines and air crew leaving this country.

Madam President, the helicopters were leased and the Government clearly cannot meet its obligation. And out of the four helicopters owned by the Government, NOC division, one of them, Madam President, as I said is currently grounded and that one that is grounded, spare parts are being used to ensure that one of the three remaining helicopters remains afloat in the skies.

So, Madam President, the Government has failed to get a proper air guard in the sky to provide the kind of security that is needed in terms of air surveillance. So our entire air surveillance capacity has been destroyed by this Government. And that is what has contributed to porous borders, the inability to contribute to crime where the TTPS cannot secure them when they are needed as it relates to fighting crime in this country.

Madam President, I do not have time this evening to deal with white-collar criminality in this country, which is a very powerful contributor to crime in this land of ours. I do not have the time to deal with it. But the Government for five years has not proclaimed and operationalized the public procurement and public disposal of land Act. For five years all they paid was lip service, hypocrisy in Opposition, hypocrisy when they were fighting for power. Now they got into power for five years, Madam President, there is not a single effort by this Government to actually proclaim and operationalize the procurement legislation.

Madam President, in closing, I think that a new government must conduct a forensic criminal investigation into the following matters under this Government's jurisdiction: the purchase of the two ferries from Australia; the purchase of two Cape-class patrol vessels from Australia; the lease of 1,146 acres of land to a gentleman who is in charge of General Earth Movers Limited, who is in charge of Marilissa Farms. There should be an investigation into that.

Madam President, all of these contracts that have been issued, valued at billions of dollars without proper tendering processes, all of these things ought to be subject to some criminal forensic enquiry. And finally, we need a criminal forensic enquiry into the cancellation of a signed contract valued at \$485 million with China Gezhoubu International Engineering Company and the HDC.

Madam President, I do not have the time to continue. I wish to thank you very much, Madam President, for allowing me to make my contribution on this very important Motion. Thank you very much.

**Sen. Dr. Varma Deyalsingh:** Thank you, Madam President, for giving me the opportunity to present today. I must say, Madam President, crime should not be used as a tool, eh, by politicians for any sort of political gain. And you know, hearing arguments, I know around election season and you are hearing allegations of from one side to the other side and sometimes we may not know what is true, what is not true, but you see, the idea is hearing these allegations, it really does not sit well for the people, the people who actually deal with day-to-day crime, deal with the idea of persons in high office, putting blame on each other. And I must say, Madam, I look at crime and I see victims of crime, they hurt, the pain in their eyes, some lives are destroyed forever. I see and I counsel victims.

Madam President, a patient I had, she was raped at 17 years old and the family, they have a little parlour, four guys came in, they raped this girl in front of her family and to this day, she has never recovered. Her father was a teacher, he cannot work, he is depressed, he feels that he could not defend his family and the brother joined some bad boys because he figures now that I have to protect my family, I am now in this “bad boys” sort of gang, that could protect me because my father could not protect me. And the mother, regrettably, is an alcoholic. So these are the faces of crime I see, the victims of crime. And you see, what is strange, Madam, the rapists are walking around free amongst us, and the thing is we do not know who they are, where they are because the system has failed them.

So when I look at the idea of tackling crime, I have to say the victim has to be foremost in the minds of all politicians. And I have to thank this Government

Sen. Dr. V. Deyalsingh (cont'd)

for at least choosing a Commissioner of Police, for giving us a Commissioner of Police after years. Our first Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams had his Randolph Burroughs who went after guerillas, who was out in the field and this Commissioner of Police actually is in the field, is amongst the criminals showing them that he is the strong hand. And sometimes when I see criminals apologizing to him when they come with these social media—they have social media posing with guns and sending messages to him and afterwards, they actually apologize. And this is a message we need to send to the youths growing up that if you say things out of hand, if you play that you are with these criminals, you very well have to apologize or face the penalty.

I am certain every citizen of Trinidad and Tobago has either been a victim of crime or knows someone who has been a victim of crime. And this is something we have here that, we look at even poor businessmen trying to make an honest living, they are targets for criminal for every opportunity. So therefore, Mr. Griffith must be commended for giving businessmen and others the opportunity to protect themselves. He has opened up the field of granting Firearm User's License so at least we can say now that persons, in the fight for crime, can take that fight into their own hands also, not just depending on police, not just depending on Government.

I have a story where, years ago, a doctor actually had a licensed firearm, a guy came into his yard, he shot the guy, a flesh wound, and when the police came they said, "You know, boss, we will have to take away your firearm but his relatives are going to come for you and you will be at a sitting duck." Now, he pleaded with the police officer, he said, "Look, I have two daughters and you are now leaving me defenseless, I have a licensed firearm." But the police said, "If you

give me 10 grand, I will let you keep your gun.” That is what happens to some people, they are beat up sometimes by the system.

So I am thinking, Mr. Griffith giving persons the opportunity to actually protect themselves, I think we need also here to give the persons the legislation to be able to defend themselves, the so-called “castle legislation”, my home is my castle I can defend myself. And you see:

“...a person’s abode or any legally occupied place (for example, a vehicle or home) as a place in which that person has protections and immunities, permitting one, in certain circumstances, to use force...to defend...against an intruder, free of legal...”—liabilities.

And this includes some circumstances of deadly force. I am thinking it is time the persons who are on the receiving ends, we get this householder defence. It is time we are able to say, “Well, Mr. Griffith will do what he is doing on the outside but if you come into my house, I will be able to do what I am doing with my legal firearm.” So we need to free up that sort of legislation to give people more protection.

So, Madam President, while I ask for that castle defence to be somehow part of the system now, I am thinking that while this COVID pandemic was dropped unexpectedly in our laps, we were already dealing with a crime epidemic. And we already had startling murder rates, domestic violence, white collar crimes were the order of the day. And on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, 2020, the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce issued a media statement where they actually called on the Minister of National Security to acknowledge that we are in a crisis of crime, and this was their statement, “We are in a crisis of crime.” So they had that knowledge there, it was existing, we had a crisis of crime but even when I

looked at the travel advisories, Madam President, from America, Canada, Australia, United Kingdom and how they portrayed Trinidad, it sometimes brings anger to me and tears to my eyes to see this lovely country is now portrayed in that bad light, internationally.

So there are persons that, from the outside, look at us as a nation of persons where crime has gone wild, *Wild Wild West*. And even in Trinidad and Tobago, the amount of crimes and the amount of social media images I see where people post pictures of images of persons who are victims of crime, it seems that we are desensitized to the murders when someone is killed. It is just a talking point and we go on to it another day. It comes like it is a way of life, murder, death, it is a way of life in Trinidad. But you see, Madam President, the whole idea of crime and violent crime is one thing. We have to look at the fact that corruption and allegations of corruption, which we have seen leveled here from each side, this has a way of undermining the psyche of the nation also. Because you see, I have mentioned it is just like a ping-pong ball, one side hitting the ball of corruption and the other side hits it back while the board is rotting underneath with the neglect of addressing crime.

So crime has to be addressed. You see and it is not just the “little black boy” as Sen. Thompson-Ahye mentioned that it was in Winston “Gypsy” Peters’ calypso, it is also the individual who drives his Porsche, living on top of the clouds in his penthouse apartment. And while some of us are struggling for a drop of water to drink— we heard the Minister talked about the water distribution— while people are struggling for a drop of water to drink, others are having champagne breakfast, mimosas with a \$6,000 bottle of champagne drinking, an Ace bottle of champagne. So these are the discrepancies that occur in Trinidad and Tobago.



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You see, years of blaming each other and conditions were allowed to continue. I think if we look at the past, Madam, all the governments had their own corruption, their own allegations of corruption. We had our O'Halloran's, Prevatt's, we had Ministers saying, "all of we tief", Calder Hart's collateral damage, Dhanraj Singh, airport fiasco, ex-Prime Minister in jail, the SIS, LifeSport, all those were corruption, allegations or corruptions that existed. We see now contracts made by one regime is cancelled by another regime. They may say, "Well, okay, we have to get a new contract because the old one was not drawn up properly or we have to get a new contract because somehow the maintenance part of it was not there." So it is like we have revolving door contracts for the same things over and over coming in. And I ask, who gains from that? Because you stop a contract, somebody else might be able there to take that gain.

Madam President, when I looked at this revolving door contract, I say we have to implement somewhere where we could stop that. Because you see, when you hear allegations about an \$80 million fence, \$300 million warehouse, all these are both sides trying to gain points. But it is really the people, the individual, the ones who cannot get the service, who cannot get the DNA to actually—to get the DNA legislation to work properly. It is those persons who are fighting up in the system, you know, are the ones who suffer. People look on speechless and not knowing what to believe. It is like they are getting battered and abused by the criminals and by the successive regimes.

