

SENATE

Tuesday, June 22, 2021

The Senate met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM PRESIDENT *in the Chair*]

PAPER LAID

Corporation Tax (Small and Medium Enterprises Loan Guarantee Programme) (Extension of Exemption) Order, 2021. [*The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat)*]

URGENT QUESTIONS**Caribbean Airlines****(Support Systems re Reduced Staff)**

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam President. To the Hon. Minister of Finance: In light of reports that CAL, Caribbean Airlines, has taken the decision to reduce its staff by approximately 450 employees, can the Minister indicate what support systems will be made available to said employees?

Madam President: Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam President. Caribbean Airlines is currently at the beginning of the consultation process in relation to the proposed reduction in staff and is finalizing the exact number of personnel. In preparation for this, the company is currently putting in place a number of support systems for any potentially affected employees. These would include: counselling services for employees and their family through the Employee Assistance Programme; outplacement services to be coordinated with external recruiting agencies and the Ministry of Labour; transition training with respect to career guidance and support and financial management; in addition to the

compensation packages that the employees would be entitled to upon separation.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask the hon. Minister, through you, whether the executive management team will be candidates for reductions or adjustments in their compensation packages, Madam President?

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

Sen. Mark: Can I go on to the next question?

Madam President: Yes. Sure.

Caribbean Airlines

(Retrenchment and Severance Packages)

Sen. Wade Mark: To the Hon. Minister of Finance: Can the Minister indicate how the retrenchment and severance packages of the approximately 450 CAL workers, who are earmarked for retrenchment, will be financed?

Madam President: Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you. Madam President, Caribbean Airlines does not have the required finances for the severance payments and therefore the severance payments will be financed by the Ministry of Finance.

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask the hon. Minister, given the approximate numbers involved, has the Government—or I should say, is the Minister aware whether the board has worked out the value as it relates to the amount that would be paid out if this figure holds of 450 workers or employees?

Madam President: Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Yes. The estimate given to the Ministry of Finance at this time, which is subject to finalization, is in the vicinity of \$110 million.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask the hon. Minister whether the Government intends to work with all the parties involved in that company to ensure that the impact on

retrenchment of workers can be seriously minimized, Madam President?

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

Caribbean Airlines

(Impact of Retrenchment on Operations)

Sen. Wade Mark: To the hon. Minister of Finance: Can the Minister indicate how will the retrenchment of approximately 450 CAL workers impact the airline's operations when the borders are reopened in mid-July?

Madam President: Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam President. Caribbean Airlines has advised the Ministry of Finance that passenger demand on its routes, as projected by IATA, the International Air Transport Association, and its external consultants, Amadeus, to decrease in the short and medium term. So that it is expected that passenger demand will decrease in the near future and for the next year or so. I am advised that traffic is expected to return to pre-COVID levels in or around 2023, and this is based on advice from IATA and the consultants Amadeus. As a result, CAL plans to reduce its network and fleet size to match the passenger predictions given to it by its consultants.

When the borders are reopened, Caribbean Airlines will have a reduced jet fleet and a reduced ATR fleet and will therefore service fewer routes than pre-COVID. Any separation of workers is directly as a consequence of the reduction in the fleet size and the reduction in the routes. CAL will therefore fly fewer frequencies and fewer routes. I wish to assure the Senate, and I have been advised and I believe it to be so, that notwithstanding the reduction in the size of the airline, the routes that will be operating will be done at the highest levels of safety and service.

Sen. Mark: Can the hon. Minister advise this Senate whether he is aware of the number as regards to the fleet size? Can the Minister indicate what would be the level of reduction, Madam President?

Hon. C. Imbert: I can answer that.

Madam President: Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you. I am advised—and I must say I am saddened by all of this; this is not something that any of us would have wanted to see. I am advised that Caribbean Airlines, it is going to reduce its jet fleet to eight jet aircraft and its turboprop fleet to five ATRs.

Sen. Mark: And, Madam President, may I ask the hon. Minister, how will this reduction from the consultants' perspective impact on passengers who may wish to access the airline during this period of renewal, recovery, structural streamlining?

Hon. C. Imbert: I am advised—and, Madam President, if you will allow me to answer that supplemental. I am advised that Caribbean Airlines has been in discussions with its external consultants, Amadeus, who are one of the leading airline consultants in the world for many months now, because of the projections for reduced air traffic, even when COVID is over and all routes are reopened, and it is expected that this fleet of eight jet aircraft and five ATRs, I am advised, that Caribbean Airlines has been advised by its consultants and by IATA that will be adequate to manage any passenger demand and therefore persons should be able to access flights on CAL's routes in similar fashion that they do now. However, there will be fewer flights and fewer routes but the demand will also be less. And therefore I am told that Caribbean Airlines has been advised that this fleet configuration will be adequate to service the future demand and provide the required level of service to passengers.

Madam President: Next question, Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Yeah. Thank you.

**Barbados “Travel Bubble”
(Impact on T&T Travellers)**

Sen. Wade Mark: Madam President, to the hon. Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs: Given the announcement of the Government of Barbados to establish “a travel bubble for specific Caribbean countries with a low incidence of COVID-19 cases”, can the Minister indicate the effect this decision will have on travellers from Trinidad and Tobago to Barbados?

Madam President: Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dr. Amery Browne): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, this is what has been described as not a “travel bubble” in the strictest interpretation of the word. The Government of Barbados has announced that effective June 30, 2021, fully vaccinated persons with a negative PCR test, coming from specific countries with low incidence of COVID-19, can enter their country without any further tests on arrival. Travellers from countries that do not currently meet their criteria, such as Trinidad and Tobago, will be subject to the existing protocols. Under those protocols, travellers from Trinidad and Tobago, vaccinated or unvaccinated, must present a negative result from a PCR test taken three days prior to arrival in Barbados.

The unvaccinated traveller will be required to quarantine for five days at a designated approved property. A PCR test is then administered at the end of this period. If the result is negative the traveller may then leave quarantine after five days. The vaccinated traveller from Trinidad and Tobago—this is referring to what currently obtains—the vaccinated traveller from Trinidad and Tobago is administered a second PCR test on arrival in Barbados. If the result is negative, the

traveller may then leave the designated quarantine location. That result is normally obtained within 24 hours. Accordingly, there is no additional challenge anticipated for travellers from Trinidad and Tobago to Barbados under the announced regime which will be effective from June 30, 2021. Thank you, Madam President.

Madam President: Sen. Mark, the time for Urgent Questions has expired.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam President: Leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, there are three questions on notice for response today, the Government will respond to all three.

Super Gasoline Phase Out Policy

(Government's Reconsideration of)

120. Sen. Wade Mark asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:
Can the Minister indicate whether the Government is reconsidering its policy of phasing out the use of super gasoline?

Madam President: Leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Thank you very much, Madam President. Madam President, the Government does not have a policy to phase out super gasoline. That was a proposal made by the technocrats of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries and that proposal was not accepted by the Government. Thank you.

Sen. Mark: Can the Minister confirm or deny that this policy to phase out super gasoline is currently before the Cabinet F&GP Committee?

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

Sen. Mark: All right. Madam President, may I rephrase? Can I ask the hon.

Minister whether this policy has been completely rejected by the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago?

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

Sen. Mark: Is the Minister aware, Madam President, through you, that this policy is properly before the Cabinet for a decision?

Madam President: So, Sen. Mark, I did not allow the two previous supplemental questions based on the question that was posed and the answer that was given and you are just—you are on your third supplemental and you are asking basically the same thing that I have disallowed previously.

Sen. Mark: My final question. Can I ask the hon. Minister, through you, Madam President, whether he can give this Senate the assurance that this decision that was published—or this proposed decision that was published in the regular newspapers, can the Minister categorically state that that particular proposal is no longer being considered by the Government, Madam President?

Madam President: Sen. Mark, for the same reason, that question is not allowed. Next question, Sen. Mark.

Craignish Village, Princes Town

(Road Repairs)

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

Given the danger posed to motorists using the stretch of road in Craignish Village, Princes Town, can the Minister indicate when said road will be repaired?

Madam President: Minister of Works and Transport.

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): The Bridges, Landslip and Traffic Management Unit is currently addressing a critical landslip along the Naparima Mayaro Road, Craignish Village. All field work and

preliminary designs have been completed. It is estimated that final designs should be completed by the end of July 2021, following which a tender document will be prepared and tenders will be invited for the project. Thank you.

Madam President: Sen. Mark?

Sen. Mark: Yeah, I am happy with that. Can I go on?

Madam President: Yes.

TTPS Amassed Debt
(Address of Situation)

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

In light of reports that the TTPS has amassed a debt of approximately \$185M because of the slow pace of the disbursement of releases from the Ministry, can the Minister advise as to if and when this situation will be addressed?

Madam President: Minister of Finance.

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Thank you, Madam President. The Government has secured loan financing in the amount of \$200 million to meet outstanding payments for Goods and Services procured by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service in 2020 and 2021. This is in addition to a total revised allocation of \$382,539,845 for this line Item, which is Head 64, Sub-Head 02, Item 001, making a total of \$582,539,845 and available to the TTPS in fiscal 2021 for past and current payments for Goods and Services. The supplementary allocation of \$4,512,329 has also been made for the TTPS for debt service payments under the line Item, Head 64/04/011, on the loan that will become due later in 2021.

The first disbursement of \$32,853,087.67 for outstanding TTPS payments has already been made out of this \$200 million loan. And in addition to this sum, the funds are already released to the TTPS out of its allocation under Goods and

Services, which is Sub-Head 02, to date in fiscal 2021 amount to \$222,476,540.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, through you, can I ask the hon. Minister which financial institution was used to access this \$200 million that you referred to?

Madam President: Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: I do not want to speak out of turn, Madam President, so I would prefer if the Senator would pose that question in the usual manner and I would be happy to answer it.

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Mark: Can I also ask the hon. Minister whether he is in a position to advise or inform the Senate of the terms and conditions of this said loan, Madam President?

Hon. C. Imbert: I would give the same reply. If you pose the question in the normal manner, I would be happy to answer it.

Sen. Mark: Madam President, may I ask the hon. Minister, having regard to this overall allocation through loans and revised allocation, can the Minister indicate that this matter of debt amassing within the TTPS is now a thing of the past? Can I ask the hon. Minister, through you, to guide us on this matter?

Madam President: Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Based on discussions with the TTPS, the loan of \$200 million should take care of outstanding payments and the additional allocation of \$382 million for Goods and Services in 2021 should be adequate to cover the procurement of goods and services by the TTPS in 2021. However, the TTPS has asked me to make my best effort to ensure that the full amount of the allocation is disbursed in this fiscal year and I have given that undertaking.

Sen. Mark: Can I ask?

Madam President: Yes, one more.

Sen. Mark: Can the hon. Minister indicate, as it relates to this loan and its disbursement to the TTPS, is the Minister indicating to this honourable Senate that the amount, the balance of the \$200 million, minus the \$32 million, will be disbursed to the TTPS on or before the end of 2021, Madam President? Can I ask that, through you?

Madam President: Minister.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam President. The basis for disbursements from the loan is the submission of invoices by the TTPS to NIPDEC, who is the executing agency for this matter, and once those invoices are in order, NIPDEC sends a request to the Ministry of Finance and that is then passed on to the Minister who would instruct the bank to disburse the money. The first drawdown of \$32 million went well and I am therefore hopeful that between now and the end of September the TTPS will send the necessary invoices, they will check out and the necessary approvals can be given for the disbursement of the entire \$200 million before the end of September, once everybody does what they are supposed to do.

I can assure you that I would not spend more than 24 hours when that file appears before me. Sometimes these files are approved by myself in a couple of minutes. I would not delay because I would be satisfied when I receive it and having checked it, that all concerned had done all of the necessary due diligence that is required.

VIOLENT CRIMES AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

[Second Day]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on question [April 27, 2021]:

Be it resolved that this Senate call on the Government to critically assess the deficiencies in the current systems to deal with the incidence of violent crimes against women and girls;

And be it further resolved that the Government present to the Parliament, within three months, a legislative agenda and policy implementation plan to more effectively address the rising incidence of violence against women and girls.

Question again proposed.

Madam President: On the last occasion those who spoke were Sen. Paul Richards who moved the Motion, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, Sen. Lutchmedial, Sen. Thompson-Ahye, the Minister of Social Development and Family Services, Sen. Jearlean John, Sen. Vieira, Sen. Bethelmy. [*Desk thumping*] Sen Lezama-Lee Sing. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing: Thank you very much, Madam President. I am really honoured to have this opportunity to enter into this discussion as brought forward by Sen. Paul Richards in his Motion which he:

“...call on the Government to critically assess the deficiencies in the current systems to deal with the incidence of violent crimes against women and girls;

And be it further resolved that the Government present to the Parliament...a legislative agenda and policy implementation plan to more effectively address the rising incidence of violence against women and girls.”

Madam President, it is no secret that I hold our Independent Senators in the absolute highest regard and, Madam President, I am so tremendously pleased that Sen. Paul Richards has used this opportunity to hold the door open to push through this conversation about violence against women and girls, using the highest and best platform that he has available to us. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President, please permit me to inform this House, this honourable Senate that the Government is in fact committed to do its part to ensure the

protection of our women and our girls. Madam President, in Sen. Richards' presentation, which was excellent I must add, he spoke to experiences throughout the region. He spoke about everything being a collaborative and cohesive effort and that we all must come together, and I applaud him for that, and I will get to that point very shortly, Madam President. You know, I grew up in Arima; I attended the Arima Girls' RC School. My mother was a teacher in my primary school. I was in primary school in the early 90s and one of my classmates received devastating news. Her sister, who worked alongside her husband in a Chinese restaurant down the road in Arima, was just murdered by said husband in the Chinese restaurant that all of us as primary school children frequented.

Madam President, that was my first real exposure to domestic violence. My classmate's niece, the deceased daughter, who was also a student in my primary school, and coincidentally she was in my mother's class, to this day, almost 30 years later, that young lady is so traumatized about the events of that fateful day in that Chinese restaurant down the road in Arima. She has gone on to become a mother as well and every slight action agitates her and terrifies her. She herself is a mother, a mother of several children, having become a young mother very early, having lost her own mother at a very, very tender age. And, Madam President, that is just one of very many stories that we must acknowledge has happened in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam President, my mother was also a primary school teacher as I mentioned. My house was 400 meters or one block away from my primary school in Arima. Being a teacher, my mother was not just a teacher to all of her students in the class, she was also counsellor to many families; she was protector, she was a resident—several times in our simple home in Arima, that one block away from

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my primary school, one block away from our church, my family, my siblings and I had to squeeze into one of the bedrooms so that my mother could accommodate another family into one of the bedrooms, and that is a reality for us here in Trinidad and Tobago, Madam President. I do not know that there is anybody in this Chamber who has not been affected in one way or another by what we call—by what Sen. John had referred to as the scourge of domestic violence.

But, Madam President, you know, amidst all of this; amidst this call for the Government do its part, to treat with this issue of domestic violence, Madam President, it cannot just be the Government to do this.

2.00 p.m.

Madam President, the Attorney General will speak to, I presume, the package of legislation that has passed in this House during his tenure in the Parliament, during his tenure as the Attorney General, that treats with this matter. But there are other things outside of the legislative agenda that must take place for this matter to be treated with.

Sen. Richards spoke about the involvement of civil society and non-governmental organizations. Permit me to declare my interest: I sit on the Council of Girl Guides Association; my husband sits on the Boy Scouts Association. We are actively involved in these two organizations, but the interest by the young people is simply not there. The Girl Guides has dwindled from probably a membership of about 5 or 10,000—maybe 15 or 20,000, to probably a membership of under 5,000. What is responsible for that? Have the parents, really and truly, of children pushed them or directed them in that direction? So it goes back to the question of, Madam President, what are children learning in their homes? You see, my mother always said to me that your home is your first school, and everything

you learn at home is what you will replicate in society. So if at home you learn that daddy hits mummy, or daddy interferes with little sister, chances are that there is a high possibility that you will, in fact, do that.

You know, I was having a chat with my sister the other day, and she was telling me—and we are talking about things that happen in homes—and she was explaining to me that she has some very close friends whose family the tradition is, or the practice is, that the fathers take the virginity of their daughters, and that is a reality here in Trinidad and Tobago. Madam President, how then do we reengineer the minds of people in this country who partake in these practices, perhaps cultural norms, traditions? I do not know what they are called. How? How do we reengineer the minds of the people of Trinidad and Tobago to move away from what is clearly a tremendously destructive practice, that destroys the family unit, that destroys and steals the innocence of a child, and that destroys a future potential leader or person in this country?

One of my greatest joys in life would be being a mother to three little girls ages 10, eight and six. I will do everything in my power to protect my daughters from any threat, of any harm, of any violation to their well-being. I am fortunate enough to have my children attend a co-education primary school. When I was pregnant with my first daughter, my doctor advised me to send the children to a co-ed primary school, because it gets children to become a little accustomed to interacting boy/girl and that sort of interaction. He warned against them going to co-ed schools in secondary schools however, but that is a different conversation altogether. I have seen the great benefit of that. In their school, and which I know can be implemented in many schools and is practised in many schools, there is a very strong anti-bullying and male mentoring programme, in that primary school.

We know that all schools ought to have counsellors available. Whether the quantity of counsellors is sufficient is a question, but we acknowledge that at least the practice has started.

I was speaking with a school counsellor last week—she is a counsellor in a secondary school—she said to me that a young man in one of her classes, he is 15 years old, reached out to her and said, “Well Miss, I have to drop out of school”. She said, “Why?” He said, “Well, Miss, meh girlfriend pregnant”. The girlfriend is 14, I believe, “My girlfriend is pregnant”, so both of them now have taken a decision, or under the circumstances are forced to drop out of school. Madam President, why is that a norm in Trinidad and Tobago? We have read reports of 2,000 people falling out of the school system through this pandemic, but we really have to do better, and by “we”, I do not mean the Government. I mean we as parents, and we as invested citizens in Trinidad and Tobago, we have to do better for our children.

Madam President, I have to say as well, there is no shame whatsoever in seeking counselling. We need to remove all these taboo topics that we cannot talk about. We need to remove the curtains and the shadows behind the things that affect us. In this pandemic we have realized that mental health is a very, very real issue. Beyond mental health, psychosocial health, and help with your family, somebody to talk to. We have come to realize that that is incredibly important. So I want to let people know there is no shame in seeking counselling, and in Trinidad and Tobago we need to remove that taboo of counselling.

I also had the privilege of being affiliated with Vision on Mission which works with the rehabilitation of offenders to prevent recidivism. Vision on Mission has an incredible programme in which it seeks to turn around the mindset of

offenders. It just goes to show that people who are offenders can, in fact, when placed in the right situation, can, in fact, be transformed. Therefore, all is not lost, we certainly have opportunity to treat with that.

The deficiencies in the current system, Madam President. We acknowledge, it has been mentioned here, underreporting, weaknesses in the follow through and, perhaps, cultural practices in this system, and we acknowledge that, but we have all done our part. At least the Government has done as best as it can, insofar as presenting solutions.

You would appreciate, Sen. Bethelmy would have spoken in depth about the role of the Office of the Prime Minister's Gender and Youth Affairs Department. She would have been spoken about the Gender-Based Violence Unit in the TTPS. Minister Cox would have given a thorough analysis of the work of her Ministry, so I will not go into those things. But, Madam President, what about things like the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service? When the Prime Minister announced that Ministry in August of 2020, he introduced it with a vision to rewire the minds of the young people in Trinidad and Tobago, because this is going to take a generational change. This is definitely going to take a generational change. In the Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, there is an expectation that young people will be introduced to civics. They will be introduced to bringing life, breathing life into the national watchwords of: Discipline, Tolerance and Production. So once these things get going, and we have a very energetic and youthful new Minister there, we anticipate that we will see certain changes in the behavioural patterns of some young people in this country.

