

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES***Friday, April 29, 2022*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

**PRAYERS**[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have received communication from the hon. Stuart Young MP, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West; Ms. Vandana Mohit MP, Member for Chaguanas East; and Dr. Roodal Moonilal MP, Member for Oropouche East, who have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

**PAPERS LAID**

1. Annual Report of the Trinidad and Tobago Postal Corporation for fiscal year 2012/2013. [*The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales)*]
2. Report by the Cabinet Appointed Expert Committee on the Causes of the Islandwide Power Outage on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2022. [*Hon. M. Gonzales*]
3. 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, 2021. [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Brian Manning)*]
4. Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the financial year 2021. [*Hon. B. Manning*]  
*Papers 3 and 4 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.*
5. Report of the Cabinet-Appointed Team to conduct an Independent

**UNREVISED**

Investigation into the Abuse of Children at Children's Homes, Rehabilitation Centres and other Institutions which provide Residential Care for Children.  
[*The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy)*]

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT**  
**Representation of the People (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill, 2020**  
**(Presentation)**

**The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Representation of the People (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill, 2020, Second Session (2021/2022), Twelfth Parliament.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**URGENT QUESTIONS**

**Payment of Salaries**  
**(MIC Institute of Technology)**

**Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Education: Having regard to the internal memorandum issued by the CEO of MIC, will the Minister inform this House whether the members of staff of the MIC Institute of Technology were paid their salaries and allowances for the month of April?

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. The answer is, yes.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

**UNREVISED**

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister inform this House why was the memo issued and what caused the delay?**Madam Speaker:** One question. Member for Couva South, one question.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister inform this House why was the memo issued?

**Madam Speaker:** The Minister of Education.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the memo was not issued from my office, it was issued from the MIC. Therefore, I cannot explain why that memo would have been issued because the staff have been paid.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, as the line Minister for MIC, has the Minister sought an explanation from MIC as it relates to the issuance of this particular memo?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Education

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, when the issuance of the memo came to my attention, I enquired from the Ministry of Education whether the cheque had been given to MIC. At that time, it had been sent and the information coming from the MIC is that salaries were issued on the 27<sup>th</sup> and the 28<sup>th</sup> of April.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Follow up—supplemental, Madam Speaker?

**Madam Speaker:** These are urgent questions, so you are invited to ask Question

No. 2, which is in your name.

**Payment of Salaries  
(University of Trinidad and Tobago)**

**Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh** (*Couva South*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Education: Having regard to the internal memorandum issued by the Assistant Vice-President of Human Resource and Administration of the University of Trinidad and Tobago, will the Minister inform this House whether members of staff of the University of Trinidad and Tobago were paid their salaries and allowances for the month of April?

**Madam Speaker:** The Minister of Education.

**The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. The answer is, yes.

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Madam Speaker, could the Minister inform this House if she is aware that this is an ongoing problem being experienced by the staff of the University of Trinidad and Tobago?

**Madam Speaker:** Member, from the answer—I will allow you another supplemental, but from the answer, I am not going to allow that question. So, maybe you would like to ask another question. Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, could the Minister inform this House as to why was this internal memorandum issued by the officeholder at the University of Trinidad and Tobago?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Member keeps asking me to explain the actions of persons other than myself. What

I, as the Minister of Education—

**Mr. Indarsingh:** [*Inaudible*]—the line Minister.

**Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:** What I, as the Minister of Education, the line Minister, am entitled to do is to ensure that the cheque is disbursed and that the persons are paid. And the information from the Ministry of Education is that the cheque was disbursed and persons were paid on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of April, 2022

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]**Madam Speaker:** Member for Couva South.

**Mr. Indarsingh:** Yes, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister inform this House, based on the cash flow situation at the University of Trinidad and Tobago, is the Government on the verge of bankruptcy?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member, I rule that question out of order based on the Standing Orders.

**1.40 p.m.**

### ANSWER TO QUESTION

**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House.

**The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there is one question for written response and we are asking for a two-week deferral of presentation of that response.

**Madam Speaker:** That would be Question 155?

**Hon. C. Robinson-Regis:** Yes, it is, Madam.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So, hon. Members, Question No. 155 is deferred for two weeks.

## **STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS**

### **Report of Cabinet-Appointed Team (Abuse of Children at Children's Homes)**

**The Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayana Wester-Roy):**

Madam Speaker, I have been directed by the Cabinet to make a statement on the report of the Cabinet-appointed team to conduct an independent investigation into the abuse of children at children's homes, rehabilitation centres and other institutions which provide residential care for children. Cabinet, in June 2021, approved the conduct of an independent investigation into the abuse of children at children's homes, rehabilitation centres and other institutions which provide residential care for children, and the establishment of an 11-person investigation team. The team was headed by retired Appeal Court Judge, Justice Judith Jones, and included representation from civil society organizations. The team commenced their work in July 2021, and submitted the report of the investigation on December 13, 2021.

The team's remit included, inter alia, reviewing reports, other documents and newspaper articles on allegations of abuse of children; identifying and documenting the abuse and developing solutions to prevent and eliminate all forms of abuse; compiling the events leading to absconding in children's homes and child support centres; reviewing policies and procedures for appropriate care and identifying gaps where necessary, and making recommendations to ensure that adequate policies and procedures are in place for the treatment of children and the prevention of abuse.

The investigation team collected primary and secondary data. Some of the main sources of data included:

- Site visits to children's homes, child support centres and rehabilitation centres. During this investigation the team conducted 21 site visits to community residences and child support centres. Twenty-three residential care institutions were selected using the set criteria which were further ranked by low, medium or high priority.
- Interviews with the staff at community residences, residents, former residents of the facilities, and former and current employees of the Children's Authority. Overall, 46 interviews were conducted by the investigation team.
- Document review.

As part of the process the investigation team focused on areas of safeguarding, as well as sexual and physical abuse. Some of the major findings of the team with regard to selected areas of focus were as follows:

Abuse and absconding at the traditional government-funded children's homes, Valsayn Child Support Centre and the Youth Training and Rehabilitation Centre:

- It was discovered that incident reports are not fully capturing the extent of physical abuse occurring.
- Lack of proper supervision facilitates physical abuse among residents.
- Staff promote a culture that encourages abuse among residents.
- Security officers were found guilty of abusing residents.
- The inclusion of children in need of supervision at child support centres has exposed the staff to child offenders.
- The staff is not trained to deal with this form of behaviour.

- The guards, especially the external guards, are not trained to deal with children.

At the Youth Training and Rehabilitation Centre:

- Physical abuse occurs very rarely. There is a plethora of regulations and layers of oversight that makes the use of excessive force difficult to go undetected.

In addition to major security concerns, the investigation team through its interviews has found that the following are some reasons why residents abscond from these facilities:

- The discipline meted out to the residents is subjective and, in some cases, unorthodox.
- The lack of structured and educational activities has been complained about by residents who have openly stated that they miss their classes while at these facilities and that they want to get an education.
- Complaints made by residents are not being taken seriously by those in authority.
- The residents miss their families and in some instances the stay is longer than first anticipated at the facilities.

Under Legislation:

- Legislation guiding the safeguarding, care, and protection of children is confusing and ineffective with respect to enforcement of its provisions and the creation of offences.
- The legislation facilitates a hybrid system of care for children residents in children's homes, children who have the benefit of orders from the court with respect of whom the Children's Authority is mandated to provide



care and treatment and children who do not, thereby creating an unequal system of care.

Under Public Financing for Child Protection:

- The number of children in need of licensed children's homes, community residences and hostels is greater than the current capacity.
- All existing facilities are understaffed and under-resourced for the number of children in their care or cannot operate at capacity.

Under Child Protection System:

- The Children's Authority is not adequately or efficiently fulfilling its statutory mandate.
- The most critical risk facing the Authority is that it is not structured and staffed to deliver the mandate outlined in the legislation.

Madam Speaker, many recommendations were put forth by the investigation team. Some of the key recommendations made by the team under the main headings include:

Under Legislation:

- There is a need to consolidate all the amendments to the Act.
- The ongoing development of a national child protection strategy must be prioritized, with clear and measurable standards for all persons interacting with children in Trinidad and Tobago.

Under Enforcing of Licensing and Monitoring Requirements for Children's Homes:

- An independent publicly-funded children's commissioner should be established.

Under More Effective State Coordination and Collaboration:

- An inter-agency task force should also be established under the Office of the Prime Minister to coordinate the national system and integrate operations across state agencies and Ministries for the effective and timely delivery of care and protection of children in Trinidad and Tobago. The task force to include representatives from the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education.

Under Operations of the Children's Authority:

- The board to conduct its organizational redesign with urgency given that effective organizational design is fundamental for the delivery of the Authority's mandate, and directly impacts upon all other risks to the organization and children in the care of the State.

Under Recommendations to help curb the gross abuse of children:

- In relation to the caregiver ratio, the Children's Authority is to ensure that a standard caregiver to child ratio, dependent on the child's age, the child's risk and needs is maintained at community residences and child support centres.
- The Children's Authority should have an internal security force trained to treat with children in residential care. This security function should also extend to private children's homes. While this will be a cost to the Authority and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the returns will be in children's safety, protection, and care.
- In relation to critical incidences, standardized criteria for classifying and reporting critical incidents should be established and enforced.

The Parliament is asked to note that the report by the investigation team was considered by the Cabinet in March 2022 and Cabinet agreed to:

- (1) The submission of the report to the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs for a review of the legislative recommendations.
- (2) The establishment of a task force to review the findings and recommendations of the said report and to develop an action plan for implementation, divided into short, medium and long-term categories with appropriate time frames. The task force has a time frame of six weeks' time from the date of commencement of meetings to submit to Cabinet the completed work plan.
- (3) The following composition of the task force:
  - The Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs: one officer each from the Child Affairs Division and the Policy, Research and Planning Division.
  - The Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs.
  - The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.
  - The Ministry of Youth Development and National Service.
  - The Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, the manager and two representatives.
  - The Tobago House of Assembly.
  - Two members of the investigation team.

The task force will be chaired by a senior official of the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs.

Madam Speaker, the Government remains committed to the establishment of a robust child protection system in keeping with national and international development objectives and to the resourcing of agencies with responsibility for effecting the system. Consequently, several initiatives are being undertaken under the implementation plan for the National Child Policy to ensure that our nation's children are protected and through various initiatives under the remit of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and the Ministries of Social Development and Family Services, National Security and Youth Development and National Service for transitional services.

The estimated expenditure for the—

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Minister, your speaking time is now spent. Member for Princes Town.

**Mr. Padarath:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 24(4), could the Minister identify the recommendations of the report that have been completed thus far—that have been implemented—sorry—thus far?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. A. Webster-Roy:** Madam Speaker, as I would have indicated in the presentation, under the roll-out of the National Child Policy, a number of the recommendations have indeed started to—have been implemented. We have already established the task force. And, Madam Speaker, it is important to note that in terms of the investment that is being made through the various Ministries identified, we have for this fiscal year allocated \$126,081,715 to ensure that all the recommendations as far as possible are indeed implemented.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** One—It is only one question allowed. Thank you, Minister.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** [*Inaudible*]

**Madam Speaker:** Minister of Public Utilities. Leader of the House.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Speaker, I would just like to indicate—and I apologize to you and to my colleague—by agreement we had—we have by agreement approved that the statements will be read to conclusion. So I apologize to my colleague and to the House for not moving the requisite Motion. May I do so now, please? [*Inaudible*]

**Madam Speaker:** So, it is by agreement—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** It is by agreement.

**Madam Speaker:**—that the—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Both statements—

**Madam Speaker:** Well, we cannot go back to both.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** I will not. I know, but—

**Madam Speaker:** All right. So—

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:**—I am just saying—

**Madam Speaker:** Yes.

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Sorry, I apologize.

**Madam Speaker:** Yes. So, Whip—Whip, it is agreed. Yes. Member, the Minister of Public Utilities.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Findings of Cabinet-Appointed Committee  
(Causes of Island-wide Power Outage)**

**The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have been authorized by the Cabinet to

make the following statement with respect to the report of the Cabinet-appointed expert committee appointed to investigate the causes of and the national response to the island-wide power outage that occurred in Trinidad on Wednesday the 16<sup>th</sup> of February, 2022. Madam Speaker, on Wednesday the 16<sup>th</sup> of February, 2022, at approximately 12.52 p.m., there was a failure of the entire electricity grid in Trinidad which plunged the island into a total blackout. The blackout lasted some twelve and a half hours, with initial restoration at 6.50 p.m., and the final customers' supply returning at 1.34 a.m. on Thursday the 17<sup>th</sup> of February, 2022. In response to this prolonged island-wide power outage, a three-member committee was established by the Government to investigate, among other matters, the circumstances under which gave rise to the failure of the electricity supply system, the process for restoring power supply, and the status of physical security of T&TEC's facilities, and to make recommendation to avoid a recurrence of a nationwide power outage.

The members of the committee were as follows: Prof. Chandrabhan Sharma, retired Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering of the University of the West Indies who was the Chairman; Mr. Keith Sirju, former Chairman of T&TEC; Supt. Allister Guevarro of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. The committee was given a period of one month from its date of appointment, that is, by March the 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2022, to report its findings and report to the Office of the Prime Minister and was allowed to co-opt any other expertise and resources that it required. The committee completed its investigations and submitted its report to the hon. Prime Minister on April the 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

The power grid before the blackout:

Madam Speaker, the committee reported that at the time of the incident the three independent power producers were supplying some 1,130 megawatts of electricity to T&TEC for distribution to its customers in Trinidad from their four power stations as follows:

- The Trinidad Generation Unlimited (TGU) - La Brea at 537 megawatts.
- The PowerGen - Point Lisas at 472 megawatts; and at Penal, 50 megawatts.
- And Trinity Power Limited - Point Lisas at 71 megawatts.

The committee noted that the country's electricity grid is a robust one with reasonable redundancy and generally well-operated and that no electricity grid is without risk or immune to failure.

The causes of the island-wide blackout:

According to the report of the committee, on Wednesday the 16<sup>th</sup> of February, 2022, a 21.64 metre tall fungal affected palmiste tree fell in the vicinity of Grant Trace Extension Road and the NGC private road in Rousillac. The said tree fell onto a single phase T&TEC 12 kilovolt distribution line. At the time of the occurrence, this trigger incident, the country was under a high wind yellow alert issued by the meteorological office of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, I wish to confirm that the committee unequivocally stated that it did not find any evidence of sabotage as the trigger for the failure.

