

STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BY

HON. DESMOND McKENZIE

MINISTER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Madame Speaker:

The country and indeed the world is aware that a little over 28 hours ago, we experienced a significant earthquake. Anyone who was in the island on Monday October 30, remembers where they were and what they were doing when the ground shook. The Magnitude of the quake was 5.6 on the Richter Scale, with a maximum intensity of 7. Let me say right away that **the Government, and I believe all Jamaicans are thankful to the Almighty that no lives were lost. We are all above ground.** As of this morning Madame Speaker, the Earthquake Unit reported that 70 aftershocks occurred after yesterday's earthquake. I am also very heartened to report that based on the preliminary reports from all our public and private sector partners, much of the damage to buildings and other infrastructure is superficial, rather than structural. I also want to assure all our citizens, and visitors to the island, that Jamaica remains open for business. I encourage everyone to continue with the activities that will cause this blessed country to be the place of choice to pursue their dreams.

Madame Speaker, even as the post-earthquake assessments continue, I want to place on record the high commendations of the Government to the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management, the Jamaica Fire Brigade, the Jamaica Constabulary Force, the Jamaica Defence Force, the Municipal Corporations, as well as the other entities that form the National Emergency Operations Centre and the Disaster Risk Management Council. The rapid response mechanisms developed for dealing with disaster were in operation within 30 minutes of the incident, and this rivals the best international best practices for immediate disaster assessment and emergency response. This event has served as an important stress test of our response capabilities, and it has revealed that the existing systems, while not perfect, are robust.

Madame Speaker, I will provide a brief summation about the state of our national infrastructure, particularly in the context of the country's strategic entities. The preliminary assessment is that there is limited damage to the works of the National Water Commission, and customers are still being provided with potable water. The Jamaica Public Service Company has reported a full restoration of services. This is similarly the case with our telecommunications services. Our Ports have remained operational, with no interruption to import and export activities. Our hospitals and health centres are still providing in-patient and out-patient services. In the education sector, 97 schools have reported superficial

damage, such as small cracks. It is expected Madame Speaker, that the comprehensive assessment report will be completed in a few weeks (approximately 6 weeks) by the Planning Institute of Jamaica.

Madame Speaker, one of the questions that has emerged from yesterday's experience, is that of the quality of the built environment. I want to appeal to everyone involved in any form of construction, to use the proper application channels provided through the Local Authorities. The Building Act governs this process, which is technically comprehensive, and involves a full range of public and private entities and professionals. The Government is also committed to increasing the number of Building Officers to assist the process of post development-approval inspections.

I also want to urge our citizens to remember the realities of our geographical location. Jamaica is vulnerable to climatic events including hurricanes and earthquakes, and we will have to live in a way that recognizes this, even as we go through our daily lives. This is why the Jamaica Fire Brigade will be increasing its disaster training drills in our schools, communities and commercial spaces. However, I must condemn the flood of prank calls and false social media posts that occurred yesterday. It is wrong and it must stop. I want to indicate to the House,

that legislative revisions are coming that will specifically address this serious problem.

Madame Speaker, I want to praise the people of Jamaica for their own resilience, and assure you that your Government will continue to improve the mechanisms of disaster recovery and resilience.

Thank You.

Desmond McKenzie CD, MP, JP

Minister of Local Government and Community Development