



2026 SECTORAL PRESENTATION

PRESENTED BY:

The Hon. Desmond McKenzie, OJ, CD, MP, JP
Minister of Local Government & Community
Development

**“Increasing the Contribution of Local
Government as Jamaica Builds Back
Better Through National Reconstruction”**

GORDON HOUSE **Wednesday, June 3, 2026**



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Madam Speaker,

I am making my contribution to this year's Sectoral Debate, with a tremendous sense of commitment and confidence. I feel this way for a number of reasons: I feel confident because for the eleventh year running, my Leader, Prime Minister and Chairman of the Cabinet, Dr. The Most Hon. Andrew Holness, has invested his trust in me to elevate the contribution of local government to national development. I feel confident because of the unshakeable love and loyalty of my West Kingston family, who have nurtured and supported me from my youth, and who have trusted me to represent them as a Councillor for over 34 years, and as their Member of Parliament over the last 14 and a half years.

I am confident in my family, who continue to love me unconditionally through all the highs and lows of public life.

I also want the Hansard to record my gratitude to you **Madam Speaker**, for your courage, strength and thorough knowledge of the Parliamentary rules. You have presided over this House with a decisiveness that no one can objectively deny, and we are better off for it. Let me also express my great concern about some of the disdainful, distasteful and frankly ignorant attitudes to your leadership that I have observed inside and outside of this House. **It is all the more concerning, because no one has been able to point out in any credible way, any failure on your part to execute the rules of the House, or any abuse of your authority.**

We on this side **Madam Speaker**, have a proud tradition of promoting talented, hard-working, nation-building women to offices of great responsibility in public life. I think about the Honourable Jeanette Grant-Woodham, the first female President of the Senate appointed in 1984. I also think about my colleague, the Honourable Marissa Dalrymple-Philibert, who was twice elected to serve as Speaker of this House. However, we have also had strong female leadership on the other side of the Chamber. When I came to the Senate in 2002, the Honourable Syringa Marshall-Burnett was the President. At no time did political differences deteriorate to the point of disrespect.

The same was true during the tenure of the Honourable Violet Neilson, the first female Speaker of the House, who served before my time. I am saying that there is no basis for the myriad verbal attacks that have been launched against you **Madam Speaker**, and I am calling for this to stop! **Madam Speaker**, while we as legislators will sometimes call for your protection, I believe that we should also protect you and your Office from unwarranted remarks. Having said that **Madam Speaker**, I know that your heart is true and your resolve is strong. **No weapon formed against you will prosper.**

Today, I feel a tremendous sense of public commitment. For the second time in ten years, Jamaica is experiencing life in uncharted waters. The first unprecedented experience was the global pandemic of COVID-19. The second unprecedented experience, which we are still emerging from, is the high-end, Category 5 Hurricane Melissa.

This Administration led Jamaica into **Recovering Stronger** from COVID-19, and we are fully confident, that with the continued support of the Jamaican people, we will achieve the current objective of national

Reconstruction which is now underway. We recognise that Hurricane Melissa has redefined the role of Government, and the expectations of the citizens it serves.

Accordingly **Madam Speaker**, my presentation will focus on the projects and programmes that the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development is doing and will do, to facilitate, accelerate and expand the new Jamaica that is now under construction.

I am also tabling the Ministry's Performance Report, which provides the details about our work and achievements over the last Financial Year.

THE SPECIAL ROLES OF THE DEVELOPMENT APPROVALS PROCESS AND THE REVISED BUILDING CODE IN RECONSTRUCTING JAMAICA

Madam Speaker, the Most Honourable Prime Minister has defined this period of restoration after Hurricane Melissa, as the **Reconstruction Phase**. In this context, the role of the Ministries, Agencies and the Local Authorities in the Development Approvals process has taken on even greater value. Between January and September 2025, the first 9 months before Hurricane Melissa hit Jamaica, there was significant construction activity, as well as an impressive number of building applications.

A total of 3,764 applications were submitted, representing an 11% increase in the number of applications received. These applications are valued at \$46.1 billion (\$46,106,976,555.75), which is an increase in investment value compared to the same period in 2024. Just as importantly, 81% of these applications was approved within the benchmark period of 90 days. For this same period, the number of approvals given was valued at \$164.2 billion.

