



GOVERNMENT OF JAMAICA

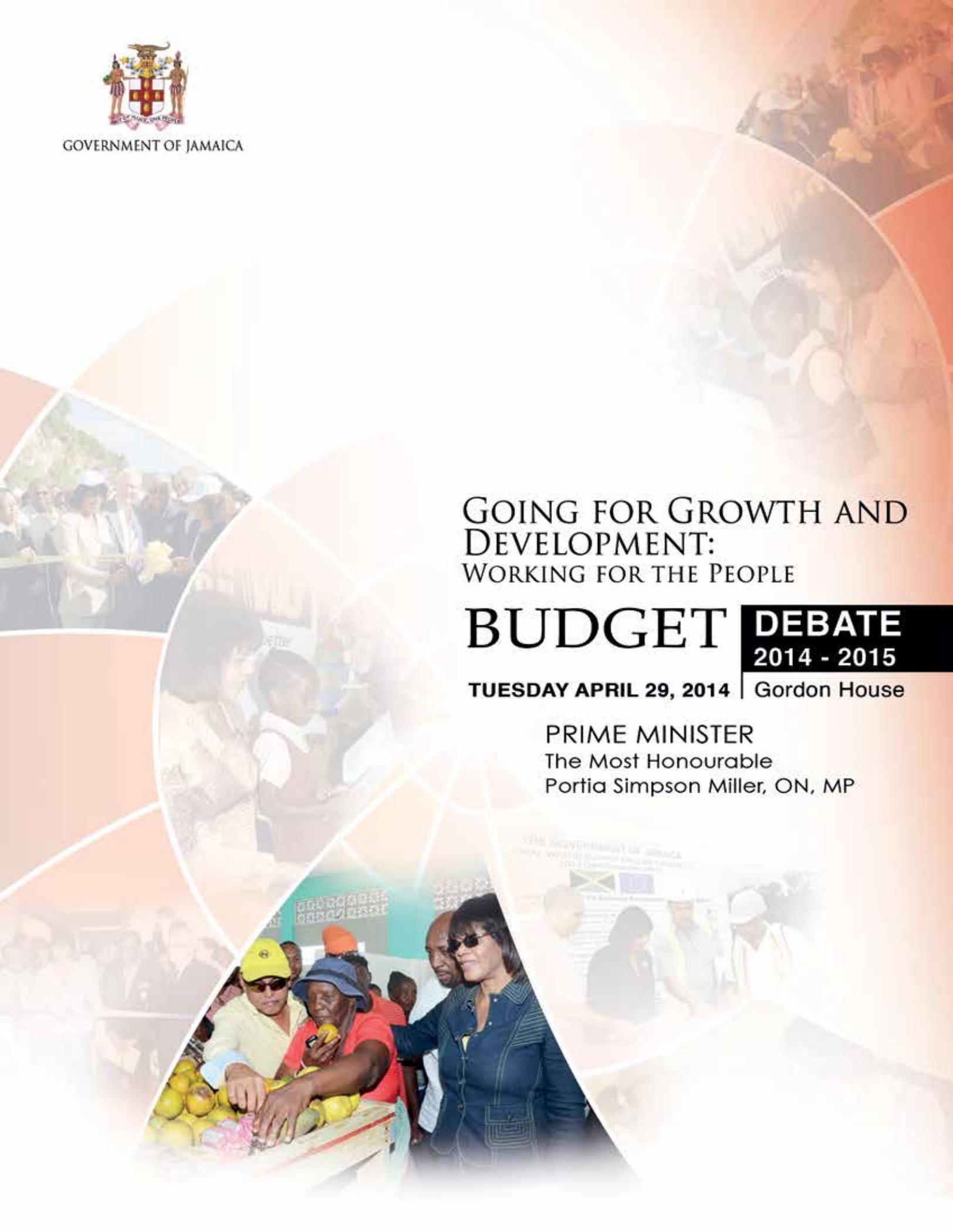
GOING FOR GROWTH AND  
DEVELOPMENT:  
WORKING FOR THE PEOPLE

# BUDGET

**DEBATE**  
2014 - 2015

TUESDAY APRIL 29, 2014 | Gordon House

PRIME MINISTER  
The Most Honourable  
Portia Simpson Miller, ON, MP





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# GOING FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT: WORKING FOR THE PEOPLE

## SALUTATIONS

**Mr. Speaker,** Honourable Members, distinguished Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps, Jamaicans at home and in the Diaspora...

It is with a deep sense of humility and gratitude that I rise to address the Parliament in this important Budget Debate.

I give thanks to the Almighty God for His favour on Jamaica, and for His guiding hand in the face of the great challenges of our times.

As a Government, we remain confident and resilient, anchored in the mandate of the people to lead this country with skilful hands and integrity of heart.

**Mr. Speaker,** today, I remember my mother and father.

I honour their sacrificial investment in my life, and I laud them for the legacy of their values, which have inspired me during my over 40 years of unbroken service to the people of Jamaica.

I thank my anchor, my husband, Errald, and the other members of my family, including the 'one-in-a-million', Marva, for their continuing support and encouragement.

### **My deep gratitude is extended to:**

- The members of the Cabinet;
- The leadership, members and supporters of the People's National Party,
- My Councillors and Constituents of South West St. Andrew;
- The members of staff of the Office of the Prime Minister;
- My advisory and administrative teams, and my security detail.

Let me once again express my heartfelt gratitude to every Jamaican: those at home and those who reside outside of Jamaica.

**"You continue to be the wind beneath my wings,"** and the source of my motivation.

Today I am also inspired by the words of **Joshua Chapter 1 verse 9:**

*"Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."*

## INTRODUCTION



**Mr. Speaker,**

I address this Honourable House at a time when the financial resources of our country are low, and when the confidence of some of our fellow citizens has been dented by doubt and discouragement.

It is a time when many ask the question: **“How much more can we sacrifice?”**

I say to them, **“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Last year was another challenging year. The severity of the fiscal adjustment, which has to be undertaken, is causing hurt for all of us.

No one has been spared:

- The poorest households;
- Middle-income professionals who operate on a fixed income; and
- Business persons with large and small enterprises.

My understanding of the pain resulting from some of the adjustments, particularly in the fiscal accounts, comes from a lifetime of service to the people of Jamaica and an abiding desire to improve the lives of the entire Jamaican family.

**It is not based on a single bus ride.**

When I go to the supermarket, I see the changes in the food prices and I am aware of the economic challenges within households.



- I feel the concerns. I know the expectations.
- Many persons tell me about their dreams for their children.
- They tell me of their hopes for a prosperous society.
- My Administration shares their dreams and their aspirations.
- To realise our goals, we have to get the economy right.
- All well-thinking Jamaicans know that the economic adjustments have to be made.
- Most understand that this Government has been focused and responsible.
- They know that we are staying with the programme of macroeconomic transformation.

**Let there be no doubt about that.**

## BALANCING THE BOOKS WHILE BALANCING PEOPLE'S LIVES

**Mr. Speaker,**

This Government is equally focused on protecting our people, particularly the most vulnerable in our society, from the shocks of the adjustments that must be made.

**Mr. Speaker,** we are **'balancing the books while balancing people's lives'**.

This is not a 'catchphrase'.

It expresses the core of my philosophy on politics and governance.

It remains my non-negotiable position after four decades of public service.

It remains the firm guiding principle of our Government. When I speak about **'balancing people's lives'**, I have in mind the generations of Jamaicans who have emerged through a complex history: descendants of slaves, Maroons, indentured workers, traders and planters.

I speak of the policemen, teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, household workers, gardeners, business owners, hairdressers, taxi drivers, civil servants – all the persons who are the engines of our nation's growth and development.

