



REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Debates of the House of Representatives

3rd Session – 11th Parliament (Rep.) – Volume 15 – Number 15

OFFICIAL REPORT (HANSARD)

THE HONOURABLE BRIDGID ANNISSETTE-GEORGE
SPEAKER

THE HONOURABLE ESMOND FORDE
DEPUTY SPEAKER

Friday 24th November, 2017

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Leave of Absence

Friday, November 24, 2017

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, November 24, 2017

The House met at 1.30 p.m.

PRAYERS

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, Mr. Prakash Ramadhar, MP, Member for St. Augustine has asked to be excused from today's sitting of the House. The leave which the Member seeks is granted.

PAPERS LAID

1. Consolidated Financial Statements of the Petroleum Company of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the year ended September 30, 2016. [*The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert)*]

To be referred to the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee.

2. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Port of Spain Corporation for the year ended September 30, 2009. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
3. Report of the Auditor General of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on the Financial Statements of the Port of Spain Corporation 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 Point Fortin Civic Centre for the year ended September 30, 2006. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

Papers 2 to 4 to be referred to the Public Accounts Committee.

5. Report of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago with respect to the Progress of the Proposals to Restructure CLICO, BAT and CIB for the quarter ended March 31, 2017. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
6. Report of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago with respect to the Progress of the Proposals to Restructure CLICO, BAT and CIB for the quarter ended June 30, 2017. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]

7. Ministerial Response of the Treasury Division, Ministry of Finance to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination of the System of Internal Audit within the Public Service. [*Hon. C. Imbert*]
8. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Labour and Small Enterprise Development to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination of the System of Internal Audit within the Public Service. [*The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis)*]
9. Response of the Elections and Boundaries Commission to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination of the System of Internal Audit within the Public Service. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
10. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination of the System of Internal Audit within the Public Service. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
11. Ministerial Response of the Ministry of Public Utilities to the Fourth Report of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee on an Examination of the System of Internal Audit within the Public Service. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]
12. Annual Administrative Report of the former Ministry of Community Development for fiscal 2013/2014. [*The Minister of Community Development, Culture and the Arts (Hon. Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly)*]
13. Annual Administrative Report of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development for 2014/2015. [*The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Randall Mitchell)*]
14. Annual Administrative Report of the Evolving TecKnologies and Enterprise Development Company Limited for the year ended September 30, 2016. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS (ENTERPRISES) COMMITTEE REPORT

(Presentation)

Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago Limited

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have the honour to present the following report:

Ninth Report of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee on the Examination of the Audited Accounts, Balance Sheet and other Financial Statements of the Telecommunications Services of Trinidad and Tobago Limited for the financial years 2008 to 2016.

URGENT QUESTIONS

Failure of Intelligence Services (Beetham Highway Incident)

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Could the Minister state the reasons for the failure of our intelligence services to anticipate, and plan for, the events which unfolded yesterday on the Beetham Highway in the wake of the arrests of two residents of the area?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, let me publicly state, that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago definitely condemns the actions of any lawless activities on the part of our citizens. With respect to what happened on the Beetham yesterday, we propose a zero tolerance of any type of behaviour that will affect the peace-loving persons, citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and also empathize with those who went through that traumatic experience yesterday.

Madam Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service had an operation on the Beetham yesterday, and early this morning the Commissioner of Police identified that there was a gap in terms of the operation. That gap has to do with, not only just the response, but in terms of the timeliness of that response.

Madam Speaker, the police intervened to arrest two individuals on the Beetham yesterday on a mounted operation. They were, in fact, on the ground at the time of the incident and had to call for reinforcement, which they did and dealt with the matter as quickly as possible to bring relief to the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, supplemental.

Mr. Charles: Can we be assured, hon. Minister, that what occurred in 1990, caused in part by a result of faulty intelligence, will not reoccur?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam Speaker, there is no comparison with 1990 with what happened yesterday, but I can assure you that even based on lessons learnt from 1990, the agencies of the State have put together an intelligence agency that can treat with any matters pertinent to 1990. And with

respect to the operations yesterday, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has learnt from lessons learnt and they will treat with any matter in the future, are well prepared to treat with any eventualities.

Madam Speaker: Supplemental question, Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: If the Minister says that systems were put in place based on lessons learnt in 1990 with respect to intelligence gathering, why did we not see them in effect yesterday?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam Speaker, again I said, there are two different matters. There are different levels of intelligence that are related to the different kinds of events, and therefore, as I said and I will continue to say, the agencies of the State are well prepared to treat with any eventualities, again, and are prepared to ensure that there is not a reoccurrence of what happened yesterday in Trinidad and Tobago.

Beetham Highway Incident (TTPS Assessment of)

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of National Security: Could the Minister please share with this House the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service's assessment of the reason or the reasons for the eruption and disruptive and violent behaviour in Beetham yesterday?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Madam Speaker, thank you. With respect to the incident at the Beetham yesterday, while there are numerous reasons that can be proffered based on the incident, from a law enforcement perspective coming from the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, it was directly based on the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service arresting two individuals from the Beetham and the reaction from the citizens in support of those individuals, purely from a law enforcement perspective as the question determined.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central, supplemental.

Dr. Tewarie: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What explains the reaction of the community or the people not actually affected by the police arrest of individuals?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam Speaker, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service is continuing to investigate with respect to the reasons and take action on those who have committed offences with respect to the protest actions at the Beetham yesterday.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, hon. Speaker. Hon. Minister, would the Ministry of National Security be reassessing the need to put the helicopters back in place in light of the fact that there is disruptive behaviour?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Sorry. Could you repeat?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Will the Ministry of National Security reassess the need to put the helicopters back into commission as a result of this disruptive behaviour?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam Speaker, the Ministry of National Security has helicopters in its arsenal and they will use them as it deems fit depending on the situation.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Hon. Minister, how do you intend to deal with the fears and apprehension of—*[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Question 3.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Ah?

Madam Speaker: Question 3.

Dr. Gopeesingh: All right. Fine.

**Prime Minister's Direct Instructions
(Commissioner of Police)**

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): To the Prime Minister: Hon. Prime Minister, under what legal authority did the Prime Minister give direct instructions to the Commissioner of Police as he publicly did at a press conference today?

The Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs and Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister (Hon. Stuart Young): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As has been happening since September 2015, the hon. Prime Minister is the Chairman of the National Security Council which meets on a very frequent basis. And having regard to what we saw happen yesterday and the need for the citizens to be assured that this Government continues to take positions of leadership, the Prime Minister met with some of the members of the National Security Council and he gave those directions to the Commissioner of Police today. Is it that you are suggesting this should have been done privately? We have done it. The Prime Minister did it today for the public of Trinidad and Tobago and with the full authority to do so as the Chairman of the National Security Council.

And once again, it just shows how a former administration may have operated before, taking no leadership role whatsoever with national security matters. [*Desk thumping*]

Dr. Moonilal: Thank you for the lucid clarification. Could the Prime Minister indicate to us, when was this meeting of the National Security Council held?

Hon. S. Young: Today.

Primary and Secondary Schools (Measures for IT Support)

Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, to the Minister of Education: In light of the non-renewal of contracts of some one hundred and fifty (150) IT Technicians, could the Minister please state what other measures will be implemented to support the IT needs of primary and secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I first of all will like to correct the Member for Oropouche West on two counts. First of all, there are 100 IT technicians on our establishment, not 150.

And the second count is, we have not failed to renew any contract for any IT technician. What has happened is, the IT technicians are at present on month-to-month contracts, and we are looking at appraising the performance of these IT technicians with a view to decide what is the best number of IT technicians that can support our IT programme. Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche West, supplemental.

Mrs. Gayadeen-Gopeesingh: How long will this performance appraisal or appraisal take place? How long?

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, before the end of this school term that will be completed.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Subsequent to your appraisal, would these IT technicians be given month-to-month contracts or full three-year contracts?

Hon. A. Garcia: Subsequent to the appraisal, Cabinet has decided that they will award three-year contracts to those persons.

**School Feeding Programme
(Non-payment to Caterers)**

Dr. Tim Gopeesingh (*Caroni East*): To the Minister of Education: Why has the Ministry of Education not paid the school feeding programme caterers the outstanding moneys owed to them despite, hon. Minister, your recent promise to ensure payments?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to announce that we have received releases from the Ministry of Finance and very shortly all the caterers who provide services to our school children, they will be paid. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, supplemental.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Can you give a comforting assurance to these caterers as to when the payments will be made to them?

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, this morning in discussion with our senior officers at the Ministry of Education, it was decided that in a matter of days these caterers will be paid. Thank you.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Would you be paying all the money outstanding to the caterers?

Hon. A. Garcia: Madam Speaker, I am not in a position to state whether all the money owed will be paid. All I can say is, a substantial amount was received by the Ministry of Education which should satisfy the needs of the caterers.

**Hillview College Break-in
(Ensuring of Safety)**

Mrs. Vidia Gayadeen-Gopeesingh (*Oropouche West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker, to the Minister of Education: In light of the recent break-in at Hillview College on Monday, can the Minister indicate how his Ministry intends to ensure the safety of students and the security of equipment at this school?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Madam Speaker, Hillview College is a denominational school. That school receives a grant from the Government to provide security services. Almost every day I am on the compound of Hillview College and I am assured that the security services are well taken care of. Only today, in speaking with some of the security officers when I visited the school, I have been assured, once more, that the security needs of the school are being met. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Christmas Season
(Plans to Address Security Concerns)**

Dr. Bhoendradatt Tewarie (*Caroni Central*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Minister of National Security: What plans if any has the Minister put in place to address fear, safety and security concerns of the citizenry given that the Christmas season is almost upon the country and the obviously deteriorating crime situation in the country?

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Minister of National Security continues to reinforce that strategic pillar of prediction and deterrence not only during the Christmas season, but throughout the year 2017 into 2018.

Madam Speaker, as a result of that reinforcement, the Commissioner of Police will, in fact, continue to increase during the Christmas season into the Carnival, the presence of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service through joint operations with the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force on our highways and our shopping centres and in our malls.

Additionally, there will be an increase in DUI testing. There will also be an increase in speed management. As you are well aware, we have just received nine additional speed guns provided to the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service. There would be an increase in speed management on the roads and highways.

We have also as part of our efforts incorporated the Trinidad and Tobago Customs and Excise Division because at the Christmas season there is an influx of a number of goods and services coming into Trinidad and Tobago, to increase the vigilance, especially the movement of illegal goods coming through the ports. So, we have incorporated the Customs and Excise also as part of our border management control system. So, Customs and Excise, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service, Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force will be actively involved in measures to ensure a safe and secure environment for the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni Central, supplemental.

Dr. Tewarie: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Will citizens be able to have a sense of high visibility of police presence during the Christmas period, and will—the Speaker will tell me not two questions, so I will ask afterwards.

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned a while ago, there will be high visibility of the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service supported by the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force on our highways and in our shopping centres, in our

malls and so on, and you will see additional efforts being placed—as I said, we included the Customs and Excise as part of that to ensure a safe and secured environment.

Dr. Tewarie: Will this proactive action continue into the Carnival season?

Hon. Maj. Gen. E. Dillon: Yes, Madam Speaker, it will continue.

**Flooding in Barrackpore
(Prevention of Water-borne Diseases)**

Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*): To the Minister of Health: Given Wednesday's extensive flooding in Barrackpore, could the Minister state the specific steps which he intends to take to prevent the spread of leptospirosis and other water-borne diseases in the area?

The Minister of Health (Hon. Terrence Deyalsingh): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the question. The Ministry of Health started its rainy season public awareness campaign in July of 2017. It continued post Bret; it continued post the Divali day flooding. Specific actions taken post Divali: the Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Nantrum of Insect Vector and Mr. Rampersad, Chief Public Health Inspector mounted a media campaign to alert.

With specific reference to this Wednesday's flooding, the principal medical officer of environmental health, working in conjunction with the Chief Medical Officer has already embarked, post Divali, on a public education programme. Specific measures also include, under the offices of the county medical officer of health, to liaise with the regional corporations to do flushing and washing of hard surfaces like roads and yards in and around homes. Once that is done, Insect Vector then moves in and sprays with bactericides for both leptospirosis—we also treat for mosquitoes, both for the larvae and adult mosquitoes. We also advise residents how to dispose of the carcass of dead animals that may have died in the floods, and how to handle vegetables.

I must say that there is a human element to this. While we can spar across the aisle, one person who got leptospirosis came into contact with flood waters because his car was stalled on Mosquito Creek. At that time a human being, a father, a husband will put himself in danger. That is the human element that we miss sometimes. No matter how much we warn people, and we have to be aware of this, that sometimes coming into contact with floodwaters may be inevitable. But we continue to alert the population and advise them and once we have a suspected case, we treat them with antibiotics. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

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

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, in accordance with Standing Order 29(14), the Member for Naparima has requested that the House of Representatives question No. 17 listed on today's Order Paper be withdrawn. Leader of the House.

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Madam Speaker, I am really disappointed because we are very ready to answer question No. 17. I am surprised that it is being withdrawn—a question about the spotlights. [*Crosstalk*] You did not want to ask it again?

Anyway, Madam Speaker, I would like to indicate that of these three oral questions that have been asked, we will answer all three; of the seven written questions that have been asked, we will answer all seven. [*Desk thumping*]

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**Women, Elderly and Children
(Measures to Protect)**

1. **Mr. Rodney Charles** (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Given that 43 women, 17 children and 22 pensioners have been murdered as at September 2017, could the Minister state the measures in place to protect women, elderly and children?

**Terrorism and Crime
(Addressing)**

3. **Mr. Rodney Charles** (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister state the Ministry's plans to address terrorism and crime to avert the concerns of potential international visitors?

**TTPS and Citizens
(Improving Trust)**

4. **Mr. Rodney Charles** (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

In light of recent incidents of conflict between citizens and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS), could the Minister state the measures the Ministry intends to implement to improve trust between the TTPS and citizens?

**Projected Annual Murder Rate
(Plans to Reduce)**

5. **Mr. Rodney Charles** (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Given that the present murder rate in Trinidad and Tobago is 343 persons and projected to increase to 487 persons by the end of 2017, could the Minister state the plans to reduce the projected annual murder rate?

**Organized Crime Intelligence Unit
(Targets and Role of)**

18. **Mr. Rodney Charles** (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of National Security:

Could the Minister state:

- a) the quantifiable targets of the Organized Crime Intelligence Unit; and
- b) the anticipated role of the Organized Crime Intelligence Unit in addressing the low murder detection rate?

Vide end of sitting for written answers.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**GATE Funding
(Details of)**

14. **Mr. Ganga Singh** (*Chaguanas West*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister state:

- a) the reasons for the non-payment of GATE funding to the Trinidad and Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute (TTHTI); and
- b) the expected time frame for disbursement of GATE funding to TTHTI?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member for Chaguanas West is inferring by his question that the Trinidad and Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute has not been receiving GATE funding. This is patently untrue. During fiscal 2017, the TTHTI was paid the sum of \$2,729,492 in respect of students at the institute who were eligible for GATE funding.

The Ministry of Education is currently processing claims from the TTHTI for GATE funding totalling \$1,571,800. Since payment of these claims is subject to

the availability of funds, I am unable at this time to give a time frame for the settlement of these claims. Thank you.

Mr. Charles: To the Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs, could the Minister give the expected time—

Madam Speaker: Member, just question No. 19. Leader of the House. Oh, Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs. I am sorry.

**Paris Climate Change Agreement
(Time frame for Ratification)**

19. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs:

Could the Minister give the expected time frame for Trinidad and Tobago's ratification of the Paris Climate Change Agreement?

The Minister of Foreign and Caricom Affairs (Sen. The Hon. Dennis Moses): [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago is cognizant of the imperative for ambitious and urgent global action to address the unsustainable trajectory of global temperature increase. To this end, Madam Speaker, Trinidad and Tobago signed the Paris Agreement on the opening day of signatures on the 22 April, 2016, thereby symbolizing this country's continued commitment to multilateral action and support of the United Nations framework on climate change to treat with the problem.

The Government is aware that ratification is the next natural step in the process and as such is seized with the issue. The matter is accordingly receiving due attention, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker: Member for Naparima, supplemental.

Mr. Charles: Is the Minister aware that there was a UN high-level pledging conference 'Building a more Climate Resilient Caribbean Community' at which US \$1.3 billion in pledges and \$1 billion in loans and debt relief took place earlier this week, and because we are not ratifying, we are losing out on a number of possible assistance?

Madam Speaker: The question?

Mr. Charles: Is it true?

Sen. The Hon. D. Moses: Madam Speaker, allow me to thank you profusely so, the Member for making that awareness available. We as a responsible

Government on this side of the House follow this matter closely, and will take the necessary steps to attract resources to treat with any problems that might arise in this area. Thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

**Proposed Opening Dates
(ECCE Centres)**

20. Mr. Rodney Charles (*Naparima*) asked the hon. Minister of Education:

Could the Minister provide the proposed opening dates for:

- a) the Ben Lomond ECCE Centre;
- b) the Reform Village ECCE Centre; and
- c) the Reform Village Hindu School?

The Minister of Education (Hon. Anthony Garcia): Madam Speaker, the Ben Lomond Government Early Childhood Care and Education ECCE Centre and the Reform SDMS ECCE Centre are both approximately 98 per cent completed, while the Reform SDMS Hindu Primary School is approximately 86 per cent completed. Works on all three facilities have been suspended by the respective contractors due to non-payment of invoices. The Ministry of Education is actively seeking to identify funds to meet outstanding payments and the cost of completion of the facilities.

In the circumstances, Madam Speaker, I am not currently in a position to provide the proposed opening dates of these facilities. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, supplemental.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Is the same approach towards completion of these three schools being adopted for the completion of the other 75 that were under construction?

Madam Speaker: That is not a supplemental question, Member for Caroni East. I will not allow that question.

**DEFINITE URGENT MATTER
(LEAVE)**

**Lawlessness on the Beetham Gardens Vicinity
(Failure of Government to Protect Citizens)**

Mr. Ganga Singh (*Chaguanas West*): Thank you, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I hereby request your leave under Standing Order 17 to move a matter of Urgent Public Importance, namely the failure of the Government to protect citizens from the lawlessness that occurred on the highway in the vicinity of Beetham Gardens.

Definite Urgent Matter
[MR. SINGH]

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The matter is definite because it specifically refers to the terror, trepidation and trauma suffered by motorists and citizens yesterday as they proceeded on their commute to and from the capital City of Port of Spain.

The matter is urgent because motorists and citizens were subjected to being shot at, pelted and stoned while seated in their vehicles, and there is a tangible fear that this will reoccur.

The matter is of public importance because the failure to provide safety and security to commuters on this main artery strikes terror on all citizens and is an attack on the Constitution which guarantees freedom of movement.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, I am not satisfied that this matter qualifies under this Standing Order. I advise that the Member pursue this matter under Standing Order 16.

2.00 p.m.

**VIABLE HOUSING POLICY
(GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO IMPLEMENT)**

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Madam Speaker, I beg to move the following Motion standing in my name:

Be it resolved that the House take note of the continuing failure of the Government to implement a viable housing policy to provide affordable housing units to qualified and deserving citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, the Motion before us today attempts to meet and treat with a critical need by citizens throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago. The housing sector, Madam Speaker, is possibly one of the most important areas for public policy intervention, not only because of the dire need to provide housing, which I think all elected Members of Parliament are more than aware of, but the housing sector is a foundation for economic development, income redistribution, prosperity, and the sector itself contributes 90 per cent or more to the construction sector which is an engine of growth for Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it has always been so, and while the infrastructure development through the Ministries of Works and Transport and Public Utilities, and so on do contribute, and do play a big part in infrastructure development, it is the housing sector that drives economic development, and drives income redistribution. So much so that in the year 2013 or thereabout the then Leader of

the Opposition, the Member for Diego Martin West, made a public statement suggesting that the entire Government was being run from the Ministry of Housing. But it was, Madam Speaker, a Ministry of Housing that had other entities in it apart from the HDC, and today I want to speak of the importance of the sector to economic development. And when this sector, Madam Speaker, is weak, when this sector is injured for any reason, when we have policy distortions that reflect itself in non-implementation of programmes, when we have institutional weakness, the economy suffers, and I think all Members of this House and particularly the Government, have been speaking about the importance of sustaining economic activity and development, given what they believe to be their economic challenges.

Madam Speaker, I will not take the limited time that is available to me to spend time and rehash the past or give an account, statistical account, of what was done from 1962, 1995, 2001, 2010 and so on, but just to indicate that we are quite prepared on this side to protect and defend our track record in the housing sector as being one of the areas that brought development, that brought care and compassion to citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, the housing sector, the flagship state enterprise is the Housing Development Corporation that is governed by Chap. 33:03, and in this Housing Development Corporation Act that governs the flagship state enterprise there is a reference to “Minister”, and I want to put on record very early our understanding of that.

“‘Minister’ means the Minister to whom responsibility for the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation is assigned;”

Unless we are mistaken, we verily believe the Member for San Fernando East is that Minister responsible for the Housing Development Corporation.

Madam Speaker, the Housing Development Corporation Act, I also want to say as part of my introduction, I believe it is section 13, speaks to the mandate of the HDC, and that mandate deals with the matter of functions and duties of the Corporation, and I would just read 13(1)(a):

“do all things necessary and convenient for or in connection with the provision of affordable shelter and associated community facilities for low and middle income persons;”

There are times, Madam Speaker, when we forget middle income [*Desk thumping*] and we carry a battle over housing for low income. And while that is clearly a focus of every Government we sometimes forget that those who drafted

Viable Housing Policy
[DR. MOONILAL]

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this Bill incidentally, the People's National Movement Government in 2005 had the intention of the HDC and the public housing sector providing shelter for middle income persons, because we have been accused over the years—the last two years or so—of providing for only middle, or not providing for lower income citizens when that, of course, is the mandate of the HDC.

Madam Speaker, in passing really, I just wanted to make a few observations. Over the years, Madam Speaker, we have had certain myths about housing developing and the Member for San Fernando East—it is the Member for San Fernando East who responds to this Motion, I am not sure—and others, over the years, you know we have spoken about low cost housing, and I just wanted to put some statistics gathered from the Housing Development Corporation data. During the period 2002 to 2009, under a PNM Government, there were 13,047 housing starts. It is reported that during 2002 to 2009 that administration completed and delivered 2,428 housing units in seven years. Madam Speaker, I repeat that: there was a delivery between 2002 to 2009 of 2,428 completed housing units, but 13,047 housing starts. That is indeed a lot of housing starts I might add.