The sequence of consequential events as recorded by the committee was as follows:

- (1) The palmiste tree eventually fell off the 12 kilovolt line, causing the line to sag, oscillate and upswing, and to come into contact with the 220

kilovolt line circuit, which transmits most of the power from TGU generating facility to T&TEC. The 12 kilovolt line crosses orthogonally under the 220 kilovolt transmission by a distance of over four metres, which is more than two times the minimum stipulated by international standards.

- (2) The fault occasioned by the two lines accidentally coming into contact with each other caused the protection relays on the two circuits on the 220 kilovolt transmission line to trip sequentially and become de-energized, thereby isolating the TGU plant from the grid.
- (3) The de-energizing of the 220 kilovolt transmission line created a large imbalance between available running generation supply of 537 megawatts at a load of 68.75 megawatts, resulting in a very rapid increase in generation speeds at the TGU plant, as the essentially unloaded turbines accelerated. The turbines immediately tripped on over-speed protection, disconnecting all generators at TGU, thereby resulting in a 47 per cent loss of generating capacity.
- (4) The sudden loss of 47 per cent of generating capacity on the grid was too fast for the system's circuit breakers to shed load to match the available generation. In the circumstances, the other IPPs experienced under-speed and under-frequency conditions which exceeded their stability limits leading to a cascading outage and the collapse of the entire electricity grid, first at the Point Lisas plants and then at Penal.

Madam Speaker, the entire episode, from the triggering of the event by the fallen palmiste tree on the 12 kilovolt distribution line to the shutdown of the entire grid resulting in an island-wide blackout, spanned about 3.6 seconds. Given the



speed at which the events unfolded the committee concluded that there was no time for human intervention to prevent the outage.

#### The Response:

The report acknowledged that the safe and timely re-establishment of power on the island following a total shutdown as what occurred on Wednesday the 16<sup>th</sup> of February, 2022, is a complex and critical task which requires a close coordination between T&TEC and the IPPs and should be based on well-documented and tested black start procedures. Such restarts must be done under the direction and the supervision of T&TEC. In this regard, Madam Speaker, the report noted that three of the four power plants in Trinidad had black start capabilities on the day and that within one hour of the outage, all three generation plants operated by TGU and PowerGen, following their procedures, attempted starting their black start units. However, there were multiple failed attempts occasioned, inter alia, by:

- the lack of preparedness among the agencies; the independent power producers and T&TEC for such an eventuality;
- the unavailability of black start units;
- the inadequate technical capacity for dealing with such a situation; and
- the absence of documented power system restoration plan governing the sequencing procedures to be followed after a total loss of power on the island.

Power was eventually restored at 6.50 p.m. to Penal and from there the rest of the power system was re-energized by 1.34 a.m. the following day, February the 17<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

#### The Assessment of Response and Recommendations:

The Committee identified several weaknesses in the management of the response, including:

- ineffective communication with the public, with heavy reliance on the Internet and social media which was negatively impacted by the blackout;
- the absence of the involvement of the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management;
- the lack of a systematic approach in the restoration process which led to many unforced errors in the re-energization process;
- the committee was also of the opinion that no single person took on the role of incident commander and had overall authority, as well as detailed knowledge of the restoration process.

At the same time, the committee recognized the initiative of the protective devices to trigger a commendable response in the circumstances. The committee has made several recommendations to address the weaknesses identified, as well as to improve the resilience of the electricity grid and to reduce the country's vulnerabilities to the recurrence of such an incident. One of the key recommendations to improve security, reliability and efficiency of the transmission grid is the construction of another 220 kilovolt circuit from the Union sub-station to the Gandhi sub-station. The construction of this second line is already at an advanced stage, Madam Speaker, with completion scheduled for the first quarter of fiscal 2023.

The report noted that the unfortunate event had unmasked several issues pertaining to all parties involved and that several of the problems encountered in restarting the plants were evident in 2013 when the system suffered a similar

collapse. The need to ensure that this was not another lost opportunity for distilling valuable lessons of experience and building resilience into the system was underscored. In this regard, the report made the following noteworthy observations:

- That one should—and I quote—“Never let a good crisis go to waste”, a famous observation made by Winston Churchill during the bleakest days of World War II.
- All of the digital protection relays in the power sector have, inherent in their design, auto event recorders.
- This event has generated a veritable mother lode of usable data which T&TEC can mine to optimize their current models of the power system, as well as updating the time constraints used in modelling the generators and turbines;
- The IPPs and T&TEC staff did make unforced errors in the re-energization process. This can be easily remedied by ensuring that the operators are schooled in the understanding of the issues involved in a de-energized grid and the safe process to re-energize the grid.

The report concluded that there was great inconvenience to the population. There was no loss of life directly attributable to the outage. The blackout had laid bare the many shortcomings in our disaster preparedness and restoration procedures.

Madam Speaker, finally, the following key recommendations were made:

- (1) Additional training of operational staff of the IPPs and T&TEC specific to the recovery of the grid from a total blackout.
- (2) The establishment of clear documented procedures related to the complete recovery of the grid from a total blackout.

- (3) Categorization of the total blackout as a national disaster, thereby automatically fully engaging the ODPM in the process.
- (4) Establishment of the Manager System Control and Generation interface as the incident commander in the future.
- (5) Construction of additional transmission infrastructure to further strengthen the grid with priority on the completion of the second 220 kilovolt line as soon as possible.
- (6) An annual independent power system resilience review and power system risk assessment should be performed to identify power system vulnerabilities that can lead to catastrophic power system failures. This should be reviewed by an independent technical standing committee.

May I take this opportunity, Madam Speaker, to thank the members of the committee for their diligence, their patriotism and professionalism in preparing the report for the benefit of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. I wish to assure the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago that the recommendations in this report will be given urgent consideration and will form part of a programme of work in the electricity sector in the short and medium term. Madam Speaker, the Government also takes this opportunity to thank the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago for their patience during those very uncertain hours. Today, I lay this report and ask that it be sent for further examination by the committee on Public Administration and Appropriations of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Princes Town.

**Mr. Padarath:** Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 24(4), based on the

Minister's frightening admission that no one was in charge of the situation on the day of the blackout, could the Minister identify the recommendations of the report that have been implemented thus far to avoid reoccurrence, including cutting of the trees?

**Madam Speaker:** Minister.

**Hon. M. Gonzales:** Madam Speaker, I had a meeting with the committee, as well as the executive management and board of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission and I am pleased to advise the hon. Member that an appropriate officer and the department was already identified, to take lead if and when, and God forbid, such an event should occur again.

**2.10 p.m.**

**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House.

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE**  
**Representation of the People (Amdt.) (No. 2) Bill, 2020**  
**(Extension of Time)**

**The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Having regard to the Interim Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Representation of the People (Amdt.) No. 2 Bill, 2020, Second Session (2021/2022), Twelfth Parliament, I beg to move that the Committee be allowed an extension to September 02, 2022, to complete its work and submit a final report.

*Question put and agreed to.*

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT**  
**Cannabis Control Bill, 2020**  
**(Adoption)**

[Second Day]

**UNREVISED**

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [April 20, 2022]:*

*Be it resolved* that this House adopt the Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Cannabis Control Bill, 2020.

*Question again proposed.*

**Madam Speaker:** If there are no other speakers, I will therefore call—  
[*Interruption*] Member for Fyzabad.

**Dr. Lackram Bodoë (Fyzabad):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for this opportunity to contribute on the Motion to adopt the report of the JSC on the Cannabis Control Bill, 2020.

Madam Speaker, as we seek to approve the report of this Joint Select Committee, we join several nations across the world that have already made provisions, in one form or another, for the legitimate use of marijuana, Trinidad and Tobago having already decriminalized its use under certain conditions in 2019.

Madam Speaker, allow me to thank all colleagues who sat on the JSC and worked so well to bring this report before us today. In particular, I wish to thank my colleagues on this side, the Member for Mayaro and the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Dr. L. Bodoë:** And indeed, the Member for Chaguanas West who raised some very important points with regard to the provisions for religious use in certain circumstances and, in this regard, I urge the House to consider the issues raised by my colleague, the Member for Chaguanas West.

We are here today to further advance Trinidad and Tobago's effort to make medicinal marijuana available to those of our citizens who need it, as well to provide the legal framework to create economic benefit for our citizens.

Madam Speaker, medicinal marijuana has been in use for centuries. In fact, it was recognized for its medicinal value long ago by the Chinese, was used in the ancient Egypt and India, by the ancient Greeks and by the Arabic physicians in the medieval Islamic world.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, the Chinese Emperor Shen Nung, who himself was a pharmacologist at that time, in his book in 2037 BCE recommended the substance for treating constipation, gout, rheumatism and absentmindedness. The ancient Egyptians used it in suppositories for painful hemorrhoids. The ancient Greeks used the dry leaves of cannabis to treat nosebleeds and cannabis seeds to expel tapeworms.

Surviving texts from ancient India showed that doctors used it for a variety of ailments, including relieving pain in childbirth. The Arabic physicians recognized the analgesic, the antiemetic and the antipyretic properties of cannabis, and used it extensively from the eighth to as recently as the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. So, Madam Speaker, we are on solid ground today, as we attempt to give cannabis a legal basis for its use as a medicine.

Madam Speaker, Appendix IV of this JSC Report before us has a consolidated version of the Bill with the amendments, and I intend to tie my contribution to several of the clauses in the Bill, especially Part V on medicinal cannabis.

Madam Speaker, if you would allow me to start at the end of the Bill and just to mention with clause 68, which gives the Trinidad and Tobago Cannabis Licensing Authority—the Authority that will be created by this legislation—the power to make regulations with the approval of the Minister. I must say that I am a little bit disappointed that some of the draft regulations have not accompanied this

Bill, but nevertheless one can accept the argument that perhaps the Authority has to be created first, and the board appointed before this function can be exercised. But, Madam Speaker, I just want to point out that in other jurisdictions, laws pertaining to medicinal cannabis have been more detailed, and I refer especially to the Antigua and Barbuda legislation.

Nevertheless, I want to fully endorse clause 68, the amendment (3) that speaks to:

“Regulations made under this Act shall be subject to the affirmative resolution of Parliament.”

And I look forward to that debate when that time comes.

So, Madam Speaker, Part V, “Medicinal Cannabis”. Now, clause 42 subclause (1), creates an offence for persons using medicinal cannabis without a prescription or recommendation from a medical practitioner. The penalties are not insignificant and include both fines and imprisonment. In fact, Madam Speaker, if I can just read the clause into the record, and that is 42(1). It says that:

“A person who uses medicinal cannabis without being authorised to use medicinal cannabis by a prescription or a recommendation from a medical practitioner commits an offence and is liable -

- (a) on summary conviction to a fine of ten thousand dollars and to imprisonment for a term of six months; or
- (b) on conviction on indictment to a fine of one hundred thousand dollars and to imprisonment for a term of ten years.”

So, indeed, quite a bit not insignificant penalties, Madam Speaker. This section implies that a medical practitioner can authorize a patient to use medicinal cannabis, by issuing either a prescription or a recommendation.



So, Madam Speaker, I want to put a few questions on the table with regard to this, which I believe require further elucidation from the Government, and I look forward to some answers in the winding up by the Government.

So I raise these matters from the perspective of a medical practitioner, as well as a citizen, a representative of the people, and who knows, even as a potential future patient seeking to treat the aches and pains that come with age. So I just want to ask a few questions. What do we really mean by medicinal cannabis? Well, it is defined in the interpretation section 3. It:

“means cannabis that is handled under a licence issued under section 29(1);” And it goes on to give eight situations where licences can be issued. But I think also what would be on the public’s mind, everyone’s mind, is what products will be prescribed or recommended and in what circumstances, that is, which medical conditions will qualify.

Let us just raise that point, Madam Speaker, because in other legislation, in other jurisdictions, we have in the parent legislation what is called “qualifying medical conditions”. I trust that this will come with the regulations, but I just raise that point.

The third point, which I think is important, is which medical practitioners will be allowed to prescribe. Now, the legislation appears to be straightforward and says that “registered medical practitioners”, but again I think the point is important in terms of training and whether there will be authorization and certification of particular medical practitioners to prescribe medicinal cannabis, to protect the public’s interest.

Madam Speaker, the Minister of Health in his contribution at the last debate on this Motion, did mention, he spoke a little bit about the medical conditions in

children. I just want to support that. The Minister mentioned about Dravet syndrome, Lennox-Gastaut syndrome, which affects about 15 children in Trinidad. I would want to support the use of that product that was mentioned, Epidiolex, and it has been approved by the FDA. So I support that recommendation, but I also want to say that this drug is not a miracle cure for all childhood epileptics, nor for that matter other epileptics.

I say this because I wanted to make a point about the protection of children with regard to medicinal cannabis. If you will permit me to refer to the “Report of the Caricom Regional Commission on Marijuana 2018”, subtitled, “Waiting to Exhale - Safeguarding our Future through Responsible Socio-Legal Policy on Marijuana”.

Quite an important report, very interesting, covers the wide remit of marijuana use, but has an important section on medicinal use. There were some interesting developments here, Madam Speaker, in terms of—the research that was in that report stated that a negative effect on the adolescent brain with marijuana use, before the age of 24—suggesting that the recent use can affect cognitions such as memory, intentional learning. The studies also suggest that marijuana use in adolescents is associated with lower academic achievement and education, and compromised social relationships. It also mentions the ability of cannabis to desensitize and calm and that, therefore, that can have a demotivating effect, especially on young people.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, in light of that I am pleased and happy to support clause 42(2) and (3) of the Bill, which seeks to ensure that the prescription of medicinal cannabis to children is strictly regulated.

Before I move on and leave the issue of children and medicinal cannabis, I

just want to raise one more point, and that is the issue of the use of medicinal cannabis for the treatment of autism spectrum disorder, and I say this for a reason. It has been raised in certain circles. In fact, speaking to a colleague who manages many of these patients in Trinidad and Tobago, and I am told that there are about 600 or 700 children who suffer from this disease, he has told me that parents have raised the issue with him about using medicinal cannabis for treatment.