For us, **Mr. Speaker**, no matter how small the pie; every single member of our Jamaican family must get a portion – regardless of where they live, how they look, how they vote; or not vote.

**Mr. Speaker**, I know that I am the Prime Minister for ALL the people. We are the Government for ALL the people.

We have developed a creative mix of programmes intended to reduce the economic and social pressure on all our people – especially the poor and the middle class.

**Mr. Speaker,**

- We were seeking to ease the tax burden, so this Government reduced GCT from 17.5%, where we found it when we came to office, to 16.5%.

That is **'balancing the books while balancing people's lives'**.

- We believe in the dignity of labour and that everyone should earn a decent wage for their work, we therefore increased the minimum wage, twice!

That is **'balancing the books while balancing people's lives'**.

- We believe that our people must be able to maintain a measure of economic stability in their later years.

That is the reason we increased the NIS pensions by 16.7%.

That is **'balancing the books while balancing people's lives'**.

- We believe that public sector workers, who have served this country with distinction and dedication should be able, despite the constraints, to feel the appreciation of the nation.
- This Government has increased Government pensions twice.

That is **'balancing the books while balancing people's lives'**.

We know that our children must be given the best opportunities to learn.

- That is the reason we have significantly expanded the School Feeding Programme.

**Mr. Speaker**, we have implemented several important community building programmes through JSIF.

That is **'balancing the books while balancing people's lives'**.

That is not all, **Mr. Speaker**.

This Government has made several major investments in our people over the last year and into this new financial year.

We believe that we have a sacred duty to intervene on behalf of those who, for reasons of circumstance, age, infirmity or lack of opportunity, cannot adequately help themselves.

- The Government will be spending over \$5.5 billion to safeguard the welfare of the vulnerable in the society.

This amount includes \$900 million to facilitate a 15% increase in payments to PATH beneficiaries.

That's what we mean by **'balancing the books while balancing people's lives'**.

**Mr. Speaker**, we believe in education.

- We are the Government that has transformed education for our people.

This is why we have made changes to the lending policy of the Students' Loan Bureau.

### Steps needed to be taken to address the conditions governing loans to students.

We are aware that there are thousands of students from low-income households, who through hard work, have qualified for tertiary institutions.

- Our commitment to balancing lives does not permit us to have the doors of opportunities slammed in the faces of those students, simply because they are unable to qualify for loans from the Students' Loan Bureau.

**'Balancing the books while balancing people's lives'** is a commitment we stand by!

**Mr. Speaker,** even before we came to office in 2012, we recognised the need for a special programme to provide jobs for the most needy.

- Under my instruction, the JEEP was designed and implemented.

It has become one of the most popular programmes in recent times.

I believe that whenever there is a crisis affecting our people, the Government has a duty to apply appropriate measures to lessen the burden.

JEEP has generated jobs for more than 42,000 persons.



JEEP allows members on both sides of this Honourable House the opportunity to have an input in the development and implementation of small infrastructure projects that benefit the communities they represent. Projects such as:

- Drain cleaning,
- Replanting of denuded hillsides,
- Repairs to health centres...

During this fiscal year, the JEEP has been refuelled to the value of \$630 million.

This is a special allocation from the loan made available for the Major Infrastructure Development Programme (MIDP).

The progress continues as we work daily to **'balance the books while balancing people's lives!'**

**Mr. Speaker,** these are only some of the measures which we have taken to address the difficulties being faced by our people.

There were many more achievements.

As I said in my address to Parliament last year, this process is a journey not an event.

The outcomes we seek will give us robust economic growth and marked improvement in the lives and fortunes of our people.

I am committed to continuing to seek out and apply the necessary measures, as we strive to **'balance the lives of all our people, as we balance the books'.**

## **Balancing the Books**

**Mr. Speaker,**

There is no quick fix to our economic situation.

On this, we should have bipartisan agreement.

If there was a quick fix, given the Opposition's claims to their capacity to manage the economy, perhaps it would already have been fixed.

**Mr. Speaker,** instead they made it worse.

Had the JLP Government done what they should have done, when they should have done it, the country would not be in this difficult position it is in today.

The truth is that, they took the IMF loan funds up front.

When the time came to make the necessary reforms, reforms that they had agreed to make; they did not fulfil their obligations.

The Opposition Spokesman on Finance is on record, saying in this Parliament in 2010, and I quote:

*"The adjustment measures were difficult but could not have been avoided.*

*No Government likes to impose new taxes or to cut wages. The truth is, if we could have avoided it, we would have.*

*We took these serious and tough measures to secure the future of the country.*

*Our willingness to take tough measures, not popular, but necessary, gave confidence to our development partners."*

They said they knew what had to be done, yet they failed to do it.

I am here to tell the returned Opposition member that no amount of blustering or rhetoric, either now, or then, will change the facts.

You squandered your opportunity.

You may have chosen to forget, but the people of Jamaica have not forgotten.

The then Government did not do what had to be done.

That is why our people are feeling the 'crunch'.

**Mr. Speaker,**

In his presentation to this Honourable House last week, the Leader of the Opposition made "interesting" use of selected statistics on the Jamaican economy.

He sought to establish that all the problems which the country now faces originated during the 18 years of the last PNP Administration – from 1989-2007.

In a sense, he was just a little too 'clever' in this use, or should I say 'misuse' of statistics.

He seemed to have forgotten the four years when the Party which he now leads formed the Government.

Perhaps we should call this period, September 2007 to December 2011 – the "missing years" of recent Jamaican history.

It is my duty to place on record the hard evidence of the extent to which the country reversed its forward movement during those four "missing years".

**Here are some facts.**

I challenge either the Leader of the Opposition or anyone else under his charge to successfully refute them.

- It is an irrefutable fact that during the 18 years of the PNP Administration, the level of poverty declined from 29% in 1989 to 9.9% in 2007.
- It is a fact that the last fiscal year of the last PNP Administration, 2006/07, the economy grew by 3.4%.
- It is a fact that inflation for 2006 was under 6%.
- It is a fact that the country's debt stock grew by just under 70% between September 2007 and December 2011: the "missing years".
- It is an irrefutable fact that the exchange rate in September 2007 was J\$70.41 to US\$1 and it was J\$86.60 to US\$1 in December 2011.... that too was during the "missing years".

There are more statistics that could be provided to establish that whilst some things did not turn out as we had wanted as a Government, and we readily admit to that, the country in 2007 was in a better position than when we returned to office in January 2012.

We accept that during the 18-year period of the PNP Administration, that there was significant borrowing and that we ran a budget deficit for several years.

However, there is clear evidence of social and economic improvements.

**These include:**

- The reduction in poverty,
- The expansion of educational opportunities, and
- Improvements in physical infrastructure, such as:
  - The North Coast Highway stretching from Negril to Port Antonio
  - Highway 2000, which has revolutionised travel along sections of the South Coast;
  - Improvements to our international airports and seaports;
  - Significant developments in the tourism sector;
  - Expanded water and sewerage developments, and the list could go on.



**Mr. Speaker,** I have a simple question for the Leader of the Opposition.

The question is: What exactly does the country have to show for the \$660 billion in increased debt incurred over those four “missing years”? – 2007-2011.

**Mr. Speaker,**

One of this Government’s main priorities is to reduce the debt.

This Administration has not only been saying that we have to live within our means, we have been doing more with less.

Jamaica cannot continue to borrow its way out of its troubles.

This is why we have to make the economic adjustments.

**Mr. Speaker,**

- The budget for 2009 was \$561 billion
- The budget for 2012 was \$610 billion
- This year’s budget is \$540 billion

Do the math!

We have no other choice but to spend less this year.

We have to live within our means.

**Mr. Speaker,**

As the country is aware, this Government secured an agreement with the IMF.

