

**STATEMENT BY H.E. MRS. ALOUN NDOMBET-ASSAMBA, HIGH  
COMMISSIONER FOR JAMAICA, ON BEHALF OF  
SENATOR THE HONOURABLE MARK GOLDING, MINISTER OF  
JUSTICE, CARIBBEAN COUNCIL ANNUAL RECEPTION,  
1<sup>st</sup> APRIL 2014, LONDON**

**SALUTATIONS**

I am pleased to be able to deliver the keynote address on behalf of Senator the Hon. Mark Golding, Minister of Justice, who regrettably is unable to be here with you due to unforeseen circumstances. I am, therefore, honoured that the Council has agreed to invite me to deliver the Minister's keynote address on his behalf on what we consider to be a very special occasion.

The Caribbean Council holds a very special place in the hearts of Caribbean countries like Jamaica. Its commitment to providing strategic, in-depth and detailed analysis of development trends not only in the region but worldwide, has proven invaluable. Through its dedicated effort to support trade and investment opportunities, the Council has provided an important platform for timely, relevant and critical discourse of issues that affect our region and the global community. We deeply value this insight. The level of practical, sound advice that you have provided us over the years is greatly appreciated. Please accept our sincere gratitude for supporting this partnership over so many decades.

**JAMAICA – A SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW**

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Jamaica has embarked on a number of programmes aimed at bringing to fruition, its vision of becoming a developed country by 2030. At the core of this vision is our expectation that Jamaica will be the place where Jamaicans, both at home and in the Diaspora, will readily invest, retire and do business.

We believe that this is the perfect platform, given the focus that the Plan brings to ensuring that Jamaica pursues a development path that is sustainable and people-centred.

Against this background, an immediate area of concern for us is economic growth and development. We are beginning to see signs of significant improvement over the past 2 years. Like many other countries, we were negatively affected by the global economic downturn of the mid-to-late 2000s.

We realise that there were things that we needed to do to set us on a more productive and progressive path of growth and development. To this end and while we had to re-engage the International Monetary Fund, the Government of Jamaica has seized the opportunity to put the economy on a more rigorous and stringent fiscal path.

The results of this approach have been significant. The first three quarterly IMF tests under the programme have all been successfully passed, with the quantitative ratios all achieved and the structural reforms all implemented in a timely manner. Following periods of decline in real GDP since 2008, there was real GDP growth of 0.5 percent in the September and December 2013 quarters. This positive growth in GDP is expected to have continued into the just concluded March 2014 quarter.

Fiscal performance has remained resilient, with Central Government primary surplus and budget deficit targets all being met. There has been increased output in a number of sectors, including agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining and quarrying, as well as construction, hotels and restaurants. Inflation has been in line with projections. For the calendar year 2013, inflation was 9.6 per cent and it is expected to be in the single digits for the Fiscal Year 2013/2014.

The Net International Reserves have been on the increase and have met the target set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Further improvements are expected. The Government has further evidenced its commitment to sound, long-term fiscal management and debt sustainability by passing the landmark Fiscal Rule legislation that commits to reduce the country's debt-to-GDP ratio to 60 per cent over the next twelve (12) years. While we take comfort in this progress, we know that the journey is far from complete.

The Government is committed to pursuing its strategy of inclusive growth. The Prime Minister, the Most Honourable Portia Simpson Miller, underscored this approach in a recent address in Jamaica on public-private partnerships, in which she reiterated the value of this collaborative approach.

The Prime Minister made the remarks at a Seminar on *Delivering Growth*, which was organized by the British High Commission in Kingston, UK Trade and Investment, and the Development Bank of Jamaica. The two-day Conference held from 19 to 20 February, not only explored economic opportunities of public-private partnerships but also provided training with the support of experts from the UK Treasury.

It is also worth recalling that in July 2013, the Government created history with the conclusion of a Social Partnership Agreement by which the Government, private sector, trade unions and civil society reaffirmed and recommitted to the principles of social dialogue and partnership. They also resolved to embark on a programme for

Jamaica's stabilization, growth and sustainable development, over an initial period of 2013-2016.

