



THRONE SPEECH

2007-2008

Delivered by

His Excellency the Most Hon.
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Governor-General

Ceremonial Opening of Parliament

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GORDON HOUSE

As we begin a new Parliamentary Year, the Administration and the people of Jamaica can be proud of our competent performance in hosting the Opening Ceremony and the other events of the ICC CWC 2007. The officials, volunteers, members of Security Forces and the Jamaican people, in general, can take credit for these achievements.

The spirit of volunteerism was reflected not only in the Competition itself but the involvement of some of our religious denominations assisting with the cleaning up of the country.

In regard to the ensuing Legislative Year, the Government proposes to take a number of actions to enhance the social, economic and political development of the country.

It is proposed to secure passage of a number of Bills which have already been placed on the Agenda of Parliament.

These include:

The Charter of Rights Bill - to replace the existing Chapter 3 of the Constitution with a Chapter providing more comprehensive protection for the fundamental rights and freedom of persons.

The Incest (Punishment) Bill - to increase the penalty for incest and to widen the categories of prohibited relationships.

The Offences Against the Person (Amendment) Bill - to establish a modern approach to dealing with sexual abuse of our women, children and vulnerable persons in our society.

In addition to these and other previously-tabled Bills, it is proposed to introduce the following new ones:

Child Pornography Bill - to make the production, possession and distribution of child pornography a criminal offence in Jamaica and to prohibit and prosecute offences against children.

Obscene Publication (Amendment) Bill - to increase fines, custodial sentences and modernise the regime of the existing Act.

Data Protection Bill - as a companion legislation to the Electronic Transactions Bill; Petroleum Quality Control (Amendment) Bill and Regulations Petroleum (Companies) Bill and Regulations; and the Petroleum and Oil Fuel (Landing and Storage) Amendment Bill - to deal, variously, with provisions for safety measures for the conveyance and storage of petroleum, to better regulate the licensing regime and to strengthen the procedure for testing petroleum and petroleum products.

The Evidence (Amendment) Bill - to facilitate the use of 'live' 'TV' links for the protection of vulnerable or endangered witnesses as well as those witnesses outside of Jamaica.

The matter of the transparent and realistic financing of political parties remains an important one and the Government looks forward to working with the Opposition to find meaningful solutions.

The Government will continue to pursue macro-economic policies aimed at achieving, among other positive objectives: increased employment; low inflation; a stable currency; a more competitive economy; accelerated economic growth.

Following a successful agricultural 'road show' by the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands to promote profitable and high-yielding non-traditional commodities, the Government will put into place a comprehensive programme of financial and technical assistance for these new areas with a view to strengthening the linkage between agriculture, tourism and the manufacturing sector. The Ministry of Agriculture will be radically transformed to enable it to more effectively service the needs of the sector.

A significant aid in facilitating greater economic growth is an efficient development approval process.

Despite making some progress in this regard, the process is nowhere near the level of efficiency and effectiveness that is desired. This will be addressed through legislative and administrative changes; the streamlining of the 'division of labour' between the various agencies in Central and Local Government; the delegation of appropriate

authority to the executives of approval bodies, so that they can make certain decisions without requiring approval by their Boards.

The Government will seek to ensure that the process of approvals is as objective as possible and not subject to 'regulatory capture' by either those who favour approvals of development proposals or those who are against them.

An important immediate step will be the launching of a Development and Investment Manual within a few weeks. This manual has been produced as a cooperative effort between the Cabinet Office, the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce and USAID. It will comprise some 7 Volumes and 55 Sections. The Manual is not a static document but represents a work in progress and is intended to guide developers, professionals, private sector individuals, civil society and government officials requiring information pertaining to planning, environment, subdivision of land, infrastructure, mining, tourism, agriculture and other development activities and standards.

A New Building Code and a new draft National Building Act are being finalised. These will provide the rules, guidelines and standards for building construction in Jamaica.

