

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, June 24, 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 Mr. Dinesh Rambally, MP, Member for Chaguanas West, who has requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Audited Unconsolidated Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission for the year ended December 31, 2019. [*The Minister in the Ministry of Finance (Hon. Brian Manning)*]
2. Audited Financial Statements of the Water and Sewerage Authority for the year ended September 30, 2017. [*Hon. B. Manning*]
Papers 1 and 2 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
3. Corporation Tax (Small and Medium Enterprises Loan Guarantee Programme) (Extension of Exemption) (No. 2) Order, 2022. [*Hon. B. Manning*]
4. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Utilities to the Third Report of the Joint Select Committee on State Enterprises on an inquiry into the operations of the Trinidad and Tobago Solid Waste Management Company Limited (SWMCOL) with specific focus on the proposed measures to assist in achieving the objectives of the National Environmental Policy and Trinidad and Tobago's progress towards achieving the United Nations

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- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). [*The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales)*]
5. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Works and Transport to the Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on State Enterprises on an inquiry into the operations of the National Infrastructure Development Company Limited (NIDCO) including its compulsory land acquisition in relation to major projects. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
 6. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Planning and Development to the Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an examination of unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic and the State's capacity to provide support to persons who became unemployed as a result of the pandemic. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
 7. Ministerial Response of the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs to the Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an examination of unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic and the State's capacity to provide support to persons who became unemployed as a result of the pandemic. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
 8. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to the Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an examination of unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic and the State's capacity to provide support to persons who became unemployed as a result of the pandemic. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

9. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Labour to the Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an examination of unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic and the State's capacity to provide support to persons who became unemployed as a result of the pandemic. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
10. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Trade and Industry to the Second Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an examination of unemployment during the COVID-19 pandemic and the State's capacity to provide support to persons who became unemployed as a result of the pandemic. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

URGENT QUESTION

Paria Commission of Enquiry (Resignation of Chairman)

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries: In light of the sudden resignation of Sir Dennis Morrison QC as Chairman of the Paria Commission of Enquiry, will the Minister specifically state how long would the commencement of the Commission of Enquiry be delayed as well as the new starting timeline as a result of this occurrence?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you, very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, this is an appropriate time to address certain issues that I have seen in the public domain, including issues that were raised by a certain editorial today. So it is appropriate at the start for me to say that my involvement in this matter stems as being the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, as many should know. I have held a number of different portfolios over the past two terms.

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One that has remained consistent since March 2016 is being Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, in addition to Minister in the Office of the Attorney General, Minister of Communications, Minister of National Security and now Minister of Energy and Energy Industries. So it is in that light, and wearing that hat, that I address the issues and especially the issues related to commissions of enquiry. Because commissions of enquiry are gazetted under the Office of the Prime Minister.

With respect to the specific question that has been asked here, as I set out very carefully yesterday when informing the population about this change, there is expected to be no delay in the commission of enquiry. In fact, I took the precaution of speaking to Jerome Lynch QC just before coming to Parliament this afternoon and confirmed with him that he will be able to stick to the timeline of August procedural hearings commencing. I have also been in contact with the other commissioner. Mr. Lynch will be sworn in, in the shortest possible time frame. Those details are being worked out now. I have spoken to Mr. Wilson, the other commissioner, over the past few weeks. They are on schedule with keeping with the time frame that they the commissioners, along with counsels to the commission, Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj, have provided.

The Government is not involved in dictating or in any way attempting to influence the commission of enquiry and their hearings. The commission of enquiry was asked for; we made it very clear at the outset that commissions of enquiry take time. The Government is providing the resources. Unfortunately, it was last week that Mr. Justice Dennis Morrison indicated for personal reasons, he did not expand on those reasons, he would have to resign. Immediately Mr. Jerome Lynch was appointed by the Cabinet, at the first Cabinet sitting yesterday.

Madam Speaker: Minister, your time is now spent. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you Madam Speaker. Thank you Minister for your response. A follow-up question, would the Minister be so kind to, based on transparency and accountability, release the resignation letter of Sir Dennis Morrison in public?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Minister.

Hon. S. Young: Dear Minister Young—

Dated 14th June.

Dear Minister Young,

It is with regret that for entirely personal reasons, and after the most anxious consideration, I have decided to withdraw from the Paria Commission of Enquiry. I know how disappointed you will be personally by this decision and I wish to apologize without reservation to you, the Government, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago for all the inconvenience and dislocation which I know my withdrawal at this stage must inevitably cause.

Having checked the Commissions of Enquiry Act, I note that it will be possible for a replacement commissioner to be appointed to join Mr. Wilson whose palpable expertise in the area of enquiry I fully expect to be pivotal.

My very best wishes for a speedy and satisfactory outcome of this to this critical exercise. Please accept and convey my thanks and best wishes to Her Excellency the President, as well as to the members of staff at your Ministry for the many courtesies extended to me during my brief visit to Port of Spain some weeks ago.

I also write to Mr. Ramesh Lawrence Maharaj SC, to express my thanks to him and other members of the legal team.

With best regards,

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Dennis Morrison.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Minister, in light of an earlier statement by the Prime Minister on behalf of the Government that the number of commissioners were reduced from three to two, but a firm would be hired to give support to the commission, are you in a position to identify the name of the firm that has been recruited to give support to the commission of enquiry?

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, should the commissioners continue to want the expertise of this specialist firm they will announce that at the appropriate time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, by letter dated June 23, 2022, and in accordance with Standing Order 29(14), the Member for Moruga/Tableland has requested that the House of Representatives questions Nos. 202, 203, and 205 listed on today's Order Paper be withdrawn.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following questions stood on the Order Paper in the name of Ms.

Michelle Benjamin (Moruga/Tableland):

Board of Management at Children's Authority (Sanctioning of)

202. Ms. Michelle Benjamin (Moruga/Tableland) asked the hon. Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Gender Child Affairs):

Will the Minister indicate whether the Board of Management at the Children's Authority will be sanctioned in light of the reports of physical

and sexual abuse at child-support centres?

**Children's Authority
(Reason for Being Under-Resourced)**

203. Ms. Michelle Benjamin (*Moruga/Tableland*) asked the hon. Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Gender Child Affairs):

Will the Minister explain why the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago is under-resourced?

**Children's Authority
(Details of Performance Review)**

205. Ms. Michelle Benjamin (*Moruga/Tableland*) asked the hon. Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Gender Child Affairs):

Will the Minister advise when last the Government undertook a performance review of the Children's Authority, the members of its Board of Management, and its staff?

Questions, by leave, withdrawn.

**SURGE IN CRIMINAL ACTIVITY
(GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO PREVENT)**

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [March 25, 2022]:

Be it resolved that this House reprimand this Government for its failure to effectively prevent the surge in criminal activity in our country. [Mr. R. Charles]

Question again proposed.

Madam Speaker: Six Members have already contributed to this debate. I now call upon the Member for Tabaquite to join the debate. Member, you have 21 minutes of speaking time remaining.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Anita Haynes (*Tabaquite*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is indeed my honour to continue our debate, which was started March 25th. And, Madam Speaker, during the last instance in March, when this Motion was brought before us, the Members of the Government who spoke sought to show the population why, at that time, they felt the Motion held no merit.

The Motion, as is brought by my colleague, the Member for Naparima, I think today as more time has elapsed, almost over two months, we are at the end of June, it shows that he may in fact be clairvoyant, a “seer-man” in local parlance, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes: The opening of the Member for Naparima’s Private Members Motion said then, well said now as well:

“*Whereas* the Government has been unable to effectively prevent a surge in criminal activity resulting in the rapid increases in murders, robberies and home invasion.”

Madam Speaker, after our holiday weekend that recently passed, the headlines were showing the merit in this Motion. I think they called it murderous weekend, bloody weekend, et cetera.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes: Madam Speaker, the Motion speaks to the inability of the Government to implement and operationalize set targets with reduction strategies. This has been a clarion call of the Opposition to use data to drive your policymaking. This is not us trying to pinpoint the failures of the Government or as Members of the Government like to tell us that we are hoping that they do not

succeed. I think it shows the very opposite. By directing you away from picong and propaganda and pointing you in the direction of data-driven policy, we are in fact hoping that your success would lead to a safer nation. But by continuing to ignore good advice, we are see the repercussions and so today, the Member for Naparima's Motion is more relevant now than it even was in March, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes: At the time, as it was recognized, I had started my contribution and I had spent a significant amount of time responding to the Minister of National Security. And the Minister of National Security, in his contribution, I took pretty significant notes at that time. I would not consider myself a note taker, but I guess we all have different definitions of what in fact a note taker is, but I guess take significant notes at that time.

And, Madam Speaker, the Member for Laventille West, our Minister of National Security, gave us a pretty emotive story of a young Ms. Crichlow from his constituency who had achieved pretty significant academic award, a scholarship. And he used the opportunity, the Minister used the opportunity to showcase what a scholarship meant in the life of that young woman and what that one scholarship meant for a community and what it meant for the all-of-government approach in crime reduction. And at that time and today, when all the time that has elapsed, I still could not understand if the Minister is unaware of his Government's own policy on scholarships. Because, as far as we are aware, scholarships have been reduced by a significant number. We went from a high of 447 scholarships in 2014 to 100 scholarships now.

And so, therefore, if the Minister can recognize, for his own constituent a story that I still think is very good, probably the best part of his contribution on that

day, and could tell us as a Parliament, as the public, that he recognizes what that investment into education, how it effectively changes the lives of just not one person, not just the recipient of the scholarship, but all the persons within that smaller community; what it means for community pride, what it means to understand that no matter where you are from in this country, you have equitable access to a way out of whatever circumstance you are facing and what that means in the context of crime and criminal activity; then how does he then justify government policy with regard to scholarship at this time?

And so, Madam Speaker, it just shows the duplicity. It shows that you will come here and tell a story to comfort a very wary public. But when you are sitting in Cabinet, when you have the opportunity to make executive decisions, that with the ramifications of which will either benefit or not benefit the citizens of this county, you are opting to do whatever you want, not using the data-driven policies that the Member for Naparima constantly recommends that this Government uses.

And so, Madam Speaker, in the time since we last debated this, I had my contribution prepared looking at school violence, looking at our dropout rate, knowing that education is our singularly most important preventive tool in our fight against crime. And in the time since we last debated to now, we have seen, as a nation, the worst levels of school violence that I have ever witnessed as a citizen of this country. And I know the emergence of social media and the videotaping it exposes a lot of us to what we may not have seen before. But it is still a very jarring and emotional situation to see young people, to see the future of our nation, engaged in that kind of violent behaviour. And it, Madam Speaker, speaks to what we are doing as a nation to prevent violence in schools from moving to wider violence in society.

And so, while the headlines and the sensationalism around the school

violence continued, I, as shadow for education, and in the context of us debating recently on another Private Members' Day, the question of children's homes and rehabilitation, looked on at a Ministry of Education, part of the all-of-government approach on crime tell us that the young persons, it was a police investigation, what is going to happen, the police will take care of it; effectively criminalizing young people.

Now, Madam Speaker, while you can acknowledge and accept that the violent behaviour is in fact wrong and ought to be treated with in a manner that shows how wrong school violence is, we must also recall that everybody involved there is a child. By our own legal definition under 18, you are a child, and, therefore, you ought to have access to rehabilitation. You ought to have access to a space that will allow you to come out of your circumstance better than you went in. And, Madam Speaker, all of that has been absent from this all-of-government approach.

And so it took me, as I was doing my research, looking at research from the National Centre on Education, Disability and Justice, which is an institution that focuses on youth justice, research from the US Department of Justice. All of the research tells us that if you are not focused on literacy, if you are not focused on juveniles who enter and interface with the juvenile court system, if you are not focused in ensuring that your education system is robust and functional and that you are incentivizing learning, you are going to have a crime problem.

And so, therefore, Madam Speaker, when the Member for Naparima, in his Motion says that the Government has been focusing on punitive measures instead of preventative measures, he is correct. He is absolutely correct and we have seen it very clearly, especially as it relates to school violence. Because we have gone to punitive measures, expulsion, et cetera, instead of saying: What can we do with the

young people in our nation? How can we assist so that you are better for your mistakes?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes: When we talk about an academic-oriented education system, I recall when the former Minister of Education between 2010 and 2015, Dr. Gopeesingh in his iteration, looked to expand the curriculum, including things like drama and dance and PE and creating a space for those who may not be academically-oriented, but that you have a space within the school system, that you have an avenue for success. These things—introduction of the school-based assessment, so that if you are not an exam-taker, if you do not perform well under the pressures and rigors of an examination, your overall performance as a student can contribute to your grade, so that you have more successes and fewer dropouts.

These are things that when you change the system, you do not consider the human impact that it has. And so you are going through a system now where students, if they are unable to cope—and I think we have done our students a great disservice, in terms of not recognizing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their mental health, without recognizing the significance of the lockdowns on young people's children of school age. I mean we talk about it. We have spoken about what it means for the adult population, but I could not imagine what it would have been like to be 15, 14 and locked down, away, no socialization and then coming back into it.

And so when I spoke in the budget, and I have spoken in the education Motion, about the need to address mental health in schools and focusing on our young people, when that advice is ignored and you are seeing the violence, you are creating a violent society. And so, Madam Speaker, that is why I say the Member for Naparima, in his wisdom, created a Motion that is showing us in the short

possible time frame, that you can go from—when you make excuses there are very direct consequences and we are seeing it played out in our headlines today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes: Juvenile incarceration, Madam Speaker, reduces the probability of secondary school completion. It increases the probability of incarceration later on in life. And so that is why I say when we look on at what is happening, in our desire to placate a population who, again, rightfully is saying the school violence, something must be done, and you want a short-term solution, criminalizing children creates a problem and we have to recognize that as we think about the future.

Students who drop out of high school, and this is again the data sourced from the US Department of Justice, because unfortunately our society has not been data-oriented. And so when we urge the Government as the Executive to make a focus on data collection so that you make data-driven policies, it is because we can then utilize that to understand the space that we are in. But using the statistics and extrapolating it to our own circumstance, students who drop out of high school are five times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested in their lifetime time.

Now take that information and consider that we have been told that there have been over 47,000 students who were not able to access online learning between 2020, during the pandemic; so from 2020 till 2022. When we consider that in the Joint Select Committee on Public Administration and Social Services, when they looked at what was happening during the pandemic, we are unable to assess how many students may have logged on once or twice and then never logged on and, therefore, their completion rates are questionable. We are unable to know the absolute magnitude that we faced in a post-pandemic reality in Trinidad

and Tobago. And, therefore, knowing that students who have dropped out of school are five times more likely than high school graduates to be arrested in their lifetime, we cannot say what tsunami may be about to hit us in about five years. And that, Madam Speaker, goes directly to the heart of the Motion; setting smart targets, focusing on prevention. Do you have specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound goals? And that is what is absent from the Government's rhetoric on crime.

When I looked at my contribution earlier and the contributions of others, you know, the focus then, as the focus may be today, has been on legislation. That is the end of the spectrum. There is very little to be done with respect to prevention. There is very little to be said with respect to what is driving your policy making. Who is telling you that this constant focus at the end, that we are looking at—and we absolutely agree resource the police service properly. But we are also saying if you are touting an all-of-government approach tell us what is driving your policy making.

And so, Madam Speaker, I think about the fact that not just as students who drop out of high school more likely to be incarcerated, but then when you look at the disparity between those who are college-educated, university-educated, versus those who just have a high school education, it shows another jump; and that brings me again to Government's intervention when it comes to tertiary education.

The reduction in GATE, accessibility to GATE, and I raise this issue again on a question of equity. When you create additional barriers to entry, the most vulnerable are left out. And so it is not simply to say: Well there is a means test. Go online, do the means test, et cetera. Persons without access to Internet, persons without access to computers, persons without access to a car to do the runaround to photocopy. Those create barriers to access. So you have to live in the real world.

You have to live in the real world to understand real world circumstances and then you will understand what we are saying. Because we on this side, Madam Speaker, we live in the real world. We live in the real Trinidad and Tobago where you have students to this day grappling with things that are out of the remit of a child to deal with, and they are doing to school and they are expected to function and perform as children ought to do, when they have adult responsibilities at home, because they may have been working during the pandemic and that is why we are saying, we have said to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, we have said to the Ministry of Education: If you are serious about your all-of-government approach, get very serious about your data collection. And when you do that, you will finally find the space. You will finally get to a space where the country can trust that you are doing something about the crime situation.

And so, Madam Speaker, as we continue with this very important debate today, and as my colleagues would speak and Member on the other side will speak, I hope that we take this with the seriousness that it deserves. I hope that the Government does not use this as an opportunity for excuse-making. We are fed up of that. I hope that there is somebody on that side that would be able to deliver on exactly what is driving Government policy and what definitive steps we are taking in the short-term, medium-term and long-term, and so that the population, despite the headlines, despite the feeling of constant insecurity, that we may get some measure that things will get better.

And so, Madam Speaker, I believe I have two more minutes.

1.55 p.m.

Madam Speaker: You have two more minutes.

Ms. A. Haynes: Thank you. It is my hope that we can engage in a discourse that

would allow for the Member for Naparima to get his wish that we will have very targeted approaches. And I know it is difficult because we are faced with a current Minister of National Security that does not inspire confidence at all—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. A. Haynes:—at all. And so, in the last time that he would have spoken, he was talking about the current incentives for the TTPS. And in the time between then and now, he is telling the TTPS that the Minister of Finance is not Jesus and he cannot split loaves and fishes and what not. And so, this is what we are facing as a nation. We are facing duplicity in messaging. We are facing vacant decision-making and we are facing policies that do not have the backing of data. And therefore, that is why we are in the situation that we are in. We in the Opposition hope for better but we are not confident that they can deliver better at this time. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Ann's East.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Education (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly): Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is indeed an honour to join this debate, very important topic being raised and in the context of what has been posited by the Opposition, that the Government has consistently ignored the fundamental causes of crime while focusing on punitive rather than preventative measures. And that is one of the posits that we are dealing with today.

Madam Speaker, it is a fact, and it has been a fact for many years that one cannot divorce societal crime from our schools. It has been a fact for many years that gangs recruit in our schools, they recruit both at the primary school

level and the secondary school level. That is the reality that we face now—that we have faced for many years. That is a societal problem. That is a Trinidad and Tobago problem. And the presence of the influence of the gangs and so, on our schools, will result and has resulted in school indiscipline, fights, with and without weapons, bullying, disrespect to teachers, gambling, robbery. And it goes on because what is represented in our society is represented in our schools. And that is a problem that we have been grappling with for almost 40 years.

It was the 1980s that the first conference was held, that consultation between the then Minister of Education and stakeholders to speak about the problem of school violence, the 1980's. So let us not pretend that this is something that has now reared its head. We are dealing with this for years across many governments. And so, the issue is that we must focus and continue our focus as we do on crime, and I want to say that the Minister of National Security has been and is actively dealing with the crime situation in Trinidad and Tobago, and we want to thank him for his effort and his work there.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: And in the same way the Ministry of Education over the years, all Ministers, have been dealing and grappling with this issue of school violence.