But, Madam President, what about other solutions? Civil society really does, in fact, have a serious role to play. This morning at four o'clock Sen. Bethelmy

sent a message about something presented by the Franciscan Institute, and it is called, "Online Grooming and Sexual Exploitation of Children". Several previous speakers have given discussions, or rather have given explanations, as to what gender-based violence really is, or violence against women really is, but I want to include that online grooming is definitely something that gets to the point of gender-based violence.

So the Franciscan Institute, for instance, is presenting an online session with a clinical child psychologist, and the target audience is Forms 1 to 6, and this is part of the solution. This debate is part of the solution. The solution really and truly is all of us taking our energies and harnessing it into something that would be productive to really transform the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

You see, Madam President, we could legislate from now until the cows come home, but what we have to do, is we have to cause people to really make changes in their attitude. They have to change their way of thinking, they have to change their behaviours. But you know, Madam President, it is imperative that we lead by example.

What Sen. Rambharat was speaking at the last debate, he talked about a class of people or a group of people who may be considered untouchables, and that is a very, very real thing that we have to deal with in this place. Madam President, I am known to frequent Carnival events. I enjoy Carnival very, very much in Trinidad and Tobago. Just about 2008 or 2009, a group of my girlfriends, and probably my then fiancé, went to QRC fete, and we were at the front of the stage, and we were having a real good time, very, very safe. Then somebody who was a public, well-known personality is there with his girlfriend and the girlfriend's group of friends. Madam President, it disgusts me to say what I am about to say, and I will be very

tempered in how I put it out. This person, this very well-known person, in the public glare at a Carnival event, totally out of control, proceeds to take his hand and pass it on the thigh, in between the thigh of his girlfriend and the girlfriend's friend. He also proceeds to pull out her right breast and do whatever he wants with it. Madam President, why I say these people are untouchable is because he further ascended into high office, really high office, and, you know, sometimes I have cause to interact with him, and it is really just totally unacceptable, totally unacceptable. These are the types of untouchables that we really, really have to treat with. Why I say it is violence and exploitation is because the girlfriend and the friend were like, "No, no, do not touch me, do not touch me," and he was just having his way with them. I do not know if he was influenced by any substance but, Madam President, it was totally unacceptable, and it happened in full view of the public glare. So can we imagine what perhaps can happen behind closed doors.

Madam President, as Sen. Richards had pointed out, the women in Trinidad and Tobago—I think he used a quote from Hillary Clinton, and the women are some of our greatest assets, really and truly. I do believe women are the cradle of civilization. I firmly believe that. It is our duty, it is absolutely our duty to look after our women, to look after our children, and this Government will not shirk its responsibility. This government will continue to do all in its power, whether it is through legislative moves, whether it is through policy action through the Ministries, whether it is partnering with NGOs and civil society organizations. But now is the time for all sectors to partner responsibly, in a very level-headed manner, and to give women the just respect that is due to them.

Madam President, there are so many other things that this Government has undertaken which we will hear later on in the debate, but I do wish to say that I am

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very, very pleased that Sen. Richards brought this Motion here today. The Government continues to be committed, and I give the assurance that the Members on this side will continue to lead by example, through our actions here in the Chamber, and through our actions outside as public and private citizens.

Thank you very much, Madam President.

Madam President: Sen. Dillon-Remy.

Sen. Dr. Maria Dillon-Remy: Madam President, I thank you for the opportunity to join in this debate this afternoon. I thank Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing for her very moving contribution just now. She actually almost brought me to tears.

I am thankful for the opportunity to make this brief contribution on Sen. Paul Richards' Private Member's Motion, regarding the deficiencies in the current systems to deal with incidents of violent crimes against women and girls, which has been such a matter of great concern for all of us in Trinidad and Tobago for some time now.

I commend all the Senators who have gone before in this debate, making excellent contributions so far. Sen. Richards asks us to debate in this Motion:

“Be it resolved that the Senate calls on the Government to critically assess the deficiencies in the current systems to deal with the incidents of violent crime against women and girls;

And be it further resolved that the Government presents to the Parliament, within three months, a legislative agenda and policy implementation plan to more effectively address the rising incidents of violence against women and girls.”

So, it is in two parts, critically assess the deficiencies in the current systems and also present to the Senate a legislative agenda on policy implementation plans.

Madam President, far too often we tend to deal with the symptoms of what is going on. Many times we do not dig deep to what the root causes are, and we just tend to respond. So violence against women and girls, we march, we this, we put things down and then we say, okay, put a little plaster on the sore here and feel comfortable about it for a while. The plaster on the sore could be legislative. The plaster on the sore could be improving prison sentences or some such thing, which I consider you are just dealing with the symptoms. But what this calls for, and again I said, I commend our colleague Sen. Richards, it calls for—and I think all the presenters so far have gone into what are we dealing with in terms of root cause, so that we deal with the root cause of what the issues are, so that we can find lasting solutions.

The World Health Organization in an article on their website dated March 09, 2021, talks about devastatingly pervasive. One in three women globally experience violence, that violence against women, particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence, and they call it a major public health problem and a violation of women's human rights. The estimate published by the WHO indicate that globally about 30 per cent of women worldwide have been subjected to either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. It further stated that most of this violence is intimate partner violence, and worldwide some 27 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 years, who have been in a relationship, report that they have been subject to some form of physical and sexual violence by their intimate partner. So the issue of violence against women and girls is not only an issue that we are dealing with here in Trinidad and Tobago. It is an issue that is worldwide. However, we have to find our own solutions, because our causes may be very different.

In an article on GlobalVoices.org, February 28, 2021, written by Jada Stewart and Janine Mendes-Franco, they highlighted that day by day, year after year, women in Trinidad and Tobago are under attack, and they talked about Dana Seetahal, they talked about Marcia Henville, et cetera, and we can talk about those things again and again and again. By the close of 2016, it was mentioned, the 20-year-old bank employee went missing, found later in a storeroom in a variety store at Port of Spain.

At the end of 2020, the *Express* newspaper dated 24 December, 2020, by Kim Boodram, the article stated that:

“In 2020, 46 women were killed—21 of them in domestic violence situations—representing around 13 per cent of homicides this year.”

The article further went on to state that in Trinidad and Tobago the police service:

“reported that of 745 people reported missing for 2020, 416 were women and girls.”

“Reflecting on 2020, the Coalition Against Domestic Violence...”—said that—“In the year when the Domestic Violence Act was strengthened and the police established Gender-Based Violence Unit, 21 women were killed as a result of domestic violence and others sexually assaulted...by people within their own families, social circles and strangers.”

An article dated March 14, 2021, in the *Newsday*, by Clint Chan Tack, our Attorney General, hon. Faris Al-Rawi, said that:

“Government is coming with more than just pepper spray legislation to combat crime in TT.”

He was talking about the suite of legislation that the Government was bringing to deal with incidents of violence. This was in reference, the article said, to:

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“the very far-reaching laws that I intend to bring to the Parliament.”—says
hon. Faris Al-Rawi.

He said:

“these include additional amendments to the Sexual Offences Act, Evidence
Act (concerning witness anonymity evidence) Trafficking in Persons Act,
Computer Misuse Act.”

Then he stated:

“We intend to return with whistle blowing legislation...We intend to list
from the cybercrime package that we had, into the Sexual Offences Act, to
criminalise things like breach of confidence of intimate partners, where one
partner leaks images of another partner, et cetera.”

Madam President, we know that the Attorney General has been very resolute
in terms of whatever has to be done in terms of dealing with the law and putting
things in place, but as everyone has so far said, the law is one part of this problem.
Fixing the law is only one part of the problem. Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing just talked
about, and many other persons who would have contributed before, talked about
this has to be a holistic involvement of all society dealing with the issues that we
are facing.

We know that since the Attorney General would have spoken that time, on
May the 18th in this Senate the Firearms (Amdt.) Bill, 2021, was passed, bringing
the legal use of pepper spray for women, and the Bill was passed in the House of
Parliament on June the 16th and is currently waiting assent by the President.

There is enough evidence that we do have a grave problem facing our
beautiful twin-island Republic, and we see that there have been many efforts that
have been put in place, putting in place some measures to deal with the issues,

particularly in recent times, putting legislation together. While I applaud these initiatives, Madam President, may I also add some recommendations made by the World Health Organization. In 2019 the WHO and the UN Women, with endorsement from 12 other UN and bilateral agencies, published an implementation package for preventing violence against women. This package provides a framework for preventing and ending violence against women, and it is aimed at policymakers. It is entitled, “RESPECT”, the acronym R-E-S-P-E-C-T, and each letter of the acronym stands for one of seven strategies that is recommended for dealing with prevention of violence against women and children.

The “R” deals with relationship skills strengthening, and, again, many people have spoken about these things starting in families and starting early, because this is where children learn a lot of their behaviours. Building relationships in families, teaching children to respect from in the families, how to respect each other. As we know, children learn what they see, and in many cases what they see at home is what they do.

Again, Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing just spoke about what is going on in what she has seen and experienced in different families. We know that the availability of healthy relationship counselling for persons who are having difficulty within relationships within the family is key to people dealing with their issues and things not resulting, going out into violence. So relationship skills strengthening is one of the areas that is mentioned in this article, and “R” deals with the “R” of the respect. Sen. Thompson-Ahye in her contribution made a strong plea also for confronting these issues in relation to families, and so did Sen. Vieira in his contribution.

Madam President, the “E” talks about empowerment of women and girls, empowering them to know their strengths, empowering them to know and have

strong self-esteem, to be able to stand up for themselves and stand up for their rights; knowing who they are and being able to stand in the face of extreme difficult situations, but it is possible to do so.

The “S” in the acronym stands for services, providing important services: services for reporting, services for counselling. We talked about counselling, relationship counselling specifically, and this is something that we know does not happen a lot where particularly men do not—many of them do not think they need counselling in situations where they are dealing with their own feelings and anger and stuff like that, but men talking to men—I know there are many organizations that are having opportunities now, where they are helping men to talk about their issues, again dealing with counselling for men. So “S” stands for services.

The “P” in R-E-S-P-E-C-T stands for reduction of poverty. As we know, there are many women that stay in relationships because they think that is where they have to be, because that is where the finances are being provided for the nurturing of the family, and as a result they stay in poverty situations causing detriment to themselves. So the “P” stands for poverty reduction.

The “E” stands for enabling environments, providing enabling environments, like in workplaces, in public spaces, et cetera. I think Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing just spoke about an incident there in an environment that certainly was not enabling, probably needed action that probably would have probably resulted in the same violence that we are talking about. If the persons had retaliated in the way that was probably required in a situation where you are openly being humiliated in the public. So that is not the kind of environment we are talking about. We are talking about providing enabling environments, where the environment is people are taught and women, men, children, people are respected,

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the kind of enabling environment that provides the respect for persons, at schools and workplaces, et cetera.

The “C” in the acronym stands for child and added adolescent abuse prevention programmes, for the prevention of abuse to children and adolescents. The “T” stands for “Transformed attitudes, beliefs and norms”. Sen. Richards in his presentation, Sen. Thompson-Ahye and just again Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing talked about the types of norms that we consider appropriate in our environment, that have to be changed if these issues about violence against women and girls have to be changed. Transformed attitudes and beliefs.

2.30 p.m.

Madam President, I do endorse the strategies that the WHO recommended in their statement, since real changes will have to occur and it has to occur over a period of time. It is not going to change overnight and it is not going to be changed with just legislation. It has to be changed over—and it has to be strategic in terms of what is done at different stages of our lifetime.

Madam President, I do support this Motion, especially understanding that, one, it requires a multi-disciplinary approach, again, mentioned by many other speakers before. And I also agree that we must put in place emphasis on programmes that deal with prevention rather than just waiting on the violence to occur. We could ensure that as a nation we condemn violence against persons period, and that includes violence against women and girls.

Madam President, I would end with a story. It is a story from the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) news of the United States of America dated May 18, 2021, entitled “Brutal violence against women in Trinidad and Tobago ignored by government, critics say”. That is the title. The story was written by Malcolm

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Brabant and they painted Trinidad and Tobago in a not so pleasant light stating that:

“If violence wins”—our—“twin island...risks being...”—deemed —
“...as a paradise lost.”

I have no doubt that we are not a paradise lost because I am an eternal optimist. I do have optimism in our people to do what is right. It may not look like that right now, but I do have that optimism in our people.

So therefore, I am urging us all to do all that we can to deal with our significant social issues of which Sen. Richards has put an important Motion on the table for debate. I do look forward to the response of the Government in bringing forward a comprehensive response. Madam President, I am here and I am a part of this Republic and a part of this Legislature and I am here to do my part in whatever has to be done. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Sen. Rambhajan.

Sen. Renuka Rambhajan: Thank you, Madam President. Good afternoon to the Members of the honourable Chamber. Critically assess the deficiencies in the current systems to deal with incidents of violence against women and girls. Like my friend Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing, I applaud Sen. Richards for bringing this Motion and I am struck by the irony that it took a man to stand up and say, what are we doing about women’s rights for everybody to sit up and listen. That in and of itself is a deficiency in the system, because it means, Members of this honourable House, that some women do not think that they have a voice and maybe that is a deficiency we need to cure. Some girls do not have avenue and options. Maybe that is an avenue or an option or a deficiency we need to cure.

I am sure that every single Member of this House can stand and speak with

anecdotal reference to a story somewhere of someone who has suffered. And it is not a nice thing to say, domestic violence, gender-based violence, violence against children, that those things happen so commonly that everybody knows it but nobody speaks of it because it remains taboo in 2021. Why? Is there a deficiency in our system that does encourage persons to speak up? These are questions that I would want to answer in my contribution.

Now, I too want to use a story, a real story, a story when I prosecuted—and I know Sen. Lutchmedial will know this case that I am going to use—and many of you might remember it because it was in the media, where a man who was separated from his wife went into a maxi-taxi stand where she was waiting for a maxi. She was seated in that maxi. He entered that maxi, drew a knife and stabbed, dragging her out of that maxi into the full glare of the public and finished what he intended to do resulting in him getting charged for murder. Why do I want to use that example? Because I am sure it causes many of you to recoil because that example shows us the deficiencies of the system that currently exists. And I agree with Sen. Richards, it is not about the blame game. Every single person in society is responsible for the society that they are a part of. What is the relevance of that story?

Well, she was a victim of domestic violence for very many years and she had made several reports. So why did it escalate into her death? Was there a deficiency in the investigative process? Did the police treat her report with the sensitivity and the urgency it required? The age-old question we all ask when we deal with violence against women: Could it have been prevented? Well perhaps if we look at the deficiencies at this point we can start fixing it because if the police have the tools and resources that they need to properly police domestic violence

cases, gender-based violence, those things that affect women and girls, perhaps we can make a dent in the cyclical devastation of women's rights in this country, because the unfortunate thing is, the majority of police officers are men and they have entrenched in them built-in prejudice that affects their investigative abilities.

I am sure many of you here would have heard stories of women going to police station and asking for assistance and being told, "Oh gaud, that is just a lover's quarrel, go home and make up. Go home and make two roti for him and everything go be good." That was a real response I got from a client. They told her, "Go home and make two roti and curry a chicken and everything go be good".

And yes we look at these situations and we say to ourselves, it cannot be happening in 2021, but the sad reality is that it is. So this young lady in the maxi-taxi, could she have been saved if the police was more proactive? Yes. Could the young man have found himself in the arms of the State, and when I said that, I mean in jail which might have caused him to sit and consider the potential repercussions of his actions to prevent him from taking her life. Could that have been done? Yes. Could there have been some programme to assist him to deal with his anger issues? Perhaps. Could there have been a programme to assist the young lady in understanding her value and worth so that she would walk away from the situation? Perhaps. Why did he think it was necessary to go there and kill her? That is the second deficiency I want to highlight in the existing system.

Toxic masculinity. Do we have things in place in the current system to assist men who are rapidly losing their identity? And when I say their identity, I do not mean their name. I mean their purpose. I mean the manner by which they define their manhood. You will hear everybody say a man is a provider and a protector. If his ability to provide is removed, he becomes frustrated. His inability to present

himself in the manner in which he thinks he presents frustrates him. And what happens? Some of these men without the ability to channel that rage, anger or frustration, they take it out on their partner. They take it out on their children. What policies do we have for men who feel they need help? That is the deficiency.

How do we treat with toxic masculinity in the TTPS when we all hear stories that when women go to make a report, the ability of the officer to investigate is directly equivalent to her ability to give her number; if you understand what I am saying. That cannot be right. It cannot be that we have programmes available for the abuser because domestic violence we all know it. I do not need to spout all of the rhetoric and the clichés. Yes it is a cycle. The abuser, he—the abused becomes the abuser. Well, what do we do to stop that cycle? What programmes do we have for men who might be willing to say, I have a problem and I want it fixed. Perhaps that is a deficiency that the Government can correct. Perhaps there can be some movement towards education, opportunity, possibility that may turn these men away from looking at their partner as a punching bag, and instead look at themselves in the mirror and see how they can improve.

Now, violence against women, everybody always focus on men but there is violence against women from other women. Mothers who beat their daughters because they are talking to a boy; grandmothers who have an outdated and archaic way of raising children who would not understand the role of social media. How do they monitor Instagram and Facebook when they themselves do not know what it is? Are we providing the tools to the persons who are taking care of our children so that they can deal with situations like this? When a child is abused or a victim of a crime, what options are there for that child beyond the counselling provided by the court? What avenue of learning do we have for them so that they can learn a

skill beyond what they have?

So, one of the deficiencies perhaps illustrated by my example is the man in the story. What do we have in place to fix him? Nothing. Then we have that she was going into this maxi, and I am sure a lot of people would say, well why did she not change her route? Why was she on the maxi-taxi stand if she knew he would find her? Simple, she had no other option. That is another deficiency in the system. There are no placement options available for long-term rehabilitation of victims of crime, especially women and children. And right now to place a woman with her children in a shelter is extremely difficult. And I am not saying that because where I stand, I say that because of where I worked. I was the manager of legal services at the Children's Authority and on very many occasions the court was stumped, the attorneys were stumped because there simply was nowhere to put them. Where it is now?

My friend Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing, and I smile when I say this because she has been very kind to me in my temporary appointment. And when I say kind, "she smile at me and ah smile back". All right? Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing said that one of the solutions available and we could legislate for now until the cows come home but we have to change the way of thinking. I agree. We need to change the way of thinking but I want to say this. The cows have come home. It is time to think beyond the box that we have already traditionally exhausted. Yes, you could send them for counselling. Yes we could have our gender-based violence unit. Yes we could have programmes available. But are we really doing it with a purpose and a focused intend in mind? And that is why I applaud the second part of Sen. Richards' private Motion which is, to provide policy, a legislative plan. I have always said that we need to be less reactive. We need to be proactive when it

comes to things like violence against women and children. We need to have a realistic look at what exists and see how it needs to be improved.

Sometimes we are in positions of power and have this disease of defensiveness. From the time you are criticized, you defend your position. That is not helpful because it means that you are not seeing the reality of what is wrong so you cannot fix it. So when I say to you that there is nothing available to the abuser to change the cycle of abuse. There is nothing available to treat with the woman or the victim of the offence because there are no placement options. There is nothing in place for behavioral modification for those who offend, because violence against women is not just hitting, you know. It is emotional and psychological, and what we seem to lose sight of, hon. Members, is that the women who are victims today give birth to the victims of tomorrow. So how do we stop that? We stop that by being honest with ourselves. We stop that by saying, we understand that the police in their investigative process need a cultural shift. We understand that those of us who have a voice, when we speak we must speak carefully and send the right message.

You cannot tell me, hon. Members across, that you will say that the Government is serious and committed but there does not exist a Ministry of Gender and Child Affairs. It is a division of the Office of the Prime Minister. Should it not be a stand-alone agency to deal with this problem that we are calling the scourge of the nation? Perhaps that may be a deficiency the hon. Members many want to consider. Whether or not it sends the right message that we are merely a division rather than a full Ministry. Could it be then that if we put focus on women and girls and the need for change, real and dramatic-fulfilling change, if we show that our focus is there, the possibility of improvement is higher? Does it not send the right

message that we are dealing with something that needs to be dealt with? And it is not that we are responding to the members of the public when they march?