Madam Speaker, the pre-Melissa figures not only demonstrate the critical expansion of the built environment. When compared to the development applications and approvals figures **after** Melissa, **they stand as an important testament to the hard work of the Local Authorities and Agencies such as the Jamaica Fire Brigade, to push the country through the Recovery Phase and into the Reconstruction Phase. Despite the loss and damage to municipal buildings in at least four parishes, the approval rates were only marginally affected, with 78% of post-Hurricane Melissa applications being approved in the 90-day timeline.**

Between January and March this year, 1,377 applications valued at \$68.8 billion were submitted. Madam Speaker, this in itself is highly encouraging and positive news. The records show that this number of applications far exceeds total applications received for all quarters, dating back to the April to June Quarter of 2023.

This level of activity shows that people are working quickly to rebuild. **Critically also, the analysis reveals that more people are applying for building permits, to ensure the structural integrity of their projects. The most significant increase of 11%, was in building applications for small residential developments under 300 square metres in size.**

This signals strong activity to rebuild houses, small businesses and factories. A total of 71% of the applications approved were done within 90 days, and the investment value of these approved applications stands at \$36.1 billion.

Madam Speaker, the continued acceleration of the development Approvals process is absolutely critical to the success of the Reconstruction Phase. This process is also tied to the duties of the Municipal Corporations as Local Building Authorities, and to the improved enforcement of building standards through the revised Building Code, which will be rolled out in this Financial Year. A critical feature of the



National Clean-Up Programme launch in Westmoreland.

new Code is that buildings are to be constructed to withstand Category 5 hurricanes. There will also be stronger enforcement powers for Municipal Corporations, mandatory compliance checks, and stricter penalties for illegal construction in high-risk zones.

In this respect **Madam Speaker,** the enforcement capacity of the Local Authorities will be strengthened, as the Ministry of Finance has given approval for a revised Establishment structure for the Municipal Corporations, which will facilitate the employment of more Building Officers.

Madam Speaker, I want to emphasise that the Reconstruction Phase is not designed to restore what has been lost. It is to replace lost infrastructure with vastly modern, climate-smart and resilient structures that dramatically improve the lives of our citizens. However, there also has to be a clear understanding and acceptance among our nationally and parochially elected representatives, as

well as the general public, that it will not be business as usual. Long-standing reckless and dangerous practices will have to be replaced with order as the new normal in the built environment.

I am therefore calling for practicality, courage and consensus among all concerned, as we work together to change living standards through the built environment.



NSWMA workers removing debris post Hurricane Melissa.

NSWMA

Madam Speaker, the role of the National Solid Waste Management Authority in moving Jamaica from the Recovery Phase to the Reconstruction Phase has been essential.

This Agency was active on the ground immediately after Hurricane Melissa, and was the first point of clearing town centres, roads, pathways, and freeing marooned communities through the **National Clean-Up Programme**. I pay special tribute to the workers of the NSWMA, some of whom had their homes damaged by the hurricane, and who turned out nonetheless to provide unstinting service.

I also specially commend the leadership of the Agency and the Ministry of Health and Wellness, for providing trauma counselling to these workers. In the rush to deal with disaster, we sometimes forget the mental impact on front-line workers and first responders. They were fully exposed to the sights, sounds and smells of destruction, and the deaths of nearly 50 of our fellow Jamaicans in the five worst-hit parishes.

Madam Speaker, heavy equipment was almost useless right after the hurricane because access points were totally cut off. This meant that the workers were engaged in back-breaking manual labour, using machetes, chainsaws and weed-whackers to get from one point to the next. Melissa deposited over 4.8 million tonnes of debris across south-western Jamaica alone. That is approximately 480,000 truck loads of construction waste, household items and vegetation.

An allocation of \$500 million was provided for Phase 1 of the National Clean-Up Programme, and within two months following the hurricane, by December 2025, over 27,000 loads of debris were cleared. A total of \$1billion was provided to finance Phase 2 of the Programme, which ran from January to April this year. Over 21,000 truck-loads of debris were removed during this Phase, amounting to a total of over 48,000 truck loads of waste removed. This intense Programme is still being implemented, **Madam Speaker,** and the 10 Tipper Trucks bought by the Government and put into service in December, have been crucial to the clearing of debris in the five parishes worst affected by Melissa.



NSWMA workers removing debris post Hurricane Melissa.