Madam Speaker, the second fact I want to put on the table, is the People's Partnership in five years executed 7,130 housing starts [*Desk thumping*] and delivered 8,521 housing units in five years. It should be noted that the housing programme is an ongoing programme and the figure of delivery of the Partnership will include the completion of units commenced under the former administration. So by 2010 or 2011 we were distributing homes in Corinth Settlement, St. Madeleine, Couva, Carlsen Field and so on, that were indeed started before us by a previous PNM administration. Likewise today, the Member for San Fernando East, he goes, he presents his keys to persons to go to live in Fair Field, Princes Town; Egypt, Chaguanas; Union Hall and so on, built by the People's Partnership. [*Desk thumping*] So it is an ongoing process. And, Madam Speaker, nothing is wrong with that at all.

Hon. Member: Say thanks.

Dr. R. Moonilal: And we thank them. Madam Speaker, when we came in office in 2010, we had real problems here. We had real problems to deal with, and I will just run it through quickly, I do not want to spend time on it.

Madam Speaker, in several of these estates there was no waste treatment plants. There was no infrastructure. There was no provision for play grounds, community centres and so on, and work was done during that period. We had to go into the housing sector and almost—I think 33 estates, we had to do remedial

work. In one alone, in Wellington in south Trinidad, we expended \$20 million on rehabilitation work with infrastructure, because we discovered that the homes were moving, they were simply moving. They moved by six inches to eight inches. They were moving down a hill, because not proper infrastructure was done.

Madam Speaker, the Government at the time had built a lot of these estates on cane lands, and while to facilitate planting cane you do ratooning and so on, when you are building house it requires greater infrastructure and a more focussed emphasis on infrastructure, and we had to deal with that in Retrench, we had to deal with that in Wellington, we had to deal with that in Couva, and so on. So, Madam Speaker, we have a proud record that we can speak at length on, but I will not speak at length on.

Madam Speaker, the other matter related to this is that we had some projects that were so sick that they required more than remedial work. It required in some cases investigation, contractual problems, and those would include the famous Las Alturas, which I think everybody knows about that now, Las Alturas. But there are also problems in Harmony Hall, Wellington. There are two towers standing in Chaguanas, when you pass there you will see them. They are still there. Regrettably in the five years we made some advance to issue a contract, but it was not completed, I do not know if we may go back and complete it. But that is in Chaguanas, that is still standing as testimony to a sick project and there are several others.

We had a problem with Vieux Fort, I believe, in the northwest, where a decision was taken to expand a housing estate without Town and Country approval. In fact, in many of those developments there was no Town and Country approval, no EMA approval, and sometimes there were no board of directors' approval. Would you believe, Madam Speaker, over \$1 billion in variations had to go back to an HDC board to approve because they were made—variations were done without board approval? Fifty-four cases went back to the board and they were done for \$1 billion in variations. In one case, I think it is in Vieux Fort, there was no community consultation. Do you know the HDC erected buildings and then the neighbour took them to court? It lasted about eight years, because the neighbour claimed that the buildings were blocking the light. So, eight years we could not finish that. I think the court matter ended a year or two ago and that has finished, so good work there. So, we have had all these problems, and again I do not want to spend too much time on them. We can take too much time and spend on that.

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Madam Speaker, when we were there we were very proud that we had a programme called, “It’s Been a Long Time Coming”, where for persons who applied 15 years and over, and I want to say we give some credit where credit is due, that was the idea I inherited from my predecessor—what is her name again?

Mr. Indarsingh: Emily.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Emily Dick-Forde, Minister of Housing at the time. I inherited that idea from her and we implemented it, and we had several distributions [*Desk thumping*] for persons 15 years and over. In one case, a man was waiting 45 years for a house; he got it. Mr. Bell in Central, I remember his name—Mr. Dell. I told him they had to name a computer after him while he was waiting. [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker, we had a programme for differently-abled. We met and treat—100 differently-abled persons received housing and those houses were specially designed for them. We met and treat with the police, with the protective services, with the Public Service Association, we had an arrangement as part of their collective agreement process and so on. So, every sector. We did random draws, televised random draws, and we were moving along in that line. To this day, I am not sure whether in the last two years we have had a random televised draw for housing, but the Minister has a latitude to distribute homes pursuant to the Cabinet decision, so I am not really focused on that.

Madam Speaker, the housing record under the People’s Partnership culminated with the amazing 100 homes a week distribution programme that continued uninterrupted for about three months. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, they could not believe it, because HDC staff were working morning, noon and night, Saturday/Sunday to ensure people got their keys in their hands. And, whatever anybody could say about that, people got their keys, they went into their homes. Madam Speaker, it is not a day goes by—and I want to say with pride too—that I do not walk in this country through a mall, at the gym, in a market somewhere or in other places, and somebody do not come up to me and shake my hand and say, “Thank you very much, when you were in office, I got a home.” [*Desk thumping*] And that is a rewarding experience. And not only the CEO of the EMBDC, but we will come to that in a little while as well.

Madam Speaker, two major problems erupted in the last few days, both linked to housing, and I will explain. The areas that are crime hotspots or deemed to be, that have the biggest amount of fear from bandits and violent crimes and so on, do you know several of these areas are called HDC community clients? They are clients of the HDC. When we were in office we met and we treated with persons on the Beetham, in

Laventille, in Morvant, in those areas where we believe that there was a need for participation, for interaction, for bringing the communities in. Today we read in the papers, in the *Guardian* I think it is now, “Police evict illegal Clifton Towers tenants again Residents afraid to return home”. When we were there, there were two things happening: one, an annual programme to refurbish and fix those areas in which HDC people around now, Christmas in particular, because we wanted to create some jobs for Christmas as well, whether it is “Colour Me Orange” or another programme, we go into the communities, mobilize everybody for work, because buildings need to be painted, light bulbs need changing, grass need cutting, work needs to be done, we mobilized the communities, and that helped a lot to keep people together.

We had, Madam Speaker, a management committee in Clifton Towers that worked with us. When one person invade a home, we found out, we sent HDC security. I asked the Minister to tell me, over the last two years, do you have a head of HDC security yet? Because there was a time when HDC did not have a head of security; this is why this situation erupted at Clifton Towers. So we worked with the communities, Madam Speaker, we worked with them. In Beetham, we went there with the basketballer, what is his name?

Hon. Member: Shaquille O’Neal.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Shaquille O’Neal. Madam Speaker, I do not bump ball and thing, but I know of these basketball players, and we took him there to launch the “Hoop for Life”, the entire Beetham came out, we completed a building, cut the ribbon. In fact, the Member for Siparia described it not as Hell Yard but as Hope Yard, to bring hope to the people, and it is so regrettable that yesterday we witnessed this catastrophe, this terror; our citizens were brutalized; they were traumatized.

And, Madam Speaker, yesterday at Couva, when the Prime Minister was approached on this matter the Prime Minister said—the reporter asked him what is happening at Beetham? He say “Where you standing, in Couva? Well, don’t ask me about Beetham, I here to talk about Couva.” The Prime Minister of the country. While persons were crying and making video, that was the response. Twenty-four hours later, we hear today, there was a National Security Council meeting this morning and—well finally the culprits on the Beetham today, a few hours ago, they got a good solid bouffing from the Prime Minister. A good bouffing. Because that is what they do, they “bouffe up”. So the persons down there may not engage in any activity again because they get a good “bouffe up”. But not one new initiative, not one new plan, not one new policy, not one new programme [*Desk thumping*] to engage with those communities.

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If you do not engage with those communities through employment, through training, through other mechanisms: sports, culture. The HDC was sponsoring—when I was there—a steel band, I think it was Harmonites in Morvant. It is somewhere in Morvant. We did that to engage the community and give support to culture. Culture and sports are very important along with employment to empower persons. And that what happened yesterday means that that community is alienated as well. [*Desk thumping*] Not that it is wrong. I am not condoning that, but you have alienated the community, the community is demobilized, so if someone is arrested and they believe is wrong and so on, they pelt stones at cars. They pelt a trolley from a supermarket at the cars yesterday, and the response of the Prime Minister is to “bouffe them up” today. That is the response. You see, Madam Speaker, we will get nowhere with that approach. You will soon discover that “bouffing up” people is not public policy. Programmes, articulated programmes, that is the way to go. And if today the Prime Minister could have said anything about a new initiative that would have brought hope. [*Desk thumping*] But, Madam Speaker, they brought no hope to that situation at all.

Madam Speaker, what did they do in the two years that they have been there? When they entered office there were several areas, Trestrail, Bon Air, several areas yet to be developed, contracts to execute, and work. Immediately they got in, a fascinating thing happened upon entry, as soon as they got in there. Madam Speaker, would you believe they got in there and by the 17th of December, 2015—that is a few weeks away after the election—the board of directors of the HDC, they suspended and subsequently fired the engine room of the HDC. They fired eight managers, gone. The people who were working to deliver. The Uff Commission of Enquiry among one of its findings, we must recall, spoke about the collapse of the public service as far as infrastructure development, because of a failure to employ qualified people; because of a failure to recruit and strengthen people to build institutions. Eight senior managers at HDC went on the 17th of December.

But, Madam Speaker, what is fascinating about that is that on the 17th of December, according to the board minute, which is in my hand [*Holds up document*] a decision was taken to recruit, to hire a consultancy team or auditing firm to conduct an audit on the HDC. Absolutely nothing is wrong with that. The HDC, section 19 of the HDC Act allows the corporation to hire an auditor and so on, section 19(3), nothing is wrong. But, Madam Speaker, this was done—indicated that they were going to hire on the 17th of December, you know what happened? There was no open tendering or bidding for any auditing firm. “Bam”, on the same day as the 17th of December before a decision was taken at the board,

PricewaterhouseCoopers went into the HDC and committed a criminal offence. They took Government property. They went into the HDC on the 17th of December, took Government property when they were not authorized by a decision of the board. But you see, Madam Speaker, what is happening in this country is boards are not running companies here. Boards are not running company, Ministers are running company. That is the important thing. Ministers are running company. On the 17th of December, the managers who were to be suspended and fired had their servers and computers—because they like taking computers and servers and phones. I think they have a preoccupation with email and texting and so on. So we will get to that as well, because I also have some texts and email, because I like that too.

So, Madam Speaker, PricewaterhouseCoopers went into the HDC illegally, took Government property without a board of directors decision, on a State corporation, under an Act of Parliament. They were given information. They took it. They gone their way to conduct investigation. When somebody tell the directors of the board at the HDC, “Look, yuh cyar do that. Yuh cyar do that because we have to take a decision of the board.” You know, Madam Speaker, what happened? They then convened a meeting on the 7th of January, 2016. And on the 7th of January, 2016, a decision to engage PricewaterhouseCoopers was taken. The 7th of January, when they illegally took Government property on the 17th and thereafter of January. And they were paid US \$138,250. Now, I am asking, are we paying a company in Trinidad that operates in Trinidad in US dollars? [*Desk thumping*] So the ordinary businessman cannot get \$20. Somebody going on vacation cannot get \$200, but US \$138,000 goes to PricewaterhouseCoopers, who illegally entered a Government area and took. Madam Speaker, they will tell us, why are they quoting in US dollars if it is they are being paid in TT dollars?

Dr. Gopeesingh: For audits in Trinidad and Tobago.

Dr. R. Moonilal: For audits in Trinidad and Tobago. But the story continues in a fascinating way. It continues, Madam Speaker.

So no formal decision taken, PricewaterhouseCoopers go to work, and at this time nothing is happening. There is no policy implementation, there is no distribution of homes, there is nothing happening in the sector. And, Madam Speaker, we have come across some quite fascinating pieces of information, and it really is mindboggling that when PricewaterhouseCoopers comes in to do what is called an independent, neutral audit, which they can do with the authority of the board of directors, the Minister in law gives specific or general directions in writing. I just want to underline that, eh. Minister gives specific or general directions in writing to the board of directors.

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And while that is happening, 17th of December computer gone, information gone. When we look at this now, they fire people, of course; they received a letter from the former managing director indicating that what they are doing is illegal. The letter goes to PricewaterhouseCoopers in Victoria Avenue, Port of Spain, from the former managing director Jearlean John. A long letter indicating that it is illegal. PricewaterhouseCoopers instead of responding to then a private citizen who is suspended, and writing, pointing out a breach of the law, they send back this information to the HDC and say, “Look, the managing director is suspended, send this for us. Tell us what to do. Tell us what to do.” That is the level at which we reached.

And, Madam Speaker, we have here the information. The lawyers at that time representing the HDC replied quickly. “See attached copy of MD to PwC , kindly advise what is happening.” But, Madam Speaker, the one that I want to get through quickly—and at this time PricewaterhouseCoopers who illegally started to conduct an audit, started asking for information. They want information on Trestrail; Indian Trail; Oasis Gardens; Cypress Hill; Eden Gardens; Retrench; Golconda; Gomez Trace, Moruga.

Madam Speaker, by the 22nd of February—and I have to take a drink before I give you this one. In fact, let me leave the bottle open, I will need more—and this is the policy implementation, this is how institutions are destroyed and policy cannot be implemented. Kofi.boxhill@tpwc.com, 22nd February, 2016, writes a letter to one stuartryoung@gmail.com and also writes a letter to another person—I just want to properly have the person here—newmangeorge1995@gmail.com. Madam Speaker, we believe that this is the chairman of the Housing Development Corporation. I do not know what 1995 is, if it is a birthday or a wedding anniversary. I suspect not, but I think it is probably a birthday of some sort.

So, PwC is writing to the Minister and the chairman, copied to the managing director, saying:

Dear Minister and Chairman—this is dated 22nd February—We are progressing with the audit and require your feedback regarding the electronic data, email review element of our work, and the initial budget estimates for our engagement.

This is a body under the law. There is a law, an Act of Parliament that governs them. The Minister in reference to this, unless they change him, is the Minister and Member for San Fernando East. Well, it is not him actually, it was the Member for Port of Spain South at that time, I believe. The Minister and Member

for San Fernando East was not on the compound then. It was the Member for Port of Spain South who was removed around March 17th, a few weeks later. Her first removal was March 17th around there. So, PwC is writing the HDC and asking—writing not the HDC actually, writing a Minister of Government, completely outside of the HDC, and asking for guidance regarding electronic data, email review element of work, our estimated budget and so on. That speaks to several infringes of the law. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I want to put it to you that a forensic audit conducted in this way, or a review, this company—this was the same company that made a mess out of the Oscar award. You all remember that? Yes. Fined in the United Kingdom about US \$6 million for misconduct. This company has certain obligations. If they are involved in audits or reviews they cannot be reporting to a Minister of Government in the conduct of those audits. [*Desk thumping*] You cannot. You cannot even be engaging with Ministers of Government, they are politicians. Madam Speaker, why would the Kofi Boxhill man write the Minister and the chairman? Well, the chairman could get away. He could say, well, I am the chairman of the board. You know what is amazing? They came in on the 17th of December—PwC—no decision is taken by the board, but the board meets on the 6th of January, 2016, to ratify a decision. [*Desk thumping*]

The chairman of the Housing Development Corporation is not the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. You cannot take a decision and ratify it. What you do is if you have an emergency you round robin your board of directors, you call an emergency board meeting, you round robin your board of directors. But the chairman apparently took this decision by himself, and decided, look, we decide that, next few weeks we ratify. Madam Speaker, this speaks of collusion. They want to talk about collusion. This speaks about collusion.

Madam Speaker, in another entity they want to sue everybody. They have brought party action. That is PNM action they brought. I hope the next government will be diligent and continue that work. Madam Speaker, I want to go to the 22nd again, one Stuart Young writing to Brent Lyons. Imagine, a Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General writing to Brent Lyons. It is not even copied to the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, let “we” begin there. It is not even copied to the Member for Port of Spain South at that time. And he replied:

This is your call—on the same matter of update on the decision. He replies on the same day, actually:

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This is your call. On the face of it I am in agreement with Brent.

Regards.

Stuart.

I mean, who is Brent? You grow up with Brent? Brent is your friend? I imagine that is the managing director of the HDC.

2.30 p.m.

But in another thing they are talking about, I having an inappropriately close relationship with a CEO. They put “meh” birth paper—they put “meh” date of birth on a court document. You know it had a birthday party for me, officials of the Ministry, CEO came, the next day he say, “Well, thanks for the invitation”. They put that in a court document, you know, “meh” birthday. So next birthday now, I have to tell people send me wishes but “doh” come. [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker, I never call the fella Gary or Gars. Now, this one might be a “gaar”, but I never call him Gary or Gars. Who is Brent? What is that familiarity? What is that closeness, that chumminess that Stuart is writing to Brent, but not to Marlene? You know, this is the involvement of the Minister that got him into trouble at PTSC which is before the police. [*Desk thumping*] That is before the police; I say nothing more on PTSC. It is the same company in EFCL now we are hearing, conducted seven audits I think in three months and there are questions about that audit.

The other one I will just drop on this and leave it, is that PwC is guilty of misconduct and I call for a full investigation into all their audits under this administration. [*Desk thumping*] PwC is asking now in a letter dated December 17th—PwC, Madam Speaker, in a letter—no, it is not the 17th, it is around the same time of March, Madam Speaker, I have it here. Do you know PwC is writing; they are writing the TTMF and asking for personal information on persons who have received housing, their payments detail?

PricewaterhouseCoopers wrote to the TTMF. They have a privacy, a confidentiality clause in all agreements. The police, by a court order of some kind, can get information if they wish. PwC writes to the TTMF and tells them, “we are conducting an investigation into the HDC and everything that went on there and we are trying to get some information and so on, could you please tell us and give us information on the applications” and the—what is called payment schedules—for Lauren Legall, Renatta Jones, Nicole Carter, Indira McFarlene-Lee, Ann

Mahabir, Rory Moses. Madam Speaker, a letter dated 21st April 2016. How can PwC, a private company, ask a government company to give us private information on payments? [*Desk thumping*] This is after the house is sold, process complete, they paying.

Madam Speaker, I want to alert you that this matter is on its way to the Integrity Commission and the police [*Desk thumping*] and PricewaterhouseCoopers, as they had to explain in South Africa, in India, in London, in the United States, they will have to explain under a Government of Trinidad and Tobago, if not your Government, certainly this Government. They will have to explain themselves. [*Desk thumping*]

You see, Madam Speaker, they went and fired people and then discovered that they do not have grounds to fire people. In a remarkable letter, a letter from a legal firm hired, the legal firm writes the HDC and tells them, they say, we are preparing a defence in the matter involving Ms. John and others, if you have any information, let us know. We want to get more information to build a defence. Fired people in December, suspend them, and in May asking, do you have anything? Did the audit find anything? Do you have anything you can give us? We are trying to build a defence. This is how they operate.

Madam Speaker, if this was not bad enough—I know my time here is now limited and I have a few minutes again—how much time?

Hon. Member: Ten minutes.

Dr. R. Moonilal: I want to get to the allocation policy of the housing sector, because you see, Madam Speaker, once you collapse the sector and you do any “ole ting” you want, including distributing homes willy-nilly and you cannot defend it, because you can distribute and defend, Madam Speaker. The Minister of Housing and Urban Development—and I have a whole list here with the Minister of Housing and Urban Development signing off on recommendations and so on. I do not have time to go through that.

The Member for San Fernando East, I have 300 recommendations from the Minister. The Minister will not know 275 of those people, but he has to sign and recommend them, because they are not from San Fernando East—he will have a few people. We have here the bulk of the recommendations for Moruga/Tableland, San Fernando East, San Fernando West, as a few constituencies, recommended by Ministers, many recommended by the Member for San Fernando West, that is his job. He would not know the people. Ministers

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“pass ting” to him, “he pass” to HDC. They want to make a big fuss over one application of one person to say that they get housing because the Minister colluding and so on. You know what is collusion, Madam Speaker?

Madam Speaker, when I asked the question earlier this year as to the housing allocation policy as it relates to Victoria Keyes we were told that advertisements went out, people applied and it was market forces taking root. People applied, they paid their money. Madam Speaker, we got an answer to the question eventually, and in this answer served in the Parliament, we were taken aback by, at the first instance, by two military leaders who were able to afford multi-million-dollar apartments and so on—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Four million.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—\$4 million. We were taken aback by that, Madam Speaker. But nowhere in the answer to this question did the Minister then tell us that they were distributing Victoria Keyes apartments valued 1.8 million to persons on a rent-to-own basis, because rent-to-own is an HDC policy. It is there when a client cannot satisfy the full amount of money and the difference is \$150,000 more or less, you initiate what is called a rent-to-own.

The Minister did not tell us in his reply that rent-to-own—people got rent-to-own arrangements. He did not tell us that. We learned that months after, and, Madam Speaker, the rent-to-own list is an interesting list. It includes an employee of the Prime Minister’s office; it includes a communication manager at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development; it includes a former board member of the—no, a board member now of the Petrotrin. Those are on the rent-to-own list. I want to ask the Minister if he presented keys to them, because they want to accuse me of what?—I did not present keys to somebody. Did you present keys to your communications manager?

I have no difficulty with people getting housing units; that is what they are there for. People paying, that is fine, I have no difficulty. Our difficulty is always process. [*Desk thumping*] On what basis did you select these people on an HDC policy of rent-to-own, when these apartments are to the tune of \$1.8 million? I will not call the names of these people. I will not, I will not. But you see, Madam Speaker, there is one troubling matter that faced me in that, one troubling matter.

Madam Speaker, when we got the answer to this question what troubled me is that many of these names here are known to us in the national community. Some people are business people, some people are retired public servants and you know

some people really, I could imagine they have the means to pay \$2.4 million and so on. So we did not have a problem; I mean, former Permanent Secretaries are here and so on and I imagine they can attract that kind of money, given their gratuity or whatever.

But you see, Madam Speaker, we saw a name of a person who was able to access a \$4.5 million penthouse loft. I think that is how it is called. And that person was able to attract that and that is a lot of money. We did some checking and that person who attracted this \$4.5 million penthouse loft applied, 24th February, 2017, mortgage loan, full sale. Full sale, you get a loan and you buy it. But, Madam Speaker, a name was called and I ask the Member for San Fernando East, I ask him politely, do you have knowledge of that applicant? One, Sean Shairsingh. Do you have knowledge of that applicant?

You see, that person—and somebody gave me some information—paying \$4.5 million for an apartment. That person is known to the police and has been in the police database as, in some cases, a victim, in some cases reporting threats and has been a victim of a lot of things. In fact, that person is a very unfortunate person. He has been a victim of robbery, victim of dishonoured cheques, victim of dishonoured cheque, victim of robbery, road traffic accident, victim of house breaking and larceny, victim of reports of threats. I wonder if this person is a victim of money laundering.

Madam Speaker, I just ask the Minister to conduct an investigation and be open with this matter to tell us how somebody who is so unlucky and unfortunate to be a victim all over town can get a mortgage for \$4.5 million to purchase a home and whether or not the Member for San Fernando East has a knowledge of this person; and if the Member could tell us that knowledge we will be very happy, because we are prepared to tell him, we are prepared to tell him the knowledge of that person. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, this issue speaks to money laundering. And their policy decision now, this HDC today cannot pay—how much more minutes?

