

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES*Friday, March 22, 2019*

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]**LEAVE OF ABSENCE**

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received communication from the following: Mr. Ancil Antoine, MP, Member for D'Abadie/O'Meara who has requested leave of absence—

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: He is here.

Madam Speaker: Sorry. Mr. Esmond Ford, MP, Member for Tunapuna who has requested leave absence during the period March 09 to 23, 2019, the hon. Fitzgerald Hinds, MP, Member for Laventille West, and Ms. Nicole Olivierre, MP, Member for La Brea, who have requested leave of absence from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Members seek is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Princes Town Regional Corporation Chairman's Fund for the year ended September 30, 2016. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]
2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Princes Town Regional Corporation's Chairman's Fund for the year ended September 30, 2017. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the South-West Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2010. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

4. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the South West Regional Health Authority for the year ended September 30, 2011. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
Papers 1 to 4 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.
5. Audited Financial Statements of the National Schools Dietary Services Limited for the year ended September 30, 2018. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.
6. Report of the Tenth Actuarial Valuation of the National Insurance System as at June 30, 2016. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
7. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Health to the Sixteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
8. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Utilities to the Eleventh Report of the Joint Select Committee on Local Authorities, Service Commissions and Statutory Authorities (including THA) on an Inquiry into the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Regulated Industries Commission. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
9. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Tourism to the Fifteenth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination into the Expenditure and Internal Controls of the Ministry of Tourism. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
10. Response of the Service Commissions Department to the Nineteenth Report of the Public Accounts Committee on the Examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Chaguanas Borough Corporation for the financial years 2008 to 2011. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

11. Annual Report of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago for the year ended September 30, 2017. [*The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy)*]
12. Land Acquisition (Requisition) Order, 2019. [*The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi)*]

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (Presentation)

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have the honour to present the following report:

Twenty-Third Report of the Public Accounts Committee on an Examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation for the financial years 2008 to 2011.

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT

Social Services and Public Administration Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (Presentation)

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Webster-Roy): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the following report:

Seventh Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an Inquiry into the Management of the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme.

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

US President Invitation to Caribbean Leaders (Exclusion of Trinidad and Tobago Prime Minister)

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Question No.1 to the Prime Minister: In light of the invitation from the President of the United States to five (5) Caribbean leaders excluding the Prime Ministers of Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and St. Kitts and Nevis on Venezuela and other matters, could the Prime Minister indicate whether he has had discussions with the Caricom Chairman to voice the Community's collective concern to the United States that these countries were deliberately excluded?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I am in no position to determine that Trinidad and Tobago or anybody has been deliberately, unwittingly, accidentally or otherwise invited to anybody's private home. What I do know is that as Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, I am constantly in communication with my Caricom colleagues including the Chairman of Caricom.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam. Madam, that response from the hon. Prime Minister, one might describe as a fool's paradise [*Crosstalk*] but the question is, Madam, could the Prime Minister say whether his Caricom colleagues share his views of "so what" in response to being left out of diplomatic talks with the President of the United States seeing that Barbados, St. Kitts and Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Ministers told all and sundry that they are making tremendous progress in resolving the crisis with Venezuela.

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I have no idea what that fulmination is about, so I do not know that I could response to any of that it. What I could say is, that I am not the one to answer what my colleagues think about the issue. What I

do know is what Trinidad and Tobago thinks about it, and we at Caricom, Madam Speaker, we have a clear arrangement of a caucus, and the caucus has provided certain arrangements for responding to these issues.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, supplemental.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Prime Minister indicate the steps taken or the plans to take to repair relations with the US in the light of our exclusion from an important meeting taking place in Miami and the role of our lobbyists in this regard?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, if it is that my colleague regards a requirement to repair relations with his neighbour if he is not invited to his neighbour's party, I am afraid that is not the yardstick that Trinidad and Tobago uses. We have no relationship to repair, because as far I am aware, there is no tear in the relations between Trinidad and Tobago and the United States. The United States remains a friendly country, and insofar as you might have a disagreement as to the approach on Venezuela, it has nothing to do with the relationship between the people of the United States and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, notwithstanding the effort of those on the other side to create that kind division.
[Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, to the hon. Prime Minister, in light of this situation, does the Prime Minister still hold to his position that Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and St. Kitts and Nevis have made significant progress in the Venezuela crisis while standing outside, uninvited, to diplomatic talks with one of the major parties in this situation?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, for you and for the benefit of the national community, Trinidad and Tobago and the countries that are called in this way are not members of the Lima Group, have not been and the actions of the Lima Group are not applicable to our absence. If we wanted to be that group, since the Lima Group was formed, Trinidad and Tobago and other Caricom countries who have not become part of the Lima Group could have done so.

Careful analysis will show, Madam Speaker, that the members who have been invited to the private residence of the American President are members from the Lima Group, and I do not know why that is being confused with Caricom. There is an arrangement in Caricom where Caricom has put in place a certain amount of presence of leaders, and those leaders have been carrying Caricom's business.

The invitation to the President's House was not to Caricom, it was to individual members who are members of the Lima Group, and I do not why Members of Parliament in Trinidad and Tobago would want to misrepresent this situation so as to create an issue where none exists.

Mr. Imbert: The DR is not even a member of CARICOM and they are there too.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: The Dominican Republic is not even a member of Caricom, and we do not go around begging for invitation, Madam Speaker, because none is necessary. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, supplemental.

Mr. Charles: Is the Prime Minister, at all concerned that his coldness, belligerence, some may say, towards the US may be the reason why we were not invited to important discussions to discuss bilateral relations between us and them?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I am very happy to see that my colleague

from Naparima, the dining partner of Marie Le Pen is here today advocating that there is something to be gained by conducting foreign affairs in such a way that you do not disgrace the country. Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South—

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Madam Speaker:—I being disturbed. Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Yes, Madam Speaker. As a man who sold out the country's image for a plate of food, I do not know that the Member for Naparima has any basis to be concerned about Trinidad and Tobago's position in foreign policy.

[Desk thumping]

Madam Speaker: By now we should all be familiar with Standing Orders we have reached for. Member for Princes Town.

**Paria Fuel Trading Company
(Retracted Sale/Request for Proposals)**

Mr. Barry Padarath (*Princes Town*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Question No. 2 to the Prime Minister: Could the Prime Minister inform the House whether he has had any discussions with the Mr. Wilfred Espinet, Chairman, of Paria Fuel Trading Company to determine how a Request for Proposals (RFP) was advertised and then retracted for the sale of the company?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): No.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Could the Prime Minister indicate whether he has requested a report from the line Minister or Mr. Espinet into how this matter occurred?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, as you would have observed, at the first

opportunity on return to this country I spoke to the national media and by extension the national community and clarified this matter beyond all confusion.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Princes Town.

Mr. Padarath: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the hon. Prime Minister say whether or not he continues to express full confidence in Mr. Espinet as chairman of Paria Fuel Trading Company?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, whenever an appointment is made by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago with respect to positions in the state enterprises sector, if it is that the Government has no confidence in any appointee, the Government will act appropriately.

Mr. Padarath: So the answer is, yes?

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Singh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Prime Minister indicate whether or not Paria Fuel Trading Company had a profit for its last year of operation?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I have no documentation to respond to that, and if that question is properly filed with the appropriate notice, the Government will be in a position. Because I mean, Madam Speaker, I seem to recall that the restructuring of Petrotrin came at December 1st last year, and it is quite surprising that a Member could come to the House and ask for the first-year profit when the first year has not even been concluded.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Prime Minister, in light of your confidence in Mr. Wilfred Espinet, would you indicate whether Government authorized him to conduct

negotiations for the loan of US \$1.4 billion?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the answer is yes. And in this House and out of this House, we have spoken on this matter of the Petrotrin debt management ad nauseam indicating that the Ministry of Finance in protection of the country's financial situation had the responsibility to make sure that we do not default on that debt.

When we went into the restructuring programme for Petrotrin one of the things that happened, and we said so before to the country, to those who listen, that Petrotrin would be taking responsibility for this and relieving the Ministry of Finance. And, Madam Speaker, today if it is that Petrotrin is able to raise the finance that the Ministry of Finance was having to raise, I do not see why that so upsets my friend on the other side.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Rehiring of Former Petrotrin Employees (Details of)

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. In light of the Prime Minister's public commitment prior to the closure of Petrotrin that former employees will be given priority in the rehiring process, could the Prime Minister inform this House how many former employees of Petrotrin have been employed at Heritage Petroleum Company Limited, Paria Fuel Trading Company Limited and Guaracara as of March 22, 2019?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, I am in no position to respond to that question, but if the question is filed with appropriate notice to the relevant Minister, I am sure an answer could be had.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Prime Minister inform this House of whether the chief executive officers have been recruited at the Paria Fuel Trading Company and Guaracara Refining?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I am aware that officers are running those companies whether in the capacity of chief executive officer, chief financial officer or otherwise. That is a matter that can be answered by the appropriate Minister if the appropriate question is filed.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

High Commission in Uganda (Closure of)

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, to the Prime Minister: Could the Prime Minister advise on the strategic thinking behind the closure of the High Commission in Uganda?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the idea behind closing the commission in Uganda is that we had observed that the role of the Mission in dealing with East Africa could have been improved but improved in such a way that it takes into account the presence of the Arab world in today's economy and our requirement to have a presence in the middle-eastern area. So we set about to do, Madam Speaker. And as these things are never static, as we went along that line, certain developments arose in the international community which has caused us to be, we are making way slowly on that. So it was a change in policy to spread our presence not only in east Africa, but also into the Middle East.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental.

Mr. Charles: Making a decision, final decision, Prime Minister, is the Prime Minister aware that over 320 Missions have been opened in Africa since 2010? Turkey opened 26 and India will open 18 this year. The question is: What is world seeing in Africa that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago appears to be unmindful of?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: The world is seeing Africa and that is why we do have Missions in Africa. We have Missions in Africa, so I do not know what the Turks are seeing or what the others are seeing, but I am sure that they are seeing Africa.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Is the Prime Minister also aware that the High Commission in Uganda provided ready access to 54 Missions attached to countries which form part of the African union and which we have now lost access to?

Madam Speaker: Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, that is a completely erroneous statement. We have a Mission in Cape Town, we have one in Nigeria, and we have other representations. So it is completely unsound to talk about Trinidad and Tobago losing its access to the OAU.

As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, when I went to New York two or three weeks ago as part of the Caricom delegation, one of the main delegations that we met with in New York was the OAU delegation, so it is quite wrong and misleading for the Member for Naparima to come here and say that we have lost access to the OAU.

1.50 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Is the Prime Minister also aware that the High Commission in

Uganda provided ready access to 54 missions attached to countries which form part of the African Union, at which we have now lost access to?

Madam Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, that is a completely erroneous statement. We have a mission in Cape Town, we have one in Nigeria, and we have other representations. So, it is completely unsound to talk about Trinidad and Tobago losing its access to the OAU. As a matter of fact, Madam Speaker, when I went to New York two or three weeks ago, as part of the Caricom delegation, one of the main delegations we met with in New York was the OAU delegation, so it is quite wrong and misleading for the Member for Naparima to come here and say that we have lost access to the OAU.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Is the Prime Minister aware of the size of the continent of Africa, that the mission in South Africa and the mission in Nigeria are—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member. Member. Prime Minister. Member, you have already asked the question, and I am not going to allow that as a supplemental. Member for Naparima.

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: I have a First Class Honours in Geography, you know, I could read a map.

Mr. Charles: Yeah, I have a First Class Honours in Geography.

**Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone Refugees
(Less Favourable Treatment of)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Could the Prime Minister state why refugees from Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone are treated less favourably than those from Venezuela?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, that is a matter

of opinion and a basis for mischief.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Could the Prime Minister then indicate if and when we will have a comprehensive refugee policy that is humane, linked to our absorptive capacity, and which treats Africans and fellow Caricom citizens equally and respectfully?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, these situations tend to generate emotion in one kind or another, as you see here. But Trinidad and Tobago has always dealt with persons within our borders within the context of the adjectives used.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North.

Red House Rebuilding/Refurbishment (Estimated Cost)

Ms. Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*): Could the Prime Minister inform this House what is the estimated cost for the rebuilding and refurbishment of the Red House to date?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, when this Government came into office, the programme for rebuilding of the Red House was in excess of half a billion dollars. UDeCOTT was tasked to restructure that arrangement, stop what was in place and restart it. I am pleased to announce today, Madam Speaker, that the cost of expenditure to date on the Red House is \$244,098,000. [*Desk thumping*] The total commitment that we have for the project is \$408million, over a hundred million dollars less than it was being done for before.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva North.

Ms. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Prime Minister, can you say how soon before this project is completed?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: It certainly would not take 15 years as it was before, Madam

Speaker. We are expecting that the project could be completed before the end of the year. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Prime Minister, would you have the information of who tendered for this project, and who won the tender, and the cost for the tender? If you do not have it now, could you provide them?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, that is a complex answer, because it is not a question of tendering for the project. That is what they were doing. They gave a half a billion dollar project or thereabouts to one contractor. What this Government did was to break up the whole Red House renovation and restoration work into packages. I think there were 17 packages which were tendered separately for various components of work, and it is in that approach that we were able to get the kinds of savings that I have just mentioned, and the project is close to being completed, and a significant amount of local contractors were involved in the project. It is a completely different approach, cost effective and efficient. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

**National Gas Company
(Natural Gas Requirement)**

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Prime Minister: Given a recent report which stated that “the National Gas Company (NGC) told bpTT it wants less natural gas than is available to it for the rest of the year”, could the Prime Minister state the reason(s) for this decision?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, this is an ongoing business arrangement where in recent times as different gas supplies have been coming on to the market, the upstream pricing and the downstream pricing

are slightly out of sync. Meaning that given the change in the market for the downstreamers, they are not in a position to support the upstream prices in some instances, and the NGC being the aggregator is managing its business by controlling how much it buys from the upstreamer to sell to the downstreamer given the price differentials. These are marketing matters which are ongoing and being addressed by those involved.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Prime Minister, could you state if given the disparity in the price that it is now, that there would be a renegotiation with downstreamers as far as an increase in their price?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: All matters of this nature, given the nature of the business and the nature of the issue in front of the users, consumers, suppliers, aggregators; negotiations and renegotiations are in the best interest of all parties to ensure that they all stay profitable in the marketplace.

Madam Speaker: Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Trinidad Petroleum Holdings (Status of)

Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Question No. 8 to the hon. Prime Minister: Given a Reuters report on March 12, 2019 which stated that “Trinidad Petroleum Holdings (TPH) is in advanced debt restructuring talks with banks and has secured new loans of up to US \$1.4 billion”, could the Prime Minister state if the Government of Trinidad and Tobago would be guaranteeing these loans to the state company?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the fact that the company that will be making this loan is owned a 100 per cent by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, Petrotrin's business and by extension the new companies'

business, carries with it an implied guarantee that the Government will stand in the shoes of these companies if they get into difficulty. That has not changed in the marketplace. But what I do know is that the company is in a position to negotiate these loans without the loan following part of the portfolio of the exchequer.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Prime Minister, are you comfortable that after having spent—the State having spent \$18 billion in the Petrotrin issue, are you comfortable with the State having to support another area of major concern of close to \$10 billion again?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I have no idea what he is talking about.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Prime Minister, on this particular issue of the raising of the bond. Does the fact that you had a position of the chairman, a different position of the Minister, and a position by the Prime Minister which seems to leave the door open to the position of the chairman, does that make it more difficult for the company to negotiate on a stand-alone basis rather than have the Government coming for support?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I am not seeing the levels that my colleagues on the other side are seeing. The statement of the chairman and the statement of the Prime Minister are basically saying the same thing. Madam Speaker, what I said yesterday, and I want to repeat it here, is that Paria Company is a new subsidiary that was formed specifically for a purpose that responded to the non-production of fuels in Trinidad and Tobago, meaning the closure of the refinery. Until we are in a position to determine what is going to happen to the refinery—and our position of the Government is, work very hard to get a refinery operating there—until we know what the outcome of that is, it is premature to get

involved in speculating on the future of Paria.

Because the proposals that may come to us, may involve some aspect of Paria's business, which could be duplicated, because if we have a refinery run by somebody in Pointe-a-Pierre, which we hope we will eventually, then just imagine it, we are now importing fuel through Paria. That is its core and sole business. If we are now producing our own fuel in the country then it necessarily follows that some kind of rationalization had to take place. And all I am saying to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, is not to get upset by those who are previous, and let us wait and work it out. We are out there looking for proposals for the refinery, and it would be irresponsible to shut the Paria business aspect of it out and leave the refinery without any access to what Paria is doing, because then you may not get a proposal for the refinery. That is all I am saying, and it is very important for the Government to use our positions with Paria to get the best position for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. That is the Government's position. So it is not a question of what the chairman says or what the Prime Minister says. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hon. Prime Minister, based on what you just described about the refinery, do you have any regrets in closing down the refinery?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, I have no regrets. It is a decision that any responsible Government of Trinidad and Tobago would have taken [*Desk thumping*] because the circumstances of the company required restructuring, and this Government true to its oath of office has embarked upon the restructuring; there is a transitional period, and we have every confidence that the future of our involvement in the oil industry will be bright once we get everything going, and once we get the support, and we escape the undermining of those who would

undermine us. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

**Nicholás Maduro Regime
(Intimidation and Terror Tactics)**

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much Madam Speaker. Could the Prime Minister inform this House whether the Government approves of the intimidation and terror tactics of the military backed regime against elected representatives in the National Assembly who oppose the Nicholás Maduro regime in Venezuela?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago's position on the behaviour of governments around the world is very simple and straightforward. We are governed by the international standards as embodied in the treaty of the United Nations.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes. Hon. Prime Minister, if the situation in Venezuela escalates in terms of state terror against opposition members and their supporters, would you contemplate distancing yourself from the Maduro regime?

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, distancing myself from the Maduro regime? I am not in this job for Keith Rowley, you know. I am in this job as head of a Government of Trinidad and Tobago representing the people of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] and this kind of unnecessary speculation will not draw me into making statements that are not in front of us. Madam Speaker, if it turns out that Trinidad and Tobago has to be a responsible nation, as we are, as we were, as we will be, we will take the appropriate action at the appropriate time on any issue.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Caroni Central.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes. Prime Minister, you know I did not mean that as a personal question—

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: No, I did not know that at all.

Dr. Tewarie:—but you as head of Government. On the website of the Foreign Affairs and Caricom Ministry, Prime Minister, although it speaks to the issue of sovereignty and sovereign equality of all states, and it speaks to the issue of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, on the website it also states, that this is qualified by acceptance of responsibility of the international community to take collective action in cases of gross—

Madam Speaker: Member. Member. Member, you have 15 seconds.

Dr. Tewarie: Yes—gross domestic violations of human rights or genocide, would an escalation of this kind then prompt the Prime Minister on behalf of his Government and the people of Trinidad and Tobago to take a stand against that regime? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Dr. K. Rowley: Madam Speaker, the behaviour of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago will be determined by the principles that we stand by, and all of those principles are spelt out, whether it is about humanitarian, it is about misconduct among nations, within nations, they are all spelt out there, and that is the basis on which any government of Trinidad and Tobago will take a position in situations as envisioned by my friend from Caroni Central. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central.

Recent Developments in Venezuela (Caricom's Vulnerability)

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Madam Speaker, does the Prime Minister agree that—or not agree—recent developments in Venezuela may have rendered Caricom very vulnerable to division and more susceptible to competing

bilateral alliances which now have the potential to undermine any recent initiatives to quicken the pace of the CSME?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, to pretend that divisions in Caricom is new, or could be avoided because of the action of any Prime Minister, is to be naive or mischievous. Caricom has 14 nations, many of which guard certain positions very jealously, and in recent times on this Venezuela issue, of all issues, was one of the few times when Caricom spoke with one voice, when all Caricom members issued the Caricom position with respect to the Venezuela situation. If, Madam Speaker, that is not to be viewed as progress, well then we are not in a position to tell individual countries how to conduct their business. One of the things that we have been struggling with throughout, and Trinidad and Tobago has been in the forefront, of always asking for Caricom to speak with one voice. It is an objective. It is a potential, and we always work towards that. It is not always achieved, but we always travel in hope, arriving at the best destination. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East.

EBC/Local Government Report

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Question 11. In light of the revelation by the Elections and Boundaries Commission that the local government report for the 2019 local government elections was sent to the Minister in June 2017, could the Prime Minister indicate when this report will be laid in the House?

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Speaker, the Ninth Report of the EBC under the Municipal Corporations Act for the purposes of local government election was submitted on 12 June, 2017, to the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government. Issues were raised by the Ministry of Rural

Development and Local Government, which resulted in amendments being made. An updated version was submitted to the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government by the EBC. The report would be laid shortly in this House.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the time for Prime Minister's questions is now spent.

URGENT QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima.

Local Fishermen in Cedros (Prospective Venezuelan Pirates)

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you. To the Minister of National Security: Could the Minister inform the House what urgent measures are being taken to safeguard the interests of local fishermen in Cedros from prospective Venezuelan pirates who continue to pose a daily threat to the lives of these fisher folks?

The Minister of National Security, Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, just this week the Member of Parliament for Point Fortin and myself were down in Cedros, along with the Acting Chief of Defence Staff, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service executive who is in charge of that area, along with the Chief Immigration Officer and other officers. One of the things that we did, Madam Speaker, was take a look at what has already been put in place. We have been increasing the number of border patrols with both larger vessels as well as the interceptors, that is within the waters; on the coastline the police have also increased their patrols. These are some of the things that are being done to deal with these issues. Of course, it has not as yet been comprehensively ascertained that the theft of nets is taking place by what they call

Venezuelan pirates. But that is within the remit of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, and they have stepped up the patrols, and they are working with those on the ground.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: I note the Minister's intention to take some action, but the question is: Why is it that our Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard always seems to be missing in action when our fishermen are harassed in our territorial waters?