Important lessons have been learned from the Melissa experience, in readiness for this year's Hurricane Season. The NSWMA is already preparing to:

1. **Preposition equipment and personnel in strategic areas, 48 hours prior to a potential disaster**
2. **Retain a 30% fuel reserve, as well as essential supplies, to ensure full operations for 72 hours after a disaster. Agreements are also being developed with suppliers and contractors to provide additional fuel and heavy equipment for disaster response, and**
3. **Identify and prepare alternative disposal sites if access to official sites is cut off in a disaster.**

At the same time, **Madam Speaker**, the Agency is still working hard to fulfil its general public cleaning mandate. Diligent efforts have been made to clear the backlog across the country, and this year, additional work, including repairs to 80 garbage trucks, will be done to shorten waste collection schedules.

Jamaica is divided into 4,275 collection districts, and the intention is to ensure that regular waste collection is done every seven to ten days right across the country. **This is in addition to a specific project to collect 8,000 tonnes of bulky waste.**

Madam Speaker, in all of this, I am making a special appeal to our citizens to practise the NSWMA's motto in their daily lives: *Jamaica's Beauty is our Duty*. The Agency's target of collecting 1.2 million tonnes of waste this year, will be far easier to achieve if practices such as illegal dumping and the casual throwing of garbage onto the streets are significantly reduced. Last year alone, over 2,300 anti-litter tickets were issued, and over 9,000 litter-removal notices were issued. However, we recognise that a special intervention is needed to ensure greater levels of civic responsibility. Accordingly, **Madam Speaker, the NSWMA will be implementing a \$200-million, special public education programme in this Financial Year.**

Behaviour change is possible and necessary, and I am looking forward to a greater sense of personal responsibility and civic pride, that is vitally important to a successful Reconstruction Phase.

THE ROLE OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISION IN ENHANCING THE SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMME POST MELISSA

Madam Speaker, I spoke earlier about the selfless service that first responders provided before, throughout and after Melissa. To this category of special people, I must add the Board of Supervision, the Matrons and other staff of our infirmaries and the Golden Age Homes. They put their personal worries aside and focused on our vulnerable citizens. Whether residents were relocated or sheltered in place before the hurricane, they stayed with them and cared for them throughout, and no praise is too great for the sacrifices they made.

It is publicly known that the infirmaries in Trelawny, Westmoreland, St. Ann, and St. Elizabeth, which were all near to the sea, were severely damaged by Hurricane Melissa. The Ministry has been working diligently to rebuild and, in some cases, relocate these facilities. **Madam Speaker**, \$150 million has been allocated for the relocation and reconstruction of the Trelawny Infirmary.

A total of \$400 million is being provided for the relocation and reconstruction of the St. Ann Infirmary. The estimate for restoring the St. Elizabeth, Hanover and Westmoreland infirmaries is \$56.4 million, and works have been done to this point to the tune of \$28.1 million.

Aside from these badly damaged infirmaries, extensive upgrades were done to the wards at the **St. Thomas Infirmary**; a new Matron's Quarters was built at the **Hanover Infirmary**, and a state-of-the-art kitchen and dining area were constructed at the **St. James Infirmary** to enhance meal services. These works were carried out at a combined cost of \$44.9 million. At the St. Catherine Infirmary, a new Therapeutic Park and other facilities were built to enhance the residents' quality of life. This year, a new wing will be built at the Spanish Town Infirmary at a cost of J\$70 million.

The work of building out a network of concrete indigent houses was curtailed by the hurricane. This year, \$160 million will be provided to build more indigent houses.

Madam Speaker, the issue of social cases at our hospitals has been long-standing, and this year, a special effort will be made to address it, in partnership with other Ministries such as the Ministry of Health and Wellness. A total of J\$200 million will be spent to increase capacity in our care facilities, in order to free-up bed spaces for people with medical needs.



The Trelawny Infirmary which was damaged by Hurricane Melissa.



Opening of the St. James Infirmary kitchen.

I now turn the matter of **homelessness**, which has taken on a new meaning in the context of Hurricane Melissa. The Board of Supervision, in partnership with the Social Development Commission, completed its latest National Survey on Homelessness in the last quarter of 2025. **The preliminary findings are that 2,000,261 people were found to be homeless, with 52.5% of this number located within Kingston and St. Andrew.**

This, very sadly, **Madam Speaker**, is consistent with a global pattern of homelessness, especially in urban centres. Homelessness is rising in countries across the world, whether they are classified as Developed, Under-Developed or Developing.

