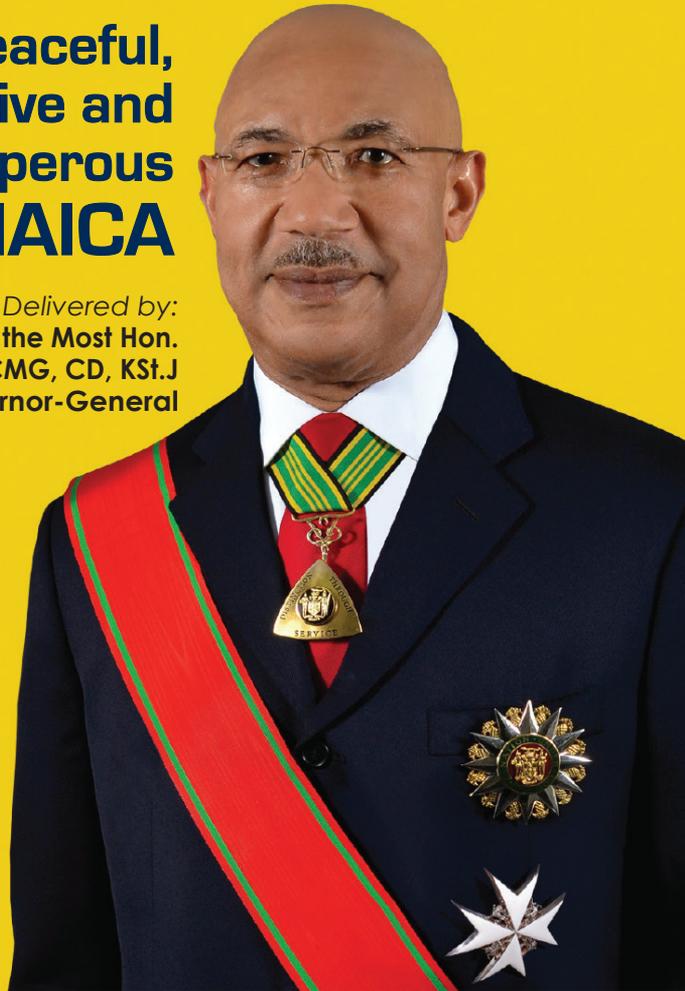




THRONE SPEECH 2024

Towards a Peaceful, Productive and Prosperous JAMAICA

Delivered by:
His Excellency the Most Hon.
Sir Patrick Allen, ON, GCMG, CD, KSt.J
Governor-General



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2024

Houses of Parliament, Gordon House
Kingston, Jamaica



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Honourable Members,

We give God thanks that today we can say that we are a **stronger, more resilient Jamaica**; having had a remarkable recovery from recent global shocks.

We place our trust in the Almighty's assurance: "*So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*" **Isaiah 41:10 (NIV).**

Our island nation is positioned to achieve our true destiny as a **peaceful, productive, and prosperous** country for all.

- We have now had **10 consecutive quarters of economic growth** since the pandemic.
- Our **unemployment rate is at 4.2%**, the lowest in the history of independent Jamaica.
- We recorded a **Balance of Payments Surplus** on our Current Account for the first time since 1966.
- In September 2023, global ratings agency, Standard and Poor's (S&P) **upgraded Jamaica's credit rating** to double B minus (BB-), the highest level it has ever been.
- Jamaica's **Net International Reserves** as of December 31, 2023 were at a record high.
- In November 2023, the Government issued the **first-ever Jamaican Dollar linked bond** on the international market in the amount of forty-six point six billion Jamaican dollars (J\$46.6B) or US\$300M.

By any objective measure, Jamaica's economic performance has been exemplary and has caught the attention of the world. Every Jamaican should be proud that Jamaica is now recognised globally for the vibrancy of our music and culture, the speed of our athletes, and for the strength and speed of our economic recovery.

Honourable Members, a growing economy provides the resources to spend on the things that matter to our people. Fixing roads, providing water, building houses, acquiring garbage trucks, acquiring buses, improving our health care system, providing for education transformation, increasing skills training, and investing in our security forces; among other things.