So the public really needs something in place to protect us from persons who occupy high office. And, Madam, I looked at it and I am thinking we probably need an anti-corruption commission to deal with any allegations of corruption. An anti-corruption commission where the chair is appointed by Her Excellency but

you have members being— members of the procurement legislation, the chair of that legislation, the President also, the Chair of the Integrity Commission, a member of the Transparency International, forensic auditors, Auditor General, IT experts. And if this is set up, any allegations, corruption coming from any side would be investigated and quickly somehow put to rest, so it would not be affecting the nation that having to hear this corruption from side to side every time.

So I am thinking this is something we may need to look at where all transparent—all contracts be transparent, published, procurement legislation in place, all these I think is something that could help in our fight against crime. You see, when someone sees the perception of crime occurring and the perpetrators getting away, there is something called “social learning theory”. So if I see those in high office getting away with crime, I may think it is going to crime. If I see the gang leader able to go in President’s House like if he is with open arms, I may say, “Well, I would be a gang leader.” You see, the messages we are sending to the young persons are messages we have to say, “No more. We have to stop these things. We have to get it right for our young people.” You see, targeting those criminals who are seasoned criminals by the brunt of the law, by the legislation that we have gotten from our Attorney General, the slew of legislation by the Police Commissioner outside, you have to target the seasoned criminals, but you have to aim now at those coming up, the young child coming up.

You see a young child coming up, growing in a neighbourhood, the gang leader is the hero. They provide sometimes books and schooling, medicine and help their relatives, we have to know that is a cultural thing. So if we are going to eliminate the gang leaders we have to put something in place, we have to give them some sort of guidance, some sort of other community leader that they could

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now look up to, some sort of government programme that they can say, “I can go in and I can fit in”, some sort of mentorship so they see doctors, lawyers, persons coming out from that area, businessmen who are successful, “I can achieve that, I do not just have to look at the gap.”

So therefore, it seems that we have things in place, MiLAT, CCC, Cure Violence, all those things we have in place, the Police Youth Clubs are essential and Prisons Youth Clubs. But you see, I noticed with our economy moneys were taken away from these bodies and I am thinking with the COVID economy now, I am worried that more moneys would be taken away from those functionaries that were doing excellent jobs.

Madam, I also looked at the fact that the youth offenders in Trinidad and Tobago, it is a high amount of youth offenders. And I have already said before, if you have somebody who is idling, who is not attending school, who is not in a trade, who is not in a family business, who is not doing homeschooling and you catch them idling, the states should have the authority, we should have legislation in place for idle youth to say, “Come in we are going to put you in a boot camp or a youth camp. You have to learn a trade, you have to learn the nationalistic spirit for it because you would be out there in the corner liming with the drug lords, liming with the gangsters.” So therefore, yes, gangs are a problem, gangs have to be somehow eliminated.

And you see, when we had—the United Nations had actually given us some figures when they looked and they said that there were about 100 gangs in Trinidad and Tobago. So even though we are having all the lovely legislation in place from the Attorney General, and he has a dream and I love it and I hope it materializes, the day-to-day running, the day-to-day getting things to work is where we may

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have to look at how we are going to do it.

So while we may be having body cameras, we may have officers improving where they have their dashboard cameras, and the TTPS has goals, the lie detector test, will give us confidence into the police service once more, we have to realize that some basic items sometimes they do not even have air-condition, toilet paper and basic things. So we cannot be aiming for the stars on one place and we cannot even climb a mole hill, an ant hill. We have to gradually build up and what I am looking at is even— we mentioned the army, they were fed macaroni pelau that was mentioned. So if we do not see about the basic needs, how could we progress? Yes, we have to progress but we have to ensure, and you see with the economic hard times, I think we are in some trouble.

Madam President, I looked at the fact that weeding out the bad guys is one thing, putting them in jail, rehabilitating some of them, some of them may not be able to be rehabilitated and the law will take care of them. But you see, we have to look at other causes of crime, you have to look at the education system.

**Madam President:** Sen. Dr. Deyalsingh, you have five more minutes.

**Sen. Dr. V. Deyalsingh:** Thank you, Madam. We have to look at educational system. There are children in school—you see, a former Minister of Education, Mrs. Manning, had school psychologists. Also, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh, a former Minister of Education, also had special ed teachers, looking in schools for children with conduct disorders, children who are behaving in strange ways, killing animals, have no response for pain, who would go on to be anti-social, what you used to call “psychopaths”, who represent a portion of the criminal jail system. So we have to look in schools. We have, in schools, to recognize these children who are being abused at home, who will now take out their anger in crime, recognize

them and we have to look at social services to reach into those homes, with love, to rescue those children. So those are the future criminals that we have to look at. If you are bullied in school, there is a chance that you will end up committing a crime too. So both ways.

So therefore, we have to look at not only social services, education, health, teenage pregnancy, a mother who has to mind—a teenage—a pregnant girl who has to mind a child, she is at a disadvantage. We say, “Okay, you made a mistake, we will teach you, we will empower you but we will make you stay two years with that child, give you some sort of contraception and put you on your path.” We have to rescue the nation—sports. Sports is something that we have to get at and I am so ashamed about what the fiasco with the LifeSport, \$400 million that I thought would have go on such a good idea and it is a shame. Even a previous Prime Minister had the idea of having orchestras, where you had music and the culture—culture Ministry does play a part in encouraging persons, Yes, you have a culture but you also have people playing the tabla, the tassa, the sitar, the guitar, the piano, the pan and those are things that are going to get the future little boy who is going to be a criminal, we are aiming at that.

Madam, I am thinking it is so difficult. If we cannot even stop cell phones from going into prisons, how could we stop the porous borders? And we have seen the porous borders up to recently caused a disaster when persons were coming in with a ship. So we are getting it wrong in certain ways. I understand the Attorney General, full of energy, and he said we are putting more people in the DPP office, we are putting more judges, but Madam, there is something in psychology called “social loafing”. If I am pulling in tug of war, I will give my maximum effort but if I have three people behind me, I would not give that maximum effort.

So we may very well have more judges, more magistrates, more personnel, but that concept of social learning is something we have to learn. Poverty eradication, you see we have to look at that. It is difficult I know, it is a difficult time, I know now with the economy in such a state, somehow the whole society has to realize we have to downsize our expectations. It is a mental thing that we have to look at. We have to stop—as the Commissioner of Police mentioned that the regional corporations were also giving out contracts to bandits. We have to stop feeding the enemy. We have to stop those things and at least—because that again sends a wrong example. Yes, we want to provide jobs for persons but productive jobs also. Madam President, I must say that the intelligence service, the SORT intelligence service, good idea, we need those things. We see misuse in the past where a past Chief Justice was monitored, and judges, and other persons, but we need something in place. We need something in place where probably an ex-judge could look at that intelligence system to make sure it is not misused.

As I continue, Madam, I realized that the gangs are a major issue and we have to realize that we have to try somehow to attack the gangs, to give them jobs, some of them we have to rehabilitate them, some of them we have to realize that due to no fault of theirs, that is the only life they knew, they grew up in that culture. Madam, I would like to say that we need to really have to have a nationalistic attitude to develop our country. We had persons in the past coming in.

And as I close I must say, Madam, that the report that we have gotten from the United States that actually asked us to, you know, actually mentioned certain atrocities, certain areas in Trinidad and Tobago that we could try to change—the OSAC report. And they mentioned a whole set of things we could—problems

Sen. Dr. V. Deyalsingh (cont'd)

facing Trinidad and Tobago. But I am saying drug trafficking and gang-related activities continue to be a major problem here. I am saying it is time we ask the DAA to come and set up shop. That may help us with our relationship with the United States and that may help us solve crime. Thank you, Madam.

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, the sitting will be suspended and we will resume at 4.45 p.m.

**4.29 p.m.:** *Sitting suspended.*

**4.45 p.m.:** *Sitting resumed.*

**Mr. Vice-President:** Sen. Williams. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Jason Williams:** Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Permit me to say a few words before I go into the debate on this Motion today. Firstly, a sincere thanks for the warm welcome by the hon. Members of the Senate upon my appointment one week ago to this day. [*Desk thumping*] I have been engrossed by the meaningful dialogue and intriguing debate on both sides of the aisle as we collectively advance matters of concern that impact Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Vice-President, thank you for the opportunity to join on this Motion today.