The other deficiency illustrated by my story is the length of time the matter took to get to trial for him to be convicted; more than seven years. So the family of the victim had to wait seven years to go through the trial process and then he pleaded guilty to manslaughter which he has the legal right to do. But the problem is, it took seven years. So if it took seven years to get to trial and she had made several reports before she was killed, in totality that young lady's legacy, her life legacy was measured more by the offence committed against her, than the opportunity she may have had to enjoy. That is the reality of the system that we exist in today.

Right now, domestic violence shelters, many of the victims who go there—I have already said there is the difficulty with children. Many of them who go there find themselves there for a very short period of time, and they call it a prison, they feel imprisoned. And the imprisonment comes from the fact that they are afraid to go out there and see the perpetrator; so they confine themselves to where they are at. But when they are confined there, after three months they must leave. Where does that place them? Not in the home of the abuser again?

A child who makes a report of sexual abuse against a family member who lives in the home, what option do you have for placement of that child? None. So she is back in the home with the abuser. All of these are deficiencies; and it is not a criticism. It is a realistic look at where we have come because we have not dealt with this matter in strong terms when it needed to be dealt with. And I am not talking my generation. I am talking about the generation before me and even before them, because domestic violence, gender-based violence, violence on the

whole is taught behaviour. So perhaps we should look at where the children are learning and how we can fix because the children are going to be the ones to come tomorrow and perhaps be either the victim or the perpetrator.

Do we have transition homes for children? Under the Children's Authority Act you are supposed to have transition homes. And you know what transition homes are? You have children in the system, when they reach the age 15 to 18 they are supposed to move into the transition home where they are going to learn a skill, how to take care of themselves and then are released into the world as an upstanding member of society who can contribute. We do not have that, so no transition homes. That is another deficiency.

So what happens is, a child, a girl child who is in the system who may have been placed at St. Jude's because the old terminology is, the child is beyond control meaning the parent is unable to control the child so they make an application before the court and the child is placed at St. Jude's. That system has now changed where you say, the child is a child in need of supervision. And I applaud these changes that have happened incrementally over time because it is a step in the right direction. The question is, is it enough? Is it that the problem is bigger than the solution that we are presenting now? Yes it is.

So that child at 18 is put out of the state housing facility they are at, whether it is a children's home or an organization like St. Jude's and she is put on the street. Who is she going to turn to? She becomes the prime target of a predator. And then three, four years later she may very well have been that woman in the maxi-taxi. So we need to understand the overarching responsibility all state agencies have when it comes to violence against women.

But I want to wrap up my contribution in a sort of odd way. The

conversation about violence against women and girls is always focused on the offender. Why men do what they do, toxic masculinity, behavioural modification, why do men feel that they own and control women, why do they have this sense of possessiveness, cultural shift, education; all of these are things targeted to the perpetrator. Why is it not more effort targeted to the victim?

So I want to speak to the victim now, I want to speak to women and I want to say this to you. And this is where I would want to agree with Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing when she said it cannot just be the Government to deal with it. No. It is not just the Government alone. It is us, every single person. And to the women who might be in situations where they are uncomfortable or they might find themselves without a voice, you are the creator of your change. Your voice needs to be heard. And there are very many who would say, well, I do not have an education, I did not finish school because I dropped out because I got pregnant at 14. Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing said that, an example she gave. Okay. Do you have other programmes available to you?

I want to talk about my mother, that I why I said I want to finish differently and give you a little snapshot of my life. My mother stopped school at 12 to take care of my aunt. And my mother, despite her lack of education, is one of the most enterprising women I have ever met. And if I am but one-fifth the woman she is, I would have done well, because without education she raised a family, and I have seen the relationship with my father and the equal voice they both have in their marriage. And I have learnt at my 41 years of age that what they represent is actually the exception not the rule. And the reason they were able to work and get me to where I stand today, temporarily thought it may be, I am grateful for it, even though they did not—and my father as well, my father never went to school. My

father is a cane cutter. Literally, I am the daughter of a cane cutter from Caroni. But the fact that they had limitations out there did not stop them here and they have built a legacy that I am proud to be a part of.

And I want to say to women who are the victims of violence that you in equal measure, your voice needs to be heard and when you start to speak up and you show the deficiencies in the system, as has been done in the last few months, change will happen. Your voice will be heard. As women we are the targets of not the best terms and sometimes it breaks us down, and my approach to it may be different to everybody else. Somebody might look at me and say, well, “yuh fat”. And I will say, “Yes I am. Thank you”. They might say, “You dress oddly”. And I say, “I do”. But that does not affect the quality of my character and the words that come out of my mouth.

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

Sen. R. Rambhajan: I am grateful please, Madam President. The reason I say this is so that those out there will understand that you can be the person to effect the change you need. Yes, it is frightening. Yes, you do not know the options you might have but now is the time because people are listening. There has never been a time where society is so ready to effect change when it comes to women and girls. So now is the time to make your voice heard. Now is the time to stand up for yourself. Now is the time to know your worth. My mother always says, you “cyar” be anything to anybody if you are nothing to yourself. And some women will say, they stay in the relationship because of their children. And I want to ask them this. How can you protect your child if you cannot protect yourself?

So while we may focus on the offender, I want to respectfully suggest that even more focus must be paid on the victim, the girls who are ageing out and have

nowhere to go and become prime fodder for predators; the women who do not have financial opportunity or skills, give them that. Given them the ability to financially support themselves, create programmes, create placement options. If there is a targeted approach with clear goals laid out and legislation that conforms with those goals, and state agencies are given the resources that they need, we can make a dent. We have started to. I am excited to see what I see. The Gender-Based Violence Unit has done excellent work in the TTPS. They have changed the conversation and the conversation needs to continue.

So, I want to end by thanking the hon. Members for their time, Sen. Richards for placing the Motion there. I may have been a little more passionate than I intended to be but that is how strongly I feel about it because I believe every woman's voice should be heard. That is why we all, we all ascribe to the statement, I am woman, hear me roar. So for those of you who are in that situation, roar. It is time for your voice to be heard. Madam President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam President: Sen. de Freitas. [*Desk thumping*]

3.00 p.m.

Sen. Nigel de Freitas: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to weigh in and have my voice heard on this topic that is engaging this honourable Chamber today, which Sen. Richards has raised by way of his Motion, which speaks to in a nutshell, the issue of violence against women or gender-based violence. And, Madam President, the issue that Sen. Richards has so timely raised, in my opinion, is magnanimous in nature, colossal in its effect on human societies, global in nature with our very own local brand of manifestation.

Sen. Richards has outlined nothing but facts in his contribution. This issue requires an all-hands-on-deck approach. He alluded to a bipartisan approach, but I

would go further to say that the approach that needs to be taken is a non-partisan one. Bipartisan tends to suggest that each side holds to their policy and they work together. This particular issue is non-partisan. There can be no politics whatsoever involved at all in this. Because this is an issue that would transcend governments, governments of the same party, governments of different parties. It is something that every single person needs to buy into. And I think based on what I have heard here today from all sides, everybody can agree with me that there is buy in and something needs to be done.

Madam President, the statement in Sen. Richards's contribution that stuck with me, was the one where he indicated that we all need to work together by way of institutions. And I would just go on to say this, I agree with you Sen. Richards. You are right in the sense that all of these institutions do need to work together. But then as I thought about it after the last time everyone contributed on this, I started to wonder if that was the issue, that all institutions need to work together. Yes, it needs to happen, but if that is something that is difficult to happen, and maybe that is the issue. You see, Madam President, in my mind, because of the nature of this problem and because this particular problem is one that runs deep in terms culture, in terms of how deeply it runs in society, in terms of, as I heard Sen. Rambhajan and several other speakers on the last occasion mention, deep within the mindset and psyche of individuals in a society.

And because it runs so deep it is something that if it is you are going to solve, then you have to go all of the way, that you have to get through all of the several layers. And a lot of the solutions that I have been hearing put forward by all sides, great solutions, they peel back one layer based on this particular institution, another layer based on another institution, but they do not go as deeply as it should,

and I will go deeper into that. And let me just give an example. Every time I hear about gender-based violence, one of the first things that creeps in is men versus women. And I understand that, because the statistics will all show obviously it is men causing harm towards women. So I get that.

But when I speak about going deeper and when you get down to those deeper layers in terms of the psyche and the mindset in terms of getting between the layers of culture and society, you would understand that you just cannot lay blame at the feet of men, and say well men have to do this and men have to do that, because it is men against women and that is what the statistics show. And I will give an example. So, Sen. Rambhajan, when she got up and made her contribution, immediately stated that something was wrong because Sen. Richards being a man, got up and raised the issue. Well, I will respond to say something is wrong with even thinking of it that way. Anybody should get up and raise this issue. If it is an all-hands-on-deck approach, man or woman should raise this issue because they all have to work together in order to solve this issue. So it should not be that a woman is the one to get up and raise this issue and champion this issue. Let it be championed by anybody who does not want to see violence against women moving forward period.

So I am very glad Sen. Richards is the one to raise it in this particular forum, in this particular Legislature. And if you look outside to society, you would see other women's group been championing this particular issue for the longest while. But we really have to get to the crux of the matter and change that mindset and not say, well, because it is an issue for women that a woman should be the one to raise that particular issue in this particular forum.

Madam President, Sen. Richards indicated in his contribution, and several

other speakers that have gone in the last day and here today, have spoken to several institutions having a role to play. And those institutions would be the Legislature, the Judiciary, the TTPS, transportation and education, just to name a few. So, we have heard speakers, and Sen. Laurel Lezama-Lee Singh spoke to it. I am sure the AG would speak to it, and Sen. Bacchus, the Minister in the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation would speak to it, in relation to their particular portfolios. But, we have heard of several pieces of legislation being passed in relation to being able to protect women. And it is not that they are taking long to be passed, because you would remember on April 27th, Sen. Richards in his contribution would have spoken to the pepper spray legislation which was imminent. And you would notice that that particular piece of legislation has been passed. Further to that, the Sexual Offences (Amdt.) Bill, again, spoken to, when he moved the Motion on April 27th, again has been passed.

So, there is commitment to pass the necessary legislation to bring some level of relief or solution to the issue from the standpoint of the Legislature. But the Legislature is just where it begins. It needs to trickle down into all of the various institutions to be executed in order to begin to attack the problem from that the layer. And so, if you look at the Judiciary, it is Sen. Lutchmedial in her contribution that spoke in great deal and in great length in relation to the Judiciary and the problems. And obviously she was raising the issue of efficiency and how fast cases are disposed of, especially as it relates to domestic violence and gender-based violence.

She went on to make a suggestion that the courts “set up a special victims unit”, so to speak, in relation to gender-based violence so that they could be treated with properly and efficiently. And that is a very good suggestion. I would leave it

to the Attorney General, if he speaks later, to truly respond to that, and the ability to do something like that. And of course, the response that you have would heard in relation to the efficiency of disposal of cases, you would have known in the Eleventh Parliament that a lot of legislation passed through this very Chamber in relation to allowing the courts to be able to move faster in the way they dispose of those cases.

But, what I would say, Madam President, is that as much as that idea is good, you have to really think of it from the standpoint of, like I said, ensuring that the mindset of the individuals that populate those institutions is corrected, and that is why I said in the beginning a few minutes ago, you have to go deeper. And as I go through these institutions and go through the layers, when I get to the last one, I will show you exactly where we need to go. Because the problem is this, and Sen. Dillon-Remy spoke to it, and Sen. Rambhajan spoke to it and touched on it a little bit, if it is you do not start at the very beginning, and these individuals, these children that we are raising, if we are raised in a particular environment where certain things are the norm, then they eventually are going to go into society and populate these very same institutions, causing the problems that Sen. Rambhajan raised in relation to not being able to properly address things like gender-based violence in these institutions, and the efficiency that needs to take place in terms of addressing that particular issue.

Madam President, we move on to the TTPS. Now, Sen. Rambhajan spoke about the TTPS and indicated that the problem was the male police officers. Again, this is why I said you cannot just go down one road and lay it all at the feet of men alone. And this is not in any kind of way to defend men per se, but I just want to prove this point. Sen. Lutchmedial in the last occasion, in her contribution, gave a

story—Sen. Rambhajan, and as much as the TTPS, because we have heard those stories where women would go in to the police station and they would not—either have their reports dismissed, or the reports would not be taken, or they would be told, yes, you could go back home and make up with your husband or whoever is the common law partner that you have there. So when the TTPS responded and indicated that they would be setting up a gender-based unit, I said to myself, okay, well, that is good. Now, in that gender-based unit it is a start. You can populate that unit with women who would tend to be more sensitive to the various issues, especially if a woman comes into the police station and makes a report. Because as a woman they would have been going through some of the experiences that many of our debaters in here today had indicated they have a friend who had gone through, and therefore would be some level of sensitivity.

So, imagine my shock when Sen. Lutchmedial tells the story of the 18-year-old girl that walks in to the police station, makes a report to a female officer who then went on leave, had the file home, the case is being called in the courts, nobody is showing up, and if was not for her intervention, the case would have been dismissed. So, Sen. Rambhajan my response to you, by saying that it is male police officers, your own colleague just indicated it is not just male officers. Obviously, the problem is wider than that. Because you are thinking in your head, women to women, women to protect women, women sensitive to women's plight, but here is the story that when an 18-year-old woman tries to make a file or a report to another woman, the same problem happens. And that is why I keep saying and you would hear me repeating it over and over again, the entirety of the mindset needs to be addressed. If it is that you are going down the road of saying well, let us tackle it from the male standpoint, then you are going to miss out a whole other section.

And the problem will never be resolved doing that alone.

Now, Madam President, in relation to what I just indicated with the TTPS, let me just go on to say too, that that particular problem probably could have been solved with proper procedure. Now, when I heard that story a couple of things jumped out at me. The first one is that I did not know police officers could take case files home. I did not know that. The second one is that if an officer responsible for a case goes on leave, is the case not passed on to another officer for continuance? The third one is, why did the female officer not follow up even after returning from leave? And as I indicated, you know, because as a female you want to ensure that woman to woman, women are protecting women. And let me just say Sen. Richards, as much as you have called in this particular Motion for some sort of government intervention, I would go as far as to just say this—and Sen. Bacchus, the Minister in the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation would probably speak more to this, I do not want to preempt him.

But it is my hope that digitization would solve a lot of these process issues. Let me just call it that. Because that is what hope that digitization would be able to do, that you do not have a situation like this being repeated, I hope not. Because this is just one instance that Sen. Lutchmedial spoke to. That if a case is being reported, Sen. Rambhajan, that once a woman walks into a police station and they file a report, that there is a paper trail of such digitally. That the Commissioner of Police, when next he appears before the Joint Select Committee on National Security, Sen. Richards, of which you and I both serve on, that we can then speak to him and ask him pertinent questions in relation to data: How many reports have been filed in relation to gender-based violence? How many have been followed up on? How many have been dismissed? No longer would you walk into a police

station and be turned away, Sen. Rambhajan, because that victim can then stand in that police station and say, “No, I want a report made”.

Because I will tell you now, all of the stories that we are hearing, if you could hear it and I could hear it and everybody in this Chamber could hear it, understand that the victims are also hearing it. And in so hearing it, they are telling themselves, “I’m not going to go to the police station because they going to send me home to make two roti”. And that is how digitization and fixing those small processes could help. Because if I know as a victim that once I cross that police door, that is a digital footprint of the report that I am making, and somebody is forced to follow up. Because now you can measure what is taking place. So I just wanted to put that on there, and of course I leave it to the Minister with the responsibility with digitization to go further in relation to that.

So, Madam President, I ask the question, in relation to the best way to solve this problem, and I am going to say it because Sen. Richards hit the nail on the head coming down to the end of his contribution: Education, education, education. He spoke to programmes in other countries dealing with gender-based violence, that they would start at the high school level, and once they did that they actually went on to the primary school level. I think it is in one of the Caribbean countries you indicated was Bahamas or something to that effect. And they were having great results in relation to the reduction of gender-based violence because you start with training at that level.

Now, let me tell you why I indicated mindset is what we need to target, by giving you a story. Several years ago—now, the world has gone through several different crises, I would call it. You have the pandemic now, you have economic downturns. But several years ago when I was much younger there was a tsunami in

one of the Asian countries, and I distinctly remember looking at the television, the news. And this was after everything had subsided, obviously, it is time to rebuild. And the individuals coming out of their houses to assess the damage all started to one by one clean up their respective areas. And what struck me and stuck in my memory was the newscaster indicated that once one individual had done with theirs, they immediately began to go to their neighbour and help their neighbour. And what the newscaster said at the point in time was that they were amazed at the fact that there was no looting, no rioting, no type of chaos whatsoever. What struck them was the orderly fashion in which this particular process started to happen. I said, okay.

But then it was not too long after that I ended up reading an article, and in those same Asian countries, what the article indicated was that the school process, the education process for their children, for the first three years they learn nothing, no math, no English, no language. The first thing they learn, manners; how to treat each other, respect for each other. That is the first three years. Nothing else. They learn to clean up after themselves. And what the article ended by saying is that before you put on top of anything else, the mathematics, the language, the sciences, you lay down the values of the society. Knowing fully well that when they age and they go out into the society, it is those values that lay the deepest in their psyche. And when you listen to that and you juxtapose it to what occurred in that crisis, you understand how effective that was. And that is what I mean by we have to get to the crux of the matter by going as deeply as you can into the mindset.

So as much, Sen. Richards, as that Caribbean island started at high school and started at primary school, I say go even further, start in Infant 1. Teach the children that girls and boys are equal. That a girl is no different than a boy. Start to

teach them in Infant 1, how to respect each other, how to value each other, and lay down those ground rules for the society that you want to see at that level. And as they start to grow and move through the school system, you start to add on the other layers that you want, so you start to teach them about good relationships, similar to what is being done that Sen. Richards spoke to. You start to teach them about sex education, if that is the way you want to go. You start to teach them about a lil bit more complicated societal issues in relation to relationships as they get older and as their mind develops and they can understand it.

So that when they turn 18 and enter into the society, they then become the change agents that you want to see, for what Sen. Rambhajan, Sen. Dillon-Remy and Sen. Richards, and everybody else that has spoken about, is bad. They are now the ones that will go there and take that layer, that base layer that was laid down in Infant 1, into the society, so that by the time all of us inside here are too old and only care about how fast “we rocking chair does rock”, that we would start to see those changes because those babies would now be leading the charge. They would now be in the TTPS, they would now be in the Judiciary, they would now be in the legislature. And you do not have to ask what is going on in those institutions because of what they learn in Infant 1, they know that when the victim walks into the police station this has to be taken seriously, and I am going to take the report, and I am going to follow up.

And when the investigation begins, that police officer is going to take it all the way through. And when it hits the court, the court is going to take it seriously. And ensure that the case follows all the way through. That is how you make the change. That is the only way to make the consistent kind of change that is required to ensure that this particular problem is dealt with once and for all. Now do you

understand why I say it is mindset issue? One of the hardest issues for any human society to treat with. Anybody would know that behaviour is one of the hardest things to change either for yourself or in others, and you have to start from young to inculcate and plant the seeds of the values that you want.

So, Madam President, Sen. Richards, you understand what I am saying. I am not saying do not do the things that we are doing now. Do them because they would help address the issues. We will speed up the cases in the Judiciary. We will talk to the TTPS by way of the Joint Select Committee on National Security and ensure that the processes are put in place. We will look at the education system and try to deal with it from that standpoint as well and put in the programmes. And let me just, before I move on, respond to Sen. Rambhajan, because she indicated that some of the programmes were not there in relation to victims and whatnot.

Madam President: Sen. de Freitas, you have five more minutes.

