



# THRONE SPEECH

# 2021

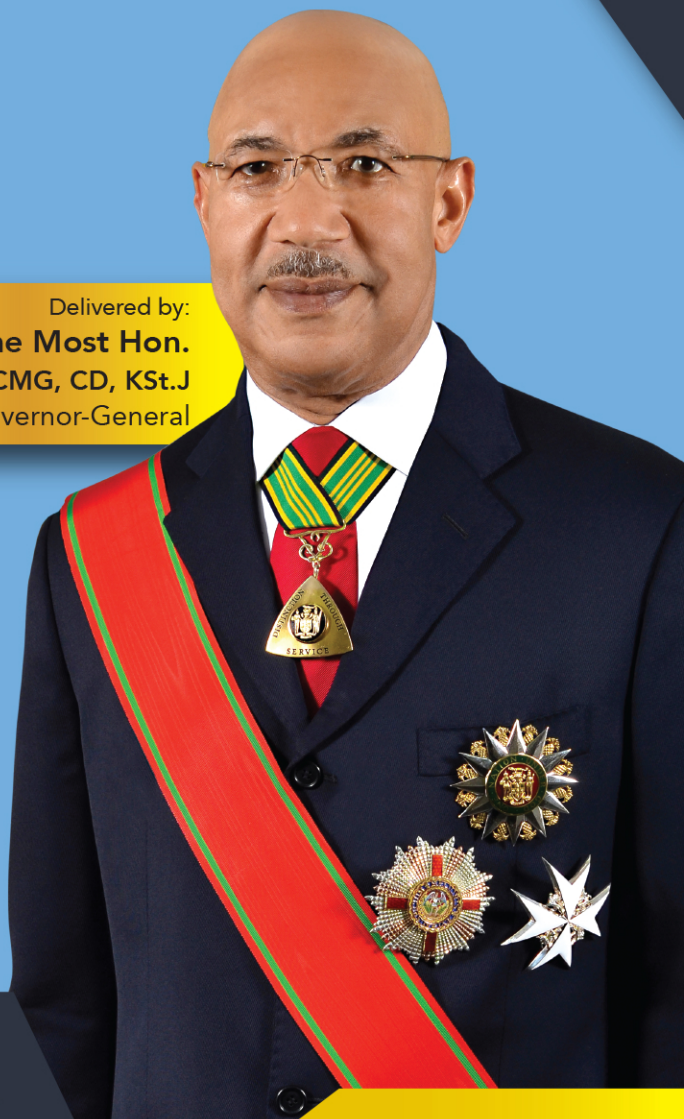
Building Forward...  
**Stronger Together**

Delivered by:

**His Excellency the Most Hon.**

**Sir Patrick Allen, ON, GCMG, CD, KSt.J**

Governor-General



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT  
GORDON HOUSE  
KINGSTON, JAMAICA

Thursday February 18, 2021



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## **Honourable Members,**

*W*e are here today during an unprecedented time which is emerging as a “new normal” in our consciousness. We have mounted a largely successful and intense programme to manage the COVID-19 pandemic and swiftly adapt to a new way of life. Wearing of masks has evolved from a practice, once essential only for a few, to being universally mandated.

Although 2020 did not unfold in a way we would have anticipated at the beginning, it has taught us more than anything, that life is precious, fleeting and must be treasured. For all those who have lost loved ones, we express our deepest condolences.

Prior to the pandemic we had forecasted 1.2 % growth for fiscal year 2020/21. The past financial year has shown us the need for strength and resilience. We have ensured that we have used a risk-based management approach that is evidence-based, measured, situationally appropriate and proportionate. We have developed strategies for coping and recovering.

In April 2020, the Prime Minister appointed the **COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force** – a multi-sectoral Task Force to help chart Jamaica’s economic recovery from the fallout and devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The recommendations of the Task Force will be our guide to emerging stronger and better than before.

Last year, we committed to making this our decade of growth. Notwithstanding setbacks caused by the pandemic, we must recommit to our 2030 vision and summon our energies, talents, and resources as we march forward to achieve it. We must never lose focus on creating a safer and more caring society where all can achieve their true potential.