Crime and its devastating effects has been part of the national narrative for way too long and we, the current administration upon assuming office in 2015, went on the offensive to remedy some of the unfortunate missteps made by the Opposition, then Government, during their time at the wheel from 2010 to 2015. Border protection, both air and sea as we all know is very critical in combating crime. Any nation that wants to keep its citizens safe understands fully well that border security is paramount. Mr. Vice-President, why would the then Government, now Opposition, cancel the OPVs leaving our maritime borders compromised. Mr. Vice-President, on February 4<sup>th</sup>, Sen. Hosein dismissed the

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OPV accusation stating that the then Government, now Opposition, was able to recover \$1 billion from the OPV arbitration. My good colleague on the other side went on to state that we do not need, again quote:

“We do not need additional vessels...”—we—“need to maintain what we currently have...”

Ironically, upon taking office in 2015, we the Government discovered that the maintenance of the Austal fast patrol vessels left much to be desired.

Mr. Vice-President, the Opposition, as far as I am concerned, really dropped the ball on the OPV deal and they know this. Just like we know, on the Government side of the aisle, that our distinguished hard-working men and women of the coast guard must be equipped with the necessary assets to ensure functionality when carrying out their duties. Mr. Vice-President, maritime assets are critical when we debate crime and more so, border security. This is our first line of defence especially when our collective objective is to keep out illegal firearms. And my good colleague on the other side, Sen. Hosein, would have spent a lot of time on such illegal firearms.

Unfortunately, between 2010 to 2015, our sea and maritime borders were compromised and we continue to pay the price today. And sadly, we are still grappling with the scourge of illegal firearms, the weapon of choice in most violent crimes. More about the Government and what we have done to push back on illegal firearms a little bit later in the debate. Mr. Vice-President, my good colleague on the other side, Sen. Hosein spent a lot of the time on illegal firearms when he moved his Motion as mentioned earlier and yes, I do agree it is a serious problem in Trinidad and Tobago. As a country, we boast of being a manufacturing powerhouse, yet firearms is not part of the cadre of products hence our borders



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should be tight to prevent such illegal firearms and said illegal firearms from coming in.

Mr. Vice-President, stats presented by the Opposition show doom and gloom. However, I can present some stats that show promise and a step in the right direction. Now, we have made some headway as a nation and according to data from the TTPS, between January 01 to December 31, 2019, 888 firearms were seized and found. Again, illegal firearms, 11,412 ammunition seized and found during the same time period, January 01 to December 31, 2019. From January 01 to April 30, 2020, 267 firearms seized and found; 5,910 ammunition seized and found.

Mr. Vice-President, we in Government continue to be steadfast with our plans to rid the nation of illegal firearms and engineer legislation that would keep offenders off the street. However, the Opposition's recent refusal in the other place to support the amendment to bail legislation as it relates to assault weapons, continue to create a major stumbling block in the Government's offensive on crime. Mr. Vice-President, let the records show that when the bail amendment was first debated in the Senate on June 11, 2019, it was passed the next day, June 12<sup>th</sup>, even though six Opposition Members voted against. When the Bill went to the other place on June 14, 2019, it eventually passed. However, in November 2019 when the Government continued via the Bail (Amdt.) Bill to address assault weapons as mentioned earlier, stumbling block, Opposition Senators abstained in the Senate and Opposition MPs abstained in the other place. Real failure, as far as I am concerned, from my colleagues on the other side of the aisle and of course, games being played, and this is not a time for games especially when assault weapons want "tuh run on de pitch".

**UNREVISED**

Mr. Vice-President, an illegal firearm is an instrument of evil, terror, intimidation and death, and we in Government will not stop until we clean up our streets. Mr. Vice-President, between 2010 to 2015 the then Government, now Opposition, had a constitutional majority and flip-flopped with the post of Commissioner of Police, outsourcing personnel from overseas and ignoring the local talent pool. When it was decided to stay local, it was in an acting capacity and little could really be done to effect a meaningful and positive change within the TTPS. Mr. Vice-President, we came into Government in 2015 and immediately sprung into action, simplified the process, and appointed Commissioner Griffith to the post of top cop. Even his appointment had pulling and tugging from the Opposition side but eventually, the appointment was confirmed and Commissioner Griffith went to work. And still my colleagues on the other side questioned his style and approach to crime fighting.

Mr. Vice-President, allow me to stay with the law enforcement for a few more minutes since they play a critical role as frontline officers in the push back on crime. According to the data and information from the TTPS, we have seen some major moves and initiatives being made: the introduction of ID badges for officers giving a more professional outlook, very much in tune with what we experience when we visit overseas jurisdictions. The implementation of Gender-Based Violence Unit, bringing much needed assistance to victims of domestic abuse and violence. The ramping up of the TTPS online presence, more access to officers and the top cop, quicker response time, just to name a few.

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

Now, I must be honest that all is not perfect, Madam President, with the TTPS, as mentioned by the Opposition. However, we look at the improvements,

we look at the strides being made, and we have seen—I have seen in recent times that a confidence continues to be restored and even though they stand as an independent entity within the nation's framework, the image of the TTPS is in a much better place during this Government's tenure, and this can only auger well in the push back on crime and criminality.

Madam President, the young people of the nation are the most vulnerable and without proper guidance and mentorship, they can get caught in the unforgiving web of crime. As a teenager, Madam President, with time on my hands and with encouragement from my mother, I enrolled to become a member of the St. James Police Youth Club, under the guidance of Officer Sharbodie, who is up to this day still performing amazing work, as he continues to be a true influence to the young people in the North-Western Division. Active police youth clubs across the country add amazing value to the lives of thousands of children, parents, and the community at large. They are all impacted. Madam President, where the youth clubs are inactive, like in my constituency of Barataria/San Juan, I want to work with the coordinators to bring energy and programmes for the young people of my area, so the proactive approach to crime prevention can be facilitated. This youth club programme and many others across the country is funded by the Government, and the Government understands the importance of creating options for the youth of the nation so that they can tap into their limitless potential.

Madam President, we spent considerable time on the perils of illegal firearms but we cannot forget the perils of the pen, especially when used to draft unscrupulous deals and agendas. Madam President, we the Government, and I must also acknowledge our AG for the foresight and energy spent on Bills to treat with corruption, white collar crime, cybercrime, money laundering, just to name a

few. We recognize that this framework and the energy being put in place will and continues to yield results.

Madam President, just a week ago we moved the Real Estate Agents Bill so that there can be due diligence, code of ethics, best industry practices, protection for consumers, and a serious push back on criminality, especially in the realm of money laundering. This is just one recent action by Government to tackle crime and criminality from all fronts.

Madam President, I assure my colleagues on the other side that tireless work is being done by Government to remedy the crime issue in this country. And in closing, Madam President, I reject the Motion moved by Sen. Hosein. However, I trust that we can put politics aside and ultimately work to create cohesion and meaningful action so that our nation could and would work together and prosper without this issue of crime and criminality stunting our potential. We owe it to ourselves and the generations to come, and as perpetual optimist, I know we will overcome. Thank you, Madam President, thank you colleagues. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, permit me to congratulate Sen. Williams on his maiden contribution. [*Desk thumping*] Sen. Seepersad.

**Sen. Charisse Seepersad:** Madam President, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the effect of crime on citizens and businesses in Trinidad and Tobago. We are all aware of the extent of the scourge of criminal activity which continues to be committed with impunity in our country. Even during the COVID-19 lockdown, crimes continued unabated. Despite the efforts of the crime prevention forces, there seems to be no end in sight to this madness. It appears as if crime is now part of the DNA of our social fabric.

A reasonable conclusion therefore is that a different approach in dealing

with the virus and parasite that the Commissioner of Police speaks about is necessary. Parts of our society are sick, Madam President, and cannot be ignored. Appropriate relief is essential in the medium to long term. Government-led initiatives need to do more in this regard by creating opportunities which are more attractive than a life of crime. President Paula-Mae Weekes, at the reopening of the Red House on January 24, 2020 said and I quote:

“While Parliament and other leaders in the country are dabbling in semantics about whether we are a failed state or not or in a crime crisis our citizens are being murdered at an alarming rate.”

She also said that the socioeconomic condition of citizens was a major item for concern.

Madam President, problem solving and the prevention of crime necessitates that intelligent analysis of the root cause or causes be first established before a lasting solution can be put in place. There must then be a feedback loop for adjustments and fine tuning. As I have previously stated, the analyses have already been done. However, the critical element that has evidently been missing is the courage and laser-focused will to administer the long-term measures for a lasting effect.

Several commentators have been using the terminology “total government approach”, but how does this work when successive governments and administrations are involved directly or indirectly in providing the financial means to support the underworld criminal activities? This has been stated by no less a person than the Commissioner of Police. Despite their protestations to the contrary, it is clear that governments are a key part of the problem and must hasten to play a major role in the solution.