Now, the research, and I quote from a paper in PubMed, August 2021, the bottom line is that the long-term safety is unknown, and there were not enough studies to say whether it is useful or not. But I make this point for one reason, Madam Speaker, and that is to support clause 29(b) which allows for a research and development licence. This Bill allows that. I am saying if this is a condition that affects so many of our children, that this clause allows some entrepreneurial researcher to look at an area of research, because autism spectrum disorder is an important condition in our situation.

So, Madam Speaker, I will move on to some of the other medical conditions that will benefit from medicinal cannabis. Again, the Member for St. Joseph mentioned in passing its use for intractable nausea and vomiting, and also for pain and so on. I just want to make a point here in terms of the medications. I will come to speak about what doctors can prescribe and what they can recommend. I am heading in that direction, because I think that is an important differentiation that needs to be made.

So, for example, in terms of prescriptions there are drugs that are well studied. For example for pain there is a drug called Dronabinol which has been licensed in the USA, in the Netherlands, in Germany, Austria and Croatia for treating this condition. But also of importance to note, is that this is a synthetically

produced medicinal cannabis product, with an identical structure to THC. I make that point because we would have heard in the discussion about CBD which has no psychoactive effects, and THC which has psychoactive effects. I think, Madam Speaker, we are seeing here that there is a drug that is approved that has THC. I am saying again, that when the regulations come we have to look very carefully at how we regulate the THC content which is the psychoactive content in the drugs that we are going to import.

So those who get, for example, an import licence, those who get a processor licence will be bound in terms of ensuring that the correct amount—and just by way of passing, some internationally THC content in some jurisdictions is said should not exceed .2 per cent of the dry weight of the product. But, again, in the international data it is also—because the industry is opening up, also you are finding that jurisdictions, individual countries are being allowed to make the law as they see fit for their own circumstances.

I wish to mention one last product on the market, Madam Speaker, which is a product used to treat chronic pain. Madam Speaker, for those of us who have personally experienced pain, or have to care for others with pain, it can be the most debilitating of human conditions, and one would seek any, and sometimes all avenues to relieve pain. I say this because it is true. I mean, I have had situations where patients would come to the office with chronic pain, back pain, leg pain sometimes, and they have tried everything. I remember this patient came to the office and was smiling eventually, and I said, “Well, your pain has gone”. She said, “Yes, doctor”, and very sheepishly she is saying, “The reason the pain is gone, because I have been using cannabis oil and the pain is gone”. So it is here. It is being used. It is our duty, our responsibility in this House to ensure now that

products which may already be used are regulated properly and safely for patients.

So, Madam Speaker, in summary, before I move on—in terms of the evidence underpinning medicinal use of cannabis, the evidence seems to be there, based on a literature search, and weighing the scientific evidence—and, again, the Caricom Commission report did this, they did a full literature search—and they concluded—and again this would be useful in terms of what conditions we would list as qualifying medical conditions—they concluded that it seems to be beneficial for the treatment of chemotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting, glaucoma, anorexia and weight loss, pain, sleep disorders and some mental disorders.

So, Madam Speaker, it appears that medicinal cannabis is unlikely to kill you, but the question is, how likely is it to cure you? Again, this is where we have the responsibility of sifting through the evidence and ensuring that the recommendations we make would be of use and benefit to our patients as we go forward.

Madam Speaker, I would leave the products there and move on. I just want to look—and, again, there must be a reason why the law is saying that medical practitioners can either prescribe or recommend. It is two separate words and, again, I think it is important for us to raise this issue and to clarify what exactly is meant by this. So the question really that arises in my mind is: What is the difference between the medicinal cannabis that will be prescribed, versus the medicinal cannabis that will be recommended. I think that is important. We need to understand that and, again, I was hoping we would get some more clarity from the other side. But I make this point, and the answer, of course, Madam Speaker, to that question lies in the fact that cannabis medicine—and I say cannabis medicine, not medicinal cannabis—cannabis medicine exists in two general forms.

First of all, it exists in medicines and medicinal products which utilize derivatives of cannabis to formulate products, and from which an exact standardized dose can be elucidated. So this is what we are talking about, prescribable medicinal cannabis, therefore it meets the requirements of a prescription. I will give two examples. We spoke about Epidiolex, just to remind the House and the population that this is a drug which has been approved for the use of two rare forms of childhood epilepsy. The reason why doctors would feel comfortable prescribing that is because Epidiolex is an oil that contains 100 milligrams per mil of CBD—and I am saying this for a reason—and it is administered in a dose of 20 milligrams per kilogram per day.

What does that mean, Madam Speaker? It means that a doctor can safely write a prescription knowing the amount, and the 20 milligrams per kilogram per day, when prescriptions are written for children. It is based on the weight, so you have to give the weight. You give the dose for the weight for the day. Interestingly, just another example, Sativex, which is also recognized and approved for multiple sclerosis and this comes as a spray, and the recommended dose is eight to 16 sprays, delivering around 20 to 40 milligrams of CBD in total. So those are just two examples of where doctors who are trained will be comfortable prescribing, Madam Speaker, these medications.

But, Madam Speaker, cannabis medicine also exists in what we would call a non-prescribing form. It exists in medicinal cannabis flower and raw extracts with different concentrations of the cannabinoids at different levels in the same plant and, therefore, it makes an exact standardized dose impossible, and hence it necessitates a recommendation as opposed to a prescription. I think this is where a bit of grey area comes around, in terms of when the medical practitioner has to

recommend as opposed to prescribing.

Again, the example here would be as opposed to the other drugs which have defined dosages and so on, you have the medical cannabis flower which is used by combustion and/or vaporization. Apparently it is the regularly used method of delivery of medicine types. You have some cannabis extracts, and you have cannabis edibles. I just want to spend a moment on cannabis edibles, because clause 29(d), which provides for a processor licence, it recognizes edibles as one form of medicinal cannabis, and there is an interesting experience which we can learn from here, Madam Speaker.

All of these products are allowed in the medical cannabis industry in the region, with the exception of Barbados, which has restricted the sale of cannabis edibles, but they are now reconsidering their position, as they have come to understand that edibles make up almost 50 per cent of the sales in the regulated market. Patients find this the most comfortable way to consume their medicine. So again that is something that we are not going to make that mistake, because we have included edibles.

But you know, Madam Speaker, and this is very interesting, edibles are already available in our market unofficially. I found this out because in preparing for this contribution, I did some research, and I engaged some young people. I told them, I said, “Listen, we are going to bring—the cannabis Bill is coming to the Parliament and we are going to make this thing legal”. So they used the young people’s term, “Huh”, meaning “What”? So they say, “Well, that is no big thing, it is already here.” So I said, “Well, where is the evidence”? So on my phone here this is the response I have, and I read, Madam Speaker, with your permission. So this is the response:

Hi, these are the dessert forms that you can get the weed edibles in, and attached below is the flyer that they use to advertise a sale for the products. Nowhere on the page it explicitly says that it is weed, but in the captions of the photos the sentence:

They are sweet, they creep, do not eat too much. Just take a munch.

There is a flyer that accompanies this. It says:

Sleepers 420, treat yourself. Four for \$120, fruity pebbles, cereal treat, Oscar the Grouch cookie, slutty brown, Oreo swirl.

And there is also a number that you can actually call, and have these products delivered to you in the comfort and convenience of your own home. I make this point simply to say that this industry is already in Trinidad and therefore, again, the processor licence which will become available because of this legislation, will now allow these entrepreneurs to bring their business legally and take it to the market.

So, Madam Speaker, in terms of the prescribing, the other question we had asked is who is to prescribe and recommend these products. The Minister of Health in his contribution did allude to the fact that there is training at the St. Augustine campus for medical students, in terms of cannabis pharmacology, and so on. That is important. But I just want to say, Madam Speaker, in my 38 years' experience as a medical practitioner, I will be very reluctant to prescribe medicinal cannabis, unless I undergo the required training. I just wanted to make that point, that we need to get the TTMA involved.

Minister did mention that, but I think we need to suggest some sort of formal engagement and, perhaps, some support from the Government in terms of how that training will take place. Madam Speaker, I just want to thank the President of the TTMA, who I would have engaged as part of my research, and they are happy to



have medicinal cannabis as part of the armamentarium for treating patients but, of course, they look forward to more detailed structure and regulations and so on.

Of course, we spoke about the training aspect of it, but there is also the authorization and certification aspect. In some jurisdictions they speak about an authorized medical practitioner, as opposed to being just registered to prescribe. Therefore, the question has to be asked: What role, if any, that the Medical Board of Trinidad and Tobago will have in authorizing or certifying those practitioners, or whether it will be the Cannabis Authority, or whether it will be the Ministry of Health who will certify these practitioners.

What is the practice in other jurisdictions, Madam Speaker? In the UK, only specialists, and not general practitioners, can prescribe medicinal cannabis. On the other hand, in Croatia, the medical prescription is issued by a general practitioner with recommendation from a specialist. Right here in the Caribbean, in Jamaica, cannabis for medicinal or therapeutic purposes must be recommended or prescribed by a registered physician or health professional certified by the Ministry of Health. So we are talking here of another category or persons who might be able to prescribe or recommend medicinal cannabis. So this is as a result of the certification.

Madam Speaker, I just want to move on quickly. I know the issue of a dispensary came up in the discussion the last time. I just wanted to make the point, and I seek clarification when the Attorney General winds up, because when I examine the retail distributor licence which is clause 29(e), it says:

“a Retail Distributor Licence, which shall be issued to allow for the operation of a dispensary for the dispensing of medicinal cannabis to patients;”

But look at the definition of “dispensary”:

“...any premises on which—

- (a) the sale, dispensing or provision of medicinal cannabis prescribed or recommended by a medical practitioner; or
- (b) the use or consumption of medicinal cannabis by a patient...”

So this, Madam Speaker, is suggesting that under this Retail Distributor Licence, where you would have the licence to have a dispensary, that you can actually make provision for also the consumption of medicinal cannabis by a patient.

The reason is because in other jurisdictions, and it is clearly spelled out for example, in the Antigua and Barbuda legislation, the law, that there is something called a “medical cannabis consumption lounge” where you are allowed to sample the products, and so on, and you can actually consume the product there. But I raise that in the context of one important point, because I am thinking that if the law allows you to do this, and you consume a product in the consumption in the medical medicinal cannabis lounge, and then you have to drive home, what happens to you. So this took my mind now to driving and the use of cannabis.

I also make this point in regard to you receiving a medical prescription for cannabis, and you will take your precautions. You would be advised by the doctor, the pharmacist: a couple of hours, do not drive, do not operate machinery and so on. God forbid, and sometimes you have elderly people who will benefit from these prescriptions, and they go out on the road. God forbid, they get into an accident, and they have a blood sample done, and cannabis is found in their blood. I am just saying, what is the situation with regard to the law in terms of whether they would be protected. I guess that is an area that the Attorney General may want to look at, in terms of whether there would be a certain amount of time that would

be required before you can operate machinery, or drive and so on. I think that is something that we need to consider, Madam Speaker.

**2.40 p.m.**

Time seems to be moving on very quickly, Madam Speaker, but I would want to believe that those are the points that I want to make. There is one more point that I want to make, Madam Speaker, before I close, and this is with regard to clauses 43 and 44 which address the issue of record-keeping by medical practitioners.

But, Madam Speaker, in this country, we have a situation where patients go doctor shopping. So, I want to make sure that whether in the parent legislation or in the regulations that the issue of patients accessing prescriptions and recommendations from different medical practitioners and filling these at different pharmacies and dispensaries, that we make sure that we safeguard against that. Because we can easily create a situation, Madam Speaker, where you can have patients abusing the drug or collecting—you know, in Trinidad, there is a thing where you go to all the pharmacies, you collect these medications and you sell it on the black market. So that could be something we have to guard against, Madam Speaker. And I close by suggesting that the idea of a medical card, which could be linked to electronic tracking, will be something that we could look at in terms of detecting abuse.

So, Madam Speaker, again, I thank you for the opportunity. Time seems to be against me. I want to close on the issue of human rights and health, just to say, in US and Canada there is already case law that supports the right of an individual to cultivate and use cannabis for personal health reasons in that individual's private home. We have already crossed that bridge here in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, again, the Caricom Commission Report found that there is: “Widespread...”—use of cannabis—“Despite Prohibition.”

“Concerns for Increased Usage after...”—legislation seem to be unfounded. And on the balance, Madam Speaker, the evidence points to more harm—sorry, to good than harm. I correct that, Madam Speaker. The evidence points to more good than harm in using medicinal cannabis.

So I say, Madam Speaker, it is time for us to take the ladder that this Bill provides to the next phase and approve cannabis for its long-recognized medicinal value. I believe our citizens deserve no less, both from a health and a human rights perspective. I thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Tobago West.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Sport and Community Development (Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe):** Thank you. Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute on this cannabis control legislation or this report coming from the Joint Select Committee. Madam Speaker, this is the second day of our debate and I think that it is clear that both the Government and the Opposition agree. Not very often we do but today we agree on matters relating to cannabis and I am pleased to see that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, this is a—I am excited, happy to participate in this debate. I am 40 years old and I did not believe that in my lifetime, Madam Speaker, we would get to a place of agreeing or a government in the Caribbean would get to a place of decriminalizing marijuana, or cannabis as we know it or as it should be called, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I grew up in a Rasta house or a Rastafarian house and for

some reason—not for some reason, Madam Speaker, there was this belief back then in the 1980s and in the 1990s that if you are a Rasta, you have weed in your house. Yes? Children going to school would be provoked by friends. Teachers would have their views and spread their stories about Rasta children or children coming out of Rasta homes. And police would run up in your house every now and then looking for weed. Just because you are a Rasta, you were expected to have weed on you or in your house.

Madam Speaker, my father was Rasta and I could tell you, I did not see—I did not know what weed looked like until I got to college. So, I spent my 22 years in Trinidad and Tobago in a Rasta house and did not know what weed looked like. And my father protected us fiercely. So, if he smoked, as a child, I did not know. I never saw it. I never smelt it on him. He was a respected man, an upstanding man. But the things we had to face in school and in society is trauma, traumatic, Madam Speaker.

So, at 40 years old now, to witness this easing up in position, not just in Trinidad and Tobago but throughout the Caribbean, it is a breath of fresh air. Because as a child, Madam Speaker, I often wondered, why this hard core war on cannabis and not a hard core war on alcoholism? And we saw what alcohol was doing to our communities. No hard-on war on tobacco and we saw the effects that tobacco had on the health of people as it relates to lung cancer and so on. So, as a young person, I always wondered why and as I investigated and researched, I recognized, this is based more on economics rather than science.