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, firstly, I do not think there is any evidence before us that the Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard is missing. The size of the waters, because I actually took the boat, drove up with the Coast Guard from Cedros up to Port of Spain, and the size of water to be patrolled, if we had the OPVs that would have helped. If they had the interceptors, [*Desk thumping and laughter*] and they laugh. I want the people of Trinidad and Tobago to look at the Opposition laugh at the crime that is taking place under their watch, and the lack of border protection—

Hon. Member: "Tell dem dat. Tell dem dat." [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order! Minister of National Security.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. To the population of Trinidad and Tobago, under the People's Partnership, they failed to maintain the Austal vessels. They did not bring the OPVs. They did not maintain the interceptors, so now that we have come in that is what is being dealt with, and the Coast Guard is getting back up to where it needs to be. [*Desk thumping*] [*Continuous crosstalk*]

[*Madam Speaker stands*]

Madam Speaker: Every Member who wishes to ask a question will be allowed. I will not allow—[*Interruption*] Member for Princes Town, you see, if you look this way you would see that I am standing. I am not going to tolerate this shouting

across the floor. Supplemental, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Madam Speaker, thank you. The question is, when will the Government stop looking back and complaining and realize that you are in power for four years, and is this complaint—[*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member, one question. You ask a question, I am not allowing that question. You have another supplemental?

Mr. Charles: Yes. Yes, yes.

Madam Speaker:—based on what is here, and the answer, please.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I appreciate it a lot. Is this complaint indicative of the fact that our borders remain porous and unprotected, and that the Government is incapable of guaranteeing the integrity of our national borders? [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the men and women in Trinidad and Tobago Coast Guard, to the men and women in the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service who on a daily basis are putting their lives at risk, and have increased the security on our borders, and closed down the porousness of our borders with the limited resources that they have, as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, I thank them, while those on the other side ridicule them. [*Desk thumping*]

Elective Surgeries (Cancellation of)

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, to the Minister of Health: Could the Minister inform this House how many elective surgeries have been cancelled at the San Fernando General Hospital due to overcrowding, during the period March 20 to 22, 2019?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, for the period 20th of March, which was

Urgent Questions (cont'd)

2019.03.22

Wednesday, up until yesterday, the 21st, those are the two days I have the figures for, 65 surgeries were in fact completed, 17 elective surgeries were postponed, which means that roughly about 70 per cent of all surgeries carded were in fact done. Only about 30 per cent of elective surgeries were in fact rescheduled, and we expect normal service to resume by Sunday into Monday. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of Health: The 17 persons' surgeries who were cancelled, who do not have the luxury to seek medical attention in the United States of America, could you give us a breakdown of how long they have been on the waiting list for the said surgeries?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Madam Speaker, elective surgeries are surgeries which are scheduled way in advance and do not involve an emergency. For example, cataract surgeries, hip replacement, those are not life-threatening or urgent. Those are the types of surgeries that over the past two days have in fact been rescheduled, and we will come to them from next week, as I indicated. These patients do not have to go to the private sector in Trinidad, or anywhere else. It will be done in the public sector, once we get over this little state of emergency that we have there with overcrowding. Admittedly, there is some overcrowding, but only elective surgeries, less than 30 per cent, have been cancelled. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, with regard to those 17 patients, are you giving them the assurance that they will be fast-tracked in terms of getting their surgeries done as opposed to being added to the end of the waiting list, as sometimes happens?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: And that is—thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Member for the question. And that is in fact what we are doing. They will not be put to the end of the waiting list. They will be treated on a priority basis because they have in fact been rescheduled. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West.

**Detention of Venezuelan Nationals
(Placement of Children)**

Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of National Security: With regard to the detention of 10 Venezuelan nationals at Cedros, including five of whom were children, could the Minister indicate whether the children were admitted to the Child Protection Unit at the Oropouche Police Station?

The Minister of National Security, Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the answer is no. The Immigration officers took the very humane decision after doing an assessment of these Venezuelans, including the children, and decided to release them on supervision orders, so they were not detained for any length of time and they were not sent to the police station.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West, supplemental.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, is there any set procedure or policy to deal with children of Venezuelan immigrants?

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, all children who are within the borders of Trinidad and Tobago fall under our suite of children's legislation. However, in Immigration matters the Immigration department and division can take decisions with respect to the detaining of persons who have

entered illegally or who have overstayed their visits. So, with respect to these particular children, that was utilized. With respect to other children, Venezuelan or otherwise, the Children's Authority is the body that has jurisdiction over them when they have run afoul of the law, which would include overstaying and other matters that deal with Immigration, and we work hand in hand with our Immigration Division.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche West.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Is the Children's Authority sufficiently resourced to deal with this further influx of children?

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I smile, because the legislation that was passed prior to this administration, and proclaimed, they did not put in place the resources that were necessary. So the answer is no. There is being—*[Interruption]* well, what we have done is we have implemented the legislation, and we have been building—*[Continuous crosstalk]*

Madam Speaker: Now, I just heard a “steups”. I am sure it could not be somebody expressing frustration here.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, they must express frustration, because this Government has been the one that has built out the children's courts, we built out the children's homes, we have built out the child protection unit, *[Desk thumping]* they built out the residence for children. All done; halfway houses for the children. All done by this administration, ensuring the protection of children's rights. Could there be more resources for them? The answer is yes. And are we searching? The answer is yes. Just this week in Cabinet we took a decision to provide more resources to the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. *[Desk thumping]* *[Crosstalk]*

If you bring back the hundreds of millions you stole we could build it out.

Madam Speaker: Member for Princes Town, Member for Naparima, I advise you all again.

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, on the request of the Member for Couva South, leave has been granted to withdraw of Question 154. Leader of the House.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, we were very ready to answer it, so, but sorry about that. There are 22 questions for oral answer, we are answering—

Madam Speaker: There are 21.

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Right, there are now 21, and we are answering 20. We are asking for a deferral of question Nos. 140 and 158 for two weeks, and there are seven questions for written answer and we are answering all seven.

Madam Speaker: Thank you very much. So that questions 140 and 158 are deferred for two weeks from today. Member for Oropouche West.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Government Projects by Chinese (Execution of)

62. Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of Finance:

Could the Minister provide the list of Government projects being executed by Chinese state companies inclusive of:

- a) the total cost per project;
- b) the labour cost per project expressed as a percentage of total project cost; and
- c) the percentage of labour cost repatriated by these companies in the form of United States dollars?

**UTT Staff
(Overseas Travel)**

102. Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister state:

- a) the total amount spent on overseas travel by UTT staff in 2018; and
- b) for each overseas trip provide the name and position of the staff who travelled, the purpose and the cost?

**Consultants Hired by UTT
(Total Cost of)**

103. Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister state the total cost for each consultant hired by UTT since September 2015?

**Non-Governmental Organization Unit
(Details of)**

119. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*) asked the hon. Minister of Social Development and Family Services:

With regard to the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Unit, could the Minister provide:

- a) the current status of the Unit;
- b) the current staffing arrangements;
- c) the criteria to qualify for a grant;
- d) the maximum amount that can be disbursed to an NGO;
- e) the number of NGOs that have applied for financial assistance from September 2015 to present;
- f) the list of successful NGO grant recipients inclusive of the NGO's address;

- g) the total grant amount disbursed from September 2015 to present;
- h) the permitted use of grant funding by NGOs;
- i) whether grants are disbursed incrementally or as a one-off payment;
and
- j) the current systems in place to verify funding was used by the recipient for the intended purpose?

**Trinidad Regional Health Authorities
(Number of House Officers)**

126. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister provide the number of filled positions of House Officer in each of the regional health authority in Trinidad for the period July 2015 to December 2018 inclusive of the nationality and graduation year of the successful candidate?

**San Fernando General Hospital
(Number of Perinatal & Neonatal Deaths)**

127. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister provide the monthly number of perinatal and neonatal deaths at the San Fernando General Hospital from January to December 2018?

**Principal Medical and Health Officer
(Number of Vacant Positions)**

128. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government:

Could the Minister provide the current number of vacant positions of Principal Medical and Health Officer within each regional corporation and city corporation?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following questions stood on the Order Paper:

Fence Line Communities (Projects Undertaken)

- 140.** With regard to statements in the Prime Minister's address to the nation on September 2, 2018 that, "*the wider population in fence line communities will benefit from some deliberate additional Government expenditure on infrastructure and social support*", could the hon. Prime Minister provide the specific list of projects that have been undertaken within the fence line communities of Pointe-a-Pierre, Santa Flora, Couva and Gasparillo? [*Mr. D. Lee*]

Question, by leave, deferred.

Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway (Repairs of Collapsed Cylinder)

- 154.** Further to the response to House of Representatives Question No. 292 on September 17, 2018, could the hon. Minister of Works and Transport inform this House when will repairs commence to the collapsed cylinder crossing on the layby onto the north bound lane of the Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway in the vicinity of the Couva/Point Lisas Interchange? [*Mr. R. Indarsingh*]

Question, by leave, withdrawn.

Group DC LLC (List of Achievements)

- 158.** Could the hon. Minister of Finance provide the list of achievements of the lobbyist "Group DC LLC" in fiscal 2018? [*Mr. R. Charles*]

Question, by leave, deferred.

**Tax Refunds to Former Petrotrin Workers
(Expected Date of Receipt)**

91. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

Having regard to the passage of the Finance Act, 2018, could the Minister state the expected date that former Petrotrin workers will receive tax refunds on the first \$500,000 of their severance payments?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, tax refunds on severance payments made to former Petrotrin workers are currently being made at this time as we speak.

2.20 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche West.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: How many workers are affected, Minister?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: The number of workers affected approximates 5,000. It is my understanding, close to 3,000 have already been refunded and the BIR is working assiduously to clear the backlog.

**Flood Mitigation Work
(Details of)**

92. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

With regard to flood mitigation work being conducted in various parts of Trinidad and Tobago, could the Minister indicate:

- a) the expected date that flood mitigation works will commence in the Penal/Debe and Siparia regions;
- b) whether projects were identified for the San Francique and Woodland regions; and

- c) if the answer to (b) is in the affirmative, provide the list and expected completion dates of each proposed project?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, flood mitigation work in the Penal/Debe and Siparia regions commenced on January 15, 2019. Ten projects were identified for the San Francique and Woodland regions; six have been completed; four are currently in progress; three at 90 per cent; one is at 15 per cent. I do have a comprehensive list that I can circulate to the Member.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche West.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, when would this massive landslide in San Francique fix, having regard that you had toured the area in 2016, toured it with me and you promised by November 2017—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, is this a supplemental question based on the response and the question asked?

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Yes, part (b).

Sen. The Hon. R. Sinanan: Madam Speaker, the question that was posed, question 92, did not speak of landslides. So I will have that information forwarded for the Member.

Persons Living at Public Hospitals (Details of)

93. Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*) asked the hon. Minister of Minister of Health:

Could the Minister indicate:

- a) whether there are persons currently living at public hospitals;

- b) if the answer to part (a) is affirmative, provide the number of persons currently living at the San Fernando, Port of Spain and Mount Hope Hospitals; and
- c) whether there is a maximum time frame that a person can be treated at a public hospital?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Yes, there are patients with an extended length of stay at public hospitals. Part (b), there are currently 18 persons at the San Fernando General Hospital and zero, none, at the Port of Spain General Hospital respectively. Answer to part (c), the maximum time frame that the person can be treated at a public hospital varies based on the type of diagnosis and treatment and care required for the individual patient. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Oropouche West.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, why were these people kept there and they continue to live after being treated?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Member for the question. And this is where we do not appreciate our free public health system and because it is free it is abused. Many of these patients are left there be their families because their families do not want to take care of them at home.

Madam Speaker, we have calculated across the health care system, there are 51 patients in all who are long-stay patients. That is the size of a small private hospital. Do you know of any small private hospital with 51 beds that would continue to provide free health care to persons? And 18 are in San Fernando. And this does not consider the patients who stay there when we call their children, come and collect your mother, come and collect your father—and the Member for

Fyzabad is nodding his head—and they do not come.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: So what do you do with them?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: What do you do? You leave them there because we cannot throw them into the streets.

Hon. Member: That is what they want us to do.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: We cannot throw them into the streets. You make some arrangements with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and if there is space they can be accommodated.

But, Madam Speaker, what the country also needs to be told: Christmas and Carnival are when children take their parents to be housed at the public expense in public hospitals because they want to go up north for Christmas. And for Carnival they start to dump their children into the public health care system from Carnival Friday. They do not come Carnival Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and miraculously they appear to collect their children Ash Wednesday. That is what this free public health system does and the taxpayer picks up the bill for that. [Crosstalk] Yes, yes, some parents deliberately give their children Broclax to induce diarrhoea. So they go to the A&E complaining of diarrhoea and you have to keep them.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: And do you report it to the relevant authority?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: There is no law against giving your child a laxative on Carnival Friday. That, Madam Speaker, is what this free public health care system has been doing from the time immemorial and because it is free it is abused. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. Khan: Minister, looking at the question I realize that you neglected to say the amount of people who are also living at St. Ann's Hospital who are not mentally

ill. Could you give the information now or at a later date?

Madam Speaker: Member, I do not see that in the question.

Dr. Khan: Port of Spain. Port of Spain means St. Ann's too.

Madam Speaker: The question was in terms of public hospitals.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, St. Ann's is a public hospital. Thank you very much, Member for Barataria/San Juan. Madam Speaker, the way this country has dealt with mental health at St. Ann's over the decades—and I blame no one for it—it is cultural. It is an absolute tragedy. It is a tragedy. What we have in St. Ann's, which is a holding bay, and I use the term “warehouse”. We warehouse patients there for 20 and 30 years. That is why Cabinet, on my urging, recently approved the creation of a national director of mental health and substance abuse to once and for all start the process, a formal process of decentralizing mental health. Because all the mental health advocates will tell you the best place to treat them is in their communities, near to their support systems or family. Many of them can hold jobs. So once we have that position filled we start once and for all the process of decentralization of mental health so the exact problem you faced, and I am facing now, we can start to treat with it so patients are not warehoused at St. Ann's at the expense of the taxpayer for 20 and 30 years. We have not dealt with it and we are dealing with it now. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**Socially Displaced Persons
(Number Removed from 2015 to 2019)**

99. Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of Social Development and Family Services:

Could the Minister provide the number of socially displaced persons who were removed from the streets of Trinidad and Tobago between September 2015 and January 31, 2019?

The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, over the period September 2015 to January 2019, 45 persons were relocated from the streets to care facilities. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Could you say, as defined by the age group of a child, how many children that comprised of that 45 if any?

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Madam Speaker, I am not able to provide that information at this time but I will do so.

Madam Speaker: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you. Hon. Minister, could you advise from what locations these socially displaced persons were removed from and to what location? Thank you.

Hon. C. Crichlow-Cockburn: Madam Speaker, as indicated in the question, they were picked up all over Trinidad, none in Tobago, and they were all placed at the Centre for Socially Displaced Persons, at Riverside in South Quay.

**University of Trinidad and Tobago
(Details of Restructuring)**

- 100. Mr. Fazal Karim** (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:
With regard to the restructuring of the University of Trinidad and Tobago (UTT), could the Minister state:
- a) the number of staff cuts expected in 2019;
 - b) the estimated total severance amount; and
 - c) whether the amount in part (b) was given a budget allocation in fiscal 2019?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The University of Trinidad and Tobago has advised the following:

- (a) A listing of 244 persons have been identified by the Board of UTT for retrenchment, consequent upon the university's restructuring exercise. That list is now being discussed with a recognized majority union.
- (b) The estimated severance amount is approximately \$18.5 million, comprising: notice period payments, severance payments and unutilized vacation leave payments.
- (c) An application is being prepared by the UTT for submission to the Ministry of Education for supplemental funding in the 2019 Estimates of Expenditure for the implementation of the restructuring proposals.
Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Chaguanas East.

Mr. Karim: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister indicate these 244, what are the locations that they are going to be severed from?

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, at this point I do not have that information, but I could provide it at a subsequent occasion and time. Thank you.

**Staff at UTT
(Investigation of Qualifications)**

101. Mr. Fazal Karim (*Chaguanas East*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister state whether the qualifications of any member of staff at UTT are under investigation?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Madam Speaker, no member of staff of the University of Trinidad and Tobago is currently under investigation with respect to their qualifications. Thank you.

**THA Missing Funds
(Update of Police Investigations)**

107. Ms. Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister provide an update on the police investigations into the missing \$10 million from Tobago House of Assembly (THA) funds meant for Virgin Atlantic Airways?

The Minister of National Security, Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has indicated that the investigation into the missing \$10million from the Tobago House of Assembly, the funds meant for Virgin Atlantic Airways, is ongoing. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is working with the authorities, the law enforcement authorities in the United Kingdom, various law enforcement agencies in the United Kingdom to resolve this matter. At this time it would be imprudent to provide any more information, having regard to these ongoing investigations.

**Assessment of Flood Victims
(Status Update)**

118. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein (*Cumuto/Manzanilla*) asked the hon. Minister of Social Development and Family Services:

Further to the response to House of Representatives Question No. 12 on January 11, 2019, could the Minister provide a status update on the completion date of assessment of flood victims?

The Minister of Social Development and Family Services (Hon. Cherrie-Ann Crichlow-Cockburn): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The target completion date of assessment of flood victims is March 29, 2019. Thank you.

Forensic Science Centre

UNREVISED

(Status Update of Construction)

120. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister provide a status update on the construction of a new forensic science centre?

The Minister of National Security, Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in 2016 the Government began discussing with the People's Republic of China the possibility of getting assistance with the building and outfitting of a new forensic science centre. After extensive discussions with the People's Republic of China they agreed to assist via a grant with the design, construction and outfitting of a forensic science centre and a DNA centre.

Cabinet agreed in January 2018 to the construction of this state-of-the-art forensic and pathology services facility on a parcel of land located in Mount Hope. The Chinese have agreed to a grant of approximately US \$10 million to Trinidad and Tobago for the design, construction and outfitting of these facilities. The designs are currently being worked on by the Chinese along with the Ministry of National Security and we are working on proceeding with this project which it is hoped would be completed by third quarter 2020.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you for that answer, Minister. Whilst we await the completion of that centre—we look forward to it, Minister—can you indicate whether the situation has been normalized at the current Forensic Science Centre with regard to the backlog of those awaiting forensic autopsies?

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much. My understanding is the answer to that

question is, yes, we have brought on board a new forensic pathologist who has been performing his duties there. My understanding at this stage is that there is no backlog at the Forensic Science Centre. We have progressed with the UNDP and we are moving very, I hope, very quickly to get more on board. I have asked them for three additional forensic pathologists. During the interim period we also have had interest from recently graduated forensic pathologists and once they can fit the criteria I intend to hire them.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Only one graduated.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Minister. With regard to those who have expressed interest, can you indicate what might be the issue in terms of they not being brought on board as soon as possible?

Hon. S. Young: Madam Speaker, my understanding is this is a recent graduate. So she is only now graduated and may be available to take up the position. So once we engage in discussions, she has sufficient qualifications, we will move to offer her a contract and employ her.

TTPS Polygraph Testing (Expansion of)

121. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Given the recent use of polygraph tests within the South Western Division, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS), could the Minister indicate whether this measure will be extended to all divisions within the TTPS?

The Minister of National Security, Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, Member for Fyzabad. According to the information

provided by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, the South Western Division was initially selected for polygraph testing due to the high influx of illegal weapons and narcotics in that division. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service will further expand this strategy to areas where they deem necessary. This decision shall be made by the Commissioner of Police and the executive members based on the prevalence of activities such as: high trafficking, high gang-related activities and high existence of weapons and narcotics. It is proposed that the introduction of polygraph testing will ensure that officers remain legitimate in the performance of their duties despite the incidents occurring within the identified areas and their surroundings.

Additionally, given the nature of the duties and operations being undertaken by officers attached to certain specialist units, sections and branches, the Commissioner of Police will give consideration to introducing polygraph testing to officers in these special units.

Human Papillomavirus (Vaccination Programme)

122. Dr. Lackram Bodoë (*Fyzabad*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister state whether the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination programme is still ongoing?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you again, Madam Speaker. The answer, yes, the human papillomavirus vaccination programme is fully operational—for the period 2016 to 2018, 55,104 doses were administered, representing an increase of 37 per cent compared to the period 2013 to 2015 of 40,001 doses. It is expected that by the end of the calendar year 2019, this year, 31,500 doses will be administered. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Minister, can you indicate whether this vaccination is available at all the health centres or just at selected health centres?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: It is available at, I believe, selected health centres. I do not want to put my head on a block to say all. I can find that out for you and it could be asked, not a problem. Thank you very much.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, can you indicate what vaccine is being given? Is it the Cervarix vaccine or the non-ovarian and whether there is contemplation for a second dose to be given six months subsequent to the first?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: I will get that information for the hon. Member.

Madam Speaker: Member for Barataria/San Juan, supplemental.

Dr. Khan: Supplemental, Minister. Minister, is the vaccination programme being extended to boys?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes, the vaccination programme has been available to males between the ages 12 to 26. Even though they do not get cervical cancer they can in fact transmit the virus. But even so, boys who get the virus can develop genital warts and so on. So, yes, it is recommended for both males, between the ages of 12 to 26 and females and girls, between the ages of 12 to 45. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Minister, is there a close collaboration with the Ministry of Education in that matter and sensitization to those who opposed it previously?

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes there is, but I am glad you raise the issue of opposition to vaccines, Madam Speaker, and I thank you for that. Madam Speaker, one of the major health crisis facing the world, not Trinidad and Tobago, the world and including Trinidad and Tobago, is this anti-vaccine campaign, what we call

“anti-vaxxers”, which leads to vaccine hesitancy. And it is unfortunate that it has reach the hallowed halls of the University of the West Indies and the medical fraternity in Trinidad and Tobago.