Sen. N. de Freitas: Thank you, Madam President. And Sen. Rambhajan, let me just respond by indicating that there are programmes, and there is help for the children and for victims. There are shelters that are up and running, because I think she indicated, and I think she was asking—I do not think she was saying that the shelters were not there at all, but she was asking whether the shelters were up and running. I am just responding to that to indicate that shelters are up and running, and there is for victims the ability to go to these shelters, and there is wrap around service for the victims.

And so, there is help that is happening now and available now. So it is not that those particular programmes are not there for them. But what I am saying Sen. Rambhajan, is that it cannot be that. That deals with after the fact. We want to treat with it before the fact. But it is not right to really say that those programmes are

not there. They are there and they are available to victims. The shelters take boys and girls, and the women can stay until they can be independent or reintegrated with their family. So these capabilities are there, and it is not that the shelters are not running. And I just want to put that out there too, because, obviously, like I indicated, the victims are listening, then they know that that is there to help them in relation to that.

So, Madam President, to wrap up, as I indicated, we can do what needs to be done by way of making these institutions better. But in order to tackle this problem effectively we have to understand that these institutions are populated with individuals who are born of a particular environment, because we are all subject to the experiences we have in life. And if it is you want to solve this problem, we have to go all the way back, Sen. Richards, start as early as we can start to inculcate and plant the seeds of the kinds of values that we want to see in society. And, what I will say, Madam President, is that we must take a long hard look at ourselves and be true to ourselves because once we do that, we can then make the necessary changes that we need to make to the benefit of all in society. With those few words, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. David Nakhid: In the name God, the most gracious, most merciful, Madam President, I thank you for the opportunity to join in on this very important significant Motion by the hon. Sen. Paul Richards, which, from my understanding, was to examine:

“...the deficiencies in the current systems to deal with the incidence of violence crimes against women and girls;”

And this is why I always seem to be at loggerheads with the Government, because everything seems to be done and dealt with at a very superficial level, and it goes

to some of the contributions that were made today.

3.30 p.m.

Now, superficiality has its place, I mean, you have people in very high office who fit that quality. But on a Motion like this, I would have imagined that Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing who spoke about Government cannot be solely responsible and the solution is we must harness our energy to improve our attitude and lead by example without saying how. And if the example is what we have sometimes heard in the other place, where we have an MP like—I would not call her name—who spoke about social media pages, attacking the women of the UNC and I quote:

“...I will gracefully not read about boys’ feuds, pink palaces...Fyzabad office...women scorned...woman horned...”

And this is on the *Hansard*, and this was submitted on the 27 January, 2021.

So, yes indeed, abuse is not solely of a physical nature and sometimes it is woman on woman, and sometimes it is verbal and it can be extremely damaging. But when I looked at the wording of the Motion:

“...deficiencies in the current systems...”

I think it went more than just to the penal side of it. And this—I am always at loggerheads with this Government because they deal with things always from the penal side of it. It is never from the developmental side of things and I mentioned that in one of the previous debate.

So we can talk about the TTPS and we can talk about the punishments and the slowness of the criminal justice system, which is something we all know and we agree. But I think Sen. de Freitas, who mentioned it briefly, has talked about, what I allude to now, developmental, and I must give him credit. I thought it was quite appropriate but it did not go deep enough and I will tell you why, because we can

speak about models that exist in Northern Europe, Western Europe, Central Europe—all over the world—Asia, but we have our own particular circumstances in Trinidad and Tobago and that is a fact. And I like to take it back, always, to the grassroots because it is the grassroots people who had the most influence on my life, even though I must admit I came from a—what will be termed a solid middle class family, but my football, my upbringing, my view, everything was shaped by the people I played football with. I must admit that and these were mostly poor and working class people of Trinidad and Tobago from all demographics.

And as I remember, something that remained with me to my life and helped me in my choice, as I wanted to marry, was a man called “Clipper” who had worked in the Caribbean bottling plant, I imagine, in Champ Fleurs all his life. He said something more profound than anything I had read from Tolstoy, Plato, Socrates. He said one time on the block, the best woman—the best woman for a man is a woman who does not change how she looks at that man in the bad times. And this has so many layers to it, which I will go into now. Because a lot of what we see in Trinidad and Tobago, in terms of violence towards women, as I mentioned in our the debate on sexual offences, it is not only about violence for sex, sometimes it is violence born of frustration—immense frustration about the situation, economic, educational, social and we have to admit that here. So it does not happen in a vacuum. That violence that we are talking about does not happen in a vacuum. As a matter of fact, nothing does. There are always underlying reasons.

So before we get to the criminal justice system and the lethargic nature of it, we could deal with that that most important system that we sometimes neglect, which is the family support system. That is a system in itself. When we erode the

family support system by cutting education, as this Government has done, by not being astute and wise enough in social grants, that also has an effect on the family support system. And several—I have seen several narratives lately in the newspaper and it has been excellent. I have seen from both sides, people who support the Government, people who support the Opposition, and they have been excellent. And they all seem to note that it is not about one demographic is smarter than the other, because a lot of people like to put things in this country according to race, unfortunately, but it is not about that part of it. That demographic never comes into it. What it is about, people advanced in education and all studies will show that, in all countries, when there is a solid family support system behind them.

What has happened is that we have certain demographics in this country who have maintained a solid family support, despite what might be termed or perceived as slights against them or attempts to undermine their family support. And then we have other demographics and we have to be very clear about it. When we look—there is no coincidence that these incidents of violence that we see are mostly recorded in the hotspots or so-called “impoverished communities” along the East-West Corridor in the rural areas, and that is a fact. Look at any crime wrap or any report, all of these incidences come from areas that have been socially and economically deprived.

So why we do not launch from there? Why do we not look at that, not just on a superficial level but a more in-depth level? So when we talk about keeping that family support, maintaining that legacy of family and faith-based communities that we used to have in Trinidad and Tobago—and where did we divert from that? Then you have to look and ask, because it has been said here that the Government

cannot be solely responsible and there must be more bipartisanship and there must be even, as Sen. de Freitas said, nonpartisan activity, which for me makes no sense. It is all about politics, politics in a marriage, politics in a community, politics in everything and we have to deal with it. What we have to hope for is that people or people with the resources— and that is the Government, whether we like it or not, that is it, the Government has the resources to take the actions that could affect the deficiencies—and I read it again—in the current systems. The Government, in truth and in fact, they are well placed to deal with these things.

So my opinion and, slightly, a recommendation is: Has this Government done anything as far as initiatives, programmes, workshops within the community, within these areas that we speak about that proffer, unfortunately, most of these incidences? Has the Government in fact—truth and in fact, done anything other than a so-called economic recovery committee—until now we have yet to see any recommendation from that committee implemented. I have spoken with a couple of people on that committee and they have said that nothing has been implemented. And it was promised—it was promised that that committee would do something and allocate resources to these communities that we consider hotspots. As usual, only talk and no action from that side.

So, Madam President, when you look at this Motion, not abstractly, but you look at it and the substance of it, we could reduce the amount of people that actually go into that penal part of it. And I keep having to make that point over and over again with this Government, because they do not seem to recognize the importance of attacking this issue from the development phase of it before we reach to the maladaptive characteristics that we see. I do not believe it is within the human nature for men to wake up, or women, and want to act violently, except in a

few cases. And having two sons who study psychology, plus a sister who was past president, it is not something that is compulsive, it is not like paedophilia, violence against women. There are a lot of underlying circumstances and fondly enough, it has a lot to do with frustration. And I go back to that quote from my partner, “Clipper”, that how important it is for a man to feel some sense of worth to his woman, to his family, to his wife; how important that is not to look at his woman and see that she sees some value and he not feel impotent, he not feel disenfranchised, disempowered.

And that feeling, Madam President, leads to a lot of the violence that we see in domestic abuse. And that happens when the man is unable to provide for his family in most instances. So he turns to alcoholism, he turns to drugs to escape the reality of being unable to provide for his family. And I am citing these instances, because these are the instances that really prevail in the so-called hotspot communities in Trinidad and Tobago. They are always fighting against the tide, always fighting to put food on the table. No one here can imagine those circumstances; no one. How it is that you have to worry between breakfast and lunch, how are you going to provide that—if you can afford that lunch or that breakfast. No one can imagine that feeling for a man to look at his wife—what Shadow used to say. Shadow used to say, “how the woman look at you when you cyah buy the box of KFC”, you know what I mean? “Poverty is hell”.

So when you cut jobs—you cut CEPEP workers, for example, their salary, which by all metrics, it is not a great salary. Okay, you cut it but then, at the same token, you increased in a mid-year review, the amount, the allocation by millions—\$43 million. You think the hill, Madam President, and the rural areas, they are not watching, they are not hearing? So if you cut the CEPEP workers,

10,000, their salaries—and you give that million—43 million—to who is that money? You are suffering the people. You think the hill and the rural areas, they are not aware of it? They are aware of it, Madam President. The men are seeing that and they feel powerless and they act out. And no one is saying, especially me; especially me, that once they act out, they should not be punished accordingly. And I will tell you all a story—true story.

There was once a beautiful, angelic woman who used to love to go to the market in San Juan; loved, she loved to go, every Friday she would go. Everybody knew her. So she took her—this is in the early 80's. This is the advent of hard drugs in Trinidad and Tobago, as the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries used to allude to in his writings in a more enlightened time. And with the beginning of the 80's—what we like to say? “Sprangers”, drug addicts, everywhere; everywhere. So this beautiful angelic woman, on her way to her market with her daughter, was assaulted, bag ripped from her blouse. She used to love to wear these flowery blouses—ripped. She looked like almost sexually assaulted. It was ripped so far down. So her husband, a serious man—“hmm”, a hard man, told his four sons, “Find that person. Find him, else for sure, you will lose your father to incarceration.” The four sons did find him.

You see, Madam President, on reflection, when that father was asked years later why he, who never did anything outside of the law, had told his four sons to take the necessary action to exact some measure of justice, some measure of revenge, he answered to his four sons, “I did not do it for your mother, I did it for your sister, for her to know that any of these actions against woman will be dealt with severely. Because in our system, in Trinidad and Tobago, God knows how long it would have took.” And my point is he recognized the generational effects of

violence on woman. He was not proud of it years later but he made his point to his four sons.

So, Madam President, I have no pity whatsoever when the crime is committed. But my interest—complete interest is how do we mitigate those actions before they come into play? And that is why I come to the deficiencies again, which I did not think was dealt with in the most profound way here in the Senate. Because you are talking about systems, you are talking about not only social support and family support systems, you are talking about the ability of the Government to communicate public awareness systems. Has the Government done enough to put public awareness systems in place with commercial, with ads, with everything? So maybe instead of a transportation hub costing \$400,000 that looks like a bus shed, they could have put up banners; banners advocating against violence against women throughout the communities. Instead of putting up signs advertising alcohol up and down the East-West Corridor, only in the so-called poor and hotspot communities, how come we do not see these banners for alcohol in Goodwood Park and Bayshore? Why only in communities up the East-West Corridor? Why?

We know alcohol is a problem that leads to a lot of domestic abuse. All of these things we have to consider. Where are the community support systems, where are the workshops, the initiatives, the programmes to help people to come in and talk to these communities? Sen. de Freitas alluded to talking in schools and in secondary schools and then in primary schools, that is also an option. But that requires government resources, government intervention. So there must be a shift away, especially in this Government, from unnecessary expenses for all kinds of manners of rental buildings and all of that. Let us put some moneys into things that

make a difference in this society. I repeat, Madam President, the hills and the rural areas are watching. They can see when we are being disingenuous. They can see when we are being hypocritical in our utterances.

So, Madam President, I would like to say that this be dealt with from a more developmental side of things. As I always allude to, no one wakes up in the morning, no man, no woman, with the idea to go against the norms of society, to break the law. We have to consider these exigencies, we have to look at that, we have to look at that in-depth, it cannot be superficial like what we have seen here. Madam President, it was mentioned by Sen. de Freitas that Sen. Bacchus will talk about, maybe a possibility of eliminating the kinks and so, in one of the systems. It would be the digitization of the system and so and it will solve many of the problems, this according to Sen. de Freitas. But I remember Sen. Lutchmedial, she raised the importance of this in a Motion on the Adjournment. She did that, she spoke about that, to have electronic filing and so. So we mentioned that. So we know it is not only about saying that we should all hold hands together and sing “kumbaya”. We have to put resources where the resources are necessary and not only on the penal side of things. And I repeat that it must be in the community programmes; social support systems; family support systems; government, communication and public awareness systems.

If we can do that, Madam President, if for once we can take a proactive approach rather than a reactive approach, maybe, just maybe, all the other superficial talk about: in a police station, if a female officer or a male officer take—that is—“one swallow does not a summer make” on either side of it. What we need to do is always, especially when it comes to these kinds of Motions, looking at the systems and their deficiencies. There must be resources. There must

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be serious intent to deal with it in a meaningful way. And I like when Sen. Lezama-Lee Sing talked about improving our attitude. I once mentioned that here in this honourable Chamber about improving the attitude towards our Service Commissions as well. And I was told—it was said after, that if you improve your attitude towards a car, it does not put gas in a car. For me—

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

Sen. D. Nakhid: Thank you, Madam President. For me, that was an inanity. It was totally irrelevant. It is important to improve our attitude to how we look at adjusting violence against women and girls. But we must take that decision—we must take that decision to realize how we have failed the women and girls, and it comes all the way back to the family structure and I repeat that. And that has to do with allocation of education, making sure that people are well placed, well trained and that needs more than just economic recovery committee talk. It needs resourcing, it needs action and it needs something that this Government never does, which is implement properly.

So, Madam President, with those few words, I would like again to thank Sen. Richards for bringing this to light and I look forward this time to a meaningful and substantial resolution to how we adjust these deficiencies in these systems that we have. I thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Dr. Varma Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam President, for allowing me to partake in this discussion. Madam President, Sen. Richards must be thanked for this for bringing this Motion because it is certainly is something, you know—we saw certain activities occurring, social marches, vigils and what not, and it seems that the country was in a position where it was trying to speak out, trying to ask the powers that be to do something for the women who were actually raped and went

missing. So therefore, there were various reasons why people came out. People came out in these vigils, candlelight movement and whatnot—some to show the authorities that they were fed up, they wanted action on crime; some to get together in solidarity with our women; some political instigators trying to whip up support; some may have come out also just to socialize.

So whatever reason, this social activism did make the Government recant on its stance with pepper spray, so it has its effect. And you see, the thing we want to see is that social change has a collective power of the citizens to bring about change and show that we are just not powerless and we could create the change we wish to see. We can foster constructive change by bringing together social activists, philanthropists to catch the attention of our leaders, to cause a shift in how we can get things done without violence or disrespect to our leaders, understanding we need to nudge them sometimes in the right direction, what is in the public interest, what they are saying is vox populi or populi, I say, that you have to see, listen to the people. And Government has to probably refocus on the citizens who may want to come out.

Now, Madam, when we had this Motion here, it was not just in Trinidad and Tobago. We had to appreciate, worldwide, we saw a change going. Women—people were coming out. Was it the COVID had people frustrated, locked up and they were just coming out for one of those reasons I mentioned? In Mexico, you found that there were 80,000 people marched on International Women's Day and two cases recently caused major problem in terms of having—there was a seven-year-old who was kidnapped and her body was found. Actually, social media took that right through. And then there was another case where a lady called Ingrid was murdered and disembowelled and skinned by her boyfriend.

So they marched a day without a woman and the slogan was that a, “Day Without Women”, where they said woman should stay home and protest, do not go to work, do not go to school, just a day without women. Because about 10 women a day are killed in Mexico. So it is not just Trinidad we have that problem. The Mexican President, you know, came out and said it would not make a big impact on the economy and he had been criticized for his comment where he said that that the conservative rivals are behind the protest. It sounds similar to what I heard a leader here say.

Madam, besides this occurring in Mexico, Australia had a case also where a worker was actually raped in the Australian Parliament. And this worker found that because where it occurred, she was not taken seriously and 40,000 women came out to march in Australia—no, sorry, it was 110,000 women took to the streets across Australia because the organizer of the march said that we have to get to the Government to take crimes against women seriously. And Brittany Higgins who was raped in Parliament, Madam, she actually said that:

“There is a horrible societal acceptance of sexual violence...”

We need a dramatic male cultural shift to assist our women.

Madam, even Japan had a case, and I must say I laughed at the case in Japan and my wife actually clouted me, so I was abused. Because here you are, Mr. Yoshiro Mori, 83 years old, was quoted as saying:

“...women talk too much...”

And when I told my wife that and I laughed, she said, “How I could laugh at this?” But I was just teasing my wife. And women came out and marched for that. And Mr. Mori had to resign his position. He was in charge of the Olympic Committee and he had to come—when women took to the street and said, “We refuse to know

our place. We do not tolerate discrimination against women.” And he made that mention when he said if we increase the number of female board members, we have to make sure their speaking time is restricted somewhat because they have difficulty in finishing which is annoying. So he paid the price, he resigned. But you see, women are taking to the streets and women are marching and women are trying to demand their right.

Madam, this Motion here brings me to question: How do we question the Government’s ability, so far, in term of handling this situation? But it is not just Trinidad, I say it is worldwide. Right now, in Greece, there is a big debate going on because Caroline Crouch, a 20-year-old British national who got married to a native there, she actually was killed and her husband told the police:

People broke—“...into the house...killed the family...”—pet and tortured her—“in front of the couple’s 11-month-old...”—baby.

So even though that happened on the 11th he only recently, two days ago admitted he was the one. So it is all over we have to get this fixed. So how do we judge the Government’s performance?

4.00 p.m.

Madam, when I looked at a recent case where someone took a taxi with a friend—she did everything right—that person body was found some days later. They found the police took too long. That person actually—what happened, her body was found too long. The system was criticized because the autopsy report, the first one was inconclusive, the other one give a different value. Then there was talk about police taking pictures of people in the station; then there was talk about people falling out some chairs and damaging themselves. So, are we a banana Republic when you see that state of events? I would have said yes, but, Madam, I

looked at what happened in UK. In UK, there was a case recently where Sarah Everard, a UK lass who went missing on March the 3rd. Her body was discovered on the 10th. So the criticism in the UK, where we always say it has the best system and we should follow, Sarah took precaution. She left her friend's house while it was still daylight. She took a longer route, populated route. She wore brightly coloured clothes and shoes she could run in. There was a criticism there about police delay in handling the case. There was criticism there where twice in custody the accused who was there had to be hospitalized for head injuries. I wonder if he fell from a chair.

The probe called into the police handling of this accused, and his court hearing was the 9th of July and there is a backlog, Madam, of 56,000 court cases in England and Wales and many will not go before a jury till 2022. So our AG must be praised for having virtual courts. Our AG must be praised by having a better system because they are complaining about crowded courts in a COVID time. You see, even in that case, the first post-mortem was inconclusive and a second one had to come about. So therefore, even when we criticize our local doctor here, look at what is happening in the UK.

Criticisms there also from the crime survey shows that so many women are victims of rape and attempted rape, but just a miniscule amount were actually reported to the police and there is just a small amount that were actually convicted. Same logic, same argument we are hearing here. Previous history of sexual misconduct from the accused in that case who exposed himself in South London, same thing we are hearing here. We do not know about past conduct. And you see, the police also refused to give a vigil citing COVID-19 restriction, similar to what we heard here when we had an Arima refusal also. And Monday after a meeting

with the criminal justice the Government promised to increase CCTV, we are hearing the same logic here.

In the UK, it was a resident's doorbell camera which actually got this footage and the movement there came about called "Reclaim These Streets". So therefore, it is the same instance in First World countries. Madam, what I am suggesting to is we have to have an instance where even when we are trying to look at women and protect them, we have to realize that women if they are going into a taxi now—because remember we have the event of a PH menace I think in society, and you know even though we have had good things Government did, giving us the sexual registry, child marriage, GBU, Administration of Justice (Electronic Monitoring) Act, a court system that recognizes the battered women syndrome so women can get through with manslaughter instead murder, sexual harassment in the workplace which has to be tweaked still, virtual courts, these are some good things. But you see, the Government in the driver's seat carrying us for this drive for the next few years, and we have to make sure that we are going in the same direction to arrive at the destination safely.

