



# **THRONE SPEECH**

## **2005-2006**

Delivered by

**His Excellency the Most Hon.**

**Sir Howard Cooke, ON, GCMG, GCVO, CD**

**Governor-General**

**Ceremonial Opening of Parliament**

**Thursday, March 31, 2005**

**GORDON HOUSE**

We can easily recall the full and robust programme of parliamentary debates in which you engaged during the legislative year which has just ended. It mirrored a year of activity in which the nation faced the challenges of fiscal constraint, escalating oil prices and natural disasters. The record shows that we were able to rise above them and substantially honour the commitments given at this time last year.

We saw the Jamaican spirit at its best. Each in its own way, the Trade Union Movement, the Private Sector, Government and Opposition, the Volunteer and Non-Government Organisations made a meaningful contribution to keeping Jamaica on course.

We were able to protect the macro-economic gains made in the previous year while prioritizing our allocations for the critical areas of health, education and national security.

As we embark upon this new legislative year, it is our fervent hope and desire that an even higher level of national commitment will characterize our efforts. This will ensure that we capitalize on the years of planning, fiscal prudence, strategic investments in both physical and social infrastructure which have laid the sound foundations on which our economy currently stands.

The year 2005 - 2006 should then signal a movement to the next plateau of development, lifting us beyond the Millennium Development Goals and our own projections over the next ten years.

The focus will be on consolidating our gains and protecting them to ensure that progress continues.

We will do this by:

- advancing our human and social development programmes
- improving governance and public accountability
- creating a safer and more secure country
- accelerating equitable and sustainable economic growth

## **Advancing Human and Social Development**

Honourable Members:

Central to the achievement of an advanced status in the world of nations is the enhancement of our human resources. This administration is demonstrably committed to a transformed, efficient and effective education system, which gives primacy to each child's development - from early childhood to tertiary - and fosters life-long learning.

Significant upgrading of the early childhood institutions continues with the passing and subsequent promulgation of the Early Childhood Act. With the revision of the curriculum as well as decisive steps to ensure articulation between Early Childhood and Primary sectors, over 2000 institutions will be empowered to deliver quality care to our young ones.

The secondary level will benefit from an extensive electronic learning project aimed at improving the teaching and learning methods and opportunities for students in all high schools throughout Jamaica.

The continued professional development of our teachers through mentorship and in-service training will be expanded to upgrade their entry qualifications in accordance with the Task Force recommendations.. Additionally, the Teacher Performance Evaluation programme has since commenced to secure greater efficiency and accountability among teachers.

Honourable Members:

The Programme for Advancement through Health and Education has shown positive trends in school attendance and immunization for beneficiaries from the participating households.

A major priority for this year is the passage into law of the National Assistance Act and the consequent consolidating of the institutional framework required for the long-term success of the social safety net reforms.

In support of our senior citizens, the National Insurance Scheme has already been considerably enhanced by the Pensioners' Health Plan N.I.GOLD.

This year, the **National Insurance (Validation and Amendment)** Bill will, among other things, extend orphan benefits to children born out of wedlock. It will also increase by several multiples the maximum sum for which employees who lose benefits can sue delinquent employers.

The Government will continue to be proactive in promoting and participating in regional and international programmes which enure to the benefit of our own disabled community and senior citizens.

The Government will target the secondary health care services this year and thereby enhance the high rating which Jamaica enjoys internationally in relation to primary health care.

The National Health Fund will through partnership with the National HIV/AIDS programme facilitate the provision of antiretroviral treatment. We expect also, through improved awareness of HIV/AIDS to see a continuation of the slowing down of the spread of the infection.

The Government will continue programmes in education, training and the promotion of healthy lifestyles to impact on all citizens, but primarily the youth of our country. We intend to work more strategically and decisively this year to ensure that values based education becomes firmly established in the curriculum.

Using the tools of cultural enrichment and the inculcation of wholesome values, the campaign for a better Jamaica will be vigorously pursued on the national scale. It will emphasize improved interpersonal relationships, more social discipline, more civil and respectful dialogue.

With a bipartisan approach, we can best demonstrate to the nation our firm and common resolve to restore civility and decency in every facet of our national life.

## **Improving Governance and Strengthening Accountability**

Honourable Members:

The government will continue its modernization efforts to ensure greater value for money and more importantly make services provided by the Public Sector readily accessible to the users and doing so with courtesy and care.

We will within the public sector complete a further fifteen Citizens' Charters in addition to the existing sixty-five.