I was criticized by Dr. Stephan Gift. He wrote an article in the papers chastising me for leading the flu vaccination drive at the Tunapuna market last year. And I was equally concerned when a respected paediatrician got free access to two nights on TV6 during the news programme, prime time, two consecutive nights to talk about anti-vaccine issues. And there was no rebuttal, TV6 did not allow, in the interest of fairness, to have someone come the other nights to give the other side of the story. I was appalled by that for two reasons. We have free speech, but as the Member for Barataria/San Juan will find out, free speech is not absolute. You cannot walk into a crowded cinema and say “fire”. Whilst we have free speech we have an obligation to give both sides to a story and when that medical practitioner got free rein for two nights, consecutively, and no one else got an opportunity to rebut, that is a dangerous thing that we are doing in Trinidad and Tobago. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**Local and Chinese Construction Companies
(Fair Evaluation)**

129. Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of Housing and Urban Development:

Could the Minister state whether local private construction companies competing against Chinese state companies which are backed by the Chinese Government are being evaluated fairly?

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, all proposals submitted by local private construction companies, whether competing against

international firms or not, have been fairly evaluated on their financial capacity and technical capability which is in accordance with their approved tendering process of the Board of the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation.

**Eric Williams Medical Services Complex
(Duration of Pathology Report)**

130. Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister state the rationale why a pathology report for a patient suspected of suffering stage four prostate cancer should take six months at the Eric Williams Medical Services Complex?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, prior to September 2015 the waiting time for histopathology reports ranged from one month to 18 months with a backlog of 1,400 reports. That is what I inherited. After an assessment, it was determined that there were several operational issues that accounted for long waiting times which included the lack of proper equipment, limited staff with the requisite skills and competencies and occupational, health and safety issues.

Since 2017, the waiting time for histopathology reports has been reduced from one to 18 months, which I inherited, down to one to two weeks. This was due to several measures being implemented, including the purchase of several pieces of equipment to improve the process design and strengthen the analysis of sample tissues, including the microtome device, the cryostat machine and an automated stainer; the hiring of additional staff, including pathologists and technicians with supporting training to enhance skills and competencies and the development and implementation of a correction action plan to address several occupational health and safety issues, including the use of personal protective equipment, the need for greater ventilation and timely disposal of chemical and tissue waste. Thank you

very much, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Dr. Khan: Minister of Health, from what you have just said, a specimen should not take more than two weeks for a specimen diagnosis by the pathology department.

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Khan: That is in—

Hon. T. Deyalsingh: Yes.

Dr. Khan: Okay.

**Board of the Children's Life Fund
(Hirschsprung Disease)**

131. Dr. Fuad Khan (*Barataria/San Juan*) asked the hon. Minister of Health:

Could the Minister state whether severe Hirschsprung disease is considered a life-threatening illness by the Board of the Children's Life Fund if diagnosed in a neonate?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Answer, no. The severe Hirschsprung disease is not a life-threatening illness and cannot be eligible for funding under the Children's Life Fund as the treatment for this illness is available locally. To date, a review of the Children's Life Fund records has revealed that no applications—that is, no applications—were received for funding for children suffering with this illness. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

**Heritage Petroleum Company Limited
(Exploration and Production Methods)**

138. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

Could the Minister state the new methods of exploration and production currently being undertaken by the Heritage Petroleum Company Limited that were not previously utilized by Petrotrin?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, maintaining and growing the domestic production base is a top priority to Heritage Petroleum Company Limited. As the company works to meet this goal, it is actively reviewing its exploration workflows, reservoir description and management procedures and assessing its production infrastructure. The plan is to adopt best practices to meet global industry standards and position Heritage Petroleum to be an internationally competitive E&P Company.

The following are the primary methods or procedures that Heritage is in the process of implementing in its exploration and production operations. Under exploration, I have to get a little technical here but excuse me:

1. Collate and build exploration scale products that include, not limited to, gross depositional environmental maps, thermal maturation maps, clear extent maps, composite risk maps and basin models that will collectively form the basis for an effective exploration strategy;
2. Improve reservoir engineering workflows and accompanying synergies with geological and geophysical workflows which will enable proper field description and the creation of appropriate static and dynamic models;
3. Approach field development from an asset scale life cycle perspective;
4. Implement consistent exploration workflows across the marine and land operation to ensure prospect volumes and risk are objectively

described within a single exploration portfolio; and

5. Implement an exploration strategy that can effectively compete for capital resources and create avenues for expanding the company's acreage.

On the production side:

1. Repair of the current metering system, most important, and implementation of new multi-phase metering system to allow for proper production allocation and production optimization;
2. Implementation of a dynamic surface facility model to understand system chokes—that is, the pressure regime across the field, which would identify areas in need of de-bottlenecking and areas with a capacity for increased production;
3. Establishment of an opportunity progression process to ensure that only opportunities that add or protect barrels of production are executed;
4. Improve the production management system for well work including work overs and drilling;
5. Implementation of an automatic level control for PCP pump; and
6. Improve the life of field plan for all assets.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Minister, you have outlined five actions in exploration and six in production. From my information none of those things—they are still being reviewed and assessed. Could you verify if any of those actions have taken place?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Madam Speaker, Petrotrin—well, Heritage is now assessing its options and primarily because the company has been stuck in the past. It has been operating.

I worked at Petrotrin for many years. Petrotrin is still operating as Shell and Texaco and Tesoro operated. The world has changed, the industry has changed and they are now trying to implement the modern technologies because everything now is dynamic models. You create the models to tell you how the reservoir will perform. So it is not static any more, it is dynamic and I think we are going in the right direction. And we have bright young scholars that we have trained in this country, in geology, in geophysics, in petroleum engineering, in reservoir engineering that will lead this charge. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Minister, based on your response, am I to get from your answer that nothing new has been implemented to date?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Sorry, I just missed that question. I was distracted.

Mr. Lee: Can I repeat, Madam Speaker? Based on your response, Minister, is it fair to say that no new measures and actions have been implemented to date?

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: That is not true. A lot of these things call for data acquisition, for setting up your database to run your models on the computer system and all these are preparatory work so that it will happen very shortly. And there are top people that we are recruiting now, both with international experience and our bright local scholars and this programme will be in place in the coming months.

**Petrotrin Refinery Shutdown
(Change of Government's Decision)**

139. Mr. David Lee (*Pointe-a-Pierre*) asked the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries:

In light of the preparation of a request for proposals for the Petrotrin Refinery, could the Minister state the reason(s) for the change from the Government's decision in August 2018 to shut the refinery down?

The Minister of Energy and Energy Industries (Sen. The Hon. Franklin Khan): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, the Government's decision to shut down the refinery or cease operation was based on the fact that it was no longer feasible to operate the refinery in its then unsustainable configuration and capacity, with high overheads, recurring and high debt and high operating costs. The refinery was losing a whopping \$2 billion per annum.

The position at that stage was to stop the multi-billion-dollar haemorrhaging at the refinery and its adverse impact on our national economy and then establish a more positive and feasible approach for the use of the asset. The difference now is that the refinery will no longer be encumbered with the extremely high and unprofitable operating costs of the past which included very high labour costs and it can be sold or leased to a suitable party who will be better placed to source the 100,000 barrels per day of additional crude oil required to operate the refinery at its optimum efficiency level and inject the hundreds of millions of dollars in additional investment capital required to upgrade the refinery to world standards, especially for diesel fuel and manage its operating costs at no expense to the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago while providing employment and significant income generation including taxes to the State.

2.50 p.m.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, would you be kind enough to provide to the population and to the House, for sure, the empirical data that substantiates the repeated statement that it would have cost the Government \$2billion annually to

run Petrotrin? Could you provide that empirical data?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: The accounts of Petrotrin clearly indicated that the company—the refinery in particular—was losing approximately \$2billion per annum. The consolidated accounts indicated much less, but if you disaggregate the account, exploration and production was making significant profit but that was being eroded by the refinery. So the company's consolidated books will indicate smaller losses and sometimes a small profit, but that did not reflect clearly the operations of the refinery which was haemorrhaging significant amounts of money. I will go as far as to say, we were importing 100,000 barrels of crude per day and losing \$5 per barrel on every barrel we refine. I mean, if that is not an untenable situation, I do not know what is.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister state how much the refinery is now—the haemorrhaging that is costing the taxpayers of this country now, presently?

Madam Speaker: Minister of Energy and Energy Industries.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: The refinery has been mothballed. The refinery is not costing anything, save and except the small fee we pay to Damus to keep it safe.

Hon. Member: Security.

Sen. The Hon. F. Khan: Security. Well, those are minuscule costs compared to when you are running the refinery. And we are now—as a Prime Minister said, we have now invited proposals. And I must go on record as saying that the interest is very significant and we expect something very positive to come out of that process.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Caroni East.

Dr. Gopeesingh: No.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

**Damaged Cable Barriers
(Total Cost to Repair)**

152. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of Works and Transport:

Could the Minister inform this House of the total cost to repair the damaged cable barriers along the Uriah Butler Highway and the Sir Solomon Hochoy Highway?

The Minister of Works and Transport (Sen. The Hon. Rohan Sinanan): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in 2011 a contract was awarded for the Gibraltar cable barriers in the amount of \$11.3 million. From 2011 to the end of the contract sometime early 2017, close to \$34 million was spent on repairs. That was an untenable situation. Going forward, the Ministry of Works and Transport has started to do some of the repairs in-house by renting the equipment from the agent of the Gibraltar cable barriers and we are working with them to try to develop the skills in-house, because it is really an expensive system. It is a very good system but the big question is: Can we afford it at this point in time? So from 2018/2019, we would have spent close to \$725,000 on the cable barrier, using in-house labour and renting the equipment from the agent. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Minister. Minister, recently the Minister of Finance raised the loan of approximately \$1.36 billion from the Andean Bank. Will any percentage of—or what quantity of this loan will be used for the expansion of the cable barrier system in the country?

Madam Speaker: I am not going to allow that as a supplemental question.

**Forensic Science Centre
(Commencement Date of Construction)**

153. Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (*Couva South*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister inform this House of the expected commencement date of the construction of the new Forensic Science Centre?

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. With respect to question 153, taking into consideration the response that has been given by the Minister to my colleague in relation to question 120, I have nothing further to ask.

**Hardships Faced by Fishermen
(Consideration of Relief Programmes)**

159. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries:

Further to the response to House of Representatives Question No. 79 on February 15, 2019, could the Minister provide the relief programmes being considered to address the hardships faced by fishermen as a result of the high price of super gasoline and the cessation of the supply of regular fuel?

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, subsequent to the response given in this House on February 15, 2019, by the hon. Minister of Energy and Energy Industries, where it was stated that together with the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, a meeting would be held with the stakeholders to discuss the matter fully. A few days ago the Minister received a formal request from a group of 10 organizations namely: Fishermen and Friends of the Sea; Las Cuevas Fishing Association, The Cocorite Fishing Facility and Fish Market Association; Independent Fishing Union of Trinidad and Tobago; Blue River/Bamboo/ Cunupia Fishing Association; Orange Valley Trawlers

Association; Carli Bay Fishing Association; Claxton Bay Fishing Association; Marabella Fishing Association; San Fernando Cooperative Society Limited; Moruga/La Rufin Fishing Association and the Trinidad and Tobago Fishing Association.

In that letter the organizations indicated that fisherfolk are now forced to use super gasoline which is more expensive and burns faster than regular gasoline. This results in fisherfolk having to spend more money on fuel which acts as a deterrent from going out to sea. The end result is fewer expeditions, limited income, a shortage of supply and the inevitable increase in the price of fish. The organizations requested a stakeholder meeting to discuss the issues affecting the local fisherfolk.

Madam Speaker, in a response to that letter, dated March 18, 2019, the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries confirmed the upcoming stakeholder meeting and in advance of that meeting invited the group of organizations to provide him with their recommendations to deal with the issue of fuel supply and other relevant matters. Madam Speaker, the fuel issues raised by fisherfolk would be determined at the upcoming meeting to be held with these affected persons and their representatives.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Would the Minister tell us, while this meeting is being scheduled, does the Government have any thoughts to present to that meeting in terms of bringing relief to the fishermen?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Charles: Could the Minister enumerate any of these ideas that the Government is contemplating?

Hon. C. Robinson-Regis: Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of

Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, I think it would be prudent for those ideas to come forward at the meeting and not before.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, question time for Oral Questions is now spent.

STATEMENT BY MINISTERS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I have been advised that this item, by agreement, shall be taken later in today's sitting.

NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS BILL, 2019

Bill to provide for the registration of non-profit organisations, the establishment and maintenance of a register of non-profit organisations, the obligations of non-profit organisations and for related matters [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE (INDICTABLE PROCEEDINGS) (AMENDMENT) (NO. 2) BILL, 2019

Bill to amend the Administration of Justice (Indictable Proceedings) Act, 2011 (Act No. 20 of 2011) [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

CIVIL ASSET RECOVERY AND MANAGEMENT AND UNEXPLAINED WEALTH BILL, 2019

Bill to provide for the establishment of the Civil Asset Recovery and Management Agency for the recovery of criminal property through the use of the remedies of restriction in dealings with civil assets restriction and forfeiture of criminal property and the management of criminal property, and unexplained wealth orders and matters incidental thereto [*The Attorney General*]; read the first time.

PROTECTION OF OUR NATION'S WOMEN

Dr. Lackram Bodoie (Fyzabad): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Whereas the United Nations established seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to transform the world by 2030;

And whereas the second target under SDG number five (5) states, “the elimination all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation”;

And whereas women are increasingly becoming victims of domestic abuse, violent crime and human trafficking in Trinidad and Tobago;

Be it resolved that the Government take urgent steps to ensure the protection of our nation's women.

Madam Speaker, as our country approaches its 57th birthday as an independent nation, women in Trinidad and Tobago have much to celebrate. The offices of President of the Republic, President of the Senate, Speaker of the House of Representatives, Leader of the Opposition, currently held by a former Prime Minister, at the time a first for a woman, and sitting here today as the Member for Siparia, are positions currently held by women. Indeed, women occupy high offices in many other spheres of our society, including seats in this honourable House, as Government Ministers and as leaders in the public service and the private sector. Women in Trinidad and Tobago continue to access many opportunities to enable their personal development, for example, in the areas of education and employment. However, Madam Speaker, a dark cloud continues to pervade our otherwise progressive society. I speak of the continuing and unabating scourge of violence directed against our nation's women.

Madam Speaker, if our society is a tapestry, then our women are the fabric that holds us together. Domestic violence is the menace that threatens to destroy it

altogether. Our women have been the matriarchs of our society since the end of slavery and indentureship. Theirs is a role that could never be overstated. But today we exist in an environment, some would say, fostered by this Administration, where our women and girls are under attack like never before. The figures are showing that more of our women and girls are being murdered, raped, assaulted, kidnapped and beaten than at any other time in the history of our country. Whilst we lose our mothers, daughters, grandmothers, aunts and sisters, some are saying this Government seems oblivious to this scourge, a scourge that threatens the very fabric of our society and our future generations.

Madam Speaker, domestic violence is like a cancer eating away at our very existence, but unlike some cancers in a medical sense, there is a cure that can provide relief to all victims of domestic violence, and there is a solution that can reform and rehabilitate the offenders of this ghastly act. Madam Speaker, it is with this in mind that I sought the permission of this honourable House to address the issues of domestic abuse, human trafficking and violent crimes against women. I wish to thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Member of Parliament for Siparia, the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, for sanctioning this Motion [*Desk thumping*] and to thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing it.

Madam Speaker, exactly two weeks ago on March 8th, Trinidad and Tobago joined the rest of the world in celebrating International Women's Day. One of the underlying concerns raised in all of the fora and the events which took place to mark this important occasion, was the call for the greater protection of our nation's women from crime and other forms of violence, especially domestic violence. Madam Speaker, a quick search on the Internet revealed that there were at least 39 newspaper articles relating to domestic violence alone in 2018.

Many citizens and several commentators have expressed a view that this Government has neglected our women and girls and has failed to protect them. A frequent claim by victims of violence and stakeholders is that the protection of our women and girls is low down on this Government's list of priorities. There is an urgent need for action to be taken to provide the greatest protection to our women and girls. We cannot continue to allow our women and girls to endure the suffering, hardship, murder and mayhem that they have experienced in the last few years. And it is for this reason that I have brought this Motion today to force and to compel the Government to take urgent action to protect and defend our women and to eliminate all forms of violence against our women.

Madam Speaker, during this presentation, I intend to review some of the evidence that women are increasingly experiencing—being subjected to all forms of violence, to remind us of why, as a country, we need to do more to address this issue, to examine some of the measures that are already in place and to point out some of the shortcomings of these current measures, and to provide some suggestions on the way forward, including examples from other jurisdictions. Madam Speaker, in preparation for this Motion I engaged several stakeholders who provided valuable information and suggestions, and before I proceed I would want to take the opportunity to thank them—the many stakeholders—who provided these suggestions, and these would have included representatives from CEDAW, from WOMANTRA, from the UWI, Institute of Gender Development Studies, from the Coalition against Domestic Violence, from the MindWise Project, the UNC Women's Arm and, of course, as well, the Equal Opportunity Commission.

[Desk thumping]

I also want to state, for the records, Madam Speaker, that some of the views

and ideas expressed here would have emanated from two events in the constituency of Fyzabad, one last November to mark the commemoration of International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women when several of the participants would have expressed their views, and recently this week when, again, many woman would have participated in an event to celebrate and to mark International Women's Day [*Desk thumping*] and some of their opinions and suggestions are taken into this presentation.

Madam Speaker, a review of statistics from the Crime and Problem Analysis Branch of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service for the 14-year period 2000 to 2013, showed that 329 women were killed as a result of domestic violence. This translates to an average of just over 23 women per year. Madam Speaker, this means that during this period an average of close to two women were killed every month from domestic violence incidents, a very startling figure, Madam Speaker, especially so, in the knowledge that this is an entirely preventable cause of death amongst women.

So, Madam Speaker, are things any better today? Well, in 2017—and it hurts my heart to say this—perpetrators had a bumper year inflicting their atrocities on the nation's women as 52 women were murdered, 19 of them as a result of domestic violence. Well, what happened in 2018? Rhondor Dowlath, writing in the *Trinidad Guardian* on Tuesday, January 01, 2019—New Year's Day this year—noted that the year 2018 ended with 516 murders, making it the second deadliest year in the history of Trinidad and Tobago. She went on to say—to note—that 47 females and 13 children were killed in 2018. Of the female deaths, 24 of the 47 were related to domestic violence and three of the children killed were domestic violence-related. This prompted Marina Salandy-Brown, writing in the *Newsday*

on Sunday 09 September, 2018, to conclude that killing women is now a sport. Allow me to quote from this article:

“Killing women is now a sport”

Very unfortunate headline but I am afraid that there is some truth in it. And she says:

“The murder on Monday of Tehilla St. Clair by her enraged former lover brought me up short, not only because of the horror of the act but rather, the words of the victim's five-year-old child who witnessed the murderous act and had himself been attacked.”

And I quote:

“‘If you see how he chop up my mummy’, he reportedly cried. The little boy had run to get help once the violence had started. The question: ‘What will become of that young person who has been so traumatised and violated’, immediately framed itself in my mind. He will need life-long help to overcome it, but will he get it?’”

And this is what is stated here, Madam Speaker, and I suspect that is the reason that we are debating this here today, to look at the measures that are going to be in place, not only to assist the victims of domestic violence directly, but also the children and those who witness it as well.

So, Madam Speaker, you know—so we have a perspective on this and we are speaking about domestic violence, but it is happening in the perspective of other crimes that are taking place in this society. And, again, if I just look at 2018—I will just run through the highlights. I do not want to go into details but this is what has been happening in Trinidad and Tobago.

“Brutal murder as Palo Seco woman chopped to death by ex-boyfriend...”

Pregnant woman...found murdered in Wallerfield.

Mom of six found dead.

US citizen murdered: Throat slit.

Woman Police Constable Raquel Renee Rachel Kipps, 27...was murdered.

National awardee found dead after house fire...

Body found by hunters may be missing mom – Cops suspect

Woman found dead at Maraval home

Woman shot in Couva; succumbs to injuries at hospital

Woman stabbed to death in Port of Spain

Longdenville pastor stabbed to death

Woman found dead in the bathroom of the attorney's office

Trini Woman stalked, killed by ex-boyfriend in Florida

Massacre in La Brea: Man, woman, children killed"

You may recall that incident when four people were killed.

"Woman shot dead outside home

Woman beaten to death in Gasparillo

Female victim in Woodbrook robbery identified; killed for \$7,000

Autopsy shows Arima woman died from asphyxiation

Badly burnt remains confirmed to be that of missing woman"

I just list the incidents so that we put all of this in perspective.

So, Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that violent crime against women resulting in death is increasing in our society. But the story does not end there. Those who escape death suffer physical and psychological injury. Madam Speaker, figures from the Crime and Problem Analysis Branch of the TTPS for the same 14-year period, 2000 to 2013, revealed the following domestic violence statistics:

Sexual abuse, 600; wounding, 661; assault by beating, 9,565; malicious damage, 189; threats, 5,351; verbal abuse, 637; emotional psychological abuse, 457; financial abuse, 21; child abuse and abandonment, 143; breach of protection order, 1,074—and I will come back to speak about this latter in my presentation, Madam Speaker—breach of protection order, 1,074; offensive phone calls, 51. Madam Speaker, this represents a total of 19,078 breaches and offences against women in the 14-year period.

What is more frightening, Madam Speaker, is that surveys have revealed that there is a significant amount of under-reporting by victims of threats and crimes committed against them and these figures may have to be multiplied by a factor of 6.3 according to some studies to determine the real extent of the problem in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Madam Speaker, why are women afraid to report these violations of their persons? Nalinee Seelal, in an article in the *Newsday* of 02 March, 2018, entitled: “Teacher lived life of abuse”, and I just want to quote from this article regarding murder victim Margaret Guevarra. This is following the investigation after her death:

“Officers were also informed by relatives of the victim that she opted not to report the acts of violence committed against her because she did not want to disrupt her children’s life. Relatives told investigators that they often observed strange black-and-blue marks, scratches and other injuries from Guevarra and when inquired, she made excuses, claiming that she had fallen or suffered the injuries while doing house work.”