Madam, PH taxis is illegal and I am saying if you have an illegal system why do we want to legalize it. Get rid of that system. Have a system where you can hire persons. Get a rental company to get the cars at a cheaper rate. Because, Madam, the Taxi Association is complaining that they are at a disadvantage with this PH drivers who are illegal, not even paying taxi—they do not pay taxi badge or insurance. So therefore, we should not attempt to legalize an illegal activity. We could institute something quickly. We can put something in there where we would be able to give our women a greater chance of travel because that is one of the Constitution, freedom of movement.

Now, Madam, the Uber had drivers here, over 500 drivers and 7,000 active users, and there was some confusion between them and the Government and they decided to pick up and go. I do not know if it was taxes or what. Maybe we could implement something like that. We need to. We need to and the Senator in charge of the digital transformation, he can provide something that we can get taxis that we could probably track persons. He can provide a system where women before they go into a taxi they could take a snapshot and give that snapshot to, like an iCloud, so you would know exactly who you are going to. And if a taxi objects, you taking my taxi, be warned out of that. So we should have proper—we should have a shift in travel protocol. We should also have the—besides having a personal picture of these taxis you are going into, institute something that we can help our individuals.

Madam, the police methods need also to be addressed because you see sometimes you find that it was mentioned that you go into a station and you may meet a male or a female and they may not take you seriously. We need to have that ethic change in the police service. You see, I think we need back the community policing in greater amounts. We need the community patrol so they can know the community. They can know which houses that there are instances of domestic violence that are occurring. Once a community police officer knows the community we can have a warning. You see collateral damage can occur where even with gangs, because a gang may now do not want you to come and check out women in their neighbourhood. A gang will have initiative rapes, gangs will have—they will perpetrate violence which permeates the society. You know we could probably use the SOE to take out those few gangs that are there because they perpetrate the violence which actually pervades our society.

Women are not really free to walk the streets and then sometimes when you are getting cat calls from—or elderly men saying inappropriate comments to young girls walking, snap them, put them on social media as these wolves who are just teasing them. Embarrass them. So therefore, we have to be thankful for the GBU Unit, but we have to let the population know we are now willing to let you come forward.

A lot of rape victims do not come forward. They do not like the system. They feel embarrassed. They feel nothing will happen. They will not get justice. We have to convince them. You see this is—even the DMO coming out to do the swabs could be females, do it in a humane manner. Actually the challenge is not really the Government, you know, so much. The challenge is to have the institutions and the institutions in place that is running properly for our women, and they will now have the faith to come out because we have the institutions there. It is just to get it, tweak it to run properly.

Madam, another problem we see here is domestic violence. This has increased in our pandemic. They say it is a shadow pandemic and we are seeing now more bedroom killers than before. You know, we have to educate persons to leave, and a challenge we have always had is women do not want to leave their men. A lot of women come out, they complain to a police and they go back to their males. Some of them are psychologically bonded to their male. Some of them are like the Stockholm syndrome or what you call the traumatic bonding theory where WOMEN will make a complaint about a gentleman and go back. There is the cycle of violence. So we have to appreciate. If we are going to take a dent in domestic violence, you know Government is really not to blame for domestic violence. They do not know what is going on in the bedroom. It is for the relatives. The victim

themselves have that power to come out, but if a victim is psychologically trapped, we need to change that law where we can go after these individuals.

You see, even under our Mental Health Act we can go after mentally ill patients if that patient is deluded and what not. We may have to look at the domestic violence law in such a way that we will figure if a relative, if a police, if doctors come out and say that their sister is in a home locked up, she got beaten before, you could provide that evidence. I think we should have a tribunal who could look at it, a doctor, a judge and a lay person to say, “That person is at risk. Look, she came out. She gave a report. She changed her mind, but look the medical record show that. Look the relatives come and are pained.” So therefore persons may say and we have attorneys here will say we are taking away the liberty of people, but I am thinking to define liberty for people with delusions about their partners that is an injustice. They are caught in that mind trap and if we leave them there, some of them will be victims. It is really taking involuntary decision to take somebody involuntary. It is like rescuing a victim from a cult. You know, we have something like exit counselling. I say we have to have the laws changed in such a way that if it is done in a manner, just as how we have the Mental Health Act, that we formulate the laws that we can now have that hearing that we could bring that person away against their own rights to come in.

Madam, also in England there is what you call the Clare Wood, a case where—they actually had a register now for patients who have a violent past. You see, Clare Wood had a boyfriend, George Appleton who killed himself after, but he strangled and burned her, and afterwards it was found that he had two cases before of violent history of beating people. And even though it was against Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the English common law, the

English decided to make a policy decision that if you have an individual who had been violent before, the police could have a duty to come and warn you, or you can apply, your family can apply. You could come and say, “What is the past of my persons?” The lawyers will scream against it that it is privacy laws, but if we do not change we will continue seeing the killings.

Australia and Canada looked at this Clare’s law from UK and try and have that shift in the law. So we need to have that shift. We need to have changing philosophies of care needed as a society where we can try to get those individuals into therapy, because domestic violence will continue there unless we can change that law to get those individuals in. There is something called the, as I am saying, the evidence-based prosecution where you do not wait for those persons to come and say well, you know— Persons would come out and they make a claim, and the evidence-based prosecution looks at evidence that you have, past history of abuse. You look at pictures of the individual, and you look at those things, and you put together a case because the whole idea is doctors have to be trained to document the victim’s account, any sort of accompanying persons could collaborate it.

You have to train our Gender Based Violence Unit to start collecting and filing evidence the minute they are aware of an abuse, with the ideal that the victims may change their mind and get the photographic evidence. So even though they changed their mind, you could still now go in and go after this. So it is really evidence-based prosecution rather than waiting for them to die, because if they die you will now go back after their death and try to formulate, oh, were they abused, do you have evidence. You are doing it after their death. What is the sense of doing it after their death? I understand these individuals are psychologically entrapped. So you have to have pro arrest policies where the police are encouraged to make

arrest whenever probable causes exist regardless of the victim's change of heart. So we have to change our mindset. The prosecutors have to be on board with this. This is one way we could help the domestic violence situation.

Sen. Rambharat spoke on untouchables in his thing, and yeah I am on untouchables. I remember there was a past Minister in the previous Government, some allegation on the airline; he touched somebody's body part. Even in this administration there was another Minister who there was an enquiry into his inappropriate behaviour. Those persons should be admonished publicly. They should not have messages sent to our young ones because of certain positions. You will get away. So therefore, you remember there was a time where a priest had a lot of allegations of abuse and it was when he went to Ireland then he was caught. There was a curator of the zoo, the man wrote beautiful books on animals, it was when he touched down in America he was caught. Those were untouchables here.

Ken Starr in the United States was the independent prosecutor who went after President Clinton, who said, "Well oral sex is not sex". You need probably an independent department where if you have allegations of any sort of improper sexual conduct from persons in authority, you can go to this department to investigate it. The WHO in 2006 said that we know inter-partner violence against women and girls, against children, this is something since 2006 they begged the medical fraternity to go after.

Madam, I heard Sen. de Freitas spoke about starting from before. Yes, the Ministry of Education has to educate children to come out and say when they were abused because we have a section of society, children are abused we do not even know. So have to develop Ministry of Education to get to those children. Once you can come and you can tell your teacher, you can tell your social worker, we could

take child, and nurture that child and rescue that child. We need the Children's Authority in place, but things have to run properly. Look at what happened to certain children in the Children's Authority recently here. We need systems to work. This is what we need, dedicated people. Systems will fail but we have to put things. The Judiciary needs to get faster. We always heard talk about night courts and whatnot. I am still waiting for all these courts to open up because we need much faster handling of these matters.

What I say, Madam President, is I mentioned when we were doing the registry list about the violent pornography could affect the minds of children. We have to appreciate this is a fact. Children seeing pornography, seeing women in certain acts and it puts in their mind that is okay to rape, it is okay to beat. So therefore, sometimes we have to know how we are going to tackle that. I say sisters instead of going and marching against the Government, you should go a sister against a sister movement to tell your sisters stop making these pornographic materials. Let us take you in. Let us education you. Let us put in a different job.

Madam, there are plenty, plenty different reasons why people may be violent. You see, you have risk factors for an intimate partner violence and sexual violence. Low level of education, Ministry of Education could help that. Exposure to child mistreatment, rescue the child, put them in Children's Authority, but recognize the ones, let them speak out. Good touch bad touch, let us know which child has been abused at home. People witnessing violence. So Ministry of National Security has to go into the gangs and attack them. Anti-social personality disorder, we have to recognize those people who are infringing the law, that they are driving on the shoulder, they are disobeying the law, they are in trouble. We have to track them medically and say, "eh", those individuals if they are anti-social

persons they can lead to violence.

Alcohol use, Madam, a risk factor. I still see alcohol coming into the country and we have a problem with foreign exchange. I went to the grocery and there is about how much, I counted about 80-something bottle of different types of alcohol, vodka with orange juice, vodka with the pineapple. Look, if alcohol has a harmful effect in domestic violence, and also in people who murder, sometimes alcohol could be—some of them say they were under the influence, some may have different reasons. We have to tackle the alcohol abuse.

Harmful masculine effects, toxic masculinity, this is a cultural acceptance. I am macho. I am head of the home. My wife is not supposed to make more money than me. So you have that, and men must learn also that to take horn. Men must learn to say, “Ay, get away from this situation.” If a woman has cheated on you, you do not have to go and kill her. Come to us, let us counsel you. Have a men’s group and this is problem we are seeing there. And again, attitudes that condone multiple partners. Madam, our culture, both of them.

Our songs sometimes demean women and I am saying if you look at calypso and soca who is only talking about jamming and wining, and sex and what not, and bottom in the road and these things, we could curb these songs you know. Because if you are going to win a prize that my taxpayer money is going to pay for you, better—Government could put judges there, who have character, who will say we are only going to allow songs to win if they sing something nation building. No bottom in the road, no sort of wine and dine. So have the judges there that if I know I am going to sing, I am going to win taxpayers’ money. I do not mind if it is a private institution, but if you are taking my taxpayers’ money to encourage that sort of song, so I think we need nation building judges in those calypso

competitions. But it is not just there. I saw my child listening to a song the other day, it had “F” words, they had persons with big gold chain, they had cars, marijuana, and I was appalled. I said, “What are you are listening.” But the young persons will always listen to nonsense that the other generation will oppose.

I remember even when the Beatles came out, the parents did not like it. When Michael Jackson holds his crutch and wine, some people objected. When Elvis Presley was there even before, they banned him from TV. So even though I would be appalled by these songs, it does really affect the children and violence. So we have to look at what we take as culture.

And community norms also we have to look at. We find that if we ascribe community norms that the status of men is higher than women but that is changing, because look we have a President who is a female. The President of the Senator is a female. The Speaker is a female. So it is changing. It is changing. I mean, women have touched all avenues of our—except the Chief Justice’s post. So therefore, that status is changing now and I am happy. Again, if you have low levels of women access to employment, this is another area where is opens the doorway to sexual harassment. So therefore you have to have equal status in employment, and low level of gender equity laws.

So, Madam, you see when COVID came about, it actually was more harmful to the women because COVID actually—more women lost their jobs, more women suffered, more women were at home and more women were abused. So COVID to me was unfortunate where it raised all our—what I would want to put the social ills that we see into the homes and it is a pity that that happened, but we have to have things in place

Madam, I would like to say that, you know, when we look at the society and

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we think that it is just women—now this Motion that my other Senator rose, actually speaks on women and women affairs, but society on the whole has this violent tendency. Society on a whole we have to address the causes of violence. Prof. Hutchinson did a study where he said violence and self-injury have emerged as a major social public and mental concern among our men. And according to a journal article where he looked at the demographic features of homicide and suicide victims in Trinidad and Tobago, they found that we are a culture of violence. Males are killing themselves and each other more than females, and the ratio is 3:1. And victims of homicide were located primarily in the north-east regions of Trinidad and Tobago associated with African ethnicity and school drop-outs, and suicide was associated with central geography and Indian ethnicity with alcohol consumption. Again, alcohol knocking on the doors. So we can hit that alcohol. Raise the age to 21 as the States has and educate our individuals. We have to educate. So we see right there that the push has to be on education. The push has to be on training our young ones about the ills of alcohol. So tackling crime again is something that we have to thank the—

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

Sen. Dr. V. Deyalsingh: Thank you, Madam. We have to thank the Commissioner of Police for the Gender Based Violence Unit, it is going on. We still have to see its full effect. We have to make sure that any deficiencies we are willing to come out and say that there are deficiencies. We have to appreciate that what is happening in Trinidad, it is a global phenomenon. We are not a banana Republic as we say because First World countries have their own deficiencies. I guess all over the world people will have to start working and seeing how the systems were there, old systems; how we could keep up; how we could make it keep up with the times;

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how we could do what was really started; how we could evolve our system to, evolve the laws as I mentioned; have therapeutic jurisprudence to change the law to help domestic violence victims.

We have to get that subset of people who are not coming out. We have to get the subset of the individuals who are raped in their homes who are not coming forth, and I think the challenge really is really—you know, crime against women has a serious social consequence and it places a burden on the economic resources of a country, and in this post oil and COVID area we must get serious. These are all preventable debts and with preventable economic strain to the State, but we need the victims to come out of the shadows and Government's duty is to put the best systems in place to really let them have the confidence that they can come out and they can get justice. Thank you, Madam.

Madam President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, any opportunity, any effort, every attempt made to promote and advance equality, justice for our women and girls must be welcomed, must be appreciated. And therefore, it is against that particular background that we would like to give our support to this matter, this Motion I should say, before this honourable Senate. Because, Madam President, there is no doubt that women in our country and girls face serious assault through crime and violence perpetrated against them by, in the main, men. So this particular Motion by my colleague, Sen. Paul Richards, seeking to address this issue and calling on the Government to address the deficiencies in the current system to deal with this incidence of violent crimes against women and girls has to be located and appreciated.

Madam President, we have said that the centerpiece of any policy aimed at

addressing the root cause of violence against women and girls has to be located in gender equality in our society. There can be no gainsaying the fact, Madam President, that we can no longer focus on symptoms, but we must focus and address the root causes of crime, violence and criminality directed against our women and our girls who have become literally endangered species in our civilization.

4.30 p.m.

And, Madam President, as we seek to address this issue, the Mover of the Motion has called for the Government to promote and to advise on legislative improvements through service delivery via Government agencies to provide some protection. And the Mover of the Motion goes further to call on the Government within a three-month period to bring a legislative agenda and policy implementation plan to more effectively address the rising incidents of violence against women and girls.

Madam President, we would like to say from the very outset that the approach that we have taken in this country, particularly under this administration, is one in which focus has been paid and placed on suppression, crime suppression and punishment, and the Attorney General has indicated that corporal punishment is being looked at as a way or as a means of addressing violence and criminality in our country. But if we are to really revolutionize and to bring about transformation, as my colleague Sen. Nakhid said, if we are to bring about a new perspective, a new attitude towards this phenomenon, then, Madam President, we have to take a different approach. And I am hoping that in doing so, we would look at the root cause of this malaise, this crisis of crime, violence and criminality against women and girls.

And that is why, Madam President, I would like to emphasize the need for gender equality in our society and that requires to bring about that we need to focus on equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities so that we can enable all individuals to achieve their full rights and potential to be healthy and to contribute to health development and benefits from that process, Madam President. And therefore, we would want to ensure that when this Motion is approved, that the Government in the spirit that it would be passed would honour, Madam President, this Motion.

Madam President, there is no doubt that there is need for us to take and to have a multi—first of all, a comprehensive multifaceted approach to this issue of violence and crime directed against our women. Whether we look at domestic violence in all its dimensions or we look at sexual violence and abuse, we have to get down to the roots and these particular means of aggression against our women and abuse against our girls, why do they persist in our country. Power relations, control, these are some of the elements, ingredients that continue to be responsible for what we are experiencing and therefore in this particular matter, we have to pay attention to education, to training and we have to focus, Madam President, on our youths and our children in particular so that they can develop a different attitude from very tender ages towards this question and issue of gender equality in our society.

So, this point has to be emphasized because if you lose that point, Madam President, we would just be dealing with the symptoms of a larger problem in our nation and in our civilization. We must work towards the promotion, both in terms of legislation and action at the cultural level as it relates to bringing about justice, equality and rights for all.

Madam President, we cannot in this particular matter, this Motion that is before us, it cannot be viewed in a one-dimensional approach. It has to be comprehensive. And therefore, there is an organization that deals with gender-based violence. It is called the Alliance for State Action to End Gender-based Violence. And, Madam President, I believe it is very important that we recognize that this concept of gender-based violence which is what we are dealing with here, women and girls being subject to violence in our society. That requires that we all view this phenomenon as a national emergency requiring immediate, short, medium and long-term policies and actions in our society.

And, Madam President, whatever we are doing to bring about justice and equality as a strategy on a holistic basis to address this matter of violence and crime against our women and girls, we must as all of us have said, pay attention to resources. We must allocate appropriate resources in our national strategy to end gender-based violence in this context. Madam President, it calls for us reviewing and strengthening the social development system to address the drivers of crime, violence and insecurity in a way which centres gender and social inequalities and place these at the forefront. So this is not a superficial and artificial response to a matter that requires deep analytical assessment and evaluation and we must come up with the appropriate strategy in order to address the injustices that our citizens, women in this instance and girls suffer.

Madam President, we also have when we are addressing this issue of violence against our women, violent crimes against our women and girls, we cannot escape to look at the necessity and almost the imperative of improving and addressing the deficits in the current criminal justice system. And that requires a complete review as to how we treat violence as it relates to our women because

when we talk about violence, it is domestic in nature and it is sexual also and then arising out of it, Madam President, those in the household are exposed, so our girls are exposed to that kind of abuse through violence committed by the male against the female, in this instance, might be the mother. So that is an issue we need to address and that is why when we were discussing another matter recently, we spoke to the issue of maybe establishing a special court to deal with violent crimes committed against our women, particularly sexual offences and other such crimes and a specialized court is needed.

Madam President, education, psycho-educational interventions cannot be underemphasized. This question has to be addressed on many fronts and prevention is critical and to prevent crime and violent crimes against our women and our girls, we need to pay attention to this issue of the availability of psycho-educational interventions, particularly for those persons who have been charged with or convicted of violent crimes against our women and we need to focus that within the principles of accountability and victim safety.

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

And therefore, this particular Motion that is before us has to be seen in the context of rehabilitation, Mr. Vice-President, re-restoration and reintegration. It cannot be seen otherwise. Mr. Vice-President, in this context, when we are seeking to revolutionize our approaches to crime and criminality and violence towards our women folk and our girls in particular, we need to pay attention to bringing about changes to our public transportation system because that has also contributed to the violence that we are experiencing in our nation today.

Mr. Vice-President, I would hope that we would be in a position to bring about the appropriate legislative changes and policy implementation so that for

instance what we are trying to achieve with this Motion and by calling on the Government to assess the deficiencies in the current system and to also present to the Parliament within a short period a legislative agenda and policy implementation plan would go a long way in addressing the rising incidents of violence against women and girls in our society.

I would hope also, Mr. Vice-President, that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, when they give support to this Motion today which could be unanimously adopted, I hope through you, Mr. Vice-President, that this Motion does not suffer a similar fate that a previous motion experienced. Because we can come here and we can say that we are in support of this Motion, we can vote for this Motion unanimously, but, Mr. Vice-President, what happens thereafter?

I could vividly recall a motion being unanimously adopted in this Parliament to bring about what is called parliamentary autonomy. This was adopted in the Eleventh Parliament and this Senate, like we are about to do, unanimously agreed to the resolution and we called on the Government to introduce legislation on parliamentary autonomy during the Fourth Session of the Eleventh Parliament and to have the same referred to a joint select committee of Parliament for consideration and report before the end of the Fourth Session of the Eleventh Parliament.