Dr. Gopeesingh: Four more.

Dr. R. Moonilal: This HDC cannot pay contractors. A contractor won a matter yesterday or day before in the court, where the court ruled that a contractor must be paid in full. Contractor cannot be paid in full, went to court and win, but PricewaterhouseCoopers could be paid in full. Agostini could be paid in full, but the contractors cannot be paid. The large-scale contractors that they want to make link with, do you know every one of the large-scale contractors in the HDC today

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was recruited by the People's National Movement. [*Desk thumping*] Not one large-scale contractor came under the Partnership. One new. All came under the PNM and the large-scale contractors are owed millions of dollars. They are taking them to court and when they take them to court the Government response is to countersue and claim that null and void because “yuh tief and yuh hide and yuh collude and yuh cartel”. “Yuh cartel or yuh cyah tell”. [*Laughter*] Madam Speaker, that is their response.

Today, no recognized mega contractor wants to build houses but they are giving away money [*Desk thumping*] to people who want to build houses as part of their build-it-yourself policy. That is where they reach in this country. Their policy for housing is go build it yourself. So a worker in KFC, by the cashier, need housing, you tell the worker go build it yourself. Take time off from your job and build it. An employee in the Ministry wants housing, you tell the employee go build it yourself. That is the approach. And when they are doing that, Madam Speaker, a fascinating letter appeared in the press which I had to take a copy of. It was written by one, Noel; it was written by one, S. Noel from Sangre Grande, 6th November, 2017, in which this person is saying that it could well be that:

“Only oligarchs”—and money launderers—“can afford to tender for...projects.”

An additional benefit to money launderers is that they get clean money at the end when they start off with dirty money. Because all the contractors are being owed money and are not being paid and they are not building houses. So it is new contractors that have to come in. The new contractors now, hear this, they have to come in with their own money. Where are they getting the money from? The PPP in Mount Hope, wherever, under NH International, I do not know the status of that, but the difficulty there was the contractor wanted some guarantee.

Madam Speaker, which contractor in this country will put their life savings in the hands of this Government to build houses and be paid, which contractor? So what you do? They are suggesting here is that you use the housing sector to launder money. You take money that you get, build houses and get it back, from when people pay their money for a house, plus 100,000 or 50,000.

Madam Speaker, if the Government does not review that policy and do not meet and treat with the contractors who are building homes and in some cases finishing homes, the HDC and the housing sector will become a nest for money laundering. If they do not deal with that problem they will not be able to

construct. As of this time and this date, I am not sure, subject to correction, but not one single home has finished under this administration. [*Desk thumping*] Not one. But they are entitled to that, because they may be busy fixing and distributing other homes.

Madam Speaker, in the few minutes left I want to warn this Government that what happened in the Beetham yesterday, Madam Speaker, what happened in the Beetham was not an accident. That is an impulse from the ground. That is a response to poor governance. [*Desk thumping*] It is a response to their failure and it will reoccur unless they change their ways—

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Oropouche East, your speaking time—

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Randall Mitchell): [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, I thank you for recognizing me as I believe it very important as the Minister of Housing and Urban Development—

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, I will just allow you to say, “I beg to move”.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Oh sorry. I beg to move, Ma’am.

Mr. Lee: Madam Speaker, I would like to second this Motion and I defer my right to speak at a later time.

Question proposed.

Madam Speaker: Member for San Fernando East. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Housing and Urban Development (Hon. Randall Mitchell): Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Motion. A Motion:

“Be it resolved that the House take note of the continuing failure of the Government to implement a viable housing policy to provide affordable housing units to qualified and deserving citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.”

But, Madam Speaker, I have listened quite intently to the Member for Oropouche East, and I think that the Motion may have been poorly constructed. The Motion ought to have read: “Be it resolved that this House take note of the continuing failure of Government to implement an auditing policy”, if that is what he has come here to talk about. [*Desk thumping*] I take great objection, and let me just deal with a few things that the Minister—Member for Oropouche East,

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former Minister of Housing and Urban Development. And let me just say as well, I was very surprised that the former Minister of Housing and Urban Development, the Member for Oropouche East, would have brought such a Motion, having regard to his abysmal failure as the former Minister. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, I will go on to talk about his failings as Minister of Housing and Urban Development.

Madam Speaker, instead of talking about the housing policy—low and middle income, qualifying citizens, who are in need of housing—his entire contribution was fixed on the selection and the process of an auditing firm. All the Member’s protestations, I would submit, should not be brought into Parliament; he should reserve them for explanation in the Courts of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Hinds: “Oh yes, Oh yes. That’s right.”

Hon. R. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East speaks about the tendering process, about a tendering process; a tendering process for the HDC—how did they come to select this auditing firm? Madam Speaker, a couple of weeks ago, a matter was raised in the public domain and it dealt with state accommodation provided for Members of Government, as well as employees of the State visiting from time to time. And what I would have discovered was in 2015, the Member for Oropouche East, while the Minister of Housing and Urban Development, would have been in charge of a government department called PRESD. PRESD would have had responsibility for Federation Villas where state accommodation is provided. And I want to ask the Member for Oropouche East, what tendering process was carried out when the then Government, under the Member for Siparia, invited a US IT auditing firm and provided them state accommodation to treat with their defence to the emailgate matter. [*Desk thumping*] The Member did not disclose that.

Madam Speaker, let me get to the Victoria Keyes, because I take great umbrage to anybody interfering in any way with my reputation.

Hon. Members: That is right.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, from the day we launched Victoria Keyes and has been reported in many newspapers, we have always said and maintained that the disposal of the units at Victoria Keyes would be on the open market via rent-to-own and a number of units retained for Government. We have gone about, we have developed a brand; we have marketed the development called Victoria

Keyes. And I will talk about Victoria Keyes a little later on. At no time did the process of the sale of those units ever involve the Minister. So he is calling somebody's name in the Parliament and accusing that person of money laundering. Well, they will deal with him at the appropriate time.

But, Madam Speaker, he stood up here and he said, the Member for Oropouche East, he stood up here and he said that the purchaser purchased the unit subject to a mortgage. Where you purchase units subject to a mortgage at any bank, that purchase is subject to the FIU regulations. And let me say it here, one of the matters I insisted on and I instructed the HDC, was to write to the FIU to ensure, to ensure, Madam Speaker—and we wrote, we wrote several times—to ensure that all these matters, the sale, the open market sale of the HDC, was subject to the FIU regulations because in the sphere of things the HDC would have moved away from the usual allocation and distribution of units to sale on the open market. And I made sure, Madam Speaker, to get the HDC to do that.

Madam Speaker, let me touch on something else.

Dr. Moonilal: Do you know that person? Do you know the person?

Hon. R. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East is disturbing me. He also mentioned—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Is there a relationship?

Hon. R. Mitchell:—matters in East Port of Spain, about putting in programmes and during Christmas, putting in programmes and involving the community members and so on. I was not in Government then, I was not a Member of Parliament, but I keenly remember, Madam Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East being photographed in the national newspaper with one of the members who was picked up in the Beetham yesterday. [*Desk thumping*] And, Madam Speaker, the Member for Oropouche East and the then managing director of the HDC—[*Crosstalk*]—Madam Speaker, I need your protection.

Madam Speaker: Member for San Fernando East please continue. Member for Caroni East please remember; [*Crosstalk*] Member for Caroni East, please remember Standing Order 53. Continue.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The then managing director, soon to be Deputy Political Leader of the UNC, Deputy Political Leader. Madam Speaker, when I saw it that the former managing director of the HDC was now promoted as the new Deputy Political Leader I thought that the Member for

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Siparia clearly thought that the Member for Oropouche East needed help. [*Desk thumping*] And I wondered to myself what date would that new Deputy Leader of the UNC be invited into the Senate. [*Desk thumping*] And which one of them will they now boot out to make way for her. But, Madam Speaker, I digress. I digress.

Hon. Member: That is on the Motion?

Hon. R. Mitchell: I digress, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Member: No, that is relevant.

Hon. R. Mitchell: So, Madam Speaker—

Dr. Gopeesingh: “Yuh farse.”

Hon. R. Mitchell: The former managing director as well as the Member for Oropouche East was congratulating “Spanish” as being one of the best contractors in East Port of Spain, congratulating them. Madam Speaker, we now have information that under the Member for Oropouche East, when he was then Minister of Housing and Urban Development, would have paid the “coward tax” under the guise of giving them work—

Dr. Moonilal: Come on man, 48(6). Coward tax.

Madam Speaker: Please continue.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, to keep a false sense of peace in the East Port of Spain area. And what we are seeing now, Madam Speaker—

Dr. Gopeesingh: 48(6), Madam Speaker, 48—he is repeating it again.

Madam Speaker: Please continue, Member for San Fernando East.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Thank you, Madam Speaker. So all these Colour Me Orange and all these things, Hoop of Life—

Mr. Hinds: Colour me yellow.

Hon. Member: LifeSport.

Hon. R. Mitchell: LifeSport, Madam Speaker—

Hon. Member: Billions. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. R. Mitchell: —was payment to the criminal element in this country. And we are now reaping the rewards for that and we will have to now deal with that. And the Member for Point Fortin has to deal with that. But, Madam Speaker, let me move on.

So, Madam Speaker, as I said, when I saw the Motion I thought there was a significant weakness in the Motion. Every time the Member for Oropouche East speaks and he speaks about a housing policy he always pre-supposes that the entirety of the Government's housing policy has to deal with the construction or the building of housing units. And I am surprised by that because, growing up in the school, in the school days, I always knew that the UNC's housing policy, charted by Mr. John Humphrey, was always for the distribution of land so that the beneficiaries can construct their own houses. But that was the Panday Government. In comes the Government led by the Member for Siparia and all they did was carbon-copy the PNM's 2002 policy.

Dr. Moonilal: It was a good policy.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Of course it was a good policy. It was a PNM policy. [*Desk thumping*] But you completely misunderstood the policy because the policy is not only about the construction of housing units.

Madam Speaker, the 2002 policy and I have said it time and time again, it is built on three pillars. It is built on affordability, accessibility, and the improvement of life for citizens.

Dr. Rambachan: And not corruption.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Not corruption. And, Madam Speaker, for middle and low income earners. The Member for Oropouche East started very early on trying to defend the construction of units as he says, to middle income earners, and we will get to that because it all turns on what is the definition of a middle income earner. But, Madam Speaker, the housing policy is more than just the construction of housing units. That is called the accelerated housing programme. That is just one. And perhaps the Member's misunderstanding was a reason why he was such an abysmal failure.

Madam Speaker, the policy also takes into consideration the rental programme for the very lowest earners. Madam Speaker, no matter what time, what year you examine the HDC's database you would find that the bulk of persons, the bulk of applicants applying for housing units are the lower end of the spectrum. So we have the rental programme. There is also the rent-to-own programme that makes the availability of housing units more affordable for those who cannot readily afford. There is also squatter regularization, the residential lots programme—and the residential lots programme is very important, because the Member for Oropouche East will have to answer in another place about a particular residential lots programme for ex-Caroni workers. And I will get to that in a moment.

Dr. Moonilal: Ramlogan will deal with them.

Hon. R. Mitchell: And, Madam Speaker, we also have the affordable mortgage programme. But I understand why the Member for Oropouche East is so fixated on this housing construction programme. It is because he has become accustomed to the largesse—

Dr. Gopeesingh: 48(4), Madam—

Hon. R. Mitchell: “Sit down nah man.”

Dr. Gopeesingh: You want to tell me to sit down, I am standing. You have to sit down. [*Crosstalk*] I stand on 48(4).

Hon. Member: Point of order. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Order! Order! Order! Member for Caroni East, please.

Dr. Gopeesingh: She is insulting.

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East, I am on my legs.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Sure.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East. I want to assure every Member here, they will have an opportunity to make a contribution to the debate if they so wish in accordance with the Standing Orders. If there is an interjection, Members know the relevant Standing Order and the practice and the procedure. Member for San Fernando East, please continue.

3.00 p.m.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Thank you, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, just let me clarify. When I said “largesse”, under the People’s Partnership administration, under the Member for Siparia, as Minister of Planning the Member for Caroni Central, the Member of Oropouche East as housing Minister, controlled over half of the development programme, [*Desk thumping*] and I wonder if Members opposite know that. He controlled over half of the development programme. It was the CEPEP. It was LSA. It was EMBD, HDC, UDeCOTT. [*Interruption*] Yes, Sugar Welfare as well, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*]

But, Madam Speaker, we are talking about HDC. We are talking HDC, Madam Speaker, and in the five years in the HDC alone, the Member had \$8 billion to spend—the HDC alone. Over 60 months he had \$8 billion to spend on affordable

housing. That equates to about \$133 million available to the Member for Oropouche East per month. But, Madam Speaker, this Motion is about affordable housing so let us go into how he contributed to affordable housing.

Madam Speaker, there were about seven housing projects started by the People's Partnership. When they came in, as he said, it was a rolling programme, the accelerated housing programme. They would have met many more from the Manning administration. So they continued the accelerated housing programme for citizens. All governments, we expect them to do that, but, Madam Speaker, there are two housing projects that concerned me and ought to concern the citizens of Trinidad and Tobago—two housing projects. One housing project, Madam Speaker, Cypress Gardens in Union Hall, it would have automatically raised red flags because that housing development was given to a contractor to construct a housing development for the cost of \$1.6 billion—one contractor.

Hon. Member: How many houses?

Hon. R. Mitchell: For about 1,000 units. And Oasis, Madam Speaker, the other one, for about 1,000 as well—1,000 units—at \$1.3 billion. Madam Speaker, this is unprecedented in the history of housing construction that one contractor would get close to \$1.6 billion to construct a housing development programme, and in the other case, \$1.3 billion—super mega contracts.

But, Madam Speaker, the issues revolve, of course, the cost. So at 1,000 units—the Member for Caroni East is a quick mathematician so he could probably figure out how much one would cost. Madam Speaker, let me tell you the contract details for that. Original contract sum: \$1.49 billion; approved variation sum, \$150 million, for a total of \$1.6 billion. Madam Speaker, what this translates into when you take it by a cost per unit—this is just the construction I am going to deal with now—of the housing units. For a single family, two bedrooms, one bath, one housing unit cost \$637,000. Madam Speaker, the PNM, under the hon. Prime Minister, when we were building housing units all over Trinidad and Tobago, a single family similar unit never cost more than \$250,000. [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Member: Say that again?

Hon. R. Mitchell: Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

Madam Speaker, a duplex, three bedrooms, two baths, Cypress Gardens, building construction cost, \$955,000. Under the PNM those units would have been constructed at a rate of \$285,000.

Dr. Gopeesingh: “How much donkey years ago”?

Hon. R. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, an apartment reserved for the lower income earners, an apartment under the Member for Oropouche East, constructing apartment units, three bedrooms, two baths for \$1.4 million per unit—\$1.4 million. Oasis, similar matter, Madam Speaker. Original contract sum, \$1.2 billion; approved variation sum, \$93 million, for a total of \$1.3 billion. Madam Speaker, a town house, three bedrooms, two baths, \$850,000. An apartment, three bedrooms, two baths, \$1.1 million. [*Crosstalk*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: What about the land cost, the infrastructure works?

Hon. Member: “Hush yuh mout.”

Hon. R. Mitchell: Madam Speaker, this takes me into another realm, because in 2014, I believe it was, they raised the income ceiling. They raised it to \$45,000, and what that would have done—the effect of that—they would have crowded out the poorer in society, the ones who need it most. And, Madam Speaker, that is why I can say to citizens now, when you drive in Oasis Gardens, or when you drive in Cypress and you see the Range Rovers parked up, you see the Jaguars parked up, you see the BMWs parked up, you should not be surprised because the Member for Oropouche East raised the income ceiling to allow for the wealthy in society to buy those units.

And the wealthy in society would purchase those units. You know why, Madam Speaker? Because the average subsidy on those units, about 40 to 50 per cent, it means, therefore, that someone so lucky to benefit from one of those units would immediately become half a million dollars richer. And I want to ask the Member for Oropouche East what process was done to allocate those units? [*Desk thumping*]. But, Madam Speaker, that is not the only red flag, you know. That is not the only issue with these contracts, you know. Madam Speaker, these contracts, \$1.6 billion for Cypress and \$1.3 billion for Oasis Gardens, were done on a sole selective basis.

Hon. Member: Oh my God!

Hon. R. Mitchell: When I dug in, Madam Speaker, into the board minutes of the HDC, you know how—Madam Speaker, let me explain to you how this was done. Somebody from the HDC called a contractor, TN Ramnauth, “Send in a request for proposal”. Same person called another contractor, Ramhit, “Send in a proposal”, and they accepted the proposal without competitive tender, on a sole selective basis. Madam Speaker, under the PNM we could never do that. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, under the PNM we could never do that and I wonder if the Contractors Association knows about that. I wonder if the JCC knows about that.

Madam Speaker, under the PNM we would have at least split up that contract into 16 parts and give it to—spread it around, spread the wealth—spread it around, Madam Speaker. He talks about redistribution of wealth. He started off speaking about that. Well, now we know what the redistribution of wealth really meant. [*Desk thumping*] And you would expect that at these high prices you would get high quality. That was not the case.

Madam Speaker, I have persons sending me—I do not know how they got my phone number. They send me on social media, pictures and videos of the poor state of these housing units and the amount of money that the HDC now has to pay to repair these units. At \$955,000 per unit, Madam Speaker—

Hon. Member: Subsidized.

Hon. R. Mitchell:—subsidized—there is a spring in the middle. Some of the units were built over pipelines. The persons cannot get the deeds to their houses now.

I leave that for now, Madam Speaker. Victoria Keyes. Much has been said about Victoria Keyes. There is a lot of strong objection—a lot of strong objection. Now the latest one is that there is money laundering. First they took objection to Tobago MPs being provided state accommodation, Madam Speaker. [*Crosstalk*] My dear Members of Parliament, that is the latest objection, and the media is questioning it, as the media ought to. But one thing that nobody has ever questioned the Member for Oropouche East, as well as the former managing director, or the chairman of the board, Mr. Moonan, who is a friend of the Member for Oropouche East—never questioned was how did a project that was supposed to cost around \$200 million meant for low and middle income persons in the Diego Martin area: Diego Martin Central, Diego Martin North/East, Port of Spain South; persons interested in living in that area, how did that project move from \$200 million to \$652 million.

No one has ever asked him but I will ask him now. I do not know if I will get an answer. But I would ask the Member for Oropouche East: Who authorized the escalation and the change in scope at the Victoria Keyes development from \$200 million to \$652 million?

Dr. Moonilal: I could answer now?

Hon. R. Mitchell: No, sit. I would also ask—

Dr. Gopeesingh: They “doh” want to hear the truth.

Hon. R. Mitchell:—who approved the inclusion of central air conditioning? Who approved multi-storey car parks with elevators in them? There are housing developments, multi-storey units, all over the country without elevators. Madam Speaker, a parking lot with three levels, they put an elevator in. Who authorized that? Who authorized the inclusion of a pool, a clubhouse and a tennis court?

Hon. Member: So, the people must live in a slum?

Hon R. Mitchell: He will answer when he gets his chance.

So, Madam Speaker, let me ask one more question. Had they been so efficient—because they were not—to complete the Victoria Keyes Development, and those units, having cost what they cost now, which is around \$3 million an apartment, what was their plan for the disposal of those units? What was their plan for the disposal of those units?

This Government decided to offer those on the open market to recover as much money—because of the inflation in cost—we offered it on the open market so that we can get as much sale as possible, as much of the proceeds to continue our housing construction programme that they left abandoned. And, Madam Speaker, we had to establish, as I said, a marketing plan. We had to establish brand Victoria Keyes and we worked very hard on it, because we really needed to get those things sold. And at every chance the Member for Oropouche East gets, he gets up and he just throws dirt on the whole development. He throws dirt on it because he does not want us to get the sale of those units; recover it on behalf of the people of Trinidad and Tobago to continue the housing construction programme for low and middle income earners—Victoria Keyes.

Dr. Gopeesingh: You just criticizing it.

Hon. R. Mitchell: And, Madam Speaker, let me just move on, ignoring the Member for Caroni East.

Hon. Member: As the world does.

Hon. R. Mitchell: I want to bring to your attention the type of decisions that can be made at the government level that would disadvantage the taxpayers of Trinidad and Tobago and those applicants seeking affordable housing. And I want you to imagine this, Madam Speaker, just imagine it for a while. The year is 2004, a 50-acre parcel. There was an agreement between seller and purchaser to purchase a 50-acre parcel for \$17 million. Fast-forward to 2010, agreement still subsists. The 2004 agreement was rescinded, and a new agreement for sale and purchase was registered. So we assume that the land was bought, registered —

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member, your speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes if you so desire. You may proceed.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Yes, Madam Speaker. I will hurry along. Registered at the Board of Inland Revenue a sale price of \$5 million—

Hon. Member: For the same land.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Same land, same parties—

Hon. Member: Years later.

Hon. R. Mitchell:—and stamp duty paid on the \$5 million at \$350,000. In 2010, on the same day, at the same Board of Inland Revenue, same property, same parties, same lawyer, a mortgage was registered in favour of the seller to the purchasers for \$18.5 million.

Hon. Member: Same land?

Hon. R. Mitchell: Same day, sale agreement, \$5 million, stamp duty paid on that. The same day, the same land, the same parties, they registered a mortgage, \$18.5 million. Madam Speaker, that is, in my view, stamp duty fraud. [*Desk thumping*] Saboteur! Saboteur!

Between 2010 to 2012, the land was developed by a developer for \$29 million. In 2012, the land—same land—was offered for sale to a state agency for \$200 million—

Hon. Member: Gooooood!!! Profit boy!

Hon. R. Mitchell: And the same land was—

Hon. Member: A state agency?

Hon. R. Mitchell: A state agency, for \$200 million and the same land was valued by a reputable valuer at \$56 million. In 2012, the state agency purchased the land. Notwithstanding the reputable valuation at \$56 million, they purchased the land for \$175 million—

Hon. Member: What! “Whaaay”!

Hon. R. Mitchell:—relying on some other valuation.

Hon. Member: No, on the Commissioner of Valuations.

Hon. R. Mitchell: The Commissioner of Valuations. Madam Speaker, I have a question. Any right-thinking, moral, upstanding citizen of Trinidad and Tobago, hearing these set of circumstances, whether they would not think that something

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here was unlawful, immoral. This is not a fiction, Madam Speaker, this is a real story and let me tell you who the actors are. The lawyer in the story is Roopchand Chadeesingh, ex-chairman of the NGC and former director of the SIS. The agency involved is the HDC. The Minister in charge at the time was the Member for Oropouche East. The managing director is the soon-to-be deputy political leader of the UNC, Ms. Jearlean John, and the Prime Minister, the Member for Siparia. And, Madam Speaker, the developer in this was the SIS.