The **UN-Habitat Report 2026** indicates that there are 318 million homeless people living across the globe. The **World Population Review** on homelessness shows that it has grown significantly in Latin America and the Caribbean, affecting an estimated 8 million people. It has grown by 125% in North America, affecting over 1.7 million people. More than 1.2 million people are homeless in western Europe. Asia is estimated to have over 80 million homeless people and on the African Continent, there are 54 million homeless people.

Here in Jamaica Madam Speaker, This Administration continues to take historic measures to care for our homeless citizens. Over the last decade, we have been building out a growing network of Drop-In

Shelters, Night Shelters and Transitional Shelters, to give these vulnerable Jamaicans secure spaces where their shelter, nutrition and medical needs are addressed.

Phase Two of the Desmond McKenzie Transitional Centre for the Homeless was completed in the last financial year, allowing for a total capacity of 80 homeless people to be accommodated. The extension to the St. Thomas Night Shelter was completed at a cost of \$12 million, and the Portland Drop-In Centre and Night Shelter was also completed at a cost of \$55 million. **This year, the Marie Atkins Night Shelter will be renovated at a cost of \$35 million.**

As we build more infrastructure for our homeless population **Madam Speaker**, I appeal for a greater sense of compassion and civic concern. I am disturbed by the incidents of violence against homeless persons. The last major incident happened in St. Mary less than two months ago, where a 69-year-old man was stabbed and robbed. We can and must do better, and treat our homeless citizens with respect.

The House will recall that last year, I indicated that following Cabinet approval, His Excellency the Most Honourable Governor-General would be asked to declare May 20 of each year, a National Day of Remembrance for the victims of the **Eventide Home fire of 1980**. The first official commemoration ceremony was held just under two weeks ago at National Heroes' Park, where the 26 coffins bearing the remains of the 157 women who perished in the fire are interred.

We will preserve this tragic chapter in our modern history in the public conscience, as we continue the work of ensuring that this will never happen again.



National Day of Remembrance for victims of Eventide Home Fire Floral tribute.

JAMAICA FIRE BRIGADE

Madam Speaker, the Jamaica Fire Brigade continues to reward the faith that this Administration, and our citizens continue to invest in it, by introducing cutting-edge projects to sharply improve service delivery. This vital Agency was also affected by Hurricane Melissa.

Six fire stations were significantly damaged: Black River Fire Station in St. Elizabeth, the Ironshore, Barnett Street and Marine Fire Stations in Montego Bay, the Falmouth Fire Station in Trelawny and the May Pen Fire Station in Clarendon.

The estimated costs to rebuild infrastructure, and to replace lost equipment and fixtures is just over J\$1.4 billion. However, I am relieved to report, that while 311 firefighters operating in nine parishes were directly affected by the hurricane, no lives were lost as they carried out their dangerous duties.

They responded to 1,661 calls between October 28 to December 12, 2025 that were linked to Hurricane Melissa. These calls included 615 Fire Calls; 116 Medical Emergency Calls and 864 Special Service Calls. The Special Service calls ranged from clearing blocked roads and rescuing trapped residents in communities, to delivering vital water supplies and power-washing mud and silt from town centres and houses. **Madam Speaker**, our country owes the Jamaica Fire Brigade a tremendous debt of gratitude.

Work has already started to ensure that the Brigade builds back better in this Reconstruction Phase. In addition to the rehabilitation of damaged stations and completion of current projects, the work is far advanced to ensure that every fire station can give 24-hour service through the use of a generator. Ninety five per cent of the island's fire stations now have generators. Four were acquired in the last financial year at a cost of J\$33 million, and two more will be installed this year.

There will also be additional firefighters to operate from the fire stations. I had the pleasure of presiding over the graduation of 96 recruits last month (May 8). Another 100 recruits will be trained in the third quarter of this financial year.



Jamaica Fire Brigade Graduation exercise.

Madam Speaker, the Fire Brigade will have an enhanced role to play in the National Reconstruction phase, as a major actor in the Development Approvals process. Its work in regulating the built environment to ensure climate-smart infrastructure, will be essential to ensuring that this country will be at optimal resilience to disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes.

Last year, the Brigade inspected **11,228** buildings, to ensure compliance with fire safety codes and standards. The inspection process will be of unprecedented importance, and will be a vital complement to the duties of the Municipal Corporations as Local Building Authorities, as they work to ensure that the revised Building Code, which will be introduced later this year, and the Building Act are obeyed.