Madam Speaker, it is with no pleasure that we recall in 2011 and 2013 two incidents of murder in our schools, murder in our schools. And this is something that we have to face as reality in Trinidad and Tobago of what takes place. And even though that would have happened in 2011 and 2013, we do not want to revert to that type of situation. And we do not want to pretend that all of our efforts now will bear no fruit, because we know that regardless of the efforts

that are made, and that I suspect were made in that point in time, and I suspect that the Minister of Education at that time, the hon. Member for Siparia, who was the Prime Minister at that time, is on record asking time and time again, for what are the plans of the Minister to deal with school violence at the time because it is a problem that has faced us all.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: It is a problem that will face our society. So thankfully, we are not back there where we are facing that specter and we saw one of the young men involved, just recently, he was released from prison after nine years. We do not want that for our children. And therefore, the issue of dealing with crime in our schools and let me be clear, there is a National School Code of Conduct and the Education Act provides for in circumstances where the crime is heinous, expulsion of students. And the Ministry will take action where required to deal with heinous crime.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: And that has nothing to do with criminalizing students. It has to do with maintaining the law and order within our classrooms, within our educational institutions, and providing an atmosphere of safety for the others, for the teachers, the students, the parents, who have to cohabit that educational institution.

And while we have this National Code of Conduct that is in force, that was revised in 2018 to deal with current issues, that is the process that is taking place now to be able to deal with our present circumstances. And that is why we would have reached out to the Ministry of National Security, Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, Ministry of Social Development and Family

Services, the Office of the Prime Minister, the Children's Authority, and with all of those heads, the Ministry of Sport and Community Development, their peer mediation programme. With all of those heads around the table, the community police, speaking about how we can revise our school discipline matrix to take into consideration our current circumstances. And that is what is required. So when the question is asked, who is making policy? These are the persons, these are the arms of the State's institutions coming together to make policy.

And just today, Madam Speaker, we met with our education stakeholders. Because when we came together, gave them the School Code of Conduct, presented our circumstances, presented our statistics that are collected on a weekly basis with respect to attendance, with respect to suspensions. And I would have presented some of those statistics in a post-Cabinet meeting. So it is no secret that the Ministry of Education collects data. And we collect that data to be able to inform our decisions and our policies. And we consult with our stakeholders, both the arms of the Government that I just mentioned, as well as our education stakeholders, principals associations, denominational boards, our teacher union. We consult with all of these, our private schools, our special school associations. We consult with all of these as we have done as recently as today on the revisions to the policies that exist at the Ministry of Education to deal with current challenges. No one dealt with COVID-19 before. Our children are now back at school, thank God for a government that stood strong to bring our children back out to school—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:—challenges notwithstanding. And so they are out

at school. We are facing the challenges that are there, and we are using the data that we collect on a weekly basis, and we are using the collaboration with our stakeholders to be able to come with up with policy that deals with our current circumstances.

So as we would have discussed with our stakeholders today, the different measures that are in place to deal with violence and how we can augment those measures in our current circumstances, with a focus on restorative justice not just simply punitive measures. And our stakeholders would have been very vocal in giving their opinions, their recommendations. They would have had two weeks to review that document. They would have submitted written documents on their recommendations, and today we took their verbal recommendations as well.

And the point is, that we are looking at the ways to encourage positive behaviour. Just about a month ago, our teachers at schools where we have the most incidents of school indiscipline would have undergone training in positive behaviour management. And that is just one of the steps that is outlined in that document that our stakeholders would have reviewed and contributed to, that deals with encouraging positive behaviour. So it is not just simply the punitive, but the punitive is important because our children need to understand that there are standards they must come up to. So there are standards for positive behaviour in that document. There are standards for negative behaviour. There are consequences for negative behaviour and there are strategies by which we can encourage positive behaviour in our students.

It is important for us to also understand the investment in education and what it does. The hon. Member for Tabaquite spoke to the reduction in

scholarships, but she failed to mention, as she should have, that there has been now the introduction of 500 bursaries. So instead of helping 400 people, we are now helping 600 people.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: And as of 2021, we would have helped 538 people above and beyond the 400 of years previous. And let me also explain the difference between what a scholarship and a bursary is, because that is important. That is important.

The children we see, unfortunately there is a link between the socioeconomic circumstances and the school indiscipline. There is that link. And so when we give scholarships, scholarships are on the basis of academic performance. And I can tell you, Madam Speaker, there is a very lively lessons culture in this country to the extent, to the extent that in the other place I was asked a question about, you know, putting legislation in place to reduce that. And when students can afford to take many different—take part in many difference of lessons, they tend to perform at the highest levels. But those are the students who can afford to. The bursaries and the difference in the bursaries is that you have to also supply and undergo means testing. It means that the funds that are available are now targeted to those who need it most. Those children who are high achievers as well, but they need the help from the Government. And so we have increased that bursary provision to 500. So it is disingenuous to say that the scholarships have been reduced and the opportunity has been reduced. The opportunity has in fact been increased and targeted to those who need it most. And that is what you do—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:—when you care about where the help is required. Because we need to help those who need it most. We need to do that. And so, we are thankful that we are able to apply our resources, limited resources, in that way.

I want to speak about the mental health aspect because we must speak about that. The Member mentioned that. How are we preparing our students for the challenges of post-COVID-19 return to school? Not even post because we are still in the pandemic and we are still dealing with that.

But we have a Student Support Services Division staffed by over 700 members. That is bigger than some Ministries. And I want to bring that into context. And every school has a school social worker and a guidance counsellor assigned, with very few exceptions. And these persons are the ones that will deal specifically with mental health issues. Do we need more? Yes, we do have some vacancies that we are filling. But I want to submit that the interministerial collaboration can assist in getting resources into our schools without the need of hiring more, and more, and more persons. Because as the family takes a hit, the results are seen in the schools and we simply cannot keep increasing that human resource base. We also have to look at the root cause. And what is why we are interacting with the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service. That is why we are interacting with Social Development and Family Services because we need their resources to formally be a part of what our schools are getting.

And that is why that matrix that has now been commented on by our stakeholders, both our ministerial stakeholders and our education stakeholders, that is why it is going to Cabinet to make these decisions formal. That is why

the discussion with the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service with respect to signing an MOU, so that students who need it the most, who are exhibiting the characteristics that say they need a more structured environment for their education, they can be accommodated in a formal arrangement by transitioning to programmes such as MiLAT which has an excellent track record, and which can help our students in our system. That is why we are formalizing these arrangements by getting Cabinet decisions so that regardless of the personalities after I have left, after the members of the staff of the Ministry of Education, after the members of staff of youth development have changed, the principle and the system will still remain so that our students can be adequately catered for.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: That is why we are doing this. That is why we are collecting the data. And as we speak to our education stakeholders they are asking us for the—you know, we need more data entry staff at our schools because the data you are asking us for, you know it, it is taxing. And so, we are providing, we are ensuring to fill the vacancies for the BOA I, we are ensuring that we ask the Ministry of Labour to provide more OJTs at our schools to assist with data entry. Because that is what we are relying on to be able to look at the trends, understand what is happening and when we speak to our stakeholders, we speak to them with the benefit of the information that can allow us to make decisions together.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: So there is no paucity of data. That is being collected. That is being used. Our stakeholders are being engaged. And as we

speak to the Student Support Services and what they do in the schools and the hard work that they give, the home visits that they make, the endless calls to parents trying to get them in the schools to deal with the situation. As we speak to that, as we look at the fact that there are students who are engaged in this Student Support Division and still, still because they do not have that support at home and in the community, they are regressing and they are, you know, giving the kind of trouble that we do not need them to give. That does not undercut the work of the department. That does not say that they have not ensured that when the students came back to school they instituted a programme that helped them to transition. That they had a program even with the parents to help them transition back to the classroom. It has not been easy. It has not been easy for the staff of the Ministry in having to change all the policies and procedures to deal with students who are not physically there, and teachers who are not physically there. It has not been easy for the students. It has not been easy for the parents.

In visiting schools, Madam Speaker, I visited over 100 schools so far, and we are doing this as part of our work programme at the Ministry to ensure that we understand what is going on on the ground. We live in the real world.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: Yes, we do because we are visiting those schools. We are speaking to students. We are speaking to principals to understand their challenges. We have met with the principals of the schools that need the most support, and we have listened to what they have said to us. And we are formulating now with them a programme that deals specifically with how those schools operate, because they must operate differently. They have students with

different needs. They have students who are coming from homes that really require more support in the school environment. We have students who need to be involved in skills training lower down in the forms, not just Form 3. They need it from Form 1, to engage them and keep their attention in the school. We have students who definitely need role models and that is what the community police—and I want to thank the TTPS. Again, the Ministry of National Security intervening, intervening in preventing crime. I want to thank them. Because the introduction of those community police in our schools has made a tangible difference in the behaviour of the students.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: These officers have provided support, advice, guidance, and critically role models for our students. We have more males; 70 per cent of those that are indisciplined in our schools, 70 per cent are male. So when we have those officers, and some of them, they are coming from single parent households, they need that role model. And those officers have provided that.

And I can tell you that we are going to be discussing with the Ministry of National Security the involvement of other arms of the defence force in our schools to provide that. Again, there is an informal arrangement in some schools but we want to formalize these things as a part of a system going forward. So that our children are supported. That ring fence of security is around our children. That is what we are doing. That is what the data tells us requires to be done. That is what our stakeholders are telling us requires to be done, and we are doing it actively. We are not speaking about it. The police are there in the schools. They are patrolling outside the schools in the evening. The number of

serious fights are down because of their influence.

And so we are doing what is required, we are learning from the successes of that and we are moving forward to provide even more support for our children. That is what we are doing.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: That is how we are preventing crime in our schools coming up from that incubator. We do not want that for our children.

And so, with the collaboration with the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, our education stakeholders, the Peer Mediation Department of the Ministry of Sport and Community Development, all of us working together to bring a formal system to the Cabinet, which will be there in the next two weeks. But even as that is being done measures have already been taken in our schools directly where it is needed, and the principals thank us for our support. Thank the community police for their support because it has been helping with our students.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: So as we move forward, Madam Speaker, that is how we are progressing using the data, ensuring that we collaborate with our stakeholders and that is how we are moving to deal with that. We have invested in education traditionally in this country. No one can say of the People's National Movement that they have not been a party that took education seriously. This is the party that has done it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: And we continue to do it. And we continue to use

the data that is collected, transform our systems.

Madam Speaker, let me tell you that all of this is tied in again with our digital transformation agenda, because to be able to get the data we have to transform our systems, our policies to be able to use that data in policy-making. So all of it is tied in very closely together, it is a synergistic relationship between school indiscipline and ensuring that we have digital records for our children.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: So when we can track what is happening at a school and we can see the attendance of the students, we can see their marks and their end of term grades at the click of a button, we can generate reports. It can show us the trends and it can show us where we have the patterns of indiscipline, and it can better inform how we deal with it, how we allocate resources.

And as we look at those schools that need the most resources and we look at the assignment of learning support assistance to make sure there is enough supervision at the school level, even when there is teacher absenteeism, as happens from time to time, as we look at the introduction of the defence force personnel into our schools, the signing of the MOU with MiLAT. As we look now at introducing other things, training of teachers to ensure that they are well equipped to deal with the students and the student needs. As we look at the support for the parents, introducing training for them as well. That is one of the things that came out today in our meeting with stakeholders.

Not only do the teachers need training, the principals need training on a constant basis, not just ad hoc, a constant programme. We also need to look at

training the parents. And we need to look at the ways we get the parents who need the training to come. Because what we can tell you is that most times the parents who really need it are the ones you cannot find. You call them on the phone over and over, their number has changed. You call them to come in to sign suspension papers even, they are not there. You call them for parental discussions, you do not get them.

So these are the things, that is why we need the help of social development and family services and the community police. Because where the school social workers end—you know, their remit ends, the police can help us. And they have helped us go to homes, find parents, get them back into school, get the children into school, get the parents involved in programmes. That is what is being done. That is the work that is required, and it is a work that is ongoing. It is something that for the past 40 years, I emphasize again, we have been grappling with, and we continue to do the work that is required in this time to make sure that the school indiscipline is reduced.

So as we look at these programmes to be implemented in the schools, as we discuss with principals how we get the students in Forms 1, 2, and 3 who have underperformed at the SEA, and you get that, how do we deal with them in the secondary system? Because as you look again at the statistics and the data that is collected at the Ministry, you realize that those who underperform at the SEA are some of the main offenders in terms of school indiscipline. And they are the ones that the gang members will recruit. So therefore, how do we keep them in school? How do we deal with them? And that is why we are focusing on the introduction of the craft at the lower levels, Form 1, Form 2, we need to get them involved there. We need to ensure that they do the—even the primary

school leaving certificate as we prepare a different curriculum at that level so that they have some certification available to them. And these are the things so that when our students have a level of achievement, they will feel better about themselves, and they will be able to perform in a different way. To have a better self-esteem.

We spoke to one of the principals recently in our school visits. Just this week, we spoke to one of the principals who has a number of students who have underperformed at the SEA, and she spoke to the way even the teachers relate with the students, and how they interact in an informal way to be able to bring these students into a feeling that someone cares about them. And that is the kind of training when we speak about conflict de-escalation, positive behaviour encouragement, that is the kind of training that our teachers will require on an ongoing basis. And that is what we are discussing with our principals now. To implement and make sure that it is a structured programme not ad hoc. Structured programme, so that our schools are supported, our principals, our teachers are trained, our parents are involved. That is what we have to do and it is a work that requires data which we collect. A work that requires collaboration which we do. And that is how we form policy. That is how we do it to be able to help our schools and to reduce the violence.

So I want thank the Ministry of National Security. I want to reject this Motion out of hand.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: And I want to reject the notion that the Ministry of Education is not collecting the data that is required. Yes we are, and yes we are using it, and yes we are using our stakeholders and their recommendations,

practitioners on the ground, and yes we are visiting the schools to see for ourselves what is happening. And yes, we are making that policy to assist our students in developing into the type of citizen we need. We educate not just for getting certificates. We educate to create the citizen of Trinidad and Tobago that will keep this country going on an upward trajectory.

2.25 p.m.

Not just for academic success. And if we all work together with that in mind, it is a citizen we are creating, it is a country we are crafting, and education must be the incubator to create those citizens so that is why the interministerial collaboration is important, that is why the assistance of corporate Trinidad and Tobago—just today, again, we had at the Ministry, Bocas Lit Fest and Scotiabank, corporate citizens coming together to work on a programme to advance literacy. And that is why we support the involvement of the corporate sector, that is why we were so happy for the involvement of the persons in the Adopt-a-School Programme because our corporate sector is also important. It takes a village to raise a child and every one of us is part of that village, even the Opposition.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly: All of us are part of that village. And so, the Ministry of Education will continue to encourage collaboration, continue to encourage stakeholder and corporate involvement, continue to work with all of our ministerial colleagues, all arms of the Government, our education stakeholders, to bring to fruition the things that are required, to bring those initiatives that we are working on and that we are continuing in our schools at this time that have borne fruit. We thank the police for their involvement, we thank the Minister of National Security for answering the call—

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Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. N. Gadsby-Dolly:—and being involved in our schools. And, again, Madam Speaker, we reject this Motion out of hand knowing that we are doing the work we were called to do in Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Augustine.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Khadijah Ameen (*St. Augustine*): Thank you for recognizing me, Madam Speaker. After listening to the Minister of Education, one would think that the education sector is better off. It is not.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: What we hear from this Government concerning crime is talk, talk, talk and we see no action, no results.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: When Ministers in their various portfolios speak about their plans and their policies and their discussions, we do not hear your targets.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: We do not hear timelines by which you expect to achieve these objectives.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: We do not see you being accountable to the country. Madam Speaker, through you, I wish to inform the Minister that the number of students enrolling in tertiary education has declined as a direct result of the PNM incompetence today. That is a fact.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: The Minister, in responding to the Member for Tabaquite concerning this Government's callous reduction of scholarships, spoke about an increased number of bursaries. Well, Madam Speaker, the nation should know that with bursaries there is much less accountability. And this Government has a scandalous record when it comes to the award of scholarships.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: This Government has been known to give scholarships to children of PNM friends and family and financiers.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. K. Ameen: This is a Ministry—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), please.

Hon. Members: That is the truth.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hinds: The biggest—[*Inaudible*]

Mr. Indarsingh: What kind of behaviour is that?

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Hinds: The biggest—[*Inaudible*]

Madam Speakers: Members—

Mr. Indarsingh: What kind of behaviour is that from Laventille West?

Madam Speaker: Members—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, on Standing Order 48(6), I uphold the objection. Member for St. Augustine, I am sure you could find another way. It is imputing improper motives. Find another way.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you. Madam Speaker, my speaking time does not allow me to read the names of scholarship awardees and indicate their relation to PNM Ministers at this time.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: But I will take—I will move on. And this objection is coming from a government who could not even get the first place in SEA right. An absolute failure. I want to say to the Government who objects to us saying that PNM friends and family get scholarships, that this country cannot trust you.

Madam Speaker: Member, I ruled on that. Okay.

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, this Government cannot trust—this country cannot trust this Government to distribute bursaries to who they think need it most. That phrase—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, 55(1)(b), the issue of bursaries was traversed by the Member for Tabaquite.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member for St. Augustine, please continue.

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, the phrase “to those who need it most” seems to be an introduction to give the Government a new way, a new form of PNM patrimony, instead of a fair and merit-based award system. But, Madam Speaker, this is a debate on the failure of the Government to prevent the increase in crime. We will bring another Motion to deal with their failure in education because they have also failed in education.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: I want to suffice it to say that nothing proffered by the former speaker has spoken to education as a tool in reducing criminality or has made us as

a nation feel that students themselves are now safer from criminals. Police in schools is not an achievement, it is a sign of your failure.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: The Minister who spoke before me has indicated that they are discussing with principals, you know, different ways of reaching out to troubled students and so on. I remember, Madam Speaker, sitting on a joint select committee examining the Minister of Education before I became a Member of the House of Representatives as a Senator. And one major recommendation to fill the gap, to fill the void with guidance counsellors in schools has not been adhered to by this Government. So, when they continue to understaff and under-resource guidance counsellors for schools, and then they talk about mediation and restorative justice, it is clearly just talk.

Madam Speaker, our women and our youth are already facing a serious social crisis under this Government. The World Bank has said that:

“Through multiple channels, crime and violence threaten the welfare of Caribbean citizens, particularly in Trinidad and Tobago.

Crime in Trinidad and Tobago...”—they stated—“is multi-faceted and like in most countries, it imposes economic and social costs.”

This Rowley Government has made it—seems to have made it into their mission to just make citizens lives harder. The victims of violent crime in this country are predominantly youth and also women. Of course, criminal activity has an impact on our business environment and so on, but I will leave that for some of my other colleagues.

Mr. Hinds: Madam Speaker, I rise painfully on Standing Order 44(10).

Hon. Member: Sit down.

Hon. Member: Rescue us.

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Madam Speaker: Okay. So, thank you very much Member for Laventille West. Please continue, Member.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you.

Hon. Member: She is reading—[*Inaudible*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. K. Ameen:—the objection from the former Minister of Youth Development and National Service is so ironic in this case because he was also part of the failure of this Government to implement youth and education programmes.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: This Government has failed to put opportunities to deal with at-risk youths through sports, education, skills training, jobs that play a role in reducing crime and gang recruitment, and when you talk—when you take it both from in terms of the victims as well as the perpetrators.

Madam Speaker, when the People's Partnership was in government, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, then Prime Minister, implemented numerous programmes that caused a significant reduction in murders—

Hon. Member: What?

Hon. Member: “Oh goooooood”.