[MR DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Hinds.: Oh, I see serial offenders.

Hon. Member: What a combination.

Hon. R. Mitchell: And this land was purchased in central Trinidad in a place where the State owns 80 per cent of all the land in central Trinidad. That is where. And the story does not end here, you know, for one of the actors in the matter met a brutal death.

Hon. Member: Mysterious.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Mysterious. He was one of the actors. We cast no aspersions.

Dr. Moonilal: The PNM kill him.

Hon. R. Mitchell: That is the Member for Oropouche East and that is what he talks about that. That is their policy for affordable housing. The EMBD—

Dr. Moonilal: The EMBD is not part of this.

Hon. R. Mitchell: It is a part of this because the EMBD is responsible for developing residential lots for ex-Caroni workers to put up housing. The matter is a housing Motion. And they talk about affordability, but, let me examine the affordability—let us examine the record of affordability. There was one of the EMBD sites, Roopsingh Road. Roopsingh Road was developed partly under the PNM, partly under the UNC. Phase 1 at Roopsingh Road, PNM developed at \$109,000 per lot.

Dr. Gopeesingh: What year?

Hon. R. Mitchell: Under the Member for Oropouche East, [*Crosstalk*] as the Minister—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Caroni East, the constant—please. Proceed.

Dr. Gopeesingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Hinds: Put him out.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Caroni East. [*Crosstalk*] Members, I am on my legs—all Members. Proceed, Member for San Fernando East.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope I get some injury time for that. Roopsingh Road, Phase 1, \$109,000 per lot.

Hon. Member: PNM.

Hon. R. Mitchell: PNM. Phase 2, under the UNC, they developed a lot for the whopping price of \$879,000.

Hon. Member: What! How much?

Hon. R. Mitchell: Eight hundred and seventy-nine thousand dollars per lot. In Exchange, Phase 1, \$109,000 per lot under the PNM. Phase 2A and B, under the UNC, \$310,000 per lot. Phase 3 under the UNC, \$399,000 development cost per lot. But the greatest is Petit Morne. Petit Morne, which is a part of San Fernando East. [*Crosstalk*] Phase 2 and Phase 2A, that development was most unfortunate to be developed by the UNC. That was developed at an average cost of \$1.17 million per lot. [*Crosstalk*] And Mr. Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Most of these sites have no approvals. They went through what I would call, sham exercises in giving out leases, giving out leases, giving out leases. The recipients of those leases cannot even build a house because there are no approvals, none—no approvals.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me move on quickly to—I just want to touch on the Member for Oropouche East. He spoke about how many houses he was able to give out and he also spoke about when he walks all over this country people hold him and they congratulate him. I want to ask him, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as we are on that point, whether the persons were the recipients of the housing units or whether the persons were the contractors who he had text message relationships with. But that is that.

Dr. Moonilal: Both.

Hon. R. Mitchell: Mr. Deputy Speaker, a couple sittings ago the Member for Oropouche East took great issue with the cost of \$250,000 paid by this Government to hold the Spotlight event at the Hyatt, a very important event, just to show the transparency of this Government. It involved all sectors of society to come in and understand what economic circumstances this country had faced.

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Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me report something here to you and it may be shocking to you. In 2012, one key-distribution ceremony on December the 3rd cost the HDC, and by extension the State of Trinidad and Tobago, \$683,000.

Hon. Member: To distribute keys?

Hon. R. Mitchell: To distribute keys. And it does not end there. In 2013, key distribution at Cypress Hills, \$586,000. In 2015, Couva Exchange, \$232,000. Key distribution in 2015, 2nd of April, \$364,000. And the Member for Oropouche East comes to the Parliament to talk about affordable housing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me talk about squatter reg. We have accelerated our programme, squatter regularization, even though this was at its very beginnings, a UNC programme. From 2010 to 2015, not one squatter had been regularized under the People's Partnership administration, under the Ministry of Housing—not one squatter. We have accelerated the development of those lands. We have pursued all the approvals and I am happy to announce to the country that in terms of our statutory leases we are now able to provide statutory leases to Certificate of Comfort holders at 25 per cent the market value, and they have 30 years to pay for it. [*Desk thumping*]

And it is not just a promise. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have already started the statutory process of going into the newspapers, identifying all the lands, identifying all the Certificate of Comfort holders. Squatters can now—those squatters who are caught by the 1998 Act, those Certificates of Comfort holders, they can now benefit from the equity in their lands. They can now benefit from the wealth that comes with land ownership, and this is what the PNM will deliver in terms of the housing policy. [*Desk thumping*]

Land for the Landless, an abysmal failure. They launched it in 2012. Not one lot was given out. Contracts were given out to develop the lots, but not one lot was given out to any beneficiary. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we scrapped that programme. We introduced the Aided Self-Help Programme. Persons are excited by it. There are a lot of applicants so far. Applications are open until the middle of January and in that programme we offer subsidized residential lots at 30 per cent the market value. But it does not end there because it is not just a residential lot giveaway or distribution programme. We walk with those beneficiaries all the way down to the end where they can construct their housing units. We offer them technical assistance; we offer them assistance in terms of getting financing to construct their homes.

So, in conclusion, we have shifted our focus. We are shifting the paradigm because the housing policy, as strong as the PNM's housing policy is, it must respond to the changing economic circumstances that the country would face from time to time. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, we are completing all those housing developments that they would have started. We are completing all. We have introduced the Aided Self-Help Programme. We have introduced tax incentives that we have operationalized. We have introduced that. We are pursuing our Squatter Regularization Programme. We have broadened the base for TTMF, our affordable mortgage programmes and, as announced in the budget by the hon. Minister of Finance, we are introducing our Housing Construction Incentive Programme. Because at the rate of 174 persons on the applicant data base, we believe that the construction of these housing units can be driven by the demand for them in society. So we are introducing that.

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would say—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, you have two more minutes.

Hon. R. Mitchell: So I would say that under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, we are committed to the housing sector. We are committed to doing all that we can do to ensure that those who need it most, those low and middle income earners, those who need it most, can access it and improve their standard of living.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

3.30 p.m.

Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh (Couva South): [*Desk thumping*] Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I take great pride in joining this debate which has been piloted by my colleague, the Member for Oropouche East, and who has placed a proper perspective on where we are in terms of the state of housing in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East, I am reminded that—you know I had a partner, we used to lime and he like to heckle people a lot, and when he spoke he liked to tell people, or tell them that the bark was louder than the bite—his contribution here this evening reminded me of that person in terms of his bark really being louder than his bite. [*Desk thumping*] There are a number of issues that I would want to put to the Minister and the Member for San Fernando East because during his contribution he had adequate

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time to indicate to Trinidad and Tobago if he was familiar with a person who had received an apartment with the sum of approximately \$4.5 million, and in 45 minutes he did not attempt to clarify that for the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] [*Crosstalk*] You had your time, Member for San Fernando East.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members. Again, every Member will be allowed to enter the debate. I will not allow the cross talking. Proceed, Member for Couva South.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. During his contribution he pointed in a number of directions and spoke about the process of allocation of units, and that the middle income group in the society was crowded out and there was no concern for those at the lower end of the economic ladder during the tenure of the Partnership Government, and he spoke about the cost of construction, and Victoria Keyes, and Eden Gardens, and providing comfort to squatters and so on, and I will address all of these issues that were raised by the Minister of Housing because it is important to bring the facts to the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

As I stand here today, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am deeply saddened because a constituent of mine, a young gentleman by the name Mr. Neshad Mohammed, 25 years old, had a dream of acquiring a house and unfortunately his life was snuffed out in very tragic circumstances and his dream is no more, and I take the opportunity to extend condolences to him and his entire family. The Member for San Fernando East indicated that my colleague was an abysmal failure during his tenure as the Minister of Housing in Trinidad and Tobago, but after \$110 billion being spent by the Government of Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley and the PNM Cabinet in two years, in two years, Mr. Deputy Speaker, everybody in this country has concluded that they are indeed an abysmal failure [*Desk thumping*] and the Member for San Fernando East belongs to that group.

Yesterday, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was perusing the *Newsday* at section eight, page 3, and the headline read:

“50% say Government doing poor job

One in two people think the government is doing a poor job managing the economy, while only ten per cent think it is doing a good job, according to a Market Facts & Opinion...Consumer Economic Sentiment report.”

And this is the reality. So when the Member for San Fernando East has indicated or wants to go in the direction of speaking about failures and not dealing with the development of Trinidad and Tobago, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is his track record since he has assumed the responsibility of being the Minister of Housing and

Urban Development? After his delivery here and his budget contribution, and wherever he has spoken in Trinidad and Tobago, what comfort has he brought to the people who are living under the poverty line in this country [*Desk thumping*] to tell them that indeed the PNM is providing or will provide you with housing from a cost point of view and an affordable point of view? I want to take the opportunity here to remind the Member for San Fernando East of the track record of my colleague and the track record of the Government which he belongs to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is a fact that the People's Partnership Government, which was led by the hon. Kamla Persad-Bissessar, executed 7,130 housing starts and delivered 8,521 housing units in five years. [*Desk thumping*] It is important to note, that during the PNM's tenure in office between 2002-2009, the PNM executed 13,047 housing starts during the period 2002-2009 and delivered—I want to reiterate—and delivered only 2,428 completed housing units in seven years. Look the difference, eh. From a statistical point of view, 8,521 units in five years as opposed to 2,428 completed housing units in seven years, and then the Member for San Fernando East has the brass-face to talk about [*Desk thumping*] what? Being an abysmal failure.

He wants to go in the direction of focusing on the standard of work and the quality of work, and so on, that was delivered by the Partnership Government, but you see, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the PNM must always be reminded of their sins and what they perpetrated on the population of Trinidad and Tobago, because again I want to indicate, as I said, the PNM spent more money and delivered less housing units in its accelerated housing programme when compared to the People's Partnership. The country, Member for San Fernando East, must be reminded that there were thousands of empty housing units all across Trinidad and Tobago, and the national outrage that was sparked and the amount of finances had to be redirected into completing all the stalled housing sites, and from a remedial point of view, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the amount of money that was spent in addressing the issues of drainage, electrical, and plumbing infrastructure.

The PNM's strategy was simply to build in phases and to allocate small percentages—especially close to elections—of completed housing units with an incomplete phase. For example, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in Corinth Hills in San Fernando, out of a total of 736, approximately 50 housing units were completed and allocated. The tragedy here, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the site was incomplete and it was without waste water facilities. Human waste had to be pumped [*Desk thumping*] out of the development daily, and the same had to be done in Retrench in San Fernando, Las Alturas, Morvant and Mendez Drive in Champ Fleurs.

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Imagine you are building houses, you are building units and you did not address the very important issue of waste treatment, and they talk about caring about people. The bodily human function is very important for the health survival of any human being, and from that point of view how could you be so callous and so [*Desk thumping*] inconsiderate as a Government to build houses and not have waste water facilities, and so on, being built? That is the track record of a Government that cares about the people or cared about the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and that is why it is important that every time we on this side get an opportunity to deal with those on the other side it is important to remind them of their sins and their failed policies and what they did in terms of—on the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East, again, a lot of—I would not even use the term bravado because it was really a continuation on his part of a narrative that the PNM is trying to create in the society. He focused on Victoria Keyes and the cost implications, and so on, and he indicated that the movement in terms of Phase 1 the contract cost was \$119,264,624.23. What he failed to tell this honourable House, and what he failed to tell Trinidad and Tobago, is that when this was supposedly approved on the 7th of December, 2005, there are no documents existing at the Housing Development Corporation that will give you a sense of understanding of who were the persons, or what was the paper trail and the process as it relates to the awarding of that particular contract—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Mitchell: How you know that?

Mr. R. Indarsingh:—and this is the legacy of the PNM. You talk a lot without giving any supporting information or data, you know. I am reading—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, I know that you are reading, but the displaying of the particular document. Proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am guided. I will hold it. You know if I put it a little lower I may have some difficulty in having to bend to read. So I seek your cooperation in lifting in at a certain level that will allow me to—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member. Okay, okay, I hear you. But, Member, holding it up on this position [*Mr. Deputy Speaker demonstrates hand position*] is not in a reading position. So please, proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am guided, but you know, in the flow of things sometimes with the hand movement, and so on, it may reach at a certain level beyond, [*Desk thumping*] and you know where I have come from, based on my previous experience, I like to articulate myself with gesticulations and so on. [*Laughter and desk thumping*]

So, Mr. Deputy Speaker, coming back to my colleague there on the opposite side, the Member for San Fernando East, about trying to be sensationalist and continuing this narrative and propaganda on the part of the PNM that there was corruption and not proper procedures, and so on, in relation to the increase in the cost of construction as it relates to Victoria Keyes, it moved to \$652,560,863.52 based on decisions of the board of directors of the HDC on the 6th of March, 2012, and in this bundle it is properly documented in relation to the process, and so on [*Desk thumping*] and at no time any Minister of Government of the Partnership was involved in the award of the contracts in relation to the cost increases of Victoria Keyes.

For example, on the 6th of March, 2012, the description of works took into consideration the completion of the building works and redesign, and so on, and as I said, it was done via a board note and minutes, and so on, and a proper board decision, and also on the 31st of August, 2014, again, via board meeting and proper documentation, and so on, which focused on external infrastructure, recreation and car park works and so on. Unlike, as I said, on previous occasions, won an award of \$119,264,624.23 and \$153,718,824.59, again there is no paper trail existing at the HDC in relation to when, how, why, who, and so on, from a due process point of view. [*Desk thumping*] So at the end of the day we could speak because we were committed to the process, we were committed to transparency, and if you go into the records of the HDC this bundle gives you a sense of comfort in terms of what was done in relation to Victoria Keyes.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Just for the records, Madam Speaker, I do not know if at any point in time from the point of view of transparency and accountability, and so on, and good governance, whether the Member for Diego Martin West will tell Trinidad and Tobago whether he tried, through HDC, to obtain a unit at Victoria Keyes. [*Desk thumping*] I see that the Speaker has returned, and probably at some point in time the Minister for Housing and the Member for San Fernando East may brief one of his colleagues to tell Trinidad and Tobago and to tell this House whether the Member for Diego Martin West indeed got one of these units and so on. I do not know, Madam Speaker. I am simply asking the question.

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Madam Speaker, it important to continue to focus on the issues that have been brought into this particular Motion. And again, I do not know what is the track record of the current Minister of Housing, and that is why I will pose this particular question also to him because you have to deal with the reality, you continue to speak about the Government not having money and there is a financial squeeze, and so on, in Trinidad and Tobago. I see the Minister of Education is watching with a sense of focus as I make this particular point and he knows why he is watching with this sense of focus. But, Madam Speaker, it is important for the Minister to really display some kind of leadership at the Ministry of Housing and to indicate why again the Government now has more or less received a slap in the face, if I should use that phrase, in relation to the oral ruling that was delivered by Justice Quinlan-Williams who ruled that HDC was not entitled to pay a contractor in instalments as it had not complied with the court rules required for, nor did the organization disclose its financial records to support the application.

Madam Speaker, it is important that from a leadership point of view that Ministers of Government who continue because—if I could recollect the Minister of Finance has stopped, or has instructed that no Government moneys be spent on Christmas parties, and so on, but also Ministers must display leadership, and if they know that cases will fail in the courts of Trinidad and Tobago at a time when they are complaining, and mourning, and groaning to workers in Trinidad and Tobago, contractors in Trinidad and Tobago, and so on, why are they not stepping in and giving advice [*Desk thumping*] and leadership to save the taxpayers of this country? The Minister during his contribution went in the direction of focusing on the Aided Self-Help Programme, he focused on the Land Settlement Agency, and so on, and I want to ask the Minister here this afternoon—because the Land for the Landless Programme was part of a vision of the People’s Partnership Government under the leadership of Kamla Persad-Bissessar Prime Minister at that time, and when we went to the population in 2015 our manifesto indicated that we would have continued to develop this particular programme, and if I am to read and quote directly:

“In parallel, we will continue with our Land for the Landless Programme, which provides subsidised lots to low- and middle-income families earning less than \$8,000 per month. For those that earn less than \$3,000 per month we will provide additional support under the Foundation for Life Programme. Under this Programme, we will provide, in addition to the land, a concrete foundation on which a starter home can be built.”

That was the vision and to continue the work if we were returned to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Speaker, up till today, during and after his contribution, no one has been properly supplied in relation to the information, or the data, or the statistics which would have guided the Cabinet of Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley to scrap this particular programme. What was the rationale, why did the Cabinet arrive at this particular decision? We must never forget—and I want to remind the Member for San Fernando East that on the 22nd of May, 2013—and I am reading from a *Trinidad Newsday* article—that the first drawing of 500 residential lots took place and 500 applicants were selected in terms of being—via the random lottery draw and to be the recipients or beneficiaries of the allotment. At the end of day, the Member attempted to make heavy weather of not a lot being distributed, and anybody who is logical in their thinking will know that if you have to distribute lots too, you have to develop the land. It was a work in progress and that is why it was clearly stated in our manifesto. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, this Government has signalled that it wants to rewrite the history of Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, the Prime Minister of this country has said that he would recruit the services of an historian to rewrite the history of Trinidad and Tobago. I am trying to remember the name.

Dr. Moonilal: Theodore Lewis.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Dr. Theodore Lewis. I want to pose a number of questions as it relates to this aided self-help programme which the Minister indicated—headlines are in the newspapers of this country and citizens are reading, that HDC lots will be ready by March and 10,000 people have downloaded application form for preapproved lots. Also, that the Aided Self-Help Programme will take into consideration preapproved lots, technical assistance in obtaining approvals, and so on, and assisting in the supplying of a pool of small contractors and so on. I do not know if you would have to qualify via a party card to become part of the pool of prequalified contractors, and so on, and that is the direction of rewriting the history of Trinidad and Tobago.

Also, Madam Speaker, we are not being told—because, as I said, I read from two articles here, one dated the 22nd of May, 2013 and one on the 21st of May, 2014, and the headlines concentrated on the numbers. In one instance, 500 residential lots and in the other instance land for 500 more, and up till now while the programme has been scrapped from the point of view of a Cabinet decision, the Minister or nobody in the Government on that side, even during the budget debate, could clarify what has become of the persons who qualified, or who were selected under the Land for the Landless Programme, will they be given preferential treatment in what we would call the Aided Self-Help Housing Programme. [*Crosstalk*]

4.00 p.m.

You had your time and allow me to put this into the domain and if you have opportunity, through one of your colleagues and for the benefit of all, to clarify this particular issue for the benefit of those who would have qualified under the Land for the Landless Programme.

Madam Speaker, and then he went into the direction of the development of lands for the ex-Caroni workers. [*Crosstalk*] And again, they have not developed any new site, they have not developed one lot [*Desk thumping*] after spending \$110 billion in the service of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker and— [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Couva South, your original speaking time is now spent. You are entitled to 15 more minutes to complete if you wish. You may proceed.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker, I will avail myself of all.

And Madam Speaker, the most important thing, I think, for—because I know they want to rewrite the history of Trinidad and Tobago, you know, and the fact that ex-Caroni workers got or received lands and 5,000, over 6,000 from an agricultural point of view and [*Desk thumping*] 2,000 plus from a residential point of view, that is a cause of concern. It is a cause of concern and I want today to ask the truth, through you, Madam Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East, lands which are being identified for the ex-Caroni workers, I am seeking clarification, I cast no aspersion and I am coming to no conclusion. But for the benefit of the ex-Caroni workers, whether the lands that have already been developed for their benefit, based on a judgment of Justice Lennox Deyalsingh in the courts of Trinidad and Tobago, Madam Speaker, whether the PNM Government of Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley is going in a direction of taking approximately 1,000 plots of lands from a residential point of view which are supposed to be given to ex-Caroni workers at sites located in Hermitage, Mc Bean, Picton, Factory Road and Orange Field and so on. That is the most fundamental issue from the point of view of the former employees of the company and I am sure the trade union, the All Trinidad Sugar and General Workers' Trade Union that I was proud to lead at one point in time, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*] And up until today, and I thought he would have used the opportunity to indicate to these ex-Caroni workers who are looking forward to the continued delivery of their residential and agricultural lands to come to an end. The Minister failed miserably in relation to providing information with this particular issue, Madam Speaker.

And, Madam Speaker, I want to take the opportunity here to deal with the ordinary people because as I said, he has provided no sense of comfort to those who are earning in and around the minimum wage, those who are living under the poverty line of Trinidad and Tobago, and I want to remind the Member for San Fernando East, probably it was by divine intervention, I do not know, but there is a lady who lives in Indian Trail who is still “steupsing”, [*Laughter*] Madam Speaker. She is still “steupsing” because yesterday—and I am in possession and I want to read for the Minister to listen and I hope that when I am finished, he will not steups but he will get down to relieving the plight of this ordinary citizen in the society. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, it is dated the 23rd of November, 2017, and for the records, because “you know you all like to engage in people fabricating” and so on, Mary Amy Paria, ID number 195708017, who was born in Indian Trail:

Dear Sir...

—and it is addressed to me as the Member of Parliament because she walked into my constituency office yesterday:

Dear Sir,

I am a homeless citizen of Trinidad and Tobago. As it has been highlighted on many newspapers across Trinidad and Tobago, I am a human being after all. I humbly request you, as a Member of Parliament, who has written on previous occasions to Ministers of Housing, to act on my behalf and to assist me which has gone to no avail. I am still homeless. I am still living in the hospital. I beg that you use your voice and seek pity on me as meetings with the Minister were futile. I wish that you highlight this issue so I may be able to get some sort of assistance.

Regards,

Mary Paria.

Madam Speaker, that is the lady who the Minister, again, with a bit of contempt and arrogance when the poor, humble citizen of Trinidad and Tobago [*Desk thumping*] attempted to engage him, all he could have responded with, with “ah loud steups”, rather than say—he reminded me of the Diana Power Mints advertisement, Madam Speaker. [*Laughter*] They could probably recruit him to advertise Diana Power Mints. [*Desk thumping*]

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Madam Speaker, I thought that they belonged to a Government: we care and let us just do this together and so on. If I was in his position at that point in time, I would have embraced that lady, offered an arm of comfort and attempted to use my staff, whether from the point of view of personal assistance or whoever within the system, to offer some sense of guidance and direction and so on, Madam Speaker, the Minister has failed miserably and certainly that will be his legacy in terms of “steupsing” to the ordinary people of Trinidad and Tobago. And, Madam Speaker, he speaks about dealing with the system and providing a certain care and programmes and so on for the ordinary and poor people of Trinidad and Tobago. And people have given me documentation, they have given me permission to call their names because the system at HDC and the system at TTMF is broken, [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Minister, based on your incompetence and your lack of leadership.

