

PARLIAMENTARY STATEMENT
on
STATES OF PUBLIC EMERGENCY

Madam speaker,

Since the imposition of States of Public Emergency in the seven police divisions on November, 14, 2021, there has been a **19% decline in the weekly murder count island-wide**. In other words, the impact of the States of Emergency has not been limited to the specific geographical areas in which they have been declared. The murder rate across the island has fallen by 19% in one week.

Combined, the seven police divisions under States of Emergency experienced a **28% decline in murders**.

No murders have been recorded in the Kingston Central and Kingston Western Police Divisions since November 14. St. Andrew South Division has experienced an **83% decline in murders**.

Madam Speaker, the debate this afternoon is less about the effectiveness of States of Public Emergency in bringing about drastic and immediate reduction in murders, and more about the extent to which this government is willing to go to save Jamaican lives.

There is a deeply entrenched culture of violence in this country. The kind of violence that leads a man to butcher his girlfriend because he thinks she was unfaithful. It is the kind of violence that causes a person to contract a killer to murder her sister because of a disagreement. This is the level of toxic violence that is taking place in communities across the island. How can these acts of violence that are borne out of personal and relational issues, be prevented?

In 2019, Cabinet approved the establishment of the National Commission on Violence Prevention which was tasked with undertaking a comprehensive review of violence prevention programmes and strategies. The work of this commission is critical to

having a clearer understanding of how to interrupt and intervene in these interpersonal conflicts that end in violence.

On the other hand, Madam Speaker, we have begun to see a level of brutality and barbarity in the gang related violence, that cannot be addressed with normal policing. This is a level of criminal violence that is sheer evil in its intent and its execution. Too many of our young men are heavily armed gangsters, killing each other and creating havoc in the communities. This kind of unrestrained criminal violence requires our strongest and most decisive security operations to provide reprieve to the people who live in these communities.

The SOEs are for the residents, the people who live in the Kingston Central and Kingston Western police divisions who have had no murders taking place in their community over the last week. They are the ones who benefit from the SOEs. It is the lives of their sons and daughters that the SOEs are saving.

Madam Speaker,

Much has been said over the last week about the welfare and working conditions of the men and women of the Jamaica Constabulary Force and their ability to disrupt and undermine criminal gangs. One spokesperson went as far as to indict the government for “paralyzing” the police. It is unfortunate Madam Speaker, that while this government is doing everything that is legally permitted to save Jamaican lives, the opposition is spinning tales out of turn.

This year marks the 154th anniversary of the Jamaica Constabulary Force. It is a historical fact that the welfare provisions and working conditions of the men and women who daily put their lives on the line to protect this country and its people, has been deficient for most of Jamaica's 59 years of independence. Following years of negligible investment in the JCF, the police were left with derelict police facilities, unreliable vehicles, inadequate communication network, and near non-existent forensic and technology support.

Over the period 2009/10 to 2015/16 the budgetary allocation towards national security capital expenditure averaged just over two and a

half billion. Upon taking office in 2016, the Administration allocated \$6.5 billion to national security. In 2019/20, (prior to COVID-19) \$21 billion was allocated to national security, of which \$5.2 billion was allocated to the continuation of the strategic investment in the Jamaica Constabulary Force.

As a matter of priority we undertook to renovate, overhaul and construct police facilities. The derelict buildings were putting the lives and wellbeing of police officers and the public they serve at risk. To date, we have renovated **111** of the 186 police facilities and constructed **six (6)**. The National Housing Trust (NHT) will construct / renovate an additional **eleven (11)** facilities. The Ministry will be rebuilding three (3) additional facilities, to include the autopsy suite.

Madam speaker, between FY2017/17 and FY 2019/20 one thousand and ninety-two (**1092**) fit for purpose motor vehicles were handed over to the police. These included cars, pick-ups, SUVs, buses, trucks, and bikes. Comparatively, in FY2014/15, **three (3)** cars were purchased by the then Administration for the police. Madam speaker, any attempts to downplay the significant investment this Administration has made in improving the welfare and working conditions of our police officers is disingenuous and misleading.

A technology branch was established and critical technology projects advanced, to include: the automated finger print information system; and the data centre infrastructure. The JCF Microwave Network has been upgraded and this has significantly improved communication across and with police divisions. The 119 Police Emergency Communication System has been upgraded to handle more calls from the public in a reliable and efficient way.

Ballistics vests, ballistics plates and helmets were purchased and provided to the officers. The forensic and ballistic facility of the Institute of Forensic Science and Legal Medicine have been expanded, and the construction of the national autopsy suite was approved. Construction is underway.

Madam Speaker, this Administration has taken a strategic approach to combatting crime in this country. We have invested, and despite COVID-19, we continue to invest in the infrastructural, technology, forensic, communication, mobility and safety needs of our police officers. Today, the Jamaica Constabulary Force is operating more efficiently than at any other time in the organization's history. The investments are bearing fruit, we have seen the increased precision and reduced response times in police operations. Madam Speaker, **it is the first time in the 154-year history of the JCF that any Administration has invested so heavily in the welfare of the police officers.** We have made the budgetary commitment and the institutional reorganization and modernization is advanced. Work is still on-going, the process is not yet complete.

We have had to build out our border security apparatus. Strengthening the capacity of the Maritime Air and Cyber Command of the Jamaica Defence Force has been particularly crucial, given that majority of the homicides are gun related and access is facilitated through the guns for drugs trade.

While we continue to build the capacity of the police we must acknowledge as a society that the nature of criminal violence that we are seeing in Jamaica requires extra-ordinary powers in the short term. We have to do whatever it takes to save Jamaican lives! In the medium to long term, we must reduce recruitment in criminal gangs through effective social investment. This is a primary pillar of Plan Secure Jamaica. We are transforming communities in a sustainable way by improving the provision of basic services – health, education and physical infrastructure.

We are utilizing an evidenced based, data-driven, all-of-government approach to social investment, under Plan Secure Jamaica. A monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework will capture the impact from the interventions and juxtapose them with the clearly defined and measureable outcomes. Madam speaker, the government's social investment for sustained transformation policy is targeted to the individual child, the single parent, and the supporting facilities that are available to them. Through this approach we will

engage the children before they become recruitable to gangs and provide older children with life skills that will enable them to choose a life outside of crime.

Madam Speaker, in the same way that our investments in re-building the capacity of the police will take time, social transformation will take time. While this work is being aggressively pursued, we must utilize the States of Public Emergency as a strategic tool that saves lives, reduces homicides rapidly, and provides reprieve to the families who live in the declared areas.