Ms. K. Ameen:—and these statistics are there to show from the TTPS.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: There is a lot of noise in the Chamber which is causing the Member for St. Augustine to have to raise her volumes above. Okay? So, let us comply with Standing Order 53. Keep your volumes down. We are in a debate so we are supposed to be listening, no need for consistent talk. If there is need for a really burning discussion with one of your colleagues, one is invited to carry it

outside and come back in when the discussion is finished. Member for St. Augustine continue.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you. Madam Speaker, it is said that the behaviour of Parliamentarians has an effect on children. And the behavior today of the Members opposite is a clear indication of why people think that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, as I indicated, it is not impossible for a Government to prevent an upsurge in violence, to deal with domestic violence. We have had headline after headline—it is becoming a norm sickeningly. An elderly woman became the first homicide victim in this year 2022. Women being raped, abducted, murdered. A 40-year-old mother murdered on the eve of her daughter's birthday. A woman killed fighting off home invasions. Week after week, violence against women has become front and center with devastating and gruesome cases almost every day, not just this year. It is surge after surge and the Government continues to fail. It was and has continuously been some really violent years for the woman in Trinidad and Tobago under this PNM Government.

In 2020, Madam Speaker, 46 women were killed, 21 of those were in domestic violence situations and that represented a total of about 13 per cent of the homicides for that year 2020. The TTPS has reported that of the 745 people who were reported missing in 2020, 416 of them were women and girls. When we reflect—when the Coalition Against Domestic Violence indicated that in the year when the Domestic Violence Act was strengthened and the police established the Gender-Based Violence Unit, 21 women were killed as a result of domestic violence, and others sexually assaulted and murdered. So, the statistics tell a different story from what the Government is saying.

In the entire Latin America and the Caribbean, this country, Trinidad and Tobago, has one of the highest homicide rates in 2021, a failure of this PNM Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, the Government has—you know, I have spoken about this before. What we find in terms of the Government's approach to women is very clear from the top down. The—I remember the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister, responsible for gender affairs, lamented a lack of Opposition support but spoke about the Government's plans to upscale activities in order to deliver on the goal of gender equality and empower our woman. They were largely reactionary measures and these were being offered when we were faced—we are facing and continue to face new murders, week after week, of women. But this is the same Government who completely disbanded the Ministry of Gender and Child Affairs, and reduced it to a department in the Office of the Prime Minister.

Madam Speaker, the Government has completely abdicated their responsibility when it comes to protecting our women from the criminal element in this country. The Government has clearly failed in the prevention of domestic violence, of improving the battered women's homes, of counselling services. Not only has this Government failed in the war against crime, but they continue every day to bring more talk, talk, talk and no action. Advice has been given over and over again, suggestions with regard to this epidemic of violence against women and girls. And the suggestion seems to be from the Government that it has to be solved by women themselves. You know, just change your clothes, do not walk alone, "doh" go out in the dark, "wave down de bus driver if ah man walking too quickly behind you". And the victim blaming starts from the Prime Minister come right down; a poor, poor example. And if they—we have seen continuous vigils

and protests in this country, and what it tells us is that the women in this country do not want to hear these naive suggestions anymore. There must be a fundamental change in this Government's approach to women and violence to ensure the safety when it comes to our women in this country.

As a local government—a former local government practitioner myself, I want to take this opportunity to share with this Parliament some measures in local government that may not be obvious, but should be engaged by this Government. Now, before I go into that, I also want to reiterate the Opposition's role in keeping the Government accountable.

Madam Speaker, I believe it was in April of this year, the public was shocked when the Minister of National Security in this Parliament, in response to questions from the Opposition, indicated that out of the 1,796 CCTV cameras installed throughout this country 1,063 were fully functional, with 733 considered to be either not fully functional or non functional. This information would not have been available to the public had it not been for an Opposition who is keeping the Government to account.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: And they are continuing to be “kicksing” and laughing while women are being raped and murdered and their bodies are being dumped. When we asked questions concerning the safety, concerning street lighting, considering the conditions of roads, again, the Minister of National Security did not seem to think that those were important and that dovetails back into the role of local government.

Madam Speaker, the present Minister of Rural Development and Local Government was—previously served as the Attorney General and I know in terms of the public conversation and so on, people might, you know, give him fatigue

that it is a demotion. I want to take this opportunity to advise the hon. Minister that the role of local government is as serious to the citizens as the role of Attorney General.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: I want to advise the Minister to take a careful look at the role local government can play in the prevention of crime, in engendering public safety in communities. It may not always be obvious, it may not always be the headline items but one has to be in tune with the reality of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. You have to get real with citizens. You have to put yourselves in the shoes of the pedestrian, the woman who works in a minimal paying job and has to walk or travel home in a maxi-taxi, that no choice but to rely on PH taxi drivers.

Local government has a role to increase—well, to reduce the number of vacant lots. Madam Speaker, the bushes that grow on the side of the road hide so many criminals who are waiting to pounce, to commit robbery and rape. And what happened when this Government came in, in local government, is that they almost immediately fired 100 litter wardens from regional corporations and they do not have the vision to know that that has an impact on crime in the community. When the municipal police get promises after promises to increase their numbers—to increase the number of officers and to improve their accommodation, to give them better equipment, and when this Government has failed to meet those promises, it does have an impact on crime. So, the role of local government goes beyond policing and engendering safety in communities.

Of course, local government has a role to play in road maintenance and you will ask: What does road maintenance have to do with crime? Well, I can tell you that the road network facilitates or should facilitate a safe, state-run public transportation system that this Government has failed to put in place. It is a factor,

Madam Speaker, that would allow women to keep safe from criminal predators. Because we have such widespread neglect of the maintenance of the infrastructure—we have collapse of roads and bridges and massive landslips. Do you know, Madam Speaker, that the Public Transport Service Commission of Trinidad and Tobago, PTSC, has discontinued several routes, especially in rural parts of Trinidad and Tobago? And it is directly because of a failure of the Government to maintain the road network. We have had numerous recommendations from NGOs, women's groups and women's rights activist to this Government to ensure that safe public transportation is a reality and they have all been ignored by this Government.

Internationally, when any discussions take place about women and safety, safe public transportation, good road networks, environmental measures such as cutting the grass—yes, they are all accepted measures to make women safer and prevent the surge in crime. This Government cannot continue—has not been receptive. They continue to be reactive. You know, they use the phrase “all-of-government approach”. That is not a catchphrase, you know. It is time for this Government to move away from the propaganda and get to work. And today I call for real action.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: It is not an impossible thing. And so many times I hear Members on the other side sound almost resigned. It is not a sign of the times that we have increased crime because just recently, under the former government led by Kamala Persad-Bissessar, the statistics from our Trinidad and Tobago Police Service indicated that crime had increased under the PNM Government, was decreased under the UNC Government—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen:—and it increased when the PNM came back, and it was decreased again under a UNC-led government, and today it has skyrocketed again. So, I support this Motion because I firmly believe, along with hundreds of thousands of citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, that this Government has failed to prevent a surge in crime in Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: I want to also advise that the words and the tone from the Members opposite in this Parliament and in the public domain has—sends a strong message on how the Government views dealing with crime. I want to begin by asking the hon. Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley, to—even though he is not here, I do not know if he is back in the country but I am sure he is still the substantive Prime Minister. But as a leader, it is important for our Prime Minister to stop brushing off the issues when it comes to women and referring to—using terms such as, “jammetry” and referring to woman as “golf courses to be groomed”. When a Prime Minister uses phrases like this, it dehumanizes women and makes criminals feel that it is okay to target them and rape and murder them.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Such—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: This is going beyond the pail now. It is almost nonsensical. Standing Order 48(6), please.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Continue, please.

Ms. K. Ameen: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, such utterances from a man, any man, anywhere in the world who wants to lead a nation indicates a lack of qualification or

temperament to lead any country with those type of utterances and descriptions of woman.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. K. Ameen: Madam Speaker, today, as we in the Opposition stand to reprimand this Government for their failure, we talk inside these hallowed halls and we ask people to vote for us to represent their voice. And I ask the Members opposite to examine their conscience and ask if they truly represent the voice of their citizens; if they are speaking on behalf of citizens who are experiencing murders and rapes, who are making themselves—their homes jails to keep themselves safe. And I ask them, Madam Speaker, to try, please, treat crime, not as just another one of your political rhetoric but really and truly take the opportunity to examine ways that you can meaningfully; meaningfully, together with our stakeholders, reduce crime.

I am a woman, I am a mother, I am a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, and this Government has failed all our citizens when it comes to crime. Madam Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for San Fernando West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise to contribute to the Motion against the Government filed in the name of the Member for Naparima. The Motion has been broadened significantly away from that set out in the text of the Motion and, according to the last speaker, has now entered the realm of the whole-of-society approach, including education, social structures, et cetera.

Madam Speaker, the Member for Naparima criticized the Government, criticized the Minister of National Security and set out on a path of saying that the Government had a failed approach because it did not deal with metrics, because it did not have a whole-of-government approach—Madam Speaker, I am respectfully being disturbed by the standing conversations opposite me.

Madam Speaker: All right. Members, all Members, I too am hearing a growing buzz—all right?—that is interfering with my ability to hear the Member for San Fernando West. All right? So I know that there has been some, you know, liveliness in this debate, which we welcome, but also, let us not disturb the contributions. Continue, Member for San Fernando West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, Madam Speaker. So, the Member for Naparima stood and said to the population on the last hearing of this debate that the Government had not taken a whole-of-justice and a whole-of-society and a whole-of-government approach, and specifically in the text of the Motion says that:

“...the Government has failed to set out and operationalise a forceful and functional crime reduction plan with”—reference to—“SMART...”—as he puts it, the hon. Member—“(specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time bound) goals...”

Hon Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: But, Madam Speaker, in rejecting the submissions from the Member for Naparima—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—and in answering the submissions coming from the Member who last spoke, the Member for St. Augustine, permit me to say, the role of

parliamentarians, as we stand in contribution today, is to do our part. All 41 of us in this Chamber were elected by the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. In my case, I stand as the Member for San Fernando West. And in the part that we have to discharge, in entertaining this Motion, the first and most important thing that we have to do is to do what we can under the Constitution. The primary job that we have here is to pass law. That is why we sit in Chambers at two swords' lengths against each other. The law is what we pass under section 53 of the Constitution for the peace, order and good governance.

2.55 p.m.

Now, Madam Speaker, apart from passing the law, we have to operationalize systems. I am an advocate of the approach of plant and machinery, people, processes and law. And what I can say, Madam Speaker, in rejecting Naparima's Motion, is that this country has had a Government for the past seven years that has approached its primary role of legislative making and operationalization via statistical information.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, it was the Member for Pointe-a-Pierre, who stood one day and said of me, in reflecting upon the role that I discharged previously, that there was a strategic Attorney General, when we were discussing laws to treat with following the money. And, Madam Speaker, in answering the claims about the focus upon our women that the Member for St. Augustine just dealt with, in answering the claims in relation to community policing and municipal policing and in dealing with statistical approach, I am duty-bound, on behalf of the Government, to put the following submissions on the record.

Number one: Madam Speaker, I have been in the Parliament now, not as long as many Members have in this Chamber, but for a short nearly 13 years and,

in that time, I can testify that statistical information was absent from considerations until we came on deck.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: In looking at the statistical output, as Naparima wants, in his smart approach, I need to say that that is a “smartmanism” if I could put it that way, and I would say why.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, we came in saying to the country, as legislators, you cannot approach the curtailing of crime, because crime has been around for a very long time. This is not the first Motion to treat with a government being called upon by an Opposition to address the issue of crime. This has happened for the entire life of our Parliament, in colonial and postcolonial era. But, Madam Speaker, we came and we said, statistically, the system of justice needed to be looked at, because that is the first deterrent to crime. If there is a system of justice that works, the deterrent against crime and the position of obeying law becomes real. Naparima is an advocate for Singapore. One can only hope that the hon. Member would choose his retirement in those far-off shores, because there would be a closer perspective to what he preaches, the hon. Member.

We look at the statistical approach to crime being prevented as a deterrent mechanism, the system of justice falls into it. But, Madam Speaker, the Members opposite could not tell you about what a plan looked like. They spoke about something which, I believe, was practised, a crime plan. We have no crime plan, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: We deal with a plan to prevent crime. And I can tell you, in the seven years of discharging the role that I previously held and in the role that I have

now, the following has been achieved. Number one, Madam Speaker, number one. The first thing is to look at justice in its compartmental positions. In a system of justice, in preventing crime, we can speak to the statistics today that instead of 12 judges, we have moved the legislative number to 30—instead of 12 judges in the Court of Appeal, we have moved it to 15; instead of 36 judges in the High Court, we have moved it to 64; in terms of two Masters of Court, we have moved it to 29. And, Madam Speaker, why is that relevant? Because when you go to the system of justice, this Government has brought about three different divisions of the courts. Number one, the Criminal Division; number two, the Family and Children Division; number three, the Civil Division. And, Madam Speaker, in looking at those outputs in bringing to life amendments of hundreds of laws, let us talk about what we have statistically seen.

Madam Speaker, we heard a treatise today about the focus on children. Where was a Government before this one in charge of operationalizing a Family and Children Division?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Where was the Children's Court, Madam Speaker, prior to this Government? Where were the Children's Rules, the Criminal Proceedings Rules? Where were the Masters to case manage? Madam Speaker, none of that happened prior to this Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, in looking at the system of justice, this Government said, listen, there can be no deterrent to crime that is effective, such as, if you do the crime, you will serve the time, unless you actually look at what is inside the courts by way of caseload. Madam Speaker, in terms of “smart” versus “smartmanism”, if you want to use the text of the wording, smart, statistics and

material data, Madam Speaker, we were the Government that came forward to say, 43 magistrates sitting in 14 divisions, such that you have to move prisoners from the jail straight to the court with justice on time, with people scattering out of the way to get to court, with trials being missed—we said no, statistically, let us turn cameras on in the prisons, let us save \$26 million a year, let us reduce the number of courts from 14 divisions to three: North, south and Tobago, let us give magistrates full judicial immunity in law, by way of law that we did, so that we could bolster the strength of the Magistracy and watch matters being heard in court, Madam Speaker. And, Madam Speaker, whilst we did that, we dealt with quickening of processes.

So, Madam Speaker, whilst the Member for Naparima may joke and laugh and giggle about statistical information coming out, Madam Speaker, to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, if we deal with the Member for St. Augustine talking about a Government focusing upon the rights and protection of our women, Madam Speaker, what could be more important than saying to 43 magistrates, stop wasting time on 104,000 motor vehicle and road traffic matters? What could be more important than saying remove those 104,000 matters, so that from 146,000 cases per annum in the Magistrate's Court, you remove 104,000 cases? And what could be more important than saying, you will now have more judicial time to deal with serious matters. But we did not stop there. We said, let us remove 8,500 marijuana cases; let us reorganize 26,000 preliminary enquiry cases. And what does that mean in terms of smart, in terms of data? It means your 43 magistrates have the ability to focus upon 8,500 serious matters with more attention. And, Madam Speaker, that is why, statistically, the data in relation to murders on the back of domestic violence that there has been a 50 per cent decrease in domestic violence murders, according to the TTPS, because of the direct intervention. But,

Madam Speaker, it was this Government in 2020 that amended the Domestic Violence Act.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: It was this Government that installed the protections of getting a domestic violence protection order from a police station at midnight on Sunday night. It was this Government that allowed a magistrate to be accessible. It is this Government, Madam Speaker that can point you to the creation of a Public Defenders Division.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, part of the system of justice, the ransom that was being held up to the people of Trinidad and Tobago—you could have all the judges in the world you want—Madam Speaker, there were 20 lawyers controlling the criminal bar, 2-0. Madam Speaker, this Government, and I dare say under the approach that the Office of the Attorney General, we created the Public Defenders Division.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: And, Madam Speaker, the data that comes from that demonstrates that they now deal with 61 per cent of the caseload assignment. Madam Speaker, we are the Government that installed 29 public defenders into active cooperation.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: We are the Government that installed laptops in the prisons so that interviews with prisoners could happen with their lawyers. Madam Speaker, when you look at the statistical information, let us look to what the Public Defenders do in relation to children alone, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member for St. Augustine was talking about what this Government has done for children.

Madam Speaker, by creating a Children's Court, by creating peer resolution, by creating a Drug Treatment Court that never existed before, Madam Speaker, we made sure that children can come out of conflict with the law so that they can avoid becoming statistics of murder and of violence and mayhem, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, the Public Defenders report demonstrates—and I want to show you the typology of matters that the children arena deals with: Disorderly behaviour, domestic violence, drug offences, escaping lawful custody, illegal entry, kidnapping, larceny, loitering, unlawful malicious damage, manslaughter, murder, possession of firearms, ammunition, weapons, robbery, sexual offences, shooting with intent to kill, threats, driving offences and violent obscene language. That is not in a place outside the Children's Court, you know, Madam Speaker. Those are the matters being dealt with in the Children's Court. For 2020, 215 children found themselves in that scenario. For 2021, in the same typologies, 107. That is 322 children in conflict with the law, Madam Speaker. Last time I checked, it was not the mighty all hail Siparia that produced any of those amendments. Madam Speaker, there was no attempt at reform to look at the whole-of-justice approach. Naparima asked for statistics, Madam Speaker, these are statistics that we are speaking about.

Madam Speaker, let us turn to forensics. Naparima says, the Government does not deal with statistics. Madam Speaker, I stood in piloting the amendments to the Dangerous Drugs Act, in asking for the Government's consideration that we decriminalize marijuana. We said that there would be a 96 per cent drop in the caseload for forensics investigation. And then, Madam Speaker, in piloting the Cannabis Control Bill, I was able to report to the country that the Government had, in fact, achieved a 90 per cent reduction in the caseloads at forensics. Now, what does that mean? Madam Speaker, surely it is not lost upon Naparima. If you are

spending 96 per cent of your caseload less in looking at plant-like substances—I know they understand what plant-like substances looks like—Madam Speaker, you now have time to look rape kits, you now have time to look at ballistics, you now have time to look at all of the genuine matters that caused an optic and resurgence.

Naparima wants to make sure that recidivism numbers fall. Madam Speaker, it is critical for us, in passing the law that we do, in operationalizing the law that we do, to show and demonstrate the statistics that we have achieved. Madam Speaker, by training 21 police officers at the forensics division, the Government can certify that over 1,000 ballistic matters have moved forward in the courts.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, 1,000 matters. For Naparima that might be a laughing matter, because I genuinely believe that the Opposition does not want the Government to succeed for some reason. On their side they believe that if they oppose matters that they will have some degree of success. Now, Madam Speaker, statistically, forensics has been bettered. A third pathologist is on position right now for pick up by way of a memorandum of understanding.

So, I have demonstrated an increase in the Judiciary. I have demonstrated, Madam Speaker, the introduction of a lower number of cases in the courts. I have demonstrated that we have added on specific divisions and specialized courts to treat with matters. Madam Speaker, do you know that nearly 2,000 convictions were secured that were not recorded on a Sex Offenders Registry, 2,000 convictions? St. Augustine wants to talk about Siparia is leading the charge of protecting women. Where was Siparia when 2,000-plus convictions were secured and not a single person was registered on a database for sex offenders? Not a single person.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: It took this Government, it took our Government to ensure that a Sex Offenders Register was operationalized. Now, Madam Speaker, before we get people fast and out of place saying what they do not know, let me explain there are two registers. There is a private TTPS register and the public register only becomes real when the court puts you on that register after release. But, Madam Speaker, for sure, now the TTPS has a chance to fight sex offenders, because they are on a register that the TTPS has and that, Madam Speaker, was no advocacy on the part of the UNC.

