

**Statement to Parliament by Minister of National Security
July 15, 2014**

Since the announcement of the retirement of Mr. Owen Ellington from the post of Commissioner of Police just over two weeks ago, there has been considerable speculation about the reasons for his departure and the consequences for the JCF and the country. Today I intend to address both his departure and related matters.

Many in the media and elsewhere have voiced their expectations of disclosure as well as matters they would like me to address later during Question Time. Let me start by reminding members of this Honourable House, and those watching, that it is an international norm for certain information related to national security to be classified, particularly when it concerns: (1) plans, weapons, or operations; (2) the capabilities of systems; (3) foreign government information or diplomatic communication; or (4) intelligence activities.

In addition to these constraints, let us be mindful of an individual's reputation and right to privacy. As lawmakers it is our duty to ensure that the shield of parliamentary privilege is used fairly and responsibly.

These are the facts. I was formally notified by way of letter on Monday morning June 30, 2014, of the request by the Commissioner of Police, Mr. Owen Ellington to retire from his post on completion of vacation leave due to him, and that he would proceed on leave on Tuesday July 1, 2014. I advised the Prime Minister, and later that day the Cabinet, of this development. The public was also advised by way of a press release from the Ministry of National Security that afternoon.

Commissioner Ellington indicated in his letter that his decision to retire was based on the need to separate himself from the leadership and management of the Force prior to the commencement of the upcoming Commission of Enquiry into the conduct of the Operations of the Security Forces in Western Kingston and other areas during the limited State of Emergency in 2010.

In addition, he expressed his belief that this would allow the Independent Commission of Investigations, INDECOM, to conduct its investigation into allegations of police-involved killings in the Clarendon Division (some of which occurred during his tenure) without any perception of influence or interference on his part.

I have heard some comments suggesting that these two reasons proffered by me were not credible. Let me emphasize that these were Mr. Ellington's stated reasons, not mine.

Based on my discussions with him over time, I was not surprised when he advised me of his decision to retire. The job of Commissioner in a country with one of the highest

crime rates in the world is extremely tough and demanding. Many of the causal factors for violent crime are outside the control of law enforcement, yet law enforcement is often held entirely responsible for getting it under control. Let me again thank Mr. Ellington for his 34 years of service to the JCF and, in particular, for his leadership through a very turbulent period.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the West Kingston Operation – one of the stated reasons - which has attracted a good deal of reporting and conjecture. Matters raised in the Public Defender's Report prompted the Government of Jamaica to establish a Commission of Enquiry to ascertain, among other things, the facts surrounding allegations of human rights violations by the security forces.

The Public Defender's Report also triggered reviews by some international partners of their support to the security forces. These reviews have not resulted in any action that would compromise the general operational effectiveness of the security forces, but support to a few specific units has been suspended.

It is our hope that once the upcoming Commission of Enquiry has concluded its work, and the findings and recommendations are acted upon as appropriate, that any residual concerns regarding the West Kingston Operations will be put to rest.

Let me now turn to the immediate future. The Police Service Commission (PSC) has appointed Mr. Glenmore Hinds as Acting Commissioner since July 1, 2014. The Chairman of the PSC has outlined to me the targeted timeline for the appointment of the next Commissioner of Police, as follows:

1. The PSC will advertise publicly for the position, starting this week.
2. During the month of August – applications will be received, reviewed, and shortlisted. Interviews of short-listed applicants will commence.
3. It is anticipated that the next Commissioner will be appointed during the month of September.

In the interim, let me assure the public that the national security environment is stable. Every category of serious and violent crime is down year-to-date, on average by double-digit percentages - murder down 11%, shooting down 6%, rape down 17%, and aggravated assault down 26%. There is a similar trend in the category of acquisitory crimes (such as robberies) that is also down, by 11%. Also important is the fact that police fatal shootings are also down year to date by a dramatic 46%.

Since the establishment of MOCA, we see that criminals and their corrupt facilitators can no longer operate with impunity. The new laws we have passed to deal with organized crime are having an impact. Already the police have arrested and charged approximately 600 persons in just 15 months that the Law Reform (Fraudulent

Transactions) (Special Provisions) Act has been in effect. All 20 or so cases that have already been disposed of in the courts have resulted in convictions. We anticipate similar success with the recently passed Anti-Gang legislation.

The Unite for Change Initiative continues to gain momentum. It is about harnessing the commitment and passion of a broad partnership of stakeholders, which is necessary to successfully tackle the multiple causal factors of violence. Just last week we had a major event in Montego Bay which brought together about 600 participants from 38 different communities and stakeholder groups across St. James, Hanover and Trelawny.

We are building the broad-based partnerships between communities, civic organizations and faith-based organisations that will provide a foundation for sustained success against violence.

With this positive momentum, and notwithstanding the commentary that has arisen from the announcement of the former Commissioner's retirement, I remain fully focused on the task of making our country safe and peaceful.

We have a committed and professional police force that has made the gains I outlined despite an environment of scarce resources, through determination, ingenuity, and personal sacrifice. I call on the men and women of the JCF to stay focused and professional, and ask all citizens of goodwill (including my colleague Parliamentarians) to give these brave men and women your wholehearted support.