Mr. Vice-President, I am sad to report, it saddens me to report that the Fourth Session has gone, the Fifth Session has gone, the Eleventh Parliament has gone and, Mr. Vice-President, the motion, like this one that we are debating that will be unanimously adopted, was never implemented by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, the Attorney General of this country gave this Senate and in particular the person who moved this particular motion,

literally chastised the mover of the motion and asked the mover of the motion why did your Government not do it when you were in power.

So I am wondering, I am hoping that the matter that we are debating today will not suffer the same fate that that particular motion suffered at a time. We must take our business seriously and no one, no one, including the Attorney General of this country should show contempt, disrespect, contumely to our Senate when we take a decision to unanimously adopt a motion and it is up to the Government thereafter in accordance with our Standing Order to implement that decision. So, Mr. Vice-President, I raise this in passing because I am hoping, hoping, Mr. Vice-President, that this Motion which we would like to identify with would not suffer the same fate as an earlier motion. In fact, "I think it is two suffered".

So, Mr. Vice-President, some of the actions that we ought to take to ensure that our womenfolk get the kind of assistance and support in dealing with violence and crime directed at them require the Government to provide sufficient financial and organizational support and resources particularly for the national support systems that provide services to survivors and victims. We need to provide more shelters for our women, more victim and witness support for our women in this regard. We need to give resources to the Gender and Child Affairs Division, the emergency hotline, the newly established TTPS Gender-based Violence Unit and other women's organizations so that they can provide services for our women and girls and promote gender equality. So we need to do all of these things if we are serious and not really pay lip service to this particular issue.

Mr. Vice-President, I am proposing that when the Government is dealing with its legislative programme and policy implementation plan, given this matter that is before us, this Motion, that the Government will look towards the

establishment of a social fund as a national budgetary priority in order to support NGO-led shelters and civil society organizations. These are some recommendations that came from a very powerful organization which I support called the Alliance for State Action to End Gender-based Violence. They have put forward several important recommendations and suggestions in an effort to end, to bring to an end if that is possible, but a gradual elimination of violence and crime against our women and girls in this society.

That same Alliance for State Action called for the establishment of a multi-stakeholder coordination mechanism that includes civil society, academics, Ministries working together to end gender-based violence and I hope, Mr. Vice-President, that as we seek towards promoting gender equality, as we seek towards the promotion of a comprehensive multifaceted prevention strategy to deal with violence and crime against our womenfolk, the Government of this country would take into account some of the solid recommendations coming from this very powerful organization called Alliance for State Action.

And when we talk about Alliance for State Action, we are talking about organizations such as Coalition against Domestic Violence—

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you end at 4.55.

Sen. W. Mark: Yes. CAISO Sex and Gender Justice, Institute for Gender and Development Studies, UWI, the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action, CAFRA, Caribbean Male Action Network, Women's Institute for Alternative Development, Organization for Abused and Battered women and children, Womantra. These are some of the organizations and others that make up this Alliance for State Action.

So, Mr. Vice-President, as we lend support to this Motion by my hon.

colleague, Sen. Paul Richards, I hope that it is not going to be approved and then dumped in the waste paper basket. I hope at the end of the day, justice will be done and the Government will take its responsibility seriously and effect whatever decisions that we take at the end of this debate by the adoption via support for this particular Motion that addresses a very serious affecting our women and our girls. Violence and crime that is prevalent and we have to come and get to the bottom of it. We cannot deal with just mere symptoms, we have to deal with the roots of that violence and the root has to deal with gender equality and justice.

I thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister in the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation (Sen. The Hon. Hassel Bacchus): Thank you, Mr. Vice-President, for the opportunity to contribute on this Motion, and a most timely Motion at that, as it relates to incidents of violence and crime against women and girls.

The Ministry in which I work, the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation has a key role to play as it relates to changing and transforming what is happening across all of Government and a number of speakers before me would have mentioned transformation. I would like to borrow a piece from the Attorney General when he speaks about transformation, he always talks about plant and machinery, people, processes and of course, the law. It is exactly that type of approach that is required to address the ills and maladies that actually are putting us in the situation in which we are.

In my contribution, I want to talk a bit about the technology and transformation and how we brought some of that to bear and some of the things that are happening today. We are not starting from ground zero to address the

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issues as identified by Sen. Richards.

Digital technology can bring huge advantages but some people also view it as one of the facilitators of the violence of which we are actually trying to get rid of and then if you add to that, the existence of a gender digital divide and then you realize that women and girls actually are even more likely targets. If you put COVID-19 into that mix and the containment measures associated with that, you would see from all the reports that we have gotten across the world, that there has been a significant rise even in domestic violence and so all of the things that we have to do to get rid of this really have to go, as identified by you, Mr. Vice-President, in your contribution, really to deal with a holistic and general approach.

One of the first things and it was really ranked in all of the contributions that have to be addressed is education. In a Pixel project “16 for 16” article on December 01, 2019, they quoted the United Nations as saying 31 million girls of primary school age are not in school globally, 17 million of these never enter school and there are 34 million female adolescents out of work. Startling numbers. A lack of education of course and the contagion pieces associated with that leave people in a vulnerable state as it relates to the violence associated with that. To deal with that, you really need to implement—one of the ways that we deal with that is actually to start to implement technology to get to those people in different places and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has already instituted a number of remote digital platforms to start to deal with that. Many speakers before me would have quoted a number of them, I am not going to go through them.

But even at the younger levels, younger ages, once those programmes become available, people snap at them.

Only last week, CARIRI launched, within their youth and innovation programme,

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a code for mobile app development initiative. It was oversubscribed in one day. And this is not because there were only 10 people and only 10 places available, this is talking about 600 places in the initial instance. They took one day to fill it out. So there is an appetite to do it and there are things being made available. People just have to be made aware of it and take advantage of it. So it is happening.

5.00 p.m.

We have an upcoming programme, where we partnered with Microsoft, for example, to increase literacy across all of Trinidad and Tobago, the citizenry, everyone. Because one of the things that hold people back is the fact that they do not have the confidence of the literacy to do what they need to do. People can isolate you to abuse you. Things like that have to be addressed in an holistic way and partnerships like the one we have. That upcoming programme, you hear a bit more about it, as time comes along.

Of course, in the rural areas, some of the areas even as Sen. Nakhid would have identified, issues of abuse tend to be more rampant. Now, one of the ways that you can deal with that is also to bring and use innovative technology to bring levels of literacy and education to those people. In light of that—and the thing about those areas is that they tend to be hard to cover, they tend to be not the most attractive areas for technology to be introduced by places that are driven by commercial interest. But the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, in recognizing that and understanding the value that exist in those areas and the things that have to be done, would have released the appropriate spectrum and provided it free of charge to a number of—well, to the relevant service providers, so that they can expand their networks to cover those areas, both in

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terms of broadband access and not just token access, but capable quality access to allow for the utilization of it within those areas. It is absolutely important that you do that. Because what that engenders then is people would be able to do self-learning and other pieces of things associated with that, from the use of the connected broadband.

The rollout of ICT centers, you would have heard about this. Why is that important? It is being rolled out by my Ministry and, of course, the Telecommunications Authority. And it is there to provide rural and underserved communities, have a number of these women and children, with centers equipped with digital recourses for self-learning and where locals can get together and everyone can get together, including these women and children, and, through peer learning, can take a first step towards breaking down some of the socioeconomic and gender barriers that challenge the vulnerable. These are things that we have to do. We coupled that with the impending rollout, or the continued rollout of Wi-Fi services in a number of areas. All of these things increase connectivity options. And again, that allows for connection to a number of these services that are already available. More are being developed.

Technology does not always have to be the latest greatest thing to be effective. There are number of things that we use today, that maybe people push to the side but they are still relevant and effective in how we do what we do.

Hotlines, something that has been in existence for, as far as I could remember. But national hotlines to report incidents like what the TTPS has, provides counselling, support, and advise to women and girls facing violence and all of those things that exist. And those things are available without charge. Some are with pay. Some are being—not only with the TTPS, of course, civil society has

theirs as well. And I want to encourage people who have the time and the aptitude to go out and volunteer to assist with those as well.

But the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service also has anonymous crime reporting, which is a significant step in having—because you understand what happens when you are the abused, and/or someone wants to help you, or you want to help yourself. You want to do it as anonymously as possible. So that is exact and that is there already.

Creation of the sexual offenders registry, which the Attorney General and all of us here were able to address, that is also an important piece of what has to do with this. So that members of the public, they will have sufficient information to make informed decisions as to how they interact with persons on that registry. Again, it helps. Every little bit helps.

Social support, we are going to talk about, and Sen. Nakhid raised it, people being able to empower themselves. I think Sen. Rambhajan spoke about it as well. You are not just looking at the abuser but the abused. But you are looking at both, the abuser and the abused. In its digital transformation thrust, the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services has processes that is trying to get to know its clients even better and to provide services through the use of ICT, to provide relief for them in ways in which it is actually easier to interact with them.

If you take for example the Income Support Grant, so the Income Support Grant is really being handled almost entirely electronically, which brings with it all of the efficiencies that you get, but it reduces face-to-face pieces with it. And then, of course, it also provides another level of anonymity. The part about the introduction of technology to the social development piece is that it will, as it continues to grow, significantly reduce the levels of malfeasance and all kinds of

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things that infest that. Because it removes certain amount of resources from the people that need it. We have people who double dip, triple dip, quadrupledip. I "ain know how far dip dey dip." But think about what they do. They remove resources that should be available for the vulnerable and the people who need it, because they want more than they should have. The introduction of the technology that we put will address a lot of that and it will stop.

A little bit of advice, as it relates to things that you can do for yourself to help in this scenario, and this I am speaking here about women, children, the vulnerable, girls in particular. Everyone seems to have wearable technology these days, fitbit, something. And they use it to connect it to their phone and to get information about themselves, oxygen level, heart rate, sleep patterns, et cetera, et cetera. But, they are wearable technology that doubles as tools to assist women and girls, people in general, but women and girls in particular, to stay safe.

There is wearable fashion that is connected to a solution. I would call the name of the solution, it is called Attinad. And what it is connected to is basically a high-tech rape whistle and it is linked to a mobile app that activates when a button is pressed for three seconds. Now why is that important? Well, music can activate a loud alarm and a flashing light, providing, of course, the circumstances and the training that you should get allows you to know when to do that, in the event that you find yourself under severe threat. It also will alert local authorities and certain chosen contacts. You have things like that, that deal even with old-type "me-too " phones, where you do not have access to broadband, where all you need to do is to simply set it the way it was and it uses SMS to get to where you need to get to. As far as personal security, I am not even going to mention pepper spray. We dealt with that last week.

I want to deal a bit with stereotyping and changing the stereotypes, as it relates to fundamental change, particularly now with our girls. STEM, software development and programming is among the biggest industries in the world today. Science, Technology and Engineering and Mathematics, STEM as we call it, is actually one of the most popular things you could get in high schools and other places. My sons are in it. But strange enough, when I go into that class, this is actually what you see, a lot of boys. It is almost like it is a masculine set of subjects. Well, that is not really true. We have to find ways to encourage more girls and young women to challenge and break these stereotypes. I mean, organizations such as Girls Who Code is a good example of that. Bring education and awareness to the public about why it is important to provide equal opportunities in these areas for girls. This is addressing the problem at a different level and provide avenues for that type of education. Global nonprofits, Girls in Tech, for example, is another one, focus on girls who are passionate about technology and provide support and training for female entrepreneurs in the start-up tech space. All of this is happening, but a lot of that is also happening at the local level. The Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation is partnering with a number of people to get things into that space.

As I close, because I just wanted to touch on a number of those things in my contribution. I want to end where I started, that technology, while some people view it particularly with respect to what we are dealing with now, some people view it as one of the things that causes problems. And you will get that. You hear about all the online pieces, and so on. What I have tried to do here is to get an understanding that it is also part of the solution, and if you couple it with the pieces: people, process, the law, and the technology itself is the plant and

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machinery, we can effective the right type of transformation that will impact all of society to get us to where we want to go, to achieve the goals that Sen. Richards wants us to achieve. Madam President, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi):

Thank you, Madam President. I have great pleasure in coming to the Senate today to contribute to this Motion. I promise not to be longer than 20 minutes to allow my colleague and friend, the hon. Sen. Richards, to have a proper time to wrap up this very important debate.

I would like to thank Sen. Bacchus for echoing what I believe needs to become reality in this country, plant and machinery, people, processes and law. And it really is a joy to contribute into a debate such as this, where everybody is literality on the same page, as we all agree that we need to do the very best we can. This is a topic that is easy to intellectualize about. We need to do more. We need to work harder. But operationalizing solutions comes through tracking the very aspects of the plant and machinery, the people, the processes and the law.

So I stand before you as Attorney General in the five years that I had prior to this particular incarnation in this new 2020 Government. I can say confidently, 532 laws, regulations and orders have passed under my hand, 532. And in hitting that kind of process, significant work was rolled out. In 2015, we did not have a Family and Children Division of the court. We did not have electronic appearances. We did not have judge only trials. We did not have amendments to the Sexual Offences Act, amendments to the Bail Act, amendments to the Domestic Violence Act. We did not have double the number of judges legislatively moving from 36 to 64. We did not have the increase in the age of retirement for judges, from 65 to 70. We did not have full magisterial immunity. We did not have a Magistrates' Court that

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operated with a registrar, not a clerk of the peace, an administrative officer, but a registrar with a court office. We did not have the Family Proceedings Rules, the Children Proceedings Rules, the Criminal Proceedings Rules. We did not have a Criminal Division which birth, not only the Criminal Division but the traffic court, the district courts.

Nobody bothered to look at the process flow, where the data came to our conscious reflection and attention. What is the data? In 2015, when I became Attorney General, we had 146,000 cases in the Magistrates' Court every year. We took out 104,000 of those cases by motor vehicle and road traffic becoming violations. We took out 8,500 by decriminalizing marijuana. We are on the cusp of proclaiming the administration of justice (indictable proceedings) amendments AJPA, as we call it, to treat with 26,000 cases, which are preliminary enquiries in a different way, leaving us 8,500 cases, where the same 43 magistrates that we had in 2015 are now dealing with 8,500 matters, and some of the 26,000 matters. In other words then, the process reform, plea bargaining, judge only trials, all of these thing in the holistic conversation that we are talking about each and every one Senator, all of these things have become a reality, which is why the Motion that comes before us by Sen. Richards asks for two things.

The Motion asks for a resolution that we have a legislative agenda published within three months and, specifically, a policy implementation plan. I can tell the hon. Members of this Senate and the nation listening the following: appointment of a Commissioner of Police simplification process, agenda item No. 1 in a legislative agenda. It was laid in the Senate yesterday. Private Security Bill, No. 2; motor vehicle and road traffic amendments legislation to treat with PH drivers, No. 3; sexual offences amendments to introduce the sexual offenders registry, passed in

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this House, now in the House of Representatives; sexual offences amendments offender charges register, Bill drafted, final consultation coming ahead; sexual offences new offences for revenge pornography and for voyeurism, already drafted; bail amendments to treat with violent crimes against women and children, already drafted; sexual harassment legislation, already drafted; amendments to the Industrial Relations Act, to bring to life the amendments for the sexual harassment, already drafted; amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act to treat with sexual harassment, already drafted.

We then come now to the cybercrime legislation, the whistleblowing Bill; the trafficking in persons amendments; further amendments to domestic violence; the Evidence Act amendments; the firearms amendments to allow for a different management of the municipal police in this area of the law; firearms amendments to also include how we catch modified devices that are used against women like Tasers or other things to debilitate people; and, of course, the firearms amendment to treat with pepper spray, which is in the House of Representatives; the gaming Bill, which is now going to the House of Representatives; the amendments to the Trafficking in Persons Act; and further amendments to the Anti-Gang Act and the electronic payment legislation; 22 pieces of law already prepared. Because, Madam President, as Attorney General I have not been asleep in discharge of the functions entrusted to me about this hon. Prime Minister, Dr. Keith Rowley and this Government.

But what good is the law if we cannot pass the law? See I heard Sen. Mark say a number of things. But I am also intimately aware that law is as good as its ability to function after it is passed into law. Is it not a demonstration of protecting the most vulnerable in our women and children to pass gaming legislation, so that

our women can have bank accounts, and not have to walk around with cash, or to be treated in circumstances where they are not part of formal employment, because the sector is unregulated? Is it not true to say that the evidence amendments to introduce witness anonymity, so that women and children who are vulnerable can give evidence where they are protected? Is it not true to say that whistleblowing protection applies to the protection of women and children? But you see, all of these are Bills that the UNC will not support, all, all. And, therefore, the reason why I have come here this afternoon, Madam President, is to specifically speak to the listening and viewing population of Trinidad and Tobago, through you, Madam President, to say it is only your voice.

I want to thank Sen. Rambhajan, who spoke elegantly as always every time she does, for saying I am woman. I will roar. Let me hear you roar. Sen. Rambhajan was right. It is the roar that is required to demand that the Opposition support legislation to protect our most vulnerable. It was that roar that prevailed when the Opposition said no to abolishing child marriage. Imagine that I had an uphill task, as Attorney General, to convince the official Opposition of this country, led by Mrs. Kamla Persad Bissessar, to convince the Members of the Opposition that child marriage was inappropriate in a democracy such as ours. Who could imagine that that could be a real debate in this House? Who?

You see, we need to be precise. The amendments to the electronic payments, I recall the Opposition refusing to support the payments into and out of court legislation, and that was a piece of law that brought dignity to women who had to receive maintenance payments, to children who had the right to be maintained, to men who had the indignity of being falsely accused or the payments being lost.

I recall vividly the Opposition saying no to the Criminal Division. And what

did that Criminal Division bring for us? A brand new system of managing our criminal justice system. We have the parole legislation, which is another Bill that I have not mentioned, which is part and parcel of this wheel dynamic. Because if we are going to talk about releasing people back into society, the programmes that you sign on to, to ensure that you are in a recovering state and condition are necessary for discussion. I agree that the holistic approach has to be applied. But my exhortation to Trinidad and Tobago is talk about the issues and what you support or do not support.

When the Government says that it is prepared, as I have drafted the law already, to make revenge pornography a crime, what is the issue? Do you support it? Do you not? You see, law must be applied, and our version of the law, in our society, as this Senate will be invited to be considered, has to decide what is the different view of Trinidad and Tobago that we want to create. Can we dare to have is a vision of Trinidad and Tobago that is different and better than where we are at present? To do that, you have to be for or against an issue at times, or make constructive criticisms at times. But you have to have the courage to start. You have to have the courage to be committed to saying: "I believe that witness lives matter and, therefore, I support witness anonymity to protect our children and protect our women. I believe that a sexual offences register for charges may be appropriate in a country such as ours, with sufficient safeguards." And if I put that in the context of the PH regulations, as we regulate the PH industry, I can tell you that the amendments to the Motor Vehicle and Road Traffic Act are technologically driven.

You see, we already have, in the policy side and the prescription side, the fact that every driver in the hire industry: buses, maxi-taxis, rental cars, private hire

cars, as they will become a feature of registration, all of them would have to be registered. All of them will involve an identification of who the driver is. All of it would be back-end checked so that the convictions and charges in relation to drivers are known. All of them will allow for a phone to simply scan a QR code, whether you have data or not, because you can cache the data. And that is why Sen. Bacchus was so right, plant and machinery, people, processes and law must unite.

But I say to you Madam President, what good is all of that respectfully, if I face an Opposition that cannot explain its refusal to support laws of the kind that I have just mentioned? Why is witness anonymity not supportable? Why is whistleblowing protection not supportable? Why are bail amendments not supportable? Why is the gaming legislation not supportable to drive out criminality and to protect the vulnerable in society? Why is the Leader of the Opposition silent on all of these issues?

