

Statement by the Minister of National Security

In 2009, Jamaica had the third highest homicide rate in the world, at 63/100,000. The rate fell markedly after the Tivoli operation, to just over 40/100,000. In 2012 there was a 4% reduction in murders relative to 2011 and for the first half of 2013 there was a 6% reduction in murders relative to the first half of 2012. However, during the summer, the level of violence started rising again and is threatening the gains which have been made over the last three years. I will now update this Honourable House on the policies and programmes that are being instituted to ensure that this is only a temporary setback and does not jeopardize the long-term downward crime trend.

There was an increase in the number of murders during the months of July and August 2013. For the period June 30 to Aug 31st this year there were 251 murders at an average of 4.0 murders per day, which represents an increase in the average daily rate, when compared with the first half of the year (up to June 29th) when the average daily murder rate was 2.9. It also represents an increase on the 197 murders that occurred in the corresponding two-month period in 2012. The Police Divisions where the highest number of murders occurred are: St. James (35), St. Catherine

North (29), Clarendon (25), Westmoreland (21), St, Andrew South (18), St. Catherine South (17), and Kingston West (15).

ANALYSIS

This spike in murders is believed to be due to a number of reasons:

1. Analysis of the murder attribution statistics show that the largest increase in murders during the period falls within the category “*murders in the course of robbery*”. There were 90 murders in this category for the spike period in 2013 versus 41 in 2012. This may suggest that more hardened gunmen/gang members are diversifying into robbery as other sources of illicit income such as extortion or lottery scamming are squeezed. These cold-hearted criminals do not hesitate to murder their victims even when it is not provoked.
2. A general increase in the number of inter and intra gang conflicts. The National Intelligence Bureau is monitoring approximately fifty of these situations currently. The contributing factors to these increased conflicts include:
 - a. A predicted increase in the trafficking of drugs and guns due to a so called “balloon effect” which I alerted this house to, in my sectoral presentation earlier this year. That is, as the war on drugs heats up in Central America, more cocaine traffic is

starting to return to the historical Caribbean routes. Cocaine seizures by the JCF, which can be used as one indicator of total cocaine traffic, have more than doubled year-to-date (Jan-Jul) with 354 Kg seized as against 152 Kg last year. There has also been an increase in marijuana interdictions. Similarly the police have seized 479 guns year-to-date (Jan-Aug) compared to 397 for the similar period last year. **The increased trafficking is likely fueling increased gang activity.**

- b. In recent times, a number of alleged gang leaders have been released from custody for a variety of reasons. Since their release there has been an increase in murder in the areas where they have influence. The NIB indicates that this increase is a result of attempts by these leaders to reassert their authority and exact retribution on those who did not support them during incarceration.
- c. Lottery scamming continues to fuel murders by gangs. For example, during the last week alone there have been four murders related to lottery scamming.

Let me preface this my saying that I am not submitting this as a reason Mr. Speaker however there have been recent stories in the media and other

anecdotal information suggesting that some police personnel are becoming reluctant to risk their lives engaging criminals only to then be targeted by INDECOM, Public Defender, Human Rights Groups, etc. and see their careers effectively stalled. The reluctance flows from perceptions/fears:

- They fear being targeted as criminals by INDECOM who now have the additional powers of arrest.
- The Police Service Commission has been reluctant to promote Officers who have commanded units responsible for fatal shootings.
- The Public Defender's Report damaged the image of the Security Forces and has triggered concerns among some of our international partners. The security forces have to await the Commission of Enquiry in order to have an opportunity to test some of the negative assertions.

While I have no empirical data to confirm this suggestion, however should there exist any doubt in the mind of any member of the Police Force, let me state - **So long as you perform your duties in accordance with the laws of Jamaica and the Jamaica Constabulary Force Orders, you will have the full support of the High Command and the Government of Jamaica.** Any reluctance on the part of the security forces to engage criminals (who are terrorizing communities, murdering and maiming

innocent women and children), would create an unacceptable malaise in law enforcement efforts and a surge in the confidence of criminals. The good citizens of Jamaica are relying on you to serve, protect, and reassure them of their safety and security. **We cannot let them down.**

RESPONSES

The Ministry of National Security seeks to ensure that any increase in crime is temporary, as such the Ministry is actively taking steps to address the aforementioned issues and is undertaking:

1. To accelerate the passage through Parliament of The Criminal Justice (Suppression of Organised Criminal Organizations) Bill, more commonly referred to as the 'Anti-Gang' Bill. This will be an important weapon in the prosecution of gang members, who under the protection of their criminal brands have intimidated, terrorized and murdered hundreds of Jamaicans.
2. To shortly present to Parliament a Bill to amend the Maritime Drug Trafficking (Suppression) Act, to empower the government to waive jurisdiction over Jamaican nationals involved in drug trafficking outside of our territorial waters. This amendment will allow our international partners, with our permission, to prosecute Jamaican

drug traffickers intercepted in international waters on Jamaican flagged vessels.