During the past year, the Ministry of Justice undertook major upgrading of twenty-one Court Houses and buildings. The Corporate Area Family Court was relocated to a much more appropriate and family friendly location.

Our justice system as a whole has been undergoing significant reform but we know that we have some way to go in creating a very robust and efficient justice system. Despite the many constraints we remain steadfast in our determination to improve the system in the shortest time possible.

We will install case management software in twelve Resident Magistrates Courts to facilitate the processing and management of all court cases.

The reform will also include the New Rules of Court in the Resident Magistrates courts to underpin the case management system and the finalization of a Restorative Justice Policy in partnership with civil society groups.

The legislative programme for this year will include Bills relative to **Plea Bargaining, Fitness to Plead, Children's Court and Child Maintenance..**

The Ministry of Health will be restructured to improve its ability to deliver on its mandate - policy, monitoring, strategic planning, regulation and standard setting.

During this year we intend to pass the **Radiation(Safety and Control) Bill, the Food and Drugs(Amendment) Act and the National Registration Bill.**

In the new year, the government will complete its implementation of the Performance Management and Appraisal System in all remaining Government Departments.

We will begin a phased implementation of an Accrual Accounting System in the Ministries of Transport and Works, Finance and Planning, including three Tax Departments and the Office of the Services Commission.

Consistent with balancing the budget, the government will commence implementing recommendations from the recently completed Tax Policy Review. Steps are already underway to improve taxpayer services. These will continue into the new fiscal year, by allowing third party collection agencies to collect revenue on behalf of the government and by allowing internet-accessible payment for those clients who wish to use them.

We will also by these and other means seek to enhance tax compliance and revenue collection.

The Ministry of Agriculture will be modernized to enable it to deal more effectively with the challenges posed by international trading agreements and technological developments such as genetic modification.

The National Land Agency will shortly open a regional office in Montego Bay to meet the needs of its clients in western Jamaica.

We intend to transform the Immigration, Citizenship and Passport Division of the Ministry of National Security into an Executive Agency. We will do likewise with the Forestry Division of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Jamaica will continue to be a strong voice in the international community.

The United Nations, that vanguard of multilateralism, finds itself at a crossroads today, and is giving serious consideration to recommendations for reform. These wide-ranging and revolutionary proposals would broaden the concept of collective security at the global level and strengthen the United Nations - its policies and institutions, including the Security Council - to provide comprehensive and collective international security for all States.

Through our chairmanship role in the Group of 77 and China, Jamaica will lead the developing world in analysing the recommendations and promoting the collective interests of this group.

At the national level, it is the intention of the Government to provide the required leadership and to promote wide discussions on these and all other matters that are indeed critical to Jamaica as well as to the region and other developing countries.

Through our active work on the WTO Doha Development Agenda and the Caribbean / European Union Economic Partnership Agreement as well as our participation in the Free Trade Area of the Americas negotiations, we will continue to protect and promote the interests of our productive sectors and our general economic development.

We have met our goal of making Jamaica CARICOM Single Market- ready by 1st January 2005. We will turn our full attention to undertaking the necessary steps, in consultation with our CARICOM partners, to ensure that the single economy will be in place by January 2008 as scheduled.

We will work closely with the Opposition to resolve matters in respect of the Caribbean Court of Justice and general constitutional reforms to, inter alia,

- enhance the fundamental rights of our citizens and
- enable us to complete the process of achieving full sovereignty.

Honourable Members:

Over the years there has been a deepening of the process of community democracy. The government's local government reform programme has impacted on the improved delivery of some services by the Local Authorities, while we work at the rebuilding of others.

At the same time, we have made significant progress in building community participation in decision-making and creating economic opportunities at the community level.

Work will begin in earnest next year on the process by which we give legal personality to Community Councils.

We will remain responsive to the citizenry, using the consultative processes which are now a part of our governance systems, providing access to government documents under the Access to Information Act, remaining open to the media and generally demonstrating that government is answerable to the people.

In return, we expect the citizens to play their part by taking an active interest in matters which affect them, including individual family responsibility, and participating in all endeavours which will create a better society for all Jamaicans.

### **A Safer and More Secure Country**

Honourable Members:

No area is more urgently in need of national commitment and community involvement than the protection of the most fundamental right of all, the right to life.

Your Government has been working ceaselessly to stem and reverse the trends in serious crime the nature of which has been plaguing our country in recent years.

Last year saw the introduction of new initiatives, including strategies involving structured community consultations, the engagement of foreign direct assistance, and a strengthening of intelligence capability. Although the results have been very encouraging in some respects, sadly the murder rate is climbing.