We must embrace reform with ambition. Our goal cannot simply be to return Jamaica to our pre-COVID-19 reality. We must go beyond this and emerge economically and socially stronger by addressing fundamental gaps that have been exposed, and exploiting opportunities that arise.

The **COVID-19 Economic Recovery Task Force** recommended several policies and initiatives that will guide our recovery effort, including;

- Greater focus and shift of capital expenditure towards activities that maximise local value added.
- Accelerated capital investment in public health capacity to serve the daily healthcare needs of the population and respond to crises, thereby ensuring our resilience.
- Accelerated investment in public education infrastructure and skills training; with greater focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).
- Increased public investment in technology and broadband connectivity.
- Expansion of the social safety net, while at the same time ensuring its efficiency and transparency.
- Reconfiguration and diversification of the Jamaican economy by supporting the creation of new industries and strengthening local linkages.

**Honourable Members**, we must not only rebuild what we have lost; Every Jamaican, every entrepreneur, every civil servant, every business, and every government agency must **BUILD FORWARD...STRONGER TOGETHER!**

## **OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER**

**Honourable Members**, the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the critical importance of unique identification for a digital society which better serves all our citizens. The Government tabled a new **National Identification and Registration Bill**, which is currently being reviewed by a Joint Select Committee of Parliament.

We have begun the process of transforming the Registrar General's Department (RGD) into the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA), and the digital birth certificate solution, which is approximately 90% complete, will be launched in the coming financial year.

**Honourable Members**, resorting to violence cannot be the chosen means by which we as a people resolve our conflicts. The **National Commission on Violence Prevention (NCVP)** has been mandated to formulate an evidence-based 10-year National Strategic Plan to guide legislation, public education, and civil society mobilisation against violence and for a gentler, more loving society.

The Government has established the **Jamaica Education Transformation Commission** to carry out a comprehensive review of all levels of the public education system, and consultations with stakeholders and international partners are far advanced. The Commission's findings and proposed recommendations will be presented for review in the first quarter of the coming financial year.

**The Government tabled a new National Identification and Registration Bill, which is currently being reviewed by a Joint Select Committee of Parliament.**

## **OFFICE OF THE CABINET**

The creation of a digital society is a core mission of this Administration, and the Government must lead by example in the integration of technology that will fundamentally transform its operations and increase efficiency system-wide.

An **Electronic Performance Monitoring and Evaluation System** (ePMES) has been implemented and will improve planning, monitoring, and reporting functions of Ministries, to enable better decision-making.

For a suitable regulatory framework within which management of our electricity, telecommunications, water, and sewage services can sufficiently function, the Government will be amending the **Office of Utilities Regulation (OUR) Act** to incorporate new and emerging service sectors into its regulatory mandate, streamline its powers and harmonise across regulated sectors with sector specific legislation. This will create a more robust regulatory framework to promote investment expansion in utilities and consumer satisfaction.

## **MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND THE PUBLIC SERVICE**

The Government acted proactively to facilitate an appropriate response to address the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government mounted an economic policy response that is unprecedented in magnitude and impact, including approximately \$15 billion in tax cuts and approximately \$20 billion for the **COVID-19 Allocation of Resources for Employees (CARE) Programme**, not including the billions spent on health expenditures and support of public bodies. The CARE programme represented the largest social intervention programme in our history, with benefits extending to a wide range of individuals and businesses with over 500,000 applicants.

Approval was obtained from Parliament to suspend the fiscal rules for fiscal year 2020/21 and the target date for attainment of the debt to GDP target of 60% was deferred by two years, from fiscal year 2025/26 to 2027/28 to accommodate the impact of the pandemic.

**“We are among only a few countries globally that have been able to maintain debt sustainability throughout the pandemic.”**

We are among only a few countries globally that have been able to maintain debt sustainability throughout the pandemic. Our ability to achieve this is directly attributable to the strong base and buffers built from our fiscal discipline over the last several years.

Through the worst economic crisis in 100 years, Jamaica has managed to maintain Net International Reserves in the region of just over US\$3 billion despite the fallout in our foreign exchange earnings. We have also managed to maintain our sovereign debt rating of B+, recently reaffirmed by Standard & Poors. This reflects confidence in the economy and Government's economic policy direction within the context of the pandemic.