And I want to read again, addressed to me, again, people always come to the constituency office and they are pained by what this Government is doing, how they are inflicting trauma and pain. And a person:

I applied...the following is a summary of what took place on the day of my interview at HDC which was the 15th of September 2017.

And I just—I do not want to—it is really personal but I want to read the last paragraph of Ms. Babwa’s statement to me:

I regret to say that I was in utter disappointment and in shock to see that a system that was originally implemented for the lesser fortunate citizens of this country was no longer for them at all but a strategy that is being pursued by the Government to rob the poor people of Trinidad and Tobago.

And in 2017, the Member for San Fernando East has done nothing to change, [*Desk thumping*] to change how the poor people feel when they go into HDC and so on.

And I also have one, and I am asking the Minister, again, because this is a personal matter involving divorce and a very traumatic matter and so on, Mr. Minister, and again, the citizens and taxpayers of this country feel that in terms of the interest, figures at the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance are being manipulated in terms of after they get their initial mortgage and so on, they are being asked to subject themselves to valuation and so on, and based on the valuation of the property, their mortgages are increasing based on the increase in the interest rates. And as I am saying to you, this is people who are coming to me at my constituency office and I have an obligation to deal with this particular

issue [*Desk thumping*] and that is why I am saying that—and also, whilst you come here to demonize contractors who are providing employment and focusing on the development of Trinidad and Tobago from the importance of the construction sector, you must also address the systems that are currently existing at the agencies under your jurisdiction, because as you said, and you continue to boast, that it is not only about building homes. It is about—what? Affordability, accessibility and some other word that you like to parrot without delivering, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

So I am pleading with you, based on the poor and humble and ordinary citizens that you all have abandoned in two years, to try and address the deficiencies in the system in relation to how people feel when they visit the HDC and when they visit the Trinidad and Tobago Mortgage Finance, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, housing is very important to all and sundry. The human right to adequate housing is, as we would know, it is also enshrined in international law and it is enshrined in the very Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago, and just to underline the importance of how the framers of our Constitution looked at the whole question of housing in Trinidad and Tobago, if I am to go to Chapter 1:

“The Recognition...of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms”

It is enshrined, as I said, 4(a):

“the right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property and the right not to be deprived thereof except by due process of law;”

And in 4(d), it states:

“the right of the individual to equality of treatment from any public authority in the exercise of any functions;”

Madam Speaker, as I said, it is recognized by international law, the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is embedded in our very Constitution.

I just want to—because I have not heard really anything substantial from the point of view of a policy, a housing policy, and whether the Government is prepared to even go a greater or a bolder step by examining the possibility of legislating our housing policy and so on. And I want to guide the goodly Minister, for example, in some countries, Madam Speaker, for example, the Republic of

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South Africa has enshrined the right to adequate housing in its Constitution in 1966; with respect to Finland, it makes it mandatory for local government authorities to provide housing resources for the severely handicapped under certain circumstances. And today, I ask the Minister what has become of the policy that the Partnership Government ensured, when we were there for five years, to allocate a certain amount or a quota for physically challenged members of our society in relation to housing acquisition? *[Interruption]* My colleague is advising me that members of the physically challenged society, they have been evicted. And again, Madam Speaker, that in itself tells me of the continued lack of care, *[Desk thumping]* the continued lack of empathy on the part of those on the other side.

For example, just to provoke some thought for those on the other side, in the Republic of South Korea, the Housing Construction Promotion Act of 1972 calls for the provision of the construction and supply of dwelling units for persons who lack housing, and Act No. 1493 of 1993 in Bolivia, mandates the Ministry of Human Development to promote the construction of subsidized housing. So in that regard—*[Interruption]*

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Couva South, your speaking time is now spent.

Mr. R. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Speaker. *[Desk thumping]*

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West.

The Minister in the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs (Hon. Fitzgerald Hinds): Thank you very, very much, Madam Speaker, for recognizing me to make a short contribution in this very important debate. I recognize immediately the difficulty of my friends on the other side. Just like in the business of education, in the business of housing in Trinidad and Tobago from our beginnings as a nation, the PNM has led the way. We have blazed a trail. *[Desk thumping]* And my friends on the other side are attempting to play catch up. “Da’ is their first problem.” The next problem they have is that the sincerity of purpose with which we have approached the business of education and housing and all aspects of the governance of this country, they have no such element of sincerity, theirs is about contracts and money for friends and family *[Desk thumping]* so they will always have a problem. They will always have a problem.

Dr. Gopeesingh: 48(6), Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Member for Laventille West, please continue.

Hon. F. Hinds: My friend from Couva South, he spoke ad nauseam about Caroni lots. I remember the Member for Oropouche East standing in this House to tell us in answer to a question, I think I filed when I was a Senator. He told this country that they were spending \$700,000 to develop one lot of those Caroni lands and that they were selling them for \$50,000, and that was part of their difficulty. He is on record as saying that, the Member for Oropouche East. And I am now learning at this stage, Madam Speaker, after all of that, \$8 billion as my friend, the Member for San Fernando East, who I must compliment publicly [*Desk thumping*] for a very potent response to a non-presentation by the Member for Oropouche East. It was disappointing in the extreme. He told all elements of the media he was coming to drop bombs here today, he was like “ah damp squid”. Dead! Broken at the wrist. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] He should have gone to St. Lucia for that. Again, he should have gone to St. Lucia, again, with that.

But, Madam Speaker, I am to learn today very sadly to the detriment of the people of Trinidad and Tobago that these very lots, at those exorbitant costs that they concocted to the people’s disadvantage, cannot be delivered to them because no approvals have been obtained. None. And my friend from—representing Couva South, he spoke ad nauseam about this but he as a former union leader who represented most of those people who were looking forward to those lots and cannot now enjoy them, “dey doh want to hear him”. He betrayed them. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. Member: 48(6).

Madam Speaker: Continue, Member.

Hon. F. Hinds: I thank you warmly. [*Crosstalk*] He even made mention of a citizen. I have not met the lady but I have read about her. Some Mary Paria. My friend, the Minister of Housing, tells me that the record reveals that there is some other kind of problem because she was issued with three HDC houses over time, three. And recently we had a situation where a family took up residence quite unlawfully, quite improperly, and the Government responded very patiently to a situation opposite President’s House, and I am to learn from my friend, the Member for San Fernando East, that that citizen as well was the beneficiary of four HDC houses and kept moving from time to time. [*Crosstalk*] But my friends on the other side, they would jump on cases like Mary Paria and the example I have just given you outside of President’s House in their effort to seek political popularity among the people. Dishonourable indeed.

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As for the question of Land for the Landless, just to get the perspectives right, the programme was launched by the Member for Oropouche East and the UNC in Government in 2012. It was a residential lots programme. They promised that they would put foundation, starter houses for people. But by March 2013, the Member for Oropouche East went to the Cabinet and had those lots transferred to the EMBD. He must tell us why. And the EMBD is a very special place when it comes to the Member for Oropouche East. It was his—it provided him with a lot of lift and it may very well provide him with his undoing. Time will tell.

Madam Speaker, the records in Trinidad and Tobago will show that the HDC, formerly the NHA, has, in its purview, some 55,778 units. It is a serious programme because we understand the importance of housing to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, from the days of self-help housing, “yuh” know. The first self-help housing development in the history of this country was done in the constituency of Laventille East/Morvant in the Morvant area and I know the person who got the first key. I cannot remember his name now but I had the honour to meet him. He has now passed. Handed over by a man called Gerald Montano. We have housing estates all over Trinidad and Tobago from far west to far east to far south and I have a list of them here. We have 281 housing estates in this country, [*Desk thumping*] all developed by the PNM over very many years and I need not belabour the point and list them; they are all here for all to see. That is our record in housing.

Well as for my friend, the Member for Oropouche East, as I said to you earlier, his presentation today was abysmal, but it had to be because he is “gigiree”, he is not thinking straight. He is seeing himself in strange places in strange circumstances [*Laughter*] because something is happening. [*Interruption*] Yes, strange and possibly confined places.

Dr. Moonilal: I am shaking.

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes, and you will get shaken too. [*Desk thumping and laughter*] [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, the Motion states:

“*Be it resolved* that the House take note of the continuing failure of the Government to implement a viable housing policy to provide affordable housing units to qualified and deserving citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.”

I particularly like the intervention of my friend from San Fernando East who told us that it should have been rearranged a little bit because it is quite clear, it is quite clear that the focus—and I agree with my friend from San Fernando East. The focus of the contribution from the Member for Oropouche East had to do with the

auditing aspects of HDC. It was not so much about building and distribution. He spent a lot of time expressing his deep concerns about the auditing, that someone is looking at what had happened, and he is very, very, very worried about that and I can understand his trouble. And I too would suggest to him: save your fire, save it for an air-conditioned room in the Hall of Justice, do not bring it here. This is the forum for the people's business, not your personal troubles [*Desk thumping*] that you choreographed because of your innate tendencies. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, I have to remind the country, my friend enunciated it but I must remind the people of Trinidad and Tobago to whom we speak that they spent \$8 billion over the past five years. [*Crosstalk*] Eight billion dollars in the housing programme in days when we had plenty. They started 5,000—I am so sorry.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Oropouche East, if you would like to make an intervention, as a senior Member here, I am sure you know the proper way to do it.

Hon. F. Hinds: Part of the problem, “he gigiree”, Madam Speaker. Jumpy. Nervous. [*Crosstalk*] His sins may have caught up with him. Madam Speaker, and he is taking comfort—[*Interruption*] He is taking comfort telling us across the floor, “is ah civil case”. Okay. You know civil cases have their implications too, you know. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, as I was saying before the Member for Oropouche East attempted to distract me, they spent \$8 billion in the five years and three months in their housing programme. They started 5,480 units and delivered 1,800 of them. The PNM, in contradistinction, between the years 2002 and 2009, we delivered 4,022 housing units to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] And recently, documents came before us in the Cabinet and we were able to see on paper, in truth and in fact, the substantial difference in the expenditure to have done 4,027 housing units. Chalk and cheese. They had all the cheese and “they behave like rats too”. [*Laughter*]

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Speaker.

Hon. F. Hinds: It is a metaphor. I did not say anybody was “ah rat”.

Dr. Moonilal: “Da’ is why Manning fired you.”

Dr. Gopeesingh: “And Rowley fired yuh three times.”

Madam Speaker: Member for Caroni East and Member for Couva South, you all are consistently disturbing my ability to listen to the Member for Laventille West and I really would ask you all to desist. Member for Laventille West, I would really like you to find another way to say that, please. Withdraw it.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am sorry. I withdraw that metaphor. I withdraw that metaphor. Let me proceed.

Madam Speaker, and from 2016 to the present time, we delivered 1,900 houses to people, the citizens of this country and that programme continues with far less resources, but it has to do with responsible governance, it has to do with responsible management, it has to do with sound leadership, and it has to do with the absence of an ethos and ethic that is about getting, getting, getting things that are not yours. That is what the last regime represented, as far as I am concerned.

And of course, my colleague from San Fernando asked a question that will remain unanswered. How is it that the Victoria Keyes, that wonderful development down there, how did it escalate from \$200 million to \$600 million? We watched in agony from the Benches of the Opposition. We had started that development for the benefit of the people in those communities and others in the constituency of Diego Martin Central, and we saw them stand there cold and idle for months and perhaps years, and then when they went back to it, they gutted it out. They converted two bedrooms to one bedroom and three bedrooms to two bedrooms. They upscaled it, obviously with ulterior intentions and they pushed the price of that construction to \$600 million, and then have the temerity to come here today to question how people got them. When those units were completed, they could no longer serve the people for whom they were originally intended. So the Government retained a few for its own use as has been done for decades in the country in Flagstaff and Federation Park so when we have dignitaries and other people and Ministers who need to occupy them, we do that. That is responsible management. And the large majority of them are now being put on the open market for those who want to purchase them. That is how we handled that.

So, Madam Speaker, questions were raised, again, about this question of Roopsingh Road. They started out at \$103,000 for the development of a lot. The UNC took it—[*Interruption*]

Dr. Moonilal: You know where that is?

Hon. F. Hinds: Yes, I know where it is. I know where everything is. [*Laughter and crosstalk*] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Madam Speaker: Members, the crosstalk. Hon. Members, it is now 4.30, we shall now take the suspension and resume at 5.00 p.m.

4.30 p.m.: *Sitting suspended.*

5.00 p.m.: *Sitting resumed.*

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As we resume, I recognize the Member for Laventille West. You have an additional 17 minutes of your initial speaking time, so you can proceed. [*Desk thumping*]

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I must—I feel obliged to address a matter raised by the Member for Oropouche East. The Member for Oropouche East, told us in the course of his contribution that the Government, the new Government, the PNM Government, fired eight senior managers from the HDC when we went into office. But I just want to remind him, the records will show that they fired 5,000 persons, including from national security, Peter Joseph which cost them about \$2 million in settlement, and Nigel Clement which cost them over a million dollars in settlement very, very quietly. That is their record.

And talking about hiring and firing, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We, Trinidad and Tobago, are represented at the United Nations with a permanent Mission in New York, and there they have a small team of workers and those workers are home based, that is to say they are employed from Trinidad and Tobago and posted there, that is how it has always been. It is such a small unit they have been called upon to multi-task and they have been doing so painstakingly over many years. But by Cabinet Minute No. 1429 of June 2011, when the Member for Oropouche East was a Member of the Cabinet and the Member for Siparia led it, that Cabinet agreed to extend a contract position for three years in that Mission, for the position for executive assistant. And that was done on June 09, 2011 and by July the 29th, they hired a certain Patricia Moonilal.

Hon. Member: Any relation?

Hon. F. Hinds: I have to know. I want to ask the Member for Oropouche East if he knows who is Patricia Moonilal?

Hon. Member: That is your sister?

Hon. F. Hinds: She lived in New York so her appointment was very unusual, because as I said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, they were largely home based. And according to a letter written by the then High Commissioner to the Permanent Secretary, she was hired on the basis of her qualifications and the interview. Let me tell you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what was her qualifications. In 1972, she acquired a certificate from Trinizuela Secretarial College.

Hon. Member: Very good, San Fernando West.

Hon. F. Hinds: And in 1992, 20 years later, she got a certificate of participation in August of 1992 from the Career Blazers Learning Center in New York. And that was the first time I would have heard of that institution and that was the extent of her qualifications. She first practised as a secretary and that was it. Resmi all over again, and she was hired. Mr. Deputy Speaker, she applied for the job on the 25th of July, 2011, she was interviewed on the 28th of July, three days later and on the 29th of July, she received a letter from the then United Nations Ambassador, the Member for Naparima, telling her that she was successful to get the job, all in a matter of three days. It is not strange that the document shows that it was a concoction of sorts just to create a position and the Cabinet was used in order to do that so she was hired on the 29th of July—

Mr. Lee: Deputy Speaker, 48(1). I am trying to understand; we are on a housing Motion.

Hon. F. Hinds: You see, she was not entitled to any housing benefits.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled, proceed.

Hon. F. Hinds: So they ramped up her salary and from secretarial position like Resmi, she wound up getting the highest salary in the Mission and that caused all manner of upset among the staff—yes, US \$4,500 a month.

Hon. Member: Wow, nice man.

Hon. F. Hinds: Broke all the rules and then the Member for Oropouche East coming to tell us about hiring and firing here today. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so the record shows, she got 30 per cent more salary than anyone else coming from where she came, like Resmi. She had less qualifications than people who were there for years with Master Degree—

Mr. Lee: 48(1), Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, again, tie it in and let us move on quickly please.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I have given you certain leeway, tie it in and come back to the—

Hon. F. Hinds: Most certainly. Well the Member for Oropouche East was the Minister of Housing at the time and what is remarkable when this happened—finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, finally in September 2011, Cabinet rearranged the position so as to move it from being home based to locally based in order to

accommodate her, because she was living there. And finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, what is noteworthy and the Member for Oropouche East must stand up here, I will give way, to tell me when all of that was happening and he became aware that they were hiring Patricia Moonilal he never recused himself from the Cabinet in those discussions.

Mr. Lee: 48(1), Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: You are tying it in now, I presume—

Hon. F. Hinds: I am tying it in—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All right.

Hon. F. Hinds: She was not entitled to a housing benefit, nor even housing in our housing programme in Trinidad because she was living in the US. [*Laughter*] [*Desk thumping*]

So Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have to now ask my friend the Member for Oropouche East and my friends on the other side, as I move on, and I want to ask more seriously the people of this country: Is that what you want for governance in Trinidad and Tobago? Or do you not prefer the stern, stable, serious, honest Government of the Peoples National Movement? I have told you of our housing record, I could have gone through all of the housing developments from River Estate in the West right on up, all over this country.

Hon. Member: Diamond Vale.

Hon. F. Hinds: Everywhere and last week I attended a funeral service and I must pay compliments or respectful tribute to her and may her soul rest in peace. A woman police officer, she retired as an Inspector, she is related to the Member for Tobago East, former Inspector Roy, I attended the funeral service, and I took note that she lived in a HDC block of flats, perhaps no more than six apartments.

Wherever we could find a footprint, we occupied it in the most urban areas and we put structures up to create housing units for people, that is why today the figure is about 55,000 in this country, and as I told you earlier, they must have distributed about 1900 of those.

So our record is strong, so I take serious affront to the Member for Oropouche East coming here to challenge my colleague the Member for San Fernando East for his very sterling management of the Ministry of Housing—following PNM policy. And therefore the behaviour of the UNC in government and the behaviour

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of those who led the Housing Ministry, whether it is to involve criminals to get contracts, here and there as we heard earlier today, that is to be rejected. We are the PNM and we do it very, very, very differently.

So I would like—I, my friend was speaking today about reporting matters to the Integrity Commission, I am going to look further into this question of the failure of the Member for Oropouche East to have declared an interest in a matter that came up in the Cabinet. It is a matter that I consider to be quite improper; it caused no end of upset in the United Nations office in Trinidad and we will take a look on that. So, Mr. Deputy Speaker—yes, but that is the way you all do business and then come in here to play sanctimonious for us—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Address the Chair, please—

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much. The Member for San Fernando East reminded us that it took a PNM Government, since we are here for the past two years without any allegation of personal benefit being sought for anybody on this side—two years, by now in government their rap sheet would have been as long as you can get it. And I feel confident to say to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, we will do the next three years just like this—clean as a whistle, good governance is all we offer the people of this country. [*Desk thumping*] That is our record. They increased the ceiling of people who could access, whether it is a single income or joint income between husband and wife or partner or brother or sister or whatever, they increased it from \$25,000 to \$45,000 allowing bigger fish to come into a small pond. This housing programme was built on a philosophy to deal with the less able in the society. So now my friend from San Fernando East can truthfully tell us, you can go through the average housing development and you are seeing Mercedes Benz and Prado and all kinds of things. Persons who would not ordinarily have qualified for a subsidized house; houses that are subsidized to the extent of 50 and 60 per cent, they allowed big sharks to come into the small pond to the detriment of the people. And it is our duty to let the people understand that, so they will know where barley and balisier grow and they will know what is best for them. [*Desk thumping*]

And we have no fear of the next three years, we have no fear of the next election because all we concentrate on is serving the people in the most difficult times and that is what we are doing and we are confident as Bob Marley would have said:

“we know we shall win”—because—“good”—will prevail—“over evil”—every time. [*Desk thumping*]

And none of my colleagues here, “doh” have to worry about any air-conditioned room anywhere, and any KY formula [*Laughter*] and any—no such issues.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the housing programme as I understand it, caters for different categories of people. Different categories of people, you have an emergency element and I have recommended persons who found themselves in emergencies, they can go and once they can demonstrate to the authorities at the Ministry of Housing that they have a genuine emergency, I have had people benefit from housing in those circumstances. That is a sound policy. As a matter of fact, yes—

Hon. Member: Tell them.

Hon. F. Hinds:—you did not help me, as Member of Parliament, I wrote a letter on behalf of a constituent—several letters, as a matter fact, on behalf of constituents who would have benefited in that regard, once they could demonstrate it was an emergency. And that is what the programme is, it is nothing personal.

And then of course, you have a category for the disabled and elderly citizens, again the weaker in our society. And having said that I want to place on record, for the Member’s benefit, because you would have heard my friend from San Fernando East demonstrate how they squandered and wasted and plundered all kinds of millions of dollars in that \$8 billion housing programme, and we did far more with far less and we will do it again. We do not waste the country’s money.

And on that point, I want to take note of the fact and I want the citizens to recognize, notwithstanding the difficulty that we now face, the first priority in Government’s recurrent expenditure every month are the elderly and the disabled. Social security benefits are paid first, old-age pensions guaranteed. Salaries, we struggle to do it, but we are doing it, that is how we do the business. Another element is for national security, there was a philosophy that in every housing development you allowed some uniformed personnel; fire officers, prison officers, soldiers, coast guardsmen and women, police officers, a small percentage take residence in those blocks obviously for the purpose of being good and upstanding examples and obviously as well to bring some palliative, bring some balance, bring some resolution of issues when they arise in such communities.

Today, unfortunately, I am getting a significant amount of calls and visits from uniformed personnel who want to get out of certain communities because of the changing social circumstances. I do not always subscribe to it, because we

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cannot be running, running, running, we have to stand up and deal with the issues. I have met many uniformed personnel, they want to come out of this area and come out of that and while I understand their personal circumstances, I understand as well the general philosophy, the wisdom of it and I hope we can return to those days.

We also have the modified random selection, because—I mean, a pure random selection will be a bit of a problem because if a man is living in Fyzabad and he is one of the earlier—well, if you do it on the basis of first-in first-out, or the older applicants getting houses first, it would not always work so neatly, so we have a modified random system where persons are chosen and they are given access to these units as well. You have the rent to own; you have mortgages; you have 2 per cent interest in some cases when you go to TTMF and 5 per cent at its highest. All soft loans, so that people in a viable housing policy, according to the Motion, so that people who are deserving can access them, we have done everything to make it possible for persons to access it.

Just as the UNC worked hard to ensure that the big fishes got into the small pond, we have been working assiduously to make sure—this is a small fish business—the people’s needs are going to be met.

5.15 p.m.

I want to tell you sadly, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about a case with which I have personal knowledge when the Member for Oropouche East was the Minister of Housing and the Environment. I will not call the name of the citizen, but I will identify that citizen by the initials K.P. and no more because these are facts. One day sitting in my office, my secretary told me that a couple was outside to see me—a young man, public servant and his recently estranged wife. They had separated, but she had gone to him and they both came to me to tell me that she went to a certain Minister of Government—“and if they only prompt meh ah call his name here today”. The man is now a chairman of a corporation.