The Government continues its march towards a **Peaceful, Productive and Prosperous Jamaica**.

OFFICE OF THE CABINET

Honourable Members, as we envision the Jamaica we all want, customer-centric service must be the hallmark. The Government is therefore committed to increasing the roll-out of the **Service Excellence Programme** across all Ministries, Departments and Agencies.

Key components of the Programme include Service Delivery Minimum Standards, Complaints Management, People Engagement, Communication and Change Management.

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

Honourable Members, the Government recognises the transformative power that technology has in shaping societies and continues its efforts towards becoming a Digital Society.

Through the **Government Wide Area Network and National Broadband Project**, 14 parish courts, 8 police stations, all 14 Municipal Corporations, 49 Ministries, Departments, and Agencies, and 662 educational institutions and places of safety have been provided with dedicated internet access. The JamaicaEye security camera network has also been expanded.

In the digital age, verifiable, credible, accurate, and contextualised Government information is a priority. To this end, the Government supported 41 Ministries, Departments and Agencies in their adoption of the **Records and Information Management**



Policy; developed a National Archives and Records Management Bill; and established a fact-checking website.

The **Office of the Information Commissioner**, which serves as the cornerstone of data protection in Jamaica, has been strengthened and the Data Protection Act, 2020 is being operationalised on a phased basis, with public education being a priority at this time.

Honourable Members, a unique digital identity for every citizen is a critical building block for a Digital Society. In 2023, the Government finalised the development of the national identification regulations and successfully completed a pilot of the system. In 2024, the National Identification and

“ In 2023, the Government finalised the development of the national identification regulations and successfully completed a pilot of the system. ”

Registration Authority will be operationalised to commence enrolment and issue National Identification cards. More government services will be made easily accessible online through use of the electronic National ID card, to enhance productivity and growth. The Jamaica Data Exchange Platform will also facilitate the consent-based exchange of data between the private and public sectors to drive digital innovation.

The Government is renovating and upgrading post offices islandwide to serve as enrolment centres for the National ID, as well as Digital Support Centres. Design work for 23 post office renovations has been completed, and contracts have been approved for 12 post office modifications.

MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Honourable Members, in realising our sustainable development we must build our resilience to natural disasters. The **National Natural Disaster Risk Financing Policy** which was approved through Parliament will guide disaster risk financing to

ensure adequate financial resources for relief, recovery, and reconstruction.

In 2024, the Government will further strengthen **Financial Sector Regulations** and key legislation, including:

- **Customs Act**, which, having gone through a Joint Select Committee, is expected to be taken shortly;
- **Private Sector Pensions Act**, which forms part of the pension reform process;
- **Income Tax Relief (Large-Scale Projects and Pioneer Industries) Act**, which will make provisions under one legislation for fiscal incentives for large-scale projects; and
- **Amendments to the Financial Services Act** to develop a regime for the consolidated supervision of non-deposit taking institutions and facilitate the Regulatory Framework for the **Twin Peaks Model of Financial Regulation**.

MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND JOB CREATION

Honourable Members, the Government continues to drive sustainable economic growth and meaningful job creation, enabling a better quality of life for all our citizens.

The **New Social Housing Programme**, introduced in 2018, has built over 200 new houses across the island, with 500 units projected for 2024/2025.

Honourable Members, major advances in infrastructure works continue - the **May Pen to Williamsfield segment of the Southern Coastal Highway Improvement Project (SCHIP)** was officially opened in September 2023. The **Harbour View to Yallahs segment** was opened on February 6, 2024, creating

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new economic opportunities, particularly for the people of St. Thomas, which was once dubbed “the forgotten parish” but will now be known as the ‘renaissance parish’.

Under the Special Capital Expenditure Programme, construction of the first road project, Grange Lane, commenced in December 2023. Braeton Road/Hellshire and the East King’s House Road/Lady Musgrave Road projects, have completed feasibility studies and are now undergoing evaluation.

