



STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

By Hon. DESMOND MCKENZIE

MINISTER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

DECEMBER 8, 2020

Madame Speaker...

The House is aware that the Disaster Risk Management Order number 16, is now in effect and will remain in force until January 15, 2021. I wish to highlight the fact that the Order preserves the ban on nightclubs, and on parties of all kinds. **Additionally, the 17 beaches and 19 rivers that were ordered closed in August, will remain closed.**

This is important, as we have observed breaches of these provisions in various parts of the country, and those committing the breaches are from one end of the social spectrum to the other.

In keeping with the Order, the Municipal Corporations have not issued any permits for any events anywhere in Jamaica.

Despite this, more than 300 events have been held every week, right across the country, in total breach of the health and safety protocols. There have been bike shows, wakes and grave digging ceremonies,

church services with more than 50 people gathered, dances and street parties.

We are also seeing a worrying decline in the levels of compliance by operators of community bars and taverns, and we are aware of nightclubs, especially in the Corporate Area, operating in defiance of the protocols. There are venues registered as restaurants, that are in fact operating as nightclubs, in addition to nightclubs being run under the disguise of restaurants. Just last weekend, there was a large event on Dunrobin Avenue, which the police are actively investigating.

We are also very aware of the trend of promoters of all kinds, using private pages on Facebook and other social media platforms to promote parties. This information has been passed on to the police for action. These are a few of the events now being promoted
Madame Speaker: **SHUT YU MOUT WID YOU LIKKLE BIT A MONEY**, set for Club Utopia in Bull Bay St. Andrew, tomorrow, December 9.

Amazingly Madame Speaker, this flyer says that this event is endorsed by the KSAC! I can assure this House that the Municipal Corporation has NOT endorsed this or any other event. Another one is **KIDS MANIA FAMILY FUN DAY**, set for December 24, at Bourbon Beach in Negril. The **DUB CLUB LIVE**, is an event held every Wednesday at Skyline Drive. There is another one called **BEAT STREET POP-UP MARKET**, set for Sunday December 20, at Orange Street.

The Government is obviously concerned about these patterns of behaviour, which have serious implications not only for health generally, but also for back to school activities after the Christmas holidays.

Madame Speaker, the Government does not intend to stifle the entertainment sector. However, the return to a full range of activities depends on full compliance now, so that life after COVID-19 can be fully enjoyed by all. I am urging people to think not only about today, but about their own medium and long-term future as citizens of a prosperous Jamaica. I must also commend and encourage the police, who, despite the breaches, have actually intercepted many illegal events and have been working hard to enforce the Order.

Madame Speaker, we have all heard and seen the reports of police personnel being stoned and otherwise attacked by residents in some communities, when they went to close down illegal parties. **This is simply outrageous and we totally condemn it.**

I am very heartened however, that many persons have been reporting breaches to the police, and I am appealing for even more public support in this way, so that the practical effectiveness of the Disaster Risk Management Order will be enhanced. In addition to enforcement measures, there will be an increased presence of Town Criers in all the Municipalities, as we drive home the critical message of compliance.

MANAGEMENT OF CHRISTMAS ACTIVITIES

Madame Speaker, I am aware of enquiries by vendors about the operating hours of Markets. **Accordingly, the Order specifies that Markets will be opened between 6 am and 9 pm, Monday to Saturday. Markets are to be closed on a Sunday, and additionally, no vending is allowed in public arcades or Transport Centres on that day.**

Typically, significant levels of solid waste are generated during Christmas right through to the new year. **The National Solid Waste Management Authority** is already implementing late-night operations across the country to ensure that we enjoy clean public spaces. Additional sweepers have been deployed to town centres, and the Disposal Sites will be open for longer hours to facilitate removal of waste throughout the season. These extended hours have also facilitated the clearing of waste that had accumulated during the recent rains. The NSWMA, the police and the Municipal Corporations are also operating in a special joint effort to ensure that there are no pile-ups of garbage in our public spaces.

Madame Speaker, I had announced in August, a special partnership between the Ministry, the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management and **Digicel Jamaica**, that would result in 100 hand-washing stations being procured and distributed to various public spaces across the country.

These stations are now in Jamaica, and I must specially thank Digicel for being a tremendous corporate sponsor, and facilitating the Government in the fight against COVID-19.

I am appealing to the public to use the hand-washing stations correctly, and to protect this investment in public health.

I must emphasize however, that the antidote to the pandemic is ultimately not a vaccine...it is the public's appreciation that compliance with all the protocols will return us to the path to prosperity in the shortest time.

INFIRMARIES and DROP-IN CENTRES

As is known Madame Speaker, visits to residents of Infirmaries have been banned by Order. As a caring Administration, we understand however, the need for contact between our residents and their loved ones. Accordingly, we will be allocating a number of tablets and smartphones to the Infirmaries through the Board of Supervision, to facilitate the joy of the season in our care facilities through video calls and messaging. This special service will continue until the end of January.

Traditionally, Christmas Dinners are held at the Infirmaries, but due to the protocols, this will be managed differently this year.

Relatives and friends will be directed to a venue at which they can leave food items, and charities and service clubs that typically cater to the Residents, will be asked to leave the meals at a special location. Infirmary staff will then collect the items to feed the Residents.

I am also happy to announce that we will be feeding our homeless population throughout the season, and that our Drop-In Centres will also be open throughout this period.

Madame Speaker, the Government, through the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, continues to manage COVID-19, and to take care of the interests of our people. I ask that as this necessary process continues, more of our citizens take heed of the need to protect themselves and their neighbours through compliance, so that we can resume in reasonable time, life as we know it.

Thank You.

Desmond McKenzie CD, MP, JP
Minister of Local Government and Rural Development
December 8, 2020