The Brigade's work in the approvals process includes comprehensive assessments of building plans, and the Agency reviewed 916 plans last year.

The considerations include whether there are sufficient provisions for fire hydrants, whether there are sufficient exit points in a building's design to allow rapid escape in emergency situations, or whether the roadways in a development are large enough to allow fire trucks to obtain effective access to the premises. The Jamaica Fire Brigade is now a prominent part of the Government's work to build a new Jamaica, where resilience is being built into public and private infrastructure, even before the start of the construction process.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION - THE CONNECTION POINT BETWEEN CENTRAL GOVERNMENT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, AND OUR PEOPLE WHERE THEY LIVE AND WORK

Madam Speaker, the Social Development Commission (SDC) continues to show that great achievements are possible, when public bodies are decently financed. This Administration took charge of the SDC when it had no money for operations or to implement projects. Now, the Agency has been transformed into one of the primary points of national research, as well as programme and policy implementation. The SDC's comprehensive research expertise during and after Hurricane Melissa was critical in helping local and central Government to make rapid, evidence-based decisions in support of national recovery and reconstruction.

These included a national **Damage Assessment Survey**, a **Temporary Accommodation Survey**, in which damage assessments were done, and potential sites were identified for erecting temporary accommodation. The Agency also conducted a **Shelter Transition Survey and Children in Shelters Survey**.

In keeping with the Ministry's efforts to reduce the number of schools used as shelters, the SDC is completing a **Community Centres Survey**, to assess the state of existing community centres, and to identify suitable ones for use as disaster shelters. The SDC also undertook **Market Assessments**, which included impact assessments on affected vendors. A **Land Tenure Survey** collected information about persons who suffered total loss due to Melissa, while the Hurricane's impact on local businesses was measured through a **Local Economic Initiative Damage and Impact Survey**.

Critically also, the SDC conducted a comprehensive Comparative Analysis and Public Perception Survey of the coming One Road Authority. **Madam Speaker**, the One Road Authority is a highly organised governance mechanism for managing Jamaica's 27,000 kilometres of major, parochial and farm roads.

I have said it before and I will say it here: **The One Road Authority will not deprive the Municipal Corporations of funding. It will not eliminate the role of the Municipal Corporations in road management and road maintenance.** The Authority will improve the implementation of road building and maintenance through clearer standards, stronger coordination, and better performance monitoring.

Madam Speaker, we recognised the need to promote greater understanding about the Authority to the leadership of the Local Authorities. As a result, the Honourable Minister with responsibility for Works and I met with all Mayors, presented the rationale and the objectives, and answered their questions. But we went further. I asked the SDC to undertake the Perception Survey to measure the views of the public, which the One Road Authority is being created to serve. I will share two key findings **Madam Speaker**. **One, 79% of respondents believe that priority should be given to repairing parochial and major roads. Two, 56% is convinced that the One Road Authority will deliver on the objectives of eliminating fragmented responsibilities and standardizing road maintenance.**

The Ministry fully supports the One Road Authority, and we will continue the consultation process with all Councillors, to promote widespread understanding and acceptance.



Consultation with Mayors about the One Road Authority.

It is clear **Madam Speaker**, that the SDC is growing and developing as a national research and implementation partner, to the Government's rebuilding, recovery and development planning efforts. This increasing value also reflects the Government's further investment in the SDC, through the approval of a new organisational structure which is now being implemented.

For many years Madam Speaker, the men and women of the SDC have operated as contract workers. With this new structure, they are being transitioned into permanent employees, while the Agency's institutional stability is strengthened and its long-term operational capacity is expanded.

Critically, **Madam Speaker**, the SDC continued to successfully implement its community development mandate. One important duty in this respect, is the management of the **Participatory Governance Framework**. Through this structure, the SDC, as the official Registrar of Community Groups under the Local Governance Act, is working to improve their levels of compliance with all rules, regulations and standards.

The SDC supported **378** Civil Society Organisations islandwide, and helped **11** Parish Development Committees to meet their obligations.

Madam Speaker, I want to explain something about this Programme. It is a critical tool that helps people to improve their communities, once they organise themselves to benefit from it. It is designed to ensure that community-based organisations meet all the requirements to be registered, **thereby making them eligible to apply for grant funding.**



The Community Church Clean-up Grant Cheque handiover Ceremony – St. Elizabeth.