Madam Speaker, St. Augustine is talking about protecting women. Madam Speaker, we passed in 2019 a Bail (Amdt.) Act that the Opposition did not support. And that Bail (Amdt.) Act that we passed for matters not dealing with murder, that matter is a serious matter. Because we said if you are treating with sexual offences or if lightning struck you twice, that you should be denied bail unless you show exceptional circumstances why you should get it. And that is set out at section 57A of the Bail (Amdt.). Madam Speaker, you know what is going to be on test? When the sunset clause is called upon to be extended by this Government, everybody will be watching the UNC to see what they will do.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member opposite, Naparima, asked for statistics and whole-of-government plan. Madam Speaker, what could be absent in the mind of any responsible parliamentarian to refuse to support evidence amendments? Madam Speaker, we heard the Member for St. Augustine complaining or alleging that the hon. Prime Minister has not done enough to treat with the rights and protection of women. The hon. Member was boldfaced enough, academically, intellectually, to say that of a Prime Minister that has a Government that secured amendments to the Bail Act that secured amendments to the Evidence

Act that they did not support. What are those amendments? CCTV cameras.

Madam Speaker, where are people going to have the courage to turn up as witnesses if there is a sense of fear because of technology today that witnesses could be under threat? Is it not better for the people of Trinidad and Tobago to have a fighting chance to say, let the CCTV camera do the job for you? Madam Speaker, the Opposition did not support that. Madam Speaker, the Opposition refused to support amendments to the Interception of Communication Act. What did we ask for? For the ability to bug the prisons so that we can record conversations by criminals in the prisons. And there are reports of criminals in the prisons speaking with people in the public and some members in the legal fraternity are well aware of this, Madam Speaker. The Opposition came to this country and said, no, we will not support interception of communication amendments. You know what they did instead, Madam Speaker? They are now trying to go to court to challenge it, Madam Speaker.

But, Madam Speaker, having the benefit of the Privy Council judgment in the case of Dominic Suraj, upholding the ability to pass simple majority legislation, which is for a legitimate aim to address a societal purpose with the simple majority that we have, I would tell you, good luck UNC. All that you do to try and crash Trinidad and Tobago will come to naught, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Because, Madam Speaker, who in their right mind could say that they want to protect prisoner conversations involving hits from the prisons? The Member for Naparima was talking about it. The Member for Naparima says, they have hits coming from the prisons, but will not stand up and support a piece of law to stop the hits coming by intercepting and using as evidence the very conversations that the hon. Member is so proud to boast about. Really, Madam

Speaker? We are here to listen to the exhortations of the Member for Naparima telling us about statistics and telling us about Singapore, Madam Speaker? Madam Speaker, it just does not hold water. It just does not hold water.

Madam Speaker, we spoke about public defenders, we spoke about forensics, we spoke about the number of judges, we spoke about the caseload, we spoke about bail amendment and we just spoke about domestic violence protection. Madam Speaker, we have operationalized Child Protection Units, Gender-Based Violence Units. We, it is the Member for Laventille West, the Minister of National Security, that piloted and championing the trespass amendments, and the Member for Naparima, all of a sudden, forgets that home invasion—part of the Member's Motion was addressed by the very Member he had the temerity to criticize, the Member for Laventille West. The Minister of National Security was the man himself that championed that law.

And, Madam Speaker, Naparima glibly laughing again at tragedy that unfolds says: "He solved the problem." Madam Speaker, really? If you do not have the primary objective of supporting law for the peace, order and good governance of our society, how does the Member for Naparima have the courage to complain about it? If the one job that they have is to support law that can give people a fighting chance, why not support it? Why go on a dedicated mission of stopping the laws that we passed to follow the money. But.

Madam Speaker, it is this Government, in a whole-of-government plan that said, criminality has money. It was the Office of the Attorney General that championed the amendments to the Companies Act to make sure that beneficial ownership was known, so you cannot thief money, hide it in a company and run away with it. It was the Office of the Prime Minister that championed the demonetization of cash. It was the Office of the Attorney General that championed

the registration of land particulars, the creation of the real estate agents. It is the Ministry of Finance and the Office of the Attorney General that championed the FATF amendments that championed the FATCA amendments, the follow the money amendments. It is the Opposition that refused to support, in full form, the “explain your wealth” legislation. Madam Speaker, we say that if you follow the money, you will put an end, at least in part, to the financing of crime.

But, Madam Speaker, the Members of the Opposition are not serious. The Members of the Opposition have not supported any of that. And, Madam Speaker, we came with statistics to demonstrate why it was important. We dealt with the number of companies that were found in odious circumstances. We dealt with the statistics of half a billion dollars not being returned to the Central Bank in the demonetization of the \$100 note. Where do you think that half a billion dollars is, hon. Member for Naparima? Madam Speaker, where is it, Madam Speaker? Half a billion dollars in cash did not come back and the Member for Naparima cannot make a serious submission, will not support the law, will not support the amendments, Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi:—because they just do not want the cash to be found. And, Madam Speaker, what on earth could be wrong in piloting and championing positions to better processes? Madam Speaker, I believe I have five minutes left?

Madam Speaker: You have until 3:20:52.

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, let me show you a difference between operationalization in this Government versus another government, to address Naparima’s contribution and the contributions coming from the hon. Members opposite. Madam Speaker, when we said to the world, in the five amendments that have happened in the Administration of Justice

(Preliminary Inquiries) Act, we said to the world, let us ensure that it is operationalized. Tick the first box, masters to case manage, we moved it from two to 29; tick the second box, judges: Legislatively 36 to 64 in the High Court, legislatively 12 to 15 in the Court of Appeal. We said, do not send home our judges at 65. We raised it to age 70. So we get five more years of productive worth of our judges. But, Madam Speaker, we did not, in operationalizing the amendments to the legislation in preliminary enquiries, we did not select out section 34. We did not provide a benefit that cost the taxpayers hundreds of man hours, millions and millions of dollars in pursuing a claim at the Privy Council and back to strike it out, Madam Speaker. Because we do not proclaim law when one sits in Opposition as we did.

But, Madam Speaker, today the justice system, if anybody has the courage in this Chamber to be frank and forthright and honest, today the justice system in the courts does not look anything like it did in 2015. You go to court online. You have plea bargaining. Look at the Public Defenders Report, 23 plea bargaining matters in the Public Defenders alone. Look at the fact that the Sean Luke trial done before a judge alone with virtual evidence given, with somebody giving evidence from the back of a cab, a truck cab, at a pit stop on a phone, Madam Speaker. Look at the plea bargaining. Look at the judge only which resulted in a man on Remand for 15 years in a trial that took 15 minutes before Madam Justice Lisa Ramsumair-Hinds. Look at the fact that we have had judge only trials for murder where the conviction of murder has not even been appealed, Madam Speaker. And watch the UNC and watch them very cokey eye, because they did not support a single one of those amendments, not one.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: Today instead of lawyers running up and down to do a case

management conference for 15 minutes here Port of Spain and then run San Fernando and catch a plane for Tobago, you sit down in your office, you turn on your computer and you go to court. You file electronically. Your filings are done up to midnight. Madam Speaker, if anybody opposite has the intellectual honesty to admit, the justice system has been radically transformed, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Al-Rawi: And it gives me immense pride to have been a part of that situation, Madam Speaker and solution. So, Madam Speaker, looking at the Member of Naparima's contribution, I just say it fails to launch, Madam Speaker. It fails to launch because there is very little sincerity in the manner in which it was piloted and the evidence upon which it was premised. I say that, most respectfully, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I will wrap up by saying that as Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, with a charge of 1,500 municipal police, half of which are filled and another cohort of which would be filled by September, Madam Speaker, we intend in the municipal police arena, under my hand, to ensure that community policing is joined, to ensure that the use of CCTV evidence and other positions and domestic violence and gender-based violence units are part and parcel of the municipal police, and I thank you for this opportunity to contribute.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Saddam Hosein (*Barataria/San Juan*): Thank you, very much, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me to join this Private Members' Motion brought under the hand of the Member for Naparima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: And, Madam Speaker, I had the opportunity to listen to the

Member for Naparima, and I even reread his contribution, and it was one of the most well-researched, excellent, comprehensive, statistical and targeted contributions on a matter involving crime.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: And I must commend the Member for Naparima, because he quoted his references, and he also had footnotes in his particular contribution.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: It was well researched; well, well, researched.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: And, Madam Speaker, I sat in anticipation for the Member for San Fernando West, the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government, to tell us what is the strategic plan with respect to the municipal police, and he used the last few seconds to just give us a brief indication of what the municipal police has been doing. But he spent most of his time speaking about a job that he no longer has.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: And the Member would have used statistics in order to try to bring some credence or credibility to some of the statements that he would have made during his contribution in terms of how well the criminal justice system is working. He spoke of 12 judges being increased, sorry, 64 judges; we going up to 29 masters and Madam Speaker, three divisions of the court. I want to give some statistics also, because I asked a question in the Parliament, not too long ago, and this question came as a written response and the Judiciary would have responded to the question on the 7th of April, 2022. And, Madam Speaker, the total number of criminal trials—because I asked about the number of criminal trials that would have taken place from the year 2020 to 2021—based on the Attorney General's

submission, one would have thought that we completed thousands of matters.

Madam Speaker, in the year 2020 to 2021, there were roughly a couple hundred murders. There were nine matters determined in terms of murders. Madam Speaker, acts leading to harm or intending to cause harm to the person, 10 matters determined; injurious acts of a sexual nature which includes rape, grievous sexual assault, sexual intercourse with a female under 14 and indecent assault, 3; acts against property involving violence or threats against a person including robbery with aggravation or violence, 3; acts against property only includes possession of stolen motor vehicles, 2; acts involving controlled substances or drugs inclusive of possession of dangerous drugs for the purpose of trafficking and conspiracy to traffic in dangerous drugs, 2; acts involving fraud, deception or corruption, 0; acts against public order authority and provisions of the State, 0; acts against public safety and state security including possession of firearms, 1; acts against the natural environment, 0; other criminal acts not elsewhere classified, 0. Because they have classified these types of crimes under the classification for crime for statistical purposes, the codes that the Judiciary now uses in terms of the new structure of the classification.

3.25 p.m.

So, Madam Speaker, the point is one would have thought that there was a massive number of cases being determined—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein:—because the criminals are mortally afraid of the criminal justice system, but then when you look at the statistics, the number of matters determined for firearms is one; one. After the Minister of National Security would have reported to the country that there are thousands of illegal firearms in Trinidad and Tobago, you can only determine one, one matter in the court. So 64 judges, 29

masters, three divisions, new courts in the Waterfront, Madam Speaker, this is the performance. This is the performance, because you have all of these judges, you are resourcing the Judiciary but you are forgetting a very important arm of the criminal justice system, which is the Office of the Director Public Prosecutions. Madam Speaker, my colleague, the Member for Tabaquite, both of us while we were in the Senate asked questions relating to the office accommodation for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. At that time, we were told that they were renting the Gulf City Mall in San Fernando for office accommodation for the DPP's office. Madam Speaker, rent is currently being paid for that particular building and the office has not moved there as yet.

They have tried or attempted to move the DPP's office to the Park Street location in Port of Spain, relocating it from the Richmond Street location. Madam Speaker, years—seven years have passed and they have not done that relocation as yet.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: So if you have prosecutors—and it is a fact, Madam Speaker, that there is a high turnover of prosecutors at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions because of poor working conditions. They are overworked. The staff there continues to—a high roll over because they simply do not have the support, the resources in order to properly do their job, Madam Speaker. So you cannot alone put the blame on the Office of the DPP if the Government who is in charge of resourcing that most important office is not doing that. And the Member for San Fernando West sat in the chair for seven years and did not nothing to assist the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Right. Madam Speaker, we hear about the Member for San

Fernando West speaking about that they took off thousands of cases from the magistracy because of the decriminalization of marijuana. Madam Speaker, they also had ticketed offences for the Public Health Ordinance which is a crime if you are not wearing a face mask. Do you know if someone is charged in the year December, 2021, for not wearing a face mask, their first date of hearing is in August, 2023?—August, 2023, and this is the Judiciary that the Member for San Fernando West boasted about.

So, Madam Speaker, if the criminals in Trinidad and Tobago are not afraid of the criminal justice system then we will always have a serious crime problem.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Because we will know, Madam Speaker, as part of being in the legal profession, when a court sits in the position to sentence an individual, that sentence sends a deterrent to other persons who may be likely to want to commit a crime. So that sentence that the court imposes will send a message to tell another person, “I am not going to commit this crime because, one, there might be certainty of a sentence; two, there might be celerity in terms of the swiftness of punishment; and three, that the punishment is sufficiently high enough for you not to commit that particular crime”, and that is grounded in the Member’s Motion when he spoke of the Government is focusing on punitive measures instead of preventative measures.

So, Madam Speaker, if you have a criminal justice system where the wheels of justice are moving quickly enough, serious enough and certain enough, you will have criminals afraid of offending, Madam Speaker, because then there is the fear of punishment by an independent Judiciary, an effective Judiciary. So those are some of the points I wish to put on the record when it comes to where we are really with the criminal justice system. What the Government needs to do is admit firstly

that we have a problem.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: We have a problem. And when you admit we have a problem, sit with the Opposition, we will assist, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Because I heard the Member for San Fernando West spoke of the Bail (Amdt.) Bill coming to an end in August, 2022, and then in the same breath he said, “Well, the Opposition gave no support to that Bail Bill.” Madam Speaker, that is a special majority piece of legislation. If the Opposition did not support it, it would not have been law.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: We had to support that Bill, Madam Speaker. That is basic, elementary parliamentary procedure, basic legal training, basic principles of law, Madam Speaker, that if a Bill requires a special majority in this Parliament the Opposition had to support it before it could have had a sunset clause for it to expire in August, 2022. The Bill was passed in 2019, it expires in 2022.

So, Madam Speaker, it is not correct for the Member for San Fernando West to put that into the record that we did not support the Bail (Amdt.) Bill. We actually supported the Bail (Amdt.) Act, No. 17 of 2019, Madam Speaker. We supported it. We supported it. So, Madam Speaker, these are some of the matters I wish to correct in terms of what the Member for San Fernando West would have placed on the record. And then we have seen over the last weekend, the long weekend that we had, it was one of the bloodiest weekends that we have where 10 persons were murdered and, Madam Speaker, the head of the National Security Council is not in the country.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: The head of the National Security Council is not in the country and then the Government tells us that this is the reality of what takes place in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, this is not the reality of what Trinidad and Tobago used to be. This country degenerated because of the bad policies and the mismanagement of this PNM Government.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Because I will remind the Members opposite that it was the Member for Diego Martin West who had said, “And if the Government cannot deal with crime then the Government itself is part of the problem.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Because it seems the only crime plan this Government has is to leave the road with potholes so criminals may not be able to escape in a timely manner.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Because they have failed in every regard, Madam Speaker, every regard this Government has failed the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And when we look at the CCTV camera system that currently prevails in our country, we have seen in the *Hansard* that the Minister of National Security has placed on the *Hansard* that almost half of the CCTV cameras in Trinidad and Tobago are non-functional, almost half.

Madam Speaker, what has the Government done with respect to fixing these cameras? The SSA just got \$63million additional allocation in the mid-year review, so we hope when the budget comes up this year we hear that we moved from 50 per cent operationalization to 100 per cent because that is what the Member for Naparima has been asking through this Motion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: You must have a smart approach, a smart approach with targets. So you must tell us, “X amount to fix the cameras. These are the amount of cameras that require repair. At the end of X month we will have these amount of cameras working”, but people do not hear that from the Members opposite, Madam Speaker. What we rather hear is that they always blame someone or there is some lame excuse for their incompetence.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Just imagine when this country went into grief because of the death of young Andrea Bharatt in February, 2021, where her body was found the CCTV cameras there were not installed. On January 28, 2022, they found another decomposing body of a young woman, 21-year-old Keithisha Cudjoe, Madam Speaker. On April 19, 2022, the body of a man was found down a precipice along the Heights of Aripo, a short distance away from where Andrea Bharatt body was found and, Madam Speaker, you cannot give a commitment to the people of this country that you will have some level of surveillance in that particular area.

Madam Speaker, it is disheartening that this Government behaves and operates in this manner with no care for the people and the welfare and the safety of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. And then what they intend to do and what they did over the last weekend is blame the crime situation on gangs. Every time someone dies in this country it is a gang-related murder.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Every time somebody dies is a gang-related murder. Madam Speaker, there is the Anti-Gang Act that is currently in force, the Member for San Fernando West stood in this very Parliament and told the country that they know the gangs by name, they know the gangs by street and as soon as this law is passed they are going to pick up all of the gangs. Where are the gang members? Madam

Surge in Criminal Activity
Mr. Hosein (cont'd)

2022.06.24

Speaker, do you know how many persons have been convicted under this Anti-Gang Act? Zero.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Not a single person has been convicted under this Anti-Gang Act.

Madam Speaker, I asked a written question in this Parliament, Question No. 145 to the Minister of National Security: Will the Minister provide for the years September, 2015, to February, 2022, the total number of gangs, the total number of gang members, the total number of arrests, charges and convictions? And I would like to use the statistics to report to this Parliament on what the Minister would have told the country. For the year 2022, Madam Speaker, there were 134 gangs in Trinidad; for the year 2022, there were 1,462 gang members. Madam Speaker, the total number of charges laid under the Anti-Gang Act for the year 2022 is one. One. When I read that there was one charge under the Anti-Gang Act, there was zero convictions under the Anti-Gang Act, I thought this was a report from the CPO giving wage offers of 0-0-1-1-1.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Madam Speaker, this is the reality and the performance of the Anti-Gang legislation. So you know you have 1,462 gang members but yet you only charged one person under the Anti-Gang Act? Madam Speaker, why is the Government not giving the TTPS the resources that they require? I mean, Mr. Jacob, acting Commissioner of Police is trying his best but I would like to give Mr. Jacob a little advice that he needs to keep better company.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. S. Hosein: He needs to keep better company because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as much and as hard as he will try there will always be that issue with respect to the

resources in terms of the TTPS. And the TTPS is just one of the examples in which the Government gives resources in a manner in which it is not strategic and targeted because they have decided to spend \$35 million to hire— Sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they have spent over \$35 million to hire SRP officers who are foreign persons outside of Trinidad and Tobago, when you could have taken that \$35million and install cameras where the body of Andrea Bharatt was found to prevent other persons from killing our young daughters and dumping them in that site. But rather you used \$35 million to go on a political expedition and witch-hunt. And they are hiring SRPs from the United Kingdom and those persons are not trained as police officers. They are in fact divorce lawyers, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: They are matrimonial lawyers. So these are some of the issues that we have with this Government and that is why, as much as they try, they will continue to fail because they have no plan when it comes to fighting crime.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: There is no plan. There is absolutely none. And they will boast about that they purchased the coast guard—two new coast guard vessels.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, on the 27th of May, 2022, in a response to a question by the Opposition in Parliament regarding the status of the coast guard vessels, TTCG 41 and TTCG 42, the Minister of National Security indicated:

“...that one of the aforementioned vessels is now...in need of some attention, and it is for that reason not immediately in service.”

Imagine brand new vessels that they purchased, fly up to Australia to purchase these new vessels, boasted to the country and the vessels are not working because they did not put a specific plan in place for, one, having maintenance and proper training. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and I ask the Government to indicate to

this country whether or not there were persons who are not well trained enough that were handling those coast guard vessels that caused the incidents that require these vessels to now undergo repairs and maintenance. I want to ask that.

Imagine in an *Express* article dated the 16th of March, 2022, there was an incident in Tobago—and I will quote from the article, where Senior Superintendent of Police in Tobago, Mr. Benjamin, he quoted and saying:

“We had a Ministry of National Security Whatsapp page and we were able to view the situation and it was very disturbing to us...because at the time we did not have a Coast Guard vessel we decided to go on land.