In the meantime, the underworld has taken and continues in the taking of the leadership role in the communities in which they control. Citizens seeking protection pay coward tax for themselves and their families to remain the situation in which they find themselves. In these communities, the law of the land as well as governments are by and large irrelevant. Those on the ground have this intelligence and use it accordingly. Taxpayers want to enjoy a better way of life, there must be a better way. Without noticeable and quantifiable changes, some citizens are prepared simply to go elsewhere.

As parliamentarians, we have sworn to uphold the Constitution and the law. Citizens being deprived of safety and the enjoyment of property is not an option. The statistics have reported criminal activity by the CSO and the TTPS, broken down by category, is shameful. In 2019, the detection rate was 8 per cent for murder and 25 per cent overall for serious crimes. While serious crimes have reportedly decreased during the current coronavirus pandemic, the murder rate for the period January to April 22, 2020 was 159, compared to 151 for the same period in 2019. It is glaringly apparent that only the most inept of criminals are caught. It also begs the question of the incidents of unreported crime. Therefore, is there a reliable estimate and what is the true number?

Efforts to harness the intelligence which is available in communities have proven inadequate. Crime reporting and community watch groups are generally fearful of repercussions from the criminal element of even corrupt law enforcement. As our crime figures have escalated, an entire generation have grown up facing decayed or decaying infrastructure, parenting challenges, household and community violence, incomplete education, substance abuse, mental health challenges, unequal educational opportunities, extreme income

inequality, pressures to consume, to mention a few.

Prevention strategies based on sound social psychological research and programmes may have prevented some of this. Unfortunately, what now is referred to as “social protection” includes stop gap measures of primarily cash transfers of various forms, for example, food cards, grants, temporary work, all important for short-term relief but inadequate in the long-term. The single exception has been the Children’s Authority which has had to take on the brunt of the fallout of our weak social support systems.

The Government intends to spend a further \$100 million on crime, hopefully not all on more weaponry and vehicles. I hope some will be spent on prevention and social support systems because while high Caribbean homicide rates are the result of many factors such as transnational narco-trafficking systems and related gun and gang cultures, criminal violence is also very much a social problem. The current social context creates the environment within which transnational organized crimes can plant seeds and grow. So everyone wants to know, is there a long-term plan and what is it, and will there be any continuity in implementation? Surely, there cannot be a quick fix or knee-jerk plaster to this festering problem. Our country is gifted with an abundance of talented professionals whose expertise can and should be harnessed in using available resources to devise a workable solution to this malaise. For too long political interest has employed insular approach to national problem-solving. Hopefully, a more mature consultative methodology would be considered. Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

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

**Sen. Taharqa Obika:** Thank you, Madam President.

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

Public safety and security of the citizenry, Madam President, it was with a heavy heart that I listened to Sen. De Freitas submit that yes, they have failed on crime but point to the Opposition as to the reason for this failure, because nothing in the Attorney General's contribution spoke of any failure. But the honesty that we got from Sen. De Freitas about a failure and the distraction to focus on the Opposition was the disappointing part of his contribution. Because fixing crime is in fact the responsibility that a government is charged with, and I was happy to see my brother from the southland give his maiden contribution, being Sen. Jason Williams. Of course, it was sad that he had to try to deliver his maiden knock on the indefensible record of the PNM Government's failure, under this administration, to deal with crime.

So what I intend to do is basically outline the root causes of crime that should be fixed in a forward-thinking manner because it is the duty of a government to protect its citizens. That is a statement that cannot be challenged. Has this Government lived up to that duty? No amount of blaming the Opposition, no amount of blaming institutions in the country, no amount of blaming other persons, can deflect the blame that falls squarely at the feet of the Cabinet of the Keith Rowley Government that is governing Trinidad and Tobago. The Government should be focused on improving the lives of the citizens in Trinidad and Tobago not just itemizing, as the Attorney General did, things that they did, items that they spent moneys on. What has been the result? That is the most important thing because crime is the runaway horse in Trinidad and Tobago.

The youth, our young poets are singing about crime in an unbridled manner



because this is the life that they are facing. There must be a solution-based approach to crime fighting. And that is why in the national transformation plan of the government in waiting, articulated by Kamla Persad-Bissessar, outlines how in fact we will deal with crime fighting, how in fact we will deal with providing a society, providing the foundations of a society, that soil that is important for the tree of life to grow in this country.

Crime is so high that it finds itself grotesquely illustrated in the descriptions of journalists. No one can forget that December front page with missing persons and the call of the editor to find these people. Crime is also finding itself in the statements and the failure of this Government to fix crime, of the Commissioner of Police who is on official record protesting the lack of funding and the failure to submit sufficient funding and timely disbursement of funds for the police service's operations.

Now, where can we find the third aspect, the “zesser” music, the lyrics of our young poets, Prince Swanny, Jelano, Stinger, Boy Boy, Medz Boss. As a practitioner in the creative industry myself, I understand the role of social commentary but it saddens many citizens, myself included, that the state of crime is such that no matter how many positive songs that these young singers who I mentioned, record and produce, that it is the ones that speak to crime are the ones that become popular. It means that is the lifestyle that the people of Trinidad and Tobago are bombarded with.

### **5.15 p.m.**

It is such a lifestyle that compelled a young man in Marabella, who I know very well growing up, to sing “We buy we gun to shoot people”. Imagine that. And this is one of his most popular songs. So this young man, I confronted him in

the barber shop a couple months ago, and he said he has many positive songs, but that is what the people are calling for, that is what the youths want, because that is the life that they are confronted with. This Government has failed the young people to even see a sense of hope. There is no glimmer, not even a glimmer of hope in crime fighting. And when we can have Government Senator after Government Senator—from the Attorney General to Sen. De Freitas to even, unfortunately, the maiden contribution of Sen. Williams—blaming the Opposition for the Government's failure to fight crime, then they should take the advice. This Rowley Government should take the advice of one Opposition Leader, Keith Rowley, when we said that if you cannot find solutions to the problem then you are the problem, if you have to be blaming the Opposition.

Now, in Point Fortin, there is a crime wave, and I want to say that the failure of this Government to provide income support grants in a timely manner—I spoke to a business person. They have 30 members of staff. Only two persons have been paid the salary relief grants to date. This Government is contributing to crime by not providing that social safety net that they are mandated as a duty to do so. So, in Point Fortin, you have increases in crime, in break-ins, in break-ins in houses and business places. Just yesterday we had to deal with a young lady, as the country was opening up, heading out to work, being a victim of rape. Half past five in the morning, I had to be in the middle of that dealing with that, engaging the police on that matter.

So I want to speak to broader than the Ministry of National Security, the failure of several Ministers in this Cabinet to do their duty which has contributed to this crime wave. The high level of joblessness across the country, for example, in Point Fortin and south-west Trinidad, the closure of Petrotrin and Trinmar and

their operations have resulted in high levels of joblessness. In Point Fortin, the failure of the Minister of Trade and Industry to operationalize e TecK Park and the Minister of planning is complicit in that, because when I speak to the companies that have the tenants, the tenancy arrangements in place, they are not getting their approvals done on time. Madam President, 240 jobs neglected. So I am saying, when we get into Government, 50,000 jobs will be created, 1,000 of those will be in Point Fortin and 250 will be in that e TecK Park that this Government in five years could not get simple approvals. These are the things that really contribute to crime.

Joblessness: in the Ministry of Agriculture, it would surprise many persons to know that their grants, even at the level of the ADB, have been taken away. The inability of the Government to use the grant programme to provide the proper incentive for young people and new farmers in agriculture. I have to be dealing with a scenario in Point Fortin where young people simply need the use of a backhoe and the materials—the equipment that makes beds for their farming operation on lands that have been recognized by the Ministry of Agriculture in Point Fortin.

So this Government—so I am speaking to 20 youths in Point Fortin, so that they can provide their own sustenance. It is not just about giving seeds. It is about providing them with access to the lands that they need to farm. So I am saying this Minister of Agriculture has failed, and in this failure, whether it be farmers, fishermen, the agripreneurs, persons involved in distributing the foodstuff of these farmers and fishermen, these people have been failed and young people and persons involved in the labour market are jobless, because of this failure.

The culture industry: the Government spoke a lot about spending in national

security, but national security is the end. What is the root cause of crime? It is the engagement of the minds of the persons engaged in crime. What engages the minds of the young persons? Sport. Well, when you have a Minister of Sport that did not understand what sport was and that was the first public pronouncement of such a Minister, we could understand why sport is in the doldrums in terms of sport administration in this country.