We negotiated hard to arrive at the best agreement for Jamaica.

As in any negotiation, both sides held strong positions.

Our strong position was that the poor and most vulnerable must be protected in the adjustments.

We had to remain true to our word, **'we are balancing the books while balancing people's lives'**.

To date, we have passed all quarterly IMF tests.

This cannot be said of the "missing years".

**Mr. Speaker,**

Now there are signs of improvement in the macroeconomic stability of the country:

The country's debt-to-GDP ratio is declining; and we must keep going in this direction.

There is evidence of growth in the following sectors of the economy:

- o Agriculture
- o Tourism
- o Construction
- o Mining and quarrying.

Earlier this year, Fitch Ratings upgraded Jamaica to a 'B-Minus' rating and an overall positive outlook.



**Mr. Speaker,**

The tough decisions we have taken and the painful adjustments we have had to make are bearing fruit.

We are seeing encouraging signs.

### **Balancing People's Lives**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Let me express my profound gratitude to the Jamaican people for making this tremendous sacrifice for the future of our country.

It is during the most difficult circumstances that the Jamaican people reveal their courage and resilience.

It is when we are asked to make that extra sacrifice, when we feel we are almost at the edge, that we find the strength to dig a little deeper into our resolve.

That is when we reveal just who we are – strong and determined to make life better for our children and our children's children.

At a time such as this, **Mr. Speaker**, we must rise above the negatives, look for the positives and seize the opportunities.

***It is during the most difficult circumstances that the Jamaican people reveal their courage and resilience.***

The issues we debate in this Honourable House today are not about the JLP or the PNP.

If we must look to a 'P', that P must be the 'People'.

That 'P' must be 'Purpose'.

That 'P' must be 'Progress'.

That 'P' must be 'Prosperity'.

Today, we must declare our purpose as a nation – the purpose of ensuring a firm and solid foundation for the future.

**Mr. Speaker,**

When I think of **'balancing people's lives'**,

- I think of our children moving into new and improved educational facilities.
- For example, the brand new Marlie Hill Infant School and Cedar Grove Academy in St. Catherine.
- I think of the sugar workers and their families who have been relocated from barracks into new houses with modern amenities.
- I think of the thousands of persons who have been 'brought into the light' through the Rural Electrification Programme.
- I think of our farmers who are now receiving water for irrigation through the National Irrigation Commission.



**Mr. Speaker,** we are continuing the process of '**balancing people's lives**'.

- We have honoured our commitment to complete various reclassification exercises.
- We have honoured our commitment to make one-off payments of \$25,000 per annum to public sector workers.

This amounts to \$2.8 billion.

We have made the first payment and are committed to make the next payment in August of this year.

- We have honoured our commitment to preserving the jobs of public sector workers, avoiding the distress of mass redundancy.
- We have honoured our commitment to transforming the lives of our people through the removal of zinc fences, building roads, schools and refurbishing health centres.

We have also provided grant funding for a wide range of projects across the country.

That, **Mr. Speaker,** is **balancing people's lives!**

**Mr. Speaker,**

I now turn to some critical areas on which this Administration is focusing.

1. We have made concerted effort to increase employment opportunities and to attract investments.
2. We are undertaking infrastructure development projects for Jamaica's success.
3. We are working towards making communities more livable through a coordinated strategy which includes rural development.
4. We are expanding ownership in Jamaica by providing opportunities for more Jamaicans to own property.
5. We have restored Jamaica's credibility within the international community.

## **EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND INVESTMENT**

**Mr. Speaker,**

No discussion about **'balancing people's lives'** can take place without improving the levels of investment and employment.

My Administration is of the firm view that our human resource must be at the heart of our growth and development strategy.

### **Job Creation**

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Government remains focused on creating jobs for our people.

Between 2008 and 2011– over 90,000 Jamaicans lost their jobs.

We came to office and immediately set about addressing the unemployment situation facing the country.

We put in place a number of programmes.

### **Earlier I spoke about JEEP.**

Some 12,000 persons are expected to be employed in the new phase of JEEP this year.

### **Government and the people – working, working, working!**

#### **Over 5,000 persons will be employed under the Agro-Parks programme.**

- Another 2,000 direct and indirect jobs will be generated from the reorganised scrap metal trade.

That industry, last year, earned in excess of US\$14.6 million – approximately J\$1.5 billion.

- Last year, 14,000 persons were employed in the Overseas Employment Programme.

Based on information from the liaison service in Canada and the United States, that number is projected to increase to 16,000 this year.

**Mr. Speaker,** several new job categories were added to the Overseas Employment Programme.

These include welders, mechanics and drivers who are paid at globally benchmarked rates.

### **Government and the people – working, working, working!**

The Government will not be able to create all the jobs that the nation needs.

We, however, accept that we have the responsibility to create the enabling business environment in which the private sector can create jobs.

It is for this reason that we have placed emphasis on increasing investment.

### **Investment Projects**

#### **Mr. Speaker,**

When we say that we have been working, working, working, these are some of the things we have been doing to assist in bringing investors to Jamaica.

- In 2007, I visited Spain and met with private investors. I invited them to come to Jamaica and in March this year, I was pleased to welcome Dr. Pedro L. Cobiella, the Chairman of the Hospiten Group.

The Group has made an initial investment of US\$20 million to build a 16-room 28-bed general hospital in Rose Hall, Montego Bay. Construction is slated to be completed within a year.

The project will provide 300 jobs during the construction phase, with an additional 300 permanent jobs for medical and health professionals. We are securing investments for growth and development with job creation!

- In March 2012, I had the pleasure of meeting with Mr. K.S. Kumar of Sutherland Global Services, a US-based Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) firm, at the Jamaica Investment Forum in Montego Bay.

I was delighted to officially open the facility at the University of the West Indies in December last year. Seven hundred (700) employees, mainly University students, are now working with that company.

Sutherland Global is now seeking to expand elsewhere in Kingston, Portmore and Mandeville.

#### **Mr. Speaker,**

The Sutherland Global investment was a direct outcome of the Investment Forum in 2012. I look forward to hosting the next forum in March next year.

**Mr. Speaker,** more than 14,000 Jamaicans, mainly young people, have found jobs in the BPO sector.

**We are securing investments for growth and development with job creation!**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Many more companies are investing and diversifying their portfolios.

We look forward to the opening of our first Marriott Courtyard property in New Kingston.

- Sagicor has invested in three hotels and plans are well advanced to expand the product offerings by building a water park at one of these properties.

The Minister of Tourism and Entertainment will provide more details when he speaks in the Sectoral Debate.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Yesterday I met with the principals of TUI travel, which is Europe's largest tour operator, and arguably the largest in the world.

Last year, TUI increased airlift out of the United Kingdom to Jamaica from over 50,000 persons to over 90,000.

I was pleased to learn that in the winter season 2014/2015, TUI will cause the British Cruise, 'The Thompson Dream', to port in Jamaica for the first time.

**Mr. Speaker,**

TUI also operates the Royalton Hotel, which was formerly the Starfish Hotel in Trelawny.

The principals of TUI have given me the commitment that, later this year, they will start the construction of an additional 150 rooms.

**Mr. Speaker,**

This is a further indication of their confidence in Jamaica.

- Noranda Bauxite is investing US\$18 million in expanding their port at Discovery Bay.
- Digicel is investing US\$80 million to put infrastructure in place to tap into opportunities emanating from the logistics hub.
- LIME is investing \$8.7 billion to deploy a cutting-edge 4G Mobile Network.

**Mr. Speaker,** all three telecoms: Digicel, LIME and Flow are getting hub-ready.

There is expansion in renewable energy, with the JPS recently opening the hydroelectric plant in Maggotty, St. Elizabeth.