We tried to go on the jetties but again there was no vessel for us to go out .”
Imagine the police is reporting to the country that there were no coast guard vessels available to them in Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to respond to incidents with respect to a beach party in the Nylon Pool and on No Man’s Land. I mean, and then they will come to boast and say that everything is all right, that these vessels will stop—these vessels will intercept dangerous drugs from coming into the country, from illegal firearms for entering. Mr. Deputy Speaker, do you know COVID came into our shores because of a porous border because they have not prevented the illegal immigrants from Venezuela from entering our borders? Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is unacceptable with respect to the poor border management capability that they have had.

Then you have—and this is something that we have to put on the record because, you see, the thing is that when you have leadership in terms of the Ministry you will have some level of performance. You will have a level performance, but when there is no respect for the leadership of the Ministry there will be no performance. Because when the leadership of the Ministry is telling the country that it is not his duty to ensure that the people feel safe and secure, Mr.

Deputy Speaker, what do you expect the persons below him to think of or to operate?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: When you report to a nation as the Minister of National Security—and I repeat, you say, “No, my duty is not to ensure that people feel safe and secure”, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in any other country a Prime Minister would have already fired that Minister; would have fired him.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: They would have fired him. Because, you see, when all of these things culminate, because it seems as though not a single arm of National Security is properly functioning. So when you have all of these problems culminating into one, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because of years and years of lack of attention and mismanagement, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we will have this particular crime situation that we currently face. Imagine that there are persons in this country—and this was so embarrassing—it was so embarrassing when I saw the front page of the *Guardian* that reported, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that one of our citizens—and I will quote the headline, “Calvin Greenidge: They want me dead...man says he informed police about govt minister and gangster link”

Mr. Deputy Speaker is this Trinidad and Tobago? Is this really Trinidad and Tobago, what we have reduced to, that citizens are now going to other countries to seek asylum because their life is at risk because they are alleging that there are links with gangs and Government Ministers in this country? Is this the Trinidad and Tobago we know? Is this the Trinidad and Tobago that we want, Mr. Deputy Speaker? The police need to Act. They have the Anti-Gang Act, go and investigate all of these persons—whose name have been named—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein:—whose name have been named in this particular instance because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it seems as though the police is more involved in looking after some of my colleagues opposite rather than the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

And then there is another article, dated the 17th of March, 2021, where Minister Young says, “Gang leaders with Master’s degrees”, and that shows a level of sophistication and a level of education that these persons—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, just quote your source, please.

Mr. S. Hosein: Sorry. The Trinidad *Express*.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Pardon.

Mr. S. Hosein: The Trinidad *Express* dated 17th of March, 2021.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: 2021?

Mr. S. Hosein: Yes, 2021. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it shows the level of sophistication that these gangs are dealing with and whether or not the persons who are in charge with the particular research, the persons who are in charge with really having that strategic level of planning in order to combat gang violence, whether or not they are being trained and given the resources. Because we have had assistance from other countries with respect to training, the US Embassy, the British High Commission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but where is that going? Are we really seeing the results of it? And again, this is what exactly the Member for Naparima is calling on in terms of a targeted approach.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Because this targeted approach, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is going to help us. You cannot just come to this Parliament and quote extensively from selected statistics in order to prove a point that you have actually done something for the last seven years.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I think the population is already convinced that this Government has done nothing for the last seven years.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: Because I will just remind you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not our job alone to just criticize the Government but we must offer some recommendation in which the Government can take on board in order to keep our citizens safe, because it is in our interest to ensure that our citizens are safe. We represent over 300,000 persons who have elected us into this Parliament and it is our job to ensure that we pass laws here to protect the 1.3million citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, because the Opposition Leader, in her wisdom, would have indicated that had she formed the next government that the Ministry of National Security would have disaggregated into various Ministries because we understand the difficulty it is for one person to manage all of these various arms of National Security in terms of creating the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Defence. So the Ministry of Home Affairs will deal with matters in relation to internal law enforcement, focusing on policing, focus on detection rates, focus on surveillance, focus on the use of electronic security and proper intelligence gathering, prisons and fire, whereas the Ministry of Defence will be based on the critical needs for border protection to prevent illegal drugs, weapons and human trafficking and the worldwide concern of terrorism, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Because we have seen the need in which you have to allocate the human resources in such a manner that they operate in an effective way so that you cannot have one particular Minister dealing with all of these things, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because when you deal with crime it is a whole-of-Government approach.

It is a holistic approach that you have to look at. You have to consult with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Services, the Ministry of National

Security, the Office of the Prime Minister, the Office of the Attorney General, because all of these wheels, once they turn in the appropriate and right synergy we will see some results being—we will see some fruits of the labour. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when you have these various Ministries operating in silos and they are not speaking to each other, you will find that the laws are not relevant to the circumstances that we currently face. You will find that the social security net is not capturing the right set of people. We will find that the education system is failing some of the youths, but if there is a targeted approach we will realize, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we will see that the synergies have to be created between all of the Ministries because we cannot continue to operate in a silo manner, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Also, with the establishment of the Community Comfort Patrols, those were things to increase police visibility within the areas. That gave some very good results for the period, 2010 to 2015, when those things were started. The Member for Naparima always will complain about the low and the small allocation being given to the cadets. You have to invest in the youths of our country; you have to.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: And the manner in which we are seeing things unfolding on a daily basis, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with respect to the rising cost of living in terms of food prices, in terms of the price of fuel, you would realize that persons need to survive—persons need to survive and if we do not have that particular social safety net to capture these people then we can see that there will be an increase in terms of violence in Trinidad and Tobago and that is something none of us want.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two more minutes.

Mr. S. Hosein: Thank you very much. Because, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are here in order to assist the people of Trinidad and Tobago. If the Government brings

legislation that is worthy of support and good legislation, we will support it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: We will support it, but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that requires a Government that listens, and right now it seems as though that this Government is deaf.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. S. Hosein: So I thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I commend the Member for Naparima on a timely, relevant and very comprehensive and strong Motion here today.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the MP for Lopinot/Bon Air West.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: And, Member, you have 30 minutes.

The Minister of Public Utilities (Hon. Marvin Gonzales): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I embrace the opportunity to represent the constituency of Lopinot/Bon Air West and to join my colleagues on this side of the House in rejecting a hopeless Motion that was filed against the Government and its track record in the fight against crime and illegal activities in Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I entered this Parliament in 2020 as a PNM Member of Parliament, over 20 or 21 months from today, I have worked with my colleagues on this side of the House and oftentimes pleading with Members on the other side of the House to join and work with the Government in putting systems in place, putting policies in place, putting laws in place for the good governance of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Even before I entered this Parliament, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a citizen, especially over the last 20 years, spending some of my time in law enforcement, the issue of crime and criminality

have been something that has been dominating the national consciousness for a very, very long time.

Governments in the 1980s, governments in the 1990s, in the early 2000s, all up the way to this present time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issue of crime and lawlessness continue to plague this country. It is a very serious matter. And even when Members opposite pretend that it was not an issue, the records can show, it is there for everyone to see that when Members opposite had formed the Government between 2010 and 2015, crime plagued them and that is the reason why they had to change Ministers of National Security almost every week because they could not handle the issue of crime. But a PNM party, even though in Opposition, worked with the then UNC Government, worked in support of legislation, doing its parliamentary responsibilities fearlessly to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and remaining true to their oath of office, supported legislation that was brought by the former UNC Government between the period, 2010 and 2015, in the fight against crime.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we as parliamentarians have our role to play. As elected Members of Parliament we have a role to play, an important one at that but, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it does not fall upon us alone. The schools have a role to play, the churches have a role to play, the mosques and the mandirs have a role to play, the village councils and all of the institutions of the people of Trinidad and Tobago and the State have a role to play, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

3.55 p.m.

Therefore, I wish to cast my argument by reminding all of us here in this Parliament, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago who might be listening and viewing on national television, that according to section 53 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago:

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“Parliament may make laws for the peace, order and good government of Trinidad and Tobago...”

That is what we do here, and when it comes to the fight against crime, the passing of laws and the passing of legislation, and ensuring that our institutions are supported, be they the police service, the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago, whatever institution they might be in this country, as a Parliament our responsibility is to ensure that the legislative framework is in place to protect the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, to equip the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service with the requisite powers and requisite responsibilities in the fight against crime. It is not our role to pick up arms, and to put on boots, and wear helmets and execute warrants. It is not our role. We have a constitutional authority. We have a body in place to do just that.

When I listened to Members opposite, it gives the impression that it is our responsibility here to put guns on our shoulders and go and fight the criminals on the streets. If that was our responsibility, Mr. Deputy Speaker, trust me, I would be first in line. I would be first in line. But as an elected Member of Parliament, the Constitution dictates that my role and my responsibility is to pass laws for the good government of the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: That is my role and my responsibility, and for 21 months, coming here in this Parliament, all I experienced from day one is obstruction, obstruction, filibustering, non-cooperation from a restless, recalcitrant Opposition party.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: They do not wish well for the people of Trinidad and Tobago, because they stand on every single opportunity and stand in our way, as we seek to

discharge our duties and our responsibilities to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, our constitutional duties to pass laws for the good government of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is our role.

Have they been faithful to that responsibility? Have they been faithful to their oath of office? I ask each and every one of them, through you Mr. Deputy Speaker. They have been unfaithful up to their role and their responsibilities to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Their sacred duty is to come here and to work with each and every single Member of Parliament, to work with the Government to pass laws for the good order of the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Their track record is there, and it must hang around their collective necks in shame and disgrace. Shame and disgrace on each and every one of them.

He has the temerity to come here and file a Motion against the Government. What is his role and responsibility? Look at his track record, listen to his contributions in this Parliament, and “he file a Motion?”

Mr. Charles: Let us reason together.

Hon. M. Gonzales: “He file a Motion”, when his track record has been one of recalcitrance and obstructionism?

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we must cast this debate in such a way that the people of Trinidad and Tobago will not be misguided by a hopeless and hapless Opposition party.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: They believe that the issue of crime is going to open the doors to them coming over on this side of the House. That is what they believe, [*Interruption*] and I am being disturbed by the Member.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One second, one second, Member. Again, please. You had

your opportunity, Members would have entered the debate already and there are those that are still to come. Please, I will not tolerate on a constant basis across the floor. Proceed, Member.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Thank you for your protection. I sincerely appreciate that. Perhaps the Member should sit quietly and listen, because their hearts need conversion.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: We cannot continue to play political football with this very issue of crime in Trinidad and Tobago. We cannot continue to expect that crime is going to open up some window of opportunity, political opportunity for us, whilst blood continues to flow on the streets and the corners in our communities and in the ghettos.

Your role as Members of Parliament and your role as Members of the Opposition is to work with every single Member of Parliament to protect the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and working with all the institutions of the State that will have a responsibility, from even the village councils and the churches. They all have a role to play, the families, they all have a role to play. But do not come here and try to fool the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that it is our duty to bear arms, and walk in military gears, to patrol the streets and enter into people's homes. That is not our responsibility.

So you want to start about SMART, and you want to talk about setting measurable targets? We are not wearing uniforms here on this side. We talk about our constitutional responsibilities, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, the law provides for the appointment of a Commissioner of Police. If I should remind Members of this side, and the other side, especially Members on the other side and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, when you look at the job opportunity and the

publication for the Commissioner of Police, what does it say? The incumbent, which is the Commissioner of Police:

“An incumbent in this office plans, organizes, directs and controls all strategic activities of the Police Service in the enforcement of laws and ordinances, crime prevention and the protection of life and property in order to promote and achieve higher levels of safety and security for the nation. Work involves providing policy advice and decision making support to the Minister, Permanent Secretary and the Police Service Commission; formulating, implementing and monitoring policies plans and programmes for the Police Service; and managing the financial resources allocated to the Police Service particularly as it relates to the procurement of goods and services. Duties also include planning, organizing and directing the major divisions of the Police Service in strategic, operational and tactical planning activities, providing administrative direction and oversight and fostering cooperative working relationships with other arms of the Ministry. Work is performed with innovativeness, initiative, discretion and independent judgment and is reviewed as necessary to keep informed and to monitor effectiveness/accuracy based on functional policies.”

Those are the responsibilities of the Commissioner of Police. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence please. Proceed.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much. So when the Member files a Motion of this nature, it gives the impression that the duties that I have just identified for the role and the office of the Commissioner of Police, assisted by his Deputy Commissioners of Police, are one for the Government and the Executive arm of the State. Members opposite—Members opposite, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would very well be familiar with the seminal judgment in the case of *Re Thomas, Endell v*

Attorney General of Trinidad & Tobago. In that judgment the Privy Council makes it absolutely and abundantly clear, that there must be a clear distinction between the role of the Executive, the role of the Service Commission and that of an independent police service.

So, therefore, as members of the Executive and the Minister of National Security, he has to be very careful in the way he discharges his duties to the people of Trinidad and Tobago where national security is concerned. Because if, God forbid, he oversteps his boundaries, I can assure you that the first on their side will file a Motion against him for overstepping his boundaries. Therefore, I remind this country and I remind Members opposite, that we operate in a constitutional democracy where our roles and functions are clearly defined—clearly defined.

That is the reason why the founding fathers saw it fit to establish service commissions to supervise the role and the responsibilities of the Commissioner of Police, because the Constitution does not envisage that the exercise of supervisory function over the independent office of Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioner of Police, is not one for the Minister of National Security. It is one for the independent service commission.

So when Members come and file this Motion, to give the impression that it is our responsibility to be operational in the fight against crime, I say to the Member what you are trying to do is to mislead the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and you know that.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: You are supposed to be a responsible Member of Parliament. I assume that you are an intelligent Member of Parliament.

Hon. Members: Do not assume. [*Laughter*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: Let me just assume for half a second.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: But Members opposite know that, and look at our track record as a government. We would have passed several pieces of legislation. Oftentimes they try to stand in our way, but in spite of that we passed several pieces of legislation in the fight against crime. You would have heard the brilliant contribution of the Member for San Fernando West, the Member for St. Ann's East, the Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, with the number of plans and programmes and initiatives that are geared toward helping young people in this country.

I can tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, when I was a little boy, 90 per cent of these programmes were not accessible to me, and I can tell the young people of this country, get up and make use of the programmes that the Government is putting in place for you, because those programmes are there to develop you, to make use and to make something out of yourself. It does not matter whether you are from Laventille. It does not matter whether you are from Beetham or Sea Lots, or Moruga, or Charlotteville, opportunities are there. Rise up and make use of it.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: PNM opportunities are here, get up and make use of it. They are there for your development, but whilst you do that, be very careful of political hustlers and mocking pretenders.

I listened a short while ago to the Member for St. Augustine. Imagine the Member for St. Augustine stood here a short while ago and talked about the conduct of Members of Parliament. Can you believe that? A Member of Parliament who is noted for activities taking place in Carapo in east Trinidad. I sat here and I could not believe that the Member for St. Augustine is coming here and schooling Members of Parliament on their behaviour. This is hypocrisy of the highest order.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: As a matter of fact, the vast majority of Members on the other side cannot school anyone on this side about parliamentary conduct. They should be ashamed of themselves.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: They should be ashamed of themselves, because as a young Member of Parliament I stood here and I looked at the behaviour of Members opposite, and I held my head in shame, because I share the title of hon. Members of Parliament with all of them, on this side and on that side. We are all hon. Members, but I can tell you—I can tell you—as we are talking about crime and lawlessness, I tell the young people of Trinidad and Tobago, do not look at them. If you want to talk about crime and lawlessness, and you want to talk about conduct in an honourable manner, the last place to look at is the UNC.

Mr. Indarsingh: “You are looking at La Horquetta/Talparo conduct?”

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, there is a certain procedure that you can adopt if you need to make a point. I will not tolerate it.

Mr. Indarsingh: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: No, no need to answer. No need to answer. Proceed, Member.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let me remind this honourable House, and let me remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago that in this Parliament in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, a Member of Parliament was ejected from a national security joint select committee. Remember that, it happened in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. It is now buried and forms part of our history, that a Member of Parliament was ejected from a joint select committee on national security because he found himself in conflict with

what was being discussed. You all remember that? Therefore, I remind Members opposite, and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that the issue of crime transcends all institutions, because we would have seen it live in this Parliament. You can go to our *Hansard* and you would see and you would read.

We had Ministers of National Security in this country whose names were called in international crimes.

Hon. Member: You are talking about Dillon?

Hon. M. Gonzales: FIFA.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The only person recognized at this moment is the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West, please. Proceed.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. This is our history, and I want to remind Members opposite—*[Interruption]* Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member opposite is—

Mr. Indarsingh: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Again Member, I do not want to think that it is bordering along those lines, Members. I do not think it is bordering along those lines, and you are sitting in the Chair representing the Chief Whip, and I think you should be edified as to the functions and the roles that we take in this particular Chamber, so—proceed, Member.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, we talk about the role of the Commissioner of Police and Deputy Commissioners of Police in the fight against crime, because that is very important. It is not our role to exercise supervisory function over the Commissioner of Police and the Deputy Commissioner, as I have explained because of the constitutional remits and the constraints that have been placed upon us as an executive. But one must also recall that for years this country existed

without the appointment of a Commissioner of Police. It is when this Government came into power in 2015, the hon. Prime Minister leading his team, ensured that the legislative framework and the regulatory framework were in place for the appointment of a Commissioner of Police.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the history would show, and the records will show, that the Opposition did not support the Government in the appointment of a Commissioner of Police. And they want to talk about the fight against crime? They want to file a Motion to debate crime? They removed a substantive Commissioner of Police from his job, and refused and/or failed to appoint a Commissioner of Police. It is a PNM Government that put the legislative framework in place for the appointment of a Commissioner of Police.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: And when that Commissioner was appointed, the Opposition abstained. They abstained. Even when the Commissioner of Police was once a Member of the UNC, they abstained. They did not support it. As a matter of fact, they ran to court to ensure that the Order did not come into existence. That is the behaviour of the UNC. And want to come today to debate crime? What is the difference between crime and the UNC, I do not know.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: Mr. Deputy Speaker, 48(6). “Nobody before the Miami courts.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Listen. Again, Member, I would like you to say that—I am sure you can say that differently.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was not speaking to Members on the other side. I am speaking to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. I am speaking to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: And I am telling the people of Trinidad and Tobago—all I am simply saying to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, be careful who speaks to you, because of pretenders and political hustlers. Mr. Deputy Speaker, look at the performance of the PNM Government since 2015. Look at all our plans and our programmes, the laws that we have passed, the different programmes spanning all across various Ministries. We did not have a Life Sport. We never had a Life Sport, that claimed the lives of so many of our young men, and blood flowing through the streets. That is the record of the UNC.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: That is the record of the party of the Member who filed this Motion. The PNM did not dismantle SAUTT. The PNM did not dismantle our capacity to protect our borders by cancelling the contract for the OPVs. That is their record. This Government did not appoint a telephone operator to head the national security agency.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: That is their record. We never declared a state of emergency when we had six murders over three days, and lock up 4,000 young men. That is their record.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: And we did not in the dead of night pass section 34 to save financiers. And now they pretend as though they care about this case in Miami? Hypocrites.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Charles: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Members, hold on, one second. Again, Member for Naparima you are close to the Chair. You are very close in proximity to the

Chair, so sometimes when you think you are saying it in hushed tones, it reaches the ear of the Speaker's Chair. If you want to wind up the debate, you are free to do so any time before the slated time. Other than that, please. Proceed.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much for your protection again, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am not speaking to the Member for Naparima. I am speaking to the people, the peace-loving beautiful citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: He does not have to stay here and listen to me. I am not speaking to him. I am speaking to the people—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, use the proper term in identifying “him” and “he” please.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am not speaking to the hon. Member for Naparima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: I am not speaking to the hon. Member. I am speaking to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I cannot end this contribution by looking at some of the achievements of the Ministry of National Security under the stewardship, difficult task of national security in Trinidad and Tobago as it is—and sometimes I feel it for my colleague, because he is fighting a very, very difficult battle.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member you have two more minutes.