It also allows them to formally participate in the governance structures in their Municipal Corporations, such as the Local Public Accounts Committees. I am therefore strongly urging civic-minded people everywhere, to work with the SDC, to properly organise your passion into an instrument that will transform your street, your area and your community.

Madam Speaker, economic growth and development at the parochial level, are critical to the rebuilding of a vibrant national economy. The **Local Economic Development Support Programme** remains the most critical driver of these objectives.

It will be assuming significantly greater importance in this reconstruction phase and beyond, as a stimulator of community re-development.

Through this Programme, the SDC has been creating a new class of skilled and confident entrepreneurs at the micro, small and nano-enterprise levels. For persons who may not be aware **Madam Speaker**, a nano-enterprise is a business run by one person, or a very small family. **The SDC has been providing critical training, getting these businesses certified, getting them officially registered with the Companies Office of Jamaica, and helping them to obtain market access to sell their products and services.**

Community members and grassroots entrepreneurs were trained in Financial Literacy and Financial Management, Customer Service, Business Planning and Product Development, Social media marketing and Digital Promotion. In the last financial year, the SDC supported **389** Local Economic Initiatives in **262** communities nationwide, which created nearly 1,200 jobs in these communities.

Additionally, through the **Special Entrepreneurship Grants** initiative, 171 nano-enterprises were provided grants valued at J\$11 million.

The SDC is also actively helping our communities to rebuild after Hurricane Melissa, through the **Community Research and Development Planning Programme**.

This Programme provides the data and analytical foundation for evidence-based community development planning.

As a result, 90 community infrastructure upgrade projects valued at over \$191 million, are currently being implemented. An additional 88 community development project proposals valued at \$207 million, are now being assessed.

Madam Speaker, I am proud that the SDC has revived its traditional functions, while expanding its expertise and becoming a highly valuable national research and implementation Agency. In this respect, I must mention the SDC's management of the post-Melissa Church Clean-Up and Restoration Programme. Applications for grant support are being processed and verified, and the Grants are being issued. **Churches in St. Elizabeth have already received J\$17.6 million in grants.**

Applicants in Hanover will receive J\$8.5 million. The applicants in Trelawny will receive J\$12.6 million, while in St. James, J\$16 million will be disbursed, and J\$19 million in grants will be provided to churches in Westmoreland.

That is a total of J\$74 million Madam Speaker, and I will be handing over these grants later this week, and also next week.

I look forward to even greater achievements by the SDC, as it pursues social cohesion and community development projects and programmes in this reconstruction phase.

CONCLUSION – THIS ADMINISTRATION SEES HURRICANE MELISSA AS A CALL TO ACTION TO RECONSTRUCT JAMAICA FOR POSTERITY.

Madam Speaker, this Administration is responding to the climatic crisis of Hurricane Melissa, by reconstructing Jamaica into a different and far better country, than what it was before the hurricane.

This process will be strongly accelerated by the National Reconstruction and Resilience Authority Act, and we will be building back better and smarter by implementing a range of projects with approval from the Authority. Some of our **Municipal Buildings** were badly damaged, and we will restore them quickly to ensure that the elected and administrative local government officials have a proper base from which to serve their parishes. **Accordingly, the work to rebuild the St. Elizabeth, St. Ann and Trelawny Municipal Buildings will begin this year.**

Our **Markets** will be built back better as centres of commerce and spatial order. Last year, the Alexandria Market was rehabilitated at a cost of \$50 million, and \$70 million was spent on refurbishing the Yallahs Market. This year the **Charles Gordon Market** in St. James, the **Savanna-la-Mar Market** in Westmoreland, the **Musgrave Market** in Portland, the **Highgate Market** in St. Mary and the **Black River Market** in St. Elizabeth will be given priority.

On the subject of streetlights, I want to indicate that the special programme that I announced last year for brightening our communities and public spaces, was disrupted by Hurricane Melissa. With substantial work having been done by the JPS to restore electricity, we will renew our focus on implementing this streetlights programme over the next two financial years.

Madam Speaker, we are now at the start of the first Hurricane Season, after Melissa hit us 7 months ago. I want to publicly say thanks to the Shelter Managers and Disaster Coordinators, who worked so hard during Melissa. I also want to express gratitude to the people who used the shelters, firstly, for heeding the call to move to safety, and secondly, for the patience and co-operation that was the general atmosphere at the shelters at a stressful time.