So, Madam Speaker, I am happy that today, even in naming the legislation, we are speaking about cannabis and not about marijuana or making a—distinguishing between marijuana and hemp because, at the end of day, we are

talking about cannabis. And I wondered, how did we get from printing bibles on cannabis paper and making clothing out of cannabis way back then, decades gone, centuries gone to this hard-on war that somewhat oppressed our people, discriminated against many and caused an unrest in our society? I always wondered that as a teenager, Madam Speaker. And then I believed that it was based on economics rather than science. And personally, Madam Speaker, today, I still do believe the same.

So, we as Caribbean people, we have a long, strong historical, cultural and religious significance as it relates to weed or I should say, weed has a long, strong, historical, cultural and religious significance to us. As a matter of fact, we can trace cannabis to several ethnic, religious and cultural traditions within Africa, India, Asia and many Middle Eastern countries. It was famous for its healing properties and was used socially and religiously.

In the early 1900s, it was introduced in Caribbean countries like Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago by East Indian indentured labourers. That is based on the research available to us, Madam Speaker. The designation of cannabis as an unlawful substance and as a dangerous drug is of recent vintage, Madam Speaker. We are talking about the 1920s, 1930s, at that time when the opium convention just came into being. But for most of us in the Caribbean, we hear stories from our grandparents and great-grandparents about the use of cannabis as like an in-thing, Madam Speaker. And that is also cited in the 2018 Caricom Regional Commission on Marijuana Report.

So, I go back to asking, how did we get from—how did we get to that place of prohibition or this hard-on criminalization as it relates to marijuana? As a matter of fact, when the opium convention came into being in 1920s, India said, how are

we going to control this? How are we going to comply? Because marijuana was growing technically everywhere in certain areas and was such a normal part of socializing and religions, and so on.

So, Madam Speaker, we have witnessed over the years other developments throughout the First World that would have led to criminalization of cannabis. The Canadian Parliament shares its history about adding cannabis to the list of dangerous drugs where there were no debates, no consultation and even Members of the Parliament then wondered how did it happen.

We look at the FBI and the history of policing in the United States and we hear about Harry J. Anslinger who was a leader in the FBI, who created these war files, pretty much discriminating against Mexicans and different races, Madam Speaker. And this war on drugs caused we, as Caribbean people, and other countries who wished to trade with US and with the First World, to pretty much toe the line without asking questions, without doing our scientific research but wanting to participate in trade and wanting to be good world citizens, Madam Speaker. However, over the years, the First World continued its research and continued to work towards utilizing cannabis for its healing purposes, like they had known from the get-go about cannabis, Madam Speaker, and looked at the commercialization of cannabis. So, we saw the USA and Canada moving full speed ahead.

We witnessed on our end how these policies hindered the progress of our society, oppressing young men—our young men and causing trauma in our families. Madam Speaker, as an MP, many of us can speak about young people or people who came to us looking for jobs. And you would first refer them to a cleaning company or to MTS or to one of these companies. They do not have CXC

subjects and so on. But they would—MTS and companies like that would ask for their certificate of good character. And many would come back to you saying, “My certificate of good character—I would not get a certificate of good character because I had a weed charge in my earlier days.” And I have seen as a student in the United States, at my college, where students failed drug tests or had that on their record—had that charge on their record and could not get access to scholarships. So, how do we wage a war against poverty and then allow a war on drugs that criminalizes people or stains your record for possession of small amounts of marijuana, or should we say, cannabis? The two just do not go hand in hand.

So, I am happy to see over the years the decriminalization and we, as a country, we have done that too. But I think we need to pay, or we have paid attention to the US and Canada moving full speed ahead developing for medicinal purposes and for economic purposes, Madam Speaker. This is a war on drugs. It was primarily based on regional hedge money and we were toeing the lines, not based on science at all, Madam Speaker.

So, here we are about 100 years after the opium convention and we are somewhat behind in an area where we should naturally have a comparative advantage. For example, 10 years ago, United States—several states within the US began legalizing the commercial sale of marijuana. By the time the states—by that time, Madam Speaker, the State of Colorado already had a well-established marijuana market in place. In 2019, the European Union was already boasting and saying to the world, in the next five years we are going to be the largest legal cannabis market by 2024.

As we witnessed these developments throughout the world, Madam Speaker,



or should I say, in the First World, we as a region were forced to take a second look at ourselves, our positions, our perspectives. So, slowly we saw jurisdictions throughout the region opening up or softening their stance. I remember being a part of the consultations in 2019, 2020, as I travelled with then Attorney General going to UWI and so on, and there were some people from different religious backgrounds, some who were for and some who were against. In a community or in a country like ours, you had to get the consultation. It was all about getting everybody on board so that we could have some great form of consensus. But not just in Trinidad and Tobago, throughout the region, countries or governments became more interested in decriminalizing marijuana, in softening our position because of that heavy burden, these charges amongst youngsters had placed on our legal system. So, time was ripe for legal reform, 100 years after the opium convention, Madam Speaker. So, cannabis reform started picking up in the Caribbean.

In 2014—and I think that—I did not hear other speakers mention it but I think that we have to salute the Caricom because Caricom decided in 2014 to create a commission on reform of marijuana, Madam Speaker, in order to give countries something to hold onto as we face our communities, as we face stakeholders, as we face First World countries. And part of the reason countries within the Caribbean, from Jamaica which started in 2015, and going throughout the region, St. Vincent and so on, it is because of the support from the Caricom Heads of Government meeting that was held in 2014, where this commission was established. And we had scholars from UWI and all our different academic institutions in the region rolling up their sleeves and putting in the work to ensure that we had something to stand on, that our position as countries within Caricom

had to be based on science; had to be based on what we had seen coming out of the First World based on their economic successes, and it was high time that we do justice to our people or on behalf or in the interest in the development of our people.

So, I say kudos to Caricom because no one country would have wanted to go this alone. We were all timid or somewhat scared as to what would the Pentecostals think among us? What would the Methodists think among us? How would we be seen by the First World if we just up, jump and legalize it? So, Madam Speaker, I think that Caricom ought to be commended in this fight towards legal reform as it relates to treating with cannabis.

Madam Speaker, I heard several speakers before mention that Trinidad and Tobago is coming late as it relates to this. But this wave of legal reform throughout the region really started in 2015 and you had countries doing their consultations and their research in 2016, 2017, 2018. Then you had the pandemic in 2020. And I remember when we were getting ready to come to Parliament in 2020, the Opposition was out there crying saying, “Oh, there are more important things to deal with in the country and they want to take us to Parliament to talk about weed.”

Madam Speaker, here we are today. Here we are today doing our part, agreeing on both sides of the floor that this is important, not only to provide some sort of relief to our legal system but towards advancing scientific research within the region, especially as it relates to cancer treatment and pain treatment. And for those of us who have experienced long COVID, if you have gone to as many doctors, somebody would have recommended to you cannabis oil.

So, I have heard speakers before me—the speaker before me spoke about cannabis oil and the research on the—and research throughout the world. You have

different doctors trying different means of medicine through cannabis, based on cannabis towards providing some relieve. The debate is still out there as it relates to utilizing cannabis for inflammatory diseases or conditions post-COVID, in long COVID, but we have heard from contributions before as it relates to cancer treatment.

So, I am happy that we as a Government are here today to provide some relief, to catch up, Madam Speaker, and we are not just doing so ad hoc because, at the end of the day, decriminalization is one part of it but having the controls, having a regulated system is what is important in this revolutionary move. We have to make sure that we, our locals, benefit in developing industry; the small farmers, making sure that if we have to do business with major companies from throughout the world, that we are in a position where we are protected and we are well set and poised and positioned to really get some kind of economic benefit from this. Of course, funding is necessary for proper scientific research and we have those matters being handled by the authority.

So, with that said, Madam Speaker, I want to give kudos to the Members of the Joint Select Committee, the Members of both sides of the House who would have supported this piece of legislation, or should I say, the Joint Select Committee Report. And I think that we as a people should take this as a lesson in, when we support something or when we support proposals or recommendations at international conventions or as we do business with the First World, we have to look at, how does this affect us. And we have to be big and bold as Caricom was in 2014, to roll up our sleeves, get together, do the work, do the research so we can hold each other's hands across the region and move with one force towards providing justice for our people.

For me, I am happy that we are moving beyond the narrow constraints of medical marijuana to embracing notions of social justice, human rights, economics, regional hedge money and our right to health. May the miseducation that would have taken place over the years be replaced by sound education on cannabis and its benefits, and may we do all that we can to ensure that we put in the necessary research to develop this product and protect our local tradesmen so that it would redound to the benefit of all of us and to all of Trinidad and Tobago. With that said, Madam Speaker, I thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. David Lee** (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me to join this debate. Madam Speaker, before my contribution today—this is a critical report that the Parliament is trying to adopt here today and it showed—when I read the report and I listened to some of the speakers before me, especially on the first day, the mover of the report, the Member for San Fernando West and others, Madam Speaker, it is a—some people would say it is a critical piece of legislation, report, Bill and I would agree somewhat, Madam Speaker, because there are both pros and cons, in my view, about this legislation that is before us here today, the report.

Madam Speaker, when you look at the report itself, the JSC, you had some— both the Opposition, the Independent and the Government participating in this report. And the previous speaker before me, Tobago West, she agreed, we both agree that both the Opposition and Government and Independent were able to produce a report without a minority report, Madam Speaker. And that augurs well

for what transpired in that Joint Select Committee, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, on that Joint Select Committee, the one that is before us now, you had, I would say, very senior Ministers, Members. You had Member Young, Member Hinds, Member Deyalsingh—I am reading from report, Madam Speaker. You had the Member for San Fernando West as the Chair. You had the Member for Mayaro. You had the Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla. You had Sen. Clarence Rambharat at the time who was Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. You had Sen. Gopee-Scoon, Minister of Trade and Industry, Madam Speaker, and Independent Senators. And coming out of that committee, Madam Speaker, the committee was able to produce a report that augurs well for the country and its citizenry without any, as we normally would say, that the Opposition normally would say, that the Government—we would produce a minority report. The Opposition did not produce a minority report.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** But that—suffice it say, Madam Speaker, not that we did not have concerns. And I just want to repeat some of the concerns that the Member for Mayaro, who was part of the Opposition, who represented the Opposition on that Joint Select Committee, Madam Speaker—and I have to repeat some of his concerns. And I quote from the *Hansard*, Madam Speaker, and this is the Member for Mayaro, and I quote:

“Let me be clear from the outset, the Opposition Bench is fully supportive of the establishment of this burgeoning industry as long as the legislation, which protects the interests and rights of the citizen, is closely monitored, Madam Speaker.”

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** So, the Opposition is—we have some concerns but for the good of the country, coming out of the JSC under the Chair of San Fernando West, we were able to get some consensus, Madam Speaker. And I go on to voice some of his concerns, the Member for Mayaro:

“...we do have valid concerns”—and I quote— “which we would express...”—in—“this debate.”

Madam Speaker, and all our speakers on the Opposition side who have spoken so far, while we are in agreement, we do have some concerns. We would have heard it from the Member for Chaguanas West. You would have heard his points in respect of the legislation. You would heard from the Member for Fyzabad a couple—an hour ago, Madam Speaker, his concerns from the medical point of view. So, we do have some concerns and I, as the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, I do have some concerns, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, when you look and you go back to mover of this report, San Fernando West, Madam Speaker—and I just want to put it on the record and I quote from his *Hansard*, San Fernando West:

The JSC—“...held 18 meetings...”

They—“...went through clause by clause...”

They met with stakeholders, Madam Speaker, critical stakeholders.

They had—“Six public consultations...”

And it was robust—and if you listen to the Member for San Fernando West, it was a robust, very robust report and robust committee, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, when you—and I listened closely to the Member for Port of Spain—I want to get it right, Madam Speaker, Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, when on the last time that we

debated this report and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West spoke and you listened to his debate, Madam Speaker, you would have sworn that he was not a member of that Committee. Because he was at odds; he was at odds with the entire, in my view, the JSC Report, Madam Speaker, and I was shocked. And the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West is a key senior Minister and was part of both JSCs, Madam Speaker.

So, we as an Opposition, we are surprised of the kind of comments that that Member made in his debate, Madam Speaker. And I just want to go through some of his comments because we came out—there is no minority report and the Opposition is in agreement with the Government about this report, yet we are being chastised by the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West in—somehow we get the impression that he wanted us to produce a minority report, Madam Speaker, because he is not in agreement—I get the view he is not in agreement with the work of the JSC that he was a member of. And I say that, and I want to quote some of his quotes, Madam Speakers, in his debate. Page 99 of the *Hansard* and this is Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and I quote:

“So, it comes down to the legalizing and the commercializing of cannabis and marijuana for those on the opposite side”—meaning the Opposition—“to unanimously say, this is something that they would support. None of the previous important legislation, anti-gang, this and that or the other.”

So, if I can precis what the Member was saying is that he is giving the impression that somehow this cannabis report, that we are in support because it is our legislation. Madam Speaker, this the Government's legislation. This Government's work that the Opposition is in support of—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:**—that the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West sat on.

**3.10 p.m.**

And, if you listen to the Chairman, San Fernando West, Madam Speaker, he was in full praise of the work done of all the members of the committee. So I ask—maybe the Member for St. Ann’s West was absent for most of those meetings, or he did not read the final report that he signed. Madam Speaker, I just want to clarify that we on the Opposition do support legislation that this Government has brought.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** And some have to be critical, because the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West is giving the impression, we do not, but we only support this one because somehow this is about cannabis and marijuana. Madam Speaker, we supported the FATCA legislation; we supported the Anti-Gang 2018 legislation.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** We supported the Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, 2020; we supported the Sexual Offences Act, 2019.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** So we do support critical pieces of legislation. And I just want to quote in the *Hansard* of the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, page 101. And I quote:

“And I remember reflecting on the time and saying, wow, it has to come down to an addictive drug, something that has been destructive to many families for the Opposition to want to progress this forward for Trinidad.”

Madam Speaker, I repeat again, this is the Member for San Fernando West brought this legislation to the House.