The new entry to Portmore from Mandela via Municipal Boulevard, widening of Sandy Gully Bridge on Washington Boulevard, and upgrade to the Arthur Wint Drive/Tom Redcam Drive and Camp Road, will undergo Public Investment Management Systems review and commence construction in the 2024/2025 fiscal year.

The Government’s \$40-billion **Shared Prosperity through Accelerated Improvement to our Road Network programme (SPARK)** to upgrade more than 2,000 roads islandwide over the next two years has been launched. Approximately \$150 million is to be allocated to each constituency for road works with additional allocations to be determined based on mileage and an assessment of the condition of the road network. Planning is now underway for community-based consultations to determine prioritisation of roads for rehabilitation.

Parks are vital to our well-being; and the Government launched the long awaited **Portmore Resilience Park**, in January 2024 and work commenced as scheduled on February 5, 2024.

Honourable Members, building a resilient Jamaica requires

“Parks are vital to our well-being; and the Government launched the long awaited **Portmore Resilience Park**, in January 2024 and work commenced as scheduled on February 5, 2024.”

access to potable water. The Government has been unrelenting in its quest to increase the water footprint with the overarching goal of achieving universal access by 2030.

In 2023/24, two hundred thousand (200,000) Jamaicans islandwide benefited from water improvement projects costing some \$4 billion. In the financial year 2024/2025, twenty-one (21) additional water supply upgrading, and expansion projects are planned with a projected expenditure of over J\$2.5 billion.

The Rio Cobre Treatment Plant project will commence this year under a public-private partnership arrangement costing US\$77 million. Once completed, this will provide an additional 15.5 million gallons of water daily to the Kingston Metropolitan Area, effectively ending the need for water lockoffs in the dry season in Kingston, St. Andrew and Portmore.

The Government continues to prioritise safeguarding environmental assets and moving forward with its commitment to declare 30% of the island's coastal, marine, and terrestrial areas as protected areas. The Protected Areas Regulations under the Natural Resources Conservation Authority Act were gazetted in 2023. The **Protected Areas Policy** will be finalised in the financial year 2024/25, with work commencing on the promulgation of an omnibus **Protected Areas legislation**.

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

Honourable Members, the Government's crime-fighting strategy has yielded notable success as Jamaica recorded a 7.8% reduction in homicides and an aggregate 11% reduction in all Crime Categories for 2023 compared to 2022.

The Government continues to make significant progress in modernising the anti-crime legislative framework through the passage of the **Law Reform (Zones of Special Operation and Special Community Development Measures) Amendment Act**.



The **Amendments to the Immigration Restriction (Commonwealth Citizens) Act and Aliens Act**, which are now at advanced stages, will strengthen our national border management framework and support the wider territorial and sovereign protection reforms.

The Government continues to make investments in major technology in its National Security apparatus with the continued upgrade and expansion of the JamaicaEye Network, the Traffic Ticket Management System, and the Microwave and Radio Networks for the Jamaica Constabulary Force.

Infrastructural reforms to National Security facilities also continued with a further 26 police stations renovated to date and the construction of the National Forensic Pathology Autopsy Suite near completion.

The Government will break ground for the construction of the Westmoreland Divisional HQ and the St. Catherine North Divisional HQ within this financial year – a major milestone in our reform agenda.

The Government continues to outfit our security forces with additional resources, to maintain law and order so that all citizens can play their part in **building a peaceful, productive and prosperous Jamaica**.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Honourable Members, our health sector is undergoing the most comprehensive infrastructure improvement since our Independence.

The Government has broken ground for the modernisation of the Spanish Town Hospital to offer a broader range of specialised

“Our health sector is undergoing the most comprehensive infrastructure improvement since our Independence.”

medical services, and has also made significant progress on the Cornwall Regional Hospital rehabilitation project and the construction of the new Western Child and Adolescent Hospital.

Upgrades to other hospitals and health centres are also being undertaken with the St. Jago Park and Greater Portmore Health Centres being upgraded to Comprehensive Health Centres, and the May Pen and St. Ann's Bay Hospitals to Regional Hospitals.

Honourable Members, as we seek to improve our productivity and expand service delivery, we must look closely at our human resources. In this regard the Government has provided over 2,500 posts for physicians, to expand primary healthcare, increase service quality, as well as eliminate employment by contract and provide better working arrangements.