- There is increased investment in the Wigton Wind Farm, and other investment in renewable energy.

**Mr. Speaker,**

There is a waiting list of investors to get into the Free Zones.



**Mr. Speaker,**

We will continue our efforts to attract both foreign and local investment, to create jobs and to grow the economy.

### **Strengthening Partnership and Collaboration**

**Mr. Speaker,**

My Administration recognises the pivotal role of the private sector in the growth and development process of the country.

The formal signing of the **Partnership for Jamaica** took place last year on the eve of Emancipation Day.

We are working together on the **Economic Reform Programme**, Energy, Crime, Justice and improving the Business Environment.

I thank the Opposition and the representatives from the trade union movement, civil society, the private sector, and members of the academic community; all members of the partnership for their participation.

Another important partnership effort has been the formation of a Linkages Council.

This is now fully active within the Ministry of Tourism and Entertainment, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.

The Council has been meeting under the chairmanship of business executive, Mr. Donovan Perkins.

The Head of the Jamaica Manufacturers' Association (JMA), Mr. Brian Pengelley, is on record as stating that members of that organisation are already reaping the benefits of this initiative.

The successful staging of the JMA/JEA Expo Jamaica, in collaboration with the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce, is another example of the benefits of public/private partnership.

**Mr. Speaker**, I would like to commend the President of the JMA, the President of the Jamaica Exporters' Association, Mrs. Marjory Kennedy, and the JAMPRO team for delivering a successful Expo 2014.

**Mr. Speaker**,

Partnerships take different forms as we all work together to **'balance people's lives'**.

### **Emerging Areas of Emphasis**

**Mr. Speaker**,

We are working hard to grow every area of business in order to achieve our objectives of growth and development with job creation.

The world is changing.

In this globalised world, there are several emerging industries in which we have an interest.

This year, particular attention will be paid to the development of three important economic growth areas.

These are:

- (i) The Cultural and Creative Economy;
- (ii) Innovation, Science and Technology; and
- (iii) The Nutraceutical Industry

These industries represent big business with new and exciting opportunities!

- The global market value of the creative economy is worth approximately US\$1.6 trillion.
- The combined global value of science and technology-based industries is currently estimated in excess of US\$4 trillion.

The Cultural and Creative Economy; Innovation, Science and Technology, and the Nutraceutical Industry all have some things in common.

- They are people-centred – they depend heavily on human input; Jamaicans have a natural inclination for creativity, ingenuity and innovation.
- They have the potential to create a large number of technical, creative, administrative, research and professional jobs.
- They have the potential to engage young people, and vulnerable groups.
- They cross disciplines, Agencies and Ministries and therefore require joined-up approaches.
- They each assist in national development efforts, including health and wellness, communication, education, community development and poverty alleviation.
- They are critical elements to grow 'Brand Jamaica'.

**Mr. Speaker,**

It is important that Jamaica quickly grasp the opportunities in these global markets.

This Government recognises that swift and definitive steps have to be taken to grow and develop these industries.

This Government has taken action!

We are actively developing plans and policies for these emerging industries.

I have instructed the appropriate agencies to consult with the relevant stakeholders to facilitate:

- o Intellectual property;
- o Management;
- o Research and development;
- o Supportive financing
- o Structures for industries;
- o Marketing and promotion ;
- o Institutional strengthening;
- o Business development and incubation;
- o Training, certification and standardisation of skills;
- o The establishment and/or renovation of facilities; and
- o The facilitation of domestic, regional and international trade.

### **The Cultural and Creative Economy**

**Mr. Speaker,** the Jamaican culture is embraced worldwide and our creativity knows no bounds.

I was extremely proud last year when on arrival at two international airports, I was greeted by super-sized images of Usain Bolt, the fastest man in the world, advertising major international brands.

### **International brand and pride of a people!**



**Prime Minister the Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller and Tessanne Chin.**

Shelly-Ann Fraser Pryce, the fastest woman in the world, is Jamaica's UNICEF Ambassador for Children.

**International brand and pride of a people!**

**Tessanne Chin's 'Voice' made waves internationally!**

**International brand and pride of a people!**

Jamaican accent, personality and the music of Jimmy Cliff made last year's Volkswagen 'Happy Campaign' a most memorable and valuable promotional piece for Jamaica.

**International brand and pride of a people!**

How could we speak of Jamaican culture and not mention the great Bob Marley? He is posthumously featured in a special edition of the Rolling Stones Magazine, over 30 years after his passing!

His song, 'One Love', was named the Song of the Millennium by the BBC.

**Another international brand and pride of a people!**

**Mr. Speaker,**

I pause to congratulate my sister, Marcia Griffiths, on her celebration of 50 years in the music business.

As we all stand together, we will all turn the corner together and be able to say as Sister Marcia sings, "Thank you, Lord, it's Shining Time Again".

**Mr. Speaker,**

I am pleased to announce that the National Cultural and Creative Industries Commission, which I chair, and the supporting Inter-ministerial Technical Working Group have been established and have begun their work within the Office of the Prime Minister.

**We know where we are going! We are working to a plan!**

This is a Government at work: **'balancing the books while balancing people's lives'**.

**Science, Technology, Knowledge and Innovation**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Science and technology are important drivers of innovation, entrepreneurship and wealth creation.

With the logistics hub and other opportunities on the horizon, knowledge facilitation and development remain important priorities.

Now and in the future, 70% of jobs will require knowledge in the areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

This year, we will begin the inter-ministerial policy integration of critical Ministries to streamline the applications of science and technology in development.

Because of the importance I place on these critical areas of development, I will chair the National Commission on Science and Technology.

### Nutraceuticals

In this context, **Mr. Speaker**, I now turn to the Nutraceutical Industry.

Many Jamaicans know of the medicinal value of our herbs and plants.

We use the leaves from our trees and bushes to make teas, spices and treat ailments.

Here is a real-life example of how this industry can stimulate wealth creation in rural communities.

The Southern Manchester Herbs & Spices Cooperative Society, which represents 30 stakeholders and 150 farmers, provides dried herbs and spices such as lemon grass, peppermint, rosemary, cerasee and basil to tea producers in Jamaica.

JSIF has provided this Cooperative with a state-of-the-art drying facility, located in Pratville, in Southern Manchester.

Communities which will benefit directly include Hermitage, Campbell's Castle, Lancaster, New Broughton and Mannings Field.

**Mr. Speaker**, I am sure you are particularly pleased with this development.

The Scientific Research Council and Bureau of Standards are providing institutional support to farmers and other players in the value chain.

I wish to commend the important pioneers:

**The Hon. Dr. Albert Lockhart** and the late **Dr. Manley West** and their team are worthy of commendation.

The **Hon. Dr. Henry Lowe** and his team have pioneered the development of dietary supplements, wellness teas and instant porridges, made from indigenous raw materials, among other products.

Businessman, **Mr. Anthony Freckleton**, who has established Jamaica Exotic Flavours and Essences Limited in Bull Savannah, St. Elizabeth.

He has been working with farmers and collaborating with local agro-processors and scientific institutions.

They are developing a wide range of value-added products from local fruits, vegetables and herbs.

These will be used in nutraceuticals, cosmetics, beverages and sauces, locally and internationally.

I wish to acknowledge the teams at the **Northern Caribbean University**, and the **University of the West Indies** that are engaged in research.

There are also hundreds of unnamed Jamaicans who, as a matter of course, have turned to nature and provided us with an organic culture of healing and nutrition that remains with us until today.



## **Entrepreneurship Jamaica**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Jamaicans are not short of ideas.

We certainly are not short on innovation and our entrepreneurial spirit is hard to beat.