The Government continues its drive to make payment of taxes and fees more efficient by increasing the online options. At the start of 2021, the Tax Administration Jamaica (TAJ), began the pilot phase of the Direct Funds Transfer Project, to allow for immediate update of the customer's record and the convenience of printing an official receipt, instead of having to retrieve it from a Tax Office. In addition, TAJ launched its Mobile App, for payment of motor vehicle fitness fees, traffic tickets, property tax and queries.

**Honourable Members**, a swift recovery can only occur in a stable macroeconomic environment with a supportive legislative and regulatory framework. Therefore, **amendments to the Urban Renewal (Tax Relief) Act, Financial Administration and Audit Act, Financial Services Commission Act, and Income Tax Relief (Large-scale Projects and Pioneer Industries) Act** will be undertaken in the new fiscal year to further create a supportive environment for business and investment.

## **MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND JOB CREATION**

**Honourable Members**, the regulatory framework around Special Economic Zones has now been firmly established, giving the platform for an increase in the number of entities and square footage available for use. The Port Authority of Jamaica continues to make significant investments in the Kingston Logistics Park and construction of the Portmore Informatics Park. This, along with continued improvement in the Port Community System, is steadily establishing Jamaica as an outsourcing and logistics destination.

During this period of economic fall-out, the Government will use the time wisely to continue planning and designing major infrastructure projects for them to be ready for the post-pandemic rebound. It should be noted that the planning and design phases of Government Campus and Houses of Parliament are progressing well. The planned development of Morant Bay Urban Centre is now in the execution phase with Cabinet approval for the joint venture agreement.

In the western part of the island, important interventions including building of the southern and northern groynes which are aimed at rehabilitating headlands along the Montego Bay Waterfront, were slowed, but will be brought back on track in the 2021/22 financial year.

Works to upgrade the Closed Harbour Beach were completed and the new facility “Harmony Beach Park” will be officially opened soon.

With respect to our roadways, improvement in the ease and movement of people and goods, facilitated by previous highway projects, continues with the Southern Coastal Highway Improvement Project (SCHIP).

Work is progressing satisfactorily on the two phases of the project: that is, the Harbour View to Port Antonio leg and the tolled section between May Pen and Williamsfield.

The Government continued to provide a more seamless process in the water, works and investment space, for faster project implementation to boost development and productivity. During the past year, major upgrade of the water supply system was undertaken for Kingston and St. Andrew, and water supply was commissioned to five rural communities that did not previously have water.

Proposed legislative changes to the **Water Resources Act** will assign regulatory functions to the Water Resources Authority and require it to provide technical support in terms of floodplain mapping and flood warning systems development, to the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) and the Planning Authorities. Additionally, with changes to the **Flood Water Control Act**, the National Works Agency (NWA) will be required to design required flood control structures and oversee construction, as the implementing agency.

## **MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY**

**Honourable Members**, the Government continues to press ahead with efforts towards improving public order and enhancing security.

The multi-faceted approach taken by the Government to include transformative social investment, enhanced security measures and sustained outlay in the technological capability of the security forces have been effective in contributing to a reduction in serious crimes. Intelligence assessments point to many of the murders and shootings being attributable to gang activity. The Government continues to intensify its efforts to pursue gangs relentlessly.

For 2021/2022, the Government will continue to invest in mobility and technology, including expansion of the national CCTV surveillance programme, to enhance intelligence and forensic capabilities to aid in swift investigation and provision of reliable and legitimate evidence.

**“The Government has advanced development of four complex priority pieces of legislation, which are currently at the draft Bill stage.”**

The Government has advanced development of four complex priority pieces of legislation which are currently at the draft Bill stage:

- 1. An Act to Repeal and Replace the Firearms Act;**
- 2. The Criminal Administration (Suppression of Criminal Organizations) (Amendment) Act;**
- 3. The Immigration Restrictions (Commonwealth Citizens) (Amendment) Act; and**
- 4. The Aliens (Amendment) Act.**

Additionally, the Government will be seeking Parliamentary approval for other key policy and legislative measures designed to strengthen our crime fighting efforts, enhance rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders and improve Public Order, including:

- The **Major Organized Crime and Anti-Corruption Agency (Investigation and Prosecution Procedures) Regulations.**

- **Amendment to the Corrections Act** to modernise the framework governing the operations of the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) and improve care, management and rehabilitation of offenders.