I also want to give a brief update on the accommodations being built for the Shelterees at Shrewsbury in Westmoreland. Ten of the 16 concrete bases required for mounting the houses to be provided, have been

constructed. The bases also have provision for sewerage and other connections. The housing units that will be mounted on these bases are in the custody of the Jamaica Defence Force and will be made available shortly. The JDF is one of the key partners that is making this project possible. They include the Ministry of Economic Growth and Infrastructure Development, the National Housing Trust, and ODPEM. **I want to thank the Shelterees for their patience, and for the understanding and gratitude that they have publicly expressed**, for these efforts that are being made to make their lives better.

Projections are **Madam Speaker**, that this Hurricane Season will be milder, but all efforts are being made to ensure the best possible levels of preparedness and response. The SDC has completed an assessment of community centres that can be retrofitted as shelters, and is developing emergency shelter protocols in partnership with the Municipal Corporations and the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management.

An additional allocation of \$60 million is also being set aside, to assist the Municipal Corporations to obtain blankets, cots and related bedding materials to make life more comfortable in the shelters.

In addition to this, we are taking a different approach to shelter management, where instead of using multiple venues in various locations across all parishes, **there will be a special, parish Emergency Shelter that will house hundreds of people under one roof**. Initially, an Emergency Shelter will be



Launch of Operation C.A.L.M in Rocky Point, Clarendon.

rolled out in three of the most vulnerable parishes. Each shelter will be approximately 10,000 square feet in size, with the capacity to house 700 people. It will be energy efficient, made to resist earthquakes and hurricanes, and will feature amenities that can be used all year round.

Madam Speaker, we intend to build an Emergency Shelter in Clarendon, one in St. Elizabeth and one in Westmoreland, at an estimated cost of J\$1 billion. At the same time, we will remain focused on assisting the Local Authorities to enhance their disaster preparation capabilities. This year, 250 volunteers from the Youth Summer Employment Programme will be deployed to work specifically with the Disaster Co-ordinators in each Municipal Corporation.

At least 10 YSEP workers in each MC, will be assisting with shelter arrangements, and public outreach activities such as Town Hall Meetings. Madam Speaker, these 200 YSEP participants who will assist the Disaster Co-ordinators will be working for six months, beginning on the first of July.

In keeping with the instructions of the Most Honourable Prime Minister, as Chairman of the National Disaster Risk Management Council, we will also be implementing emergency drills islandwide, to ensure far more efficient, coordinated responses to incidents in real time.

Madam Speaker, the Government has initiated a special effort to reduce the risks that traditionally flood-prone communities face once bad weather occurs. It is being driven by the NSWMA and is called Operation CALM. C is for Clearing flood-prone areas of bulky waste. A is for Advising residents in these areas about their roles and responsibilities in managing waste during the hurricane season. L is for Leveraging the network of community leaders in the flood-prone areas, and M means, Maintaining a presence in flood-prone communities during the hurricane season.

Yesterday, I launched Operation CALM at Rocky Point in Clarendon, one of Jamaica's most flood-prone communities.

This programme, the first of its kind, will be implemented in 94 traditionally flood-prone communities in five parishes: Clarendon, Kingston and St. Andrew, St. James, St. Elizabeth and Westmoreland.

We are combining government action, the promotion of civic responsibility and community goodwill to ensure that people in flood-prone areas can face every hurricane season with confidence, instead of fear and uncertainty.

We will also be implementing a special Drain Cleaning Programme at a cost of \$70 million. Under this Programme, each Division will be allocated \$300,000 for drain cleaning. Madam Speaker, this is in addition to the drain cleaning allocations given to the MCs for the months of May and June through the Parochial Revenue Fund.

We are also rolling out a Priority Parochial Road Programme, which will target badly damaged roads that connect communities, and roads that lead to critical places like Hospitals and schools. This Programme is valued at \$350 million, and I emphasize Madam Speaker, that this is separate from the monthly allocations that the MC's receive for road maintenance.

Even as we continue to manage the Hurricane Season, we are also addressing the reality of dry conditions in parts of the country. The Ministry has been working with the Ministry of Water, Environment and Climate Change, and we will shortly unveil initiatives to respond to this reality. In the meantime Madam Speaker, my Ministry will provide three water trucks valued at \$65 million, to assist the St. Elizabeth MC, the Manchester MC and the Portland MC to deliver potable water to affected communities.