As a Government, we are endeavouring to do more and to find new ways to facilitate our people, to help them to start and maintain viable businesses.

**Good things are happening.**

Recently, the NHT launched an entrepreneurship competition.

In just two weeks, over 500 applications were received.

This tells me that our people have the desire and the capacity to actively participate in economic activities.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I see hope in the responses to the calls for proposals from the CHASE Fund and the Sports Development Foundation.

Hundreds of Jamaicans apply to them every year, to fund their proposals.

This tells me that our people are yearning for opportunities.

**Mr. Speaker,** the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in Jamaica.

**Mr. Speaker,**

- Corporate Jamaica can testify to the large number of applications for sponsorship that they get for viable, practical projects.
- I commend the National Bakery for their 'Bold Ones' project that is helping small businesses to grow.
- I thank all companies which are facilitating entrepreneurship through sponsorship and corporate social responsibility.

Every Member in this House has received their fair share of business proposals and ideas.

We all have facilitated micro and small businesses, from chicken rearing to dressmaking.

**We are, indeed, “all in this thing together. We gonna work it out”.**

We have put in place programmes to address business facilitation.

We have recently launched the Enterprise Jamaica Project, which is consistent with the new MSME policy approved in Parliament last year.

JAMPRO’s Export Max Programme is assisting small businesses to expand exports.

Also, the EXIM Bank, last year, saw the highest levels of lending in its history.

We are creating an enabling business environment.

**We know where we are going! We are working to a plan!**

## **INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT**

**Mr. Speaker,**

I now turn to infrastructural development.

I was recently speaking with a colleague who reminded me about what life used to be like in the 1950s, for persons living beyond Spur Tree Hill, who had to travel to Kingston.

I was told that persons would shed tears, bidding their families goodbye, as they were unsure when they would reach Kingston by road, and how long it would take them to return.

**Mr. Speaker,** I understand that many boarded the back of a truck, which they literally had to push when they came to the steep and treacherous track that took them over Spur Tree Hill.

This is a true story, **Mr. Speaker.**

That is why, this Government, over the decades, has placed special emphasis on infrastructural development.

How far we have come over time!

**Mr. Speaker,**

- Norman Manley was ridiculed for building the National Stadium.

- Highway 2000 and the North Coast Highway were called ‘pipe dreams’.
- Many scoffed at the work done to expand the Portmore Causeway. These development projects were implemented as part of a plan.

This Administration continues to be guided by a plan for the development of its social and physical infrastructure.



A section of the Portmore Toll Road.

## The National Physical Plan

During my budget presentation last year, Leader of the Opposition may recall that I gave him a copy of the 1978-1998 National Physical Plan of Jamaica.

We promised to revise that Plan.

This is being done.

### **We have a plan: we know where we are going!**

I promised in 2013 that we would commence the promulgation of Development Plans for those parishes that do not have plans.

Four plans have been promulgated for the parishes of Portland, Trelawny, Manchester, and for Negril/Green Island.

### **We have a plan: we know where we are going!**

**Mr. Speaker,**

We are continuing with the implementation of major infrastructural projects across the country as part of the National Development Plan.

### **Infrastructure Projects**

Let me share with the country what some of these infrastructural projects are.

**Mr. Speaker,**

When we improve our road network, other development follows.

### **Roads**

We improved several major roads and highways during 2012 and 2013, including:

- o Bay Farm Road in St. Andrew, a road to growth and development!
- o Scott's Cove to Belmont and Ferris Cross to Belmont, in Westmoreland, roads to growth and development!
- o Red Hills to Santa Maria, between St. Andrew and St. Catherine, a road to growth and development! ....and
- o Bog Walk to Sligoville, in St. Catherine, a road to growth and development!

We completed Segment III of the North Coast Highway Improvement Project.

This runs from Ocho Rios, St. Ann to Port Antonio, Portland... ...and was officially opened in May last year at a cost of 80 million Pounds Sterling.

### **This is a highway to growth and development!**

The section of the North Coast Highway from Linstead to Moneague will be opened in August.

Work will continue on Sections 1 & 3 in this fiscal year.

We are moving steadily along the highway to growth and development!

I could tell you about more roads that are to be completed across the island, but time does not permit.

**What is certain is that – this is a Government at work.**

**We are 'going for growth and development, working for the people!'**

## Gullies and Bridges

**Mr. Speaker,**

Over twenty-five retaining walls were constructed across the island last year.

Among these are:

- o Mount Ogle
- o Lawrence Tavern, Allman Hill
- o Oberlin and Cassava Piece in St. Andrew
- o Castleton, St. Mary
- o Buff Bay Valley, including Hollywell, Cascade and Regale
- o Aberdeen, Balaclava and Dalintoba in St. Elizabeth

**This is a Government that is working for the people!**

We have more work to do.

We know that there are many roads still to be fixed.

This provides challenges for our transport operators, farmers and entrepreneurs who depend on the road network.

We are determined to repair and build as many roads as possible within the limits of our financial resources.

Contractors are obligated to do quality work so that we do not keep repairing the same road over and over.

Jamaicans are making great sacrifices and want to see development happen. They want to see value for their tax dollar.

All of us in Government have a duty to ensure that this happens.

**Mr. Speaker,**

This Government has completed flood mitigation activities valued at over \$4 billion.

A number of gullies have been built and others cleaned:

- o Sandy Gully in St. Andrew
- o Capital Heights in Gully Green Pond in St. James
- o Black River Seawall in St. Elizabeth
- o Roselle and Yallahs in St. Thomas
- o Rio Cobre and Port Henderson Drive in St. Catherine
- o Nightingale Grove, St. Catherine

**This is a Government at work – working for the people.**

**Mr. Speaker,**

We also completed a number of bridges during the period. We are literally connecting growth with development!

The Rio Grande Bridge in Portland was opened last December, building bridges for growth and development!

The Westmoreland Bridge in St. Mary was opened in August. It replaces the one destroyed by floods more than three years ago. We are building bridges for growth and development!

Cassia Park Bridge in St. Andrew last year: We are building bridges for growth and development.

The Queensborough Bridge in St. Andrew was completed in December. We are building bridges for growth and development.

The investment made to build these bridges totals \$7.56 billion.

Additional bridges built, **Mr. Speaker**, include those at:

- o 11 Miles in St. Thomas;
- o Port Maria, and Eden River and Fontabelle in St. Mary;
- o Crooked River, Clarendon;
- o Craig Mill in Portland; and
- o Kintyre in St. Andrew.

I had the pleasure of crossing the new bridge in Kintyre with the residents when we opened it last year.

**We are going for growth and development, working for the people.**

### **Other Infrastructure Projects**

**Mr. Speaker,**

There are even more infrastructural projects currently underway, across the length and breadth of this country.

These include:

- A \$400 million improvement project in Ocho Rios to upgrade the cruise ship terminal and create stalls for craft vendors. **Working for the people!**
- A \$2.1 billion sewerage improvement project in Portmore.

- o A \$1 billion project for the installation of water pipes from Old Harbour to Manchester. **This is a Government at work!**
- o We are completing tourism development projects including:
  - Hampden Wharf and Streetscape in Falmouth
  - The sea park in Negril
  - Lighting the Elegant Corridor in Montego Bay
  - The development and operation of and travel halts

**Mr. Speaker,** there can be absolutely no doubt...

**This Government is going for growth and development, working for the people.**

**Mr. Speaker,**

**We know where we are going....This is how we balance people's lives.**

#### **MIDP**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Over the next three years, we will continue the development of our infrastructure by way of the Major Infrastructure Development Programme (MIDP).

This will be financed through the China EXIM Bank, in the amount of US\$300 million.

The Government of Jamaica will provide an additional US\$52 million in counterpart funds.