## **MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS**

**Honourable Members**, pandemics, health emergencies and weak health systems not only cost lives but pose great risks to our sustainable development. The Government, in a year which was like no other, continued to focus on enhancing health care services delivery. Managing the response to the COVID-19 pandemic requires multi-sectoral collaboration; it is a whole-of society approach. Right from the inception of the pandemic, the Ministry developed a range of infection prevention, and control protocols, for various sectors and settings.

A national communication strategy was also executed. Screening and testing at our ports of entry further bolstered the pandemic response. Isolation and quarantine sites were put into operation in public hospitals and private facilities. The Government continues to monitor the local and international environment, disseminate its daily COVID-19 Situation Report and host regular press briefings.

It is projected that we will soon receive our first vaccine shipments through the global COVAX facility. The Government continues to explore various supply options and plans are advanced for distribution of the vaccines.

While COVID-19 has clearly been the focus in 2020/2021, the Government continues to work on its general health system strengthening initiatives including:

- Construction of a 5-bed Intensive Care Unit ("ICU") for Mandeville Regional Hospital;
- Expansion of ICU capacity at the Cornwall Regional Hospital; University of the West Indies, Kingston Public and Victoria Jubilee Hospitals

- Creation of 4-bed High Dependency Unit (“HDU”) space at the Spanish Town Hospital;
- Construction of two facilities – one in the eastern and the other in the western part of the island – to provide additional isolation beds; and
- Increase in the number of trained critical care personnel.

Notwithstanding the pandemic, activities directed towards enhanced vector control and prevention and management of non-communicable diseases have continued through inter-ministerial collaboration and private sector partnerships.

Priority legislation included the **Tobacco Control Bill** which was tabled in Parliament in December 2020 and has been referred to a Joint Select Committee. Additionally, the pandemic has heightened the need for amendments to modernise the **Public Health and Quarantine Acts**.

## **MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND INFORMATION**

**Honourable Members**, the pandemic has had a severely disruptive impact on our educational system. We developed the **Education in Emergencies Initiatives Plan**, through which we outlined strategies to manage the crisis.

While utilizing technology to enrich and improve educational levels and move towards a fully connected and knowledge-based society has always been a priority, the pandemic has necessitated an acceleration of the Government’s plans. Efforts have been directed towards providing equitable access for all, and ensuring that we equip our students with 21st century skills for the 4th Industrial Revolution.

The Government of Jamaica has been providing students on the PATH Programme with devices to facilitate their connectivity to online classes and launched the ‘Own Your

Own Device' initiative to provide vouchers valued at twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) to parents of 36,000 vulnerable students who are not PATH beneficiaries. We thank our local business community, our diaspora and international partners who continue to contribute generously to the 'One Laptop or Tablet per Child' initiative, which has added 12,000 devices to the education sector, moving us closer to the elimination of the digital divide.

Alongside the online modality, the Government took steps to ensure no child is left behind, and launched a national timetable to guide our students to lessons broadcast on television and aired on radio. Additionally, our teachers were deployed to help those students who could only access learning kits with printed textbooks and worksheets.

Following on a successful launch of the Amber HEART Coding Academy, the Government will shortly launch a pilot programme to introduce our primary and secondary students to coding skills, as we seek to develop creators rather than mere users of technology.

**“We thank our local business community, our diaspora and international partners who continue to contribute generously to the 'One Laptop or Tablet per Child' Initiative.”**

For the new fiscal year, renewed focus will be on the **Jamaica Teaching Council Bill**, and amendments to the **Education Act**, while also putting our efforts on the **Children (Adoption of) (Amendment) Bill**, the **Child Care and Protection (Amendment) Bill** and the **Access to Information Act and Regulations**.

## MINISTRY OF TOURISM

**Honorable Members**, it is no surprise that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the tourism sector. This has manifested in declines in visitor arrivals and expenditure, employment and revenue.

A comprehensive set of COVID-19 Tourism Health and Safety Protocols, which were the first to be endorsed by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), were developed to enhance health hygiene and safety standards for tourists, employees and facilities.