I say as I come to a close, I will certainly be able to produce, on behalf of the Government, a legislative agenda with immediacy, because clearly we have one. COVID has interrupted our ability to publish the agenda in the normal way that we do, because it was basically turned upside down. He can say with respect to latter part, which is the policy implementation aspects, that might be a slightly different aspect. Because the implementation of policy is a little bit deeper than a prescriptive formula may allow to say this is the checklist for implementation. So I can certainly give the undertaking and commitment to oblige by the outcome of this Motion, as it relates to a policy prescription that is short, but as it relates to an agenda, which is clear and precise.

I thank Sen. Richards for bringing this Motion and for this opportunity to

contribute. Thank you, Madam President. [*Desk thumping*]

Sen. Paul Richards: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to bring closure to this Motion which states:

Whereas the statistics on violent crimes against women and girls have been widely reported by the TTPS from late 2020 to present;

And whereas said reports have garnered nationwide focus and given rise to several accounts of similar experiences by women, whose cases have not been followed-up and solved by police;

And whereas the public has consistently called for the passage of legislation and improvements to the service delivery of public agencies in relation to, inter alia, non-lethal weapons, transportation and judicial process, to support the protection of women and girls against violent crimes;

Be it resolved that this Senate call on the Government to critically assess the deficiencies in the current systems to deal with the incidence of violent crimes against women and girls;

And be it further resolved that the Government present to the Parliament, within three months, a legislative agenda and policy implementation plan to more effectively address the rising incidence of violence against women and girls.

5. 30 p.m.

Madam President, through you I would like to offer my sincerest and deepest thanks to colleagues who all made absolutely amazing contributions, 17 of them, including on the first day of this debate: Sen. Rambharat, Sen. Lutchmedial, Sen. Thompson-Ahye, Sen. The Hon. Donna Cox Minister of Social Development and Family Services, Sen. Jearlean John, Sen. Anthony Vieira, Sen. Bethelmy.

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Senators from today: Lezama Lee Singh, Sen. Dr. Dillon-Remy, Sen. Rambhajan, Sen. de Freitas, Sen. Nakhid, Sen. Dr. Deyalsingh, Sen. Mark, Sen. Bacchus, and just before me, the hon. Attorney General. I thank you all for your sterling contributions and the fact that for the most part the tenor of the contributions and debate has been conciliatory and not particularly partisan. And I really thank you all for the heartfelt contributions.

Madam President, safety is a human right, the right to protection and we all clearly share the deepest pain about this situation related to the violence against girls and women in our country. We may not always see eye to eye on how to solve the issue or address the issue but we certainly have the passion for the protection of our girls and women.

So the Motion—I took my time to write it because I did not want it to be condemnatory of the Government in any way because I think it is an all of country approach that must be undertaken and taking that sort of tenor would have been counterproductive. It also sought to deal with the wider agency and mechanisms that can and should be coordinated effectively to see the kind of results we want. So what do we have? We have law, as the AG so eloquently identified. We have passed a number of laws, we have amended a number of laws in the interest of not only protecting girls and women but also dealing with many societal ills and providing protections in a wide range of areas.

We have the courts, we have the Legislature, the Parliament, we have the Executive, we have the Opposition, we have the Independents, we have the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the Defence Force, the Coast Guard, we have NGOs, we have faith-based organizations, we have the media, we have civil society, we have outreach. What we do not have is the results we want. We have

all the elements, but we do not have the results we want. So it seems that there is something awry, something amiss in our collective approach. And I think that is coordination.

I think very often what is happening is the various agencies and sectors are working in silos. And I will go through a bit of what has worked in the UK in terms of my contribution, but before that let me just do justice to some of the contributions of my honourable colleagues.

The AG just spoke about the 36 to 64 judges, and I am extremely happy hon. AG, through you, Madam President, that the AG has put on the table officially the coming of sexual harassment legislation in Trinidad and Tobago. I think that is very important and commendable and long overdue. Because we cannot be talking about the violence against women and girls and not have laws in place to deal with sexual harassment in the workplace in a country like Trinidad and Tobago. So thank you very much, AG.

And the AG also spoke about the law's ability to function and achieve the objectives. As I said before, we can use the social science and management acronym SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound. That is important because we have to set goals. We cannot be coming to the Parliament every year, every six months and the numbers and the statistics are getting worse. We have to start seeing some sort of arrest of the situation, and then we have to start seeing a decline in the situation consistently, and we have to monitor what is working and what is not working effectively. That is the only way we can make measurable progress. The progress cannot be a kneejerk reaction when the heinous crimes are committed. The progress has to be that we can tell the population these are the statistics between 2019 and 2020, 2020 and 2021, 2021 and 2022 and the

numbers are going down with a measurable target of possibly zero idealistically. That is the only solution. That is the only response that the public is going to accept. Because every female, every girl or woman who is assaulted, molested, raped, or killed, is a family in distress, and you cannot take that back, that is a life almost destroyed that needs rehabilitation. So thank you, hon. AG, for your contribution.

Sen. Bacchus I fully agree with you that the issue of technology has to drive the solution in Trinidad and Tobago. And the implementation of mechanisms by which women and girls can be empowered to be more digitally literate will also help the solution. What I would suggest is that the country needs a basic national Wi-Fi grid that nobody is ever offline at a basic level. That will go a long way in terms of keeping people connected. Also, a national CCTV network that is connected to the national security grid that works in jurisdictions around the world where you are almost never more than five minutes out of view of some sort of electronic monitoring device that can be used as evidence to track you, to find you if you find yourself in trouble, or to bring you to safety. So I applaud that and I think technology is the way to go to make the system more accountable and more efficient.

Sen. Deyalsingh spoke about the issue of people power and citizen power and the global rally against violence against girls and women and the State cost to violence against girls and women. I will quote some statistics about what it cost the UK to remediate violence against girls and women. And you will realize that in those jurisdictions they have realized, like Trinidad and Tobago, if we are not proactive and preventative, it costs us more down the road when you add up all the agencies that have to use resources to catch up. So, being proactive and being

innovative is the way not only to protect women and girls because every life is priceless, but also to mitigate the cost of that if it is done effectively.

Sen. Mark spoke of crime suppression and punishment and gender equality which I think is extremely important in this context. We do not have a general mindset or culture of gender equality in Trinidad and Tobago. We say all the right things, but our actions say something different on a daily basis, on a personal basis, on an interactive basis. So we know it is the right thing to say but as a country do we really act that? When we do cat calls in the streets, are we really respecting women? Is that gender equality?

So we have to think about not only the Government and the Opposition and the Parliament, but all our individual responsibility in promoting gender equality and gender respect. And the socialization of our youth not only girls but boys, but women, and girls, and boys, everyone.

Sen. de Freitas spoke intelligently about the issue of coordination and the societal mindset and the systems, process, challenges. He also spoke about the education system. And I know, Sen. de Freitas, you dealt with the formal education system, but in psychology and sociology, you know that the informal education system is much more impactful because it includes family, religious bodies, community sporting organizations, multimedia, social media, et cetera.

So if the education system is telling a child, a young man or woman one thing, and they go out into the wider society and the message is different, there is incongruence, so the child is confused. So we have to have a holistic education system both formal and informal.

And Sen. Nakhid brightly spoke about the importance of applying consistent resources to the agencies. Sen. Dr. Dillon-Remy and the world strategy in terms of

RESPECT and the acronym: relationships, empowerment, services, reduction of poverty, enabling environments, child and adolescent training, and a transfer of attitudes beliefs and norms. Cultural change, which many other hon. Senators spoke about.

Sen. Rambhajan, excellent contribution. I am an English person, so I like diction and delivery. Your delivery is always very enjoyable to listen to and—not that the others are not, let me put that on the record. But as Sen. Rambhajan said, you know, it is an irony that a man brought this Motion. I do not think so, I disagree. I think as Sen. de Freitas said, that is the mindset that sometimes we get caught up in. And in these instances there is no gender involved, we all have to be on board. So whether it is a man or a woman who brought it, it does not matter. The fact is that it came because there is a need for it in Trinidad and Tobago. And men have to stand side by side and support women and vice versa. So, I disagree with that although I understand your intention.

And I like the fact that Sen. Rambhajan indicated that you are the creator of your own change, speaking to women. But we have to also understand that some woman because of their background and their socialization, they do not have the intrinsic motivation or the sense of agency to make that change without the support systems in society. All homes are not the same. Sometimes we think of the fact that we had two caring loving parents, we had guidance, we had support systems when we went wrong because we all went wrong at some stage in our lives. That is not the case with everybody's home situation. Sometimes, people grow up in situations where they have absolutely no guidance or they are taught to be victims. The example is modelled to them. So they do not have an intrinsic model sense of agency to make the changes they need and they end up in a cycle repeating what

has happened for generations. So while I understand your intention, Sen. Rambhajan, sometimes some people need support and help.

Sen. Bethelmy spoke about the Government's interventions and the "No Child Left Behind" policy. And also, issues related to anger management training in schools and coping skills. Sen. Vieira, the laws and enforcement of laws and the mindset we have in Trinidad and Tobago about sometimes having a "big stick mentality", we do not seem to be able to act responsibly if we think no one is watching. And we have to take personal responsibility. And changes in attitude and culture must start with the youth and also be modelled by adults in society.

So I am saying—and everyone's contributions were very important because this is not a single, a unidimensional issue, everything is interrelated, everything is intertwined, everything affects everything else. So it is not insular any way. We have to keep that in mind when we proffer solutions to these situations. He also spoke about the importance of positive examples.

About seven years ago, I had the option to interview a mentorship programme coming out of the Ministry of National Security, the TT Defence Force out of MiLAT and MYPART, and they had gentlemen who volunteered, were extremely well vetted, about 15 gentlemen, and they were trained in mentorship and they took on the role of each mentoring five young men who found themselves in trouble. So the young men were put through a programme and these gentlemen, older gentlemen who were retired had the time, wanted to give back, and they mentored these young men to young adulthood, modelling some of the behaviours that they know would be productive to society. And the young men did not have that in their lives before. And the programme was so successful, I often wonder why these programmes are stopped, or not well promoted in Trinidad and Tobago.

We need mentorship, and I know there is a new Ministry of Youth Development and National Service, and I hope mentorship and national service are programmes that are initiated and promoted by such a Ministry.

We also heard from Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries who spoke about the importance of having a safe transportation system in Trinidad and Tobago. That is critical. And I am not too sure if I agree with the attempting to legalize the PH system, but that is another debate which we will get on to I am sure in time.

And all other Senators who would have contributed and I wish I could go through the whole list. I now realize how difficult it is for Government Ministers to pilot Bills because then you have to listen to everybody and take notes and respond. So I give you your commendations for doing that effectively.

So, Madam President, on many occasions I have received calls from friends and family members, females, at hours of the night to early morning crying on the phone, screaming “Come help me please”. “I think he is going to kill me.” I have done interviews in a series called “Survivors” where I interviewed 25 women, many of whom were survivors of gender-based violence, domestic violence.

Tricia was attacked by her partner who chopped off her hand. She actually saw her arm on the ground in the process. She saw her arm and she was—it was such a violent attack, that she was wondering if the person attacked somebody else. And she was wondering, “Oh my God, he actually attacked somebody else”. Not even realizing it was her own arm. She fortunately survived. Unfortunately, society now revictimizes her because she cannot get a job because she is differently abled. So every job she tries to get, they look at her, she is qualified and they do not want to hire her. So she feels revictimized by society.

Shanti, 34-year-old wife and mother. What happened to her is in her opinion worse than actual death when her husband chopped her, left her on the ground and told her, “I ain’t going and kill yuh, yuh know, Ah going and hurt yuh worse”. And proceeded to chop their seven-year-old son to death, and told her, “Ah want yuh tuh live, because ah know dat would hut yuh more than if ah kill yuh”. That is the kind of mindset that some of these people have, these perpetrators have. And she had to live with that. Eventually, I think the grief just killed her and Shanti passed away.

Angela, who eventually became a minister of God, her story is one of a childhood stolen by her father who sexually abused her from the age of eight to 16. At 16 she had the agency to run away because she was an adolescent then. What is worse, she told her mother when she was 10 years old, “Daddy is doing me bad things”. Her mother ignored her and allowed the abuse to continue for years to come until she got away.

These are real stories and I know everyone has experiences. I failed to mention Sen. John who something she said stuck in my head when she indicated, I think it is in a home setting, when a drink was tossed in someone’s—in one of the family member’s face. And she asked, “Why is he doing that”? You know, that sort of mindset in a child’s or an adolescent’s mind, it is difficult to process and it affects you for the rest of your life.

Violence against women and girls has been an issue not only in Trinidad and Tobago but around the world. So much so, that in 2020 there was a commission enacted in the UK by her Majesty’s Government and it is titled, “Ending violence against women and girls strategy: 2016 to 2020.” And the opening paragraph indicates:

“The prevalence of domestic and sexual violence and abuse has dropped according to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) and, in 2014/15,...saw total prosecutions for VAWG offences reach the highest...ever recorded.

Significant new...”—laws—“...now in place including specific offences of stalking, forced marriage, failure to protect from Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), and revenge pornography,”—which the AG referenced—“as well as the new domestic abuse offence to capture coercive or controlling behaviour in an intimate or family relationship.”

They have gone that far. Laws protecting against coercive and controlling behaviour because as one of my colleagues indicated, this is about power and control. I think it was Sen. Mark. It is not about in most instances sexual gratification. It is about the power and control.

“The cost to individuals cannot be measured, but the costs of violence and abuse to the economy can be calculated and...”—has. The costs—“... are considerable. Sylvia Walby’s report estimates that providing public services”—for intervention—“to victims of domestic violence and the lost economic output of women affected”—and—“costs the UK”—approximately—“£15.8 billion annually.”

UK £15.8 billion is what it takes for intervention and remediation services. So if we think it is not costing, and I mean, the damage to the human soul is incalculable but it is also costing the State. We see it every day by our failures in some sectors that we have to put into national security. By our failures in health and wellness promotion, that we have to put it to Ministry of Health. We have to be proactive not only to protect human life and dignity, but also to safeguard the economy.

“The cost to health, housing and social services, criminal justice and civil legal services is estimated at”—an additional—“£3.9 billion.”

So now add £15.8 billion, £3.9 billion, we are getting to a £20 billion price tag annually for intervention against abuse against women and girls in the UK. I am sure we have similar metrics that we can proffer in terms of what is this costing the State. And as I said before, the cost to the taxpayer is one thing, the cost to the human being is incalculable.

Some of the mechanisms that have worked: Education, holistic education starting from very young; national campaigns for culture change; opportunities for victims to seek help safely; effective perpetrator interventions; police response including confidence in the criminal justice system.

We have commendably through Commissioner Griffith, initiated the gender-based unit which is doing great work in the TTPS. And that is extremely commendable because what he is able to do through that is retrain officers to more sensitively and effectively handle and manage reports of sexual abuse and domestic violence. And from my reports it is working very well. And it is just starting.

Improved understanding of violence against women and girls including coercive control and the importance of that element of it. Bystander reporting programmes. So the AG spoke about whistle blower legislation and the ability to anonymously report crimes in neighbourhoods. We all know in neighbourhoods the man was “beating she”. After it reaches the tragic state, everybody has something to say. After the “PH driver” is apprehended, everybody in the community knew he had the propensity to be a perpetrator, but nobody is reporting it because people do not feel safe enough that their report will be anonymous. And

we live in a very small country and that is part of the issue.

So if mechanisms are not provided where people really feel extremely safe in terms of their ability to report anonymously, we are going to have less public participation. Evidence led prosecutions; the courts are very important. Enhanced support through the criminal justice system for victims. The effective use of new technology, Sen. Bacchus spoke about that. Highly technologically driven. Integrated family intervention and approaches. Because you could do one thing in the school and at home is hell. It has to be holistic and integrated. And effective sanctions for breaches.

To meet the increasing challenge and to continue the results they are seeing the UK Government is set to spend an additional £80 million annually because they are seeing the results. So they want to continue the trend forward and that is also commendable.

And £15 million additional that the Government is finding through taking a percentage of VAT from the national purse is to provide for sanitary products for women and girls who cannot afford it, and intervention and training services for those girls.

So there is a Women's Aid and Safelives initiative that is also working with the Government as an NGO to help the British Government in this intervention. So again, it is not only on the shoulders of the Government because the Government cannot do everything. The society is not the Government, the society is the people of the country. And every sector, agencies, faith-based organizations, civil society, everyone has to play their part, but someone has to coordinate it so it does not operate in silos.

The new Government programmes announced will cost an additional £200

million already invested in a programme called the Troubled Families Programme, and a further £720 million will be put or has been put in the programme through 2020.

So they are seeing where the investment needs to go. They have to fix societal family problems because if we cannot do the interventions in the family which is where the mindset and the culturalization, socialization starts, we are going to have to be coming behind the curve all the time. So I think this is a very important aspect of it in terms of looking at it.

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

Sen. P. Richards: Thank you, Madam President. Quickly, I looked at the “National Policy on Gender and Development” from the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Office of the Prime Minister, dated February 2018, which is a green paper. And it states that:

“The Gender Policy is driven by the philosophy that fundamental human rights and freedom and the dignity of the human person is guaranteed to all women, men, girls and boys. The policy commits to preserving the equal and inalienable rights of men, women, boys and girls in Trinidad and Tobago as guaranteed under the Constitution.”

It is that I wanted to read but I am going to have to skip past that because of the limited time.

“The Policy makes the following commitments regarding legislative reforms from a gender perspective:

- Promote gender equity enforced by strong Equal Opportunities Legislation and informed by a National Gender Policy;
- Amend maternity protection...

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- Champion legislation to provide universal maternity benefits;
- Enact legislation to ensure equal opportunity in the workplace;”

And I am glad as I said, the AG referenced it earlier, legislation to deal with the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace which is very important, which provides an environment for gender equity in the workplace in Trinidad and Tobago. And also, moving legislation forward to have more parity in terms of remuneration packages because women are still getting on average less than men in the workplace.

Madam President, you know, as I close, one of the greatest advantages that this country has is the passion for this. It is called a “criminal justice system”, justice is very prominent there. Justice denied is a travesty in any society. We have to deal with our systems holistically. The TTPS, national security, Ministry of Works and Transport, social services, education, NGO, faith-based organizations, Judiciary, legal fraternity, media, all have to come together to play their parts.

It is important that we understand the opportunity here and we do not waste it at this important juncture in our country’s history. We have an opportunity collectively to make a difference and deal with this once and for all because women and girls have a right to feel safe in Trinidad and Tobago. They do not now, they have a right to feel safe in the country of their birth and our visitors to these shores too. Madam President, I thank you and with those few words, I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

Be it resolved that this Senate call on the Government to critically assess the deficiencies in the current systems to deal with the incidence of violent

crimes against women and girls;

And Further Resolved:

That the Government present to the Parliament, within three months, a legislative agenda and policy implementation plan to more effectively address the rising incidence of violence against women and girls.

ADJOURNMENT

Madam President: Leader of Government Business.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Madam President, I beg to move that this Senate do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Madam President: Hon. Senators, before I put the question on the adjournment, leave has been granted for two matters to be raised. Sen. Mark.

6.00 p.m.

Home Self-Isolation Protocols

(Details of)

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Madam President. Madam President, the first issue I want to address is what I call self-home or home self-isolation. And I raise this matter because we have to draw very, very powerful lessons from our experiences thus far. Madam President, as we speak, we have had today 215 new cases and 14 deaths, and the tally is 761. Madam President, as we speak on this very important Motion, there are some 7,170 persons in home self-isolation at this time. At one time, we may have had over 10,000 in home self-isolation. We are concerned, Madam President, about the protocols that have been employed and deployed to deal with this issue of citizens who have been tested positive but have been confined to home quarantine or, as I said, home self-isolation.