**Mr. Speaker,**

We know where we are going.

**We are going for growth and development, working for the people!**

## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

**Mr. Speaker,**

I turn now to the matter of community development.

To me, **Mr. Speaker**, communities are not just clusters of homes in a common geographical area.

Communities are, and should be places, where people from all backgrounds live, do business, create lasting memories and spend moments of recreation and rest with their families.

Central to the Jamaican community is the Jamaican family.

That is why this Administration is placing emphasis on families and communities.

Our ultimate aim in building communities is for Jamaica to be ‘one family, shaping the future together’.



We are strengthening communities across the island through a number of programmes:

- 174 Community Access Points have been established islandwide in collaboration with community organisations.
- They have been funded by the Universal Service Fund working for the people in communities!

- Since June 2012, five markets have been rehabilitated.
  - o The Fish Market in Lucea, Hanover,
  - o The Charles Gordon Market in St. James,
  - o The Black River Market Phase 1 in St. Elizabeth,
  - o The Linstead Market Phase 1 in St. Catherine; and
  - o Rocky Point Market in Clarendon.

**Mr. Speaker,** earlier this month I visited Clarendon to open the Market.

- This was a commendable example of a community partnering with the Government for development. We are working with the people in communities!
- Thirty-one (31) health centres were refurbished across the island.

Three of these are Centres of Excellence in Darliston, Santa Cruz and Claremont.

Another four health centres are currently being refurbished.

This includes the 'Centre of Excellence' in Duckensfield.

### **We are working for the people in communities!**

- The Social Development Commission has established a national database. This provides us with information to assist us to set priorities and plan for community development.

### **We are working for the people in communities!**

## **Education**

**Mr. Speaker,**

We have long held the view that it is people whose ideas, skills and energies develop our communities and grow the economy.

That is the reason why we have invested so much in education over the years. This has resulted, for example, in tertiary enrolment moving from 21.2% to 29.5%, over the last 10 years.

Last year in education:

- We built or improved over 100 basic schools and created 68 infant departments in our primary schools.

- Eight schools have been taken off the shift system and we have opened two new high schools.

In this year:

- Twenty-seven thousand tablets will be distributed in our schools from May of this year, at a cost of \$800 million.
- \$1.2 billion is to be spent to replace pit latrines with flush system toilets in 158 schools.
- 2,300 additional school places will be provided through plant expansion or the construction of new schools.

These include Belair High, Holy Trinity High and Cedar Grove High.

- We will be spending over \$615 million to upgrade the infrastructural facilities at a number of schools across the country.

The schools targeted include Herbert Morrison Technical, Anchovy, Hampton, Edith Dalton James, Tacius Golding, Bridgeport, Titchfield and Aabuthnott Gallimore.

**These are positive indicators.**

Our investment in education is paying off.

We all know that we have a great deal more to do.



**Prime Minister the Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller interacting with students.**

We continue to be encouraged by signs that we are moving in the right direction....  
**As we continue to go for growth and development, working for the people.**

## **Youth**

I turn now to our young people.

**Mr. Speaker,**

My Administration is placing serious emphasis on youth development.

I wish to share with you just a few of the programmes that are being pursued across the country.

- The Ministry of Youth trained over 8,000 young persons for job placement.
- The Government continued to support the private sector-led YUTE initiative (Youth Upliftment Through Employment).
- In 2013, through public/private partnerships, we started BILD Jamaica, a leadership and youth development training project, which will ultimately impact 120,000 unattached youth.
- The Government increased its financial support of the National Secondary Students Council, the National Youth Council and the Uniformed Groups.
- 186 children of public sector workers were given grants under the Public Sector Memorandum of Understanding, valued at a total of \$10 million.
- The CHASE Fund has spent \$547 million on sport development, and \$205 million to fund arts and culture projects.
- Over 12,300 children entered the JCDC National Festival in areas including dance, music and drama through community and school groups.

These are new and recurring programmes that are working for our young people!

We are placing special emphasis on education and training as part of the framework of activities to benefit the youth:

- As we prepare for the demands of the labour market, the Government is placing special emphasis on science, language, mathematics and technology subjects.
- Our tertiary graduates are receiving the proper orientation for entrepreneurship and the encouragement of innovation.

Let me commend the churches, community organisations, NGOs and the private sector for the part that they play in helping our young people to grow and develop.

I say to the young people of Jamaica, so many of you make us extremely proud, in so many areas of our national life.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Persons with disabilities are among the most vulnerable in our society.

Their rights must be respected and dignity preserved.

The approximately 400,000 persons with various types of disabilities are an important part of the Jamaican family.

That is the reason, **Mr. Speaker**, when I was at the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, I led the charge for the establishment of the National Policy for Persons with Disabilities.

We continue to lead by example.

We have engaged the services of a sign language expert to communicate the proceedings of this Honourable House.

The Disabilities Bill will be tabled in this parliamentary year.

We congratulate the Combined Disabilities Association, which has paved the way for more persons with different types of disabilities to be fully integrated in our community.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I appeal to all Jamaicans, to ensure that they do everything in their power to include persons with disabilities in community activities.

There is a great deal that needs to be done to improve the quality of life and unlock the potential of these Jamaicans.

## Women

**Mr. Speaker,**

The contribution of our women to family, community and national development has been significant.

Women are the breadwinners in many families; they are the glue that keep our communities together.

They are not only making their mark in the home, many have become leaders in both the public and private sectors.

Last November, I received an award on behalf of Jamaica from the European Union recognising the country's role in the empowerment of women.

I was heartened when recently the World Bank issued a publication titled "Gender at Work" as a companion publication to its 2013 World Development Report on Jobs.



**Prime Minister the Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller (right) proudly holds the award given to Jamaica for bridging the gender gap in terms of women in public Administration.**

The report, which contained the results of a survey conducted in 114 countries, identified only five that had reached or surpassed gender equality in occupations such as legislators, senior officials and managers.

**Mr. Speaker,** Jamaica is one of the five countries.

More of our women are becoming engaged in business. For example, in 2013/2014, 70% of those benefiting from the nearly 10,000 loans disbursed by the Development Bank of Jamaica were women.

This Government has, over the years, been at the forefront of implementing policies and programmes to advance the cause of women.

We will not depart from this position.

**Mr. Speaker,** we are mindful that our women and girls continue to face challenges, gender-based violence.

To address this problem, we have received assistance from UN Women to revise the National Strategic Action Plan on Gender Based Violence.

That revision was recently completed and implementation will start soon.

We are also implementing some of the recommendations in the National Policy on Gender Equality.

**Mr. Speaker,** I am pleased to report to this Honourable House that the Cabinet has approved the issuing of drafting instructions for the preparation of the Sexual Harassment Legislation.

The proposed legislation will contain gender-neutral language and will be a priority of this Administration.

## **Sport**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Sport is one of the world's largest economic and social activities.

Sport is the single most unifying force in the world, matched only by music.

Community-based sporting structures are central to Jamaica's sporting success.

People from around the world are often curious as to the secret of our success in track and field.

In response, I usually make the connection with our grass-roots sporting activities starting from infant school, to our globally recognised Boys and Girls' Championships.

I give credit to parents, teachers, coaches and volunteers in the community who encourage and support our young children.

**Mr. Speaker,**

We are indeed a country of achievers.

Recently, a team of 84 athletes competed at the Carifta Games in Martinique.

This was the first trip for our young athletes following the sudden passing of Cavahn McKenzie in Tobago at the NACAC Cross Country Championship.

We understood that this would have been an emotional trip for them and we prayed for their safety and strength.