The Government established the Resilient Corridors along the North Coast and South Coast to encourage safe tourism practices through delivery of service that conforms to a rigorous set of tourism, health and safety protocols.

The Jamaica Tourist Board (JTB) implemented innovative strategies geared towards rebuilding confidence in the destination. Among the major initiatives was the Rediscover Jamaica Campaign, which encouraged Jamaicans to take advantage of tourism products and attractions through 'staycation packages'.

The Government is using the slowdown as an opportunity to upgrade our infrastructure and innovate to improve the quality of our product to enable us to rebound strongly when the pandemic abates.

Through amendment of the **Bath of the Apostle and Milk River Acts**, public private partnerships for Milk River Hotel and Spa and Bath Fountain Hotel, will be sought to enable their development into world-class facilities.

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By amending the **Tourist Board Act**, the Travel Agency Act and their accompanying Regulations, the Government will modernise the provisions of these Acts and strengthen enforcement provisions.

## **MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES**

**Honourable Members**, the past year underscored the need to focus on resilience, innovation and increased adoption of technology for our food security. The pandemic, coupled with changing rainfall and drought patterns due to climate change, impacted demand and supply chains.

Despite the challenges, growth of 1.8% was achieved in the second quarter and further growth is projected. The Government continues to put programmes in place to stimulate increased usage of local products and encourage investment, and provided a \$1 billion COVID-19 Recovery Fund to support the agriculture sector.

True leveraging of the sector requires significant investment. Accordingly, the Government has since expanded the Production Incentive Programme (PIP) to provide inputs to farmers. The Ministry has also actively pursued development of the Fisheries Sub-Sector through a relief programme valued at \$226 million for the provision of critical inputs.

The recently launched AgriCare Programme will provide access to medical and life insurance. We also entered into a landmark partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO) to help informal operators in the agriculture and fisheries sectors, become formalised.

In the coming financial year, the Government proposes to repeal the **Plants (Quarantine) Act**, to be replaced by the **Plants Health Act**; repeal the **Animals (Diseases and Importation) Act**, to be replaced by the **Animal Health Act** and amend the **Praedial Larceny (Prevention) Act**.

## **MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY, INVESTMENT AND COMMERCE**

The Government recognises its role as an enabler to ensure that businesses not only survive, but grasp opportunities to strengthen value and supply chains. This is especially important with changing consumption patterns.

In fiscal year 2020/21, the Government facilitated the full operationalisation of the Cannabis Licensing Authority (CLA) to support the local medical cannabis industry.

The Small Business Development Centre initiative was strengthened as a central and comprehensive source of support for MSMEs through provision of a platform for business development professionals to acquire capacity building opportunities.

The Manufacturing Sector Strategy was approved facilitating implementation of a five-year plan with the ultimate goal of increasing local manufacturing output and employment by 23% within five (5) years.

The Ministry supported enactment of critical legislation such as: **the Patent and Designs Act, the Trade (Sale of Goods during the period of Declaration of Disaster Area) Order, the Insolvency (Standard for Determination of Excess Income) Notice and the Copyright (Extension of Transitional Period) Order.**

During the FY 2021/2022, the **Companies (Amendment) Bill, the National Compliance and Regulatory Authority Bill and the Customs Duties (Dumping and Subsidies) Bill** will be tabled.

## **MINISTRY OF SCIENCE, ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY**

The Government is at the forefront of efforts to expand broadband internet penetration and ultimately to achieve universal internet access through the continued provision of public WiFi hotspots.

The Government is also committed to driving innovation through research and development. Through the Scientific Research Council (SRC), a number of new product development ideas have been commercialised into varying products such as jams, seasonings, drinks and sauces.

We are on a mission to secure Jamaica's energy future through diversification and the provision of alternative sustainable and environmentally friendly sources. Jamaica is now a regional leader in renewable energy, boasting some of the largest solar and wind facilities.

“ **Jamaica is now a regional leader in renewable energy, boasting some of the largest solar and wind facilities.** ”

eGov Jamaica Limited developed both the online application 'WeCare', for supporting the Government's CARE programme and the 'Own Your Own Device' (OYOD) online application for non-PATH beneficiaries to receive grant assistance for computer equipment.