**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** This is the Government's work, Madam Speaker. This is not the Opposition work. So why would the Member make these kinds of comments in this debate, after even the Minister of Health, the Member for St. Joseph, was in high praise for all members for the good work that they did on that committee. So maybe in his winding up the Member for San Fernando West could add some clarity, why there appeared to be some pull and tugging between the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West and the members on the committee or even his Government, and I will say why. I will go further, Madam Speaker. Because even when the part for the local content 30:70 of the foreign versus local, Madam Speaker, the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West sat on that committee. That was raised, Madam Speaker, in that committee. The Member for Mayaro and some of the Opposition Members raised that as a concern, yet in that committee, Madam Speaker, why did the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West not object to that?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** Why he is now objecting in this debate?

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. Members:** Because the Member is saying, even when it comes to the regulation time the Member would have a lot to say at that point in time, so I do not know if the Member wants to come over by us and write his own minority report, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Mr. D. Lee:** But we are at odds. Clearly something is going on with that Government, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, there is a concern, as I said, that

for me as the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, and my colleague the Member for Fyzabad touched on it, and it is about edibles. Edibles can be qualified as baked goods, chocolates, gummies, candies and even, I think, some infused water. Now, edibles are something in clause 29(d) of the Bill, and in my view when I looked and I reviewed the report, and I mean it with all full respect to the San Fernando West and all members who sat on that committee.

I do not know if the type of work that is required in respect of edibles, Madam Speaker, was done, and I stand to be corrected there because edibles are very, very, in my view, very dangerous, and that is why I said I have some concerns. And when I did some research on edibles, Madam Speaker, and the side effects of edibles, and how it can affect children, I ask the Government of the day to maybe pause or even add some importance, some strengthening of the legislation to protect the children, or the young adults as far as edibles are concerned, Madam Speaker. Because when I did some research, from the American point of view, on the serious side effects of edibles, and I just want to quote, long lasting effects:

“The effects of marijuana”—and I quote—“edibles last much longer than smoking, usually up to several hours depending on the amount” of THC “consumed.”

There are unknown potency of edibles.

“The amount of THC is difficult to measure and is often unknown in many edibles.”

And these edibles I am talking about, Madam Speaker, baked goods, cookies, gummy bears, chocolates, et cetera.

“Consequently, many products contain significantly more THC than labelled and people who consume these edibles can be caught off-guard by their strength and

long-lasting effects.”

Then another part of the side effects, Madam Speaker, is:

“Delayed Onset and High Potential for Overdose.”

While marijuana takes 30 set in the effects of edibles may take two hours to set in, leading to overdosing as a person keeps consuming them.

“Research has shown that edibles are the form of marijuana consumption most likely to lead to emergency room visits for marijuana overdose.”

So, these side effects are real, Madam Speaker. It is out there globally. It is not something that I am making up, and as the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, I have a great concern about these edibles. Because you see, Madam Speaker, even right here in Trinidad, and before I get to the Trinidad experience as far as edibles, on a BBC on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April report, 2022:

“A 23-year-old woman has died after eating synthetic cannabis sweets that was delivered to her door.”

A CBS report in the states on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July, 2015, Madam Speaker, “Marijuana cookie deaths highlights need for warning labels, CDC says”.

A 19-year-old jumps off a fourth storey balcony after eating six times the recommended dose of a marijuana cookie, Madam Speaker. In Jamaica in 2017 they were forced to ban the sale of cannabis, infused edibles, because individuals were being overdosed. Right next door in Barbados, Barbados also prohibits the production, import or sale of cannabis infused edibles.

So, Madam Speaker, and right here in Trinidad we had a situation as recent as last year on March 16, 2021, where Trinidad and Tobago’s position concerning edibles. And, Madam Speaker, in Trinidad we had on the Trinidad *Newsday* report on the 16<sup>th</sup> of February, 2020, “Police investigates marijuana edibles in school.” So

we had some issues back in 2020 where in Chaguanas five children from Chaguanas ate brownies a student brought to school as part of a Valentine's Day celebration, while one child from Couva bought the items from a vendor outside the school.

So, Madam Speaker, I listened to the Member for Tobago West in her contribution, and she was comparing alcohol and the prohibition of alcohol versus smoking of weed, et cetera. But edibles, Madam Speaker, that we might want to just glean over and not consider it as important or life threatening, edibles, in my view is a dangerous, dangerous retail product that if not properly labelled, not proper strengthened as far as the authorities are concerned, Madam Speaker, we as a country can have issues in years to come. And another part of the concern that I have is cannabis and the banking industry. And I hope that the Member for San Fernando West could add some clarity again, because there are a lot of banking issues in respect to the cannabis industry. I do not know if the JSC the members had enough time to really flesh that out, and I am hoping that the Member for San Fernando West can add some clarity on that issue of banking issues as far as corresponding banking. Because, you know, we have so much issues in the banking industry, Madam Speaker, in respect of money laundering, et cetera, and I am asking, how does this, when this legislation gets into place and becomes operationalized in respect to the banking issues, how is the Government of the day, or as a country, as an industry we are going to be dealing with that, Madam Speaker?

Now, Madam Speaker, there are some positives coming out of this legislation, and the positive that could be in someone, as an industry, is the tourism industry. And when you do some research they are now branding in some countries

“bud and breakfast” as a tourism marketing tool, Madam Speaker. So he talks about what is cannabis tourism given that we are now coming out of a pandemic, COVID recovering for the past two years as an economy, Madam Speaker. Maybe this legislation is timely that we can get some added revenues as a country. Even our small and medium businesses can get into this kind of industry. This industry is not for, in my view, not for any and every one, but it is a thriving industry globally, and you have heard the big numbers that the Member for Mayaro would have spoken about, and there is a whole industry under cannabis as far as tourism.

So, you know, it is there for research to be done. I do not know, again, how the JSC members or even the chairman had thought about cannabis tourism as an industry. So, Madam Speaker, there are a lot of pros and cons, as I said, of this industry, but I want to stick a pin really and truly, while we traverse new ground as far as this industry is concerned, I as the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, I am asking for the Member for San Fernando West and his Government to really strengthen the authority and give them the operational strength that is required, Madam Speaker, so that in maybe five years, 10 years’ time from today that we as a society do not live to regret this legislation, Madam Speaker. So, with those few words, Madam Speaker, I thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for La Horquetta/Talparo.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**The Minister of Youth Development and National Service (Hon. Foster Cummings):** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate on the report of the Joint Select Committee on the Cannabis Control Bill, 2020. And, Madam Speaker, I know that there have been many speakers before me

who have touched on many areas of the report, so that I will attempt certainly not to repeat the points that have been made, but to say that the Government, of course, has focused in 2019 on the decriminalization of marijuana. It is a most welcomed decision, Madam Speaker, and we now take the courageous move to bring legislation to treat with the regulation of the industry. It is a step in the right direction for persons who utilize cannabis for medical reasons, for religious reasons, and for other reasons.

I represent the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo, and it is welcomed, this move of the Government, particularly as it relates to our young people and those who may have had their lives restricted and their future restrained in relation to convictions for the possession of small quantities of marijuana, or weed, or “sensimania”, or the herb. Many other names associated with this herb called cannabis. Many persons were, prior to the decriminalization, as I mentioned, convicted for small quantities of marijuana. This interfered—speakers before me I believed mentioned it—with their ability to gain jobs. And, of course, we know all too well of the thriving business, the village business, the block with all the associated illegal activities that come with it, is almost as though that is what the young entrepreneur in the community, many rural communities, but certainly in urban communities as well, where that block, the major activity is the illegal sale and trading of marijuana joints. And the protection of that, and the known association with gang activities, the associated relationship with guns and ammunition, and the violence that comes with it to protect the turf and to protect the borders of operation, these individuals are looked upon by other young persons as the role models that they would like to look up to and become, as successful, because of their activities associated with the trade in marijuana.

And then you have coming with that the amount of time it consumes for law enforcement agencies, and certainly as the mover of the Motion, the hon. Member for San Fernando West indicated, the clogging of the judicial system, and the many cases associated with cannabis possession, and that clogged the judicial system. I think what was mentioned is some 6,600 cases annually, now down to 1,400, or a monthly drop of 551—from 551 to 114.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Cummings:** This, Madam Speaker, is a significant achievement by this administration, and it has brought considerable relief to the Magistrates' Court, and as well addressed the question of the stigma associated with cannabis use. I think that as a Parliament today that the country takes note of the cooperation between the Government and the Opposition. I want to commend the work of the Joint Select Committee for bringing us to this stage. It is not often that we have, notwithstanding the points raised by the previous speaker in relation to the number of Bills or legislation that the Opposition has supported that the Government brought. I think the list of Bills that they have not supported is significantly longer that, but notwithstanding that, it is good that we have gotten to this point today, Madam Speaker.

For many years the Government has been plagued with many issues, critical issues affecting our society, and in particular the drug trade and how we address all of these activities, these criminal activities associated with the drug trade. And from time to time, I would listen to the contribution of the Member for San Fernando West in his previous incarnation in the Ministry he served prior to moving to this new Ministry, speaking about relief required in the judicial system and the clogging in the Magistrates' Court, matters taking a very long time to be

heard and determined, and certainly this action taken by the Government in 2019 with decriminalization of marijuana, I know from the statistics given to us by the Member, has significantly addressed that matter, Madam Speaker. The future of our young people in many cases was stymied as a result of their issues with the law in relation to the use and possession of marijuana, and so now—

**Madam Speaker:** So Member, I think I have given you some time. This Bill is not about the decriminalization, and I think you may have used that for context, and please let us get on with the report.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** I am guided, Madam Speaker. So that we have reached to the point, Madam Speaker, where we are treating with the regulation of the cannabis industry and the benefits that will come from the establishment of the Authority, as mentioned in the report. It is a comprehensive strategy, I believe, for the economic development and diversification, and, of course, this requires proper management and the relevant human capital.

The Bill requires Members serving on the board to have at least five years' experience, and this is outlined in clause 6, Madam Speaker. And, the management of this new industry I think will bring significant benefits to the agricultural sector and to those entrepreneurs who wish to take advantage of this new and very interesting industry. It should be noted, Madam Speaker, that according to CNN Business:

Sales within the cannabis industry in 2020 hit \$20 billion globally, and is projected to reach up to \$45 billion in 2025.

It is in fact a growing industry, and this Bill takes account of the entire supply chain associated with the cannabis industry. It will impact the agricultural aspects of it, it will impact the manufacturing, it will impact research and development,



particularly in areas of the medical use retail, and of course retail and export as well.

Statistics indicates that there are about 200 million global users of cannabis. That is very a large population, Madam Speaker, when you look at it in relation to our small twin-island State of just 1.3 million people. It is therefore commendable that the Bill also caters for issues in relation to the granting of export licences, and the significant economic benefits that will be associated with that. Madam Speaker, this move generates significant physical benefits to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago through licence fees and taxes, and if we look at the State of California, which is noted as being one of the largest markets for cannabis, some \$1 billion in tax revenue for cannabis. Madam Speaker, is it therefore in our best interest to move in this direction. And, in relation to the cultivation issues, Madam Speaker, it also brings significant benefits to the farmers both on a small scale and a large scale, who will have an interest in this new industry, as it will also allow them to actively participate in the cultivation.

Madam Speaker, it addresses the issue of the black market associated with cannabis that has plagued us for several decades. And, this legislation allows for mitigation of the supply of cannabis on the black market, which, as I mentioned before is at the heart of a lot of the issues, the illegal issues associated with the cannabis industry. We have heard several speakers speak about the benefits, some of them practising medical doctors. The Member for Fyzabad spent some time on that as well, and therefore I do not propose to go into that area except to say that we know that for the Rastafarian community, and I do not suggest that I am anywhere close to being a Rastafarian, but we know that, of course, that community uses that herb for religious purposes. Madam Speaker, it was in 2014, I

believe, that the Caricom Heads of Government decided on the setting up of a Regional Marijuana Commission, and in 2018 discussions were held regarding what step should be taken for individual states to review the current status of cannabis use and the attendant regulation.

As part of the discussions coming out of that meeting was the need for countries to determine its own pathway of pursuing law reforms, and these reforms were proposed by the Regional Marijuana Commission as well to explore the potential of cannabis being a controlled substance and the management that would be associated with such regulations. The decriminalization is just one side of the discussion. The other aspect of the discussion is what we are doing here today, which is discussing how do we formulate an entity to legalize the use of this industry, of cannabis for medical, for research, for religious purposes, and of course the establishment of this regulatory body to approve licences for the cannabis business. One of the major elements, Madam Speaker, will treat with the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Cannabis Licensing Authority as a body corporate with the responsibility for regulatory control and the handling of cannabis. This Authority will conduct several key procedures, including the appointment of a board of directors, the appointment of a CEO, the employment of staff, the engagement of expert advisers and consultants, the issuance of several types of licensing for specific medicinal and therapeutic and scientific purposes.

Madam Speaker, these measures will lead to increased opportunities which include the potential for higher levels of employment and business opportunities for new entrepreneurs, as would come with any other new industry. And I must say that the world is moving in that direction. In the region we should take credit because several of our jurisdictions have already taken steps in relation to—

**Madam Speaker:** Okay. So, Member I just would like to invite you to go on to something new. We are kind of late in the day and I think we are really becoming, treading on the grounds of tedious repetition. All of this is ground that has been covered, so I will invite you to treat with something differently in the report.

**Hon. F. Cummings:** Speaking late in the debate, particularly on a matter like this that has a common attention on both sides of the House, I want to say, Madam Speaker, that I wish to once again commend the committee for the work that it has done in bringing us to this point. It is a legislation that I support, that really requires the support of all of us, and in so doing I wish to thank you for my opportunity to contribute, Madam Speaker.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**3.40 p.m.**

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Moruga/Tableland.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Ms. Michelle Benjamin** (*Moruga/Tableland*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to present today on the Cannabis Control Bill. I am thankful for allowing me to join this debate.

**Madam Speaker:** Right now we are on the report. Okay, so I just want to guide everyone what we are dealing with is the report. All right.

**Ms. M. Benjamin:** Duly noted, Madam Speaker, and I am pleased to present on this Joint Select Committee Report. Madam Speaker, before us this legislative framework would establish the Trinidad and Tobago Cannabis Licensing Authority, the body that would govern licences for the cultivation, distribution, sale, import and export of cannabis for medicinal use. We are well aware of the culture of cannabis use in Trinidad and Tobago and by extension the Caribbean.