The Government will be intensifying its current efforts to clean-up and beautify the country and to sustain it. This will take the form of providing the required resources to the relevant state agencies in Central and Local Government, to the fullest extent possible, to enable them to do an efficient and effective job; streamlining the activities of the various agencies involved to reduce duplication and get better value for money, among other things; furthering discussions with various civil society and other non-state actors, including communities, to assist in the effort; and requiring the Security Forces to enforce the Anti-Litter and other relevant laws. The Government is encouraged by the Public/Private Sector initiative in respect of the National Best Community Competition. Some 179 communities - almost one-quarter of the total number in Jamaica - have applied to participate in this Competition and Programme.

Apart from the continued effort to improve the general quality of services offered by the Public Sector, special attention will be given to human development in general; and in

particular, the vulnerable in the society, such as children, the aged, the sick, the poor, and the physically and mentally challenged.

In pursuance of this, emphasis will be placed on: (a) improving - albeit on a gradual basis as resources allow - the physical environments of public hospitals, health centres, children's homes, places of safety and parish infirmaries; (b) providing more courteous and caring service; and (c) expanding the social safety net and other forms of support.

The modernisation of the health services, especially those providing primary care, will be continued.

The Public Sector Reform Unit of the Cabinet Office will be compiling, and making available in electronic and print form, a user-friendly guide on some of the frequently required public services, including, importantly, those for the vulnerable and also 'life cycle' events such as births, marriages and deaths.

In respect of the Educational sector, the completion of the audit of school places will guide the Government in determining the process for meeting demand which will ultimately lead to the abolition of the shift system and the reduction of class sizes. Concurrently, the governance structure of the educational system will be revamped.

Better targeted interventions for numeracy and literacy will commence shortly to ensure that no child leaves primary school without the required grade level competence in both areas.

During this year, new curricula will be introduced for Early Childhood Education; the training of caregivers and teachers will continue; and a nutrition programme will also be introduced.

The Government will be accelerating its efforts to reduce crime and violence in the society. These will involve, inter alia : (a) appropriate legislation; (b) modernisation and upgrading of the law enforcement infrastructure; (c) concentrated attention on 'hot spots' of violence and crime; (d) promoting higher levels of transparency and accountability in the Jamaica Constabulary Force through the newly-established Police (Civilian

Oversight) Authority to be accompanied by a major review of the Police Service Regulations and the 'Book of Rules', with a view to expanding the legal powers to remove tainted members of the Force from duty; and (e) continuing the programme of social interventions in vulnerable communities.

The Government will continue to pursue sound policies in the management of Jamaica's international relations and the promotion of the country's interests overseas, including the protection of its nationals.

This becomes even more critical given the increasingly complex and volatile international environment.

The policies will be guided by the core principles of:

- (a) A multilateral approach to international, political and economic dialogues;
- (b) Regional and hemispheric cooperation;
- (c) The sovereign equality of states based on commitment and adherence to the United Nations' Charter;
- (d) Respect of Human Rights, democracy and the Rule of Law;
- (e) Territorial integrity of states.

The Government will continue to be active in international trade negotiations including the WTO Doha Development Round and the ACP/EU Economic Partnership Agreements.

The matter of securing long-term supplies of fuel at stable prices will remain a priority on the Government's foreign policy agenda given the cost and importance of this item to the national economy.

The welfare of the Jamaican diaspora remains of paramount importance. In a matter of months, the Government will be involved in the preparatory stage for the Third Diaspora Conference scheduled for Kingston next year.

Huge challenges remain for us as a people, in this the 45th Anniversary of our political Independence and the 200th of the Emancipation of the Atlantic Slave Trade, but we have the capacity as a people to measure up.

In the words of one of our National Heroes, with a 'fixity of purpose and continuity of effort' we can succeed.

The Estimates of Expenditure will be presented today.

May the blessings of the Almighty rest upon your counsels.