A very common finding in our society, Madam Speaker. We know now, Madam Speaker, that from a report in yesterday’s *Express* newspapers that this male

relative—and we continue to hear about “male relative” being reported in the newspaper—was, in fact, her husband who is now charged one year later for her murder; a 46-year-old beekeeper of Coalmine, Sangre Grande.

So, allow me, Madam Speaker, to draw the attention of the House to the National Women's Health Survey, a very useful, important document with important information which I will be referring to throughout my presentation. And the findings of this survey suggest that one in three women remained quiet about their experience and most survivors did not seek or receive assistance for their situation. This is worrisome because it means that there is something happening which prevents, or makes victims and potential victims afraid to access services that may be in place.

“Several factors precluded women from accessing help...fear, shame, and the normalcy associated with violence.”

And I just want to speak a little bit more about this, Madam Speaker, normalcy associated with violence. And if I were to suggest that the cultural norms that serve to justify male domination within the family will facilitate the tolerance of domestic violence and the indifference of the authorities. And, again, we have to look at that in terms of how the police treat with victims of domestic violence. There is a lot that needs to be done in that area.

The reason why survivors were reluctant to leave violent partners, including—and I often wonder about this, Madam Speaker. Why is it that women remain in violent homes, knowing that statistically they stand a very good chance of not coming out alive of those relationships? The reasons included—and I am quoting again, Member for Tobago East. I am sure you are very familiar with the findings of this Women's Health Survey. The reasons were given as to why they

were reluctant to leave violent partners, included:

“...economic survival...”

And this is something for us, because it means that we have to take steps to ensure the economic independence of women going forward in our society.

“... concern for their children”—that was the case with Margaret Guevarra—“and a desire to keep the family structure intact.”

So all very noble causes, Madam Speaker, but unfortunately, reasons that have led to the death of so many women in Trinidad and Tobago. Women of all ages and in all places continue to be at risk. Angela McKenzie, 64, was hacked to death in her garden in Siparia earlier this year, trying to do some gardening, plant some crops, perhaps. Maria Neptune, 18, killed outside her home in Macoya. Charisse Bramble, killed in a home invasion, and so on.

So, you know, Madam Speaker, there is a video—and I tried to make it a little bit light because this is very serious and gruesome statistics that we are dealing with here. I just want to make it light. There is a video that says, “Women gone wild.” And I am wondering whether in Trinidad and Tobago that video now is “Men gone wild.” It makes me wonder, really and truly, what is happening in our society.

So, Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago remains a dangerous place, not only for locals but for visitors. Sadly, we all remember the case of the Japanese pan player and Carnival tourist Asami Nagakiya who was found dead in the Queen's Park Savannah on Ash Wednesday in 2016, and as recently as two weeks ago when two female English tourists were assaulted in Tobago. So women remain at risk throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, allow me to just address briefly the issue of human

trafficking which was also part of the Motion, and I quote here from the Director of the Counter-Trafficking Unit at the Ministry of National Security, Alana Wheeler, who was speaking at a Maraval Rotary Club meeting in February 2019, stated that:

“An average of 10 to 15 cases of human trafficking are identified annually in Trinidad and Tobago.”

In 2019 she noted that:

“...there have been 10 confirmed cases”—so far—“of mixed nature—forced labour and sexual exploitation, especially amongst women.”

This is of increasing concern because of the issue that is happening with the refugees coming across from Venezuela and other Latin American countries. But there is more to it, Madam Speaker. In a bulletin from the—the Bulletin 24076, emanating out of Bogotá in Colombia, October 03, 2018, states that a criminal organization in a particular region in Colombia recruited young people between the ages of 15 and 19 years and promised them lucrative work in—guess where, Madam Speaker? Trinidad and Tobago. And they are in the process of trying to validate about 100 cases. And, of course, recently, last month, we would have had the case of 19 South American female victims between the ages of 15 to 19 years being rescued by the police in various areas in north Trinidad. So human trafficking in Trinidad and Tobago remains a clear and present danger.

Ria Sookdeo and Carolyn Katwaroo and others disappeared under mysterious circumstances and are yet to be found, and this has fuelled speculation that they may have been victims of human trafficking. The US Department of State Report on Human Trafficking 2018, makes the observation that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago does not fully meet the minimum standards for the

elimination of trafficking. This is something that will raise a red flag. And, of course, it suggests that we have a lot more to do as a nation. And, of course, the Government will have a lot more to do. And they raised some concerns about delays in prosecution, the decrease in the amount of funding for victim services and the fact that we did not have policies in place—policies and laws regulating foreign labour recruiters.

3.20 p.m.

Madam Speaker, I just want to return to the bruising issue of domestic violence, and again, if you will allow me, this is communication that was sent to me following a request from the Crime and Problem Analysis Branch of the TTPS. I asked for the figures over the last 10 years, 2008 to 2018, in terms of domestic violence and what has been happening. Madam Speaker, the results that I received are as follows: in 2008—we are speaking directly now to murders attributable to domestic violence, and the figures that were given are: 2008, 19; 2009, 11; 2010, 18; 2011, 8; 2012, 10; 2013, 12; 2014, 15; 2015, 10; 2016, 19; 2017, 19; 2018, 24. Again, very, very startling figures.

Madam Speaker, there are several reasons why all of us here, as parliamentarians, must be concerned, and why we on this side, as Members of the Opposition, and on behalf of the women of this country, should be asking the Government as the custodian of the country's resources to do more and to take urgent steps to ensure the protection of our nation's women from increasing crime and domestic violence. Why should we be addressing this issue? Well, of course, first of all we have a moral obligation as a civilized nation to protect our nation's women. Women play a fundamental and critical role in the economic and social development of any society, and it is in our interest, as a nation, that we protect

their health so that they may fulfil their reproductive role. Yes, Member for St. Joseph, I am sure you would appreciate that this is a public health issue as well, their reproductive role.

This is very close to my heart because as a professional I have been dealing with women in a professional capacity for more than 30 years and I see the pain sometimes. Sometimes they come into the office with the bruises and the black spots that cannot be easily explained and they come up with excuses, but you know with my experience I know what is happening, and then I see the results of it five years down the road when the relationship has separated for those very reasons. I also see the pain that women experience in giving birth to children and ensuring that the generations continue. So that is a very important role that they have, the reproductive role. And, of course, you have the productive role, Member for Tobago East, as very productive members of society and women are increasingly taking up that challenge and we need to address their productive role in terms of the nonpaid social work which I am sure that we all aware of, and their community development role.

In passing, with regard to the community development role and solutions that may be available, I just want to bring to the attention of the House the Winard study, which is a study that was done in East Port of Spain that has many recommendations which I hope the Government will be inclined to look at and to implement. So we have had two very good reasons why we should be looking at this, but more than that, Madam Speaker, is that our Constitution guards the human rights of all persons within the country and holds the State accountable for violation of human rights. So we are legally bound by our Constitution to protect the rights of women, and this is so because we know that gender-based violence

threatens women's rights to life and security of the person, and the obligation mandated by this provision in the Constitution is to protect the human rights of persons and it places a positive obligation on the State to protect women and girls from domestic and sexual violence.

And, of course, the reason why we are here today is because we have a duty to comply with International Human Rights Conventions such as CEDAW 1979, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women 1994, and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995 amongst others, and most importantly our agreement to pursue STG 5 and other UN development goals going forward to 2030.

So, Madam Speaker, there are very, very good reasons why we should be paying attention, trying to address this matter and to address it urgently. How do we define domestic violence, intimate partner violence? I just want to mention the intimate partner violence. The UN definitions which I do not need to go into, but I just want to indicate that the term "intimate partner violence" is often used synonymously with domestic abuse or domestic violence, so that when we are speaking we are speaking the same language. And to note that now domestic violence, the definition is commonly defined to include all acts of physical, sexual, physiological, or economic violence; a very, very important part of that definition.

Madam Speaker, I did mention the women's health survey which IDB funded. It was a national quantitative cross-sectional study which was designed to provide a diagnosis of violence against women and girls in Trinidad and Tobago, with a specific emphasis on intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence. I trust that the Member for Tobago East, the Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister with responsibility for gender affairs, has taken

careful note of the recommendations and is preparing to engage all stakeholders to solve this problem.

I say this because at the launch of this survey—and I refer to an article here written by Carol Matroo, “Domestic violence victims feel trapped”, where the Minister is reported and quoted to have said that:

“...behaviour change did not have the luxury of time...”

—and I agree with her—

“...and it was not something that Government could do on its own”. Now, this is what the Minister said at this launch, that the “Government could not do this on its own”, and we on this side here are very willing and able to assist in whatever is necessary, and, of course, all the NGOs and so on, and all of the stakeholders in Trinidad and Tobago. So I suspect this is what the Minister is alluding to, but I am sure that we will hear what her intentions were when she made that statement.

So, Madam Speaker, as I said the report is here, it speaks to—there is a sample of just over 1,000 women—1,079 women. I would not have the time to go into all of the findings nor the recommendations, but just to note that 30 per cent of women experienced lifetime physical and/or sexual partner violence, 68 per cent of women with very controlling partners and again that is an issue, one of the factors experienced emotional partner violence over the lifetime, and sometimes we tend to overlook the abuses and the emotional abuse, but eventually that may lead to physical abuse as well. And interesting, 7 per cent of women experience physical violence during pregnancy.

You know physical violence during pregnancy, when the women is trying to fulfil her role in terms of propagation of society, how can we allow that? How can that happen? Ninety per cent of these incidents is not by strangers. It involves the

father of the unborn child. A very, very frightening statistic, and something that we as a people, we as a nation, as a country, need to take note of and to take urgent steps to address. What is also worrying in this study is that one-third of intimate partner survivors felt that violence between a husband and a wife is a private matter and we still have that issue. We have that cultural issue, and this could be one of the hindrances that is preventing this going forward in terms of addressing and reporting this matter properly.

If we were to put this another way, in the 15 to 64 age bracket, over 100,000 women in Trinidad and Tobago are estimated to have experienced one or more acts of physical and/or sexual violence perpetrated by male partners. So we are talking about partner violence here. What is even more a worrying statistic is that approximately 11,000 are likely to still be in an abuse relationship. Very, very, very worrying. The study also identified the associated factors that might preclude women to be victims of domestic abuse, and some of the factors were lower education attainment. So that is something that we can address. It was found to be more common in rural women rather than urban woman. Again, that may be a cultural issue. Age between 20 and 34 years, married or living with a partner at a young age. What about the perpetrators, the men who perpetrate this domestic violence? Well again, lower levels of education, so an avenue for intervention. Unemployed, big issue, and, of course, in difficult economic times and even more an important issue, men who are engaged in some form of substance abuse, an issue that we can address, and again at the age 25 to 34.

What were the common triggers identified by women for their partners' violent behaviour? What would cause men to come home and start to beat up on their partners? Well, being drunk was identified as one factor, being jealous

apparently is a major issue in this country—[*Interruption*]

Dr. L. Bodoë: Sorry?

Hon. Member: Jealous and drunk.

Dr. L. Bodoë: Well both, of course. It does not exclude—and him wanting to show her who is the boss was identified as a factor. You know it is difficult to understand how that can be an issue in Trinidad and Tobago in 2019, but be that as it may, Madam Speaker.

So what is the impact of domestic violence? I refer to an IDB Technical Report of 2016 by Randy Seepersad, and, of course, we know the most serious impact would be death and we spoke about those figures already; violence, and interestingly of 10,000 cases reported between 2007 to 2012, 72.3 per cent were female. Of course, we know that, that is, the majority of—females are more subject to domestic abuse. We seem to have similar numbers in the African and East Indian population. So that does not make a difference.

The other issues, the other effects, the other impact is a physiological distress and the trauma. Quite often you can have women suffering from anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder. They are more prone to higher consumption levels of alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs. They are more likely to experience depression and attempt suicide; and, of course, you have the health complications, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancy, miscarriage and so on. Madam Speaker, it also creates a big effect on society, and it creates fear amongst those who are close to it, those who experience it, neighbour sometimes in the village or in an apartment building, and a sense of helplessness amongst those who are unsure as to what needs to be done to reduce its incidence.

So, Madam Speaker, I have defined the problem. Allow me just to have a

look now at the measures that are in place to deal with domestic violence, and I want just wanted to categorize those really into three categories. One would be the legislative measures; the other would be the administrative and policy measures, and I also want to speak a little bit about preventative measures, measures that we can implement to prevent this problem in the first place. The basis of the legislation that addresses gender-based violence, of course, is the Domestic Violence Act of 1999, which seems to be a very progressive piece of legislation, but which has been found to be wanting in several areas. There are quite a few provisions here that can protect women, but the question is: Why are we still having the number of cases of domestic abuse and women getting killed despite the legislation? And I think it is in this regard that many have looked at the shortcomings and the shortfalls in this Act especially the Equal Opportunity Commission.

I wrote the Chairman of the Equal Opportunity Commission seeking a response because I became aware during my research that they had proposed some amendments to the Domestic Violence Act, and in her defence, the Chairman, Lynette Seebaran-Suite, indicated to me that I should look at their media statement, and so I just want to draw reference to the media statement of the EOC and this is dated 17 March, 2018, and it speaks about the Domestic Violence Act being a progressive piece of legislation, but it says:

“As such, in November 2017, the EOC proposed ten legislative and policy amendments to the act, at a public forum jointly hosted with the UWI Institute for Gender Development Studies commemorating the 16 days of activism on ending gender-based violence.”

This is an event that normally takes place locally and internationally around

November/December. You would be very much aware of that, Madam Speaker.

“...these proposed amendments can be used to strengthen the accountability of the State and state actors to perform with due diligence to protect and prevent against gender-based domestic violence.”

They would have justified—there is a policy document from the EOC, a position paper, that justifies the reasoning behind the amendments. I do not need to go into detail of that. I am sure my colleagues who are speaking after me with more legal background will address that. But just to mention in passing, some of the recommendations they have made would be to remove the perpetrator from the home, not the victim; the police must respond to all complaints”. That apparently is in the law but not being followed; to amend the definition of cohabitant to include same sex relationships, taking account of our changing social situations in the country; police must charge for assaults. Again in the law, but not being followed and for breaches of protection orders; no bail for persons charged with breaches of the protection orders; provide a network of support to persons who have a protection order; create intervention for perpetrators threatening to kill, which they are suggesting as a new section.

The issue of dealing with perpetrators, both from a legal perspective and a social perspective still need some work to be done. We tend to focus on the victims but not so much on the perpetrators of these crimes. And they go on to talk about interagency protocols between police, magistrates, prosecutors, and social workers and shelters; and to create mandatory programmes for victims and perpetrators; and to resuscitate the police domestic violence register. This media release, Madam Speaker, and I quote here directly now from this media release.

“We call on the Honourable Attorney General & Minister of Legal Affairs to

expedite these proposed amendments as a matter of urgency, to better respond and prosecute domestic violence as a criminal act, as we believe that the amendments will effect real change and prevent future domestic deaths.”

So we await the response of the Government with regard to this request from the Equal Opportunity Commission and just to indicate that these proposed amendments have gotten support from various quarters. I quote here from the *Guardian* of 26 June, 2018, article written by Shaliza Hassanali, “Police association welcomes changes to protection order”, and I just want to quote from this article because there is an intervention here which could be regarded as controversial, and it comes from the President of the Police Service Welfare Association, Inspector Michael Seales, speaking about gaps in the Act and he is in support of some of the proposals saying that

“...the Police Service needed more power”—and—“...recommending not harsher penalties but decisive action that protects the victim.”

So he is calling for the swift implementation of the electronic bracelets on people served with protection orders. So this is a suggestion here coming from the President of the Police Service Welfare Association.

One of the issues before I leave the Domestic Violence Act is the issue of the breach of the protection order, and you know I often wonder—I mean, it is a protection order. It is meant to protect the woman from violence, from being killed, but in many, many instances we have a situation where in spite of a protection order women get violated and they get killed. What is the reason? Let us listen to this story, and again I quote here a story by Sharlene Rampersad and the headline is “Man beating me in the night”, and this speaks to the experience of a:

“Single mother, Ramrajie Chance”—who—“is appealing to the police to

step up their efforts to arrest a man she alleges continuously breaches a protection order and beats her in front of her young children every night.”

This makes a joke of the protection order, Madam Speaker. She goes on to say that:

“Within hours, the man breached the order, beating Chance in front of the children before stripping himself naked and threatening to kill the children. He was arrested later that night and spent the weekend in police custody but released on bail on Monday.”

And he comes back to taunt and to haunt this family.

Madam Speaker, she is quoted as saying:

“It is too much for me, I just want a little bit of peace with my children and no matter what he says when he reaches in front the magistrate he coming right back here to beat me when court finish...”

So this is a women talking about her own experience in terms of how the protection order has failed to protect her. So again, a lot of food there for thought and something that we would need to pay attention to.

Madam speaker, what about the proposals from other stakeholders; the proposals from the head of the Institute of Gender Development Studies who has raised concern about no approved national strategic plan to end gender-based violence?—a plan which apparently has been sitting in front of Cabinet for a while. She also raised the concern of no nationwide primary school level programme. It would be remiss of me if I did not bring to this debate the suggestions from the consultation with the various stakeholders, and they raised issues of insufficient training for police, poor privacy at police stations, poor privacy at health facilities, data not readily available at police stations, and insufficient protection and support

for victims.

I wanted to say a bit on the policy administrative measures, but in the interest of time I will leave that to the colleagues. I just wanted to mention briefly the way forward and to mention in other jurisdictions—for example, in the United Kingdom, the budget allocation for treating with domestic violence is ring fence so it cannot be touched by other Ministries. A very good measure. They also have created a victim's charter for the rights of victims, what victims would expect. In the Dominican Republic, they have special prosecutor offices at work exclusively with domestic violence cases, and they also have something call the *Amigo de la Mujer*. Of course, in Trinidad and Tobago now we all know Spanish because of our circumstances and it means—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Padarath: One way or the other.

Dr L. Bodoë: No, I meant the Spanish language, Madam Speaker, just for clarity—and of course it means “friend of the woman”, and this really is the name for designated police squads that go out specially to investigate these incidents, and, of course they have dedicated Magistrates' Courts and criminal courts to deal specifically with domestic violence, and they have a care centre for abused women.

So, Madam Speaker, with regard to prevention we spoke about the importance of increasing woman's economic empowerment and I am sure my colleagues will address that going forward, but I feel very strongly that one of the most significant prevention efforts should be geared towards education of our young men and women, boys and girls, in the primary schools. [*Desk thumping*] I think that is where it has to start, in the primary schools. I am sure that the Member for Tobago East would have had discussions with her colleagues in the Ministry of Education, and I trust that she would tell us about that, but I think that is an

important intervention. I think it is overdue, it is necessary, and it is something that we need like yesterday. And of course, the other issue would be the issue of better mental health screening because we quite often hear of normal looking men just go home and they pull out a gun and they shoot somebody. They could not have been normal. There must have been something going on in their minds.

So the solution to this problem must begin with leadership that respects and cherishes our women and girls. Without this we are simply spinning top in mud. We must see the success of our women as the success of our society as a whole, and our men must not be threatened or intimidated by our women taking their rightful place in society. We must instil in our men and boys respect for our women. They must understand that our women are our equals and gone are the days when they are seen to be members of a lesser class. So, Madam Speaker, I am proud to be a member of a political party that not only talk the talks, but stand up for women. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity and I beg to move.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Madam Speaker, I beg to move that the Motion piloted by my colleague, the Member for Fyzabad, to second it and reserve my right to speak. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Question proposed.

The Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Ayanna Wester-Roy): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to respond to this Motion. It is not very often I get to commend those on the other side, but I would like to thank the Member for Fyzabad for helping us in highlighting the issue of domestic violence and violence against women. [*Desk thumping*] Just to put our heart at ease in some of the issues you have raised in

terms of the Domestic Violence Act, just around the 31st of January of this year I would have had the opportunity to review the preliminary draft working document, and a number of the recommendations proposed by stakeholders would have been considered. Like yourself, we at the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs, we engage stakeholders continuously. We meet with them frequently to learn from them what approaches we could integrate into our strategies as well as international best practices as well. So just to rest your heart on the matters in terms of the Domestic Violence Act, it is being worked on, and I had the opportunity to look at a preliminary draft on the 31st of January of this year. Okay?

In terms of the statistics coming forward, I do not want to dispute your statistics because I know for a fact the numbers are real, but one of the things I would like to point out is the fact that we now have the central registry on domestic violence, which means that we pull data from all over, which before was not even coordinated. Now we have that coming to a central registry. This gives us the opportunity, as Government, to take an all of Government approach to addressing the issue, not only for victims but for perpetrators as well, ensuring that we put policies and programmes in place to protect those who would have been victims and who are survivors, and to help those who are perpetrators move away from the habit and also to change their lifestyle.

Having said that, I want to just cast our minds back to last year Carnival. Madam Speaker, in 2017, during the Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month, the Office of the Prime Minister would have partnered with bmobile to send out messages to their clientele. The messages would have been crafted to ensure that persons would have been aware of the different services available in

terms of child abuse, the contact numbers that we could have reached out to get assistance. When we recognized that the response from the public was so positive, we would have decided to move it out from just child abuse awareness and prevention and also extend it to issues around HIV, gender-based violence, domestic violence.

So leading up to Carnival 2018 we would have again partnered with bmobile to send out messages, and I remember the day the programme was launched, I did not even realize that we had actually started it until I started getting messages on my phone commending me and commending the Government and I was really elated. I saw messages coming in on social media platform about it is a good move and then around midday things started going downhill, and it was the fact that an Opposition Senator decided to politicize the whole issue and would have put out a message saying, "Why is the Government bothering me about this issue? Who gave them permission to use my cell number to send messages about domestic violence, et cetera?" And that would have started a chain effect where people just start to jump on the bandwagon and complaining.