The Government of Jamaica has sought to systematically identify critical areas which require investments to expand and modernise the infrastructure network. We recognise that devising ways to improve the physical infrastructure will provide the necessary supporting elements to facilitate increased private investments, expanded employment and further economic growth. For example, both international airports - the Donald Sangster and the Norman Manley International Airports - have gone through a period of modernisation and expansion in keeping with our own determination to make our airport facilities among the best in the world.

The construction, operation and maintenance of Highway 2000 also stand as another prime example of how Jamaica has used infrastructure development to improve the country's overall economic development. The travel time to major destination points across the island is being significantly reduced, with several spin-off investment opportunities for surrounding communities.

Another central feature of Jamaica's development objectives, in keeping with Vision 2030, is the creation of its Logistics Hub. We see the Hub as an integral plank of making Jamaica the gateway to the Americas, the Caribbean and the rest of the world. The Hub seeks to position Jamaica as the fourth node in the global logistics trade, after Singapore, Dubai and Rotterdam.

The island is poised to be the premier transshipment and air cargo logistics hub of the Western Hemisphere as well as the digital hub for the Caribbean and Western Hemisphere. It will expand the reach and market size that businesses can serve, while increasing the speed with which services can be accessed by and provided to each customer. Through the Logistics Hub, we intend to integrate Jamaica's economy into the global supply and value chain, and attract multinational firms that are outsourcing their international production.

The Government, therefore, anticipates and is catering to a range of large, medium and small businesses in taking this project forward. Work is underway in a number of sectors to ensure that we will be able to realise this objective, particularly through the modernisation and/or construction of new facilities for the transportation of goods by sea and by air.

Thousands of jobs and related business opportunities are expected to be generated. We anticipate that British companies and firms will support the Logistics Hub and position themselves to take advantage of the significant geographical and competitive advantages that Jamaica has to offer.

Another major plank of our development strategy is in the area of agriculture, through the use of agro parks. To date, more than J\$1 billion in grant funding has been earmarked for investment in these parks, which will be spread across the Island. The aim is to integrate each facet of the agricultural value chain, thereby creating an area of intense agricultural production. This will prove critical to ensuring that the country is able to strengthen domestic production as well as reposition the agricultural sector.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE**

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a small island developing state, Jamaica is vulnerable to the vagaries of the global environment. This susceptibility extends not only to global economic crises, but to vulnerability linked to climate change and extreme weather patterns. The recent floods here in the United Kingdom and throughout the Eastern Caribbean stand as frightening reminders of the devastation that can be wrought on communities and towns by Mother Nature. We, therefore, have to take bold and decisive action to address natural disasters. We must support each other if we are to effectively respond to such disasters.

At the regional level, Jamaica and fellow Caribbean countries have been working with their Latin American counterparts to address natural disasters and climate change. In fact, Jamaica hosted the Sixth Regional Meeting on International Mechanisms for Humanitarian Assistance (MIAH) in October 2013, at which Baroness Amos, the UN Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs, was present.

We will also continue to use our membership of the Commonwealth and the UN to advocate small states issues. Indeed, Jamaica is a member of the newly established Open-Ended Ministerial Group that has been charged by Commonwealth Heads of Government to put forward practical and concrete proposals to advance the priority developmental concerns of Commonwealth Small States. Jamaica also played host to the Caribbean Regional SIDS meeting in July 2013 in preparation for the Third UN SIDS Conference to be held later this year.

A key area of focus for Jamaica as we seek to mitigate the effects of climate change is the diversification of the energy sector. Like many countries, Jamaica is looking to the use of renewable energy as a means of providing long term energy security and environmental protection. We know that the UK is also engaged in a very lively debate about energy sources and believe that there is scope for us both to work together as we try to find ways to reduce our levels of dependency on oil.

## **JAMAICA/UK RELATIONS – A PERSPECTIVE**

Excellencies

Ladies & Gentlemen

All of us are looking for new ways to ensure that we can adequately and appropriately respond to the needs of our respective constituents. Our efforts to do so, however, do not mean that long established friendships and partnerships become redundant. Far from it. In fact, those relationships take on even more significance because there is a natural understanding of and appreciation for the needs and concerns of the countries involved. That is how Jamaica and dare I say the rest of the region regards its relationship with the UK.

We, therefore, expect that there will continue to be a platform for us both to continue to give meaningful and practical interpretation to our years of cooperation and collaboration. In the G20, for example, we would expect that our needs and concerns will be fully appreciated and articulated by friends like the United Kingdom. We would expect the same in Brussels where discussions on the level of EU development assistance to Jamaica and the Caribbean take place.