Culture: culture of a people. I spoke at the beginning of the songs of the TriniBad Youths. Growing up in NJAC, the organization spent a lot of time focusing on cultural exponents, those artistes and musicians to engage them in some form of enlightenment so that it would be reflected in any shape or form in their music, so that the music would not be seeking to denigrate women but elevate the family; so that the men will elevate their sisters; that the sisters would elevate their brothers.

If we engage young people and cultural exponents and create the environment where culture can flourish, we can create even more jobs, and a simple example. In Point Fortin, our Festival Square is a car park for the borough corporation. That is an embarrassment, but it will be fixed, because we shall be in office in a few months' time, God willing and Point Fortin, under the urgings of myself and the leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar will get, as it has gotten a hospital from the work of Kamla Persad-Bissessar's Government, they will get a cultural and festival arts centre that will create jobs, scores of jobs for young people and cultural workers in the cultural capital of the Caribbean where the most Road March winners hail from.

In conclusion, a Government that seeks to blame the Opposition for their failure of every Member of Cabinet to make sure that their policies and their

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procedures and their work and their expenditure fixes crime in this country, a Government that fails in their duty must leave office, and such a Government has no place—Madam President, may I ask how much time I have left?

**Madam President:** You finish at 5.29.

**Sen. T. Obika:** Thank you very much. Such a Government has no place in the running of Trinidad and Tobago. Now, I spoke at the beginning of my contribution on the National Transformation Plan, and that National Transformation Plan has in it a segment on crime fighting initiatives, and there are several initiatives that are articulated there, one of which is the repealing and replacement of the now dated Domestic Violence Act.

We have seen the need—and I spoke of having to deal with the rape of a young lady in Point Fortin to the point where some journalist somewhere put out a question, if there is a serial rapist on the loose in Point Fortin? We need to focus on crimes, domestic violence, crimes against women, because it affects each and every one of us in this Chamber and in the country.

The establishment of a National Operations Centre as originally designed instead of a watered-down version has existed. What we need in this country—

**Madam President:** Sen. Obika, you have five more minutes.

**Sen. T. Obika:** Thank you very much, Madam President. What we need in this country is not an intelligence apparatus that is used to track down a fella on Facebook who put out a video against a Minister. What we need is a national intelligence and surveillance apparatus that is used for the purpose with which it was built for, to fight crime. But when we have a Minister of National Security using information at his disposal, we are in a dangerous place.

**Madam President:** Sen. Obika, let me stop you there. I would ask you to

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withdraw that statement, please.

**Sen. T. Obika:** I see nothing wrong with the statement, Madam President.

**Madam President:** Sen. Obika, withdraw the statement please.

**Sen. T. Obika:** I withdraw and I will rephrase. We must never have a scenario in this country where a Minister of National Security uses the apparatus of intelligence and surveillance to hound or track down citizens of this country for personal purposes. We must never have that scenario. [*Crosstalk*] I say we must never have that scenario. Should we not have that scenario?

**Sen. Khan:** Madam President, 46(6) please. [*Inaudible*]

**Madam President:** Sen. Obika, just move on please.

**Sen. T. Obika:** Thank you, Madam President. So I want to say that the allocations to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service in the national transformation plan, it puts pride of place to a timely system of allocating funds as is due to the police service in this country. So, therefore, it should be a thing of the past where you have open quarrels between a Commissioner of Police calling for moneys that are due to the police service and a Minister of Finance which are played out in full view of the public and the media whilst crime rampages across the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

Now, and the last point I want to end on which is dear to me, when you have a Government that closes down the energy skills centres in three PNM-held constituencies: Point Fortin, La Brea and Moruga, the places that are part of the oil belt, and then you are telling young people to take up opportunities, what you have done is discarded the futures of these young people. This Government has contributed to crime by virtue of negligence, by virtue of closing down these energy skills centres by virtue of not paying attention to joblessness and by virtue

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of not giving citizens, especially in this time of this pandemic. Whilst they are patting themselves on the back, this Government is failing to pay citizens—after they told them to stay home—their income support grants and their salary relief grants. That is, in fact, the highest crime committed against the citizenry of this country, and for that reason alone, the people of Trinidad and Tobago are anxiously awaiting the date of the election so that they can see the back of the Keith Rowley regime. I thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

### ADJOURNMENT

**The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan):** Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, before I put the question on the adjournment, leave has been granted for two matters to be raised. Sen. Haynes. [*Desk thumping*]

### **Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Government's Disregard of)**

**Sen. Anita Haynes:** Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, I stand here today to raise a critical matter on Government accountability and transparency. It is the need for the Government to account for its disregard of the 73 year-old Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, also known as the Rio Treaty, when it facilitated the visit of the sanctioned Venezuelan Vice-President Delcy Rodriguez and that delegation.

Madam President, this administration, by their wilful and reckless actions have endangered Trinidad and Tobago's foreign and diplomatic relations with its key allies. Madam President, there is an absolute need for the Government to account as to why they chose to disregard this Treaty when it facilitated this visit.

**UNREVISED**

I assume by now, Madam President, that we have gone past whether or not the Treaty has been broken, but for the sake of those in doubt, allow me to clarify how we broke this Treaty.

In December 2019, countries from Latin America and the Organization of the American States joined with signatory states of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty). They met in Bogotá Colombia and voted overwhelmingly to impose travel restrictions on the Nicolás Maduro regime and members of his regime including Delcy Rodriguez. According to the Colombian Foreign Minister, these measures were implemented to support a re-establishment of democracy and respect for human rights in Venezuela. Curiously, Trinidad and Tobago was absent from this extremely important meeting. But now, Madam President, you can see why. Though Trinidad and Tobago was not present for this vote, the vote itself is binding on all signatories, including Trinidad and Tobago.

On December 16<sup>th</sup> the US Embassy in Trinidad and Tobago sent a diplomatic note, No. 219354, to the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. This note reads:

The Embassy of the United States of America has the further honour—this is merely an excerpt from the note—to inform the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago of the resolution adopted by the Organ of Consultation at the meeting of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance to impose travel restrictions on 29 individuals associated with the former Maduro regime.

The Embassy of the United States of America has the honour to highlight as per Article 20 of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance that the resolution is binding to all parties in the said treaty—I will repeat that last part—all parties in the said Treaty.



Plain and simple, Madam President, by allowing Delcy Rodriguez to enter Trinidad and Tobago on March 27<sup>th</sup>, a full three months after the vote and to ban her travel after the US Embassy reminded the Government that she was banned. This was a reminder in December, Madam President. Trinidad and Tobago chose to violate Article 20 of the Inter-American Treaty for Reciprocal Assistance.

Now, Madam President, the question I am calling on the Government to answer today is, why? Why would you take this decision? The Government has been caught being less than forthright with the people of Trinidad and Tobago on the details of said meeting, feigning ignorance and flip-flopping on their story. They have deliberately sought to derail legitimate queries into the reasons for the meeting which have put our country at risk by using insidious and inaccurate terms like “treason” and “traitor”, all in an attempt, Madam President, to distract and derail from accounting for their actions. But today by virtue of this Motion, I hope that we will finally get an answer as to why. Why the Government chose to facilitate this meeting?

The US Embassy confirmed, Madam President, that Delcy Rodriguez is subject to travel sanctions. They confirmed that the sanctions were binding on all signatories of the Treaty. The Government must be aware, Madam President, that despite their routine defence that the UN recognizes the Maduro regime, this does not override any treaty that we have with our international allies nor does it negate any actions that violate these treaties. Any attempt, Madam President, to cover the reasons for the visit, the reasons that the sanctioned Vice-President of Venezuela was able to meet with our Prime Minister, the Minister of National Security and a delegation, Madam President, that to this day the Government has yet to confirm the full membership of the delegation that met with senior members of our Cabinet, including our head of Government.

Every day, Madam President, since the revelation made by the Opposition Leader, Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, the story is changing. New revelations are coming forward and there is a rapidly escalating maybe we did this, maybe we did that, Madam President. The first excuse you would recall, was that they did not know who was in the room. The second was that nobody granted any authorization, we do not know which planes are sanctioned which are not sanctioned. Madam President, a three-minute Google search would have given them all of this information. The excuse that they had no responsibility of knowing whether or not aircraft are sanctioned and that this was under the Civil Aviation, Madam President, that was put to bed by the Civil Aviation Authority's Director who stated that this was solely the responsibility of the Minister of National Security. So we ask again, why all the secrecy, Madam President?