Legislative priorities will include the implementation of the **Data Protection Act** and the promulgation of **Data Protection Regulations** and drafting of **Regulations under the Telecommunications Act**.

Additionally, the Government plans to enact **the Electricity (Amendment, Indemnification and Validation) Act**, the **Petroleum (Downstream Activities) Act**, the **Petroleum (Amendment) Act**, the **Electricity (Electric Power Wheeling and Net Billing) Regulations** and review **the Cybercrimes Act**.

## **MINISTRY OF HOUSING, URBAN RENEWAL, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

Inclusion of a Ministry with special focus on urban renewal combined with housing, environment and climate change is indeed timely. It is a significant dynamic to drive inclusive growth and position us to better respond to challenges.

Proliferation of informal settlements has posed significant social, economic and environmental challenges for Jamaica; a situation which necessitates urgent intervention through focused policy measures and remedial actions. Work progressed on development of a National Squatter Management Policy and Implementation Plan which will, among other things, guide a coordinated programme to gradually reduce and eventually eliminate squatting and define the attendant legislative, regulatory and institutional framework within which it will operate.

The Real Estate Industry has long been recognised as a primary driver of economic activity, accounting for a significant portion of individual and business wealth. More Jamaicans realised their dream of owning a home as the Government continued to fulfil its mandate of providing affordable solutions. Additionally, units were handed over under the National Social Housing Programme.

Completion of the amendments to the **Real Estate (Dealers and Developers) Act** has been prioritised. This will give effect to the merger of the Real Estate Board, Commission of Strata Corporations and the Timeshare Registrar, into the Real Estate Authority of Jamaica; it will also address new dynamics of the

industry that are not currently legislated, offer greater protection to purchasers, and update existing fines for breaches.

Jamaica has a wide cross-section of residential and commercial developments that have shared property, which are not covered under the Registration (Strata Titles) Act, because they are not strata properties. Following extensive research, legislation is being developed to govern the operations of such communities. The Real Estate Authority of Jamaica will have oversight responsibility.

Jamaica remains steadfast on the climate resilience and sustainable development agenda and has submitted its revised Nationally Determined Contribution to the Paris Agreement in June 2020, committing the country to more stringent targets.

In 2021, Jamaica will pilot an investment prioritisation tool that will integrate climate change in infrastructure development. This tool will identify key locations with the highest concentration of economic and social value at risk, over the next 20 years.

## **MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND FOREIGN TRADE**

**Honourable Members**, despite limitations on regular diplomatic activity, international cooperation remained central to the Government's achievement of inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

In response to the pandemic, the Government secured and coordinated assistance valued at US\$12 million from international partners, who donated medicines, field hospitals as well as medical, personal protective, and emergency response equipment. The Government also quickly and effectively engaged its network of Missions, Honorary Consuls, Diaspora communities and bilateral partners to see to the welfare of our nationals who were stranded overseas.

Recognising the importance of our Diaspora, the Government established new Councils for engagement and tabled the National Diaspora Policy. Jamaica's Honorary Consul Network was strengthened, not only by refreshing certain posts, but by increasing the network by 20% since 2016.

Our efforts in Foreign Trade and Investment were enhanced under the newly launched Economic Diplomacy Programme, which, in collaboration with JAMPRO, further empowers diplomatic Missions and Consular Posts to vigorously promote opportunities for trade and investment in Jamaica.

Legislative achievements include:

- Accession to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons as one of the first 50 states required, for its entry into force;
- Accession to the Apostille Convention, which will allow simplified document authentication processes to be implemented;
- Ratification of the Revised Georgetown Agreement for the establishment of a new Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (OACPS);
- Conclusion of the new Partnership Agreement between the OACPS and the European Union, together with its Caribbean Regional Protocol; and
- Acceptance of the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol, to assist developing countries, like Jamaica, to access financial assistance to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Legislative priorities for the new fiscal year will include:

- Further strengthening the legal frameworks for Anti-Money Laundering/Combating Financing of Terrorism, and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions;

- Modernising monetary penalties in legislation within the remit of the Government; and
- Domestic implementation of Part XI of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, to regulate deep seabed mining.

## MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

**Honourable Members**, the Judiciary's Strategic Plan is ushering in transformation in the operations and management of courts. Despite onset of the pandemic, courts continued to operate effectively, including by hearing matters electronically.

Operational changes have resulted in an increase in the number of judgements. By the end of March 2022, there should be no judgement that is outstanding for more than three (3) to six (6) months at the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal.

**“ By the end of the coming fiscal year, there should be no judgement that is outstanding for more than 3 - 6 months at the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal. ”**

The Government continued a progressive programme of Justice Reform and strengthening delivery of social justice services in the areas of restorative justice, child diversion and victim services.

The Ministry promulgated the **Dogs (Liability for Attacks) Act** which provides for criminal and civil liability for attacks by dogs and the **Authentication (Foreign Public Documents) Act**, which will facilitate a more simplified process for authenticating local public documents intended for use overseas, and foreign documents to be used in Jamaica.

For the upcoming fiscal year, the Government intends to introduce a **Mediation Bill** to enact legislation to ratify the

United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation ("the Singapore Convention on Mediation"), and to create a legislative framework for greater use of domestic mediation.

The Government will also amend the **Criminal Records (Rehabilitation of Offenders) Act** to expand powers of the **Criminal Records (Rehabilitation of Offenders) Board**, to consider applications for expungement; and repeal the 19th century **Notaries Public Act**, replacing it with a modern and more comprehensive legislation.

Further, the Government intends to pilot for enactment, the **Judicature (Parish Courts) (Amendment) Bill** and **Judicature (Appellate Jurisdiction) (Amendment) Bill** to, inter alia, grant a limited right of appeal to the Prosecution.

## **MINISTRY OF CULTURE, GENDER, ENTERTAINMENT AND SPORT**

**Honourable Members**, of great importance is the fact that the first Government owned and operated shelter for victims of Gender-Based Violence was opened in October 2020. Two (2) additional properties were purchased during the 2020/2021 financial year to be used as shelters.

Embracing the new normal, the Ministry was able to organise and host three (3) major virtual events:

- The "Together We Stand" Telethon which raised approximately Sixty Million Dollars (\$60,000,000.00) to purchase Personal Protective Equipment;
- The virtual staging of the "Emancipendence" Celebrations under the theme "Resilient and Strong - Let's Celebrate Jamaica 58"; and
- The Fifteenth Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,

held virtually for the first time. Participants from almost 150 countries were exposed to our cultural and musical offerings.

Jamaica celebrates the 60th Anniversary of our Independence in 2022. The “Secretariat for Special Commemorative Activities” has been established to coordinate activities to commemorate this our Diamond Jubilee and the UN declared International Decade of People of African Descent.

Progress in legal reform saw the tabling of the **Sexual Harassment (Prevention) Act**, which is currently before a Joint Select Committee of Parliament. The proposed amendments to the **Domestic Violence Act** are being expedited. The amendments to the **Jamaica National Heritage Trust Act** are being finalised for submission to the Legislation Committee of Cabinet. These amendments are to protect Jamaica from the illicit trade of our cultural artefacts and provide a more robust regulatory framework for the declaration and preservation of our heritage sites.

## **MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and its portfolio agencies and Local Authorities play a pivotal role in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM) has been charged with the responsibility of the Disaster Risk Management Act which has formed the basis for the national response. In keeping with ongoing efforts to be sufficiently responsive to ever-changing conditions, amendments will be made to the Disaster Risk Management Act.

Through social protection programmes and initiatives, several activities were undertaken to care for the vulnerable. Care

packages were provided to the homeless and a special feeding programme was initiated to provide at least two meals per day. The Church Street shelter was opened to provide accommodation to over 70 homeless persons in the Downtown Area of Kingston. Additionally, temporary shelters were established in St. Catherine.

Also, in all infirmaries and golden age homes a comprehensive cleaning and sanitisation exercise was carried out and buildings were renovated to be used as isolation areas.

“In all infirmaries and golden age homes a comprehensive cleaning and sanitisation exercise was carried out.”

The National Solid Waste Management Authority (NSWMA) is expanding its fleet capacity to better serve communities islandwide.

The Government remains committed to improving infrastructure, capacity-building and creating additional employment opportunities to propel economic development and improve quality of life in the rural areas.