The Government is committed to the programme of prevention for Non-Communicable Diseases and will continue its "Know Your Numbers" campaign to provide 500,000 screening tests to the population. This is also being supported by the continuation of the Jamaica Moves Campaign in schools, communities and workplaces.

This legislative year, the Government will revise various key pieces of health-related legislation to include:

1. The **Tobacco Control Bill**, which will enable Jamaica to be in compliance with its international obligations under the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC).
2. The **Food and Drugs (Amendment) Bill**, which will allow for the effective regulation of natural health products, including nutraceuticals.
3. Amendments to the **Nurses and Midwives Act and the Pharmacy Act**, to legalise the role of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses and enable family nurse practitioners and mental health psychiatric nurse practitioners in Government

Health Centres and the University Hospital of the West Indies, to prescribe a list of pharmaceuticals as approved by the Pharmacy Council.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND YOUTH

Honourable Members, a peaceful, productive and prosperous Jamaica is predicated upon the quality of our education system. The Government is currently implementing the recommendations of the **Jamaica Education Transformation Commission (JETC)**; recognising that this will be a multi-year wide-ranging transformation exercise, which should enable the success of every learner.

Dialogue, partnerships and feedback are essential to the success of this process and, as such, the **TREND - Transforming Education for National Development initiative to include a robust communication campaign** was launched with the tagline – “**For a brighter tomorrow**”. Significant changes are anticipated to include some high-impact legislations, namely:

- (i) **The Jamaica Teaching Council Bill.**
- (ii) **The Amendments to the Education Act and Regulations.**
- (iii) **The Overseas Examinations Commission (Amendment) Bill.**

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

Honourable Members, Jamaica's tourism industry continues its incredible post-pandemic rebound as one of the world's fastest-recovering countries and the Caribbean's fastest-growing tourist destination. Our warmth and hospitality have kept visitors returning at a 42% repeat rate.

“ Jamaica's tourism industry continues its incredible post-pandemic rebound as one of the world's fastest-recovering countries and the Caribbean's fastest-growing tourist destination. ”

In 2023, Jamaica welcomed a record **four million, one hundred and fifty thousand visitors**, comprising two million eight hundred and ninety thousand stopover visitors and one million two hundred sixty thousand cruise passengers, and generated some US\$4.27 billion in revenue.

The Government is focused on Strengthening Tourism Linkages; through the Agri-Linkages Exchange (ALEX) platform, a collaboration between the Tourism Enhancement Fund (TEF) and the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA). This generated \$1 billion in sales by small farmers in 2023.

The Government's Investment in **Certification and Skills-Training** is ensuring that Jamaicans are not spectators but active contributors to our tourism success.

Our tourism workers are a core part of our growth strategy, and we are committed to providing **housing** for them through partnerships with the private sector. We also welcome the pledge by four major international hotel investor groups, who have committed to constructing over 2,000 residential units for industry employees.

Honourable Members, the provision of greater access to suitable public beach facilities to all Jamaicans remains a priority. Eight (8) beaches are at various stages of the design and approval process under the ongoing **National Beach Development Programme**.

Among those proposed for enhancement in 2024/2025 are **Priory Bathing and Fishing Beach in St. Ann and Pagee Beach in St. Mary**.

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND MINING

Honourable Members, the agriculture and fisheries sector achieved a sustained positive trajectory with eight consecutive quarters of growth up to the final quarter of the 2022 calendar year. In 2023, however, Jamaica experienced its hottest and driest year on record, and this inevitably posed severe

challenges for the sector. The Government's interventions in 2023 sought to mitigate losses, increase the resilience of the sector, and ensure the country's food security.

The Government provided some \$1.13 billion to advance growth in the sector through the **Production and Productivity Programme**. This yielded production of 777,000 tonnes up to the end of December 2023, the second highest level of domestic crop production in the country's history. The Government will be placing specific focus on rehabilitation and expansion of orchard crop production of mango, breadfruit and ackee.