Madam Speaker, we were forced to work with bmobile to send out a message to the public to alert them that this is a voluntary service, if you wish to opt out you can opt out. But at the end of the Carnival period we were able to meet over 250,000-something citizens [*Desk thumping*] with information about domestic violence, about HIV, about child abuse. We would have sensitized the public about what you can do if you see something happening, what you can do if you are a victim, what numbers to contact, and that would have been a very successful strategy because even though there was an attempt to politicize the issue, persons would have still reached out to the Office of the Prime Minister because I started

panicking. I said you know what should we pull this initiative, should we pull this initiative, and bmobile said, "No, do not pull the initiative". What we would have done was at the bottom of the message instead of just saying OPM, we included the OPM, Gender and Child Affairs to know that it was coming from the specific aspect of the Office of the Prime Minister treating with the issue of domestic violence and gender-based violence, et cetera. And bmobile would have indicated to us that after we sent out the message asking persons to voluntarily ask them to opt them out, they did not get any calls coming in saying, "We do not want the message".

So people were actually grateful to know, okay, yes there are services available, yes there are resources available, thank you for making us aware. We can now know, if it is a domestic violence situation, call 800-SAVE; if it is child abuse, call 800-2014. People were really grateful for the information and that was just a small part of a wider strategy.

3.50 p.m.

Madam Speaker, our strategy would have also included work in terms of the legislative framework in Trinidad and Tobago and I would have mentioned before, the Domestic Violence Act but we would have seen recently, right in this honourable House, where a number of Bills were passed to protect not only our women but our women and our children, and we have significantly strengthened the framework for our children in Trinidad and Tobago, creating opportunities for them to live a more meaningful life, and we are seeing the effects of this out in the public domain where even though people say the numbers are going up, I often argue the numbers are going up because of the awareness created. When people say that, you know, before it was less, now because people know that we have the

services available, they know who to contact, more people are reaching out. Before they were not empowered to reach out but now they actually are empowered because of the work we are doing, not only with Government and government agencies but with all of the different sectors in Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, I would like to just highlight some of the programmes and initiatives that would have been coming out of the Office of the Prime Minister within the last few years. We would have significantly strengthened resources at the National Domestic Violence Hotline, 800-SAVE. There was a time when we did not have enough active listeners so when people called in, we had to create a shift system. Now, we have the service up and running 24/7 so if somebody reaches out to the hotline, there is always somebody at the end of the line to give them words of comfort, provide them with information in terms of where to go if they need to find a shelter.

Madam Speaker, as I am speaking about shelters, one of the things that we would have done as Government was try to establish domestic violence shelters to facilitate our women with children, and this is a call I want to make to the public. We have sent out documents to tender more than once begging stakeholders to come on board and partner with us because we recognize that we cannot do it alone. Government cannot solve this problem alone. And Madam Speaker, we have the buildings up and waiting and we are just waiting for, you know, voluntary organizations to respond positively to manage the facilities.

Because what the facilities would do, the hon. Member for Fyzabad mentioned it, women worrying about their children, especially women with boys over the age of 14. Some of the private centres will not take them if they come with a boy child who is 14 years old. We have the facility where we would be able

to take that woman out of her situation with her children and give them temporary respite, help her to get back on her feet and be economically empowered but we need the support of the NGO sector to help us to manage it. I will say it, again, Government cannot do it alone. If we are to really address the issue of gender-based violence in Trinidad and Tobago, it calls for all hands on deck: PNM and UNC working together, every political party working together, every stakeholder, every religious organization, every organization working with women, every organization working with men. It cannot be just up to this Government, we have to do it together.

But, again, in terms of the shelters, I am begging; I am begging those agencies. If you have the capacity to manage it, come forward. We are willing to work with you. We have already developed the template for management, we have already developed a template in terms of staffing, what kind of training you would need. We just need people to be brave enough to step forward and say yes, we will work with you to help manage these facilities. We have already constructed and are waiting to service the women and men of Trinidad and Tobago because we did not leave the men undone. When we were building and establishing those facilities, we took into consideration that men are indeed victims of domestic violence as well.

Madam Speaker, in terms of our approach to solving the issue, one of the things I always point out is that if men are part of the problem, they have to be a part of the solution. So we would have been engaging men and boys in communities in different forums to help them to understand that, listen, if we have to end gender-based violence, you have to recognize that you are part of the solution because you are part of the problem. So we would have launched our

Defining Masculine Excellence Programme, our Barbershop Initiative which would have been reaching out to not only adults but males as well. And I will go into further details but I am just outlining some of the things that we have been doing. And also, the defence force would have been instrumental in coming on board and wanting part of the training in that as well. Even the private sector would have reached out to the Office of the Prime Minister asking for the Barbershop Initiative to be introduced in some of their different sectors. For example, Massy would have approached us about the whole Barbershop Initiative coming to their staff and helping their staff to really be a part of the call to work together with Government to end violence against women and girls.

Madam Speaker, I just mentioned the Barbershop Initiative and I will just want to go into some more details for you to understand the context of it, right. The local theme we used in terms of the Barbershop Initiative is: Celebrating the Health and Well-being of Men and Boys. And the seminars often include interactive sessions as well as male developmental workshops. I remember last year, we would have had a situation where a young lady was murdered and we would have gone into the community over a series of weeks and we would have worked with different NGOs in the community and also used the whole strategy of the Barbershop Initiative to bring about change. And what we do is that when we leave the community, we leave the community with what we call "Community Champions". We train men who will stay in the community and then be able to be influencers and carry the message forward. Even as we move out, we know we left somebody or persons in the community so empowered and with the skills to be able to carry the message forward to ensure that it stays there and we maintain the change and the progress that we would have made. So in terms of the Barbershop

Initiative, we would have gone to communities such as Sobo Village, Los Bajos, Five Rivers and Malabar. We would have gone to the Gasparillo Secondary School, the Malabar Secondary School and Five Rivers Secondary School, and also the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service would have benefited from this initiative.

Another initiative coming out of the Office of the Prime Minister to treat with the whole issue of violence against women and girls is that in collaboration with UN Women, we conducted a five-day training programme, a facilitator training programme under the UN Women Foundations Programme which was done on the 28th and 24th of August in 2018. And, Madam Speaker, most of these initiatives come out from the fact that when we meet with the NGO sector, they would make proposals to us as to what can we do to address the situation and we will often take their ideas, work with them and if we cannot find the resources internally, we reach out to our international partners to be able to fund, if it is not in cash but in kind, and that is one of the strategies we use. So with the UN Women Foundations Programme, which was held in August, we would have targeted males and females between the ages of 13 to 24 years. The programme was designed to engender an appreciation of core gender concepts such as a gender socialization, gender equality and human rights among this age group in Trinidad and Tobago. The overarching goal of the Foundations Programme is to accelerate action towards preventing gender-based violence. Also we had 27 persons trained from various government agencies, Ministries and faith-based organizations.

In terms of our gender-based violence sensitization initiatives, we would have had half-day sensitization workshops on gender-based violence for the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force on the 13th of November, 2017, and also we

would have the same workshop in San Fernando, in Tunapuna and in Tobago as well. And what we would have done in terms of treating with gender-based violence, we would have also linked it—[*Interruption*] You want it in Siparia? Sure, I will facilitate Siparia. What we would done, we would have also linked HIV with gender-based violence and try to develop a comprehensive programme so when we go into the communities, you know, we do not just treat with one issue but other issues affecting our very vulnerable citizens. The Gender Affairs Division in collaboration with the Academy of Nursing and Allied Health of the University of West Indies School of Nursing hosted a one-day sensitization workshop on gender violence and health on Thursday the 13th of November, 2017. In terms of our outreach and work with young people around gender-based violence, we would have hosted youth outreach programmes and we continue to do this at the different community-based organizations as well as our schools.

Madam Speaker, a key aspect of addressing gender-based violence, as the hon. Member for Fyzabad would have said, would be our policy framework and developing a national strategy and action plan, and you have noted that it is in Cabinet. But although it is in Cabinet, we have already started rolling out a number of the initiatives identified by our stakeholders that is enlisted in the Strategic Action Plan to end Gender-Based Violence because Cabinet would have given us to go ahead to implement certain aspects of it. And what we did, we met with the stakeholders and decided okay, what are the key areas that we should roll out now to help to address the situation and one reoccurring theme is the fact that we have to have our men and our boys involved.

So when we had the HeForShe programme adopted by the UN and it was brought to Trinidad and Tobago by one of our NGOs, what we did, we embraced it

at the Office of the Prime Minister and I was really happy when in the first year of it being rolled out, the defence force would have embraced the HeForShe programme and we saw where our servicemen and servicewomen were given a commitment to say: Yes, I as a man, I stand in solidarity with women, I will give a commitment to do my part to end gender-based violence. And we saw women as well taking it up and they said: Yes, I stand with other women to work towards ending gender-based violence in Trinidad and Tobago. So the work is ongoing. What I must say, if we have a fault, is that we work hard, we work quiet, we do not boast enough of what we have been doing to really improve lives in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

In terms of ensuring that the whole issue of gender is mainstream in our different Ministries and Departments, we would have been training our gender focal points at different state agencies and Ministries. To date, we have 76 gender focal points trained. So what they are supposed to do, they are supposed to become like the champions in the different agencies. You know, when we talk about change and you are rolling out a change management strategy, it is often recommended that you have champions, you know, to help to carry the message and to sustain it. So that is why we have been focusing on training and ensuring that we have those focal points at the different Ministries, agencies and the Departments of the State and in the long run, what we would like to do is to partner with the private sector to have gender focal points in our private sector organizations as well.

In terms of the CEDAW and the CEDAW report and all of that, the CEDAW Committee, we would have had a preliminary report. We would have worked with the same Committee that you would have mentioned, the CEDAW

Committee of Trinidad and Tobago. They would have made proposals to us in terms of the areas that would have been identified at the last report that we need to strengthen, and we would have been working with them to really work on those areas to ensure that when it comes for us to do a next periodic report, that we would not be flagged in those areas as weaknesses again. So we would have been partnering with those same agencies that you would have called out, right?

I want to talk too about what we are doing in terms of the boys. As part of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, we have been training what we call Child Rights Ambassadors and not just empowering them with knowledge about their rights and their responsibilities as children, but also how they could help to change the culture in Trinidad and Tobago as it pertains to violence against women and girls and as well as boys and men. So what we would have done in our Child Rights Ambassadors Programmes, we would have trained not only girls in the schools but boys as well. We would have trained schools in deep south, Tobago. It would have been extensive and every year, we increase the cadre of trainees coming forward under that programme. What they now have is the ability to go out into their schools and their communities and carry the message forward. And you keep hearing me talking about carrying the message forward and change champions because the communication has to be ongoing. We cannot do something today and have a success and stop. It must be sustained and for it to be sustained, it really requires for us to have all hands on deck. As I said before, we cannot do it alone. I commend you for bringing the Motion but you have to work with us.

So when we put strategies in place, for example, that text messaging strategy, that was very, very, significant and to have somebody on your side come

and really “cry it down” for political reasons. I would not say who it is but you will figure it out soon. Hear somebody “cry it down” for political reasons, that was really disheartening because that initiative was actually making an impact, and we would have not moved it to gender and HIV and that sort of thing unless we did not see the benefit of it when we had the Child Abuse Prevention Awareness month and saw how it would have impacted on children.

I remember I went to a village in my constituency and I was talking to some young girls and young boys, and I asked one of them, I said, “So you know what is the number to call for the Children’s Authority”? And the child rattled it off. So I said, “Well, how yuh know de number?” He said, “Well, meh mummy got a message on her phone” and I laughed because I remember that was one of the messages that would have gone out when we were doing the campaign with Bmobile and it was so good to have, you know, private sector Trinidad and Tobago partner with us on this very important initiative as well as continue the partnership to treat with the whole issue of gender-based violence and then to have the initiative, you know, scorned and frowned up by those on the other side who I was hoping would have been able to help us to really champion it forward.

But today, I want to thank—[*Crosstalk*] No, today, I want to thank the Member for Fyzabad because he gave a personal commitment that those on the other side would work with the Office of the Prime Minister.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: “Is only him alone.”

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: He gave a commitment for his team. Member for Fyzabad gave a commitment on behalf of his team that they are going to work with the Office of the Prime Minister to ensure that we reduce gender-based violence in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: You are saying that and she is saying, do not bother with that.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Because we know he is not going to do it. [*Continuous crosstalk and laughter*]

Madam Speaker: Order, order.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Madam Speaker, our National Action Plan to end Gender-Based Violence includes strategies including strengthening state accountability and community action to end gender-based violence and sexual violence against women and girls; ensuring greater likelihood of perpetrators being punished; enhancing victim/survivor access to justice; minimizing the trauma of the prosecution process for victims of gender-based violence; improving the delivery of services to victims, and providing rehabilitation of perpetrators and strengthening data collection systems.

Madam Speaker, as it pertains to perpetrators, we recognize that the only way we could help somebody to stop a habit is if we have the right interventions in place and we have been committed to work with all of our partners within the State to ensure that perpetrators have access to services, counselling, et cetera. Madam Speaker, for our female victims of human trafficking, the hon. Member would have mentioned talking to those at the Counter Trafficking Unit, we have been working with them as well. When we established these shelters for domestic violence victims, we also established a facility and we told them you have access to this facility, you can programme it how you want to facilitate female victims of human trafficking. So there is a building that we have that they have access to that they could be able to support those persons. So when you were talking, I was smiling because everything that you were saying, we have already started implementing

because just like you, we would have gone out, met with the stakeholders, engaged them, engaged different partners within the different Ministries and Departments to ensure that we really deliver on this promise.

Because whenever I talk to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, “ah doh like to talk for likes and ah doh like to talk for votes”. When I talk it is because I genuinely want to see something happen. [*Desk thumping*] And I come from a background of community development and I am passionate about empowering people and really helping people to transform their lives. So for me, it is not about likes and about votes but when I talk, it is giving a firm commitment: I will work with you and for you. This Government will work with you and for you to address those social issues that cause our men and our women, our boys and our girls to resort to violence.

As it pertains to the schools, we have been going to schools and working with them on programmes to prevent bullying because bullying at the early childhood stage in primary school and even nursery school could trigger and signal something to come later on, and once we start working with our children from young, we could help to prevent abusive behaviour going forward. Also when children act out in schools, it sometimes signals that something is wrong in the home and that way we are able to then go in and intervene in the home.

In terms of the Children's Authority working to help to address this particular issue, somebody in the question time would have asked about the resources for the Children's Authority. We would have been systemically building out the Authority, ensuring that we are reaching every corner of Trinidad and Tobago. Member for Naparima, you were quite grateful when we opened the facility down on your end. We opened one in Sangre Grande and we are on the

road to us opening one in Tobago as well, you know. And what we did, we recognized that we did not have all the resources in place. Cabinet, so graciously, would have approved funding, just yesterday, so I could recruit the number of persons we need to enhance service delivery at Tobago, [*Desk thumping*] at Sangre Grande and even at the facility I opened for my very good friend in Naparima. [*Crosstalk*]

So we are working towards building out the systems to affect our children so that when they grow up, they do not become perpetrators of violence. We are working to build out our system to help our women who are in situations of violence so that they could emerge from it by providing training opportunities so that when they leave the home, and they are in a shelter or when they leave the shelter, they could stand on their own two feet—they do not have to run back to that abusive situation—by providing traditional and non-traditional skills training for our women who would have been victims of domestic violence. As I said before, we are working with our perpetrators to help them to change their behaviour. But again, I want to call on the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we cannot do it alone, it needs all hands on deck. Again, I want to highlight the issue of our shelters. We really need the voluntary sector to come on board to help us to manage those shelters.

I would have had the opportunity to visit a facility in Colombia and what stood out for me was the fact that whereas the Colombian Government would have established the infrastructure, put the building up, it was the NGOs who were programming it and ensuring that the women would have had access to training opportunities, counselling on site, medical intervention. It was the NGO sector that was doing it. So whereas Government would have put the infrastructure, the plant

in place, the NGO sector would have provided that additional support in terms of operationalizing the facility, and that is what I took away as a strongpoint that we could implement here in Trinidad and Tobago. That is an approach that could work.

I want to commend those people who work tirelessly in the background to really support women who would have been victims of violence. I want to highlight the Ms. Mars in Tobago championing the cause of women who would have been victims of domestic violence and working in her own little way to help to establish a shelter in Tobago. And I want to highlight all the different agencies right here in Trinidad who when we cannot answer the call, they answer the call. Because as it is now, we do not have state shelters but we have women accessing facilities because there are NGO sectors who are operating shelters.

I want to give the commitment of this Government to ensure that the resources are in place. Even though times may be hard, one thing I can always say is that the hon. Minister of Finance, whenever we approach him to support our initiatives and to help us to fund it, he would try to find a way. It may not be all but we will get some, so we have always been able to deliver for the people of Trinidad and Tobago. If it is that we cannot find the resources internally, I have been very fortunate to see where the international agencies would have supported the Office of the Prime Minister with our programmes for our children, our programmes for our women and that is going to continue.

But even though we get the support from international agencies, even though the Minister of Finance may pump the resources in, it calls for a change in mindset and a simple thing as our music and what we are promoting with our culture as well. You know, I remember speaking right here a time and talking about my

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son—I do not have a radio at home because I do not have reception, and hearing my son coming and singing this song about—[*Laughter*] Siparia, you laugh, I live in the countryside in Tobago so I do not get very good reception with the radio. I live in the countryside. But I remember my son coming home and singing “kick een de back door”. “I am like, where he picked that up from, he is ah lil boy, you now turn seven”, and I was trying to figure out if he understood the context of “kicking een de back door” and you know, we really want our musicians, our artistes to be more responsible in the types of message we put out into the public domain. That is a very, very, very critical point. We have to be mindful of the type of songs we promote because people listen and children internalize these messages and then it goes from just a message into action. So, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Tobago East, your original 30 minutes are now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes to complete your contribution if you wish.

Hon. A. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As I call for all hands on deck, I really want to encourage those of us in the entertainment industry to start promoting women more in a positive light. This year, the Office of the Prime Minister would have awarded a prize for a song that was geared towards gender awareness and also the National AIDS Coordinating Committee would have done the same, so that we could help, you know, through our culture and our art to promote a more positive image and to help to change the mindset and to change the culture in Trinidad and Tobago.

So, Madam Speaker, as I close, again, I just want to, again, reiterate the fact that we need all hands on deck. It cannot be done by the State alone. I call on my hon. Members opposite to work with us, to support us as we continue to strengthen

the framework to improve the service delivery in terms of domestic violence and to improve the lives of vulnerable women and girls in Trinidad and Tobago. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Ms. Ramona Ramdial (*Couva North*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. First of all, let me commend my colleague, Member of Parliament for Fyzabad, for bringing this very important Motion [*Desk thumping*] and let me also congratulate him for piloting the Motion brilliantly here this afternoon. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, before I go into my contribution, I would just like to respond to the Member for Tobago East and I want to start off by making a comment on the last point that she made which is, of course, talking about positive music that we need to encourage and positive lyrics from our local artistes and otherwise. But I just want to remind her that her Government has continued to support the employment of our local calypsonian who was caught on video cursing and disrespecting our fellow citizens. So I want to know what kind of example is this Government continuing about and you know— [*Desk thumping*] You are saying one thing in the Parliament but outside, you have persons and Members of the Government defending the negative actions and comments from our local artistes. So that is food for thought, food for thought.

Madam Speaker, let me also continue by saying that I want to give the Minister some words of advice and the Minister spoke earlier about working hard but quietly and I want to give her some advice. In this business that we are all in, you need to communicate your work to the people and to the public. [*Desk thumping*] We are all elected Members of Parliament and therefore, it is their moneys that are paying for us to be here and to work on behalf of them and therefore, I want to urge the Minister to communicate effectively through the

Ministry of Communications and otherwise to let the population know what is happening, otherwise no one will really believe until they are in a particular situation to respond. So, Madam Speaker, I just wanted to lay that there.

Now, Madam Speaker, as I continue, let me also say that I have been really a strong advocate for women's rights in Trinidad and Tobago, and like my colleagues across the floor, we have all been fighting for equality, gender equality. As you know, we have global issues with respect to gender equality, but in Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean region, we are, of course, dealing with issues of high incidences of violence against women. Madam Speaker, there is a quote that I want to share:

“...there...”—is—“no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women.”

And that was said by Kofi Annan. Emily Taft Douglas said:

“If women understood and exercised their power they could remake the world.”

And those are powerful words, Madam Speaker, that I want to encourage all women to live by.

Now, Madam Speaker, WHO, a World Health Organization report said:

“Approximately 35% of women in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region have experienced intimate partner violence and...non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime.”

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“Preventing violence against women requires a multi-sectoral approach and the health sector, while having a lead role to play in providing clinical and mental health services to women who experience violence...”

—they themselves have to develop and upgrade that environment. Health care providers are trusted most by women to disclose abuse.

Madam Speaker, in a study done: Violence Against Women in Caribbean, by Janice Joseph of Stockton University.

- “• Caribbean societies are organized around hierarchical gender power relations with male domination reducing women to economic and emotional dependency.”

In this study, the UN Women Caribbean stated that:

“1 in 3 women in the Caribbean will experience domestic violence.

- Over one third of the region's women report incidents of intimate or sexual violence.”

And:

- “• According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, every one of the Caribbean islands has a sexual violence rate that is higher than the world average.”

So, Madam Speaker, this is a serious issue that we need to tackle head-on.

- “• There have been”—positive development—“in the laws governing gender-based violence.”

However, there are implementation challenges.

So this study shows that the legislation, yes, it comes to Parliament, we hash it out on both sides. I am referring now to the Member of Parliament for Tobago East who mentioned here that they have reviewed the Domestic Violence Act and that they will soon be coming with that. But that is not the problem, Madam Speaker. Well-laid legislation is not the problem. It is really the implementation of that legislation that is the challenge. [*Desk thumping*]

And what they are suggesting is that the courts, police and other law enforcement personnel often operate to dissuade people or women from executing their rights and achieving the protection afforded by the law. And I am making reference to those women who are victims of domestic violence.

“...over 77 per cent of the applications for protection orders are dismissed or withdrawn...”