Like the UK, we value the contribution that our nationals make to the development of societies around the world. Jamaicans have a fine tradition of being industrious, dedicated and selfless individuals, wherever they find themselves. For the many who made that journey decades ago to assist in rebuilding Britain after the War, their legacy continues to have a lasting impact on modern British society. We must never forget their contribution, as well as those made by nationals of other Caribbean states, who accepted the invitation to assist Britain's reconstruction efforts.

As we prepare to also mark the Centenary of the First World War, let us remember the men and women of the Caribbean who unreservedly accepted the call to defend the British Empire. We all owe a debt of gratitude to these individuals and their descendants.

Efforts to respond to modern day challenges and to put in place systems to protect our borders must not seek to disregard or discount the invaluable contribution that migrants have and continue to make to national development.

## **AIR PASSENGER DUTY (APD)**

Excellencies

Ladies & Gentlemen,

We are pleased that there has been positive movement by the UK Government on the Air Passenger Duty (APD). The decision to re-Band the Caribbean is a step in the right direction. We had long maintained that the APD is discriminatory. It places the

Caribbean, where some countries get as much as 40 percent of their total arrivals by air from the UK, at a competitive disadvantage to close competitors such as south Florida holiday destinations.

The Caribbean is also the most tourism dependent region of the world. For many of us, revenue from tourism represents a significant proportion of our GDP. Any reduction in visitors is economically challenging and those countries that are highly dependent on the UK market, will invariably continue to suffer.

Annual figures from the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB), which collates statistics from Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, show that while overall figures for visitors arriving by air has increased by 0.1 percent between 2012 and 2013, arrivals from the UK actually fell by 5.7 percent in 2012.

Compared to 2008 figures, arrivals from the UK were a staggering 23 percent lower in 2013, while arrivals from the USA showed a 3 per cent increase over the same period. This suggests that arrivals from the UK have not seen the same recovery as those from North America.

Jamaica is one of the few Caribbean countries to report an increase in traffic from the UK in 2013. But even this data masks a very important factor, namely that there is an imbalance in the arrivals between our two major cities, with the balance being in favour of Montego Bay. Arrivals to Montego Bay in 2013 grew by 13 per cent while there was a 14.5 per cent decline for Kingston.

The 2011 UK Census confirms that there are just over 1 million people in the UK who identify themselves as either Caribbean or as being of Caribbean heritage. This statistic is significant. It means that there is a very large Caribbean Diaspora that potentially travel back to the region at any given time. They are the ones who were being severely impacted by the APD as a large majority could no longer be able to avail themselves of the opportunity to return home. This is corroborated by reports from specialist Diapora travel agents that indicate that the Diaspora have been the group most greatly affected by the cost of travel to the Caribbean.

Excellencies

Ladies & Gentlemen

I have taken the time to present a brief overview of the impact that the APD has had on the region in order for you to appreciate the importance which we attach to the recent announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer that the APD would be revised. We believe it is timely and welcome the fact that we have been able to reach an understanding on this very important issue. We look forward to the decision being enforced on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015.

## **THE COMMONWEALTH**

Excellencies

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Our collective peace and security cannot be advanced without due regard to significantly advancing the Global Development Agenda. Organisations like the United Nations and the Commonwealth must continue to be at the forefront of this multilateral process.

As we are in London, home of the Commonwealth, I wish to reiterate the important role which we see the Commonwealth playing in this endeavour. The 53 member countries of the Commonwealth must not forget the legacy that this Organisation has bequeathed to the world of promoting the shared principles and values that has characterised its growth and development since the 1960s. The Commonwealth must continue to be that platform where countries, whether big or small, developed or developing, can participate as equals. Otherwise, the Organisation that we have so lovingly nurtured runs the risk of becoming out of touch and increasingly irrelevant.

The 2014 Commonwealth Games to be hosted by Glasgow will provide us with an important opportunity to show what is unique and special about the Commonwealth. This celebration of sport, diversity and peace, which unites over 2 billion citizens, will see over 4,500 athletes from 70 nations and territories of the Commonwealth. Like you, we are looking forward to the Games and what we know will be exciting performances from the athletes, including from our own region.

