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THEME: On a Mission to Achieve Economic Empowerment in this Year of Jubilee.

1.0 Introductory Remarks

Mr. Speaker, I wish first to thank God for his love, His wisdom, His blessings and above all for His faithfulness. I want to thank the Most Honourable Prime Minister, Portia Simpson Miller for according me the privilege to serve in my current capacity, that I might make a meaningful contribution to the growth and development of our country.

Madame Prime Minister, your exemplary leadership as a trailblazer has inspired me both as a woman and as a Jamaican to the honour of service and to the importance of unwavering sacrifice. To my colleague, Minister of Industry, Investment and Commerce, Hon. Anthony Hylton, I am honoured to serve with you and admire your strength of character and the breadth of knowledge and agility of mind that you bring to the Ministry. I am grateful for the confidence you both have reposed in me.

To my Permanent Secretary, Reginald Budhan, for your continued guidance, support and experience, and to all the agency heads, board persons and staff of the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce, thank you for your hard work and unstinting dedication to the work of this Ministry. Let me also say a special thanks to my special assistant, Nora Blake, and the dedicated staff of my office.

To my family – my husband, Peter, who has been my rock. My dear you have been an exceptional husband and my best friend. Words cannot express how much I am blessed by your total commitment to me and to our three children, Leah, Stephanie and Matthew, particularly in the last two years of my entering the political arena. The sacrifices you have all made have enabled me to stand here today to make my maiden presentation. To my parents who loved, nurtured and

educated me and brought me up to be responsible and caring, to my mother, Greta Ffolkes and father Eugene Ffolkes, who designed the emblem of the People's National Party when he was just 16 years old, to my brother, sister and her husband and my in-laws, I could not have made it without your love and commitment to me. May God continue to bless you all.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me express appreciation for the delicate but significant role that you play in this Honourable House in guiding us through many thorny issues. As Members of Parliament, we can never forget the people who put us here so I am committed, first and foremost, to my constituents and will continue the efforts to improve their quality of life and represent their interests to the best of my ability.

I humbly extend, therefore, my heartfelt appreciation to the constituents of West Central St. James, my constituency committee, my campaign committee, my counsellors, the Women's Movement, and the members of staff in my constituency.

Let me also record my appreciation for the help afforded me by the People's National Party at all levels, without your help I would not be here today. And, how can I not mention all the families in Montego Bay who assisted and gave me support along the way, as well as, the present and former Members of Parliament whose guidance and expertise remain invaluable to me.

Most important in all of this, were the many pastors, churches, and church members in Jamaica and in the Diaspora who prayed and continue to pray and support me in this call to service. I want you to know how much I appreciate you, thank you.

2.0 Development in West Central St. James

Ultimately, Mr. Speaker, it is the people who put us here to whom we must report. As such, I will briefly outline some of the developments in the constituency of West Central St. James. The constituency is a beautiful one with three divisions – Mount Salem, Granville, and Spring Garden. Within the three divisions there is an interesting and eclectic mix of urban, rural, business, and tourism interests.

The constituency is blessed with the business districts of the Montego Bay Free Zone and Port, the Bogue and Fairfield Business Districts, and the Barnett Industrial and Office Park. This represents the fastest growth corridor in the greater Montego Bay area. The Retirement Landfill, situated in the Granville Division, has enormous potential for an environmental best practice in recycling and for the production of biomass energy. We are currently in discussions with a firm from Canada, which has indicated a serious interest in the business prospect that this represents. This will provide an opportunity for not only employment, but will also be beneficial to the environment.

We have two large hotels in the Free Zone area and would like to see the development of other forms of tourism within the constituency, such as retirement tourism and health tourism.

2.1 Montego Bay Free Zone

Mr. Speaker, one of the success stories of the West is the Montego Bay Free Zone (MBFZ), in which there are now 14 outsourcing companies, employing over 4,500 persons. These companies are engaged in back office processing in finance and accounting, insurance claims processing, airline and hotel reservation, data processing, customer service, telephone and online sales, website maintenance, receivables management, technical support, and web-based design services.

Currently, Montego Bay Free Zone enjoys 98% occupancy for office space. The provision of new space is, therefore, imperative to achieving employment growth in 2012/2013. Current prospects include Vistaprint, which is constructing 92,000 sq. ft. of space at Barnett Technology Park, where they will be relocating their 635 seat facility from the Montego Bay Free Zone. The 35,000 sq. ft. of space to be vacated by Vistaprint is already being pursued by a number of companies.

A number of new and existing companies are also in the process of expanding or setting up new operations. The only issue that we have with the Montego Bay Free Zone, Mr. Speaker, is the scarcity of office space to meet the demand. So, we need some entrepreneurs to come forward and invest in the build-out of new space, whether through public-private partnerships, or otherwise.

2.2 Education

Mr. Speaker, we have some of the top performing schools in the island. We were very successful in the recent GSAT examinations – over 30 students in the Howard Cooke Primary, for example, received an average of 90% or over in the exams. I have set aside almost a third of my Constituency Development Fund for the purpose of education, because education is the key to facilitate growth so that our young people can achieve their full potential and that Jamaica can rise to its full stature as a nation.

2.3 Skills Training

The area of skills training is another tier of educational development for young people that must be developed. In this regard, I am pursuing plans to open a branch of the Caribbean Maritime Institute at a location in the Mount Salem Division. This will provide training for young people in the maritime field and link into the broader vision of the Ministry and Jamaica to become a logistics hub for

the hemisphere, taking advantage of Jamaica's opportunity with the expansion of the Panama Canal. This is the way forward for Jamaica.