And I want to draw reference to an article that was printed on June 24, 2018, that titled, “Protection orders worthless”. And right here in T&T, they gave the statistics that:

“Cases of domestic violence and child abuse are on the rise in T&T and over the last two years, more than 57,000 applications for protection orders have been made.”

And it went on to say that:

“According to statistics...by the International Women's Resource Network (IWRN), in the past two years more than 50 women who obtained protection or restraining orders against their...husbands/partners are now dead.”

Madam Speaker, that is a very serious issue that we need to look at and I wonder if it is that, hearing this and making recommendations that the Government and the Judiciary will probably agree, in the future, to do away with these protection orders and put something in place that can really prevent and protect our women from domestic violence. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, in addition to that, I also want to state that:

“Systemic delay in the prosecution of offences”

It is a delay that:

“...prolongs trauma and adversely affects recollection of facts due to the

passage of time.”

—especially victims of domestic and sexual violence. So they are saying that the systemic delays in our justice system allow for victims of domestic violence and violent crime and sexual abuse to, of course, suffer further trauma when there are, of course, delays in the system.

Victims are pressured to drop charges. [*Crosstalk*] Inappropriate use of cash settlements that are now being utilized to prevent the prosecution of especially sex offenders.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the murmur is growing. I am being disturbed. I would like to hear the contribution of the Member for Couva North. Please proceed.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So, Madam Speaker, in the scrutiny of our system here in Latin America and the Caribbean, they are saying that, of course, victims are pressured to drop charges, meaning those victims of rape and domestic violence. Inappropriate use of cash settlements are being utilized to prevent the prosecution of especially sex offenders. And this is the reality out there.

Here in the Caribbean we have a culture of reconciliation where:

- “• Many women feel guilty for sending their partners and fathers to their children to jail.

Violence against women”—it is—“‘ghettoized’ in legal reform”.

And, of course, it is that sort of stigma attached here in the Caribbean.

“Domestic violence has been pigeonholed as a family law matter.”

—in the Caribbean and in Trinidad and Tobago and therefore there is a failure to develop law and policies to address it as a criminal matter. And this is very, very

important, Madam Speaker.

“Lack of specialized interventions:

- Specialized responses are often necessary to victims of gender-based violence but yet are noticeably lacking across the Caribbean.
- Too few Police and Prosecution Departments have specialized units that are dedicated to the investigation of domestic and sexual violence involving ‘special victims’.
- Even where such units have been established, they are often not sufficiently equipped to conduct the specialized interventions so critical to these offences.”

So these are all, you know, setbacks within the justice system that allow for our victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse to continue and to increase over the years, as we have seen by my colleague from Fyzabad, as he mentioned the statistics.

- “• Patriarchal ideologies are prominent in the region and are difficult to change.”

And, therefore, reform is needed. Substantial reform is needed to allow for protection and safety of our women. And some of these reforms are to improve the laws and policies, especially at the national level.

I am very heartened to hear again from the Member of Parliament for Tobago East that the amended laws and improved laws, with respect to the Domestic Violence Act, would be coming soon to the Parliament, and we look forward to that to:

- “• Ensure full implementation of laws and policies addressing violence against women.

- Guarantee scaled-up funding and resources needed to fully implement the laws addressing violence against women at all levels on which they must operate.
- Monitor the compliance of law enforcement, justice and health personnel with existing laws to protect women and girls when they are victims of violence.

Care for victims of violence against women:”

Care is extremely important.

- “• Guaranteeing appropriate, medical and psychological care, legal assistance, and emergency housing alternatives for the victims.”

I want to pause there for a minute because the “emergency housing” triggered a memory. We have the HDC here within the Ministry of Housing. I remember a constituent—a single mother coming to me—and her boyfriend, when he came to visit his children, he would batter her, beat her badly. And most times she would come to my office and I would try to help her because it happened quite a few times. And then I remember listening and I knew that there was this emergency housing system that was there for victims and other persons who experience such trauma. I wrote a letter to the then Ministry of Housing. I stated in the letter quite clearly that this was an emergency housing situation, in terms of the mom being a renter, the single mother being a renter, her boyfriend knowing where she is from and all of that, and she needed that support, that emergency housing support.

Madam Speaker, a year went by and no response, no feedback. So, right here in Trinidad and Tobago we need to deal with these loopholes that exist and I am calling on the Minister of Gender in the Office of the Prime Minister to deal and

look at this issue. This emergency housing situation that exists is not working. It is not working for the victims. [*Interruption*] Sorry.

Maj. Gen. Dillon: It is a grant.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Yes, but the system, it has to go through the HDC. It has to be processed. There is a process. That process was not engaged. It was just completely ignored, a year after the fact. So we need—the will needs to exist within the Ministries, the Government, the public officers, to deal with victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse. It is very, very important.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Couva North. Members, it is now 4.30. This House now stands suspended. We shall resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, as indicated earlier, an item was deferred to later in today's sitting by agreement; we shall now revert to that item.

ARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you, Madam Speaker. In accordance with Standing Order 50(3), I beg to move that the debate on the Private Members' Motion No. 4 be adjourned.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker—[*Crosstalk*] I know, but just for clarity—the time that is taken during Private Members would be given back at the end, right?

Question put and agreed to.

STATEMENT BY MINISTER

Government's Rental of Property (No. 3 Alexandra Street, St. Clair)

The Minister of Public Administration (Hon. Marlene Mc Donald): Thank you Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am authorized by the Cabinet to make this

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statement. It is well known that the negotiation and execution of all agreements for the rental of property to be occupied by the Government or government agencies is handled by the Property and Real Estate Services Division (PRESD), in accordance with the established policy and procedures.

Earlier this week, a number of allegations surfaced in the public domain, to the effect that the Attorney General had a material conflict between his private interests and his public duty and had used his public office to improperly procure the rental by the Government of the property at No. 3 Alexandra Street, St. Clair. Madam Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth as the following facts will reveal.

In fact, contrary to allegations in the public domain, at all material times, the Attorney General declared his interest in the property at No. 3 Alexandra Street, St. Clair, and recused himself from all deliberations and decisions made on the rental of this property, whether in Cabinet or in subcommittees of the Cabinet.

Further, throughout the negotiations for the rental of this property, the annual returns and other relevant documents regarding the directors and shareholders of the company that owns the property were filed at the Companies Registry and made available to the PRESD.

By way of explanation, the following well-established procedures apply to the rental of properties by the Government Ministries, Departments or agencies: In the first instance, the Ministry, Department or agency that requires accommodation submits a request to the PRESD with details of its user and space requirements.

An assessment is then done of the floor area and building characteristics that are required and a search begins for a suitable property. Suitable properties are identified either by the PRESD or by the Ministry, Department or agency itself.

Once suitable properties are identified, the PRESD seeks to secure satisfactory technical reports from statutory agencies or persons involved in the inspection, certification and approval of office buildings, in addition to other important documents such the title deed, tax clearance certificate and annual returns.

Specifically, with respect to the rental of the building at No. 3 Alexandra Street, St. Clair, and contrary to the allegations in the public domain, firm expressions of interest in the rental by Government of this property date back to 10 years ago, as follows:

- (1) On January 14, 2009, PRESD wrote to Mr. Faris Al-Rawi of Zaman Enterprises offering to rent the property.
- (2) On January 20, 2012, under the former UNC Government, the Ministry of Housing and the Environment, which was responsible for the rental of properties by Government at the time, wrote to Mrs. Mona Nahous of Zaman Enterprises enquiring about the availability of the same building. This letter was copied to Dr. Roodal Moonilal, the then Minister of Housing and the Environment and to the Director of Personnel Administration.
- (3) On October 09, 2017, the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development expressed its interest in the same property. In December 2018, the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development withdrew its interest in the rental of the property.

However, as early as April 2018, the Personnel Department had indicated their desire in leasing the same property to accommodate its head office and other divisions. This interest was subsequently reconfirmed by the CPO on December 27, 2018, when it became known that the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise

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Development was no longer pursuing the rental of the property.

Accordingly, a Note was submitted to Cabinet by the Minister of Public Administration on February 07, 2019, with respect to the rental of the property for the use by the Personnel Department. The rental was subsequently approved and then confirmed by Cabinet on February 14, 2019.

Madam Speaker, it has also been alleged that the rental of the property does not represent value for money. However, the property is a brand-new A-class office building with modern amenities such as a standby generator, storage facilities, two 13-passenger elevators and 89 covered car park spaces. Further, the rental of the property will allow the Personnel Department to consolidate its current operations under one roof, which are currently scattered across several locations.

The agreed rental of \$575,000 per month, VAT exclusive, is also below the fair market value rental rate, which was determined by the Commissioner of Valuations to be \$640,000 per month, VAT exclusive, and below an independent valuation from Linden Scott & Associates, who recommended a rental of \$600,000 per month, VAT exclusive.

Additionally, in an effort to save taxpayers from unnecessary expense, the landlord has given the Personnel Department three months' rent-free occupation to facilitate the fitting out of the building. This has set a new precedent as to how this Government conducts its business. [*Desk thumping*]

It is noteworthy that the rental and other occupational costs for the various locations, including state-owned premises at Tower D, currently occupied by the Personnel Department, is in excess of \$900,000.

Finally, Madam Speaker, it would be remiss of me not to make the point that

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over the past 30 years, the Government has on many occasions rented properties owned by Cabinet Ministers or their relatives.

For example, in December 2010, the UNC Government rented a property to accommodate the Ministry of National Security from DW Holdings Limited, which is owned by the son of Jack Warner, who at the time was a Minister in the UNC Government. Further, prior to the 2015 election, the NLCB rented property from the children of Jerry Hadeed, a Minister in the UNC Government. There are several other examples of this practice under all Governments over the years.

I trust, Madam Speaker, that the foregoing has cleared the air on this matter and put to rest the false allegations currently in the public domain. Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 24(4), in my 15 seconds. Madam Speaker, in reference to the Ministerial Statement a second ago, in the context of what the Minister has said, arguing that it was a steal of a deal, rather than a steal, could the Minister indicate to us, on February 14th, Valentine's Day this year, when this gift was done, who was the Attorney General of Trinidad and Tobago on that day?

Madam Speaker: Member, I do not see this arising out of the statement or even requiring clarification, based on the statement.

Dr. Moonilal: Could I ask Minister whether the Minister believes that this should be a precedent for future governments in this country, to have Ministers with direct beneficial interest in government contracts and rentals obtaining such from the Cabinet of which he or she is a part, not their children, brother, sister, mother or father but the Minister himself or herself? Is this a precedent that you will like to see?

Hon. M. Mc Donald: Madam Speaker, as I said, this is something, upon my research, that has been happening for years, over 30 years, and I dare say, Madam Speaker, that whatever this Government does, we do it above board, we do it with transparency and very open. Absolutely no hidden—[*Crosstalk*] Exactly. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members. [*Crosstalk*] Member for Naparima and Members of the front row, there is developing a penchant to engage in continuous crosstalk. You are all now experienced Members. You know how to make an intervention in accordance with the Standing Orders. I really do not think that this should be tolerated and I hope I do not have to speak to any Member about this; not just for today, the rest of the session.

PROTECTION OF OUR NATION'S WOMEN

Question again proposed.

Be it resolved that the Government take urgent steps to ensure the protection of our nation's women.

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North, you have 16 minutes and 25 seconds of your original speaking time left.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Back to some serious politics. So, I was on my list of recommendations, with respect to assisting victims of domestic violence and I was on the point of care for victims of violence against women. What can be recommended is:

- “• Guaranteeing appropriate medical and psychological care, legal assistance and emergency housing alternatives for the victims.”

Another such recommendation would be:

- “• Implementing free telephone hotlines...”

—and I know that the Minister earlier on made reference to that—

- “• ...at national levels to receive reports of all forms of violence against women.
- Funding of public campaigns to increase the visibility and accessibility of this service.

And I made mention of that earlier, where the Minister needs to communicate effectively to the public to let them know what is happening and how they can access help.

In addition to that, Madam Speaker:

“Data Registry Systems”

And I know that the Minister before made reference to the data registry system, but is it public, the central registry system? [*Interruption*] Right, so it is not—

Madam Speaker: Would you want to give way?

Ms. R. Ramdial: Sorry. I will continue. I will continue. We will talk after. So:

“Data Registry System

- Designing and implementing national and sub-national unified data registry systems to document the number of women and girls victims of the multiple forms of violence against women by:
- Disaggregating data by sex, age and form of violence.
- Creating and maintaining a unified online database of the statistics on cases of violence against women that is available as public information, including the evolution of the prevalence of violence against women in all its forms.”

So, this recommendation seeks to encourage governments to make the registry public.

- “• Improving indicators and measurement of health care services,

psychological, social and legal support requested by and provided to victims of violence at local levels.

- Generating information required for tailoring programs and services to the specific needs of the population.”

So that is another recommendation, Madam Speaker.

“• Prevention of Violence Against Women”

We need to:

- “• Develop mass media campaigns to deconstruct violence against women...
- Ensure that all primary and secondary schools incorporate education and information aimed to eliminate gender stereotypes and violence against women...”

Madam Speaker, I know that within our education sector, informally, this sort of education has already started to take place.

Now, Madam Speaker, I want to shift focus a little bit because, you know, as we stand here on different sides, many persons would ask: What did you do, or what have you done, as a former Government, with respect to eliminating and dealing with domestic violence against women? So I just want to highlight quickly some of the work that we did whilst we were there.

Now, Madam Speaker, let me start by saying that there were amendments to the Maternity Protection Act for increased maternity leave and to repeal the Masters and Servants Ordinance. Three hundred and twenty women graduated from the Women in Harmony Programme for a single head of households with low or no skills and low or no income. The URP Women's Programme, during our time we were able to increase their salaries and make it on par with that of the males.

We also introduced the baby grant for single mothers. And, of course today

we are very disheartened to know that there has not been a reinstatement of that particular baby grant. But it was very, very important in assisting single mothers and, of course, giving them a measure of independence, at the end of the day, when it came to cost.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Would the Member give way?

Ms. R. Ramdial: No.

Mr. Deyalsingh: How many grants did you all give out?

Ms. R. Ramdial: No. So, Madam Speaker—

Mr. Deyalsingh: How many grants did you gave out?

Ms. R. Ramdial: You will have your time to respond, Member.

Mr. Deyalsingh: None. None.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Okay? So that baby grant whether—it does not matter how many grants were given out. Government is a continuum and it was a good initiative, a good programme. If you wanted to adapt it to your liking in different ways, change it up, modify it, so be it. But it helped single mothers, at the end of the day, with respect to cost of taking care of their young ones, and that is what is very important. It is a recommendation that has been made.

Madam Speaker, in addition to that we had in plan—and I know that the Minister spoke about the homes, the transition homes and all of that. But it was not really clear, with respect to what was there before and whether or not there was an intention to go ahead with it.

Now, in August of 2015, under the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development, which we got kudos for as a Government in forming, during our time, a regional assessment centre was constructed at Manahambre Road, Ste. Madeleine and it was opened in August 2015. Whoever is probably responding

after me could probably tell us what is the status. Is that building still currently carrying out the function that it was constructed for? The assessment centre in Chaguanas, as far as we know, it was completed, but what is happening to that particular centre? Is it being utilized? That was also a very important centre that needed to be used, because it was completed during our time. The female safe house, I would like to get an update on that, the male safe home, the male transition homes.

So these were some of the projects. And as I have been advised, they were about 70 per cent and more to completion when we left government at that point in time. So if we can get a statement or a status with respect to that from the next speaker.

5.20 p.m.

So, Madam Speaker, there were a lot of initiatives that were implemented by the former government and, of course, I know that some of them continued under this present Government, and as the Minister before me said, we need all hands on deck and everybody needs to work together to see how best we can deal with this scourge of domestic violence and sexual offences against our women.

Now, in addition to that, in just today's newspaper, Madam Speaker, I recall reading a statement from the Head of the Police Complaints Authority where he said—because part of this Motion deals with human trafficking where he mentioned that the rogue police element is involved in human trafficking because it pays well. And therefore that issue is a serious issue that needs to be dealt with by the Minister of National Security and the Commissioner of Police. So, I just wanted to flag for their information that persons out there are speaking about it, they are aware and I would like to know what is going to be done about dealing with that rogue element in the police service that, of course, they are now involved

in that human trafficking issue.

And, of course, with the situation with our next door neighbour, what is happening in Venezuela it is now more prevalent than before, and therefore, it needs to be dealt with. I know that there was a situation with the 19 girls that was dealt with. So, we need to continue on that path. And we need to pluck that rogue element out of the police service as best as we can, and as fast as we can to ensure that our women are safe at the end of the day.

Now, Madam Speaker, over the years we have had many recommendations coming to us and it has been out there. There have been workshops spearheaded by NGOs, numerous NGOs out there. I know, Hazel Browne is one of our pioneers, and she had been really advocating for protection of women against domestic violence for the longest while. And some forms of abuse that exist and what can happen. Now, I spoke about the protection order earlier on, and that is something that needs to be looked at again, because again it is being said that that protection order has now become useless. So we need to deal with that.

But there are other measures. Now I remember, Madam Speaker, CEDAW we are all part of that CEDAW agreement where it deals with—like a human rights Bill, but it deals with women's rights. And it is really a document that deals with rights of women. And I have seen certain islands; Dominica, for example, has implemented. So in the absence—they do not have a gender policy, and they have in the absence of their gender policy used that and termed it a “Women Bill of Rights” where they have, of course, clear definite clauses that deal with protection of women from domestic violence, sexual abuse and other issues affecting women. And it has proven to be very, very effective in that country.

And therefore, probably it is something we can look at here. Because, I

know for years we have had gender policies in different Cabinets, you know, new versions, different versions, we tweaked versions and to date this current Government that promised in their manifesto that they were going to come with the gender policy we are yet to see that. And I want to recommend that this women Bill of rights that we see Dominica has adopted that works for them that probably we can take a look at that and see whether or not it can work here. And I am very positive about that, because it is actual legislation that is now being implemented or has been implemented in Dominica that has worked. And they have seen a decrease in the number of women afflicted and, of course, protection of their rights.

So, Madam Speaker, in addition to that, let me also say that there was a report *National Review Trinidad and Tobago*, done on the Beijing platform for action and that was two years ago? It was about two years ago, this report was done—

Dr. Bodoë: 2014.

Ms. R. Ramdial:—sorry, 2014, this report was done. And it really is a positive document, Madam Speaker, and as much as there is still so much to be done we have come a long way in terms of dealing with women protecting our women. So it is really something important that everyone should read, and look at, and improve from there. And it has a lot to do with, of course, legislation brought and programmes and policies implemented by the various Ministries over the years in terms of the dealing with the protection of women against domestic violence and otherwise.

Now, Madam Speaker, we co-exist in a region where, you know, it is easy to feed off what is happening in other areas and other jurisdictions and implement

here. And in addition to that, let me say that this gender policy that I make reference to, as much as persons are calling for it, I think it is high time that we evolve from that situation. You know, we move forward, we look at another alternative at the end of the day. I mean if you cannot, this current Government, cannot bring the gender policy and there are sensitive issues that you do not want to touch and handle there are other mechanisms by which—and again I want to strongly recommend that “Women Bill of Rights” that I mentioned earlier.

Now, Madam Speaker, there was some recommendations again that we had in terms of dealing with the protection of women's rights and it had to do a lot with, of course—

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Member.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Sorry, yes go ahead.

Mrs. Webster-Roy: Thanks, Member for Couva North. You noted that we did not bring the gender policy. But, I remember in March of 2018 we laid the Gender Policy in this Parliament as a Green Paper, and I would have noted in this statement that we would have adopted an official policy going forward. And the other thing I wanted to correct that you mentioned that Dominica did not have a gender policy, when they in fact have a gender policy even though it may not be as conservative as ours, but there is one in Dominica as well.

Ms. R. Ramdial: And do have the “Women Bill Of Rights” also, Madam Speaker, that they really refer to more than that gender policy, which I am sure would have come after that women Bill of rights, bearing from that CEDAW agreement that would have been implemented within that jurisdiction.

Now, Madam Speaker, I also want to recommend that there were some programmes under us that we were looking to spearhead that I want to share. The

nursing and health care education and training facility was established, but I do not think that it is being used to its full potential. And therefore that can be looked at in terms of dealing with women, protection and all of that. There was another plan, the proposed pilot programme, how to nurture baby, right start, breast is best, and mothers supporting mothers for expectant parents that should be implemented as a comprehensive strategy for prenatal, maternal and baby and early childhood care—again to help especially single mothers. A multi-pronged strategy intended to deal with reproductive issues and to empower women in seeking good health during pregnancy, maternal and child health policy, and standard operating procedures for obstetrics and midwifery will be updated and should be updated and implemented. Another recommendation, Madam Speaker, ante-natal and postnatal care services that should be improved by purchasing additional equipment needed to track the health of mothers to be and their babies. And I know that the Member of Parliament for Fyzabad had been actively involved as Chairman of South-West Regional Health Authority in this.

Madam Speaker, the gender imbalance is also something that requires attention and more women are being educated at the tertiary level. Men get better pay than women for doing the same job in some instances. These are challenges for both sexes and need to be addressed. And, of course, equal pay for equal work and the issue of male under-achievement also needs to be addressed to strengthen the productive male sector and a working relationship between private and public sectors needs to be implemented to build a merit based talent appreciative society that eliminates the gender bias. It is also a very economic issue, Madam Speaker, also when you deal with this gender disparity that we have existing at this point in time.

Another recommendation, Madam Speaker, is to institute a national system

of properly run daycare centres involving public and private initiatives, which will help to address one of the major stresses of working women. And these are all just recommendations that can really see the protection of women against domestic violence and sexual abuse. And is also in keeping with that—

Madam Speaker: Member for Couva North, your original speaking time is now spent you are entitled to 15 more minutes extended time to complete your contribution. So if you wish you may continue.