3. Notwithstanding resource constraints, we are investing in the technological capability of the police through:

a. The upgrade of the Automated Palm and Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) for the JCF. This upgrade will enhance the forensic capabilities of law enforcement to make more positive “hits” in seeking to identify criminal suspects.

b. The operationalization of CCTV in Montego Bay on September 5, 2013 and the planned roll out of CCTV facilities in Ocho Rios.

c. The upgrade of the Mobile Radio System currently used by the JCF.

4. Orders have been placed for seventy (70) motorcars, six (6) midsize SUVs, Forty-four (44) pickups, and thirteen (13) 600cc motorbikes and two (2) fifteen-seater buses. Delivery will commence this week, and the balance scheduled over the next three months.

5. Four mobile police posts are currently under construction and will be available for deployment in volatile communities by the end of month.

In addition, the Jamaica Constabulary Force is undertaking:

1. Re-assignment of a number of Divisional Commanders in the main Affected Divisions.
2. Implementation of a nationally coordinated Vehicular Check Points and People Check Points on a 24 hour basis across all geographic divisions. Emphasis is placed on the stopping and searching of suspect vehicles and people along major thoroughfares and built up areas in an effort to deny armed criminal free movement.
3. Increased number of Curfews, Cordon, and Search and Raid operations in crime Hot Spots.
4. Strategic support from the High Command to Divisions experiencing an upsurge in serious and violent crimes. In this regard, the Mobile Reserve and the JDF have been deployed to these areas to provide support in major operations. The JDF in support of the Police, has deployed companies of soldiers in: a) Tivoli Gardens, Denham Town, Olympic Gardens, Seaview Gardens; b) St. Catherine North, c) Mount Salem and Flanker in St. James. A platoon is deployed in St. Elizabeth as part of Operation Buccaneer.
5. High Level Case Conferences and Linked Investigations are being held, which targets major violence producers and influencers.

6. Administrative duties are being scaled down and personnel deployed to strengthen operational activities.

Conclusion

This Administration made a promise to Jamaica that we will be transparent in governance and that we will engage citizens at every step of the way. The objective of my statement today is to empower the country. It is paramount, that as a nation, we be sensitized to what is now a spike in crime and take corrective action before it hardens into a long-term trend. It will take more than our efforts alone.

- It will take action like that of the residents of that Highgate community who came to the assistance of the fifteen-year-old girl who was brutally assaulted and allegedly raped. I am reminding the public that Section 6 of the **Child Care and Protection Act** places a responsibility on anyone who suspects that a child is being, or was in the past, abused in any way to make a report to the authorities. Community members therefore have a duty to move away from the “See no evil, hear no evil” practice. The requirement to report is aimed at rescuing the child and where there is an identifiable perpetrator, holding him accountable.

- It will take action to identify the perpetrators of the recent multiple shooting in York Town, Clarendon, which has left a 5-year-old boy crippled. Communities must understand that when one person is involved in gang-based criminal activity it can place an entire family at risk.
- It will take committed parents, communities, and teachers to try and ensure that we have no more 16 year olds wanted for murder, much less 10 murders, as was the case of one young man arrested in Central Kingston in August.
- It will take the business community to understand that hoarding, and travelling with large quantities cash increases their risk of robbery and violence.
- It will take an enlightened understanding of the public that disorder in public spaces creates a fertile environment for criminals to operate. Therefore, when the traffic authorities request licence and registration documents, they are ensuring order on our roadways; when the Police enforces the 'no vending' rules, they too are promoting order in public spaces.

We want our citizens to be fully aware of the context in which we are operating. When I addressed the House in June, I alerted the nation to the expected challenges. I have outlined what the Ministry of National Security and the Police are doing, as these challenges unfold. I'm also reminding the country that a successful fight against crime will require a broad coalition of well thinking Jamaicans, it cannot be business as usual.

Honourable Peter Bunting MP

Minister of National Security

September 4, 2013