



**Summary of Proceedings
Public Hearing**

Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration

Held on Wednesday May 18, 2016

Inquiry: An inquiry into the effectiveness of the State's interventions directed at socially displaced persons in Trinidad and Tobago.

Venue: The public hearing was held on Wednesday May 18, 2016 from 10:22 a.m. to 12:34 p.m. in the J. Hamilton Maurice Room, Mezzanine Floor, Office of the Parliament, Tower D, the Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port of Spain.

Committee members

The following committee members were present:

1. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir – Chairman
2. Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, MP
3. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP
4. Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP
5. Ms. Khadijah Ameen
6. Mr. Hafeez Ali

Witnesses who appeared

The following officials of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MoSDFS) appeared before the Committee:

- Mrs. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers Permanent Secretary
- Mr. Haimdath Ramoutar Deputy Permanent Secretary
- Ms. Loraine Reyes-Borel Executive Director, Social Displacement Unit

*Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration
(Including Education, Health, Gender, Tourism, Public Administration, Labour, Culture,
Community Development and other Social Services)*

- Ms. Sarah Rambaran Deputy Director, Inter-Agency Unit
- Dr. Barry Ishmael Legal Officer II

The following officials of the Ministry of Health (MoH) appeared before the Committee:

- Ms. Donna Ferraz Permanent Secretary
- Dr. Clive Tilluckdharry Chief Medical Officer (Ag.)
- Dr. Rohit Doon Advisor, Health Promotion, Communication and Public Health
- Mr. Lawrence Jaisingh Director, Health Policy, Research and Planning

The following officials of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) also appeared before the Committee:

- Mr. Deodat Dulalchan Deputy Commissioner of Police, Operations (Ag.)
- Mr. Sterling Hackshaw Assistant Commissioner of Police, Operations (Ag.)

The following officials of the Port of Spain City Corporation (PSCC) also appeared before the Committee:

- His Worship Councillor Keron Valentine Mayor of Port of Spain
- Mrs. Annette Stapleton-Seaforth Chief Executive Officer
- Ms. Lystra Parke Deputy Chief Executive Officer
- Ms. Erica Prieto Acting Superintendent, City Police

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the key subject areas/issues discussed during the hearing:

- i. In 2004, the number of street dwellers was estimated at 905 as compared to street counts conducted in January 2015 which estimated the number of street dwellers at 539 persons. A two day count on May 16th to 18th, 2016 suggested that there 349 street dwellers;
- ii. The role of the Ministry of Health involves clinical care of the socially displaced. The Ministry currently has 212 cases under its remit; of which 78 are at the St. Ann's Hospital;
- iii. The Port of Spain City Corporation (PSCC) engaged in four (4) exercises to remove persons off the streets; who may fall into different categories ranging from drug addicts, mentally challenged to deportees.

- iv. The role of the Police in relation to Section 75 of the Summary Offences Act Chapter 11:02;
- v. The challenge with the systems in place for treating with the socially displaced;
- vi. The challenges facing the MoSDFS in treating with the socially displaced include lack of human resources, facilities for assessments, accommodation, and challenges in the operations of other agencies involved;
- vii. Socially displaced persons are frustrated, vulnerable and disenfranchised;
- viii. The system for treating with the socially displaced needs to become more structured and closer collaboration amongst the relevant agencies is required;
- ix. The need to have a *Continuum of Care* to treat with the issue of social displacement;
- x. The difficulty faced by socially displaced persons in accessing the various forms of identification/documentation such as a Birth Certificate and Identification Card and social services;
- xi. The feasibility of the use of social workers to assist socially displaced persons in acquiring their forms of identification;
- xii. The disconnect in activities between the Social Displacement Unit (SDU) and the Inter-Agency Unit (IAU);
- xiii. The methodology used by the SDU to determine the statistics on socially displaced persons;
- xiv. The disconnect in statistics collated by the Port of Spain City Corporation and that of the SDU;
- xv. Information on the number of rehabilitation facilities owned/controlled by the Government and NGOs and the respective subventions received from the MoSDFS;
- xvi. The use of NGOs to assist to take the socially displaced off the streets;
- xvii. There are no laws to mandate that the socially displaced be confined to rehabilitation centres;
- xviii. The use of University resources such as the University of the West Indies to assist in collating and maintaining a database of socially displaced persons;
- xix. The need to institutionalize surveys done by the MoSDFS;
- xx. The practicality of mandating that wandering displaced persons be confined to a halfway house;
- xxi. The need to categorize socially displaced persons in terms of mental challenges and substance abuse;
- xxii. The challenge faced by Police Officers in assessing a person giving an account of and for himself;
- xxiii. The feasibility of the use of court orders to mandate that socially displaced persons go to rehab;
- xxiv. The need for legislation changes to the Mental Health Act Chapter 28:02 and the Summary Offences Act;

- xxv. The lack of continuity of tracking of socially displaced persons in place at the SDU;
- xxvi. The implementation of quarterly meetings to assist in treating with challenges facing the SDU;
- xxvii. The core responsibility of the SDU is that of policy and the IAU's is that of implementation;
- xxviii. The effectiveness of the IAU;
- xxix. Support mechanisms in place for people facing poverty to prevent homelessness;
- xxx. The factors causing social displacement;
- xxxi. Accommodation available to the socially displaced and the amount of accommodation provided by government, private or religious institutions;
- xxxii. The number of socially displaced children residing on the streets; and
- xxxiii. Arrangements in place for socially displaced parents with children.

Recommendations proffered during the Public Hearing

The following recommendations emanated from the discussions:

- i. that the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services use Social Workers to assist the socially displaced in acquiring forms of identification and social services;
- ii. that every socially displaced person should be documented;
- iii. It be compulsory for persons living on the streets be confined to a properly run halfway house;
- iv. that quarterly meetings amongst the relevant stakeholders be held;
- v. that mentally challenged persons be categorised from substance abusers and other socially displaced persons.

View the Hearing

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube channel via the following link:

<https://youtu.be/mIXrLL8s5jQ>

Contact the Committee's Secretary

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Committees Unit

May 18, 2016