Hon. M. Gonzales: Thank you very much. When I look at the achievement of the Ministry of National Security, under the guidance of the Member for Laventille West, I wish to commend him and to commend his Ministry and all the arms, and the men, the women who continue to do battle for the people of Trinidad and Tobago in the fight against crime.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. M. Gonzales: Mr. Deputy Speaker, the establishment of a joint border protection task force; the upgrade of coastal radar system; the new Coastal and Riverine Patrol Unit operating under the Ministry of National Security; the commissioning of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service Ballistic Recovery Department; the prediction and deterrence and detection strategies would involve increased joint patrols; the establishment of a multiagency task force comprising members of the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, members of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service and the SSA, and the Immigration Division; the establishment of the National Forensic DNA Database; the purchase of equipment for the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service in its aid and its fight against crime in Trinidad and Tobago; the Trinidad and Tobago Canine and Mounted Branch being equipped with some modern technologies to continue to fight.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, again your time has expired.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Fyzabad, and you have 30 minutes.

Dr. Lackram Bodoë (Fyzabad): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute on this very important Motion today in front us, on the issue of crime and the Government's failure in that area.

Before I go into my contribution, it would be remiss of me not to address a few of the issues raised by my friend and colleague, the MP for Lopinot/Bon Air West, and I know that he is heavy these days, a lot of issues with WASA and other public utilities on his mind.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. L. Bodoë: But there are some issues which I feel should not go without being

addressed. The first thing I want to say is we on this side have always supported good law in the interest of and for the benefit of citizens. I want to put that on the record again. My colleague started off well, speaking about the whole of government approach and so on, and saying that the Opposition has to work, and then came on to bash the Opposition. So we agree with the whole, and I want to call it the whole of nation approach, because we talk about the whole of government approach, but my colleague is right. It should be a whole of nation approach.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. L. Bodoë: And that includes the NGOs, the FPOs, all of the communities and so on, but it also includes the Government working with the Opposition, and I want to make that point. We on this side are prepared and willing and able, at any time, at any point, to work with the Government when it comes to the dealing with the issue of crime, because despite what is said on that side, the side opposite, we on this side see no benefit in crime. It is really a myth and a fallacy to say that we in the Opposition look forward to the promulgation and the propagation of crime. That simply is not true, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are not obstructionist. We are willing to work.

You know, it was interesting, again, my colleague went on to espouse the values and the roles of us as Opposition Members. We are very much aware of our roles here and our oaths, and I want to say that we are faithful to our oath of office, but we are not faithful to this PNM Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because of their lack of performance.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. L. Bodoë: If attacking the Opposition is their strategy, then we can see why the crime situation is as it is. I mean, attacking the Opposition, my colleague would

have spent a considerable amount of time on that, and it is unfortunate at the end of his contribution, speaking about the performance of the Government, he ran out of time. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we need no lecture on our role as the Opposition.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, my colleague for Naparima has all reason to file this Motion, and I want to commend him on this Motion

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. L. Bodoë: I want to commend the contributions of all my colleagues who have spoken before me on this side, for some very valuable contributions. I say that the Motion is timely and appropriate, because of the fact that crime is an issue in every constituency. You know, my colleague who spoke before me mentioned about blood in the streets, and it is true. There is blood in the streets of all constituencies, and we should all be concerned here as parliamentarians as to why that is and what is happening, and what we can do about it.

So, again, this Motion is in no way asking for us in this House to don military uniforms and replace the Trinidad and Tobago Police. This Motion does not speak to that at all. I just wanted to make that clear.

4.25 p.m.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. L. Bodoë: My colleague, again, alluded to that fact and, you know, implied that this Motion was asking for us to go out in the streets and do the battle ourselves. That is not the Motion at all.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the fiasco surrounding the appointment of a Commissioner of Police by this PNM Government will be dealt with by some of my other colleagues. And my colleague went into quite a bit about that. And I just want to say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that no Member on this side has any Special Branch report, consuming his attention, when he should be focusing on his job.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, again, I just want to thank you. I want to go into a few issues here with regard to this Motion. It is common knowledge that criminals are committing crime; crimes with impunity day or night. As my colleague for Tabaquite quite rightly stated in her contribution earlier, criminals do not care about laws. They do not consider laws when planning murders, robberies, home invasions, car thefts, rape, et cetera. So, their plan as criminals is to take, Mr. Deputy Speaker. They are not afraid and obviously, in our setting, they are not afraid of the police, the security services, the Minister of National Security and most of all, they are not afraid of this present Government, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Why? Because criminals know that they can get away with it. The dismal detection rate gives them another reason to do the crime and the lack of implementation of laws is another reason.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to focus a little bit on the issues as it affects my constituency. And again, you know, why—when I got my staff to go through a bit of research as to what has been happening, particularly in the constituency of Fyzabad—and I just want to look, you know, well, look at the reports from November 2021 to June of 2022, that is a six-month period, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And just to look at the 29th of November, 2021, *Newsday* article:

“Prison Officer killed in drive-by shooting in Siparia”.

A most frightening, worrisome incident, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And, you see, it is very easy to forget what happens in this country. And this was, you know—and this shows how, you know, how emboldened these criminals are. This is an incident—and, I mean, it gives me no pleasure to repeat this but again, if we do not treat with these things, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are not going to be able to solve it. And this is an incident here, it was a drive-by shooting.

“The...death of a prison officer”—it—“happened so fast”—I am quoting—

“that he did not get a chance to draw his licensed gun.

Nigel Michael Jones, 38...died on the spot at the Fyzabad taxi stand in Siparia.”

That is a very busy area; a quite busy area in Siparia. You know, what is very unfortunate though is that:

“His six-year-old daughter, who was standing with him, was uninjured.”

Well, that is fortunate but it was unfortunate she was there, of course. and:

“She ran off screaming, and a passerby comforted her until relatives arrived and took her away.”

Very, very you know, very worrisome. You know, as a doctor, you know, one could almost describe this as a “clinical execution”. I hate that term but that is exactly what happened. These criminals have, you know, they have gotten to the point where they can commit these crimes with, you know, such accuracy and so on. But it does leave an impact on the society and on persons and the communities and so on.

After that, on November—if we go to February, again, we have headline, *Guardian*:

“Pensioner among two killed in Fyzabad”.

“Sixty-seven-year-old pensioner Worlene Joseph fondly known in his hometown of Fyzabad as Caribbean Fox was shot dead at his home...”

And that is February.

We go into March 21st—and this is also in instructive, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The headline in the *Trinidad Express* of March 21, 2022, that is a couple months ago:

“‘Mammy, I dead, you know’: Murder on the street”.

So:

“Hours after...”

And I quote again with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker:

“Hours after her spoke his final words to her, Leah Allen yesterday called for illegal guns to be taken off the streets.”

And I say this, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as the reports are saying that we have 12,000 illegal guns in the streets of Trinidad and Tobago. And this mother here is calling for illegal guns to be taken off the streets.

“Marvin Allen, 39, of Lezama Trace, South Oropouche was killed during an argument outside his...”—house—“around 2 a.m...”

And I quote, the mom is saying that:

““These guns on the streets, I find they should do something to get rid of them because I see things happen, but I never thought it would have happened to me...””—and so on.

So, that is one of the issues that, you know, we need to address as a Parliament; the issue of the illegal guns.

Again, 15th of April—I am just going down, you know—this was happening again in Fyzabad. This is the very unfortunate incident of a soldier who was killed. He is a constituent of mine in Fyzabad. It happened in San Fernando. Again, a very sad circumstances outside a food place.

And April:

“Fyzabad dad shot dead while repairing car”.

Again, this is someone I know. I do not know the circumstances so I do not want to go into it. But again, it is sad. I mean, this is a family person who was killed in circumstances where it appears that the wrong person was hit. But, you know, it is for the police again to deal with that. So, the point I am making, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is that we do have, you know, we do have an issue. We have, you know,

we have something that we need to treat with. I agree that we as parliamentarians have that responsibility, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

And with regard to the SMART—the Motion speaks about SMART solutions, Mr. Deputy Speaker. And again, when we ask about data, you know—the Government thinks that data is by itself can lead to results. We are saying that SMART plans deal not with data but with the results; with results, Mr. Deputy Speaker. So, you know, in that regard, maybe someone on that side can tell us when they respond, you know, what are their SMART goals for the Forensic Science Centre, for example, and for the ballistics unit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Government can talk until the cows come home about their crime plans, their strategies and statistics. But that sadly, tragically, as we have seen, brings no measure of comfort to citizens who are made to cower in their own homes because of the escalating crime and the outright brazenness of criminals.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with that in mind, you know, it is important to know how citizens react. As a Member of Parliament yourself, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you know, you go out—and I just want to refer to a police meeting. I want to commend the TTPS again for their community outreach programmes which they have resumed following the pandemic, the COVID pandemic, and one was held in Siparia on the 12th of May, 2022. And I just took notes. I am not a note taker but I took notes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I took notes because I thought it was important to understand and to hear what my constituents were saying. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the issues that were raised—and four—there were about five or six—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. L. Bodoë:—there were several—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. L. Bodoë: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I did take notes. There were several constituents who spoke but the point here is what was said. And it is important to know what was said because there was a recurring theme on many occasions, Mr. Deputy Speaker. That is the point I want to make. And one of the recurring themes was the fact the Police Youth Clubs needed more support, more funding. This was an issue that was raised. And interestingly, in that community outreach police meeting, the TTPS themselves looked to us as Members of Parliament, you know, to bring these arguments to the Parliament, in terms of trying to advocate for the resources that are required and, of course, the funding of the Police Youth Clubs because these Police Youth Clubs seem to have an important role in their communities. I am aware as well, it is very vibrant Police Youth Club in Siparia and Fyzabad. And we, of course, as parliamentarians have to try and, you know—try to get the support for them.

It was also said by another resident community policing officers have too little resources. So, again, the issue of resources came about. And, you know, interestingly, my colleague the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West spoke about engagement of the community. And this was interesting because the residents out there came out not only complaining but also offering suggestions and talking about the lack of opportunities. So, there was a judicial officer who came out and said that they love to work with children, they love the youth, they want to work with the police, made the point that rehabilitation was important and so on, but also made the point that there was limited or were limited opportunities for engagement—a citizen engagement in the process.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

The issue of crime, of course, with the cable cutting and so on—and again, you know, it shows, you know, in terms of where we are that criminals are emboldened in terms of being able to go out in these communities and vandalize. It is crime, Madam Speaker, in a sense—I mean, this issue of the cutting of cables and so on. And I just mentioned that because I just want to also throw in one other initiative. It is not only about, you know, talking about crime but it is also about trying to—this debate, I believe, is also about trying to put in some solutions as to where we can go with this, Madam Speaker.

And I just want to commend the initiative of these community watch groups. One in particular, in Fyzabad, has been very good, very effective and very efficient and safe, by the way, because they know the rules. But they have been very effective in terms of being able to pick up, you know, those criminals who are coming into the villages and so on, and trying to commit crime, whether it is by way of stealing vehicles or by way, you know, of stealing cables and so on. So that is also an important community effort that needs to be commended. But it also needs to be supported in some sort of formal way, Madam Speaker, by the Government, these community watch groups, Madam Speaker. And this was an issue that was raised as well in this meeting.

Another important issue, you know—again, if we listen to citizens out there, we have brilliant citizens and great suggestions, you know. One young man got up, he is 27 years old, he is a sociology graduate. He spoke about the role of the Trinidad and Tobago Cadet Force, the importance of the Police Youth Club, again, and he spoke about the lack of a youth space in Siparia. And I thought that was a very interesting concept, Madam Speaker, the lack of a youth space. I kind of understood what he was saying and that is something we can look at. And he also spoke about no formal structure for citizens to invest in policing.

So, perhaps the Minister of National Security and the Government, if they listen—if they are willing to listen, these are thoughts and these are ideas that are coming from the citizenry who are directly affected by crime and perhaps we should be listening a bit more and taking on because there are great suggestions that come out of these meetings, Madam Speaker.

But, you know, I left the meeting with the feeling—and, you know, my colleague for La Brea was also in that meeting because that area encompasses both our constituencies. And I am sure he will agree that we both left that meeting with the feeling that almost, you know, the leadership of the TTPS was asking us, short of begging; just short of begging, asking and hoping and expecting that we as Members of Parliament will come to this Parliament and raise these issues, Madam Speaker, in a way, you know, that will create and provide the resources and so on that are necessary.

Madam Speaker, so, I just wanted to close with one issue here and this is the issue of crime as a public health issue, and this is an interesting concept. And, in fact, the Prime Minister himself is reported on the 13th of May, 2022, by Sean Douglas in the *Newsday* of saying that we should:

“...Treat”—with—“crime as a public-health issue”.

I want to throw out this concept to add a different perspective to some of the solutions that we can look at. And I quote the Prime Minister as saying:

“Saying crime was now ‘unusually horrendous...’”

And the Prime Minister himself has admitted that crime was “unusually horrendous”. The PM said:

“...it should viewed as a public health issue as much as typhoid and malaria...”—and so on.

So, there is thinking now, a different approach in terms of, you know—one other

approach that we could use to treat with crime, a more holistic approach. Because, Madam Speaker, you know, crime has effects on individuals, it has effects on communities and we just came out or we are coming out—I should not say “we just came out”, we are not out yet but we are coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic and we saw the mental health issues. But, Madam Speaker, there are studies which have shown the effect on crime on individuals and it is quite serious, you know. It is quite serious. I just want to list a few here if you will allow me, Madam Speaker. And these are some of the studies—the findings of studies with regard to victims of crimes. You feel angry, upset or experience other stronger emotions. And the reason for this is that, you know, an illness or an accident is something that you did not expect. It was not something that was planned. But when a crime is perpetrated against you, you know that you were targeted as a victim. You feel angry because you know somebody targeted you and you get those emotions, you know.

They say in some people’s cases things suddenly fall apart for you. Some people’s lives are destroyed, not necessarily by the physical harm but by the mental and emotional stress. You can also show, you know, physical symptoms, headaches, nausea, sleeping problems are quite common, jumpiness. You know, sometimes it is very difficult for you to operate in a normal setting because you think somebody is going to pull a gun on you or something like that. So, it changes your life forever.

And this is very interesting, you know, Madam Speaker. One of the things that was found is that you blame yourself, thinking you should have done things differently. And this can haunt you for the rest of your life. You are thinking—you are going about your business normal, something happens and then you end up blaming yourself because you are thinking you should not have been there or you

should have done something differently. You know, it is not easy and nice to live with something like that. And, of course, you can develop long-term problems such as depression, anxiety-related illness including post-traumatic stress disorder.

And, Madam Speaker, you know, a very, very interesting finding here is that—and again, I speak to the issue of a public health issue. And there was one study which showed that in neighbourhoods where crime is prevalent, you have an increase in obesity. Now, why is that? The reason is very simple, Madam Speaker. There is an increase in obesity because you are afraid to go out. You do not want to go out and exercise. You do not want to go out and walk in the park. You do not want to go out and walk in dark and therefore, you end up staying in your homes, okay?—and you end up leading an unhealthy lifestyle. So, in addition to the emotional and anxiety-related factors, there is also the physical impact on your health, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, as I close this short contribution, I just want to say that, I am fully in support of the Motion brought by my colleague the Member for Naparima. I agree, you know, that this is something that needs to be debated and, you know, I fully support the Motion:

“...that this House reprimand this Government for its failure to effectively prevent the surge in criminal activity in our country.”

I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Arima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Penelope Beckles): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I would like to state at the outset my total and absolute rejection of this Motion that has been brought by the

Member of Parliament for Naparima.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Beckles: And I want to start by making reference to the statement made today by the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine. The Member of Parliament for St. Augustine, in making reference to this Motion, indicated that the hon. Prime Minister lacks the qualification and temperament to lead this country. And let me remind the Member of Parliament for St. Augustine that the people of Trinidad and Tobago rejected the United National Congress and voted in total and absolute support for the hon. Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley to be the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Beckles: Madam Speaker, the hon. Member for St. Augustine would have us believe that the hon. Prime Minister simply dismisses matters relating to women and girls. And I want to remind my colleagues opposite that the Ministry of gender affairs falls under Office of the Prime Minister, with the hard-working and distinguished Member of Parliament for Tobago East having that responsibility.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Beckles: And there are not many countries in the world where you will have a Prime Minister taking responsibility for gender affairs. And I want to congratulate the work being done by the hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy and that of the hon. Prime Minister.

I want to also state that it was just yesterday that Trinidad and Tobago was elected to CEDAW which is the committee of the United Nations on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. And when that convention—well, first of all let me say that between 2019 and 2022, Trinidad and Tobago, since we actually signed onto that convention, it would have been the first

time under the leadership of Dr. Keith Rowley that Trinidad and Tobago was elected. And I want to say that Trinidad and Tobago got 158 out of 185 votes, and it was actually the highest number of votes for any country during that election in 2019.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Beckles: And again, as I said, yesterday we were elected again. Now—so that to give the impression that Trinidad and Tobago—sorry, the People’s National Movement and the Government under Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley has no interest in women, just brush aside issues related to women, let me say that is absolutely and totally false. But I also want to share with this Parliament some of the programmes that are being done under the Ministry of gender affairs. And just recently, that is in January of 2022, working together with the United Nations, several training programmes were developed with that partnership between the Ministry of gender affairs and the UN Women for the purposes of training women and men as well in these very difficult areas relating to gender-based violence.

I also want to say that on 28th of June, there will be a session on “Death before divorce: why are some men unable to walk away”. And that is a town hall meeting and that meeting will be organized by the Ministry—the division of gender affair in the Ministry of the Office of the Prime Minister, and I want to recommend that persons who have interest tune into that meeting.

Now, we are all aware that this issue of crime, justice, is an extremely difficult and complicated matter. What is important for the listening public, in particular, is that I think they are becoming quite accustomed to this Opposition filing Motions with the sole intent of making the Government look bad. And when you listen to the contributions of speakers on the other side, you know that they have been totally unsuccessful with that objective. The impression that they want

to give the public that everybody who gets killed, every woman who is killed, every woman who is raped, that it is as a result of some activity or inactivity of this Government. And I just want to use an example.

The hon. Member for St. Augustine, the hon. Member for San Juan/Barataria, the hon. Chaguanas East as well as the hon. Leader of the Opposition has from time to time made reference, including today, of what took place in the Heights of Aripo as it relates to Andrea Bharatt and the other body that was found. And their focus is almost exclusively on the fact that there are no cameras and there are no cameras, and they want to the impression that the Government does not care about people of Aripo and, of course, by extension, the Member of Parliament. And we all know that this totally and absolutely false.

What I find very interesting is that yes, a vigil was held just on the outskirts, actually almost on the highway to the entrance of the village; not in the village, outside of the village, and they are continuously referring to the village of Aripo. You know, what I find interesting is whether or not they have actually gone into the village of Aripo and actually spoken to the people. I want to thank the Commissioner of Police; I want to thank my colleague, Minister Fitzgerald Hinds as well as the business community who have worked together with Commissioner of Police and the Ministry of National Security, and I would like to announce that the CCTV apparatus was set up in the Heights of Aripo on 17th of June, 2022.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Beckles: The cameras are high-definition cameras providing surveillance and footage over a large scope of the area. The CCTV has a direct linkage with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service Northern Division operational centre. Personnel in the operational centre can view and monitor activities at the particular junction. In addition, activities at the location are also recorded and can be

reviewed over a period of time. The operational centre has direct communication with the patrols that are assigned to patrol that area and could direct the patrols accordingly depending on any negative occurrences. The TTDF, the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, also provides patrol support to the TTPS in the Aripo area. And, at present, they are constantly carrying out particular defence operations in that area.