Ms. R. Ramdial: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now, Madam Speaker, I also want to make reference to an article by Dr. Gabrielle Hosein that was titled “What is our Response to Domestic Violence?” And in there she said:

Somewhere in Trinidad and Tobago there is a woman who is going to be the next one killed. It is just a waiting game until we know her name. We do not have an urgent, coherent, cross-sectoral, national strategy to prevent or even systematically reduce this violence against women. I will be relieved but surprised if we do by the time we hear the news.

And this is the sort of disenchantment that exists out there, Madam Speaker, with respect to protection of women.

Our women are being killed daily. There are increasing numbers of murders resulting out of domestic violence. We see, of course, increase in human trafficking and I spoke about that earlier. Violent crimes against our women some heinous crimes. And what do we do as a society to deal with this scourge? As much as we stand here and talk, we really need to get down and act on it. And as much as we have heard the Minister speak about acting on it, and plans, and programmes, and policies. There is also this issue of getting everyone together to do what is necessary.

In addition to that, Madam Speaker, let me say that we will continue to advocate both in and out of the Parliament. As women we have a duty and an obligation to all women in society to ensure that they develop positively and progressively, and that is the only way we can foster a healthy and safe country. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of National Security, Minister of Communications and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): [*Desk thumping*]
Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I rise today to contribute to this debate, and I would like to start by saying that from our perspective on this side, we do not see any politics with respect to a discussion on violence and abuse of either women or children in our society.

Madam Speaker, I have sat here and I have listened to the contributions by those on the other side, and by my colleague the Member for Tobago East. And as a Member on this side, I would like to take the opportunity on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago to publicly congratulate, Minister Ayanna Webster-Roy, the Member of Parliament for Tobago East,—[*Desk thumping*—]—for the tremendous work that she is doing in bringing not only gender policy, but driving things like the Children's Authority, as well as a number of other initiatives for the protection of women in our society.

And to answer the Member for Couva North, Minister Webster-Roy has taken on and driven the opening of many of those houses and homes to which she has referred for protection of, not only women but the young men, the transition homes, the safe homes, et cetera. And it was interesting to listen to the comment and the "advice" of my friend from Couva North to say, "Listen you have to go out there, and you have to blow you trumpet, and you have to sing your own praises,

and you have to let the public know what it is that you do.” Whilst there may be some merit in that, those on this side do not necessarily believe in that, and we believe just in doing good, and doing for the whole sake of doing good and not publicizing it. [*Desk thumping*] It is all about decency, integrity, class and doing these types of things.

One of the issues I have not heard referred to this afternoon that is very, very, common place and unfortunately growing with respect to abuse of women in our society, is the use of social media. So I have not heard the entering of a discussion as to what role social media is playing in our society, how social media is being used to shame people, and how social media is being used in society to attack women, and you hear the murmurings from those on the other side that will be ignored.

So, Madam Speaker, that is a serious scourge on society, and I look forward to the Attorney General bringing the Bill for debate on cybercrime, and for us facing the reality of how social media is being used to defame people to hide behind the anonymity of a number of sites. The use of Facebook, the use of WhatsApp, and all of the various fora, all of the various platforms that are being used. We have seen it, we have seen cases in our courts by women who have come out of relationships, and their former partners may have used photographs, videos, et cetera, taken at the time that were very personal and intimate, and they then use that for abuse.

We have seen happening all too frequently, unfortunately in our society, the use of these social media platforms to attack persons, and that is a form of violence and abuse. It is emotional abuse, it is verbal abuse, it is psychological abuse and that is going on all too frequently. And I would not hazard to say the genesis of

where that started from and in particular which foreigners may have come here and may have advised that these are the platforms to be used.

Madam Speaker, some of the things we have listened to this afternoon, and one of the things I also did not hear touched on is something I learned about reading one of the many reports from the Member of Parliament from Tobago East, and the Ministry that she heads up. Is something called "Non-partner abuse" and the whole phenomenon of non-partner abuse. So we have heard about domestic abuse, we have heard about abuse between partners who are in intimate relationship, in sexual relationships, in all different types of relationships. But one that I have not heard addressed this afternoon, and I would like to touch on very briefly, Madam Speaker, is that of non-partner abuse.

Mr. Singh: Define that.

Hon. S. Young: Non-partner abuse is when persons are not in an intimate relationship. They are not in a sexual relationship, they are not in a co-habitual relationship, they are not in a marriage or any form of living together. But they have some sort of relationship where they interact, where they may interact, it might be in an employment setting, and it may also be interaction on the basis of a need. Some sort of financial dependence, or some sort of relationship, a familial relationship, or even a friendship type of relationship. And I was shocked to hear and to read the statistics that very often in these relationships, men do abuse the women on that side. And these women are not in an intimate relationship with these men. And these men would take advantage of the women in our society. They take advantage of the young girls in our society, and it is from all different walks of life unfortunately.

And when you interact with these women, or you ask the question, it is a

psychological breakdown of the women that takes place over a period of time that has led them into believing that they cannot get out of it. I heard my friend, the Member for Fyzabad, ask that rhetorical question, because we all ask it, “Well, if you know you are in abusive relationship why do you not get out of the relationship?” Unfortunately, we have learnt it is not as easy as that. So we on this side and we in the Government, and I dare say we in the country must provide these safe houses, we must provide these safe spaces. There are a number of NGOs that do it. These are not things that are publicized because by definition, safe houses are not something that we should talk about in public in terms of the address and the location, et cetera.

I would like to now use the opportunity, Madam Speaker, to thank some of the bodies, some of the authorities, the men and women in Trinidad and Tobago, our public servants who are going over and beyond what can be expected to provide services in this arena for abused women and abused children. For example, the Counter Trafficking Unit. Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank the handful of men and women in this Counter Trafficking Unit, and the Ministry of National Security, Children's Authority part, and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. It is literally a handful who are under-resourced. I have asked the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of National Security for us to find additional resources, and I will use an example that is quite current right now. When there was recently a raid in Trinidad and they picked up 19 young Venezuelan women that was my first direct involvement with the scourge that we face. And the Counter Trafficking Unit did yeoman service, and I would like to publically thank them now on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago; with minimal resources. [*Desk thumping*]

They need drivers, they need interpreters, but what they were able to do is to protect these 19 young girls and they did a great job keeping them out of the public eye, dealing with them confidentially. I remember one Saturday night getting a call from the head of the Counter Trafficking Unit that one of the young girls was bleeding internally, unfortunately, and needed to be taken a general hospital in Trinidad. And we had to arrange police protection. So, I would like to thank the officer in charge of that division, who answered her phone at that late hour of the night and immediately provided police protection for this young girl, who was terrified to go to a public institution because she was convinced the demons and the villains who operate in this space were going to find her there. And I thank all of the men and women in those divisions who have done their work in the protection of these young girls, these women as well as children.

I heard the mention of the electronic bracelets, the Cabinet did certify and approve the award of a contract. The implementation of these electronic bracelets, as far as I am concerned it is taking a bit to long for us to get it implemented, for it to get implemented, and for it to start working for that unit and division to start working.

I heard it suggested that you tie that into the orders, the protection orders. Unfortunately protection orders like every other court order, depend on the persons respecting the law. So, yes there has been—and as I say there is no politics in it. There has been in our society an ignoring of these protection orders. Unfortunately, we have even had some incidents where the persons who have obtained the protection orders have encouraged the abusive partner to reengage them. And it is because of that same psychological breakdown, those same psychological effects of abuse over a period of time take effect. It is real, Madam Speaker, and we as a

society have to provide that level of support for these vulnerable women, and also, unfortunately, children in our society. *[Interruption]* Thank you.

The safe homes. Madam Speaker, safe homes are spread throughout Trinidad and Tobago. Do we have enough? The answer is, no. There are a number of private sector safe homes. And I would like to thank the men and women who open their homes and open their properties to allow us those opportunities, because part of the whole safety of a safe house is that persons do not know where it is located. It is not located in a state location. The Minister is also working very hard on building in these halfway homes, as we call it as laypeople. These homes where women who are trying to get back on their feet, after going through abusive relationships and may have children with them. They can go into these safe spaces. There will be facilities to look after the children after school and to allow these women to get back on their feet, start to make money, start to earn money.

Madam Speaker, I do not know if we really recognize as a society, how prevalent this is throughout our society and how many people on a daily basis face this scourge, and face the abuse, be it domestic abuse, be it all other types of abuse and violence towards their person, including psychological and emotion abuse. But they still manage to wake up every morning to keep going. So we also need more psychologists, we need more assistance in that area as well.

We as a country need to also not protect those who engage in that type of behaviour, has been my constant conversation. I would also like to take the opportunity to congratulate the Minister on her "barbershop programme" because she is right. Madam Speaker, my respectful submission is men have a very, very important role to play in this. I think a part of the problem, and what has spawned this growing phenomenon of abuse of women in our society is because our men are

being left behind, or boys are being left behind. Women have long since broken any glass ceiling. There is no longer a glass ceiling in existence. But what society did not prepare the males for is that change in roles.

It is a conversation I have had with my friend, the hon. Member for Tobago East, time and time again. Our young boys have not been provided with the support that they need for this change in roles, as the girls exceed them in academics, as the girls form their own independence. There is no longer this traditional need by women in our society for the financial assistance of men and to be dependent on men. And men have not always reacted well to that. But we need at this stage, Madam Speaker, in my respectful submission, to work with the young men on our society, the young boys in our society from early ages to prepare them to deal with this phenomenon.

One of the things that my friend has done from Tobago East is the barbershop programme, and she invited me to participate in the barbershop programme. In a training programme for the males in the police service, teaching men in the police service to become—train-the-trainers to then go out and teach the rest of the men in the police service. A number of things:

1. to recognize what happens in an abusive space;
2. to sensitize them as to how when they get called into those environments, and they get called out to duty to respond to domestic violence, and domestic abuse, and these types of situation where women and children are abused, how they intervene, how they deal with the situation.

But most importantly for me in that barbershop programme is to teach men how to deal with what I have just described, which is our changing role in society, and not to react in violent, physical manners when they think they are being—they think

they are being challenged by women. But it is not a challenge by women, it is just a shifting of the roles.

And that barbershop allowed a safe space for men to have that conversation. Because very often men are macho, as we say in Trinidad, and they do not want to confront the realities of this situation. But, I, participating in that for the limited time that I did, saw big grown men, the toughest of our men, because they are in the police service, et cetera, going out there and facing criminals, after about half an hour of conversation that was skirting the issues, really begin to open up, and begin to have the conversations. And men themselves need those safe spaces to confront amongst themselves without fear of ridicule. How do they deal with these types of situations? How do you deal with the situations of infidelity? How do deal with the situations of a woman deciding she wants to move on? How do you deal with the situations of no longer being the bread-winner? You maybe have lost your job, and your wife or your partner is now the breadwinner.

These are the things, Madam Speaker, that this Motion also needs to address and that we as a society need to address in how we prepare the future society, the future men and women growing up. Not to confront each other in violence. Not to confront each other in physical means and circumstances, it happens all too often. Today we were having a conversation about that situation that my friend from Fyzabad referred to. Where a man in Sangre Grande decided to take his wife's life, and then try to take his own but failed and now is facing a murder charge. How do we as a society deal with that? I cannot say much more about it because it is before the courts. But these are the types of instances.

Now, I would like to correct something that, unfortunately, I think it was just getting caught up in the contribution that my friend from Couva North said, but I

cannot let it remain on the *Hansard* and the record where she says that women are dying daily, and are murdered daily. That is not so. But any murder of a woman in those types of circumstances, one is too much as far as we are concerned. We have to find a better way to protect.

The Commissioner of Police upon entering office and this being a topic of conversation told the men and women in Trinidad and Tobago Police Service that they need to be sensitized, and when the women come in and they have the protection orders, and they make the complaints that they do not just say, “Well I doh have a vehicle, I cah respond, there is nothing I could do. Well, we will get there soon.” But to understand the urgency of the situation, for a person, a woman in these instances to reach out to the police service and say I need help. It is my respectful submission, Madam Speaker, that has to go to the priority list.

The police, and I make the call now to the men and women in the police stations across the country, when these instances take place, whether there is a protection order or not, and females in our society call out for help, let us drop what we are doing and go and assist because that in itself may end up saving a life.

5.50 p.m.

And it cannot be part of a proper argument to say, “Well, I save yuh now” and then a month from now you may do something. We cannot deal with the future, we cannot change the past. Let us immediately prioritize when those calls are made, those SOS calls—those calls for help are made by women across the country—that the men and women in the police stations give them the time of the day and immediately go to their assistance.

Madam Speaker, last weekend we had an event up in Toco, and on my way back out of Toco, I stopped at the Matura Police Post, and I would like to use this

opportunity now to congratulate and to thank the two police officers who were at the Matura Police Post, because when I went into the station, there was a male corporal and a female WPC, and there was a woman who came out from the back of the station—she was in a residential house and it was the downstairs of the house—and I could see she was dressed in her—let us call it her night clothing—and just with a cover-all over it. So I asked: “Well, what is going on?”

When you go into police stations you enquire: what is the strength, who is on call, what are the issues that they are dealing with, and they told me that right now they are dealing with a domestic situation and, unfortunately, it is a repeat situation. It turned out that was the wife of an abusive husband, and she had sought refuge in the police station, and I would like to commend those two police officers here today publicly [*Desk thumping*] for how they were dealing with her. As they began to tell me about all the woes and all the difficulties they faced, they did not lose the human touch, and very often in those circumstances, Madam Speaker, that is what is going to make the difference, because a person who is abused is going through all sorts of psychological trauma, conflict and turmoil internally, and we on the outside may not be able to appreciate that, and it is how we interface with them, at the given point in time, that will make the difference as to how they go on with their day, and maybe even possibly their life.

Madam Speaker, the NGOs in this space and this area, are playing a very important part and, again, I use the opportunity to thank the NGOs, you see because this Motion by my friend from Fyzabad, the hon. Member for Fyzabad, ends by saying:

Be it resolved that the Government take urgent steps to ensure the protection of our nation's women.

It is not only the Government. I think we all accept here, in this debate this afternoon, it is all of us.

The Member for Tobago East and myself have listed a handful of the projects and the various things that the Government is doing from a national security perspective. We take it very seriously. It has formed part of the conversation. I am reaching out here again, publicly, to call upon the men and the women in the police service to prioritize how we deal with these types of situations. There are some great stories in there.

A few weeks ago, I attended a passing out parade at the prisons, and for the first time, there was a batch of all female prison officers graduating; 34 of them. [*Desk thumping*] I commend the prison service for that. Part of the training of those female prison officers is: how are they dealing with the female prisoners? Because very often, female prisoners may be inside there because they were, at some stage in their lives, subject of abuse, et cetera and you find this very often in the prison system.

I was walking through the YTC a few weeks ago as well, and interacting with some of the inmates at YTC, some of them were, unfortunately, subjects of abuse in their home circumstances. When you are subjected to that type of life they have to find an outlet, but what we may see is the violent life or the turning to the criminal gangs, et cetera. So you are right. We need to intervene, but as a society into this, and for the Government to pump as much resources as they can into these types of situations. I am constantly arguing with my Cabinet colleagues, in fact, up to recently, this week, that we need to provide more resources to our Children's Authority, we need to provide more resources to the work that Minister Ayanna Webster-Roy is doing, for more safe houses, for more halfway houses and more

transition homes.

The Member of Parliament for Diego Martin North/East was making that point to Minister Webster-Roy and I recently, a week ago, saying what happens to the children and, in this case, for example, the females, who are, for example, in a St. Jude's environment and they hit the age of 18, from a legal perspective, you must now leave the community residence, you must now go, but they are not prepared. They are not prepared for that harsh world. So we were talking about what it is that can be done by the State to provide that halfway house, that safe shelter for them to catch themselves.

Mr. Al-Rawi: We are on the Remand side of it.

Hon. S. Young: As we all know—correct. I would tell you as well, as the Minister of National Security, we face that difficulty, especially with the young women, because we do not have enough facilities. I remember one Friday night getting a late call from the Commissioner of Prisons that the girls who were being housed up at the—you remember that?—female home, the home that we have for juvenile girls. They were basically revolting, “rioting”. And how could we deal with them? And when you listen to the stories, they were telling the officers who responded: “You cyar touch me, I am a female and I am a minor. You cyar touch me.” Go beyond that. Go into that psychological mindset to watch authority and say: “You cannot touch me”, and that is what we are dealing with as a society, and these are things we need to confront frontally. We need to find a way to deal with it. The only way we could do it is by taking the politics out of it. So I commend you, Member for Fyzabad, for bringing this Motion here and for us looking at it collectively as 41 Members.

Mr. Al-Rawi: It coincides with our work.

Hon. S. Young: And to give us the opportunity to speak about it publicly and to say these are some of the things we are doing.

Again, another thing that happened within the last, I think it is a month, a month and a half—and I thank the outgoing Chief of Defence Staff, Rear Admiral Pritchard, for having the foresight in the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force to have a specific programme for the female officers in the defence force. These are the types of things we need to do. And when I spoke to them and delivered a few remarks, I told those female defence force officers, do not underestimate—and I will say it as well to our female police officers, two of whom are in the Chamber now—three of whom are in the Chamber now—do not for a moment, officers, underestimate the role you are playing in society. And to the young girls out there, who look up to you all, as you wear your uniforms with pride, thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

I told the female defence force officers, your sisters in the defence force, to understand when you are just walking down the road in your uniform, young girls may be looking on and saying: “That is what I want to do when I grow up”, and you all through your sisterhood and that bond of sisterhood, have to stand up to the elements of abuse, and if there are men doing those things, you all stand together—the fourth female officer now walks in. Do not for a moment underestimate the role that you all are playing, and we thank you for that leadership that you are providing. [*Desk thumping*]

One of the points that was made by my friend, the Member for Fyzabad, and you have heard me make the same call here today, is that police must respond to all complaints, but sometimes that is not being followed. In our communities, and as we get down to the community policing, there are more important roles to be played—in the Police Youth Clubs, the Ministry of Education, in our schools, we

must be prepared to identify the children who may be acting a little differently, a little off, because they may be the products of what is going on in an abusive home. That is another thing we need to discuss, the effects this is having on that younger generation.

I heard you say—and you are right—physical violence during pregnancy. It is only a beast, first of all in my opinion, that would carry out that type of attack on a woman, but worse yet when a woman is pregnant and carrying another being inside of her, protecting the baby inside of her, and we have this all too frequently happening. I have heard the stories myself of pregnant women being attacked by their partners or in these non-partner relationships.

One of the things I would like to suggest that we can do as a Government, is look at the curriculum in our primary schools and our secondary schools. Let us work with the young men, exactly as I have said, along the lines that I have just said, the young men in terms of preparing them psychologically for “this is how you face the world”. There are going to be occasions where you may feel outdone by females and that is okay, that is normal. You do not then have to use your physical brute and your physical strength to react to it. We need to have those conversations with our young people.

I also said a way to fight corruption in our society, let us get back into the schools and teach ethics. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, we take it for granted that every young child growing up in our society has the same opportunities we may have or we may be able to give our children. There are many children in our society who are growing up, and they may be in single parent homes and that mother is out there working two and three jobs just to be able to provide. We cannot take it for granted, as a society, that those young children will grow up

knowing what is right and what is wrong, and I would give you another example, again, from the YTC visit.

There was this small little boy in what they call the dormitories—the cells in YTC are called dormitories, where you have about six young boys in these dormitories that all are barred off, and there was one small boy—and I was asking all of them: “What it is that you are in here for?”. And I saw his head drop and the look of remorse. And, Madam Speaker, when I engaged in conversation with him he was remorseful. He said I am in here for trafficking drugs. Afterwards, the warden—he was 13 years old—told me the story. He said: “You see that young boy you just engaged with, when he came in here, he was big and he bad and he walked in here, his chest high—you all cyah do me anything”—and when you heard the story—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes to complete your contribution.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. What had happened is, unfortunately, his mother had left him and the mother had left him and he was being brought up by the father. The father did not have food in the house, but there was a man down the street that told him: “If you sell this product in school, you will be able to get money to buy food.” When he started doing that, of course, he had no idea what he was doing was wrong, and they told me that he came into the system he was not remorseful. He did not believe he was doing anything—

Madam Speaker: I will ask the Member whose phone has gone off to go outside please, get their phone under control, and all Members take this opportunity to ensure that their phones are on silent please.

Hon. S. Young: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. And they told me over time working with that young boy, he then learnt right from wrong so the remorse that we were seeing on that day was learnt during his incarceration and that, to me, was confirmation of exactly the point I was just making. This transfers now to abuse as well, Madam Speaker, because young boys may grow up thinking, it is okay for them to engage in the shouting down at girls, the pushing of girls, the hitting of girls and these types of things, and we need to get in there at the young ages and say, no it is not okay, and I take up the challenge from the Member for Tobago East as I have told her before, we the men, we the leaders in society, we the parliamentarians, the male parliamentarians, need to go out there and give that message to the men. The policemen need to go out there and give that message to the men.

Because she made the point to me, she said very often—sorry, the Member for Tobago East, Madam Speaker, made the point to me that very often when she as the Minister goes out there and tries to engage in these forums among the male forum, she senses from the body language that the message is not getting across, and it is time that us men get up there and we stand with the Member for Tobago East and others to deliver this message and to do the work that is necessary.

So, Madam Speaker, in conclusion, I agree that it is a problem in our society, the abuse of women. I also have added the abuse of children and I agree that more needs to be done with respect to it. But as we have listed here this afternoon, the Government is down to board, the Government is doing as much as it can. We can always try to do more, but how I want to end is by thanking everyone, Madam Speaker, through this House, for all of the great work that is going on out there, because there is a lot of great work that is going on out there—all of the volunteers and all of the public servants, all of the NGOs, all of the

people who are working in this arena. And I end by thanking the men and women in uniform, both in the defence force, in the police service and also in immigration.