Madam Speaker, in our local art fraternity we hail our local Reggae singers like Prophet Benjamin with his famous song “Coming from Moruga”, the area of which I am the Member of Parliament.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Ms. M. Benjamin:** We also hail Marlon Asher who would have sung “Ganga planter”. These songs are not just songs, Madam Speaker, but are melodies of the culture of Trinidad and Tobago specifically with cannabis and its use. As such, Madam Speaker, this Bill is long overdue and the Members on this side are in support of this Bill or this legislation that would establish a fair and transparent licensing regime. But before me, Madam Speaker, I am not sure that in its current state or form that we can adopt this. If it is to be adopted in its current form, Madam Speaker, it can stand to be a runaway horse. Effective implementation must guide this legislative framework because the consequences can be dire. We have to think about our future, particularly, those of the youths.

The committee report as at July 2021, addresses many of the preliminary concerns of the Bill. When it was first laid in Parliament in or about October 2021, Madam Speaker, where was the Cabinet policy directive or the policy guidelines from the Ministry of Health or even the Attorney General’s office to guide the drafting of this legislation? What were the policy considerations or the data examined to boost the people’s economic gain? Where are the several regulations or subsidiary legislation from the former AG, Madam Speaker, as he was saying that it would fix the present state of the Bill? I will further establish this point as I develop my argument here today.

Let me start off by saying, Madam Speaker, Moruga currently has a large group of cannabis farmers which is part and parcel of the Cannabis Growers

Association of Trinidad And Tobago—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Ms. M. Benjamin:**—which is a duly registered entity. Currently that group represents over 10,000 cannabis farmers in Trinidad and Tobago, nearly 1,000 of which are from Moruga alone. I would have hoped, Madam Speaker, that as a matter of due diligence this duly registered group would have been consulted on. The fact of the matter remains they were not.

**Hon. Member:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Ms. M. Benjamin:** As such, Madam Speaker, it was strange that the Member for San Fernando West said consultations were made with 30 different agencies, yet was the Cannabis Growers Association consulted for the Cannabis Bill or legislation before us here today, Madam Speaker? No. Despite the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West putting it on the record that he will not allow this Bill to benefit a few or that they do not work by exclusion, the Government's action continue to say differently.

We know of their promises, Madam Speaker, they speak of protecting farmers, farmers that we know that they do not protect. Madam Speaker, their track record and their history would show that they do not protect the farmers of Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, in an article dated February the 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016, it relayed:

“Five held in \$1.4m Moruga drug busts”

This is a *Guardian* newspaper article. And an online report from CNC3, July 2021:

“SORT...”—would have seized—“96.8 kilos of marijuana in Moruga”

That roughly is 320 kilograms of cannabis, would have been estimated at a street value of \$2.5 million.

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Madam Speaker, Standing Orders 44(10) and 48(1).

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, so, as far as 44(10), I mean, it is a debate and, you know, I had asked Members, we are a bit seasoned now, not to be so tightly tied to their notes, okay? As for 48(1), I will give you a little leeway for me to see where you are going with that, Member for Moruga/Tableland.

**Ms. M. Benjamin:** Appreciated, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, these articles are just to show that cannabis or marijuana is big business in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, it tells us that cultivation and trade of marijuana again is big business, but what is being presented here, it also tells us that our local farmers are put at some serious risk and soon to be out of business.

Madam Speaker, this Bill is a slightly modified version of the provisions of Barbados. This is ironic, I might add, since I think the Government only uses comparison from our Caricom counterparts when it suits the agenda.

Madam Speaker, I do wish for our market not to be monopolized by foreign entities. Despite the ownership of the board having 30 per cent, there is still room that it would be monopolized from foreign entities, and I will show this as I develop my argument. What this Bill misses, Madam Speaker, is consultation from small farmers throughout Trinidad and Tobago. The Bill has struggled to find a way to include the island's small farmers in this new industry in which Trinidad and Tobago is slowest to move into. I have listened to the Members from the opposite Bench and they give an excuse for Trinidad and Tobago's slow progression for the regularization of the medicinal cannabis.

I will begin my contribution on clause 5 of the Bill. Under clause 5, subclause (4), the Minister may give the Authority general policy directions that must be implemented by the Authority. It must be that the policy directions must

not be unilateral decisions of the Minister and must be Cabinet approved before—

**Mr. Hinds:** I rise on Standing Order 44(10), again.

**Madam Speaker:** So Member, again, it is quite obvious that you are really very tied to your notes. This is a debate and while you do have notes, remember it is a debate, and you have to, you know, debate, okay. So, please.

**Ms. M. Benjamin:** Madam Speaker, thank you for your guidance and I wish to continue. In continuing, Madam Speaker, this is because of the nature of the issue. Madam Speaker, as I highlighted previously, cannabis is big business in this country so we would like to see some form of accountability when it comes to clause 5, subclause (4). But it is of noteworthy concern, Madam Speaker, that some of the illicit provisions within the Bill that I will address despite the policy considerations which parliament is yet to say—

**Mr. Hinds:** Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker, it appears as though your ruling a moment ago is being completely ignored. I rise again on Standing Order 44(10), Madam Speaker, out of due respect and courtesy to your Chair, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** Okay, so again, Member for Moruga/Tableland you have debated before, it is not that it is a maiden contribution and you know, you have got to make an effort. All right, so I would ask you again, and please let us not rise on this again, okay?

**Ms. M. Benjamin:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, I am so guided. Madam Speaker, as I continue I would like to move to another substantive point that I had here, Madam Speaker. I would move to clause 6. Under clause 6, subclause (5), Madam Speaker—and I am looking at the Member as he attempts to rise to interrupt me again—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Ms. M. Benjamin:**—and he was held back by the goodly Minister of Health.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, please, address your contribution here—

**Ms. M. Benjamin:** Agreed, Madam Speaker.

**Madam Speaker:** And just remember, any Member could rise on any Standing Order, that is part of what we do, and I rule on it. Okay?

**Ms. M. Benjamin:** Madam Speaker, as I continue clause 6, subclause (5), Madam Speaker, there should be a cap on the number of terms a person can be appointed to the board of the Authority. And this is necessary, Madam Speaker, as we would want the board to be not influenced by political entities. Madam Speaker, and we would have seen the history of this throughout several boards within Trinidad and Tobago that would have been recently—

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b). That was said ad nauseam on the last day and 44(10), again.

**Madam Speaker:** So, Member, you know, sometimes the difficulty with coming late into the debate, a lot of the ground would have been traversed by several speakers, okay? So there has been a lot of discussion about the appointments to the board, the term of the appointees, the types of licences, the small man. I have tried to give you some leeway, but I will invite you to come to a new point in the report so that we can progress with the debate, alright? I do uphold the objection under Standing Order 55(1)(b).

**Ms. M. Benjamin:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for your continued guidance during this debate. I really appreciate it. I will move on to another clause with regard to—clause 30, Madam Speaker, when it speaks with regard to the local ownership of the board. We deal with that clause having 30 per cent local ownership. Madam Speaker, and I would raise that clause in light of one of my



main points during my debate that I want to stress with regard to the social equity programme. Madam Speaker, the reason why I would raise a social equity programme with regard to that clause, when we have a mandating of the local ownership of the board—

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b). That issue of 30 per cent ownership has been beaten to death by the Opposition last week Wednesday and today.

**Mr. Hinds:** Like how Le Pen “get beaten” in France.

**Madam Speaker:** Member, again, I will have to rule in favor of the objection when it comes to the 30:70 per cent distribution of companies and partnerships in the business.

**Ms. M. Benjamin:** I am so guided again, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, but if you would allow me, what this Bill will do which the PNM Government has failed to address is allow large entities, local large organizations or regional and international entities coming to ply trade of small farmers. Madam Speaker, small farmers that would have been prosecuted—

**Mr. Deyalsingh:** Madam Speaker, 55(1)(b), you just ruled on the matter.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Members, okay. So, yes, Member, could you please go to a new area. The small farmers related to the 30 per cent, the 70 per cent, all of that. You yourself, as you in the couple of minutes you have spoken, you have spoken about small farmers. So please, let us get on to something new. I am trying to give you as much leeway as I can.

**Ms. M. Benjamin:** Noted again, Madam Speaker, and I am so guided. Madam Speaker, as I search through my notes to find something that was not raised—

Madam Speaker, I would like to speak with regard to the tracking aspect of the Bill. Madam Speaker, in my point of view it was left out, the tracking aspect, and the tracking aspect it is something that is very apparent in all the different regions. And we see that the Government would have been guided by the notes or guided by the legislations from all the different regions, but this is something that they would have left out when compiling the Bill here today or even the report from the Joint Select Committee, where with a lack of tracking. They also, with regard to the financial transaction, Madam Speaker, this would allow us to see with regard to the different areas that the cannabis would have come, would it have been from the legal entity or from legal means, Madam Speaker. So this is something I would like clarity when the AG rises on his legs to do the windup, with regard to why any kind of tracking mechanism was left out of the legislation.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to raise with regard to my local cannabis farmers and with regard to the use of the agro-processing facility that was recently built by this current administration. Madam Speaker, because if that—

**Madam Speaker:** Could you just point me to where you are in the report, both on the tracking and this agro-processing. If you could point me to that then I could link the report and what you are saying to this debate and to maybe a provision in the Bill that has been recommended by the Joint Select Committee.

**Ms. M. Benjamin:** So guided, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in light that I am joining this debate in the latter stages and most of the substantive points would have been raised, I would like to thank you for the few moments that you have given me here today to debate and I would like to thank the Members of this honourable House and all the Members of the Opposition that would have contributed thus far.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for San Fernando West.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

**Madam Speaker:** May we have some order, please. Member, you have 30 minutes to wind up.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**The Acting Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs and Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi):** Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to wind up the debate on the report for adoption before this committee. Of course that report is the Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Cannabis Control Bill, 2020. Madam Speaker, suffice it to say that there is agreement in this House, today, and therefore the first order of business is to express my gratitude as the chairman of the committee for all of the contributions that came to this House. It is the work of two successive committees that brought us to the work product before us, Madam Speaker, and I am very concerned to lay on record gratitude for all of the committee members which includes, Madam Speaker, those who served in the committee established to look at the 2019 Bill as well.

Madam Speaker, the benefits of the law, if this committee delivers the Bill attached as the Fourth Schedule into law, and that is Appendix IV that I refer to, the benefits of the law are to be factored right alongside the structure of law that operates with this. I want to remind you, Madam Speaker, that we are dealing with the Dangerous Drugs Act that articulates with this. I would like to remind that we are also dealing with the laws that treat with medical practitioners; we are dealing with the laws that treat with our pharmacists; we are dealing with special economic

zones in parts as that becomes part and parcel of the law.

And if you look at Appendix IV, Madam Speaker, and you look to clause 3(4), there is a very important provision here:

“The provisions of the Dangerous Drugs Act, the Proceeds of Crime Act, the Medical Board Act and the Pharmacy Board Act shall not prohibit, or otherwise restrict or render unlawful, the cultivation, processing, extraction, distribution, import, export, possession or other handling of cannabis, in accordance with the provisions of this Act.”

I want to remind, Madam Speaker, again, in clause 3 of the Bill attached as Appendix IV that the definition of “handling” in relation to cannabis includes:

- “(a) the use, cultivation, processing, importation, exportation, transport, transit, transshipment, manufacture, sale, distribution and possession of cannabis; and
  - (b) the conducting of scientific research, testing and analytical services for the purpose of improving or developing cannabis,
- but does not include the use of medicinal cannabis by a person pursuant to a prescription or recommendation...”

Now, I have started there in annex IV, in these provisions specifically to respond to the contributions coming opposite. With respect to the Member for Moruga/Tableland, the hon. Member said that she wished to speak. The hon. Member spoke to the cultivators of cannabis in her constituency. And I would like to remind the hon. Member that cultivation of cannabis is not permitted by law under any circumstances other than as provided in the Dangerous Drugs Act as amended in 2019 where one is permitted, each individual, to have four growing cannabis plants.

Now, Madam Speaker, I say that because even though we take the step in producing this report and in delivering for recommendation before this House the annex IV, which is the Bill, the Cannabis Control Bill, I would like to remind that we are obliged to obey the law, we are obliged to be conscious in our reflections that this is a progressive step. Now, permit me to explain that.

Madam Speaker, it is a fact, a scientific fact, I get the extreme pleasure of having in 2019, delivered for the Government, the proposition that there would be a significant benefit in decriminalization and dangerous drugs amendments reflected on in this report. We have statistical evidence that there has been a 76 per cent drop in case load. We have statistical evidence coming from the forensics institute that there has been a massive decline in use of time to examine plant-like substance for cases in court and instead that they can focus upon big areas.

But, Madam Speaker, the law that we bring about here is intended to work along with regulations. Now, if I can speak to the work of the committee in this report and answer my colleagues, we were very careful in the committee to make a strong distinction between medicinal, therapeutic use of cannabis and that, Madam Speaker, is in clause 29 of the Bill. The Authority may issue the following licences for medicinal, therapeutic or scientific purposes and there are eight licences, and then we have religious licences. So there are two ways that you can use this.

In answer to my colleagues opposite who are medical practitioners, the use of a recommendation versus a prescription was very purposefully thought of by the committee. The recommendation is for the psychological and other uses that are beyond medical categorization. A prescription is intended to treat with medical categorization.

Madam Speaker, permit me to stop at this point and recognize that the work

of this committee is not as the hon. Member for Moruga/Tableland put it, a cut and paste of Barbados. No, hon. Member, through you, Madam Speaker. This is the work of our committee—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:**—which factored amendments to the Dangerous Drugs Act, which factored the Cannabis Control Bill and which factored expert advice that we received from the Caricom, and the work of the committee in the report demonstrates that we were guided by expertise in Jamaica, in Canada and, Madam Speaker, in Barbados, and I would like to flag a few local experts. In particular, there is a gentleman by the name of Mr. Marcus Ramkisson, someone who has been an advocate for the prescriptive detail of law when it comes to the cannabis industry and I would like to address recommendations coming from experts, including Mr. Ramkisson, through you, as they feature in the recommendations of the report, to remind that we are moving towards a great detail of prescription, the fine detail of the law in the regulations which will be produced under the law, Madam Speaker.