The team returned with a record-breaking number of 89 medals, comprising:

- 42 gold
- 34 silver, and
- 13 bronze.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Jamaica is proud of this outstanding performance of our team.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I also want to congratulate the 21 record-breakers at the Boys and Girls' Champs and the Under-16 Netball team that won the regional championships.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Let me highlight a number of sporting activities taking place in our communities.

- Under the High School Sport Infrastructure Project, \$250 million will be spent over two years to improve sporting facilities in 24 high schools across the island.
- \$71.7 million was spent by the Sports Development Foundation to upgrade hard courts, football fields, provide lighting and other sporting facilities.
- We also want to thank the Government of India for the planned installation of lights at Sabina Park.
- I am sure all of us look forward to watching cricket under lights later this year.

**Mr. Speaker,**

This Government continues to go for growth and development; we are working for our people!

## **Rural Development**

**Mr. Speaker,**

I now turn our attention to a critical area of priority for this administration, the development of rural communities.

This is a central pillar in the approach to national development.

When I spoke in these debates last year, I advised the House that “some of the worse areas of poverty exist in deep rural Jamaica.”

As someone who grew up in a rural community, I am acutely aware of the difficulties faced by rural folk.

It is because of these difficulties, **Mr. Speaker**, that over the years, so many persons, and in particular young Jamaicans, seek to migrate from rural to urban areas.

The urban “pull” of an earlier period has now turned into a rural “push” to the urban areas.

We cannot sit back, relax and see rural Jamaica losing its young and productive labour force to the urban areas.

The approach to rural development must be holistic, integrated and multi-sectoral.

All people desire good work, good living conditions and access to public and social services.

Over the last year, we have been quietly, but successfully, achieving a better “coordinating mechanism” among Ministries, Departments and Agencies.

**Mr. Speaker,**

It is important to note that rural development is not just agricultural development, although agriculture is central.

The primary objective of rural development is the economic enrichment and promotion of social well-being of our rural population.

**Mr. Speaker,** we have made a start.

When Agencies such as:

- o JSIF, through their Rural Economic Development Initiative,
- o RADA,
- o The Jamaica Agricultural Society,
- o The Social Development Commission, and
- o The Rural Electrification Programme....

...all worked together, they have a greater impact on arresting rural poverty.

A number of programmes are currently being implemented with this joined-up Government approach.

These include:

- Construction of housing units under the Sugar-dependent Communities project, funded by the European Union.
- The Ginger Expansion Programme and the Agro-Parks by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries.
- It is no accident that all the Centres of Excellence completed to date are in rural Jamaica.
- The National Housing Trust Mobile Service is bringing the NHT to the people, wherever they are.
- The Rural Electrification Programme has achieved 97% electrification throughout rural Jamaica. This Programme has embarked on a new electrification project utilising primarily, solar energy.

**Mr. Speaker,** we recognise the importance of rural development to Jamaica and will continue to place focused emphasis on this area of national life.

## **EXPANDING OWNERSHIP IN JAMAICA**

**Mr. Speaker,**

It was National Hero, the Rt. Excellent Norman Washington Manley, who declared at the launch of the PNP in 1938, and I quote:

*“There is a tremendous difference between living in a place and belonging to it, and feeling that your own life and your destiny are irrevocably bound up in the life and destiny of that place.”*

As a people, we must all feel that we have a stake in Jamaica, the land of our birth.

People identify more strongly with their country and take better care of its assets and its future when they 'own' a piece of it.

Many Jamaicans dream of owning a piece of land, with a house on it and a business to support themselves.

They have to be given a chance at self-reliance.

In order to expand ownership in the Jamaican society, the Government has implemented programmes for land ownership, titling, housing and business.

- That is why we will continue to place even more emphasis on facilitating micro, small, medium and large businesses for Jamaicans.
- That is why we will support the creative and cultural industries, science, technology and innovation. Jamaicans must own the intellectual property in their song, dance, art, and all other inventions and designs.
- That is why we are doing so much for infrastructure.

We want every house, farm and business to have access to roads, water, electricity and Internet service.

That is why we are pursuing community development and rural development.

Ownership is central to the empowerment of people.

**This is what we mean by people power, and what we are working to achieve.**

We the people have invested the money, the sweat, the blood, the tears and also the fervent hope for a better life in our beloved country.

More Jamaicans must have the opportunity to own and profit from their country.

As I travel the length and breadth of Jamaica, I witness the joy, delight and excitement of my countrymen and women who have come to own their piece of this 'rock'.

One NHT contributor, upon receiving the keys to his home, at one of the many handover ceremonies I attended, said it best:

*"Thanks to you all, it is 'BYE-BYE rent'. We now have the keys to our own homes.*

*Thanks to you, we here can say, 'BYE-BYE rent'; mortgage time now...*

*Now we have houses we can do our little improvement on."*

Home ownership delivers a great sense of pride, achievement and stability, like nothing else.

A student, from Majesty Gardens in my constituency, who has nine CXC and seven CAPE passes, and whose family recently received their keys to an NHT house, told us:

*“This is an opportunity for me and my family to improve our lives....  
We will now have individual bedrooms. I do love my younger brother, but I really don’t mind not sharing a room with him....*

*If and when asked for proof of address, I will now be able to furnish several utility bills....*

*I will no longer be afraid or embarrassed to invite a friend to visit because I am terrified they might ask “can I use your restroom?”*

**Mr. Speaker**, it is in moments like these that I am most heartened to lead a Government that is working for our people.

### **Land Titles**

Permit me now, **Mr. Speaker**, to address the issue of land titles.

Holding a certificate of title provides a sense of security in having your land for life.

A title holder takes pride in knowing that they will be able to leave something tangible for their children.

When Jamaicans own their land, no one can move them from it.

Under the Land Administration and Management Programme (LAMP), over 1,100 titles have already being handed out, in the last two years, by the Ministry.

Let me congratulate those who have received titles.

You are now part of Jamaica’s ownership society.

**Mr. Speaker**, the following citizens are now a part of the ownership society:

- o The 60 residents of Flanker and Norwood in St. James
- o The 29 residents from Rose Hall in St. James
- o The 24 residents of Callaloo Mews in St. Andrew
- o The 17 residents of Martha Brae and the 35 from Duanvale in Trelawny

- o The 70 residents from Ebony Park in Clarendon
- o The 85 residents of Gravel Heights in St. Catherine, and
- o 51 residents of Seaview in St. Andrew

This is a Government working to empower our people.

LAMP is also rolling out its services in a number of other parishes.

LAMP 2 will begin in St. James, St. Ann, Westmoreland, Hanover and Trelawny during this financial year.

NHT will also deliver 1,502 titles later this year.



**Mr. Speaker,** I am sure there now can be no doubt that this Government is going for growth and development. We are working for the people.

### **National Housing Trust**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Much has been said in this Debate about the National Housing Trust (NHT).

The NHT's mandate has not changed.

The Agency continues to provide affordable housing with emphasis on middle and lower-income contributors.

The Trust's asset base is currently at \$205 billion.

The National Housing Trust is solvent and secure.

Over the course of its 38 years, the NHT has provided over 173,000 mortgages to its contributors.

### Contribution to National Development

**Mr. Speaker,**

When the Government of Jamaica signed off on the agreement with the IMF, one of the conditionalities was for the country to reduce its national debt.

The NHT was called upon to contribute \$11.4 billion per year, over four years.

The Trust has honoured the first year of this requirement.

Jamaica is in a better place today because of the role played by the National Housing Trust!

**Mr. Speaker,** I knew Michael Manley. He was my mentor.

The NHT was established by him as an instrument for national development.



He would be proud of the role the Trust continues to play in assisting to **'balance the books while balancing people's lives'**.

He would be proud of the role the NHT continues to play in national development, while working for the people.