The woman told me she went, in the presence of her husband—I am only repeating, because we are dealing with housing policy, and the way we do it as opposed to the way they did it—to him with some problems including the need for a house. He listened to her pain and then got up from his cushy chair and walked towards her and put his hands intimately on her body and began to touch, and to assure her that the Minister would help.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member—[*Crosstalk*]—I am on my legs, Member. I am on my legs. [*Crosstalk*] I am on my legs. I was on my legs before you rose,

Member. Member for Laventille West, I am not directly on what line you are going down to, but I would prompt you at this time to desist, or caution you from going to the extremity of what you are probably coming to, just in case.

Hon. F. Hinds: I am most grateful and I do understand, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am most grateful and I understand. I just wanted to deal with this question of housing allocations and housing policy. The Motion says—let me remind us of the Motion, you know. The Member filed a Motion saying:

“Be it resolved that the House take note of the continuing failure of the Government to implement a viable housing policy to provide affordable housing units to qualified and deserving citizens...”

I am responding to this. So I was just relating a real-life example of a deserving citizen who found herself—

Dr. Gopeesingh: Concocted.

Hon. F. Hinds: Concocted? You know. God is my witness. [*Crosstalk*] Yes. And, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so the thing went. The next thing you know, I called a senior attorney and told the attorney what was happening and I said: “You are female, I want you to interview and talk to the young lady so no one could say that there was any political interference.” The next thing you know, I received a call that the following morning at around quarter to six a.m., that former Minister made contact with the lady all night calling because he must have found out she was talking to someone.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member, your original 30 minutes have expired. Do you care to avail yourself of the additional 15?

Hon. F. Hinds: Most certainly. And according to the husband—

Dr. Gopeesingh: 48 (1), Mr. Deputy Speaker. What is the relevance of that? [*Crosstalk*]

Hon. F. Hinds: All right. Well, let me come to it. Let me come to it. Eventually, offers and approaches were made to the young lady. And under—I do not know what it was because I, myself, felt disappointed—she was issued a house in Oropune in Trinidad and Tobago. She was issued a house in Oropune in Trinidad and Tobago—and I have the address if my friend wants to have it—as part of a price to discontinue certain discussions with the senior counsel and I. Her husband, in pain, told me that is what happened there. [*Desk thumping*] She is

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now in occupation of the house. I want to know if the Member for Oropouche East is prepared to deal with that. Mr. Deputy Speaker, a word to the wise is sufficient. I consider this Motion to be—[*Interruption and crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member for Laventille West. Member for Caroni East and Member for Toco/Sangre Grande, if you care you all can exit the Chamber and have your discussion, but I am not going to tolerate any—[*Crosstalk*]—Members. Members for Chaguanas West and Couva South—Member for Caroni East, take a little walk for me please. Take a walk. [*Desk thumping and crosstalk*] Member for St. Joseph—Members, I am on my legs. If this is the sign that we have to reach to, I am not tolerating the excessive crosstalk across the Chamber, Members. Added to that, I am on my legs and Members still want to make comments. So proceed.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your intonation to my errant colleagues on the other side. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Member.

Hon. F. Hinds: Thank you. Mr. Deputy Speaker, I was coming to my own conclusion, and I was simply putting these facts to the people of Trinidad and Tobago as it relates to our housing policy. I consider this Motion to be vexatious. I consider it to be a concoction that was supposed to be the staging post for certain bombs today but, of course, as I indicated there were none, there could be none.

We heard today in the presentation by the Member for Oropouche East, personal considerations. It is what I call an ad hominem Motion. It was done for a singular purpose for the benefit of the singular Member; that is why I call it ad hominem.

Dr. Moonilal: Standing Order 48(6).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Hon. F. Hinds: And I also put those simple sordid facts so that the people of Trinidad and Tobago could, as they contemplate—those who look and listen to this debate—the issues in front of us: the cost of housing, the fact that there are 172,000 people on a waiting list and the fact that this Government was bold enough, truthful enough to say openly there is no way the Government could meet in our housing programme, with the best intentions, the expectations, the desires and even the needs of every one of those 172,000 people and, therefore, we are trying to find new ways, creative ways.

One of the things we have done is to say, look here, we have lands, we can make land available, Mr. Investor. You can come in with your capital and we will do a PPP—a partnership between the Government and the private sector—and you develop the housing. We have the list of those with needs. We have the TTMF. We will make our list of persons who are ready to buy your units so a market is not going to be your problem. You build them on lands we will fix and approve for you, and you will have a ready place to sell them among our list using the very TTMF. A very creative solution. We tried it in Mount Hope and it is happening, a little slowly but it is happening. Creativity in difficult circumstances because we know we cannot in the normal traditional ways meet all the needs of the people who want them.

And, most of all, we have cut out waste and theft and corruption. We have done that, at least, at the level of the Cabinet and the Government. We have done that. That is the ethos. That is how we operate. It is taking a little time to seep right through the system, but we are confident within the next three years they will understand that perfectly. And the last reason why I put those sordid facts to the people is so that they will choose sensibly. They will know from the record that the Member for San Fernando East demonstrated here, a proud housing record—they will know from the few facts on housing that I offered to them, they will know what is what, who is who, which is right and which is wrong and they are sure that the Member for San Fernando East will treat no woman, no citizen that way. [*Desk thumping*]

So when the next time comes—whether it is in a local election, whether it is in a by-election or whether it is in the next general election—when the time comes to choose, they will be well advised and they will know whether they will choose Jesus Christ in metaphor or Barabbas. I thank you very warmly, Mr. Deputy Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I recognize the Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. Roodal Moonilal (*Oropouche East*): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Mr. Deputy Speaker, as I begin—[*Crosstalk*—please, they are disturbing me—let me begin by thanking all Members for contributing to the Motion. I want to warmly congratulate the Member for Laventille West who contributed, and the Member for Diego Martin North/East who contributed as well, in his own way, by talking rubbish across the floor. [*Crosstalk*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, they are disturbing me, please.

Mr. Imbert: Whichever Standing Order deals with insulting language.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The point of order, Member.

Mr. Imbert: Insulting.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I withdraw that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Use a different word.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, I withdraw it completely because there is no other word I could use.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I want to thank colleagues for contributing today. I have heard the contribution from the Member for San Fernando East and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, having heard the contribution, I am really today sadly and regrettably and, probably, depressingly—there was a time when the Member for San Fernando East stood in this House and we were blessed by rhetoric, charisma, vision and flamboyance, and today look what they gave us today from San Fernando East. May his soul rest in peace. He was my Member of Parliament as well and he was well missed. If today this is what San Fernando East is, we are really straining, we are straining. But, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that is my own emotional take.

The Member made a few observations. Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are two fundamental issues I dealt with earlier in the Motion, two. I raised a matter of the allocation of a house—an apartment, an executive apartment. I called upon my friend, the Member for San Fernando East, to please identify this person and give us your knowledge of the person. For 45 minutes the Member for San Fernando East spoke. He spoke about every single thing imaginable, but at no time did the Member want to go on record—not to talk across the floor, not picong, not old talk—and say I do not know this person, and there is a reason for that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, it is not my job and I do not wish to embarrass the Member for San Fernando East. All I will ask the Member is in the appropriate forum with his Government and his Cabinet, please indicate to his colleagues the nature of that relationship that he has. [*Desk thumping*] I am not in the business of embarrassing people. I am not in the business of embarrassing people.

Mr. Mitchell: Utter nonsense.

Dr. R. Moonilal: If it is—[*Crosstalk*—you see, he is prompting me to—Mr. Deputy Speaker, let me go on the next—

Mr. Deyalsingh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, Standing Order 48(6) please.

Dr. R. Moonilal: What is that?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Standing Order 48(6).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With regard exactly to what, Member?

Mr. Deyalsingh: The Member was saying that Minister Randall Mitchell should tell the Cabinet about some sort of relationship, sordid relationship. What does that have to do with this? That is imputing improper motives.

Dr. R. Moonilal: “Methink they protesteth too much.”

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Overruled.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your wisdom. [*Desk thumping*] Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will leave that matter there and move on. I will leave it there. I will leave it. It is not my intention to embarrass anybody, and not the Member for San Fernando East. I see him as harmless, non-combative and temporary.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, the other major point I made today is on the PricewaterhouseCoopers involvement in the Government. I spoke about that involvement with some depth at HDC. I made reference to the EFCL, colleagues opposite made reference to the EMBDC. To this time—this debate is now to an end—not one Member of the Government speaking in 90 minutes has sought to defend the Government from the allegations that I have made and that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, speaks volumes. That speaks volumes. It is deafening.

I would have thought the first thing the Government would want to do is rebut my allegations and accusations—[*Interruption and crosstalk*]

Mr. Imbert: What allegations? “De debate done.” [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Members.

Dr. R. Moonilal: You see again—to go on record, because I am speaking on record. I am not speaking in picong. [*Desk thumping*] I am not in the bar here. I am at the Parliament speaking for the public record. I made serious allegations against PricewaterhouseCoopers. I made serious allegations about involving a Government Minister. I would have thought that the relevant Government Minister from Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West would have rose and defended his good name, and tell us no it is not him, or if he did, that I did not do that knowingly. [*Desk thumping*] I understand the law.

The Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West is a lawyer, an attorney-at-law, and if he could not rise in this House and clear his own role on the public record—could not explain those circumstances—[*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Silence.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Mr. Deputy Speaker, that also speaks volumes. It speaks volumes. I am in shock and awe that those two main issues I raised were left unanswered by the Government. So the public record in this matter will close and those two issues are left on the public record.

[MADAM SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Let me repeat the two issues, because Members are asking what are the two issues, so let me repeat them. The Minister from San Fernando East's knowledge of someone who has received an apartment through a mortgage arrangement for \$4 million from the HDC. They sold it. [*Crosstalk*] I do not know, you could find out. All I am asking—look, the Member for San Fernando West asked me about my family member, I am going to reply to that now. My friend from San Fernando West, I am going to engage him directly, because he is really going to try to confuse me and to confuse the Parliament and so on.

Madam Speaker, on the matter of the house at Victoria Keyes, I raised it earlier in my presentation, \$4 million, the Member for San Fernando East ought to tell us his relationship to the person who obtained that. On the matter of the PricewaterhouseCoopers, the Government for 90 minutes could not stand up and defend their actions in PricewaterhouseCoopers coming into HDC illegally. I have said it before—and I am winding up now—I was waiting on their defence. I was waiting—to tell us how PwC can come illegally and take Government property illegally, cart it away, when there is no contract in place with the Board of Directors of the HDC.

The PwC continued this process by writing the TTMF, as I said before. No Minister of Government stood and confronted that issue and told me I am wrong, or in law they ought to have done this or they ought to have done that. Madam Speaker, no one rose and told me that I got it wrong; that the TTMF letter was proper. You know in a strange way, Madam Speaker, I do not know, they may have had an explanation. I was waiting for it.

In the absence of an explanation—because that is what we do in a debate. One side would make some points, the other side will rebut—we will have to stand our ground by indicating that PricewaterhouseCoopers acted improperly at best, if not, illegally, in approaching the TTMF and that matter is there.

Madam Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East took his good time to reply to me and raised several matters that I would like to respond to in winding up the debate. The Member was concerned, of course, with housing costs and argued as he will argue from now until eternity, about costs of housing under UNC and PNM. That is

such a sterile debate to enter into—statistics, because everyone can marshal statistics. You know, you could actually use statistics to tell the truth. You can use statistics to say anything you want. So persons can come and say under the PNM, it was \$2; under the UNC, \$6; under the UNC, \$10; under the PNM, that dollars. I am not going to get into a fight like that. What the Minister will not tell you is that when you quote price in 2002 and price in 2010, there are different prices. [*Desk thumping*]

The Member for Diego Martin North/East was the Minister of Works and Transport in this country when a bridge collapsed in Caroni somewhere. You remember somebody died there? I remember a debate in the Parliament when the Member, as Minister of Works and Transport, led an argument when we raised the issue of price and escalation and variation and cost and the Member for Diego Martin North/East argued vehemently that what we were talking was not proper sense, because we are comparing prices in 2008 and 2009 with prices in 2001 and 2000. He carried that argument. But, today, we all have to hear the Member for San Fernando East talk at length about the cost then, the cost now as if that is changing anything, as if that would make some difference. Talk about Victoria Keyes. That was a big preoccupation of the Member as well, Victoria Keyes.

Victoria Keyes, Madam Speaker, I have a bundle here that I would never have had time to go through, but we have the bundle on it here. The Member, I just want to inform him, that this matter of Victoria Keyes started in 2005. In 2005, the original building works/design concept was more or less \$119 million. At the HDC, we could not find a contract agreement—we could not find the date of that contract—and we could not identify who were the parties legally to such a contract, but work started, work was done.

There is also a figure here for Victoria Keyes, additional floor and other variations, \$153 million. At the HDC—and I am reading from something here, a document of Tuesday, January 26, 2016. It is quite relevant at this time—at the HDC we could not find or they could not find now, a contract agreement with whom and by whom.

So the point I am making, Madam Speaker, is that 119 plus \$153 million spent—that is about \$260 million more or less—and at the HDC as of January 26, 2016—this is when you are in office—you could not find any documents from 2005 to tell you who are the contractors, what are the contract terms. Nothing. That was a hallmark of the old HDC—build everything, put up everything, no contract in place, no board decision taken.

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But let us talk about escalation because I think the Minister was very concerned with escalation. Escalation: \$183 million more or less; building completion works, redesign, and there is a breakdown for redesign, building completion work. This was a site, Madam Speaker, that they had to blow up a mountain, I think. They had to detonate dynamite at Powder Magazine to put it down. We have building completion works, redesign, et cetera. But, you know, there is a board approval and board note, 06 March, 2012. So the matter went to the board on the 6th of March 2012 where a decision was taken to spend \$183 million, but no board note could be found for \$260 million before us.

You have another note here from the board, 31 August, 2014, external infrastructure, recreational facilities, car park works and so on and, guess what? Madam Speaker, 30th August—there is a note here—contract agreement date. And this was done by the board. So when we got involved in this, we had board approvals to do everything. [*Desk thumping*] But, Madam Speaker, at Victoria Keyes, the Minister would have us believe that we would have a nine-storey building without an elevator. So what you were expecting? Persons there to carry a fridge on their back nine floors up the hill? To carry up a stove. [*Crosstalk*] So you did not want a car park? You have a car park with elevator, and how they are going in their house with the fridge? [*Crosstalk*] So, Madam; Speaker— [*Crosstalk*—no, they are putting the fridge in the car to go in the car park. That is what your colleague is saying. [*Crosstalk*] Madam Speaker, you see, they cannot talk when they have to talk, but they disturb when we have to talk.

Madam Speaker, under our Government, we put external infrastructure in place, recreational car park works and it was properly approved by the board. So when the Minister says he does not know about cost escalation, you ought to know. There are board Minutes that tell you this. Look all the board Minutes here. [*Paper in hand*] I could show you it. Well, I cannot show you it, but all the board Minutes are here. You could find out and read yourself and find out what led to cost escalations.

At that place, I remember there was no garbage chute. So when you put out your garbage by your door, you had to walk down nine flights and carry the garbage down, and when you are going down you will be hitting people door in the corridor throwing down garbage as you go down nine floors. That is what we met.

In the HDC communities we were also wanting to build facilities like recreation grounds, put things for children. Beverly Hills. There is a Beverly Hills HDC. You know it? I think you know it. We put a playground there for the children. Do you know that Beverly Hills facility has solar lighting? [*Desk thumping*] We thought

that if we put normal lighting, given the nature of that community, it may be vandalized and so on. We put solar lighting because we said the sun could keep the energy. We opened a solar-lit park for children in Beverly Hills and that was part of our vision. So do not be upset that we spent money on recreation facilities and cultural facilities, on car park and that type of things. So it explains itself.

Madam Speaker, on the PricewaterhouseCoopers matter, the Government did not respond. I am saddened by that because I thought there ought to have been a response. Madam Speaker, but what gets it more worrying now is a matter I want to raise. In addition to that, PwC went in and sought to conduct an audit. The member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West who is now telling us he is going to deal with WASA—he had his hand in PTSC, he had his hand in EMBDC, he had his hand in the HDC and so on and that is fine. That is a matter we will take up somewhere else. But PwC went in to do audits and then you know what is the end result?

The PPP programme instituted by HDC, guess who is the project manager for that programme? PricewaterhouseCoopers. So, you go in as an auditor and you come out as a contractor. They have a contract of service while they are auditing. They could be effectively auditing themselves. You go in as an auditor and you come out as a contractor. To this day, we had to learn in the newspaper that PricewaterhouseCoopers is the project manager of the PPP. What experience do they bring to managing these programmes? No wonder that is in a state of pre-collapse.

NH International and HDC—I do not know if it is over the Member for Diego Martin North/East and the money he has for him—but they are now in a state of pre-collapse, because what you have done is you have infested the PPP from the beginning. You have infested it. Once you do that you infest it. So, PricewaterhouseCoopers conducting audits, in touch with Government Minister, in touch with chairman, conducting the business and then suddenly they pick up a contract while they are inside there.

I want to ask the Member for San Fernando East—he will answer, he could do a press release—was there a competitive tendering to get the project manager for the private/public partnership projects? [*Desk thumping*] Was that done by competitive tendering? [*Desk thumping*] Or did you sole select PwC because they were working before on audits and investigating and running down and sharing information about former Government Ministers and the administration before so they get “ah end”? They get a big end, but they get “ah end”. They come in and they are now working for the HDC.

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You see, Madam Speaker, I know you were not always in the House but you diligently follow the proceedings. During their contributions and, particularly, the Member for Laventille West—you know, it takes a PNM Government to put a PNM civil case in court and talk about jail. [*Desk thumping*] It takes them, because right through, you know, this is who is going to jail, who is not going to jail, who is doing this, who is doing that, and they are preoccupied with that. I want to tell them there is an old saying: When you dig graves for others you will fall in it. So be careful. [*Desk thumping*] Be careful, Member for Laventille West, with your shovel.

5.45 p.m.

So, Madam Speaker, the Member for Laventille West also took this opportunity to—without skill—work into the debate a matter concerning my family. But my family member whose name was called by the Member, and he continued to give us some information about, there was a councillor in San Fernando named Duncan and he was a PNM councillor, and when he fell out with the PNM he told me one day, he said, I want to tell you something, you see with the PNM, they will victimize your dog. [*Interruption*]

Dr. Gopeesingh: Yeah, Barry Garcia said so too.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Barry Garcia, who is that? So, Madam Speaker, I am not surprised that they will in Parliament, with the name of my sister. She works in New York with the UN mission, and they would bring her name here and raise matters of her business, so I am not surprised at all.

Twenty years ago maybe I would have reacted differently, but I will not react differently, except to say that, to my knowledge, in the Partnership Cabinet we had several lawyers, and several outstanding lawyers, and I have no recollection of her name coming into the Cabinet for any discussion. I have a recollection of positions being the subject of a Cabinet Note, but I want to assure you if any member of my family's—particularly close family like this—name was on a Cabinet Note, a few things in the world you could be sure about, Roodal Moonilal will excuse himself. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Speaker, I was Leader of Government Business for five years, in the Cabinet—I mean, I can say this without feeling bad, without hesitation—Madam Speaker, it was my job as part of the little Cabinet to pick up that when we have Notes involving people, Ministers and their family, or anybody who may be related, I would speak and I would say, Minister, notice this and that, and we have to ensure that is done properly, you cannot be participating, and so on. So if I took

that as a responsibility in some way, you think I will sit down in a Cabinet decision, see somebody named Moonilal, on a Cabinet Note, and sit down and participate in that? Member for Laventille West, do you think I am you? [*Desk thumping*] [*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: You cannot be me.

Dr. R. Moonilal: No, I cannot be you, I ‘duz’ trim. [*Interruption*] Yes, thank you.

Madam Speaker, so I want to assure the Member for Laventille West who raised the matter, and the House, and the country that at all times in Cabinet we would act properly. And I ask him—if he has raised this matter today, I now challenge the Member for Laventille West. Although being a junior Minister I understand he has Cabinet rank; he is a junior Minister with Cabinet rank. I challenge the Member for Laventille West to produce the Note that bears my sister’s name, and any evidence he may have from the Cabinet Secretary that I was in the meeting at that time. I just ask. That is all I say, because I know the person I am dealing with, the Member for Laventille West. A year-and-a-half ago I gave him some advice, I made three editorials that time. I gave him some advice, I think I made about five calypsoes. That advice stands. [*Desk thumping*] I think it is more valid today than it was then, you know. Madam Speaker, that stands.

So they will choose to take steps. I understand the Cabinet has already passed a Note to deal with my family members, and so on, and that is fine. It is one thing when you are in Government you will do so, as I say, the dog they will victimize, the dog, so that is nothing, we expect that. In fact, we do not expect less than that. So they can do that, God is great, and time is longer than the Member for D’Abadie/O’Meara, Antoine. So we will understand when the time comes around, Madam Speaker. We will understand—[*Interruption*] Well, you cannot understand that because you have school leaving. [*Laughter*] Madam Speaker, today when they talk and they all give their view and talk about jail, and who going to jail, and I like to hear this talk because it tells me something about the mind. They have confused and they have deliberately fragmented the separation of power issue, [*Desk thumping*] that there is a court, I challenged Members opposite to serve documents; they did serve. Regrettably, neither the Member for San Fernando West nor the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West put their name on the court document. When I was waiting for them, they hide. They duck and run. They put a small insolvent company that cannot pay me damages. They put the company in front and they take off and hide in the back.

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You see, Madam Speaker, when we were growing up too, we had a dog named Rover, and Rover used to go by the gate and bark, and from the time you open the gate “he run in de back an he hide”. This is Rover we are dealing with, Rover one and Rover two, Madam Speaker. So they are barking but when the time come they run in the back of the house and hide. They could not put their name. If you want to sue a former Minister be brave enough. Say the Attorney General taking action man—it is a former Minister—you put an insolvent company that cannot pay damages. But, Madam Speaker, they raised the matter today; that is what they come here to do. That is why they come, to talk about that. And the Member for Laventille West, you know, he was halfway kind, because he cannot be completely kind, when he acknowledged that he came to me with a housing concern and I was able to assist him.

Mr. Hinds: Me? You assisted me?

Dr. R. Moonilal: He brought a housing concern to me—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: Madam Speaker—

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, I am not giving way. If he has a Standing Order he must say it.

Mr. Hinds: Madam Speaker, Standing Order—the Member is imputing—Madam Speaker, I just want to make it clear, he helped me with no house. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker: Member, you can only rise on a Standing Order or if the Member gives way. So, continue.

Mr. Hinds: Madam Speaker, 48(6), the Member is stating an untruth.

Madam Speaker: No. No.

Mr. Hinds: And an improper motive.

Madam Speaker: That cannot be done that way, please, Member for Laventille West.

Mr. Hinds: I am obliged.

Madam Speaker: Okay. Please continue, Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Speaker, so he admitted today I was able to assist him, and—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: Assisted me?