That treated with what Pointe-a-Pierre had to say. The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre made a very important point shared by all members of the committee, that is, in treating with the benefits against the risks, in particular, to our children. And when we look at the risks to our children, Madam Speaker, I want to remind that the law is specific and clear as annex IV demonstrates in the committee's report, that we protect children, there must be strict medical supervision, there must be strict prescriptive use by medical practitioners.

In this law, Madam Speaker, that we propose in this report, we are asking that every aspect of the chain, of the link from where the plant is grown to how it is

consumed, to who consumes it, to how it is destroyed, to the therapeutic use, to the patient information and confidentiality provisions, every step of the transaction is mapped out in the prescriptive form of the law proposed by this report, but it will be in much greater detail set out in the regulations that come via the Authority which is to be established under this law. Those regulations, Madam Speaker, will ultimately come down to an explosion of care and caution versus economic opportunity.

I want to compliment my colleague for Toco/Sangre Grande, the hon. Roger Monroe—

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:**—in being a champion for rural community development.

Because it was my colleague who pointed out to me that the opportunity in rural communities, in particular, from an economic standpoint is tremendous.

**4.10 p.m.**

Now, we know, Madam Speaker, from the arrests and convictions under the rubric of gathering and the cultivation of cannabis, again, reflected on in this report, that it is the people in our rural communities that have been caught. They are often stranded in terms of geography. Their access to rural communities is difficult. As Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, that is my task, to deal with the 80 per cent road network. But in the meanwhile, Madam Speaker, this Bill, offered by this report, provides an economic opportunity that I have heard my colleague speak to and therefore I say, through you, respectfully that the work of this report demonstrates a tremendous economic opportunity.

Because what do we have growing for us? What do we have going for us in Trinidad and Tobago? Relatively safe geo-positioning outside the hurricane belt,

tropical climate, one of the most aggressive intellectual property arenas in the world. Madam Speaker, you may not know this but the Office of the Attorney General, Intellectual Property Office, took five out of six conventions into law in one year alone. And why was that an aggressive item in the Office of the Attorney General? Because geo-patenting of our DNA, of our type of the genealogical positions of the genesis of cannabis as defined in this Bill, in this report, Madam Speaker, it means that we have the opportunity to present our cannabis as an origin indicator of worth, much like champagne is for sparkling wines. So, for persons in rural communities—and I wish to compliment my colleague, in particular, for having drawn this to my attention—this is a tremendous opportunity.

Now, Madam Speaker, the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre and a couple of others raised the issue of criminality and the concern about the banking industry, correspondent banking. The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre raised that a while ago. It is a very good observation. It is why in the report you will see that the Bill attached to the report starts off in the definition section of a specific position. The first defined term at clause 3, at page 31 of the report, is AML/CFT/PF. What does that mean? Anti-money laundering, countering the financing of terrorism and proliferation financing. It also includes a reference to controller. And a controller in relation to religious organization has the meaning assigned to it in section 31 of the Non-Profit Organisations Act. It also includes, Madam Speaker, the reference to subclause (4) of clause 3, which I pointed out, the Proceeds of Crime Act.

And therefore this law is intended to specifically treat with the corresponding banking and banking issues to make sure that people who go into the industry of cannabis can be banked, that their money can be brought into the system, that the legality of the system can work. Because you cannot be a non-



profit organization unless you are registered. You cannot be a non-profit organization unless your AML/CFT/PF forms are done and law enforcement has access to those forms if you look at non-profit organizations. The Proceeds of Crime Act, law enforcement has access to every aspect of this train.

Madam Speaker, when you get now to the other provisions, which show why you can be banked, why there is no risk of correspondent banking failure, the law also provides for acknowledgement of what we call Recommendation 35 of the Financial Action Task Force, and that is to be found in clause 65 and clause 67 of the Bill where we specifically treat with the introduction of administrative fines. What are administrative fines? Administrative fines are an alternative to prescribe summary offences so that if you are given a notice that you are potentially guilty of a summary offence, that you have the option to pay an administrative fine. That finds itself in origin from Recommendation 35 of the Financial Action Task Force. So, in answer to the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre's concern about the corresponding banking, about making sure that people who have an opportunity to make serious money in a serious industry, that they have the chance.

Now, permit me to address something as well. Madam Speaker, there has been expressed concern about our participation in international treaties and I want to refer specifically to the International Narcotics Control arena, brought about by international conventions which we are parties to and part of which laws we have on our books. Remember, we are a dualistic society. Our laws are made—our international laws become local law when we make them local law and until they are local law, the international treaty is just on the outside.

So, Madam Speaker, I want to remind that that is where the Proceeds of Crime Act and the Dangerous Drugs Act came about. And it is important to

recognize that what we are saying to Trinidad and Tobago, after two joint select committees, after decriminalization on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December, 2019, Madam Speaker, many people in Trinidad and Tobago literally celebrated the proclamation of the Dangerous Drugs Act amendment. And, Madam Speaker, it gives us immense pride to participate in a Government that had the courage to do that.

**Hon. Member:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** Because the benefit to the average human being in Trinidad and Tobago is tremendous. And, Madam Speaker, as a Member of Parliament for San Fernando West, my 11 HDC communities, my some 2,500 people who live in squatting conditions, Madam Speaker, I can testify, as many of my colleagues can, of the hardship of “locking up people for two joints”. And what we are proposing now, for people who are inclined to agriculture, in this report, we are proposing an opportunity for economic profit. And, Madam Speaker, for the people of San Fernando West who I speak for in this House, with the nameplate being not Faris Al-Rawi, not Minister of Rural Development and Local Government but being Member for San Fernando West, I would like to say for San Fernando West that my constituents all line up, as all of our constituents surely do, behind the economic opportunity that this Bill offers.

This report makes a recommendation that 30 per cent of any entity going into the development of cannabis as an industry, that 30 per cent of people who will get licences have to have local content. I would like to remind that is not a small number and we ought not to be xenophobic and think that we can do it by ourselves. There is nothing wrong with big industry participating in Trinidad and Tobago provided that we have local content factor.

Now, what I found strange is that the Member for Naparima did not speak in

this debate because the Member for Naparima who is, perhaps, exploring acquiring another passport, perhaps in Guyana, is an advocate of the local content laws in some other jurisdictions. And when you look at the local content in this law, I thought that the Member for Naparima would have been jumping up and down to say, “Local content in Trinidad and Tobago law, look the PNM Government ensuring 30 per cent of the companies in large enterprise in a country like ours where we can grow agriculture, indoors, outdoors, hard concrete, hydroponics, in the field, in rural community.” I thought my friend from Naparima would certainly have been an advocate of that.

**Hon. Member:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** But I guess it is only Barbados, and only Le Pen and only Guyana that intrigues my colleague opposite, perhaps that is why he did not participate.

So, Madam Speaker, local content anchored in this report is huge factor because your committee explored what happened in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Antigua and Barbuda, Jamaica, in Barbados and we were very mindful that we needed to preserve the local content. Minister Hinds, as he sat then in the Office of the Attorney General, the Minister of National Security, walked up and down Trinidad and Tobago with me in my capacity as then Attorney General and participated in lively debate in demonstrating the public consultation for the work that this Committee considered and I wish to publicly commend my colleague, the hon. Minister of National Security, for his dedication to this exercise.

**Hon. Member:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** Because, Madam Speaker, the people for Laventille West also stand behind this particular Bill, also stand behind this report—

**Hon. Member:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:**—because they too want to have their opportunity for success. And, Madam Speaker, what this committee's report demonstrates is money can grow on trees and that that money growing on trees has an economic potential which must be balanced against the risks to society. It is why the committee's report focuses very clearly on criminalizing conduct that jeopardizes the most vulnerable. It is why the committee considered the report that caregivers have to be included in this, why parents have expressed liability in respect of their children, why in respect of the religious purposes that we can have an absolute prohibition against the commercial activity in religious organizations. Because, Madam Speaker, if you are an adherent to the religious faith that may apply for a religious licence under clause 29 of the Bill, as the report recommends, you have to make sure that it is under strict conditions, and the dispensary aspects, the control aspects, who receives, where those records are, are all part of the subsidiary legislation, meaning the regulations to be produced under clause 68 of the law as it is proposed.

So, Madam Speaker, on behalf of the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I can certainly say that there is great excitement. Madam Speaker, there were many people along the way that had great doubts and fears about the propriety of a law such as this. Our hon. Prime Minister acting in his capacity as the head of the Cabinet, in considering our very diverse views. And, Madam Speaker, I would like to say this publicly. In our Cabinet, there is no position other than robust intellectual debate. There is collective responsibility. But, Madam Speaker, we are not people afraid to deal with issues. Sometimes issues can be tough, sometimes there will be disagreement but it is our hon. Prime Minister who

quite publicly put me in my place at least on one occasion in relation to this law in the early days and for good reason, reminding that there had to be Cabinet-approval of policy. The Cabinet-approved policy, led by our hon. Prime Minister, is that we need to take our heads out of the sand, we need to protect the most vulnerable, we need to ensure that there is a careful commercialization, we need to ensure that our children are protected. And I would like to say to the hon. Prime Minister, thank you for having the courage to support law such as this.

**Hon. Member:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** Madam Speaker, we are definitely, if I could put this forward for people who are listening, we are definitely going to see certain amendments to the law when the authority comes into effect. When the Authority comes into effect, there will be further revisions on the law. We have left space for the authority to be created. The Authority would then take best practices, develop the regulations under section 68. Those regulations come for affirmative resolution in the Parliament. Those regulations will allow us to deal with any international concerns that may come our way. There will be tightening up of provisions. So, I am giving notice the approach that the Government has taken which is to start.

Madam Speaker, our friends opposite had their turn at the wheel on many occasions. The Member for Siparia served in the NAR Government, the Member for Siparia served in a UNC Government, the Member for Siparia served as an Attorney General for a couple of months in this country, the Member for Siparia served as Prime Minister. I am talking about 15 years of operation, Madam Speaker. Is there a point of order?

**Mr. Charles:** Yes. Standing Order 48(8). This is not about the Opposition or the Member for Siparia.

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** Madam Speaker, as I was saying in answer to the debate, the Member for Siparia, for 15 years, had an opportunity to treat with law such as this but regrettably there was no courage; regrettably.

**Hon. Member:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** And, Madam Speaker, what I am saying in the context of this report, this report signals hope for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. The Member for Pointe-a-Pierre was right, coming out of a COVID-19 pandemic and transferring ourselves now into an endemic stage, Madam Speaker, in climbing down from our reliance on oil and gas, we, the People's National Movement, as the Government of this country, are proud to offer an opportunity to people in the cannabis industry because it is intended to be regulated in a very strict way. And, Madam Speaker, to all young entrepreneurs out there, get ready; get ready and set for a diversified economy which includes cannabis as an option under strict regulation.

Madam Speaker, I do not think that there is anything more to add to this particular Motion to adopt this report, other than to say those careful words, I beg to move.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Report adopted.*

### **CANNABIS CONTROL BILL, 2020**

*Order for second reading read.*

**The Acting Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs and Minister of Rural Government and Local Government (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi):** Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 66(4), I beg to move:

That a Bill to provide for the regulatory control of the handling of cannabis for certain purposes, the establishment of the Trinidad and Tobago Cannabis Licensing Authority and connected matters, be forthwith read a second time.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a second time.*

*Bill committed to a committee of the whole House.*

**Madam Speaker:** This Bill has 68 clauses.

*House in committee.*

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Madam Chairman, in the circumstances, may I suggest that we suspend for about 10 minutes, Ma'am, because I know my friends would be at a—well, not my friends but the other side.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So, let me ask, how many amendments are there?

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Madam Speaker, there are one, two, three, four, five, six short amendments which are—five of which are very, very, very minor. The word “or”, “;”, “and”, et cetera.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** But, Madam Speaker, I would like them circulated.

**Madam Chairman:** Sure. I mean, all amendments should be circulated.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Of course.

**Madam Chairman:** What I would ask, Member, do you have in paper form a copy that you can just show to the Whip so that we can decide—

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:**—whether this suspension is 10 minutes or more?

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Sure.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. And I just want to say for us going forward to the

Leader of the House, I would appreciate if all amendments are circulated. We are still in the throes of the pandemic and as Members would know, we do not suspend for tea. Okay? And this is causing me to breach something that I am trying to avoid. So—

**Hon. Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Madam Chairman:** One minute, please. So, Leader of the House, I am putting this squarely in your lap. Yes?

**Mrs. Robinson-Regis:** Yes, Ma'am. It has been rightly placed in my lap and I accept it. Madam Chairman, I apologize on behalf of this side.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**Mr. Lee:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. With all due respect to the Member for San Fernando West, when he moved the report, he had mentioned that he had amendments, so I was surprised that those—I thought he withdrew it because I am surprised that we are now getting these amendments at this late stage, Madam Chairman, and I mean, I respectfully submit that statement for the *Hansard*.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Madam Chairman, I apologize to the House for the difficulties. When my learned friend has a chance to have a view, I am sure it would make sense but I accept full responsibility, Madam Chairman, because it is my instruction that should have been given. I wound up much sooner than I expected I would have to because of the collapse opposite.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. So, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, if I suspend for 15 minutes, will that be sufficient?

**Mr. Lee:** Yes, Madam Chairman.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes? Okay. So, this committee meeting is suspended. It is now 4.32, so we will come back here at 4.45. Yes? Okay. This committee meeting



is now suspended.

**4.32 p.m.:** *Committee suspended.*

**4.45 p.m.:** *Committee resumed.*

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so this committee meeting is now resumed. And just for the edification of all of us, to avoid us finding ourselves in this position again, Standing Order 70(1)(b) says that amendments must be in writing and handed to the Clerk for circulation. And there, as Leader of the House will know, is a certain relationship that happens between the Leader of the House and the Clerk of the House for the circulation for the receipt, release and circulation of any amendments. So that I hope what was a tradition which worked for us will be maintained, so we would not find ourselves in this position again. All right? So, I think there has been some confusion. The Clerk of the House had not received any actual amendments or any instructions to circulate any amendments. All right? So can we proceed?

*Clauses 1 and 2.*

*Question proposed:* That clauses 1 and 2 stand part of the Bill.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas East.

**Mr. Rambally:** Madam Chair, Chaguanas West.

**Madam Chairman:** Sorry, Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Rambally:** I am just occupying here for convenience. Yes, we have no objection please.