The Government continued to prioritise the small ruminants development programme to boost Jamaica's self-sufficiency in meat production. GCT has been temporarily waived on live animal imports to further drive improvement of our local herd populations. Through the National Fisheries Authority, a dedicated aquaculture agro park is being targeted.

The Government is investing \$2.6 billion in key irrigation projects that are expected to result in over 2,433 hectares of additional irrigated lands for production.

Honourable Members, during 2023 the mining and quarrying sector recorded a 25% increase in total equivalent of dry bauxite shipped (inclusive of alumina production). As we continue the diversification of our minerals sector, the exportation of high-purity limestone increased by 77%.

Under the legislative programme for 2024/2025, several key pieces of legislation will be amended to include:

1. The replacement of the Animals (Diseases and Importation) Act, with the **Animal Health and Welfare Act 2024**.
2. The replacement of the Plants (Quarantine) Act, with the **Plant Health Act 2024**.
3. **Amendments to The Praedial Larceny (Prevention) Act.**

MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY, INVESTMENT AND COMMERCE

Honourable Members, the Government continues to prioritise increasing productivity through various process and legislative reforms to enable economic growth and to foster a more peaceful, productive and prosperous society.

During the last Financial Year 2023/2024, the Government continued the implementation of the Global Digital Services Strategy, geared towards supporting Jamaica's shift to high-value knowledge process outsourcing. In 2023, the project graduated five hundred and ninety (590) apprentices trained in supervisory management and leadership skills. One thousand, one hundred and ninety-four (1,194) apprentices are expected to graduate in 2024 to significantly enhance the sector which currently employs approximately 62,000 persons.

The Jamaica Business Gateway, the premier Business-to-Government (B2G) transaction platform, was launched in May 2023 with 14 Government processes, thereby increasing the ease of doing business and productivity. Further expansion of the Gateway continues with the addition of 29 processes targeted for the end of June 2024.

Over US\$100 million was invested through the special economic zone regime in the development of seven special economic zones, which have facilitated employment for over 3,000 persons.

Honourable Members, the **German Ship Repair Jamaica Limited**, a designated Special Economic Zone (SEZ), deserves special mention as it welcomed its inaugural floating dock (JAM-DOCK 1) into the Kingston Harbour in August 2023. This monumental milestone marked the dawn of a new era in Jamaica's maritime industry, where vessels, both local and international, will have access to world-class repair facilities on our shores.

During the FY 2024/2025, the key legislative priority will be the **Amendments to the Companies Act** - The draft Bill is being finalised. The amendments are expected to strengthen the efficiency and operation of companies in Jamaica to create an enabling environment for business.

MINISTRY OF SCIENCE, ENERGY, TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND TRANSPORT

Honourable Members, energy security, robust and expansive telecommunications infrastructure and reliable transport are key elements for **a peaceful, productive and prosperous society**.

The Government continues to develop policies which will contribute to reducing Jamaica's energy intensity and carbon footprint, while advancing the adoption of new technologies. The **Policy and Guidelines for Energy Efficiency and Conservation in Public Facilities specifically for Schools and Hospitals, and the Electric Vehicle Policy**, were tabled in Parliament in June 2023.

Likewise, efforts to diversify energy sources for public passenger vehicles for the Jamaica Urban Transit Company received a major boost with the acquisition of five battery electric buses, as well as 20 compressed natural gas (CNG) fuelled buses.

Efforts to secure private sector interest in renewable energy generation, took a significant step forward, with the Generation Procurement Entity inviting tenders for the supply of up to 100 megawatts of electricity generation capacity for the national grid. Another Request for Proposal for a further 168 megawatts will be launched later in 2024/2025.

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Increased focus will be placed on improved quality of service by telecommunications operators. The **Telecommunications (Quality of Service Standards) Rules**, which establish the formal framework for the parameters and targets against which operators' performance is measured will be published.

In the new financial year, the Public Passenger Transport Stakeholder Committee will begin to address the provision of transportation for students. A Rural Student Transportation System will be introduced that will provide a more affordable alternative for the students in rural Jamaica who do not now benefit from the transportation subsidies that are available in the KMTR through the JUTC.