Dr. R. Moonilal: Well, nobody came for assistance, you came. But he came, the constituent never came, he came. He came to see me. He was waiting for me in my office for about two hours. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: “Yuh lie.” Madam Speaker—

Dr. R. Moonilal: Madam Speaker, can I proceed, please?

Mr. Hinds: Madam Speaker, 48(6).

Dr. R. Moonilal: I want to proceed.

Madam Speaker: Member, I overrule. Member for Oropouche East— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Hinds: I have never been to that office, I wrote a letter as Member— [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker: Member, please. Member for Oropouche East.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

So, Madam Speaker, the PricewaterhouseCoopers work at the HDC is corrupted, polluted, infested. We would be calling for an investigation subsequently into the conduct of this PPP matter involving the same auditors that were used for other political purposes, and that matter, the Government will be well advised to prepare themselves for.

Madam Speaker, the Member for San Fernando East spoke about random selection, and so on, and to this day the Member for San Fernando East has not indicated to us whether the HDC under his tenure has engaged in one random draw of a lottery for persons to get an equal opportunity to get a home. We had two big ones, they had none. In two years or so they had none. And, you see, this is why their Prime Minister, speaking to them the other day, had to “bouff” them as well, because they are not performing as a government should. The Member for San Fernando East stood 45 minutes, could not tell us what is his policy projections; the Minister for Diego Martin North/East in his budget, as convoluted and thing as it was, and as crazy as it was— [*Interruption*]

Mr. Indarsingh: A paradigm shift.

Dr. R. Moonilal:—is a paradigm—well, I thought that was more of a “para-dig-um” shift.

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Madam Speaker, you would think that today is a golden opportunity for the Minister to come and say, these are the details of our policy as announced in the budget and this is what we intend to do, he could not say that. They talk about EMBD and they will continue with that because they have a fascination. You know, their problem is they cannot believe that we did so much without crookedness and corruption. [*Desk thumping*] They cannot believe it. They “düz” accuse me of all kind of wrongdoing, you know, look at them. I mean, it is just bewildering but, Madam Speaker, I am sure that Senior Counsel Anand Ramlogan will deal with them in the courthouse at the appropriate time. They will deal with them there, I do not want to get too much into that.

Madam Speaker, there is a looming crisis in the housing sector and it is coming soon. It revolves around a report that was done by Lauriston Lewis Associates Limited, 2015. Madam Speaker, there is a housing estate called Wellington, and a professionally contracted review, technical review of this site has indicated that this site should be demolished and all 200 residents should be relocated because it is a sitting time bomb. And, Madam Speaker, in Debe, in my own constituency, we tried, we spent \$20 million to save that estate with infrastructure work. Today, a report, a technical report has now recommended that they—I am reading it today—a technical report has now recommended that the entire estate be demolished because of the construction problems that they have faced. It was, Madam Speaker, a report, an expert witness statement and report, experimental housing units, it is dated 2015. They would have had it in their possession.

Madam Speaker: Member for Oropouche East, your original speaking time is now spent, you are entitled to 15 more minutes if you wish to avail yourself.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. [*Desk thumping*]

So, Madam Speaker, the report—and I have the report in my hand—the report was made available, and I do not want to go through in detail, but the report was made available to two Ministers, the Minister from Port of Spain South and the Minister from San Fernando East. And, Madam Speaker, the conclusion of this report that I have in my hand here says that the entire review has shown—well, there is an omission of several things, poor infrastructure, poor this, poor that, I do not want to spend too much time on that, but the report has concluded that the option of the Housing Development Corporation is to completely demolish and rebuild the buildings on that site. This, Madam Speaker, is another \$100 million estate. This is worse than Las Alturas, and you now have a technical report telling you to demolish the site. I speak now on behalf of my constituents, Madam

Speaker—I speak on behalf of my constituents to ask the Minister of Housing and Urban Development to investigate this matter. Take whatever steps but, please, do not allow citizens of this country to be exposed to danger, [*Desk thumping*] to be exposed to risk by continuing to leave them there while the homes may collapse, given the gravity of this report that has already gone to the relevant people in the HDC.

Madam Speaker, if they do not have a copy and they lost it, I can give them the copy. I can easily give them the copy of the report. This was a matter that we dealt with, Madam Speaker. We had to institute this—

Mr. Al-Rawi: You have the arbitration judgment?

Dr. R. Moonilal: The arbitration judgment came out, and as the Attorney General is well aware, \$23 million, I think, was the negotiated payment. And, Madam Speaker, it was very instructive that as soon as we left Government they settled the arbitration. You know, they settled it and agreed to a figure. They agreed to a figure. That is what they did, they went and agreed to \$23 million, and I am putting it to you that you will pay Agostini your \$23 million before you pay any contractor for work. It is Agostini that built the Wellington housing estate. The sod was turned by one, Dr. Keith Rowley, Minister of Housing. The sod was turned by Keith Rowley, Minister of Housing. Agostini, who had never, until then, been involved in the housing sector at that level came to build house. This is what we have today. They came in 2004, 2005, I was the MP then, I went. Mr. Rowley was there. We went, and I did not turn sod but I was there, and today, in 2017, I am telling you that the entire estate, they are recommending to be demolished. Now what manner of madness is this one now? But what I am concerned with, Madam Speaker, is the safety of my constituents; I am concerned with nothing.

So, Madam Speaker, the Member for Laventille West, preoccupied as he always is with jail and courthouse, and all these kind of things—and handcuff, and all these things, but that is his preoccupation, and we do not have a problem specifically with that, because that means he would have had nothing else to say. There was also another attack that was launched today, the Member for San Fernando East started it, the Member for Laventille West continued; when you drive into certain places you see certain houses and cars, Benz and Rover, and so on—Madam Speaker, half the Government does drive Benz and Rover, by the way. So you go there, so you are telegraphing to people. That is what they do, they telegraph to people, look here, they have rich people here, rich people; they have cars, they have house, they have money, you could go there and rob them,

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and Government must be careful of that. [*Desk thumping*] The Member for San Fernando—the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West, I have a record of his talking in what I think is a budget consultation in San Fernando, and the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West telling his crowd, “Look, yuh could see who thief money watch the size of their house”. [*Interruption*]

Madam Speaker: Member, you are really winding up and I am not going to let you go down that road.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Okay, sure. So, Madam Speaker, the Government ought to be very careful of their utterance in these matters.

Madam Speaker, the housing sector deserves another review, and the review deals with the land issue. The Minister was right that under a former UNC administration, Mr. John Humphrey and others, pioneered a land distribution programme, but what was amazing, is that John Humphrey pioneered a land distribution programme—Madam Speaker, it is 6.00 p.m.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: You could talk.

Hon. Member: You could still talk.

Dr. R. Moonilal: No, it is 6.00, the business should end at 6.00, I think.

Madam Speaker: Please, continue, Member for Oropouche East, unless you have finished your contribution.

Dr. R. Moonilal: No, I have not finished, Ma’am, but the Standing Orders require us to finish at 6.00.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: No, it does not.

Madam Speaker: Member, please, continue.

Dr. R. Moonilal: Yes. Thank you.

Madam Speaker, the matter I raise now is land, and why is it that there is a database at the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development? There is a database there. When we advertised for the Land for the Landless programme, within one week we had 10,000 applicants. At the end of that process we had 42,000 applicants for land at the end of that. What is to become of that database? [*Desk thumping*] And more than that, Madam Speaker, we had two random draws televised nationally involving professional auditing companies. I do not know if it was PricewaterhouseCoopers either, but professional auditing companies. We took two draws, 500 and 500, I believe. So you now have 1,000 persons, Madam

Speaker, who have indicated that they would like a lot of land, and they have indicated to you that they qualify. You know what was the response of the Minister of Housing and Urban Development? He said, this system is corrupt. He said, why? He said, listen, some people are selected they do not even qualify. But they cannot qualify, when you are selected through a random draw it is because you apply. It is now for the Ministry to go through the applications, and who do not qualify, quite clearly, you cannot give them, but you will find people who are qualified. Remember when you fill out a form and apply for a piece of land, you deposit it, you get a receipt, we do a random draw based on that. We do a random draw based on that, so it has nothing to do with who qualify.

The Minister said, “dey doh” qualify, we find people who have house, and we find people who have property, and we find people who did not qualify; you will find. This is what the people apply, you will now have to crosscheck if they are selected to go forward. The Minister has to indicate to us, Madam Speaker, what are you going to do with the thousands of persons who have applied and with those who have been selected?

Mr. Mitchell: To reapply.

Dr. R. Moonilal: And the Minister is saying they will reapply. So 41,000 people, poor people, depressed people, underprivileged people must now go and reapply for a lot of land. You understand what is happening here, by the time that application is received, by the time that application is dealt with they are out of here, they are out of here. Nobody will have an opportunity to get a lot of land, nobody. And, you know, they stand here and talk about EMBD—I want to put on the record, and I brave enough to do this, I brave, the EMBD was one of the best managed companies in the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Yeah, and you laugh, because you have not distributed a lot of land, under the EMBD we distributed 5,000 lots. [*Desk thumping*] Five thousand lots distributed when we were there; the EMBD prepared that. How much they prepare when you there? They “ent” prepare one lot because they are preparing case. They are preparing case to go to the PNM civil cases, and “doh fool yuhself”, this is not police and DPP; this is PNM civil cases.

So the EMBD spends all their time preparing case but not preparing a lot of land for which they are mandated to do. I do not know where those cases they are preparing; they are preparing more. I “doh” know, maybe the Malcom Jones formula might be used, but I do not know what they are doing with that. They will waste judicial time, they will waste money, they will waste everything, but, more important—I do not mind the personal persecution. That is nothing, I am dealing

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with that, I make for that. Have you delivered one lot of land in two years [*Desk thumping*] when we left developed sites there for you? In two years, not one citizen of this country has received a lot of land, and now you come to say that the site bad, but the site must be bad, two years you are doing nothing. My constituents came to see me from an EMBD area called Picton, Madam Speaker, and the people are complaining there, the bush overrun the area, no street light. The road, after two years of course, of heavy rain, and so on, is becoming eroded. They do not have any garbage collection service, and it is bandits in the area every night. The EMBD cannot find—they do not have money to fix that, they do not, but they have money to spend on their friends who are lawyers, and I will treat with that elsewhere, but they have money to spend on consultants from England. They spend US dollars for consultants from Canada, but they cannot pick up garbage in a community. You cannot cut the grass. You cannot fix the road. You cannot work with T&TEC to put lights, and people are being plundered and slaughtered in some of those sites. They talk so much about EMBD, when you go in some of those areas today—anyone of you know where Petit Morne is? They do not. San Fernando East, you know where is that?

Mr. Mitchell: “Yeah, man.”

Dr. R. Moonilal: The people looking for you there. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Mitchell: Mark Bassant—

Dr. R. Moonilal: And when you go there you will see houses built, you think it dropped from the sky, we gave the people the lot of land there. We gave lands that today you could see house built by former Caroni workers on the land, [*Desk thumping*] you know, and you sit there and do nothing, but we filing case, we filing case. When you all demit office, I personally will prepare a suitcase with all that case and send you with it, and you will take that when you leave and you demit office. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Speaker, and that will be sooner than they think because there is a “fedupness” throughout the country now, a “fedupness”, [*Desk thumping*] and it is not my responsibility to give advice to the Member for San Fernando East. Quite frankly, I do not think he needs advice, I think he is doing the best he can, but you need to implement now a much more innovate housing policy that targets building homes but land distribution, that targets high-rise, but yet communities for middle-income people. They are against middle-income people. Anybody in this country work hard and make money, this Government is against them. “Doh” want to give them land, “doh” want to give them house and want to tax them. That is their approach, and then telling the criminals where to go and rob.

So, Madam Speaker, the vision must be decent, affordable housing. The vision must be, because our land is limited, and the Minister by now, after two years, he should know that 48 per cent of the land mass of this country is forestry, and so on, green, only 52 per cent, more or less, we live on, and as you go along you have to work with Town and Country Planning, the Ministry of Planning and Development, and so on. We had the plan. We had the plan that we will develop new towns, new villages, new cities. Today—you know, I am almost tempted to ask the Minister if he has taken an aerial tour of the HDC, but they are banned from helicopter, I understand. You all cannot use helicopter, but if you had the opportunity like me to take a chopper ride above Egypt in central Trinidad you will see a city. If you go above Petit Morne and look down, you will see a city, a town with roundabout and houses, and so on. This is how you build and you develop, and you push your settlements more and more east because that is where naturally you will find land, and you create new communities, but create decent communities.

My appeal to the Minister, Minister, I told you in the beginning, you did not say, no, so I assume I am right, that the HDC staff, in terms of their security department, is depleted. For a long time now the HDC—imagine the HDC that operates in crime zone does not have a head of security. I met a gentleman once in the lobby of the Hyatt, he came up, he shook my hand, I said, “How are you?” He said, “Good, man.” He said, “Yuh doh recognize me?” I said, “No.” He said, “I am the head of security of HDC.” I said, “Wey yuh doing here?” He said, “I leave that job a long time ago.” I said, “Who is the head now?” He said, “He doh know.” When I checked with HDC, they do not have staff. How could you prevent Clifton Towers from happening again if you do not have staff? How could you prevent the invasion of property in Carlsen Field and elsewhere if you do not have staff? And security is critical to HDC, and I will tell you why, because your assets are houses, and many homes, as you know, will be shells in construction, so you have a roof, and so on, but if you leave that unattended, it will be vandalized. People will go and not only live but they will steal whatever you put there, and then you will pay more money. You will have to spend more money of the taxpayer, more you will have to spend in a condition where you say you do not have, you do not have more, you will have to spend more. And the problem now is that the communities for two years, when they were building case and chasing down Jearlean John and other people, and doing that, for two years they abandoned their primary responsibility, which was to safeguard the assets of the State. [*Desk thumping*] They abandoned that, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Member for Oropouche East, your speaking time is now spent.

Hon. Members, pursuant to Standing Order 46(2), a Minister has the right to conclude the debate, so I now call upon the Minister of Finance. [*Desk thumping*]

The Minister of Finance (Hon. Colm Imbert): You did not remember that, eh.

Hon. Member: “Now we go know.”

Hon. C. Imbert: Madam Speaker, I rise to conclude this debate, as you have indicated, pursuant to Standing Order 46(2), since this Motion is critical of the Government. Madam Speaker, in listening to the introduction of the Member for Oropouche East, and his winding up, I can summarize the contribution of the hon. Member as follows. He made some nebulous, unsubstantiated allegations about the engagement of PricewaterhouseCoopers to audit something at the HDC, but I am certain, Madam Speaker, I do not know what the Member’s intent was, but I am certain that that will be argued in another place, so I would not go into that matter now. I am not certain what the hon. Member was seeking to do, because I am certain that matter will be argued in another way in another forum.

The Member also complained about a person who bought a unit at the Victoria Keyes housing development on the open market and who financed the purchase by way of a mortgage loan, and as the Minister of Housing and Urban Development indicated, this mortgage loan would have been subjected to the usual source of funds declaration. So since the person, using the evidence presented to us by the Member for Oropouche East, took out a loan from a financial institution, and all financial institutions in Trinidad and Tobago are required by law to have their customers engaging in these transactions indicate a source of funds, and also satisfy the relevant officer at the bank to the integrity of the source of funds otherwise a suspicious transaction report would be made to the Financial Intelligence Unit, the complaint of the Member about this person who bought a unit on the open market at the market price, using a loan which would have been scrutinized by a bank, the complaint was nonsensical.

The hon. Member also tried to justify the astronomical increase in cost of public housing units and serviced lots under his Government where the average cost rose from approximately \$300,000 per housing unit to \$1.2 million per housing unit in just a five-year period. And the hon. Member sought to justify that 400 per cent or four-fold increase in the average cost of a housing unit from the

PNM era to the UNC era—cost went up four times on average—he sought to justify that by inflation. That too, in my humble view, Madam Speaker, was not a sensible argument, because the inflation rate, the aggregate inflation rate over the period of the UNC, although they did superheat the price of things, the average inflation rate was not 400 per cent. I do not think so.

So that argument that the average cost of a housing unit under PNM was \$300,000, and escalated to \$1.2 million under the UNC was as a result of inflation, is without merit.

6.15 p.m.

The hon. Member also made some other vague allegation about money laundering, without a shred of evidence or even a single detail. We had no clue what he was talking about. The hon. Member also failed to answer very serious allegations made by the Minister of Housing and Urban Development—and I would correct myself, not allegations—failed to answer very serious facts put into the public record by the Minister of Housing and Urban Development with respect to the rationale of the former administration for making sole selective awards to housing contractors in the billions for housing contracts. He failed to even touch on that and rationalize that.

But what I found particularly upsetting was his last foray about a housing project in the Wellington area. Is that where it is?

Mr. Young: Wellington, Debe.

Hon. C. Imbert: Wellington, Debe area—his own area. His statements about some housing development constructed by a company called Agostini, and he read from some report, Lauriston Lewis report, which according to him was another scandal similar to that housing project in the Morvant area, Las Alturas. He said, “This is bigger than Las Alturas”; full of sound and fury. Well, Madam Speaker, he failed to tell us that in December 2015—and I would think he skirted very close to breach of privilege, but that would be determined by others in another forum—in the matter of the Arbitration Act 1939, in the matter of an arbitration between Agostini Limited and the Trinidad and Tobago Housing Development Corporation, where the arbitrators were very serious men, Mr. Peter Williams CHB, QC; Miss Debra Mastin, fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators, attorney-at-law; and Mr. Stewart Kennedy, FRICS, also a fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators, a chartered arbitrator and a barrister-at-law, were the three arbitrators. [*Interruption*] I think I have read out enough

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qualifications for him. So the three arbitrators rendered an award. Contrary to the allegations put into this House by the hon. Member, it was not a settlement. It was an award by the three arbitrators, where they awarded Agostini Limited the sum of \$13 million in payments that were due to them by the HDC under the United National Congress Government.

And for the record, Madam Speaker, the hearings in that arbitration were concluded entirely within the period of the UNC Government. The last hearing was on May 26, 2015, and the terms of reference for the arbitration was settled on April 28, 2014. So between 2014 and 2015, an arbitration took place while the UNC was in government. The hearings ended on May 26, 2015 while they were in government, and the judgment was given in December 2015, based on the evidence and the cross examination and the submissions made by the UNC during their period. And in December 2015, the arbitrators awarded Agostini Limited the sum of \$13 million. They dismissed the counterclaim of the UNC, which was made under the UNC when the hon. Member was the Minister, but what was most interesting is in that award they made this comment:

In the claimant's closing submission reference is made to the evidence of the Respondent's expert witness Mr. Lewis of Lauriston Lewis...

—and they had this to say:

We respectfully submit very little weight, if any, should be placed on Mr. Lewis's report and his evidence.

To put it in layman language the arbitrators rubbished the report. They made the point that of the 280 housing units—this is not my words:

It should be noted that this project consisted of 280 housing units. While Mr. Lewis' report is silent as to the number of houses he surveyed, he submitted in cross examination that he took photographs of the houses he surveyed. We have been able to identify based on the photographs that Mr. Lewis only surveyed three units out of the 280, one of which had been unoccupied, one of which was under repair and one of which is occupied...—[*Interruption*]

Hon. Member: “He running; typical.”

Hon. C. Imbert: It is for this reason, and for the other reasons, the arbitral tribunal of three distinguished arbitrators and attorneys said:

We submit very little weight, if any, should be placed on Mr. Lewis' report.

Yet the hon. Member came in this House and said this is a scandal and it is bigger than Las Alturas. But he did not tell the Parliament that under his administration they led evidence and got an award against them, saying that the contractor had to be paid for these houses. I find this shameful that the so-called expert report that he submitted was rubbished by the arbitral tribunal. They said they were not impressed, they could attach no weight to it.

So, Madam Speaker, I am very, very disappointed in the submission by the mover of this Motion. I thought with all the “tra la la” and the build up to this Motion today, I thought he was coming to drop bombs. My hon. colleague, the Member for Laventille West, said it was a damp squib. I beg to differ. He fired blanks. [*Laughter and desk thumping*] There was no gun powder whatsoever; a caps gun, as my hon. colleague in the back says. This was a waste of parliamentary time, Madam Speaker, [*Desk thumping*] and as I said, and I wish to repeat, it is just wrong for a Member to come and read out a so-called expert report that was dismissed by a distinguish panel of arbitrators, dismissed by cross-examination and careful examination of that report. It was dismissed as rubbish; and he comes into this Parliament and reads this report and drops this bomb, as if it is something. It is reprehensible, it is wrong, it is just plain low.

So, Madam Speaker, I reject this Motion. [*Desk thumping*]

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 4 Noes 17

AYES

Lee, D.

Tewarie, Dr. B. [*Laughter*]

Madam Speaker: Order! Order!

Khan, Dr. F.

Singh, G. [*Crosstalk*]

NOES

Robinson-Regis, Hon. C.

Al-Rawi, Hon. F.

Imbert, Hon. C.

Young, Hon. S.

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Deyalsingh, Hon. T.

Hinds, Hon. F.

Mitchell, Hon. R.

Crichlow-Cockburn, Hon. C.

Forde, E.

Dillon, Hon. Maj. Gen. E.

Webster-Roy, Hon. A.

Gadsby-Dolly, Hon. Dr. N.

Francis, Hon. Dr. L.

Jennings-Smith, G.

Olivierre, N.

Antoine, Brig. Gen. A.

Leonce, A.

Motion negatived.

ADJOURNMENT

The Minister of Planning and Development (Hon. Camille Robinson-Regis): Thank you very kindly, Madam Speaker. I beg to move that this House do now adjourn to Friday, December 01st, at 1.30 p.m. At that time we will be continuing the debate on the Mutual Assistance Bill that is before the House and debate started on November 17th.

Thank you very kindly.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Members, the matter filed by the Member for Fyzabad has been withdrawn, therefore there is one matter that qualifies to be raised on the Motion for the Adjournment of this House. I now call upon the Member for Chaguanas West.

Flooding in Port of Spain (Government's Failure to Address)

Mr. Ganga Singh (Chaguanas West): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I have filed this Motion entitled, the failure of the Government, in particular the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government to solve the problem of flooding in the City of Port of Spain.

When you peruse the newspaper over a three-month period, let us say July 02, 2017:

Flash floods in Port of Spain: A street in Port of Spain

This is the *Trinidad Express* newspaper.

Brief showers flood Port of Spain

Trinidad Express newspaper of July 26, 2016.

Pedestrians stranded as capital city under water

August 6, 2016, *Trinidad Express* newspaper. *Trinidad Express* newspaper published on August 11, 2016:

Twenty minutes of rainfall caused this.

Gridlock out of Port of Spain

Trinidad Guardian newspaper of July 11, 2017.