I end with the story, when Minister Dillon and I were down in Cedros this week, we saw in the holding cell at Cedros—we talked about Venezuela—we saw a young Venezuelan woman with a three-month old baby and a three-year old—and I had the Chief Immigration Officer with me—and before we left the station two young men and a young woman came—and were at the counter—and they are the roving immigration officers who are going around the country looking at these cases making the recommendation that persons in those circumstances be released on supervisory orders, and adding that human touch, and it was good to see that taking place, Madam Speaker. So to all of these persons out there who are making the difference as a citizen of Trinidad and Tobago and as the representative for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I thank them, and with those few words Madam Speaker, I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, in accordance with Standing 50(3), I beg to move that the debate on this the Fourth Private Members' Motion be adjourned.

Question put and agreed to.

COMPANIES (AMDT.) BILL, 2018 Senate Amendments

The Attorney General (Hon. Faris Al-Rawi): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name, Motion No. 3, Madam Speaker—the Senate amendments to the Companies (Amdt.) Bill, 2018—and I beg to move that Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that the Senate amendments to the Companies (Amdt.) Bill, 2018 listed in Appendix II be now considered.

Question proposed.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 9.

Senate amendment reads as follows:

In proposed section 337C in subsection (1) by deleting the word “enable” and substituting the word “identify”;

New Clause 10A.

Senate amendment reads as follows:

Insert after clause 10 the following new clause:

Section 516A amended	10A. The Companies Act is amended in section 516A— (a) in subsection (1), by deleting the words “1 st July, 2016 to 16 th September 2016” and substituting the words “1 st May, 2019 to 30 th August, 2019”; and (b) in subsection (3) by deleting the words “16 th September, 2016” and substituting the words “30 th August, 2019”.
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Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I take it there is agreement that the two amendments would be taken together? Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to report that the Bill, the Companies (Amdt.) Bill, 2018, had a successful passage through the Senate. There are two small amendments to be made, but they are quite important; the latter is actually quite powerful. With respect to clause 9, so as to have the correct wording read in the new section 337C, in subsection (1), it really was to allow for the identity of the party to be discerned. In that circumstance, we

needed to put in the word “identify” so as to enable that the party be identified, Madam Speaker. It is really, quite simply, a linguistic change. I apologize.

Madam Speaker, the second clause, which is a new group 10A to be inserted, is important in the context that, as it stands right now, the Companies Registry has some 104,000 companies in existence. Those companies are several in type—for-profit companies limited by shares, companies limited by guarantee, not-for-profit companies, externally registered companies and then, of course, companies that are previously in existence and are yet to be continued.

When we look at that particular matrix, of the 104,000 companies listed in the registry, nearly 20 per cent of that registry is in a state of decay. Madam Speaker, 20 per cent of the register is, in fact, non-compliant and a number of these companies find themselves in non-compliance for a very important reason. The calculation for penalties for the registration of late documents is really done on a multiplication basis. It is \$300 per month, per document, and then you multiply it by the number of years.

So if you fail to file your annual return for four years, you take \$300 multiply it by 12, multiply it by 4, and if you fail to file your annual return together with failing to file your notice of declaration of your directors or your secretary or your change of directors, et cetera, you are finding yourselves actually running into the thousands of dollars by way of penalties over a six-year period in particular. Some companies find themselves with indigent shareholders who are not able to bring the companies up-to-date and that is most important in management companies that own property. In those circumstances, town-housing companies are arranged that way, condominiums are arranged that way. Sometimes the owners of the properties there who own their apartments, et cetera, in two forms—one by way of a lease to the apartment and, secondly, by way of a share in a company,

which is a management company—what has happened is there is an inability to bring those companies up-to-date because people just simply cannot afford to do it.

We have engaged in a deliberate exercise of identifying the delinquent companies, and so as to facilitate an opportunity to allow them to come up to deck without punishing them with debilitating sanctions, we propose that an amnesty be granted in the period May 2019—that is from the 1st of May, 2019, to the 30th of August, 2019. This will allow us to go on a robust education and information campaign to alert people that there is an amnesty for this period until August 30th, 2019, and to go on a marching exercise to obtain compliance by filing of these documents. It is a huge relief for literally potentially some 20,000 companies on the register that are in default at present.

In those circumstances, after having had the companies come up-to-date, we will be going on a very aggressive exercise to strike off companies and to treat with assets according to the sections of the Companies Act for the disposition of assets on involuntarily winding up and striking off equations. That is the rationale for the new clause 10A, Madam Speaker, and I think that it augurs well and in the best interest of the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: AG, I am not sure what you beg to move. So, I think you should let us know what you beg to move.

Mr. Al-Rawi.: And, Madam Speaker, I am begging to move that this House agree with the Senate in the amendment to clause 9 as set out in Appendix II and I am also begging to move that this House agree with the Senate's insertion of the new clause 10A as circulated on Appendix II.

Question proposed.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I just rise quickly. I have

a few comments to make on these two amendments coming from the Senate to the Attorney General. Hon. Attorney General, the question I would like to ask is, what triggered this amnesty that is coming now? Because I know back in July, just before July 2016, there was an amnesty given and the rationale at the time, if I remember during your debate, was to actually do what you are doing now again, and one of the concerns that you had at that point in time was that you were cleaning up the registry, and you were giving people time, companies, to come up to speed and you would have been striking off these companies over a period of time. So we are just curious to know, what triggered and why this amendment was not brought when you first piloted these amendments in the House a couple of weeks ago.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Sure.

Mr. Lee: Because I know it did not come from the other place, it really was an amendment done by you, the Attorney General. The other comment I would like to make is, is there a period—how far back would you allow someone, a company, to file? Is there a sort of a time period or a time limit of how far back you are asking a company to bring up their companies filing up to date?

Madam Speaker, in principle, we agree with this amendment. We have no difficulty with it, but we would like the Attorney General to answer some of those questions. Thank you.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you. I thank the hon. Member for the questions. Madam Speaker, I answer as follows. This extension of time was a Government proposal, specifically one which the Ministry of Finance approved and, certainly, the rest of our Cabinet approved. It came about because in our exercise in two areas we thought it necessary to bring a further amnesty. We only crystalized that position when we settled upon the Non-Profit Organizations Bill.

So, as Madam Speaker would be aware, we laid that Bill in Parliament today, and there are some 7,900-odd non-profit organizations and in capturing that new non-profit organization registry, alongside a beneficial ownership registry which we are creating, in looking at the data across it, even though we have struck off hundreds of companies in the period since 2016 to now—and, in fact, last week there was a full page notice of further companies to be struck off—in anticipation of the non-profit organization registry and, secondly, because we have been migrating data under a new system of companies.

The Companies Registry IT system was the worst of the three systems there—the Civil Registry, the Companies Registry and the Land Registry. The Land Registry is under full purchase right now in a new system and the Companies Registry, that data migration has allowed us to drill in with specificity in the period post-2016.

So, in summary, further data analysis in the period 2016 to now as a result of improvements in IT structures. Secondly, as a result of the imminent debate, without breaching the rules of anticipation, on the Non-Profit Organizations Bill by bringing in some 7,900 non-profit organizations and then thousands of others onto that MPO Registry, we think it prudent to clean, cull and manage the situation.

The hon. Member asked as well, what period backwards can people comply with this? Basically, all compliance from any date that you failed to comply. So if your documents are 12 years in arrears, 15 years in arrears, you can bring them all up-to-date. So it is a golden opportunity with a proper education campaign to get this out into the public domain to till the soil in anticipation of the non-profit organization and, very importantly, to till the soil for the preparation for the strike offs as we go to deal with the companies that are properly defunct and can pose a risk to the financial system and facilitate money laundering, terrorist financing, a

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simple example being the juice cans and the use of an old defunct company that had \$1 billion in drugs finding themselves in the United States of America. I beg to move. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

6.20 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis):

Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, before moving the adjournment, I wish to advise as follows, the Government proposes to introduce the Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, 2019, at the next sitting of the House, and in order to introduce this Bill it will be necessary to move the suspension of Standing Order 78. I therefore give notice, pursuant to Standing Order 122(1), of my intention to move for the suspension of Standing Order 78 at the next sitting of the House to enable the introduction of the Income Tax (Amdt.) Bill, 2019. Madam Speaker, a copy of the Bill will be circulated with the issuance of the next Order Paper.

Madam Speaker, at this time I would like to move the adjournment of the House to Friday next. Madam Speaker, on that day we will be doing the Non-Profit Organizations Bill that was laid on the Supplemental Order Paper. Thank you. Sorry, Madam Speaker, we will be starting at 1.30.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, there is one matter that qualifies to be raised on the Motion of the Adjournment of House. I now call upon the Member for Oropouche East. [*Desk thumping*]

Boeing 737 Max 8 Aircraft (Steps Taken to Cancel Agreements)

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (Oropouche East): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 16, I rise to speak on a matter on the

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adjournment. I believe, Madam Speaker, I have 10 minutes to do so. Madam Speaker, the matter filed is a matter that brings us no pleasure and it is a matter that deals with a very, very serious, serious issue. It reads as follows, in light of recent fatal accidents involving the Boeing 737 Max 8 aircraft, the Government should take urgent steps to cancel all commercial agreements to purchase or lease the 12 Boeing 737 Max 8 planes being acquired for the Caribbean Airlines Limited's fleet.

Madam Speaker, it is no secret that in the domain in the national community, in the media, social media, and elsewhere, there is an international development that has taken place surrounding the crashes of two Boeing 737 Max 8 aircraft. Madam Speaker, on October 29, 2018, an Indonesian airline, Lion Air, flight 610, crashed into the Java Sea killing 189 persons.

Madam Speaker, within less than five months, on March 08, 2019, an Ethiopian Airlines' flight 302 crashed killing 157 persons on board. Madam Speaker, while the International Press, and the technical and financial part of the International Press, has raised several issues involving the suitability of those aircraft, calling into question its engineering design, its IT capacity, the aircraft itself, the 737 Max 8—and let be very clear at this time, Caribbean Airlines does not have any 737 Max 8 aircraft. But, Madam Speaker, they have called into question, serious questions after both the crashes whether or not that aircraft is technically and engineeringly, in an engineering sense and in an IT sense, there have been reports—Madam Speaker, in 10 minutes or less, I really do not want to plough through materials before me and quote at length, but really to give the headline issues. In the International Press there is speculation that both the crash of the Lion Air and the Ethiopian Airlines, as a fact, it took place within minutes of

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take-off and there are serious concerns that what has caused this. There is some type of IT malfunction involving the nose-diving 12 times faster than it should, and a control mechanism, a sensor control mechanism where the pilots lose control. That is technical business and that is a matter that is subject now to an international investigation, I believe, in France, a forensic investigation.

But, Madam Speaker, long before any report comes to us by the end of this year, there is another issue, and that is, interestingly, one month after the October 21st crash, last year, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago announced, by way of a function in Jamaica, and I believe one in Trinidad, that the Caribbean Airlines had taken a decision to acquire, we believe, by leasing 12 Boeing 737 Max 8 aircraft. Madam Speaker, I raised this because prior to that it was not in the public domain in any meaningful way, if at all. We had not heard of it. We had not seen any releases. Certainly, there was no statement. The Prime Minister of this country made a statement in this Parliament on the acquisition of the boats from Australia, there was no statement, to my knowledge, made on the acquisition of 12 Boeing jets. The cost of which, Madam Speaker, we are not certain as a matter of public record, because I do not proceed by press conferencing, and that type of thing. On the public record we have no knowledge of what is the cost, when did this deal take place, who negotiated this deal, what is the cost of the 12 jets, how much money have we paid down for that, is it TT \$50 million, is it less, is it more, what is the total cost.

Madam Speaker, if, according to the research, US \$75 million to US \$100 million is the cost of one jet, we estimate that Trinidad and Tobago will be entering into another TT \$6 billion to TT \$7 billion deal. This, Madam Speaker, is the exact problem that we faced years ago with the OPVs when Government changed, [*Desk*

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thumping] problem after problem to clean up a mess with a contract we did not know enough of with the OPVs. This, I put it to the House and the country, this Boeing 737 Max 8 purchase acquisition is exactly akin to another OPV scandal in this country. [*Desk thumping*]

So the Minister should tell us when they entered into, who entered into that arrangement, did it have Cabinet approval, not who recused “theirself” necessarily; did it have Cabinet approval—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, I would just remind you of what the text of your Motion is, so please get back to it.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes. Sure. So having provided the information on that secret deal, we have the crash before us now, we have reports emanating all over the place. Madam Speaker, what was amazing in light of these incidents, and I come to it now, is that there were countries across the world, China, South Korea, India, Ethiopia, of course, Turkey, Europe, Mexico, Cayman Islands, Guyana, Brazil, and, finally, the United States, that grounded and banned the 737 Max 8 aircraft, and Trinidad and Tobago again was last in the queue, as we seem to be internationally on everything, whether it is Venezuela or anything, we are last in the queue. The United National Congress, Sen. Anita Haynes had to put out a press release, calling on the Government to ban the 737 Max 8, and I think it was the next day, in the aftermath of Sen. Haynes’ press release, that the Government took some action, I believe. And I have the newspaper reports here, when there was a report in the press of panic, the Minister of Finance, in his usual way, he blamed the press. He “buff up” the press. The Minister of Finance “buff up” the press and say, “What you talking about panic, CAL doh have any 737 Max 8”, but he, of course, could not understand that the passengers, the public and the pilots, and so

on, they were concerned not only with Caribbean Airlines but of aircraft coming in and leaving Trinidad and Tobago. But he “buffed them up”, but, Madam Speaker, then the Minister called for more information on this, more information on that, and so on, but the position it is now is that Trinidad and Tobago has some deal, some secret arrangement with Boeing on this matter.

I am calling upon this Government to halt all agreements pending the outcome of the report [*Desk thumping*] on the crashes that took place, Lion Air and Ethiopian Airlines. I am calling upon this Government to also, while it is a legal issue, because you may have already entered into a contract or some type of agreement, the fact that those aircraft have been grounded across the globe also gives you legal leverage now to negotiate with Boeing, of course, so that you can take action. The Minister—in fact, somebody told me there is was “buck” interfering in the business of Caribbean Airlines, but, Madam Speaker, the Minister needs to get his story clear with Caribbean Airlines and tell us which legal firm has been recruited, at what cost, what is the legal advice, and when would Caribbean Airlines be announcing, with fanfare or not, that they have cancelled or postponed these arrangements pending the outcome, because, Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago is always slow to Act. But today, I want to just tell you, Madam Speaker, in the closing minute or two, that just today we got the news, Indonesia’s Garuda airline cancelled its \$4.9 billion order for the Boeing 737 Max 8. Madam Speaker, Indonesia has gone US \$4.9 billion, they cancelled an order for 50 aircraft; you are 12, and they have done this, as they say, with sound legal advice. Indonesia has done it; Malaysia, the Malaysian Airlines is now reviewing their arrangements.

Tell us who is also the middleman here because on the website of Boeing

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Trinidad and Tobago is not listed as a purchaser, and they are leasing companies that are involved? Is there a leasing company that was recruited to lease or acquire these airlines, these aircraft from Boeing, and if so, what company? And what are the legal implications for having a leasing company in the middle of Trinidad and Tobago and the Boeing Company? So, Madam Speaker, there are serious questions to answer, where is the legal advice, how long should we wait for the legal advice, and where is this money, where is \$6 billion to \$7 billion coming from, from a Government that every single day claim they have no money?—they have no money from an empty Treasury. Where is the \$6 billion, \$7 billion coming from? Those are some of the questions, Madam Speaker, we would like the Minister, the very interventionist Minister to speak to today. I thank you so much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: The Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): Madam Speaker, there was such a—[*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, I have not even begun to speak and the Member for Couva South is shouting, I beg your protection, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Okay. So, Members, we do not have long here again, I will ask everyone to comply with the Standing Orders. Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] There was such a torrent of misinformation from the Member for Oropouche East. It was such a barrage of untruths, I do not know where to start, but some housekeeping matters, the OPVs are currently the pride of the Brazilian Navy, the Trinidad and Tobago OPVs.

Hon. Member: Trinidad class.

Hon. C. Imbert: No, the OPVs built for Trinidad and Tobago are the pride of the

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Brazilian Navy; that is number one. Number two, Madam Speaker, it has been made clear in the public domain, in press releases, in press conferences, in advertisements, and in other forms of communication that Caribbean Airlines is not purchasing any aircraft from the Boeing aircraft company. I want to say that again, Caribbean Airlines is not purchasing any aircraft from the Boeing Aircraft Company. [*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, the Member for—I did not say a word when he was talking.

Madam Speaker: Minister of Finance, it seems, somehow or the other, we love to hear you and like we “doh” like to hear you. So I will ask all Members, please, let us hear the response. Minister of Finance.

Hon. C. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was very quiet. Now, Madam Speaker, Caribbean Airlines and its forerunner, BWIA, has been in the leasing business for 20 years and the Government, of which the Member for Oropouche East was a part, was involved in the leasing of aircraft and knows fully well that Caribbean Airlines and its predecessor did not purchase aircraft for at least 20 years. The last aircraft the BWIA bought was the Lockheed L-1011. [*Interruption*] No, no no, the last jet aircraft that Caribbean Airlines or its predecessor purchased was the Lockheed L-1011 aircraft, as far as I can remember, Madam Speaker. But they have been leasing airlines for years, aircraft for years, so that by putting this mischief into the public domain about Caribbean Airlines buying planes, when the hon. Member knows very well that for the last 20 years Caribbean Airlines has been leasing aircraft because it is more efficient and more economical to do so, that is just pure mischief, Madam Speaker.

Now, let us go to the facts. The leases of the current B 737-800 fleet are due to expire over the period 2019—2021. As a responsible entity, Caribbean Airlines

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commissioned a fleet planning team to undertake a study of the possible options available to them. The main aim of the committee was to determine and recommend the best possible jet option for the airline with consideration for lower operating costs, minimal additional investment, enhanced brand visible, optimized passenger revenue, minimal disruption for their customers, and equipping pilots, engineers and technicians with newer technology to enable improved operations and technical reliability. The jets under consideration by the committee were as follows: the Boeing 737-800, the current fleet; Boeing 737 Max 8; Airbus A320neo; Airbus A320neo PW. An analysis of each aircraft type was conducted and a comparison was done. After considerable deliberation, Madam Speaker, the committee decided that the Boeing 737 Max 8 was the best and most efficient aircraft for Caribbean Airlines new fleet. For many reasons, Madam Speaker, but not least of all being the fact that since these aircraft are similar to the current fleet of Boeing 737-800s, the additional pilot training, the additional engineering training and the additional operational requirements, switching from the 737 to the 800 to the 737 Max 8 would have been minimal, Madam Speaker.

If Caribbean Airlines had chosen to go with the Airbus, for example, they would have had to retrain all of their pilots, all of their ground crew, all of their engineers, all of their various staff members, Madam Speaker, and also order completely new spare parts, and so on. These are the kinds of decisions that responsible people take when they are considering an acquisition of this complex nature. So at the end of the day, after weighing up all the pros and cons, the cost of the lease, the fuel consumption of the aircraft, the passenger capacity, the fact that the new Boeing aircraft would not require any comprehensive additional pilot training, and so on, the airline took the decision to least 12 brand new Boeing Max

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8 aircraft, like every other airline would do, Madam Speaker. Let me just move on, Madam Speaker, for the record, on the 4th of August, 2009, a Bangkok Airways ATR aircraft crashed killing one of the crew members. On the 13th of September, 2010, an ATR aircraft crashed killing 17 people. In November 2010, an ATR crashed killing 68 people, all seven crew members and all 61 passengers were killed. In 2012 an ATR aircraft crashed and killed all passengers, Madam Speaker, and so on, and so on. However, the former Government signed an order in September 2010, for nine ATR aircraft at a cost of \$1.4 billion, purchased eh—purchased, purchased, purchased \$1.4 billion. And, Madam Speaker, after all these crashes—[*Interruption*] Madam Speaker, I did not speak when they spoke. After all these crashes that I just read out, including in particular the crash in September 2010, killed 17 people, the crash in November 2010, killed 68 people, Madam Speaker, in 2011 the UNC Government bought five ATR aircraft, after all these crashes, Madam Speaker.

So it seems to me that it is “do as I say but not as I do”, Madam Speaker, UNC-style. But let me deal now with the facts, in February 2019, after that comprehensive study that I referred to, Caribbean Airlines executed 12 aircraft leases with two lessors, as has been its practice for 20 years, including the five years and three months under the UNC, for the lease of Boeing 737 Max 8 aircraft for a period of 12 years per lease. The first delivery is scheduled for December 2019; the second aircraft, 2020, January; the third aircraft March 2020; the fourth aircraft May 2020, and so on. So Caribbean Airlines entered into a lease arrangement to lease 12 aircraft, as the leases of its existing 12 aircraft expire, it is replaced, it is planning to replace them with Boeing 737 Max 8 aircraft, as and when the leases expire. So they signed a lease arrangement with two lessors to

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lease 12 aircraft. Shortly after that, Madam Speaker, in March 2019, a Boeing Max 8 aircraft operated by Ethiopian Airlines crashed resulting in the death of 157 passengers. Caribbean Airlines has followed and continues to follow all of the information available in the international media. I have instructed Caribbean Airlines to determine their options, to determine their legal rights and the various ways they can deal with this matter. I can tell you right now that in the lease arrangements the aircraft cannot be delivered unless they are fit for purpose and certified as airworthy by the flag state, which is the FAA, the design state actually, and our local civil aviation authorities, Madam Speaker.

So if the aircraft are certified as being not fit for purpose, then Caribbean Airlines will not have to take delivery and will not be obligated to pay any money and can pursue a refund of the deposit it made on its lease. Let me say as well, Madam Speaker, I do not have enough time, but there are multiple examples of aircraft being grounded or prohibited from flying temporarily because of some issue with respect to some part of equipment, multiple examples, and then a month later, two months later, three months later, the civil aviation authorities all over the world have declared the aircraft to be safe and declared that the aircraft can fly.

Madam Speaker, we are a responsible Government, we will follow the advice from the civil aviation authorities of the world and we will ensure that the passengers of Trinidad and Tobago are safe and secure as we protect their interest. I thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.41p.m.