## **PEACE, SECURITY & JUSTICE**

Jamaica's commitment to promoting peace and security is unquestionable. We have a long tradition of respect for the rule of law and democracy. We have had consistent and unbroken periods of democratic rule, characterised by the regular holding of free and fair elections. It should also come as no surprise that in 2013, Jamaica was rated by Reporters without Borders as having the highest level of press freedom in the Western Hemisphere and the 13th highest rank in the world.

We are committed to these principles. They continue to inform our engagements at the bilateral, regional and multilateral levels. That is why Jamaica values the cooperation it has had with successive British Governments in the areas of security and justice.

It is a partnership that has been mutually beneficial and has served both sides well. In recent years, for example, the British Government has provided us technical

support to develop our Criminal Case Management Programme and a Protocol on Prosecutorial Decision-making. We have also received assistance in respect of ensuring the effective prosecution of cases being investigated by our Major Organized Crime and Anti-Corruption (MOCA) Task Force. In the same manner, an assessment of the reasons for delay in cases before the Gun Court is also being done by an Officer from the UK Crown Prosecution Service.

At the global level, both Jamaica and the UK were at the forefront of efforts to adopt the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). Like you, we are extremely proud that this dream became a reality in 2013. Jamaica was pleased to be among the first countries to sign this historic Treaty when it opened for signature on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2013. We believe that provides a much needed avenue through which greater attention can be drawn to the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons. Jamaica has suffered tremendously from this illicit trade, which has been magnified through its link with illicit drugs and organized crime. A victim of its geographic location between the demand and supply centres for guns and drugs, Jamaica has been used as a transshipment point for the purveyors of this very dangerous and lucrative business exchange. We, therefore, look forward to the effective implementation of the ATT and are taking the requisite steps to ratify the Treaty to allow for its early entry into force.

We take the same active and visible approach in fulfilling our multilateral obligations in relation to Money Laundering, Terrorism Financing and the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

The enactment of the *Proceeds of Crime (Amendment) Act*, the *Terrorism Prevention (Amendment) Act* and the *United Nations Security Council Resolutions Implementation Act* in 2013, has enabled Jamaica to meet important obligations to the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF) with regard to money laundering and terrorism financing. It also allowed Jamaica to ratify 4 Treaties to meet its obligations to the United Nations Security Council under resolution 1373 on terrorism. These will continue to remain an important feature of our foreign policy objectives.



## **THE DIASPORA**

Excellencies

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Jamaica's Diaspora is integral to its development goals and objectives. A key feature of Vision 2030 is not only that individuals will seek to invest in Jamaica, but they will retire and raise their families there too. We want our Diaspora to be our partners in this endeavour.

Last year, we had our Fifth Biennial Diaspora Conference in which over 1500 delegates from all over the world, including the UK, participated. The Government is working to strengthen the links with the Jamaican Diaspora by encouraging their participation in nation building. To this end, The Government is currently working on a Diaspora Policy, to be complemented by a National Policy on International Migration and Development.

## **REPARATIONS**

There is one other issue that Jamaica and other CARICOM countries are pursuing on which British support and understanding will be critical. It is a sensitive one but it is a discourse that must take place. I speak of the issue of reparations.

As the Prime Minister, the Most Honourable Portia Simpson Miller, reiterated in her address to the 68th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, in September 2013, the time has come for an international discussion on reparations for slavery. Only last week, the region agreed to a 10-point Plan of Action to better chart a course to take the discussion forward. There are suggestions in the media that legal action is to be taken by CARICOM Governments for reparations.

I wish to clarify, however, that the meeting of the region last week only agreed to two things, namely a 10-point Action Plan and the convening of a Conference of CARICOM and European Governments to further discuss the issue of Reparations. The major elements of the Plan include a formal apology from European Governments involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade; the establishment of Caribbean Cultural Institutions to scientifically record the Caribbean experience; an Indigenous Peoples Development Programme; Technology Transfer and Debt Cancellation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will end the same way I started by thanking you for this opportunity. It is a privilege to provide you with an overview of issues and initiatives that my Government is pursuing. I also hope I have left with you, food for thought about possible areas in which cooperation between our respective countries can be strengthened.

As the great Winston Churchill once said, "*This is no time for ease and comfort. It is time to dare and endure.*" We stand ready to work with you to take up this challenge.

Thank you.