Thundershowers accompanied by thunder and lightning cause people in Port of Spain to panic yesterday as the severe weather resulted in flash flooding throughout the capital.

November 25, 2016, the *Trinidad Express*:

Will city floods ever be solved?

The *Trinidad Guardian* newspaper July 11, 2017:

Port of Spain floods after 30 minutes of rain

Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. Minister of Rural Development and Local Government for being here. Our intention really is to address this issue of flooding in Port of Spain, because when your capital city floods it is emblematic of a certain approach to governance, and this problem has been existing in this country for several decades.

I point to an IDB report of 2013, done by DHI for the IDB. At page 1 in the introduction, it says:

The overall purpose of the Port of Spain flood alleviation plan has been to develop new ways to eliminate the recurrent flooding which hampers Port of Spain frequently, one to several times during each rainy season. Although the flood events are of relative short duration of a few hours each of them has big impacts on the infrastructure, on properties, traffic and other infrastructure

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components. The storm-related flooding is not a new phenomenon but has been going on for decades, due to the development of urbanization in the catchments of St. Ann's and Maraval rivers. The continued impermeabilization of the town area and functional deterioration of the old drainage system, the flooding event seems to have increased in frequency, and combined with small changes in annual precipitation the severity of the flooding has grown. Despite the increased frequency of flooding over the last two to three decades nothing substantial has been done to minimize the flooding and the adverse effects.

Madam Speaker, therefore, you have a serious problem.

In the previous administration, Port of Spain came out of the Emerging Cities Sustainable Cities Programme and out of that, through the efforts of the Minister of Planning and Development then, Dr. Bhoe Tewarie, we acquired a loan of US \$120 million in order to deal with the question of flooding in Port of Spain. But that had its own challenges, and that is for another day. The reason why the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government is here is because we have to start with what can be done immediately within the precincts of the Port of Spain catchment area in order to deal with the flooding that takes place so easily.

So, Madam Speaker, we attempted to deal with that whilst we were engaged in the long-term and the medium-term planning to deal with the major drainage infrastructure that is required of Port of Spain, and the study has been done, and the study has recommendations. But what we did was utilize the vacuum masters in order to clean the drainage within the area, and then we proceeded to put grates to block the garbage from going within the underground drainage. Unfortunately, the reason why the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government is here is because the practice of garbage disposal on the streets of Port of Spain by the city council employees is to really use what is called "the intakes", and they push the garbage down the intakes and as a result you have flooding taking place, because then the garbage goes into the lower reaches of Port of Spain in the South Quay area, and that is why you have the slew of newspaper reports of flooding in the streets of Port of Spain.

So the first thing that is required of the hon. Minister is to really have a consultation with the mayor. I want to say that I had approached Mayor Tim Kee and he was very cooperative. He himself sent a reporter around to look at what was happening, and they recognized the approach that the sanitation workers took to the disposal of garbage created that problem further down the road.

So in the beginning of the process we have to vacuum out the underground drains because they lack the capacity, and then we have to be able to deal with a different measure, a different way to manage the disposal, and therefore the city council workers in dealing with that have to have a new management regime as to how they deal with the garbage in the streets of Port of Spain.

This is no rocket science. The recommendations are there, the catchment areas are there, the need to build cofferdams in the northern range. They need to deal with expanding the drainage within Port of Spain, but they have to establish where the utility lines are located: water, electricity, telephone, sewage, et cetera. Madam Speaker, the level of water because of climate change is increasing. You do not have enough permeation of water, because there is a lot more concrete within the Port of Spain catchment area, and as a result you have the problem that is taking place.

So I want to suggest to the Minister of Rural Development and Local Government that you have this discussion. Meet with the mayor. Mayor Martinez I see has indicated:

Port of Spain mayor/IDB to work on flood plan

Monday, September 11, 2017, the *Newsday*. Therefore, there is an inclination in that direction, and we cannot allow our capital city to be flooding all the time when there is very little rainfall. So this is a much more solution-oriented approach. It is an approach that starts at the base, and then as funding becomes available, as it is available through the IDB for this exercise through the Emerging Sustainable Cities Programme, that we can then proceed with a view to getting this capital city of ours flood free in a time period, with conditions that would allow us to recognize that if you stop the flooding in Port of Spain, then you will begin to approach the flooding in the rural communities and centres differently.

So, hon. Speaker, to the hon. Minister, step by step a methodology can take place. There can be a programme of works that would allow Port of Spain not to be flooded, or at least the run off is quicker in the short-term, and then of course you do the medium to long-term plan, utilizing the IDB study, which is extensive and which has recommendations.

With these few words, Madam Speaker, I therefore commend this IDB study to the Minister and I look forward to his action in this area to cure the flooding in Port of Spain.

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The Minister of Rural Development and Local Government (Sen. The Hon. Kazim Hosein): Madam Speaker, thank you for having me here this afternoon. After listening to the hon. Member for Chaguanas West, I was wondering if to respond or just to take his advice and meet with the mayor to discuss the flooding in Port of Spain. So I will take the advice of the hon. Member, and it is well on the way. Thank you.

Question put and agreed to.

House adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 6.37 p.m.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

The following question was asked by Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima) earlier in the proceedings:

**Women, Elderly and Children
(Measures to Protect)**

1. Given that 43 women, 17 children and 22 pensioners have been murdered as at September 2017, could the Minister of National Security state the measures in place to protect women, elderly and children?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): The measures in place to protect women, the elderly and children involves a mitigated strategy that involves, a coordinated multifaceted approach involving all arms of National Security. There will also be deeper collaboration among the Judiciary, the Police Service and the Prison Service, rather than these major institutions operating in silos. The measures implemented to assist in reducing the current murder rate involve, strengthening human resources, use of modern technology and intensified operations by law enforcement and defence agencies.

The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) has instituted several initiatives to strengthen the four main anti-crime pillars of prediction, deterrence, detection and prosecution. The agencies of the Ministry of National Security have been mobilized. The Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force, continues to support the law enforcement effort.

The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has also called out additional members of its reserves to boost its numbers, and to assist in providing the level of safety and security in all communities across the country to give the citizens the level of reassurance from increased mobile and foot patrols in key locations. The approach also involves strengthening crime detection mechanisms. The manpower of the Homicide Investigative Department has been doubled and officers attached to this unit have benefited from basic investigative techniques and advance investigative techniques. In addition, technology software has been introduced to aid in the management of homicide investigations. The Cold Case Unit has also been strengthened with the addition of extra officers who have distinguished themselves as investigators, to aid in addressing outstanding investigations.

One of the main initiatives which is currently being pursued is the establishment of a DNA Database. A DNA Custodian has been hired by the Ministry of National Security. The establishment of the DNA bank is part of the detection pillar, one of four (4) strategies

in the fight to reduce the murder rate and other serious crimes. The DNA register will begin building the database with samples from the entire prison population and law enforcement officers. A proper functioning DNA register gives a better chance of detection, prosecution and conviction, because the evidence will be available.

Further, the TTPS will continue to intensify its efforts to remove illegal arms and ammunition off the streets. As at November 15, 2017, the TTPS seized eight hundred and ninety-seven (897) illegal firearms which is the largest number ever recorded in one year.

In addition, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) is committed to maintaining the safety and security of all the persons that is within the borders of Trinidad and Tobago. The detection rate is being addressed and murders and other violent crimes are being targeted through the crime reduction measures that have been mentioned above. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) has initiated key activities such as community policing, media collaborating with stakeholders and partnering with communities which will play a critical role in the strategy to maintain safety and security across the nation.

The following question was asked by Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima) earlier in the proceedings:

**Terrorism and Crime
(Addressing)**

3. Could the Minister of National Security state the Ministry's plans to address terrorism and crime to avert the concerns of potential international visitors?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): The Government of Trinidad and Tobago is cognizant that as a country, it is not immune to terrorist attacks and has strengthened its collaboration with international partners to combat terrorism in order to ensure the protection of its citizens as well as foreign nationals. The following is an outline of several initiatives embarked on by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to address terrorism and related crimes:

**AN INTERNATIONAL CALL TO
ARMS AGAINST TERRORISM**

Trinidad and Tobago has answered the global call to arms against terrorism as identified in the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy. On September 24, 2014, in recognition of the emerging threats of terrorism to the Caribbean and to Trinidad and Tobago in particular, the country co-sponsored United Nations Security Council

Resolution (UNSCR) 2178 in recognition of the grave threat posed by Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) to peace, law and order. Importantly, Trinidad and Tobago also undertook to formalise a counter terrorism strategy to examine existing mechanisms to address terrorism at the national level, foster closer collaboration and partnerships and enhance information sharing through cooperation.

**ENHANCEMENT OF STRATEGIC
POLICY FRAMEWORK**

In response to this commitment, an ad-hoc Inter-ministerial Committee on terrorism, comprising senior government representatives was established under the chairmanship of the Executive Director, National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) and engaged in dialogue over the period October-December 2014 to consider the threat of terrorism to Trinidad and Tobago and to develop a draft national Counter Terrorism Strategy to enhance a strategic policy on the issue. A review of the draft Strategy was subsequently undertaken in 2016-17 by the Ministry of National Security to ensure alignment with recent legislative and other efforts at the national level to combat terrorism.

The national Counter Terrorism Strategy focusses on deterring persons from participating and supporting terrorism, enhancing national counter terrorism operational capabilities and building national resilience in the event of a terrorist attack against Trinidad and Tobago. It is established on three (3) mutually reinforcing pillars: ‘protect and prevent’; ‘pursue’; and ‘respond and recover’ and is based on the following five (5) underlying principles:

- i. Strong legislative framework;
- ii. An integrated whole of government and whole of country approach;
- iii. Respect for human rights;
- iv. Flexibility and innovativeness; and
- iv. Effective partnerships.

The Strategy proposes, inter alia, the reinforcement of existing legislation; the design and implementation of vibrant public sensitisation campaigns and other social programmes; and the disruption of further development of radical extremist entities and their ideologies that lead to terrorism. The Counter Terrorism Strategy of Trinidad and Tobago was approved by the National Security Council on November 01, 2017. The GORTT is currently addressing the implementation of the Strategy.

**NATIONAL EFFORTS TO COUNTER AND PREVENT
TERRORISM AND ITS FINANCING**

Trinidad and Tobago, as a member of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF), agreed to implement common counter-measures against money laundering (ML) and by virtue of this membership, is obliged to operate in compliance with the Forty (40) Recommendations outlined in the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) publication "International Standards on Combating Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism and Proliferation", commonly described as the "FATF Recommendations". Having completed the FATF Mutual Evaluation Process in 2015, Trinidad and Tobago developed a Strategic Plan to address the deficiencies within the Report. The country has also collaborated with the World Bank in the conduct of a National Risk Assessment to improve understanding of ML/TF risks as well as design and develop a risk-based Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) action plan to mitigate risks. In this regard, one key initiative has been to place particular focus on the identification and listing of terrorist individuals and/or organisations to enable the seizing of assets that could potentially be used for terrorist activities. The Financial Intelligence Unit of Trinidad and Tobago has also conducted a series of education campaigns for members of the banking and financial institutions to enable early detection and prevention of terrorist financing.

REVIEW AND AMENDMENT OF DOMESTIC LEGISLATION

The GORTT has enacted and amended several key pieces of legislation to prevent and counter acts of terrorism and to counter terrorist financing. These include, but are not limited to the Anti-Terrorism Act, Chap 12:07; the Interception of Communications Act, Chap 15:08; the Proceeds of Crime Act, Chap 11:27 and the Strategic Services Agency (Amendment) Act, 2016.

**STRENGTHENING NATIONAL CAPACITY AND INTER-AGENCY
COLLABORATION TO COMBAT TERRORISM**

The GORTT has also given considerable focus to strengthening the capacity of law enforcement and intelligence agencies charged with combating terrorism and preventing terrorist activity in Trinidad and Tobago. These measures have included the provision of increased specialised training to government and non-government agencies which includes:

- Response to Active Shooter Incidents
- Maritime Port and Harbour Security Management
- Countering Violent Extremism: Security and Defence in struggle against Terrorism

- Surveillance Detection
- Financial Investigations Techniques Course
- Interdicting Terrorist Activities Course
- Combatting Domestic and Transnational Terrorism

Additionally, the Government has bolstered the resources of key security and intelligence agencies, including the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS), the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force (TTDF), and the Strategic Services Agency (SSA) to better monitor terrorist and organised criminal activity and support wider national crime prevention initiatives. Some efforts include the:

- Establishment of a Terrorism Interdiction Unit under the Special Branch, TTPS, comprising representatives of law enforcement and intelligence agencies. Its mandate include the gathering and processing of intelligence and the conduct of threat assessments.
- Enactment of the Strategic Services Agency (Amendment) Act 2016. The Agency has traditionally been the central co-ordinating agency for, the suppression of illicit drug trafficking and the Fusion Centre; which coordinates the activities of multiple agencies in an effort to provide a common operational picture for situational awareness and critical decision making. The 2016 Amendments expanded the SSA's mandate to include the investigation of serious crimes, including acts of treason, money laundering, sedition, terrorism, terrorist financing and corruption.
- Greater participation of the TTDF in National Youth Programmes to address at-risk youth, promote community outreach and alternatives to crime and radicalism.

In addition to the development of the draft Strategy, a number of efforts to assess Trinidad and Tobago's compliance in respect of international obligations on terrorism have also been made by relevant stakeholders. These include the revision of national legislation and the establishment of specific committees to assess compliance on international anti-terrorism resolutions, namely:

- The National Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism Committee (NAMLC) chaired by the Ministry of National Security;
- Inter-Ministerial Ad-Hoc Committee to review existing deficiencies in Trinidad and Tobago's approach to implementation of the UNSCR 1540 pertaining to curtailing the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction chaired by the Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs;

- An Inter-Ministerial Committee to treat with matters pertinent to AML/CFT compliance, specific to the Third Round and in Preparation of the Fourth Round of the Mutual Evaluation Process of the Financial Action Task Force chaired by the Attorney General and including the Ministers of National Security and Finance; and
- The Inter-Ministerial Committee on the Listing of Terrorist Entities to examine the issue of the listing of terrorist and the freezing of assets in accordance with the Anti-Terrorism Act, Chapter 12:07 chaired by the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs.

**EFFORTS AT STRENGTHENING BORDER SECURITY
TO COUNTER TERRORISM**

The Government has also sought to fortify border control at air and sea ports through the signing of a Memorandum of Intent (MOI) with the Government of the United States of America (US) for the establishment of the Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES) in Trinidad and Tobago. This advanced border control mechanism would work in tandem with the existing border management system to document the arrival and departure of visitors to Trinidad and Tobago. Through this system, the Immigration Division will be able to verify the identity of persons entering into and leaving Trinidad and Tobago, as well as identify individuals who might pose a threat to public security.

ISPS Port Audit, 2017

In 2017, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago conducted an Audit of all Ports in an attempt to ensure greater compliance with the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code. The Code is the international standard for ship and port safety. The International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code is an amendment to the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention (1974/1988) on minimum security arrangements for ships, ports and government agencies. Having come into force in 2004, it prescribes responsibilities to governments, shipping companies, shipboard personnel, and port/facility personnel to "detect security threats and take preventative measures against security incidents affecting ships or port facilities used in international trade. The Audit sought to verify that effective anti-terrorism measures are in place at ports.

**STRENGTHENING INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS TO COMBAT
TERRORISM AND COUNTER VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

Importantly, in an effort to bolster national capacity in the area of countering and preventing violent extremism, Trinidad and Tobago has also enhanced collaboration with its bilateral and international partners, including the United States of America (USG),

the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Canada and the United Nations on a number of crime reduction and social justice programmes. These cooperation initiatives involve increased intelligence sharing between law enforcement/intelligence agencies, the provision of enhanced operational support and participation in CT programmes.

The GORTT has also partnered with key international agencies such as Hedayah, an International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) to deliver required training to national stakeholders in an effort to build national capacity on the issue of both preventing and countering radicalization in Trinidad and Tobago. In this regard, key training has been provided for the proposed development of a National Action Plan. A similar partnership also exists with the Commonwealth Countering Violent Extremism (CCVE) Unit. To this end, the GORTT has enhanced its security and intelligence collaboration with traditional and non-traditional partners at the national, regional and international level. Additional attempts are also being made to ensure full compliance with international treaties and UNSCR on the issue of terrorism.

The GORTT is committed to addressing and reversing the process of radicalisation of FTFs who return to Trinidad and Tobago from conflict countries. In this regard, focus is being given to the conduct of targeted research on this group and the implementation of innovative social campaigns and initiatives geared toward rebuilding national allegiance and support for national counter terrorism efforts. The GORTT has also begun a process of deepening partnerships with key Non-Governmental, Faith-Based and Community-Based Organisations to harness their extensive social networks, inherent dynamism, innovation and energies to counter the terrorist ideologies. Priority focus has also been given to strengthening programmes aimed at addressing perceived economic and social inequalities, employment creation and overall rehabilitation and reintegration of radicalised persons into society.

In addition to the initiatives outlined above, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service through Special Branch continues to monitor terrorist activity and work closely with INTERPOL. Further, in keeping with the TTPS Operating Plan 2017 the organization conducted training for officers to deal with active shooter situations as part of its efforts to address risk of terrorism. The TTPS also recognizes the importance of safety and security to potential visitors and continues to partner with the Ministry of Tourism, Division of Tourism Culture and Transportation and other stakeholders as well as train Officers in Tourism Oriented Policing with the aim of maximizing the safety and security of citizens and visitors to our island.

The following question was asked by Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima) earlier in the proceedings:

**TTPS and Citizens
(Improving Trust)**

4. In light of recent incidents of conflict between citizens and the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS), could the Minister of National Security state the measures the Ministry intends to implement to improve trust between the TTPS and citizens?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service has indicated that the organization will continue its efforts to increase the level of trust and confidence between the police and citizens. This will be achieved through the continuation of the following initiatives of the TTPS:

- Prosecute and discipline errant officers
- Engage directly with community members through:
 - Town meetings
 - Station Action Councils
 - Neighbourhood watch groups
- Continuation of Community Policing initiatives
- Increase participation in Police Youth Clubs
- Building Partnerships with stakeholder organizations
- Educate and engage the public through various traditional and non-traditional media platforms.

The following question was asked by Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima) earlier in the proceedings:

**Projected Annual Murder Rate
(Plans to Reduce)**

5. Given that the present murder rate in Trinidad and Tobago is 343 persons and projected to increase to 487 persons by the end of 2017, could the Minister of National Security state the plans to reduce the projected annual murder rate?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): The plans to reduce the projected annual murder rate is by utilizing a coordinated targeted approach. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) has increased its focus on violent criminal offenders across all locations in Trinidad and Tobago. The focus has been the assessment of violent crime hotspots. At present, the TTPS is utilizing all available human and other resources with a clear purpose of ensuring that violent crimes, murders especially, are effectively reduced by the end of 2017.

Further, the TTPS will continue to intensify its efforts to remove illegal arms, ammunition, and narcotics off the streets. As at November 15, 2017, the TTPS seized eight hundred and ninety-seven (897) illegal firearms, twelve thousand seven hundred and thirty-six (12,736) rounds, seventy six and a half (76.5) kilograms of cocaine and one thousand and twenty three (1,023) kilograms of marijuana. Specifically, firearms related matters are high priority as seventy-six percent (76%) of all murders are committed with this weapon. As a result, there is an increased focus on firearm offenders with a high emphasis on prosecuting which leads to conviction.

The following question was asked by Mr. Rodney Charles (Naparima) earlier in the proceedings:

**Organized Crime Intelligence Unit
(Targets and Role of)**

18. Could the Minister of National Security state:

- a) the quantifiable targets of the Organized Crime Intelligence Unit; and
- b) the anticipated role of the Organized Crime Intelligence Unit in addressing the low murder detection rate?

The following reply was circulated to Members of the House:

The Minister of National Security (Hon. Maj. Gen. Edmund Dillon): The Organised Crime Intelligence Unit (OCIU) was launched on Friday September 22, 2017, by the Ministry of National Security's Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS). This new Unit, which represents the merging of the Organised Crime Narcotics and Firearms Bureau (OCNFB) and the Criminal Gang and Intelligence Unit (CGIU), is intended to produce a marked difference in the way the TTPS detects and investigates organised crime.

More specifically, the role of the Unit is to pursue, target, disrupt and dismantle organized criminal groups and networks in Trinidad and Tobago. The OCIU is

expected to employ a more robust intelligence-gathering and intelligence-led policing system, which will be used to operationalize anti-crime initiatives and raise the current rate of crime detection, and in particular, the murder detection rate.

To this end, the OCIU will collaborate with other Units of the TTPS; other Ministry of National Security agencies like the Strategic Services Agency (SSA), the Transnational Organized Crime Unit (TOCU) and the Trinidad and Tobago Defence Force (TTDF); and with other government departments such as the Financial Investigations Bureau (FIB) and the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU).

- a) Taking everything into account, the strategic objective of the OCIU is to achieve functional efficiency in crime fighting, through intelligence-led policing. The resultant increase in functionality, readiness and capability that this Unit will lend to the overall operations of the TTPS, is largely expected to be reflected in one aspect, by an increase in the detection rate. In this regard, the Unit is expected to meet a number of operational and performance targets, which will be continuously monitored to effectively remain up-to-date with critical developments. These targets include, inter alia, to increase:
 - i. the disruption/dismantling of organized crime groups involved in the trafficking of firearms, ammunition and dangerous drugs. In this regard, the OCIU has identified seventy-seven (77) Organised Crime Groups for investigation, and is currently engaged in the aggressive pursuit of seven (7) of these;
 - ii. the quantity of charges laid against individuals and organised crime groups who provide murder for hire services;
 - iii. the number of persons arrested for committing Violent and Serious Crimes;
 - iv. the regularity of marijuana eradication exercises; and
 - iv. OCIU's demand-reduction Social Intervention Programmes. In particular, high risk schools and communities will be targeted.
- b) It is anticipated that the role of the OCIU will be to, inter alia:
 - i. Conduct inter-agency investigations and share intelligence with other operational arms of the Ministry of National Security in order to dismantle organised crime groups in Trinidad and Tobago;
 - ii. Strengthen synergies within the TTPS by disseminating intelligence on serious crimes at the strategic and operational level;

- iii. Execute concerted high-impact operations against organised crime groups in Trinidad and Tobago;
- iv. Increase collaboration with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions particularly with respect to the role of the TTPS in murder investigations;
- v. Liaise with the Financial Investigation Bureau (FIB) and Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) in all murder investigations, with a view to assist in locating and identifying the proceeds of crime generated from the activities of the organised crime groups;
- vi. Partner with regional and international law enforcement agencies in joint operations and investigations against organised crime groups; and
- vii. Develop and implement appropriate public awareness and social intervention programs and strategies to combat and reduce organised crime, with the assistance of other government agencies and departments.