You see, Madam President, in their desperation to cover up all of the recklessness of their actions they have attempted to introduce this idea that by attempting to discuss this topic, by attempting to gain clarity for the actions of a sitting Government, of an Executive, that that is in somewhere indicative that we are inviting sanctions on the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. I wish to put that to bed today, Madam President. Transparency and accountability cannot invite sanctions on the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] It is only the actions of the sitting administration, the actions which I have been at pains to outline earlier in this Motion, which show that we have deliberately chosen to violate a treaty of which we are signatory, which there is a note to the Ministry of Foreign and Caricom Affairs from the US Embassy which has reminded them of that we signed on to, Madam President, that these actions have put Trinidad and Tobago at risk for international scrutiny, Madam President.

What should be clear to the people of Trinidad and Tobago is that this

administration had no qualms about endangering the diplomatic relations of our country by facilitating this meeting with the sanctioned Ms. Rodriguez. Again, they have yet to come clean on why this meeting was so essential and why it had to be accommodated just one day, Madam President, one day after the Maduro regime was indicted by the US Department of Justice on narco-terrorism, drug trafficking and money laundering.

The actions of this Government do not reflect their non-intervention as claimed but rather, Madam President, the actions, the deliberate wilful actions of this Government, has chosen to align Trinidad and Tobago against our strongest hemispheric allies and the people of Trinidad and Tobago deserve to know why. Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dennis Moses):**

Thank you very much, Madam President. I have very little doubt, and I have all confidence, in that persons who would have intently listened to what was just said, would come to the conclusion that it has all to do with—has very little to do with the truth, but all to do with, perhaps, fishing.

Madam President, Trinidad and Tobago became an independent sovereign nation on the 31<sup>st</sup> of August, 1962, and thereafter, assumed control of its foreign policy. Less than one month later, Trinidad and Tobago was admitted to the United Nations on the 18<sup>th</sup> of September of 1962. Membership of other bodies followed. Trinidad and Tobago signed the Charter of the Organization of American States on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March in 1965, ratified the Charter on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March of the said year and deposited instruments of ratification on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March of 1967.

Trinidad and Tobago is a signatory to the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, otherwise known as TIAR, or the Rio Treaty. Trinidad and

Tobago signed the Treaty on the 6<sup>th</sup> of April in 1967 and ratified it on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June and deposited it on the 12<sup>th</sup> of June of 1967. As part of the Treaty, the high contracting parties agreed that an attack by any State against an American State shall be considered as an attack against all the American States and, consequently, each one of the said contracting parties undertakes to assist in meeting the attack in the exercise of their inherent right of individual or collective self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. Self-defence, collective defence, notably should a member state come under military attack from another state and the need for a request from that state, the state or states directly attacked are central tenets of the Treaty.

Madam President, consistently over the years, Trinidad and Tobago has maintained a foreign policy anchored on multilateralism, non-interference and non-intervention in the internal affairs of States, an independent position in international affairs and one rooted in improving and safeguarding the welfare of its citizens. Madam President, beyond multilateralism and the Rules-Based Charter of the United Nations, small countries, and especially small island developing countries like Trinidad and Tobago could very well find themselves without due protection and at the mercy of the doctrine “right is might” or rather not “right is might” but the other way around, “might is right”. Attempts at diluting multilateralism and the rules-based order could render us even more vulnerable and rob us of our dignity, sustenance and voice as members of the international community.

Madam President, the hon. Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, as part of a Caricom delegation of Prime Ministers, visited the United States of America and participated in talks with the Secretary General of the United Nations on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January of last year, 2019. The Secretary General confirmed that the

Government led by President Nicolas Maduro continued to be the sole legitimate Government recognized and seated at the United Nations. The hon. Prime Minister also participated as part of a Caricom delegation in a meeting on the Montevideo Mechanism on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, 2019, in Uruguay.

This meeting was convened to treat with the internal problems of Venezuela. These initiatives were part of the response of Caricom in the face of the then heightened reality that attempts were being made to intervene in Venezuela militarily and install a new government. Trinidad and Tobago and Caricom's stated position was, and continues to be that the situation within Venezuela needs to be resolved through dialogue by the contending parties and not by external intervention by third parties. Caricom also offered its good offices to bring the parties together to treat with the problem.

Trinidad and Tobago and Caricom States have a stake in maintaining the Caricom as a zone of peace, given the potentially catastrophic consequences of armed conflict in neighbouring Venezuela.

Madam President, Venezuela withdrew from the Organization of American States on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April in 2017. Venezuela's denunciation of the Rio Treaty took effect on the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, 2013. Venezuela supposed reinstatement of its ratification of the Treaty on the 6<sup>th</sup> of August, 2016, was done by representatives of Mr. Juan Guaidó, the leader of the National Assembly of Venezuela and not by the legitimate Government of Venezuela.

At the 49<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States in Colombia on the 28<sup>th</sup> of June, 2019, Trinidad and Tobago reserved its right not to be bound by the resolution AG/CG/document74/17 adopted at the meeting on the situation in Venezuela, and by any decision taken by the OAS which is based on, principally includes, or in any other manner involves

the participation of the representatives of Mr. Juan Guaidó reportedly seated as the permanent representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs represented Trinidad and Tobago at the Rio Treaty Meeting in New York on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September, 2019. The meeting adopted resolution RC20/RES1/19. Subsequently, the resolution was revised to include Trinidad and Tobago's reservation. The new reference for the resolution is RC30/RES1/19 RES 2.

**5.45 p.m.**

During the vote on the resolution, Trinidad and Tobago abstained, Uruguay voted against, Cuba was absent and the other 16 member states voted in favour of the resolution which invoked the provisions of the Rio Treaty and laid the basis for taking punitive measures against Venezuela. Once again, Trinidad and Tobago reaffirmed that it reserves the right not be bound by any decision adopted in this resolution by the Thirtieth Meeting of Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Acting as the Consultative Organ in Application of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance which involves the participation of the representatives of the Venezuelan National Assembly, purportedly seated as the permanent representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, nor to recognize this resolution as legally valid or to consider itself bound by the provisions approved on the said date of September the 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2019.

Trinidad and Tobago was invited to participate in yet another Rio Treaty meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December in Colombia. The purpose of the meeting was to take punitive measures against Venezuela. Trinidad and Tobago decided not to participate in the meeting. Decisions of the Rio Treaty at that meeting included travel restrictions imposed against Vice President of Venezuela, Delcy Rodriguez. Trinidad and Tobago also did not participate in any of the informal or preparatory

meetings of the provisional organ of consultation for the session of the Thirtieth Meeting of the Consultation of Ministers of Foreign Affairs held in Colombia on the said day of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December.

Madam President, notwithstanding the difficulties within Venezuela, Trinidad and Tobago stands on solid ground in being in harmony with the position of the United Nations and the stated position of Caricom in recognizing the Government led by President Nicolás Maduro as the legitimate Government of Venezuela. Given our understanding of the Charter of the United Nations, Trinidad and Tobago does not recognize Mr. Juan Guaidós the President of Venezuela. To do otherwise would run counter to the stated positions of Caricom and the United Nations.

Madam President, the distortion of the Rio Treaty, a collective self-defence pact to treating with matters internal to Venezuela without the consent or request of that country is questionable and does not sit well with the intended purposes of the Treaty. Indeed, as the Rio Treaty explicitly informs, none of the provisions of the Treaty shall be construed as impairing the rights and obligations of the high contracting parties under the Charter of the United Nations.

Trinidad and Tobago takes the position that it is not bound by these recent decisions of the Rio Treaty, inclusive of the travel restrictions imposed on the Vice President of Venezuela since it had entered, meaning Trinidad and Tobago had entered, repeatedly so dare I say, in a sustained and consistent manner regarding such decisions at the OAS General Assembly in June of last year and at the meeting of Rio Treaty in September of 2019.

Further, Madam President—

**Madam President:** Minister, your time has expired.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Moses:** Oh, I thought in five minutes you would have alerted

me.

**Madam President:** Your 10 minutes has expired.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Moses:** Okay.

**Madam President:** That is it, Minister.

**Sen. The Hon. D. Moses:** I am fine. Many thanks to you. I hope I would have brought clarity. Thanks.

**COVID-19 Pandemic  
(Plight of Stay-at-Home Workers)**

**Sen. Wade Mark:** Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, the matter that I am about to deal with focuses on the plight of the stay-at-home workers in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the negative effects of this on their livelihoods. Madam President, as Trinidad and Tobago continue to slowly lift its lockdown restrictions, very shortly thousands of workers would be returning to their respective workplaces, some have already begun to do so. But many of them, Madam President, are not going to be certain as to whether their jobs would be available and if they are, under what terms and conditions? Whether these workers would have to face a salary or a wage cut, or even a wage freeze is a matter that is still up in the air given these circumstances.