The Government will also continue its focus on rural electrification with the plan for full national access to electricity being accelerated over the next five years.

In the Financial Year 2024/2025, the Government will prioritise key legislative reform as follows:

1. The **Petroleum (Downstream Activities) Bill** aimed at creating a modern framework to regulate the quality of fuel imported, supplied, stored and transported.
2. **Amendment to the Civil Aviation Act**, to foster compliance with current International Civil Aviation Organization standards and practices.

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND FOREIGN TRADE

During the Financial Year 2023/2024, Jamaica continued its active and strategic engagements at the regional, hemispheric and multilateral levels, increasing Jamaica's influence globally and harnessing bilateral assistance of \$4.5 billion, towards national development.

The Government elevated the protection of the interests of Jamaicans overseas, by strengthening its consular activities and network and its robust diaspora engagement.

The Government leveraged its relationships towards increased cooperation and outcomes, leading to successful elections to seven prestigious international bodies, including the Executive Committee of the UN World Tourism Organization, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee and the International Maritime Organization Council.

Jamaica assumed the one-year chairmanship of the **Council for Foreign and Community Relations** successfully convening its 26th Meeting and the Caribbean/UK Dialogue, in Kingston in May 2023, in addition to special and informal meetings of the body.

Jamaica played a lead role in the CARICOM response to the situation in Haiti, hosting the first meeting of Haitian Stakeholders, over three days of intense discussions, facilitated by the CARICOM Eminent Persons Group and effectively launching the Group's engagement which has continued.

In June 2024, the Government will host the Tenth Biennial Jamaica Diaspora Conference, the first fully in-person staging of the Conference, since the pandemic.

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

Honourable Members, the Government continues to promote healing, reconciliation, and mutual respect in our journey towards **a peaceful, productive, and prosperous Jamaica**.

In the Financial Year 2023/2024, the Restorative Justice Programme facilitated 1,792 referrals, with 82% resulting in agreements between parties. The Child Diversion Programme transferred 764 children (ages 12-17) in conflict with the law, from the formal court systems,

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providing them with treatment plans: 99 youths deemed high-risk were assigned mentors.

Significant progress has been made in the parish courts, reducing the overall net criminal backlog to under 2%.

Infrastructural upgrades continued, and Public-Private Partnerships for new judicial complexes are planned in selected parishes.

In the 2024/2025 legislative year, the Government will seek to enact a **Mediation Bill**; a **Restorative Justice Bill**, and a new **Justice of the Peace Jurisdiction Act** to further enhance the role of Lay Magistrates.

We will continue the improvement of access to justice, expansion of Alternative Justice Services, and enhanced legal aid services for vulnerable groups.

MINISTRY OF LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Honourable Members, the **Bail Act, 2023** came into force on November 15, 2023. The new law is grounded in the entitlement and exception to bail as provided for by the **Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms**. Bail may now be granted or denied pre-charge, post-charge and post-conviction.

Honourable Members, during 2023/2024, the Government implemented critical aspects of the Road to Republic Public Education Programme with over seventy (70) stakeholder meetings, as well as five (5) Town Hall Meetings in St. James, Westmoreland, St. Elizabeth, Manchester, and Portland.

The Government continues with the preparation of the **Constitution of Jamaica (Amendment of Section 61) Bill** to modernise the Words of Enactment, as the first legislative step in a proposed series of amendments, intended to give effect to a Constitution enacted by the Parliament and approved by the people of Jamaica.



Honourable Members, legislative priorities for 2024/2025 will focus on amendments toward establishing the Republic of Jamaica; and under the whole-of-Government Legislation Programme accelerate the pace of law reform and improve the quality of legislation promulgated.

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, GENDER, ENTERTAINMENT AND SPORT

Honourable Members, through the amendment of the **Domestic Violence Act, 2023** the Government continued its efforts to end gender-based violence. The **Sexual Harassment Tribunal** will be operationalised during the Financial Year 2024/2025 to address sexual harassment complaints. Also, the **Third National Shelter** will be renovated in 2024/2025 to support victims of gender-based violence.