So, I hope now that they know that the cameras have been set up, that they will not continue every Monday morning talking about the Heights of Aripo in a very negative way. And I just want to say that I have the good fortune, as the Member of Parliament, to represent that area. It is a very quiet and peaceful village. And it is very unfortunate that in making their comments they have not focused on the activities of the criminals who are going into that area to disrupt the lives of the people, but what they have focused on exclusively is what the Government has not done. No condemnation of those who are going to disrupt the lives of the people who live there, just the Government, “the Government did not put up cameras and the Government did not put cameras.” Well, now the cameras are up and I think it is very clear for all of us who are in Trinidad and Tobago, we know the importance of cameras and we know the importance of streetlights because that is another issue that they raised. And I want to acknowledge the Member of Parliament for Lopinot/Bon Air West who visited the area with me and installed several streetlights there to make the lives of the citizens who live in that area much safer. But we also know—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. P. Beckles: We also know, Madam Speaker, that when you look at the data, a lot crime is committed in day time, in the broad daylight.

I want to now, again, make reference to a comment that was made by the

hon. Member for St. Augustine who spoke about the fact that, at least according to her, that the hon. Dr. Rowley is not—I want to make sure that I have is exact words, but basically not qualified to lead. And she also made reference to the fact that young people basically are listening and can be affected and influenced by what happens in and out of the—in the Parliament. But I want to say, people are affected by what goes on in and out of the Parliament. And as we debate this Motion today and we talk about crime, and we talk about the upsurge in crime, and we talk about the fact that the Government is not doing enough about the crime, let me just say this when we talk about the influence of parliamentarians and crime.

Madam Speaker, I was—someone sent me a flyer that the hon. Leader of the Opposition read during a meeting and this was what was highlighted on the flyer. It was actually a genuine activity that was taking place in the constituency of La Horquetta/Talparo, a joint activity to address concerns about farmers as it relates to crime that was taking place in this area.

4.55 p.m.

And this is what the hon. Leader of the Opposition read during a meeting of hers. “How to land grab and get away with it.” Now, could you imagine that later on in the said meeting someone during the meeting actually corrected her, the hon. Leader of the Opposition, and said to her, that was not what the flyer said? The flyer said, that the hon. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo, Foster Cummings and myself, together with the Heliconia Foundation—the purpose of that meeting was to deal with issues of land tenure.

And could you believe that they are comfortable, in my view, to commit what I consider to be a crime, to mislead the population of Trinidad and Tobago, to mislead the farmers, because there were issues that were raised as it relates to the issues of larceny, robbery, people being killed in that area of Wallerfield and

environs. And therefore the hon. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo and myself discussed this matter and we believe, because we are constituencies that bound, we decided that we would have a meeting and we would invite the farmers. And hundreds of farmers came out on Saturday the 14th of May, so that we could deal with this issue.

And when it is that, you know, you want to go so far that you can actually superimpose something that is totally false to give the impression to the public that the hon. Member for La Horquetta/Talparo and myself are literally committing some sort of or being part of some sort of criminal activity. I want to say that is not just unfortunate but we are dealing with a Motion on crime and we are talking about how parliamentarians should and should not behave and how they influence members of the public. And this is a typical example when we talk about how as parliamentarians we could influence the way how people think and what people do, this is a typical example. And that is why today I totally, totally condemn this Motion that is being brought by the Member of Parliament for Naparima. Because we in Trinidad and Tobago, we ask ourselves what about the value systems. Is it always that everything is about the Government and the Government?

You know I recently had an experience where my husband called and he said to me that somebody is outside, actually on the highway, could you believe that, on the highway using a rod to pick avocados from our tree, on the highway. I mean, you know, he stopped and asked the guy, he had a bucket, just picking. I mean, that is—I suppose that if you were to read this Motion carefully and you listen to the contributions of the Members opposite, well, I mean, it is the Government that is actually causing this person to do that. And it is ridiculous.

I have not heard any discussions about people taking responsibility for their actions. I have heard absolutely nothing where there is any kind of discussion as it

relates to parenting. We talked a lot about violence in schools. So that the easiest thing to do is to talk about what the Ministry of Education is not doing and what the Minister is not doing. It is very easy to talk about the fact about the issue of road infrastructure and the fact that if you do not have proper roads that are paved that is part, the Government did not do it. If you do not have street lights, is the Government. If it is that the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government did not do certain things he is responsible for crime and so you go on. The Minister of Finance, every single Ministry, Ministry of Public Utilities, no water.

So that all of these things when you combine together it is always the Government and the Government. Yes, the Government has as—the ones who are responsible for leading the country. We determine the policies, we determine—we come, we debate the budget, but, I mean, at the end of the day when you come before this honourable House and you have to present a Motion, your responsibility is to be fair, is to be honest and to make sure that when you put forward your Motion that you make sure that you tell the public of Trinidad and Tobago the truth, as we would say, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

So, Madam Speaker, therefore in my very brief intervention I want to say that the public of Trinidad and Tobago, the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago both in 2015 and in 2020 they have demonstrated their clear confidence in the leadership of Dr. Rowley, Dr. Keith Christopher Rowley and the People's National Movement and that is why we are here today and we as a Government will continue to do all that we can to ensure that we have a safe Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you very much.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Arnold Ram (*Caroni Central*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity afforded to me this afternoon to contribute to this private Motion brought by my colleague, the Member for Naparima. And let me say at the very onset that I think it is a very timely Motion in light what is happening in our country. Madam Speaker, permit me just briefly to respond to my colleague the Member for Arima on a couple of points that the hon. Member raised.

Firstly, the hon. Member indicated that this Opposition is filing Motions to make the Government look bad. Madam Speaker, may I indicate to my hon. friend that the role of the Opposition is to call the Government to account—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. A. Ram:—and the filing of this Motion does exactly that. We are asking the Government to account for your performance in respect of the level of crime in this nation. So I think my hon. friend may have been misguided in terms of indicating that we are filing frivolous Motions in this Parliament.

Madam Speaker, another rebuttal point from my friend and colleague on the other side, the Member for Arima, is in respect of the CCTV camera in Aripo. And the hon. Member indicated that the Member for Chaguanas East, the Member for St. Augustine, the Member for Siparia has indicated time and time again in different forums about the lack of CCTV cameras in Aripo. Madam Speaker, may I indicate to my colleague that if this Government was serious about crime, if this Government was serious about solving crime that they would have installed those cameras almost immediately—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. A. Ram:—almost immediately upon the discovery of not one, not two, but three bodies in Aripo. Their belated response, Madam Speaker, leaves much to be desired. So, Madam Speaker, whilst we are happy, whilst we are now happy that

there are now CCTV cameras in Aripo we indicate to this Government that we were not happy with the timeline in which this was done to protect our women and our children who has been dumped in the Heights of Aripo.

Madam Speaker, the hon.Member indicated that someone was taking and picking avocado, what we normally call “zaboca” also in Trinidad, local parlance, and it is almost as though the Government is causing people to do this. Madam Speaker, if all your programmes, your social programmes, your educational programmes and all of the vocational programmes in this country are lacking, are non-existent, then these are the types of activities and criminality which will occur in this country. So my colleague is saying that, you know, all aspects, all aspects of what is taking place in this country is a result of, whatever it is, but it is always to blame the Government.

May I remind my hon. friend that it was the Member for Tobago West who indicated, “we are in charge, deal with it.”

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. A. Ram: They want the position but they do not want the responsibility.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. A. Ram: And that is what this Government is about. So, Madam Speaker, as I now get into the crux of my contribution this afternoon after those few rebuttal points, I say men may lie, men may hide the truth and we all know from recent happenings men have lied and men have hidden the truth. But facts and figures and stats they do not lie and they paint a true picture, a true reality of what is happening. Basically crime is out of control in this country, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. A. Ram: The citizenry is afraid. It is not even safe to walk in the streets of our capital without fear of being robbed, shot or killed. And it is not just restricted to

the capital city, anywhere in this country people are afraid to venture out after 6.00 p.m. And that is a reality that we face. Crime continues to be unabated in this country.

Madam Speaker, I know of many of my constituents who are afraid to even go out in their own yards to enjoy, to gaze at the full moon, because of what this country has become. And we in this Parliament we have a responsibility and we as a responsible Opposition have a responsibility to bring this timely Motion to call the Government to account. I know of families who have to keep their doors locked in the middle of the day, and my good friend, the hon. Member for Arima also indicated in her contribution a lot of crimes are committed in the daytime. So she is adding to my narrative and my point, that families have to keep their doors locked even at midday, Madam Speaker. And that is the reality that we face Trinidad and Tobago.

Criminals are roaming the streets free while we remain imprisoned in our homes. Criminals happy, it seems that way, Madam Speaker, the criminals are happy. They are in their glee, they rob and plunder and they dance while doing so. The country will know of a robbery which took place in Penal not Penal/Debe, in Penal and the person with the firearm of some sort, was dancing. So the criminals are dancing while they take advantage of our poor citizens. The citizens, Madam Speaker, are at the mercy of the barrel of a gun and this Government is impotent and powerless to stop it. The PNM rhetoric is no longer working. The citizens are up against it.

Madam Speaker, as the saying goes, “who feels it knows”, a popular song by Buju Banton, “who feels it knows”, and it is very pertinent to what our citizens are facing now, Madam Speaker. Over the weekend, 10 murders in this long weekend and there is little confidence that the citizens have in this Government or in this

administration to solve the crime woes that we now face. And to add insult to injury, as though, Madam Speaker, we have the Commissioner of Police saying, crime is not out of control. I read that in the newspaper, in response to 10 murders over the week, crime is not out of control. And where would someone like the Commissioner of Police, I mean, would he get that feeling, that feeling that you know, crime is not out of control? It has to be that the person that he reports to has a lacklustre approach.

We have the Member for Laventille West indicating that his duty as Minister of National Security is not to make you feel safe, is not to make you feel safe. Imagine that, Minister of National Security, unheard about anywhere in the world, someone has said something as damning as that, they would have been forced to resign. But not in Trinidad and Tobago, not under a PNM Government, Madam Speaker, and I think that is where the crux of the issue lies. You know sometimes—you said, you know, when you are having a conversation, admittance is the first step, you have to admit your shortcomings. But if the Member for Laventille West indicates that he is not responsible for crime, sorry, not responsible for making you feel safe, that drives what those who are reporting to him will take a cue from him on what he has to say. So, Madam Speaker, the PNM Government is responsible for where we are today and sadly we did not get here today over the last week, over the last months, over the last year or even two. We have gotten here because of what happened in the past. It has been a protracted period which has caused us to reach where we have reached.

Madam Speaker, we are here today because of decades of mismanagement of our national security apparatus and more importantly because of the PNM association, the criminal gangs through the URP and other make works—

Madam Speaker: Okay, so—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(6), please.

Madam Speaker: Okay, so uphold the objection, Member for Caroni Central. I would ask you to withdraw that and find another way to say it.

Mr. A. Ram: I kindly withdraw, Madam Speaker, and thank you for your guidance. Madam Speaker, it is documented that there has been certain associations between Members who were in government at one point in time and criminal gangs. It is documented. And my job here is to remind this nation and others who have conveniently forgotten about this. Madam Speaker, to put it into some context, let me first remind of the statistics that people may have forgotten, as I say facts do not lie.

Madam Speaker, permit me to quote, to publicly attribute information to its authors. Permit me to quote from the report of the:

“Commission of Enquiry Appointed to Enquire into the Events Surrounding the Attempted Coup 27th of July 1990,”—published on March 2014. At paragraph 10—

Mr. Manning: Madam Speaker, 48(1), please.

Madam Speaker: So, Member I will give you a little leeway to see where you going with that, but that is about 30 years ago. This speaks to the current scenario, so I am giving you one minute to see where you are going with that and then I will intervene if necessary.

Mr. A. Ram: Certainly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I indicated very earlier on that we did not get here today. It has been decades of mismanagement of our national security apparatus which has caused us to be where we are today. Madam Speaker, just like and let me draw an analogy, there have been 45,000 plus students who did not access learning via virtual means over two years. And, Madam Speaker, we have no indication from the Minister of Education whether upon the

reopening of schools, physical school that is, whether those persons have attended school or not, whether they have dropped out, whether the Ministry of Education has reached out to these persons to offer additional assistance seeing that for almost two years they did not attend school.

Now, Madam Speaker, what will be the scenario? Now I do not know the figures because the Minister of Education, we talk about data driven activity, is yet to confirm how much of these students have actually dropped out. Let us say for argument sake, Madam Speaker, there are 20,000 persons who have dropped out from school over this period of time, you are looking into the future of approximately 20,000 persons who may not have the ability to earn an income and when they do not have the ability to earn an income, Madam Speaker, in most instances they turn to a life of crime. And that is what this debate is about, it is about crime. And what we are asking the Government to do is to do their homework. The Member for Naparima spoke about data driven solutions and that is the kind of information we require of the Minister of Education and those responsible on the other side in respect of, Madam Speaker, giving the information and being held response for the job that they have.

So, Madam Speaker, I say that to bring it back to the point that this crime situation that is existing today did not happen yesterday. It is decades of mismanagement. And in 2002, according to the Commission of Enquiry, there were:

“...36% of all murders were gang-related and many of the victims were connected to the URP.”

The victims of crime, the murders were connected to the URP. It goes on to say:

“But in 2008, there were 295 recorded gang-related murders; that is to say, 54% of the total number of murders”—for that year which stand at—

“(547)”.

Madam Speaker, when someone, you know, look at crime rate and criminality in a country they normally measure that by the level of murders taking place in the country. And we have consistently seen that when a PNM Government is in office that the crime statistic, and the statistics are there—

Mr. de Nobriga: 55(1), it has been over and over dealt with by those on the opposite side.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So Member I will caution you that you are bordering on tedious repetition. So this is one caution, if you are going that way this is a warning. Okay.

Mr. A. Ram: Yeah, I am guided, please, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, and I was just saying that to indicate that what the reality is on the ground, what the statistic say and I will move on. My contention here, Madam Speaker—and I see my colleague from San Fernando East standing, that I think in my opinion the turning point in our history it was then Prime Minister, the hon. Patrick Manning, decided to meet with community leaders, with community leaders—

Mr. Manning: Madam Speaker, 48(1), please. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: So, Member while I understand you are trying to build some context I do not think the Motion as crafted by your colleague allows for that sort of things. He is talking about what exists now, the failure to provide measurable, smart solutions and so on, so I would ask you to come to present day, all right, please.

Mr. A. Ram: Madam Speaker, it says, at the third recital:

“And whereasthe Government has consistently ignored and, through their incompetence—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker—

Mr. A. Ram:—added to the fundamental—

Madam Speaker: So, Member, I have ruled, please continue—

Mr. A. Ram: Pardon.

Madam Speaker: All right, I have ruled, please continue, okay.

Mr. A. Ram: Thank you. Dealing with the third recital:

“And whereasthe Government has consistently ignored and, through their incompetence, added to the fundamental causes of crime, while focusing on punitive measures instead of preventative measures;”

Madam Speaker, the Motion speaks of the Government consistently ignoring the fundamental causes of crime and that is where I ground my contribution on to indicate that the fundamental causes of crime did not happen yesterday.

Madam Speaker: Yes, I am not asking for an explanation. I have already ruled. So if you want to deal with recital three, deal with recital three. I have already ruled on something that you wanted to speak about.

Mr. A. Ram: Certainly, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: I am not asking for justification.

Mr. A. Ram: Madam Speaker, you know sometimes when persons are in opposition and when they are in government and they speak sometimes on the same issue—

Madam Speaker: Member I am not hearing, I am really not hearing.

Mr. A. Ram: Madam Speaker, permit me to rely on a famous quote and I will give the date of the quote, it was the 18th January, 2009, and it was an *Express* article written by Darryl Heeralal. And this is what the person had to say:

“I say without fear anyone who is directing my children towards URP is doing a disservice to my children. I don’t want them in URP because the worse thing we can do is direct our children towards URP.

All I have to do is to take 20 gangs, URP gangs and make murders take place, you know. If I want an army around me...”—

Mr. Manning: Madam Speaker, 48(6), please. It is a quote from a media person who was fired from making racist statement.

Madam Speaker: No, no, no, continue.

Mr. A. Ram: Thank you.

“If I want an army around me I can get it, you know, because when I came as MP I meet...”—you know. “I meet who use URP to set up an army, para-military unit, you know.”

And, Madam Speaker, this quote was from no other person than an hon. Minister of National Security, Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds who made his comments in 2003 after then Prime Minister, met community leaders at Ambassador Hotel.

So that is what the hon. Member had to say then.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), 48(6) and 55(1(b)).

Madam Speaker: Okay, so Member for Caroni Central in terms of the quote, even though that is a quote that you are referring to it becomes your statement. And I will rule that it does impute improper motives which is 48(6), okay. So regardless that it is a quote that you are getting from the newspaper it is really your statement. All right, so I would ask you to withdraw that and continue.

Mr. A. Ram: I kindly withdraw the statement in light of your ruling. Madam Speaker, I get the feeling that my colleagues on the other side know, are all too familiar with where this level of crime and criminality all started.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Standing Order 48(6) and 48(1)(b). And again he has defying your rulings.

Madam Speaker: All right, so, Member, again on 48(6), okay. I am not sure where your statement is going, but as far as what you have said I am cautioning

you. I uphold 48(6), please continue.

Mr. A. Ram: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, just permit me, as I almost wrap up to respond to the Minister, the hon. Minister of Education who spoke about the awards of scholarship and bursaries in her contribution. And in her contribution she spoke—and additionally the Member for Laventille West also indicated, one Ms. Crichlow who was granted a scholarship and the way that it changed the lives and the livelihood of those connected to Ms. Crichlow.

Madam Speaker, in response and nobody has responded really to the Minister of Education, scholarships and bursaries would have decreased from a number of 400 in 2014 to a number of, approximately 100 this year. But during all these years there has been secrets scholarships taking place from the Ministry of—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 55(1)(b), three speakers opposite have gone into that already.

Mr. Charles: Where did they come from?

Madam Speaker: I will give you some leeway.

Mr. A. Ram: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think my colleague may have been in a different debate because I was here sitting all afternoon and no one responded to that point, please. So, Madam Speaker, what I am saying is that there has been a freedom of information request made by the Indo-Trinbago Equality Council and ITEC, that is I-T-E-C and there is an article of Wednesday 02, December, 2009, by one Andre Badoo who indicated that there has been a number of scholarships which were granted to individuals over these years.

Madam Speaker: Member, Member, I am getting a little difficulty in hearing you. I do not know if it is that the mike is not properly placed so that you are coming in and out. So maybe if you could fix the mike that I can hear your contribution.

Mr. A. Ram: There was a freedom of information request, Madam Speaker, from

the Indo-Trinbago Equality Council, and there is an article—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1), what this have to do with crime and criminality?

5.25 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Well I give you some leeway, please.

Mr. A. Ram: And I indicated that I was responding to the Minister of Education if the hon. Member was listening. I know there may be some difficulty if he was not hearing. It may have been the mike was not—

Madam Speaker: Member, I have ruled. So speak so that I can hear and continue. Use your time wisely.