Legislative priorities for the 2021/22 fiscal year include the **Human Services Bill**, the **National Solid Waste (Amendment) Bill and Regulations related to the National Solid Waste Management Authority** and the **Building (Service and Enforcement of Notices and Orders) Regulations**.

## **MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND MINING**

**Honourable Members**, in the past year, the Government had to take steps to assist the transport sector in the COVID-19 relief effort. Licensing fees were waived and the period for

renewal of road licences extended. First responders were allowed to ride free on Jamaica Urban Transit Company (JUTC) and Montego Bay Metro buses, between March and September 2020. The procurement of buses for the Jamaica Urban Transit Company is far advanced.

The Government has been able to maximise on revenue from alumina sales through new legal and marketing structures which now allow the Government to enhance its earnings with respect to its alumina offtake from the JAMALCO operation. This follows closely on the heels of the tabling of the new National Minerals Policy for Jamaica as a White Paper. Additionally, the Shipping (Amendment) Act, which seeks to incorporate the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, was passed.

The Government intends to focus on the **Shipping (Pollution Prevention, Response, Liability and Compensation) Bill** as well as the **Bill to amend the Transport Authority Act**. Another key priority for the Ministry is the implementation of the **new Island Traffic Authority**, and attendant regulations pursuant to the passing of the **Road Traffic Act**.

## **MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY**

**Honourable Members**, social workers were called upon to assist with COVID-19 relief efforts and were on the front-line packaging and distributing food packages for persons in communities that were subject to community quarantine measures.

A Social Pension Scheme was approved to benefit persons 75 years and older, who are not in receipt of a private or public pension, other retirement income, or social protection benefits and are not within a Government-owned institutionalised facility. This new programme will be implemented in the second quarter of the 2021/22 fiscal year.

A special sub-committee of the Labour Advisory Council (LAC) has been established to assess the impact of the pandemic and provide recommendations for labour market resilience.

The Government remains steadfast and committed to the enactment of the **Occupational Safety and Health Bill** to protect workers and other persons from harm to their safety, health and welfare through the elimination or minimisation of hazards, serious injury, or risks arising out of, or in connection with activities at workplaces.

The amendments to the **National Insurance Act, (National Insurance (General Benefit) Regulations** and the **National Insurance (Sugar Workers Transitional) Regulations** remain legislative priorities. It is anticipated that these amendments will give effect to increases in several benefits under the Scheme.

Jamaica remains committed to achieving decent wages for all workers with particular attention paid to the most vulnerable; accordingly, work is still ongoing on the **Minimum Wage (Amendment) Act**.

The Government has been working assiduously to ensure that the **Disabilities Act** is brought into effect to promote, protect and ensure full and equal enjoyment of privileges, interests and benefits by persons with disabilities. Subsidiary legislation is needed to support the **Disabilities Act**.

Consequently, **Disabilities Regulations** have been prepared and it is the intent of the Ministry to table these in the 2021/2022 fiscal year.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

**Honourable Members**, the road ahead will be a steep incline with many rough patches. However, rising from adversity is nothing new for us. Time and time again, we have demonstrated the ability to recover and overcome. Undoubtedly, we were on the right path before the pandemic, and the dividends of sound economic and social policies have assisted in cushioning the shocks. We are confident that the fundamentals of our economy and Government are strong and we will rebound and rebuild even stronger than before.

My fellow Jamaicans, I am optimistic that we will rebuild and recover, however, the pandemic has provided us with the opportunity to build forward. We have seen first-hand how technology has kept us together when we must maintain distance, how work can be done virtually, how a system of unique identification is important for efficient, transparent and equitable distribution, and the importance of a strong security force to support public order and the efforts of our health professionals and first responders in times of crisis.

We must not merely seek to build back what we had; we must embrace the opportunity to build forward to the new future. We must build forward to a digital society, build forward to a smarter society, build forward to an orderly, law upholding and peaceful society.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has, no doubt, dealt a severe blow to our lives and livelihoods, let us as one Jamaica, embrace the challenge and opportunity to **BUILD FORWARD... STRONGER AND BETTER TOGETHER.**

BUILDING FORWARD... **STRONGER TOGETHER**