Honourable Members, our sportsmen and women continue to shine “To the World”. The Sunshine Girls won the bronze medal at the Netball World Cup; Jamaica finished fourth on the medal table at the World Athletics Championships, with Shericka Jackson setting a championship record in the 200 metres; and the Reggae Girlz had their first qualification for the knockout stage of the FIFA Women’s World Cup.

Jamaica plays a leading role in the global mission to keep sports clean. The Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport was elected to the Foundation Board of the World Anti-Doping Agency, a significant achievement as the first-ever English-speaking Caribbean representative on the Board.

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Our excellence in entertainment outweighs our size. The JamWorld Entertainment Complex is being renovated for the facility to be the first 24-hour Entertainment Zone, to address the need for designated entertainment areas.

Honourable Members, the nomination of the "Archaeological Landscape of 17th Century Port Royal" for inscription to the UNESCO World Heritage List puts us again on the global stage. The 'Port Royal Sunken City' is the only site in the Western Hemisphere and one of three in the world that fall into the category of 'Catastrophic Sites'.

Honourable Members, amendments will be made to the **Jamaica National Heritage Trust Act** to respond to changing norms in heritage protection and management, consistent with international trends and best practices.

MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Honourable Members, improving local level service delivery and economic development are critical to our **peace, productivity and prosperity**.

The Government strongly believes that every homeless person should have access to a safe place for shelter, and has opened three (3) night shelters in Trelawny, St. Ann, and Clarendon. Several infirmaries have also been renovated across the island.

Through the Indigent Housing Programme, the Government has handed over houses in St. Mary, Westmoreland, Hanover, St. Elizabeth and Manchester. These houses have been equipped with rainwater catchment facilities and solar panels. The Poor Relief departments continue to assist with housing repairs and provide other assistance to the registered poor.

The Government is also investing in the Jamaica Fire Brigade. Two (2) ladder units will be procured to fight fires in high-rise buildings. A new fire station will be constructed at Ulster Spring,

Trelawny. The Jamaica Fire Brigade will also engage two (2) batches of recruits for training, totalling 220 new firefighters.

Honourable Members, as we strive for a cleaner Jamaica, solid waste collection has also improved with the acquisition of additional garbage compactors.

MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY

Honourable Members, to achieve true prosperity, we must have broad and deep participation in the economic and social aspects of our society to allow all our people the opportunity to flourish. The Government, with the support of the World Bank, will begin implementation of the **Social Protection for Increased Resilience and Opportunity (SPIRO)** Project, to strengthen and expand Jamaica's social protection systems. One key initiative will be the establishment of an unemployment insurance scheme.

Building on the progress made with the coming into effect of the Disabilities Act, an Accessibility Checklist, which serves as a practical guide for ensuring that the built environment is appropriate was launched by the Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities in December 2023.

Honourable Members, as we seek to improve the quality of life of all our citizens, you would recall that the Government increased the NIS by up to 76% and the minimum wage increase was the largest in the last 20 years.

The transition of security guards to employment contracts was effected to afford them key benefits related to overtime pay, sick and vacation leave.

The Programme of Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH) is the most critical arm of the Government's social protection programme, and we are moving to make it more accessible and responsive. In that regard, stakeholder engagement has commenced as the first step in the overhaul.

CONCLUSION

Honourable Members, as we reflect on the progress made in fiscal year 2023/24 and look ahead to the plans for fiscal year 2024/25, it is evident that our national vision of economic independence is not just a distant dream but now well within our reach.

I have a profound belief in the collective power of our nation. Each of us holds a crucial role in shaping the future of Jamaica.

We will unite as a determined nation and overcome our challenges.

We will build a caring economy that leaves no one behind and provides opportunities for every Jamaican to fulfill their dreams and aspirations.

We will seize opportunities, and chart a course towards a brighter future, individually and as a nation.

We will work hand in hand, secure in the knowledge that, with the grace of God Almighty, a **peaceful, productive and prosperous Jamaica** is now firmly within our grasp.



Designed and printed by the
Jamaica Information Service
FEBRUARY 2024