Madam President, as you are aware less than 20 per cent of our employed labour force belongs to organized trade unions. It means therefore that hundreds of thousands representing some 80 per cent are not represented by any trade union and given what has happened with the stay-at-home order, many workers have not been in receipt of any sort of wages and/or salary from their representative employers and therefore, they have had to depend exclusively on the State via the salary relief grant. The Government has indicated, Madam President, that about 40,000 or so workers or citizens would have applied for the salary relief grant of



\$1,500. We have learnt also from the Prime Minister that as of the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, a statement in the Parliament indicated that some 12,162 workers or persons had been in receipt of the salary relief grant. I think the Minister of Finance subsequently increased the number from 12,162 to 15,333 but, Madam President, we are talking about hundreds of thousands of workers who might be in a situation where they are not in receipt of any kind of wages.

We understand, Madam President, that according to the Minister of Social Development and Family Services, the Government received some 946 rental assistance applications of which 25 per cent over 200 were deemed invalid. It is therefore important at this point in time for the Government to really pay attention and to give some kind of direct support to these tens of thousands of workers, particularly those that are preparing to return to work as the country lift these lockdown restrictions. Madam President, children are going to be left unsupervised as these workers report for duty under probably different terms and conditions of employment. And one of the reasons I have raised this particular matter on the Motion for the Adjournment is to get the Government to indicate to the Senate what steps it intends to take to address those citizens, those workers who would be going back into the workplace, and with schools scheduled to be reopened in September, what will happen to the children who are going to be left unsupervised by their parents, many of whom, as you will know, Madam President, are single female-led households? So they have to go back to the job or their jobs very shortly but the question is, who will supervise their children in a period, Madam President, when school is scheduled to be reopened?—or the Government will consider its reopening in September. So we need to get clarification from the Government on this.

Now, Madam President, this brings me to the question of pandemic leave.

Now the Government has said, through the Prime Minister, that that no longer is relevant given all that has taken place but, I believe, as we open or reopen the economy and workers have to report for duty, particularly single mothers, who will take care of their kids? And that is why, I believe, that whole pandemic leave concept needs to be revisited and maybe the Government can tell this Senate whether the Government is contemplating looking at this pandemic leave in the context of the reopening of the economy vis-à-vis when school will get restarted and who will take care of these children who will be unsupervised.

Madam President, I also wish to draw your attention as we focus on the plight of those workers who are operating under restrictions, I was quite happy because I believe that people deserve to get some income, particularly given the dislocation that we have all experienced. I was happy to see that maxi-taxi owners, some 5,000 of them were able to receive \$2,000 as a fuel grant. That is very good, the question that has to be asked is that they were able to get that money within less than two weeks. Less than two weeks they were handed a cheque but, Madam President, the stay-at-home workers who have applied for the salary relief grant, over 40,000 we are told, only 15,000 or thereabouts have been in receipt. And, Madam President, the complicated arrangements that have been put in place, the kind of questions that the Government would have put in place for these ordinary citizens to address for them to access this measly \$1,500, you have, for instance at the same time— and I have no grouse with the maxi-taxi owners having their \$2,000— but how do we treat with the salary workers and those workers who are at home and have to go back to work, their children unsupervised? We need to give them some pandemic relief for supervision of their children and the Government needs to speed up that distribution process involving social grants of \$1,500 to those persons. Madam President, I thank you very much for allowing me to raise

this matter. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Minister in the Ministry of Finance.

**The Minister of Public Administration and Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Sen. The Hon. Allyson West):** Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*] Madam President, Sen. Mark's Motion deals with the issue of the negative effects on the livelihood of the stay-at-home persons—which is what I am quoting here—workers in the country in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. So, Madam President, in response to that—and I will deal with the extra issues, the additional issues, the thrown-in issues as and when I have time at the end of my contribution. So the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, when it became evident that we have this challenge to deal with, adopted a carefully planned and managed approach to the COVID-19 situation to reduce the impact on the society. What the Government did was closed the borders, we closed the schools, we closed all business other than essential businesses, we restricted congregating in public first to no more than 10 persons and thereafter no more than five, and we introduced social distancing rules. These measures, Madam President, resulted in a significant curtailment of economic activity with one inevitable result being the suspension or termination of employment of a lot of workers in the country.

Madam President, this result was anticipated but unavoidable, so what we immediately did was we devised an approach to mitigate the impact of the actions that we had to take to combat the COVID-19 situation on especially the most vulnerable, whether they be individuals and/or businesses. So our approach, the Government's approach and actions were informed by the following objectives: the plan was to leave no one behind, to address and mitigate socioeconomic impacts, to jumpstart the economy and sustain economic momentum. All of these, Madam President, were devised on the understanding that in sustaining economic

activity and revitalization of the economy had to be a trans-sector approach, meaning that everyone needed and needs to play a part, and everyone needed and needs to share a part of the burden, because the impact of this COVID-19 situation was recognized, from the start, to be so significant that we understood that no one sector in society, whether it be Government or anyone else could fully bear the burden.

So we set about doing that by creating an environment that would allow and facilitate actors, other than the Government, to assist in easing the burden that would be placed on the unemployed and the vulnerable. We sat with the financial sector members, we sat with business sector members and agreed with them as to what approach we needed to take to put them in funds to minimize the fallout for employed persons, the “stay-at-home workers” as Sen. Mark calls them. So in seeking to create an environment that would allow business— and including the banks— to assist employees to stay employed and to maintain a salary, we reduced the reserved requirement which introduced an additional \$2.6billion into the economy. We reduced the repo rate which allowed the banks to reduce the lending rates to its customers, to waive payments, to defer mortgage payments, to waive and reduce interest payments on loans, and so on. We agreed that we would settle VAT refunds and payments outstanding to contractors to put businesses in funds to be able, as far as possible, to maintain employment of their workers. And those businesses in turn, we asked them for a commitment to retain those workers for as long as they could and many of them gave this commitment.

We also paid income tax refunds. In addition to the VAT refunds, we have started paying off the VAT bonds. We have created facilities that allow the banks and the credit unions to issue soft loans to businesses and others. And all of this, Madam President, as I said, was for the purpose of creating an environment that

allowed the business sector to contribute to the mitigation of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures that had to be taken on the most vulnerable. In addition to that, Madam President, the Government directly devised various categories of financial support to provide mainly against the most vulnerable and it was estimated at the start that this financial support would initially cost \$4.5 billion. So what we have done, Madam President, includes the following: we issued food cards to persons who would not normally be in receipt of food cards or entitled to food cards but whose children were at home and therefore they could not benefit during the time at home from the school feeding programme. We did not want them to be in need so we provided food cards to those persons. We did that via the MPs across the country.

We topped up the food cards of persons who were already entitled to food cards. We provided additional relief to persons in receipt of public assistance and disability assistance. We provided food hampers to regional corporations. We provided income support grants for persons outside of the NIS system. And, Madam President, in looking at how we would structure those reliefs, it came to our attention that a full one-third of the population, of the working population, is outside of the NIS and also the BIR system, so they are not contributing but they are receiving contributions. We also set up a salary relief grant for people who are within the NIS system. So we have the Ministry of Finance with the salary relief grant and the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services with the other support grant, both to provide the same objective to two different groups of employees. We are continually assessing the situation and revising how we treat with things. So realizing that the demand for nutrition was in excess of what we originally contemplated, we recently engaged the religious and civil society organizations to provide food relief or to be engaged in the distribution of food

relief so that it could more efficiently and effectively be provided to those in need.

We also, as Sen. Mark just commented, provided the fuel grant to the maxi-taxi drivers and the reason why, Madam President, it was easy to do that in a short time is because we targeted the people who are registered. When we have a register that indicates all the qualifying people, it is easy to contact them and say, “Come in”, we verify that the person is the person on the system and we pay them. When we have employees who are not registered, who are not being paid, who we have to confirm have in fact been terminated by their employer or have ceased getting income from their employer even though they are only suspended, that takes a longer process. We cannot just give out cheques to everybody who comes and puts out their hand says, “We want something.” So that the system of distribution is as efficient as the applicants allow it to be, as the information before us allow it to be. Our objective is to provide relief to people as early as possible but there are certain circumstances which require us to investigate and confirm the accuracy of the information we get from the applicants.