Mr. Ram: Certainly. There was a request for freedom of information under the Freedom of Information Act by the Indo-Trinbago Equality Council, and in this article a number of persons would have benefited from bursaries under the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, and amongst those were, Laurel Lezama Lee Singh in the amount of \$500,000 to peruse—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker—

Mr. Ram:—an LLB—

Mr. Deyalsingh:—Standing Order 48(1), please—

Mr. Al-Rawi: And (6). She is a Member of the [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Deyalsingh: And (6).

Madam Speaker: So in terms of 48(1), really you need to show the relevance. Okay? You are about talking bursaries having been given, which is what the Minister has said. So let me hear the relevance of what you are using this information for.

Mr. Ram: Yes. So, Madam Speaker, the relevance of it is that both the Minister of Education and the Member for Laventille West, when he spoke, spoke about a Ms.

Crichlow who would have benefited from a scholarship and the impact that scholarship would have had on the person's life in terms of getting them out of a life of crime and criminality. So in response to that, I am just putting on record, Madam Speaker, those persons who would have benefited from scholarships under the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, Standing Order 48(1) please, and 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Well certainly on 48(1) I rule that it is irrelevant because this is not a debate about bursaries and scholarships. Bursaries and scholarships were mentioned in a particular context. Okay? So that I rule on 48(1) that is irrelevant. Please go on to something else.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in light of your ruling and in light of the notes I have made, I want to conclude my presentation here this afternoon, and to express and endorse this timely Motion by the Member for Naparima before this House. I thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Mayaro.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Rushton Paray (Mayaro): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, Madam Speaker, I rise with mixed feelings to contribute to the debate on this Motion. On one hand, I am extremely pleased to add my voice to this, what I would call a very patriotic and conscientious Motion—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Paray:—brought by my distinguished colleague, the hon. Member for Naparima. I warmly commend the Member for bringing the dreadful state of crime to this Parliament due to his deep concern for the welfare of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and also that we are a country that is slowly becoming, and in some

space, almost the most violent small state in the entire world, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, I join the hon. Member for Naparima in denouncing this administration for its failure to effectively prevent the scourge of criminal activity in our country. On the other hand, Madam Speaker, I fully believe that there should have been no need for this Motion if the Government had delivered on all of their 2015 promises that they made during the general election. You would recall, Madam Speaker, that there was a Minister of National Security who came to Parliament each and every Friday and boasted about a menu of measures that he said would bring an end to the crime scourge. Well, Madam Speaker, unfortunately, the Minister absolutely and famously failed in that action to the point he was removed from his Cabinet post and you could say that he is no longer on the menu as well. And Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, has now become the sixth most brutal and vicious place to live in, and that is in—

Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. R. Paray: It is not in a newsletter, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, in my contribution today, I would spend some time to look at the devastating effect—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Speaker, I rise on Standing Order 48(1). Insofar as there is no source of reference, I therefore debate the relevance. It is a very dangerous statement on *Hansard*.

Madam Speaker: So Member, if maybe you can give us your reference. Yes?

Mr. R. Paray: Madam Speaker, I will withdraw. I do not have the exact source, but I know it was IDB—

Hon. Members: Ahhhhhhh.

Mr. R. Paray: Madam Speaker, it was on an IDB report—

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk*]

Surge in Criminal Activity
Mr. Paray (cont'd)

2022.06.24

Mr. Hinds: Withdraw.

Madam Speaker: So are you withdrawing or are you saying it in—

Mr. R. Paray: I withdraw.

Madam Speaker:—your own explanation?

Mr. R. Paray: I withdraw. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Paray: Madam Speaker, I would devote my contribution to look at the devastating effect of crime on business and investment in Trinidad and Tobago, and this will speak specifically to the fourth and final recital in the Member for Naparima's Motion, which reads:

“*And whereas* the failure to effectively address crime has created social, political, economic and cultural crises of immeasurable proportions”

Madam Speaker, it is an accepted fact that criminal activity, it hurts investments in both the domestic—or for both domestic and international entrepreneurs who are seeking opportunities here in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, with respect to local business the impact is obvious. Patrons run scared of indulging in night-time entertainment and activity especially those business activities where you have to have your cash on your person to make point of sales transaction and so on. Madam Speaker, they are afraid of walking in business districts or even patronizing your local coffee shop or even the grocery at times.

Madam Speaker, if you will permit me to read from the *Guardian Newspaper* on May 9, 2022, one of our business leaders, Mr. Vivek Sharron, he was quoted in saying:

When criminals come into your business place it leads to robberies and death. When they come to rob you they kill you one time, and then search and take what they need.

Madam Speaker, Mr. Sharron tells of grief and devastation.

I would also like to briefly cite, for the purpose of this debate, Madam Speaker, a couple other of our business leaders who have made statements in the public domain. The President of the Greater San Fernando Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Kiran Singh, he too made a comment that:

“The statistics prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that members of the business community are targeted by criminals.”

Madam Speaker, Mr. Singh went on to make a comment in the *Express Newspaper* on May 21, 2022—and, Madam Speaker, these are all recent comments—that business operators:

“...are prey to criminals.”

And referred to the brutal murders of two brothers who ran a hardware store.

Now, Madam Speaker, he goes on to say that many crimes are not reported in mainstream media. So some of them, many of them, go unnoticed by the national media, but it impacts the psyche of the average man. And the Member for Fyzabad spoke about the mental and the medical issues that sometimes the population face when they are fatigued by the level of crime in the country, Madam Speaker. That impacts business and business opportunity because of that mental state of our citizenry. When they are uncomfortable they are unprepared to venture outside of their home for entertainment and so on, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, then we have the Cunupia Chamber of Commerce. They too spoke about the killing of a 52-year-old businessman some time ago, and the Chamber, they lamented the fact that Cunupia has been a place, a very laid back type of community in years gone and that is now changing. The President of that Chamber, Madam Speaker, Mr. Rasheed Ali, he too is reported in the *Express* of May 8th as bemoaning what he calls “free ranging criminals” and the spread of

lawlessness. Madam Speaker, when you have our captains of industry making these comments and they are justified, it really sets a tone in the national space that suppresses the ability of our citizenry to move freely, and when the citizenry can move freely money moves freely from a business perspective, and that is causing a serious concern for an already struggling business sector. Madam Speaker, he told the media that some criminals are extorting protection money from some business people. So not only they are scaring the consumer, they are actually going into business places and they are extorting money and saying, look, if you do not pay us this fee, whether it is monthly, weekly, bimonthly, we may act on that in a very negative way, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, finally I want to quote the San Juan Business Association President, Mr. Jason Roach. He said that:

“...criminals are playing...mas...”—in his community.

Now Mr. Roach, he went on to make a comment in the *Newsday* on February 25, 2022, after “Mr. Brian Manswell and his staff at Reliable Appliances were attacked and beaten by bandits”. Madam Speaker, he made a very passionate comment which really sets the tone for the context of what the Member for Naparima in terms of his Motion today. He says:

“The way we are today cannot be the way we go forward.”

And I think the intent of the Motion today, Madam Speaker, is to bring to the fore, through the Parliament, to the Government, that things are not well in the country in terms of the state of crime and criminal activity, and it is our hope that the Government, for whatever they are doing, they ramp up and they look to do some cost redirection to bring us out of where we are so we can speak directly to what Mr. Roach has said.

Madam Speaker, the names that we have just called in terms of the

commentary that has been made in the public domain, I do not want these names to be used as statistics, as numbers. These are all hardworking nationals who have loved ones, they have employees. They are doing the right things. They are doing the right things legally. They are conducting their business. They are doing what it takes to make sure that both their families and employees have a livelihood going forward. These gentlemen, these men and women, are really the pillars of our society and what you will refer to as the salt of the earth. These are all people, Madam Speaker, that are playing their part in making Trinidad and Tobago a better place for all of us. They are absolutely law-abiding citizens, Madam Speaker, however it is no secret—it is in the public domain—the criminals have launched an attack. These very same businessmen and their employees are being robbed, murdered, and there is an increasing band of armed and sadistic bandits who do not fear being caught and prosecuted, Madam Speaker. They have no fear absolutely.

The criminals, Madam Speaker, they are turning their guns on business investors, and coming right off after the COVID-19 pandemic and the struggles that business had to go through to stay afloat, now you have this ramp up in criminal activity putting further pressures on business and businessmen. In other words, Madam Speaker, the criminal element, it is really hitting the business class when they are already down, and the Motion that is before us today really speaks to a bit of the silence and the poor communication that the Government is being ineffective in dealing with the crime situation. I have no doubt, I—Madam Speaker, I am very thoughtful and mindful that there is not an MP who leaves home in the morning to go to their office, to go to their jobs, to come to this Parliament, and say, “Look, I am going to do a rotten job today.” I do not think any of us does that. But what is happening, Madam Speaker, the State, the Government has a duty of action, and there is a huge disconnect between all the great things that

the Members on the other side spoke of today, all the plans, the actions, the activities, the legislation, but it is not resonating with what is happening on the ground and it is being reflected in the newspaper by, as I said, the captains of industries who are speaking on behalf of all their members.

So, Madam Speaker, you know most businesses because of the crime situation they are having a lot of difficulty in meeting their commitments, their rent, their payrolls, utilities bills. It is really putting a lot of pressure on them. And when you have, coming off the COVID-19 pandemic as well, as quoted by the Regional Chamber President, his estimate was almost 6,000 small businesses could not open. And when you have that as a starter point and now you have the issue of crime in a lot of our urban areas, a lot of our central business areas, it is putting more pressure on them as well, Madam Speaker

Madam Speaker, what is causing some of these small businesses to have issues in meeting their commitments, because of the crime situation they now have to spend money in security. They have to spend money to install cameras, burglar proofing. There are some businesses, Madam Speaker, now in order to just get their workers, especially the ones who are working on shift, they now have to pay transportation to take these workers home and back to work at all ungodly hours because of their fear, and the businesses' interest in protecting their employees as well. When they add these cost on top of the operational cost, Madam Speaker, it really puts them in a bind.

Madam Speaker, businesses in general they are very easy targets because you know they are easy to manoeuvre in terms of they cannot go anywhere—businesses are stagnant—and a lot of small businesses will always, sorry, Madam Speaker—a lot of small businesses will always have cash on their hands, unlike large companies that would trade in electronic commerce a lot of credit cards, and

debit cards, and so on. A lot of small businesses will always have a fair amount of cash on them and it makes them an easy target for criminals. So, Madam Speaker, the cost of security, the fear by shoppers, and now because you have the issues of unemployment, and so on, you have a ramping up in shoplifting, which is another cost that burdens small business as well. Again, it is because of the environment of lawlessness, the lack of communication, the no fear by our criminal elements that the police takes very, very long to reach, in the event there is an alarm, you find these things are combined and it is causing a lot of businesses to go belly up as well.

Madam Speaker, in doing a bit of research for the debate, I looked at some commentary by the United States Chamber of Commerce and in their statistics—because they do a very robust statistical driven reporting system—they estimated that crime causes at least 30 per cent of all business closures worldwide, and what I have noticed as well in the US, when businesses refer to crime they usually mean vandalism, piracy, burglary, counterfeiting, shoplifting, and other offences that affect profitability. But in the Trinidad, Madam Speaker, crime in our business is fatal shootings, bloody stabbings and other gory acts, Madam Speaker. So there is a clear heavy impact on what the issue of crime is doing to our business community, our investment opportunity. Madam Speaker, I suspect that the statistics on crime in Trinidad and Tobago, especially in the business sector, could be considerably much more higher per capita when you look at the types of crime that is entering our business places. Without having the statistics from just reading what you see in the daily newspaper, Madam Speaker, clearly the crime and criminal activities is clearly more deadly, and you know you know have issues of even the security guards and so on losing their lives.

Madam Speaker, in Trinidad and Tobago, under this Government crime

could cost you your life. Now I have heard the Member for Lopinot/Bon Air, my good friend by the way, he made a case that as legislatures we are not responsible for operationalizing issues. I have heard that from the Minister of National Security as well. But, in the same breath, the hon. Member for Lopinot/Bon Air West accuses the former administration for locking up 3,000 or 4,000 young men sometime in 2013 and 2014.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Paray: That does not make sense because I am wondering if the constitutional separation that exists today, as espoused by the Minister of National Security and the hon. Member, if that was not in existence 2013/2014. The police had legislation to work with, the police did their job, the court ruled in a particular way. So while—you know at the end of day we are legislatures here. We have to put policy in place, we have to put legislation in place, and you have to have the arms of national security to do their job, but as leaders in our space, Madam Speaker, and I think one of the other Members on the other side spoke about our responsibility as parliamentarians, we must espouse that leadership quality in terms of creating a safe space for our citizenry, is how our language, our tone, our body language must espouse those values.

Madam Speaker, what we have also that compounds the issue at times, when you have these small businesses closing—and you would know, Madam Speaker, the small and micro enterprises, or what you call family business, it is the core of your workforce. It is what keeps your economy afloat, your small and micro enterprises. And when these business go out, when they go out of work, the unemployment rates skyrocket, and these small businesses—these businesses are not hiring MBAs and PhDs and engineering staff. They are really hiring the low end labour force that is required in some of these small businesses. So when you

go out of business you put these children on the breadline and sometimes many of them may be the sole breadwinner in their own families. So we really put them between a rock and a hard place to mind their elderly mother, or their father, or their little siblings, and that too causes a problem to escalate in terms of crime and criminal activity, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, it is really—you know it deepens this vicious and violent cycle which we must address, which the State must address from a leadership perspective.

Madam Speaker, for the businesses that do not close down outright, many of them choose to move themselves from the area that they operate in, and they go into other areas, new areas where they feel they may have a sense of more comfort, more activity. So you stifle that original community from the benefit of your craft, your business at the end of the day as well, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the simple truth is that crime in general, it has a ruinous effect on the domestic business sector, and the Government, in my respectful view, Madam Speaker, has paid very little attention to the cries for the assistance.

Madam Speaker, when the head of the Regional Chambers of Commerce spoke to the media, he identified that not only were the robberies happening with more frequency, the quality of the crime, the intensity of the crime was even getting worse, and that speaks to the frustration of the citizenry in terms of job availability, opportunities. And, Madam Speaker, you may agree with me that, when a man has to look after his family, he may stretch as much as he has to make sure he can put food on the table. So while not all of them may have a criminal intent embedded in them, but sometimes to put food on the table for your loved ones some of them may choose to do certain things, and as the Member for Arima said, stand up on the highway and “chook de zaboca” from across the road. So while that is a crime, what he may be doing is to make sure he can put food on the

table for his family.

Madam Speaker, allow me just to identify in the couple minutes that we may have left in this debate for today, you know some facts that with all the resources over the years that governments put into the police service—and I mean I commend them for working with the resources that they have with the limited resources sometimes that they have—their detection rate is still in single digits. We have been unable to get their detection rates up in the double digits. Today, in 2022, for whatever the reason, for whatever the cause, we have not stabilized a police commissioner, and as leaders in any organization without a functioning police commissioner, Madam Speaker, it creates a space of uncertainty and I think the criminals they run with that as well.

Madam Speaker, the Judiciary as usually, as mentioned by the hon. Member for San Fernando West, he has identified a suite of activities that under his tenure ship as Attorney General he has been able to accomplish. But then, whye we are still moving a snail space, Madam Speaker? Our Remand Yard is still overflowing with men waiting on their trials. So, Madam Speaker, our borders are still porous with all the investments in vessels and so on. We still have an influx of refugees coming through our porous borders, and because of that we have the guns. We have the guns that are still coming and they end up in the hands of trigger happy teenagers, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, those are the things that we must address as a Government, as a Parliament, and it is our duty as a parliamentary Opposition to raise these matters, bring it to the forefront, but it is up to the Government to decide whether they will take and they will use it for their benefit. Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Members, it kind of late in the afternoon, but I would like to hear the Member for Mayaro. I think we all should give him that respect.

Hon. Member: Certainly, Madam Speaker.

Mr. R. Paray: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the gangs are multiplying and when you look at the impact or the effort that has been made in terms of the anti-gang legislation and so on, the Bail Act and so on, “all of them is law”. So all the hon. MP for San Fernando West and some to them could talk that the Opposition does not support this and does not support, it is law, and the only way it could have become law is if we supported it. So I do not know where is the disconnect in that. The real crux of the matter, has it worked? Has the legislation as put forward over the last few years by the Government, has it delivered the numbers that would have put us in a space that we would be happy and comfortable at the end of the day, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, investors in trade and industry do what they could do to protect themselves, and we pray that we do not become victims of this outrageous and appalling crime state, this epidemic that is taking over Trinidad and Tobago. Madam Speaker, all of Trinidad and Tobago should take note that our country’s middle class is being destroyed because of the collapsed of this SME, this middle income business group that is really suffering at the hands of criminal.

And every one of us must know that our middle-class serves as an incubator for the next generation of investors and business professionals.

5.55 p.m.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. R. Paray: So the crime and the criminal element, they are really putting a strangle hold on the future of our business because if we do not allow this middle-class business to explore and innovate and create an opportunity for the next generation of family businesses, Madam Speaker, we are doing ourselves a disservice in this country.

Madam Speaker, this is causing our home-grown investors who, in a lot of communities, their prices and their payment plans in small communities—you know long ago, Madam Speaker, “yuh could ah go by the chinee shop” and buy something and get to pay it for two or three weeks. What happens when all of these small businesses collapse? But you cannot go by the Hi Lo, “yuh cannot go by the Massy, yuh cannot go by the Persads” and get credit. That too is causing a shift in the pattern of commerce in communities. Those things really were the foundation of our development over the last 50, 60, 100 years and the crime and criminal element, the uncontrollable criminal activities because of the lack of communication and being able to take the legislation that we are bringing to this Parliament and put it in force to protect that sector, Madam Speaker, that will have a long-lasting impact for all of us and that is something that the Government must take away from this Motion in terms of acting on it.

Madam Speaker, in the last couple of minutes that I have, I just want to say too that not only is the domestic business community, foreign investors looking at our crime statistics and that gives them caution whether they should invest their money in Trinidad and Tobago. And not only the crime statistics but the legislation that we bring to Parliament as well depends on issues such as our procurement and issues on cyber crime and so on, a lot of our foreign investors will want to make sure that when their capital comes here, it is protected, their IP is protected, their technology is protected, and more so, if they are bringing staff, if they are bring expatriate staff, will they be safe in this country. So, Madam Speaker, it is not only our domestic investors, it is our foreign investors as well. You would know the World Bank and so on has done several studies. There is a lot of information on that in terms of justifying some of that as well.

So, Madam Speaker, this has been a very quick overview on the impact of

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crime in terms of how it impacts our trade and investment portfolio. The evidence is all over the place, and Madam Speaker, it is something that we must address. So thank you very much for the opportunity. Thank you.

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Hon. Members: [*Crosstalk and desk thumping*]

Dr. Rai Ragbir (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank you for the opportunity to speak on this Motion brought by the hon. Member for Naparima on crime, which I fully endorse. Before I start, I just want to share with my colleague from Mayaro that the [*Inaudible*] that he mentioned came from a *Newsday* article Friday 27th of May, 2022 entitled:

“International NGO: Trinidad and Tobago has sixth highest crime rate”

And that came from—

Hon. Members: [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. R. Ragbir:

“The World Population Review website placed...”—Trinidad and Tobago—“in the position ahead of Guyana, El Salvador, Brazil and Jamaica.”

And that could be read on that article. So my colleague from Mayaro, you did well in bringing that.

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

Dr. R. Ragbir: Madam Speaker—

Hon. Members: [*Interruption and laughter*]

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: It is six o'clock.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-

UNREVISED

Regis): Madam Speaker, I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to a date to be fixed. “Yuh objecting to that?”

Hon. Member: No. [*Laughter*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.00 p.m.