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

Mr. Vice-President, caregivers, in the absence of what I call clear, defined protocols, have themselves become victims of contracting and becoming infected with this deadly COVID-19 virus because, Mr. Vice-President, of three factors: the failure to properly test, the inadequacy of professional manpower and capacity problems surrounding the laboratory. Mr. Vice-President, we would like the Government to clear the air on the kind of protection, the kinds of protocols that have been provided and established for those citizens who happen to be caregivers and who happen to be in self-isolation. And as I said, some 7,170 according to data supplied to us today, are now in home self-isolation. The question or questions that I would like to put to the Government are as follows: How many of those persons, the 7,170 persons who have been infected and are in home self-isolation, are provided with N95 masks? How many of them? This is a question that we need to ask and we need answers. How many of them are provided with face shields by the State? Because they cannot be in hospitals or they cannot be in facilities called “quarantine facilities”, so they are asked to be at home, take care of those loved ones who are infected at home. But is the State providing the N95 masks? Is the State providing, Mr. Vice-President, the protective face shields? What about hand sanitizers? Are these provided by the State to the 7,170 persons?

Mr. Vice-President, when people—just as how I came into this booth, you have somebody spraying this place because you do not want anyone to become accidentally infected. How many citizens who are in home self-isolation are provided with the kind of disinfectant or sanitizers or spray to provide protection for their families from the ones who are infected at home? We do not know. But we get reports that after they provide you with the tests and they tell you to go

home, Mr. Vice-President, that is the medical people or the health officials, how—they seem to have left these people on their own.

And some of these people, Mr. Vice-President, we have seen and read horror story—horror stories of caregivers dying while administering to their loved ones. Because why? The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has not taken an interest in providing these people with the relevant materials and supplies to take care of themselves and their families. So many of them have died as a result of this development.

Mr. Vice-President, many persons who are home in self-isolation, because the Government has not set up a system to provide them with food and medicines, some of them have to leave their homes and mix with the larger population in order to secure food from the supermarkets and groceries and the shops. And many of them have to go in the drugstores, the pharmacies to buy pharmaceuticals, because the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has not established a system to provide, through our NGOs and civil society organizations, that can be very useful in this kind of exercise, with that kind of ability to know where these people are and to provide them with food, when it is lunchtime or in the evening time, as the case may be, or to provide them with medicine that they need, rather than they have to leave home, Mr. Vice-President, and mix up with the population out there.

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you have two more minutes.

Sen. W. Mark: So, Mr. Vice-President, in closing, I want to ask the Government to take a page out of the book of Barbados. Mr. Vice-President, I have come across something called—it is called a Bluetooth wrist temperature gauge where, Mr. Vice-President, that is placed on your wrist once you are tested positive. It takes your temperature every half an hour, automatically, and it sends that signal back to the administrator within the hospital environment so they know how your

temperatures is reading. And if you leave that room, that you are in self-isolation, that you have been quarantined in, they are able to track your movement.

Why can we not provide that wrist Bluetooth temperature gauge to our 7,170 citizens who are currently infected with this virus, Mr. Vice-President? Why? Small Barbados has been able to do so, why can Trinidad and Tobago, a rich country not—even though we under pressure, we still have some money to deal with our sick citizens. So I am calling on the Government to account—that is why we have called for a commission of enquiry into the management of this COVID-19 madness.

So, Mr. Vice-President, my time is limited. I call on the Government to account—to give an account of this situation as it relates to protocols involving our citizens who are in home self-isolation. I thank you, Mr. Vice-President.

Mr. Vice-President: Leader of Government Business. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Agriculture, Lands and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Thank you very much, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, in presenting the Motion—and let me recite the Motion for Sen. Mark's understanding. The Motion calls upon points to the need for the Government to explain the specific measures being used to monitor and evaluate COVID-19 positive patients in home quarantine. And in defence of a Motion that is not before us, Sen. Mark has strung together immense number of fallacies, unsubstantiated statements and a sprinkling—and I am stretching it by saying sprinkling—of facts. In fact, I should use singular there, a fact, and that single fact is that there are now, as of today, 7,170 persons in self quarantine.

So, Mr. Vice-President—and what is presented and unsubstantiated are those three factors which Sen. Mark spoke about: failure to properly test. Well, Mr. Vice-President, as of today, 218,568 tests have been conducted. So, that does not

demonstrate any failure to properly test, and that is in the public and private system.

He has presented the statement about inadequacy of manpower. Mr. Vice-President, the numbers are now declining. Unfortunately, we still have deaths and we still have positives, and our condolences go out to all those families, those who have suffered loss of relatives and those who have had to deal with the pain that comes with having a positive member of the family. But the fact is that even at the peak of the positives, when we were touching on 700 and something cases a day, even at the peak, nowhere in the health care system has there been an inadequacy of manpower. Trinidad and Tobago very uniquely has been able to maintain its parallel health care system and even at that peak—and I hope that we never get back anywhere near that—there has been no demonstration of inadequacy of manpower.

And then the third factor which Sen. Mark points to: capacity problems of manpower. Well, once Sen. Mark starts to talk about capacity, I stood here in response to a question and a question from Sen. Mark in which there was a demand that we close the Brooklyn facility in Sangre Grande, which was a step-down facility for which Government had a three-month contract and Sen. Mark was demanding that that be closed. And I said in response, the costs of keeping it on a month-to-month basis, in case it is needed, far outweighed the cost—just the rent we were paying, far outweighed the cost of having to re-establish a facility and we have proven right about that.

So those three factors in support of a Motion that he has not presented, they are unsubstantiated, Mr. Vice-President. The fact is, in relation to patients in home quarantine, the first thing is that the Government has followed the WHO and CDC

guidelines in relation to self-quarantine measures. They are not perfect, I am sure. They are not perfect but they represent what are the WHO and CDC guidelines.

In relation to that part of the Motion which has not been presented, those deal with monitoring and evaluation, the Ministry of Health has implemented a telemedicine strategy. There are 150 officers who were trained specifically to provide that support to persons who are in home quarantine; 150 officers. That is not a sign of neglect. And those 150 officers are required to do five things in relation to home quarantined persons. One, to conduct the tracing in respect of these persons. Two, to track and monitor those patients and provide ongoing medical advice towards their recovery. Well, what could be better than that, being assigned? You are talking about 150 officers. We have now gotten to the point of 7,170. So you are talking about 150 officers being assigned to an average, at the peak, 50 patients who are in home quarantine and provide them with ongoing medical advice towards their recovery. There is a tracking system and they are required—those officers are required to track the positive patients who were supplied with pulse oximeters, to manage, record and report on the status of their oxygen levels.

The fourth thing is that if it is found that these patients exhibit readings below the required level, there are arrangements being made in place for these patients to be moved for treatment, immediate treatment at three facilities. These patients who are in self-isolation, the arrangements being made for them to be moved to Couva, Caura, and Augustus Long Hospital.

And then finally, Mr. Vice-President, this home quarantine is not a holiday. It is conducted under the force of law and you are required before you go into home quarantine, you are required to sign a quarantine order and that order is enforceable by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. So the Ministry

collaborates with the police to ensure the order is complied. And if you have people who know they are positives, you are pleading for them and we have put all these arrangements—if you have persons who are positive and who are prepared to go into supermarkets and go outside and shop and so on, then the law has to be enforced, the law has to be enforced and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is the entity to enforce those laws.

So throughout, in relation to the persons who are in home quarantine, self-isolation, the Ministry of Health continues to provide the support through the officers—the 150 officers—and particularly, in relation to certain things that must be done and the must be done is to stay at home and isolate from others; to ensure that they use separate facilities and they do not share utensils, and so on; they do not go to work; they do not allow visitors; they wear a mask, and they have food and medication and so on. And if it is that someone who has been in home quarantine, not only for the facility of moving because of a medical issue—

Mr. Vice-President: Minister, you have two more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: The facility of moving to one of the facilities if the oxygen level falls is one thing, but I am sure, Mr. Vice-President, that if somebody in home quarantine is unable to maintain themselves in home quarantine, there are state facilities provided. There state facilities provided for quarantine and they may have access to that.

So, Mr. Vice-President, this is not an issue. There is nothing—there is nothing presented here today. There is nothing known to anyone of us and there is nothing that has been demonstrated, when we compare ourselves to the rest of the world, to suggest that there has been a failure of the Government and in particular, those professionals who work in the Ministry of Health and elsewhere, and those frontline people who risk their lives to provide the support that I am speaking

about. There is no evidence before us or otherwise, of failure to properly test, inadequacy of manpower or capacity problems. And I referred to the difficult period we have just gone through, the anticipation that our arrangements could be broken if the numbers escalate, the measures that this country and the citizens of this country have had to endure, and the fact that they have worked so far and our health system, the existing pre-existing or the COVID system, they have not broken down. Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. [*Desk thumping*]

Aripo Livestock Limited Public-Private Partnership Agreement
(Details of)

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark.

Sen. Wade Mark: Thank you, Mr. Vice-President. Mr. Vice-President, the second matter I wish to raise deals with the status or the status of the private-public or public-private partnership agreement or arrangement with— involving, I should say, the Aripo Livestock Farm or Station. Mr. Vice-President, approximately one year ago, I raised this matter via a Private Member's Motion. To be precise, it was on the 23rd of June, 2020, that I raised this matter. And I sought to get clarification from the Government on the transparency, accountability and to get from the Government, how was this process in handing over 1,176 acres of agricultural lands—of course, many parts of that acreage, we know is under forest essentially—but I wanted to get from the Government an understanding of the process because we wanted transparency and accountability.

I called on the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries then, as I would call on him now, to give us an understanding, provide us with information as to the terms and conditions of the lease. I called on him then, as I call on him now, to make public that particular lease agreement. He did not do it then and I shudder to think he will do it now. There is secrecy surrounding this entire transaction

involving the hijacking of our 1,176 acres of agricultural lands, Aripo Livestock Farm. And it is purported to have been given to some person who apparently is a powerful goat and sheep farmer in this country, who is a big “sawati” in a private company called General Earth Movers Limited, and he is also in charge of this farm in Penal called Marilissa Farms. This individual, Mr. Vice-President, one by name of Lincoln Thackorie or Thackorie, he is now in charge of the Aripo Livestock Farm. And we have information where they recently entered into an MOU with Nestle—right?—to supply them with local fresh cow’s milk.

So this company seems to be going very well. I want to know what are the benefits accruing to the taxpayers of this country? Because this company has been given by this criminal administration, 1,176 acres of prime—of land—agricultural lands without any proper accountability, transparency in this whole exercise. Mr. Vice-President, I was shocked, amazed, when I looked at what has taken place. And the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries has to account today for this travesty that has taken place. Mr. Vice-President, we demanded and we demand today that the Minister put on the table of Parliament—lay on the table of Parliament the lease agreement. We need to get that so we will understand what are the terms and conditions.

Mr. Vice-President, on the 18th of August, 2019, a company was incorporated. Never in our wildest dreams did the Minister of Agriculture, —Land and Fisheries, in his private-partnership agreement and in his statement on the 23rd of June, 2020, rather, told us that a private limited liability company was being established. We never knew that, Mr. Vice-President. We went into the registry—the company's registry to see registered and incorporated on the 13th of August, 2019, a company by the name of Aripo Livestock Limited. When we looked at the

incorporated documentation, we saw two names that appeared and we said, “But these people are not involved in Aripo?” These are now directors. The names are Harold Ramoutarsingh and Karina Chooniedass Ramnath, both from the same address, No. 2 Macoya Road, Tunapuna. And so, we asked what is this thing is about? Is this a front? Are these people fronting for the real people, who are now owning our 1,176 acres of land and they have now formed a company? So we gone from a leasehold arrangement, Mr. Vice-President, where the Minister gave no indication that Marilissa was going to establish a company to run the operations of this farm. But it becomes curiouser and curiouser, like Alice in Wonderland.

Mr. Vice-President, all of a sudden, on the 23rd of August, 2019—you remember they were formed sometime on the 13th of August 2019, a couple days later, on the 23rd, these two directors, Harold Ramoutarsingh and somebody called Karina Chooniedass Ramnath, vacated their directorship and who took over? A fella call Lincoln Thackorie, and another person called Judy Thackorie. So they are now in charge of this place called the Aripo Livestock Limited. At no time at all did the hon. Minister tell this country—

Mr. Vice-President: Senator, you have two more minutes.

Sen. W. Mark: Yes, Mr. Vice-President—that this company was going to be formed. We were told about the lease agreement. We were told about a private-public partnership agreement. So, Mr. Vice-President, we want answers from the Minister. And, Mr. Vice-President, when I looked at the incorporated documents, no shares issued at this time. No shares issued at this time. We do not know who are the shareholders of Aripo Livestock Limited. We do not know who are the beneficial owners of Aripo Livestock Limited. Mr. Vice-President, we need answers, we need them now. This appears to be a sophisticated hijacking of our

lands; 1,176 acres of land being hijacked by the Government on behalf of their friend and we need answers.

Why was this company formed, Mr. Vice-President? And why did the Minister tell not this Parliament that this company was going to be formed when I asked the Minister back in June of 2020, what was this lease about? Lay the lease on our table of Parliament. Let us see the terms and conditions. None of these things were done. We have to go, Mr. Vice-President, into the Companies Registry to discover a company called Aripo Livestock Limited was formed with the two company's directors who are the owners of the Marilissa Farm Limited.

Mr. Vice-President, all we ask is for the Minister and the Government to come clean and tell us what is behind this entire fiasco that has now gripped this farm that was once owned by the people of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you very much.

6.30 p.m.

The Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries (Sen. The Hon. Clarence Rambharat): Mr. Vice-President, the first and foremost mystery before us is, the fact that my colleague allegedly graduated from the Institute of Business with an EMBA, and that graduation is preceded by a degree from the same UWI in Economics, two areas which also formed part of my background. And I am embarrassed, both as a graduate and as a lecturer of that university, to know that this big man cannot understand the basics of a public/private partnership. This is our second expedition.

The first was a night, late one night, when I put a serious licking on him, beaten with the facts and the truth. Because this is not Mamoo and Beetham Wastewater, where Mamoo gone, the money gone and all that the citizens of

Aripo Livestock Limited Public-
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Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat (cont'd)

Trinidad and Tobago get in the wastewater project is pipe. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] From town to central, all that we get is pipe, and that is because, I now understand, you do not have an idea of how business functions in this world. [*Desk thumping*] How did you exit that institution? I call for an enquiry today, [*Desk thumping*] not only as a graduate of UWI on multiple occasions, but as a former faculty member from that institution. I am ashamed that you do not understand.

An advertisement went out. I went through that. An advertisement went out, site visits, extension of time—I went through that—bids received, chaired. Are you casting aspersions on retired PS Vishnu Dhanpaul? He chaired the committee. The committee was made up of technocrats. Are you casting aspersion on the present Acting Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Sport, who was then the Deputy PS in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, who was on the committee?

Sen. Mark: I want the lease. I want the lease. Put the lease on the table.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: No, deal with your Motion. You asked me for a status report [*Desk thumping*] and tonight—you asked for a status report, and I am giving the country a status report on your intelligence [*Desk thumping*] and your understanding [*Crosstalk*] and your abuse of—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Vice-President: Okay, Sen. Mark. [*Crosstalk*] Minister, Minister, Minister, one moment. Sen. Mark, please, allow the Minister to make his contribution.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: No one had to do your exam in secret. [*Laughter*] This is a scandal. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*]

Sen. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, I mean to say, this is—

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: I am—

Mr. Vice-President: Okay. Okay, okay, okay.

Sen. Mark: Standing Orders. Mr. Vice-President, the hon. Member is not dealing

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with the Motion. He is dealing with my personal. I am not dealing with a personality matter here. I am dealing with facts. Do not deal with no personality.

Mr. Vice-President: Sen. Mark, what is the Standing Order? You called the number? What is the Standing Order?

Sen. Mark: I am saying that—46(4).

Mr. Vice-President: 46(4)?

Se. Mark: Mr. Vice-President, he is imputing improper motives, and I am asking you to rule on it.

Mr. Vice-President: Okay, no problem. Okay. Minister, just temper your response a bit.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Thank you very much. Mr. Vice-President, I am imputing improper motives in relation to my friend. I am imputing improper motives in relation to the institution that granted him the EMBA. [*Desk thumping*] This has to be wrong, because the process of a public/private partnership is that the State enters into a relationship, a partnership, not like the People's Partnership, [*Laughter*] with a corporate entity, and the bid was in the name of existing entity, Marilissa Limited. And once they were selected through this process—and this company did not put in a bid to steal. As of today, this company has invested \$28 million of their money. Who signs up—I mean, listen. I am flummoxed.

I cannot even write a conspiracy theory or a mystery novel in which somebody goes through, a very complex way of, stealing from themselves? It is their money, and they have invested \$28 million. I have gone through the process with you. The reason that company was formed was to facilitate and, I mean, you want to hide, you want to hide and form a company, and you would call it Aripo Livestock Limited? [*Laughter*] There is a reason that company was formed and

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named, to continue, I mean. So, it is the corporate vehicle. Once they bid as Marilissa, and we entered into the MOU, they then formed the corporate vehicle, Aripo Livestock Limited, which is the partner of the State. The State owns the land and is making it available. They are paying rent for the land you know.

Sen. Mark: I know. I know that.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: Half a million dollars a year.

Sen. Mark: They have directors?

Sen. Gopee-Scoon: Just listen “nah”.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: And there is a partnership, a public/private partnership. And you referred to the MOU with Nestle as though it is—listen, this company is taking its money, its established forage facilities, so that they could manufacture their own feed. They have expanded the irrigation system. They have moved the water. The water storage alone has moved from 150,000 gallons to 18 million gallons. It costs money. They have employed people. They have created opportunities for UTT students to be trained and they have entered into an MOU with *Nestlé* as you correctly said. They did it in my presence. It just so happen that this morning I went to Tru Value and bought yet, again, my *Nestlé* local milk with the national flag. [*Desk thumping*] And, I have said to the country that, you know, there is a lot of things that give us pride in this country but, you know, for me, to reach into my refrigerator and pull out local milk with the national flag, it is the only *Nestlé* product anywhere in the world that carries a national flag. [*Desk thumping*] And the intention, there are many, many things will come out of Aripo, but that MOU, by 2025, that single facility in Aripo will double the production of local milk in Trinidad and Tobago, 2025, right there down the road. And they are on course to do that.

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Mr. Vice-President: Minister, you have two more minutes.

Sen. The Hon. C. Rambharat: *Nestlé* does not deal with any and anybody on that basis. *Nestlé* does not go out to enter into an MOU, but they have assessed the facilities. They were very proud. The country head was there. We spent almost the entire day there at the facility. And, so far, what has happened at the facility, you know, you are not talking about what it was. You are not talking about what it was. You are talking about what it is in your head. But I have already established what is in your head. [*Laughter*]

So the irrigation, I have said. They have gone into grass production. So they have established 40 acres of elephant grass. They have done two cycles, 60 acres each of corn production. They now have the capacity to handle the harvest from 100 acres of corn. They have developed the silos for storage. They have expanded the pond, the water storage on the acreage to up to 18 million gallons and they continue to do what, under the MOU, we agreed that they will do. And it is on the animal side, where they project by 2025 to have 1,000 animals there, imported brought there at their cost that will provide local beef and animals that will provide milk.

And, as I said, the objective is by 2025, we will double the milk production. They will also bring along local farmers. They have just established an automated milking parlour, as they have in Penal, up at that facility, and they will work with students with farmers. They will work with the industry, because that is what we need. We do not need the State to be paying people to mind animals. We need that sort of private investment in the industry. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Vice-President: Hon. Senators, the question is that this—

Sen. Mark: We want the lease. [*Crosstalk*] I want the memorandum of

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understanding. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Senator: That is it. We want to see the lease.

Sen. Mark: We want to see the proof.

Mr. Vice-President: Senators, would you allow me to—

Sen. Mark: Sorry. I know you are going to.

Mr. Vice-President: Thank you.

Sen. Mark: No problem.

Question put and agreed to.

Senate adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.40 p.m.