Local Government is not only contributing to national reconstruction through infrastructure. It is also doing it by setting historic new standards of service delivery. In a few days, I will officially launch the Jamaica Fire Brigade's **Emergency Communication Centre**, based at the Waterford Fire Station in St. Catherine. Twenty-four firefighters were specially trained and graduated as **Emergency Telecommunicators** in February this year.

A key feature of this Centre is the **Automatic Station Alerting System**, which will transmit emergency notifications instantly to fire stations, thereby dramatically reducing dispatch times.

Madam Speaker, if you make a call, the Emergency Telecommunicators will process the information within 64 seconds. That information is then transmitted instantly to the relevant Fire Station, and the firefighters there will leave the fire station 60 seconds after that to respond to the emergency. This is a total response time of 2 minutes and 4 seconds, which will put the fire brigade perfectly in line with international best practices.

This ground-breaking project is being implemented in two phases. **All the fire stations in Kingston, St. Andrew and St. Catherine, are part of Phase 1, which is active now. These parishes have the highest volume of emergency calls, the greatest population density and the highest fire risk exposure. Phase 2 will commence in the next financial year, and includes all the remaining fire stations islandwide. The York Park Fire Station will be the base for the Emergency Communication Centre in Phase 2.**

Madam Speaker, the Jamaica Fire Brigade has entered a new dimension of professionalism and technological readiness.

This is the transformed Fire Brigade that is safeguarding the new Jamaica that is being **Built Back Better by Labour.**

We are also building back better by ensuring through the SDC, that national economic reconstruction involves all our citizens who operate at the small, micro and nano-business levels.

This is critical to rebuilding and transforming the local economies of districts, communities and towns that were shattered by Melissa. This Government is working to improve the lives of all Jamaicans.

This year, The SDC will expand business development support services for nano and micro enterprises across Jamaica. This will increase the number of Local Economic Initiatives receiving direct, structured and consistent business development support by approximately 80%, moving from 389 to 450 beneficiaries annually.

The SDC will also increase access to the Special Entrepreneurship Grant for own-account workers and micro-entrepreneurs. This Grant will support business continuity, expansion and income generation, while supporting the revival of local economies.

The SDC is also making sure that these new business-people gain market access, to earn good money from their goods and services.

That is why this year, the SDC will nearly double the number of established Economic Villages from 9 to 16 locations across 11 parishes. There will be 3 new Economic Villages in Portland, 1 in St. Mary; 1 in St. Ann and Trelawny; 3 in St. James; 1 in Westmoreland and in St. Elizabeth; 1 each in Manchester, Clarendon and St. Thomas, and 2 in St. Catherine. Through the SDC, we are increasing the contribution of local government to national reconstruction.

The SDC's work is critical to ensuring that our citizens at every economic level, can achieve their financial potential in their communities. This is a key feature of community recovery, community stability and community development.

I conclude **Madam Speaker**, with a reflection on the Book of Nehemiah. It tells the story of the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Wall, and I believe that it is a mirror of our experience as we rebuild Jamaica. Nehemiah Chapters 1 through 4, is about the destruction of the wall surrounding Jerusalem, which is like the destruction of Melissa, with people left exposed. Then Nehemiah leads the work of inspiring the people to help to rebuild the wall, a huge project, just as how our Prime Minister continues to secure goodwill to rebuild.

Then you read further, and Nehemiah Chapter 2 verse 19, tells you about the people who tried to **undermine and prevent the reconstruction work from starting**. Chapters 3 and 4 reveal how reconstruction was organised, and I think about the National Reconstruction and Resilience Authority. Then you get to Chapter 6, which says that the new wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt in 52 days - a historic achievement at that time!

The Book of Nehemiah is my biblical inspiration about what we will achieve: a reconstruction of Jamaica in record time, that will benefit all of our citizens, and be the talk of the world for years and years to come.

This Administration therefore views the destruction of Hurricane Melissa as a call to action! To reconstruct, rather than replace, to transform, rather than restore. **Madam Speaker, we are heeding that call.**

The vision and the grand design have been laid out by our national **Builder**, the Most Honourable Prime Minister. We continue to experience sincere goodwill and to receive practical assistance from countless partners here and overseas. In the midst of our challenges, we remain a blessed country. I know that the Almighty will bless our historic efforts to Build Back Better, and Build Back Stronger, Together.