**Madam Chairman:** All right, so—

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clauses 1 and 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 3.*

*Question proposed:* That clause 3 stand part of the Bill.

3(1) In the definition of “child”, delete the words “who is a patient and”.

**Madam Chairman:** Attorney General.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Thank you, Madam Chair. In relation to clause 3, Madam Chairman, we propose an amendment to clause 3(1) in terms of circulated, if I may explain. In the definition of “child” we have currently included the words “who is a patient and”, which we propose to delete. We prefer to stay in the definition section with the classic definition of “child”, as it appears in Act No. 12 of 2012; the definition of “child” being someone under 18 years of age.

And then secondly, Madam Chairman, to let the law speak in the relevant section where children are dealt with and that is in clause 29 onward, after licensing, where we treat in particular with the exposure to children. So this is just to harmonize the definition section into what is the classic definition of “child”, Madam Chairman.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Rambally:** Madam Chair, we have considered this proposed amendment and it would be keeping it in line with the definitions across the board. So we are okay with this proposed amendment at clause 3(1).

**Madam Chairman:** All right.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 3, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clauses 4 and 5.*

*Question proposed:* That clauses 4 and 5 stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Rambally:** Madam Chair, we have no objections to clauses 4 and 5.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clauses 4 and 5 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 6.*

*Question proposed:* That clause 6 stand part of the Bill.

6(2) A. Insert after the words “experience in”, the words “any of”

B. In paragraph (h), insert after the semicolon, the word “or”.

**Madam Chairman:** Attorney General.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Madam Chair, we propose a small amendment to clause 6(2) by the inclusion in the chapeau appearing in clause 6(2) of the words: “any of”. This means therefore that of the nine persons who are potentially appointed to the board by the President, that any of the specific nine skills set out in letters (a) to (i) inclusive can be there. Of course, that is complimented by the inclusion of a semicolon at subparagraph (h), education or the inclusion of the word “or” drug rehabilitation. So that the nine members may be in the skills of any of those nine categories set out, all in the alternative.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Rambally:** Madam Chair, the proposed amendments to clause 6(2) and 6(2)(h), we have no objections please.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 6, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clauses 7 to 10 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 11.*

*Question proposed:* That clause 11 stand part of the Bill.

11. A. In subclause (2), delete the word “members” and substitute the word “Members”.
- B. In subclause (5), delete the word “members” and substitute the word “Members”.

**Madam Chairman:** Attorney General. Sorry, Member for San Fernando West.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** And Acting Attorney General, so it is all right, Madam Chair, at least temporarily. Madam Chair, clause 11 we propose simply as an important amendment, which is changing the common “m” to capital “M”, as it is a defined term, Madam Chairman, and those are the reasons for the proposed amendment as circulated.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Rambally:** Madam Chair, I heard my friend said Acting Attorney General temporary. I am not sure what that means, but no objection to clause 11.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 11, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 12 to 33 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 34.*

*Question proposed:* That clause 34 stand part of the Bill.

34(5) In paragraph (b), insert after the semicolon, the word “and”.

**Madam Chairman:** Attorney General.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, we propose the inclusion of the word “and” in paragraph (b). So just after, we are proposing to insert after the semicolon the word “and”. This would give us the conjunctive, Madam Chairman, into 34(5). So at 34(5), which is at page 53 of the report, that there is a conjunctive approach where the Authority grants a transport licence, et cetera, you must have all three, the name and contact details of the licensee, the type and quantity cannabis to be transported and the location from which. So that we avoid one of the three applying and therefore diluting the impact.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Rambally:** Madam Chair, we have considered the proposed amendment. We have no objection to this one.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 34, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clauses 35 to 64 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 65.*

*Question proposed:* That clause 65 stand part of the Bill.

Delete subclause (1) and substitute the following subclause:

“(1) Where the Authority has reasonable cause to believe that a person has committed a prescribed summary offence under this Act, the Authority may issue to that person a notice offering the person the opportunity to dispense with any liability to conviction in respect of that offence by

payment of the prescribed administrative fine.”

**Madam Chairman:** Attorney General.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, clause 65 is proposed to be amended as circulated. And if I could explain. When the committee considered this report, Madam Chair, we did not have the benefit of settled versions of administrative fines language. And if I could explain. Administrative fines have been refined as a result of the FATF, Financial Action Task Force Recommendations in Recommendation 35. Those have been internationally tested, Madam Chair. And in those settled versions we no longer need to express it as set out in 65(1) at page 67 of the Bill, where the DPP’s consent is being asked to be procured. Mainly because it is an option for a prescribed summary offence and, Madam Chair, that is to be found by way of examples recently passed by this House in the SEZ legislation, just to name one in particular, the most recent of the lot. And, therefore, Madam Chair, we are proposing this amendment as circulated to meet with local and international standards set in relation to the use of administrative fines, Recommendation 35 of the Financial Action Task Force.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Rambally:** Madam Chair, we have considered the Acting Attorney General’s proposal on this point. We have no objection to the proposed amendment at 65(1).

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 65, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 66 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 67.*

*Question proposed:* That clause 67 stand part of the Bill.

Delete the words “a civil” and substitute the words “an administrative”.

**Madam Chairman:** Attorney General.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Madam Chair, in light of the requirements for administrative fines and their adjustments, as we just saw in clause 65, clause 67 is proposed an amended by deleting the word “civil” and putting “administrative”, which is a direct cross-reference to the marginal note in clause 65, even though marginal notes are not part of the interpretation. This is in fact an administrative fine. And, therefore, we are asking for this to be harmonized with what the House has just approved in clause 65.

**Madam Chairman:** Member for Chaguanas West.

**Mr. Rambally:** No objection, Madam Chair.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 67, as amended, ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 68 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Madam Chair, of course, for the record, I take it that the renumbering and cross-references are consequentially made.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, they will be.

**Mr. Al-Rawi:** Much obliged. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** You are welcome.

*Question put and agreed to:* That the Bill, as amended, be reported to the House.

**Madam Chairman:** This committee meeting is now adjourned. The House will resume.

*House resumed.*

**Madam Speaker:** Member for San Fernando West.

**Hon. F. Al-Rawi:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I wish to report that the Cannabis Control Bill, 2020, was considered in the committee of the whole and approved with amendments. I now beg to move that the House agree with the committee's report.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill reported, with amendment, read the third time and passed.*

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**Madam Speaker:** Leader of the House.

**The Minister of Housing and Urban Development: (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday the 6<sup>th</sup> day of May, 2022, at 1.30 p.m. Madam Speaker, at that time we will debate a Bill to amend the Sexual Offences Act, Chap. 11:28, and for other related matters.

**Madam Speaker:** Thank you.

### **Eid-ul-Fitr Greetings**

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, as you all know we are in the blessed month of Ramadan, and before I put the question on the adjournment of the House, I will now call upon Members to bring greetings. Member the San Fernando West.

**The Acting Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs and Minister of**



**Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Faris-Al-Rawi):** Thank you, Madam Speaker. As-salamu alaykum. Bismillah ir Rahman ir Rahim. I offer peace on to all those of our beloved nation and I begin in the name of God the most compassionate, the most merciful.

Madam Speaker, the holy month of Ramadan is one that is celebrated by all of Trinidad and Tobago. As we approach Eidun-Saeed, which is the second or smaller of the Eids, the first being Eid-ul-Adha, which is the larger Eid celebrated in the rest of the Islamic world, we in Trinidad and Tobago begin our reflections upon the five pillars of Islam that we have celebrated in this holy month of fasting.

Madam Speaker, our country is all the much better for the unification of religions that we celebrate. But as we focus upon our Muslim brothers and sisters who have supplicated themselves onto Allah the most merciful, the most beneficent, the epitome of all things superlative, we certainly reflect that it is the almsgiving, the zakat. It is the faith, the iman. It is the reflection of stopping to feed our brothers and sisters when we broke fast, Madam Speaker. What better way for us to have celebrated a month than at the break of dawn to find ourselves praying to the Almighty and to then, during the journey of the day, purposefully take on thirst and hunger so that we may reflect upon those who are certainly less effort fortunate than ourselves.

Madam Speaker, the traditions of Islam are not far off from the traditions of Hinduism or Christianity which in fact are joined by Judaism and other religions, where there is commonality in fasting and commonality in prayer.

We had the night of power celebrated last night, Laylat-al-Qadr. And in

looking at the night of prayer, the tradition, which is observed, is where you can stay awake for the entire night in recitation of prayer, knowing that the prayers you offer are to be elevated and amplified with the power of the Almighty.

Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago has passed through significantly hard times. In these times, we have witnessed a pandemic. It is through faith, it is through charity, it is through giving, it is through sacrifice, it is through the generosity of spirit that Trinidad and Tobago passed through COVID, all of which are reflected in the five pillars of Islam, all of which are bound together in the celebration as we come to the end of the holy month of Ramadan.

Ramadan, when it was first introduced, represented fasting and prayer in the longest month. And, Madam Speaker, having spent a few long months in the Middle East myself, when the nighttime is but merely three hours long and the daybreak begins after three hours of nightfall and you are fasting for the entire time, I can tell you it is a journey, specifically when it is very hot.

So, Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago celebrates Eid-ul-Fitr. "Eid" means a celebration, "ul fitr", of breaking of fast, Madam Speaker, as we all know it. And in coming to the celebration of breaking of fast, in coming to the sharing of meals, of generous giving, in particular the zakat, in terms of giving alms and in terms of sharing what you have with others, we can find no better day to celebrate Eid-ul-Fitr than coming on Monday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, which incidentally gives me a birthday gift at the same time.

So, Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I say Ramadan Mubarak. This has been a Ramadan Kareem.

It has been a kind Ramadan, where we saw the easing of our sanctions, of our restrictions, where we could have iftar together again.

Madam Speaker, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, the hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley celebrates with our Muslim brothers and sisters in this holy month of Ramadan coming to an end. Ramadan Mubarak. Thank you.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Member for Barataria/San Juan.

**Mr. Saddam Hosein** (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Bismillah ir Rahman ir Rahim. I begin in the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful. Today I am humbled to stand in this august Chamber as the only elected Muslim Member of Parliament in the Twelfth Parliament to bring greetings on this most auspicious occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr on behalf of the Opposition of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

Allah commands us in *Holy Qu'ran* Chap 2, verse 183: [*Arabic spoken*] which is translated:

“O ye who believe fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may develop taqwa (God’s consciousness)”.

Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam. Our brothers and sisters in Islam abstain from food and drink between dawn to dusk in the holy month of Ramadan. Fasting humbles us, as it makes us aware of the suffering and the challenges the less fortunate face, who go hungry on a daily basis. Fasting teaches us that the most powerful or the rich are all equal in the sight of Allah. It reminds us how

grateful we must be for simple mercies such as food and water. During this holy month, we do not only abstain from food and drink but we also free our minds from negative thoughts and practise self-restraint. We dedicate our time to prayer, increased charity, reading of the *Holy Qu'ran*, zikr, which is the remembrance of Allah, and self-reflection. These actions bring us closer to our creator.

Ramadan is known as the time of unity, as it brings families and communities together. During the holy month, we sit with each other to break the fast at home or in the mosque. It is a time of happiness, as you take that first bite of food and that sip of water after a long day of fasting. But COVID-19 deprived us of this opportunity. This year, for the first time after two years, it brings me immense joy to my heart knowing that the doors of our masjids are reopened. We are able to join in congregational prayer daily. During Ramadan, Muslims are able to perform the taraweeh sunnah every night. We also search in the last 10-odd nights for Laylat-al-Qadr, the night of power, which is believed to be better than 1,000 months. And last night we were able to be in congregation in commemoration of that night.

Sunday evening marks the ends of 29 days of fasting. So after we break our fast, we lift our heads in search of the crescent moon. The sighting of the crescent fills the heart with emotions as it is a bittersweet moment. On the one hand, it marks the end of the beloved holy month of Ramadan and on the other, it ushers in the joyous celebration of Eid.

The last two years have thought us several lesson. The most important is the importance of life. Many of us listening right now would have lost loved ones in

recent times. The sadness is indescribable of not seeing that person at home to share a cup of sawine for Eid, joining them in iftar, or having a conversation with them at the mosque. I thank Allah for giving us the opportunity to witness another Ramadan as we are not promised another. Let us take it as a lesson we learn in Ramadan and carry it with us throughout the year.

I must acknowledge the efforts of the imams, executives of the Jamaat, and all others who would have made sacrifices during Ramadan for iftar and taraweeh. As we bid this Ramadan farewell, I pray sincerely that we live to see another. I ask the Almighty Allah to accept all our prayers and sacrifices made during this holy month and forgive us for any shortcomings.

May Allah accept our fast and prayer and I hope that your Eid be filled with love, laughter and light. As the Member of Parliament for Barataria/San Juan, I would like to wish Trinidad and Tobago, Eid Mubarak.

**Hon. Members:** [*Desk thumping*]

**Madam Speaker:** Hon. Members, I join Members who have contributed before in extending greetings to the Muslim and by extension to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago on the occasion of the celebration of Eid-ul-Fitr 2022.

Eid is an Arabic term, which is translated as festivity or celebration, and ul fitr, as to break the fast of. Eid-ul-Fitr therefore, marks the end of the month of Ramadan, the holy months of fasting. Muslims across the world refrain from food and drink from dawn to sunset daily during Ramadan. And this fasting is accompanied with increased prayer and acts of charity, with the aim of increasing their discipline and obedience to the teachings of Allah.

Hon. Members, the practices of fasting, sacrifice, discipline, and charitable works are virtuous practices which need not be confined to a season, as those practices build stronger character, self-control, tolerance, and compassion. Hon. Members, on this celebratory occasion of Eid, as the members of the Muslim community celebrate the magnanimity of Allah in his provision of health, strength, prosperity and peace, may we all as members of the national community, in joining with the Muslim community, not focus simply on the national holiday and the gaiety of the celebration, but reflect on the spiritual meaning and lessons to be derived from the holy month of Ramadan and strive to inculcate the practices of restraint, self-control, sacrifice, prayerfulness, and charitable works in our daily practices.

On behalf of the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, on behalf of my family, and on my own behalf, to the Muslim community, and to all of Trinidad and Tobago, I wish you Eid Mubarak. And to the Member for San Fernando West, on that very special day, I wish you happy birthday.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*House adjourned accordingly.*

*Adjourned at 5.15p.m.*