We intend to pursue those strategies which are bringing success, and to be as clinically efficient as possible in confronting the criminals, locally based and internationally connected, using all the legal and administrative tools which are available to us.

We will shortly be bringing further amendments to the **Firearms Act** to increase penalties for the illegal importation and distribution of firearms.

We will not surrender to the criminal elements no matter what resources they have plundered. Jamaica is ours to shape, nurture and enjoy. We must defend it resolutely on behalf of the vast majority of well-thinking and upright persons who represent the mainstream of our nation.

New legislation to forfeit to the Crown the **proceeds of criminal** conduct and the instrumentalities of crime will be introduced. The new provisions will further restrict those involved in criminal practices from enjoying the wealth of their ill-gotten gains.

Two pieces of legislation to bring into effect the **Port Security Agency and the National Independent Investigation Authority** are nearing completion, and will be introduced in the first half of this legislative year.

At the community level, the Social Intervention strategies proposed in the National Crime Plan will be reactivated and given new focus during the current phase of crime fighting.

### **Accelerating Sustainable Economic Growth**

Honourable Members:

The growth areas of the economy have been clearly identified. The Government is committed to ensuring that facilitation by the bureaucracy is efficient, that there is constant focus on improving product and productivity and that for all major projects, there is ready project development support.

The support which is being provided is aimed at

- Ensuring that there is holistic development in the areas where major investment is occurring; and
- Strengthening and diversifying the supply chain to the Export Sector.

Efforts will also be pursued to ensure that economic opportunities are spread as widely as possible to facilitate even and equitable development across the country.

As part of the new tourism marketing strategy for Destination Jamaica, we are facilitating new attractions based on our rich heritage in such areas as culture, sports and music. These are being encouraged not only in the traditional resort areas but also in other carefully selected areas of the island, including Kingston.

In the field of Agriculture, we will continue to forge ahead with sharing best practices among the farmers and therefore add to the list of our successes in the development of new products and increased production of high quality commodities for both the domestic and the export markets.

In the Bauxite and Alumina sector, alumina production attained record levels last year surpassing all previous output figures. This will be further boosted by the anticipated major investment at the Halse Hall plant over the period 2005 to 2007.

In the Transport sector, major expansion continues, with the Kingston container South Terminal being the latest area for expansion expected to be completed early in this fiscal year. It is worthy of note that the Kingston Transshipment Container Terminal is moving gradually upward in the rankings of the Top One Hundred Ports of the World.

Earlier this week, we broke ground for the Half Way Tree Transportation Centre and construction of the facility will begin shortly to provide one of the most modern passenger terminal facilities in this part of the world.

Developments in other areas of infrastructure will include the provision of twenty-eight water projects island-wide, the completion of three sewage treatment projects, the implementation of two major irrigation schemes. We will further improve the living conditions of our people by the completion of housing projects and shelter solutions.

Through all these investments and initiatives, we will continue to strengthen the pillars of sustainable integrated economic growth, on which our future economic prosperity as a nation is predicated.

Honourable Members,

Your government has embarked on a programme of consolidating the gains which this country has made in recent years.

Your government has recognized the absolute and compelling need to invest its energies and finances in building our human resources, and enriching the minds and hearts of our people who remain the most important resource that we possess.

It is only when we have people who are equipped and motivated to give of their best that we can truly realize maximum growth in our economy. Efficiency, productivity, creativity and flexibility of mind are the required ingredients for the cutting edge in a competitive world economy which refuses to grant us any favours.

But we need to go beyond that. We must create an environment in which our people are not only skilled and competent but are also able to live peaceably with all persons, to go gently and quietly about their business and for each of us to make a contribution to keeping our neighbourhoods, our communities, our towns and cities safe.

It is a situation which we can attain, if we all pledge to do it together.

We have the clearest evidence of economic growth. But we must ensure that the conditions exist to guarantee that it will be sustained for ourselves and for the generations yet to come.

Our country is a great little country. Leadership in every sphere and at every level must inspire and encourage our people. And leaders can do that only if they themselves believe in our country, believe in our people, believe in our institutions, and are therefore prepared to make our country their pride and joy and the focus of their best efforts.

I urge you in this year upon which we are embarked to heed the call to stand up for this Jamaica land we love. Take charge of the future which I am convinced will shine brightly upon those who hold the faith.

'Breathes there the man with soul so dead

Who never to himself hath said

"This is my own, my native land " ?'

I urge you to keep your soul alive and be guided by its leading.

The Estimates of Expenditure will be laid before you later on today.

I pray for you God's guidance and His sustaining grace in all your deliberations.