So, Madam President, the Government has taken a measured approach and is continuing to take a measured approach. We have certain issues to still resolve, including what will happen when people start going back out to work and children are still at home, but this is why have we have the road map committee which is working and we will report to the country in short order. Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, I now invite Members to bring greetings for the celebration of Indian Arrival Day. The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. [*Desk thumping*]

### **Indian Arrival Day Greetings**

**The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence**

**Rambharat):** Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, last Thursday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, was celebrated as the UN-sanctioned World Day for Cultural Diversity, also known as Diversity Day. Madam President, 175 years ago, the first East Indians brought not only their labouring skills but their religion, socio-cultural practices, their food and their festivals to the Caribbean region. Almost 150,000 East Indians came to this region and including, Madam President, with my great-grandfather, Sumaran Pundit from Uttar Pradesh, my paternal grandfather, my great-grandfather and also, my descendants, my mother's parents and grandparents, and so on. Madam President, it is because of this Trinidad and Tobago is such a diverse country and the diversity is reflected in that line in our National Anthem, "Here every creed and race find an equal place".

Madam President, the reason we have that diversity is, a part of the arrangement with the indentured labours is that they had the opportunity, at the end of their contract, to either stay in this country or leave and those who elected to stay formed part of what is well established in this country, a land-owning East Indian population. It was the opportunity to own and farm a parcel of land was tied to the decision to stay here. And I am very happy that my great-grandparents decided, Madam President, to stay here, because living here led to schools being established, places of worship, contributed to our architecture, our way of dress, our mannerism, our culture, everything, in particular to food and festivals in this country. Trinidad and Tobago is a colourful place, Madam President, on account of not only the East Indian arrival but the arrival of the ancestors of everybody who live here.

Madam President, we recently celebrated Spiritual Baptist Liberation Day, Easter, Eid-ul-Fitr; Saturday we celebrate Indian Arrival Day, thereafter we will celebrate Corpus Christi, and it might surprise a lot of people still to know that

East Indians are Baptists, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and among the Christians, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Catholics, Pentecostals. So East Indians have established themselves in our society, Madam President, to the point that there are 16 Senators in this House who can claim direct lineage to East Indians but, Madam President, every Senator in this House can claim some association with East Indians either by virtue of marriage or some other thing. It is not just love of roti, it is a deep and direct link to the East Indian ancestry. But, Madam President, in closing, I say it is an opportunity, 175 years later, to reflect on the agony of the journey, the expectation of arrival and the great effort that not only East Indians have made but all of us brought here to these islands have made to the development of our beautiful nation. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Saddam Hosein:** Thank you very much, Madam President. According to the Constitution, which is the supreme law of the land, at section 4:

“It is recognised and declared that Trinidad and Tobago have existed and shall continue to exist without discrimination by reason of race, origin, colour, religion or sex...”

Today this Senate acknowledges the arrival of the first group of immigrants which began a period of indentureship who arrived on our shores 175 years ago. They brought with them, themselves, their culture, traditions and hope for a better life. When they disembarked, they bowed in reverence and humility, touched the earth saying “Jai dharti maa”. “Jai” means victory, “dharti” means land, and “maata” means mother. These were the Hindus who did this as they pledged allegiance to the motherland, Trinidad and Tobago.

Our Muslim brothers and sisters performed Salaah, which is the prayer signalling that they turn to east. They did not forget the values of the Holy Land of Mecca, no matter how far away they were.



They landed on the shores of Trinidad and Tobago as strangers but adapted quickly to make it their home. Through hard work, determination and faith, they made a permanent impact on the future of our nation. They believed that education is a pathway to success and out of poverty. And while they may have been poor in fortunes, they had wealth in knowledge. They have shown their resilience after finding themselves at the center of attack and discrimination.

The history will show that they were branded as a recalcitrant minority, an unfortunate label that we thought would have never reared its ugly head. However, after 175 years of their existence on this soil, that label was resurrected at a time of a pandemic, when we were told that we are in this together. I am proud to be a member of a party that understands and demonstrates that we need all Trinidadians and Tobagonians to build this nation.

The East Indian community played a critical role in the development of our twin-island Republic. They advanced their talents in fields such as medicine, law, literature, teaching and governance. They have occupied the highest office of the land in Trinidad and Tobago. They have made Trinidad and Tobago proud of their accomplishments locally, regionally and putting Trinidad and Tobago on the world map. Today, the influence of the East Indian community is relevant in our society, as we still we practice the traditions of their religion, values, norms, and culture, such as food and music.

Today we reflect on the contributions of our forefather after the brave trip they took across the Kalapani in search of a better life. I feel extremely grateful, humbled and proud that because of the sacrifices of my forefathers, I am able to occupy a seat in the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

We celebrate the contributions of all those persons who come from other countries and honour the sacrifices they made to build their communities, and in

turn built a vibrant, multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious society that is Trinidad and Tobago. Let not our differences divide us. Let our differences unite us and let us take delight in our differences.

As we celebrate this occasion, we must continue to work together to build a stronger, more prosperous future for our country to return Trinidad and Tobago once more to growth and prosperity and into a united nation, which we can all be proud to call our home.

On behalf of the United National Congress, the Opposition Bench and our esteemed Opposition Leader and political leader, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar of Senior Counsel, I wish Trinidad and Tobago a happy and reflective Indian Arrival Day. I thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

**Sen. Deeroop Teemal:** Madam President, May 30<sup>th</sup> of this year 2020, would be the 175<sup>th</sup> year of arrival of the Jahajis or Girmitiyas indentured labourers to the shores of Trinidad and Tobago. What is also less known is that in January of this year, it was also the 100<sup>th</sup> year of the abolition of Indian indentureship under the British system. And although legislation was passed by the British Parliament a year or two earlier, the actual—the last indentured labourer was 100 years ago in January 2020.

So a lot of organizations and groups in Trinidad and Tobago were planning a lot of extravagant celebrations and events around this double 175<sup>th</sup> and 100<sup>th</sup> year of the abolition of indentureship. But of course, as we know, due to the COVID pandemic, a lot of that has changed and attempts are being made to have a lot of these programmes and events through online and virtual mediums as much as possible.

Madam President, Indian Arrival Day for me, really affords us the opportunity for introspection and reflection. Whilst there is a national tendency to

celebrate, because success calls for celebration and there are many reasons to celebrate Indian Arrival Day but within all of that celebration, reflection and introspection, to me, offers us very unique opportunities, not only as citizens of the country, but collectively as a nation.

One of the factors really is that, when we look at civilizations and the advance of civilizations, and we would want to surround it with many complexities and many innovations, particularly in the age of technology that we live in, and think that success really hinges on all of these complex and innovative measures, I think the Indian Arrival Day gives us that opportunity to remind ourselves that success is grounded in values, and there are eternal values, irrespective of age, irrespective of time, that serve us well as individuals and nation.

And our Jahajis, our indentured labourers really, you know, based their lives on simple but profound and eternal values. Some like perseverance, never giving up, the ability to accept setbacks and overcome all odds, irrespective of circumstances. Faith, simple faith, unshakable faith grounded in a deep sense of belief in yourself and in your culture and in your spirituality. Madam President, courage, the ability to stand firm, irrespective of whatever conditions and circumstances you find yourself in. Madam President, that value of self-sacrifice, not imposed on you but what you find deep within your heart and your soul. The ability to give of yourself for the welfare of others and for the welfare of future generations. Madam President, these values really served the indentures well and I recommend that it would serve us even more so in the future years to come.

Also, I am of the view that every Indian Arrival Day also offers us the opportunity to focus on nation-building. Madam President, of the 14 public holidays that we have in Trinidad and Tobago, nine of them are related directly to religion, one in recognition of workers, two in the context of nation, brought about

through the experience of colonialism, that is, Independence and subsequently, Republic Day. And the other two, Indian Arrival Day and Emancipation Day, are unique to our country of Trinidad and Tobago and it relates to two distinct experiences in the history of our country.

I submit, Madam President, a view that within these two days, these two festivals, these two national public holidays lies tremendous potential for nation building. And in this regard, we should also use Indian Arrival Day as part of a framework for nation-building, engage citizenship, civic engagement, social engagement, and social justice.

Madam President, on behalf of all Independent Senators of this honourable Chamber, I would like to extend Indian Arrival Day greetings to all the descendants of the Girmitiyas, the indentured Girmitiyas and to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam President:** Hon. Senators, I too wish to join in bringing greetings on the occasion of Indian Arrival Day. As we celebrate the 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the arrival of the first indentured labourers to our country, we recall the difficult and painful journey that they were forced to endure. We acknowledge the sacrifices made, the challenges faced and ultimately, the successes. We are grateful for those achievements and for the contributions made in every area of national endeavour. Those contributions have helped to make Trinidad and Tobago the richly diverse country that it is.

I wish all Members of the Senate, the members of staff of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, and all of Trinidad and Tobago, Happy Indian Arrival Day.  
[*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Senate adjourned accordingly.*

Indian Arrival Day Greetings  
Sen. Teemal (cont'd)

26.05.2020

*Adjourned at 6.25p.m.*