## Housing Expenditure

**Mr. Speaker,**

During the last financial year:

- The NHT spent over \$22 billion on housing construction and mortgage financing.
- Last year, the Trust made refunds to over 150,000 contributors totalling \$3.8 billion.
- Over 7,500 mortgage loans were provided to contributors.
- The NHT built 2,100 housing solutions during 2013/2014.

Through the Joint Finance Mortgage Programme, the NHT provided over \$3 billion in loans to contributors through our private sector partners.

- The Trust, through the Youth Upliftment Through Employment (YUTE), empowered and encouraged young people living in inner-city communities.
- This year, the NHT will contribute a total of \$32 million to the YUTE Build initiative, to finance the training of 100 inner-city young people in construction-related disciplines.

***These are all promises made and all promises kept!***

Through the NHT, this Government is going for growth and development, we are working for the people.

## The Year Ahead

This year, the progress will continue.

- The First Step Programme, under which workers in the sugar and tourism sectors benefited last year, will continue.
- The Inner-City Housing Project also continues.

The Trust will commence preliminary works for Majesty Gardens Phase II, Frog City and Maxfield Avenue.

Two weeks ago, I launched the NHT Mobile Service in Mile Gully.... And it is on the road!

- The NHT has developed a Diaspora Strategy.

We are creating opportunities to give Jamaicans everywhere in the world, a chance to become NHT contributors, and to receive NHT benefits.

This year, the Trust will be using a portion of its surplus, normally used for grants and subsidies, to provide assistance in four main areas.

- \$280 million has been set aside for this effort. The areas that will benefit are:
  - o The improvement of infirmaries
  - o Assisting with the provision of shelter for street persons;
  - o Assisting with the maintenance of indigent housing, and;
  - o Providing help to the families of Government security workers, who have lost their lives or suffered major injuries in the line of duty.

**The National Housing Trust is working for the people, all the people!**

## **RESTORING JAMAICA'S CREDIBILITY IN THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA**

**Mr. Speaker,**

I turn now to Jamaica's position in the community of nations.

Jamaica's foreign policy has always been based on mutual respect.

We have always maintained a progressive, non-aligned and forward-thinking foreign policy.

We will not divert from this position.

When we took office in January 2012, this Government had to put a lot of effort into restoring Jamaica's good name internationally.

We were on 'shaky ground' with many of our traditional partners.

Many Jamaicans living overseas told us how embarrassed they were at what was happening in Jamaica.

We promised that we would fix it, and we have!

Jamaica once again enjoys close fraternal relationships with all our traditional partners.

Now, members of Jamaican Diaspora communities are, once again, proudly holding their heads high, and asserting themselves as Jamaicans.

The Jamaican Diaspora Conference in June last year was the largest and most successful to date.

Many of the participants said that they are, once again, proud to be a part of the process of building their homeland, Jamaica.

The momentum should not be lost.

We must all commit ourselves to making them feel at home again.

**Mr. Speaker,**

For Jamaica to generate sustainable economic development, it is important for us to deepen and strengthen our relationships with other countries, be they our closest neighbours or friends in faraway places.

We have been known for our principled and reasoned positions.

We have gained respect for our steadfastness and fidelity to our positions on matters of national and international importance.

We have not shied away from being bold.

We have not been afraid to stand alone or to stand up for principle where required.

Under this Government, Jamaica will continue to have a strong voice in international affairs.

In recognition of emerging global challenges, we have deepened and accelerated economic diplomacy.

We will continue to seek opportunities that maximise our economic potential.

Jamaica remains grateful for the extensive development assistance we have received from our bilateral and multilateral partners.

We recognise the value of these contributions.

We have spent a lot of time and effort working closely with our long-standing traditional partners.

These include the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Canada,

Japan and the countries of the European Union.



**Prime Minister the Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller (right) is greeted by Secretary General of the United Nations, His Excellency Ban Ki-moon.**

We have maintained excellent relations with them, over the years.

**Mr. Speaker,**

We cherish and continue to develop our relationships with Venezuela and Cuba.

We have implemented many projects with the support of the PetroCaribe Fund.

We thank the Government and people of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

**Mr. Speaker,**

We continue to enjoy good relations with the People's Republic of China, and we remain committed to the One China Policy.

Current investment flows are fruits from seeds of solidarity sown decades ago with many countries around the globe.

Jamaica continues to strengthen the bonds of friendship with the BRICS countries as well as other countries on the African continent.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Jamaica is committed to the development of a strong region.

We will continue to play our part to ensure that we have a dynamic Caribbean Community.

In this context, I wish to once again express my profound regret at the recent passing of a strong advocate of Caribbean regionalism, Professor Norman Girvan.

His entire life was dedicated to building regional institutions and advancing the cause of the people of our region.

We will miss him.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I want to thank the dedicated team at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade and those at our overseas Missions for the sterling work they continue to do.

As we pursue our policy, we will always put Jamaica first:

As we go for growth and development, we are working for our people, wherever in the world they are.

## **CONCLUSION**

**Mr. Speaker,**

When all is said and done, despite the difficulties that we still face as a nation, Jamaicans know that our country is now in a better place than it was in January 2012 when the people returned us to office.

We remain focused on stabilising the macroeconomic framework while cushioning the pain from that process, and establishing a platform for stability and growth.

The Government honestly and truly does not have the fiscal space to do all the projects that need to be done, but we are doing many good things.

We are finding solutions.

We are going for growth and development.

We are working for the people.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Challenges there are. It has not been easy.

We are approaching the corner.

Once we turn that bend, we, like the sprinters we naturally are, will power down the home stretch.

Taking the corner requires the greatest skill, the best technique, concentration, focus and enduring strength.

The extra push required will not be in vain.

**Mr. Speaker,**

In situations like ours, growth and development processes are complex. They do not happen overnight.

As I have demonstrated today, **Mr. Speaker,** governance is a demanding process.

We all have to work long and hard to see success.

This Government is working to get our nation where it needs to go.

We are building a stronger economy, which borrows less, produces more and delivers more growth and a better quality of life for all Jamaicans.

**Mr. Speaker,** I have outlined many good things that are happening in Jamaica!

We must remain resolute. We must remain confident. We must work for positive outcomes as we go for growth and development, working together as a people.

- o We are working together with our communities
- o We are working together with our private sector.
- o We are working together with our international partners
- o We are working together with civil society
- o We are working together with all our stakeholders

This gives me hope for the present and the future.

I felt that hope at the 'Prime Minister's Youth Awards' ceremony.

We saw some of the finest examples of what our young people can do when they apply themselves with courage, discipline, dedication and determination.

There is hope, **Mr. Speaker,**

I see positives. I see seeds being planted and growth appearing.

I see a bright future ahead of us.

We cannot throw away our sacrifices and our gains now.

We must all work that much harder.

We must stay the course.

It is time.

We already know we can.

Now we are at 'Yes we will',  
'Yes we shall'.

We are Jamaicans and today we pledge anew in our hearts, our love and commitment for Jamaica, land we love.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Our hopes are high.  
Our faith is great.  
Our courage is strong, and  
Our dreams for this beautiful nation will never die!

This is a call to action, a call to accountability, efficiency and unselfish participation.  
This is a call to action...  
A call to believe the unlikely...  
To do the unthinkable...  
While we face what may seem unbearable.  
If it is a race,  
We will run it.  
If it is a mountain,  
Like Caleb, I will climb it.  
If it is a stone,  
We will move it.

Stand with me.  
Come with me.  
Walk with me,  
Jamaica, work with me.

Let us work together to build a bright and glorious future for Jamaica, land we love.

I leave you with the words of the Right Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey, "Up, up you mighty race, you can accomplish what you will!"

I thank you.

# Notes

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