2.4 JEEP Project

Under the JEEP Project, we have provided work for over 200 persons so far in the Mount Salem, Pitfour, Granville, Belmont, Spring Garden, Moy Hill and the Tower Hill areas. The JEEP projects continue in the constituency including, drain cleaning, bushing, disaster mitigation, school repair and road maintenance.

2.5 Summer Jobs

Summer jobs have been provided for 30 young people through the Tourism Product Development Company (TPDCo), 10 through the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce, and we continue to develop a job bank for at least 40 young persons in the IT sector. We are developing job banks for cooks, truck drivers, strawberry pickers, and hospitality industry personnel for Canada and elsewhere. In addition, we are training 30 persons in landscaping for placement in tourism and other industries.

2.6 Roads and Drains

Mr. Speaker, roads remain a challenge in West Central St. James. However, we are working to improve the condition of the roads. The Long Hill Road at Kings Gate has been in a state of disrepair for the past two years. This has represented a very dangerous situation to motorists. Mr. Speaker, immediately upon assuming stewardship of the constituency I made successful representation on behalf of the constituents to the NWA and have received approval to reconstruct the parapet wall and drain cleaning, which is to start immediately.

Other roads that I have fixed on assuming office include Catherine Mount, Pitfour Boulevard, and the road at Moy Hill intersection with Tower Hill. I assure the residents of Bogue Hill that their sign: **“We Want Road”** has not escaped my attention and that this road is next on the agenda for repair.

The Granville Road remains a thorny issue since the road was originally part of the JDIP Project which was left in suspension, in an incomplete state. Residents have had to suffer through dust and poor air quality, resulting from the condition of the road. But, I assure the residents of Granville that I have made adequate representation on their part to the NWA and that efforts are on the way to rectify the situation. Mr. Speaker the fixing of this road is urgent.

Drain cleaning also continues in the Catherine Hall, Tucker and Retirement areas for rehabilitation and disaster mitigation.

3.0 Vision

Mr. Speaker, the vision for West Central St. James is built on the Jubilee theme. The concept of Jubilee is taken from Leviticus, which means the year of release – release from all debts.

Secondly, the year of Jubilee means the ownership of land, and that is why I have dedicated \$1 million of my Constituency Development Fund to accommodate land titling in conjunction with the Land Administration and Management Programme (LAMP). We will be undertaking training of young persons to render assistance to navigate the LAMP process, so that constituents of West Central St. James will become land owners in this our Jubilee year. We have four Operation PRIDE sites in the constituency and we are making representations to the Minister to transfer titles to all qualified persons.

Thirdly, according to the year of Jubilee, persons should return to their inheritance and possessions and family. And, this is why I have returned to Jamaica at this time to be a part of the process of empowerment to produce economic growth and development. I have returned to my roots in Montego Bay for this purpose. That is why I am so happy to be a part of the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce in which Minister Hylton in his presentation to you spoke to the strategy for achieving economic growth with jobs.

Fourthly, dwell in safety. This is one of the premises of our 50th year of independence that we should dwell in peace and safety for reconciliation among family, neighbours and community. This will affect all aspects of the community – police, churches, schools, businesses and other members of civil society. I am, therefore, working along with the Citizen, Security and Justice Programme (CSJP), particularly in Granville and Mount Salem, and with the Dispute Resolution Foundation (DRF) and the Restorative Justice Programme (RJP). In fact, the Granville committee is having their own homecoming celebration for the 5th anniversary.

I believe that a new day is coming, Mr. Speaker, as a promise of a fresh start associated with the year of Jubilee. This means restoration and release and liberty to all of the inhabitants of the land, those in Jamaica and those abroad. This leads me to the Diaspora. I am so grateful to the Most Honourable P.J. Patterson for having the vision to recognize the Diaspora and its important role in the development of this great nation. Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller has facilitated me as a motivated Jamaican to become an active participant in the governance and nation building process, again I say thank you.

Mr. Speaker, there are many more Jamaicans in the Diaspora who play an active role in building and sustaining the economy of this nation. In fact, the Diaspora has contributed \$1.7 billion dollars in remittances alone in 2011 - the number two

foreign exchange earner after tourism. Even in times of recession, the Diaspora has shown their commitment in maintaining their flow into the economy.

4.0 Outward Mission to Toronto

Mr. Speaker, let me now report on a successful mission led by me to Toronto, Canada from April 4 to 15 this year. This visit provided a unique opportunity to meet with leading exporters to Canada, prospective investors interested in doing business in Jamaica, and major Diaspora groupings such as the Jamaican Canadian Association (JCA).

On a whole, Mr. Speaker, the programme of meetings in Canada was successful in meeting and advancing the interest of both top exporters and high-level investors that are serious about investing in Jamaica. Top-tier ICT networks and billionaire networks in Canada have been successfully penetrated, representing a significant breakthrough in our marketing efforts on the ground and the creation of a much clearer pathway for realization of new investments. Of particular note, is the strong interest by Diaspora investors, which needs to be engaged through high level presentations across North America in key cities such as New York, Miami and California with a view to taking full advantage of the additional funding opportunities that are now available.

In June of this year I was also a guest of the Diaspora at their conference in the North East in Boston for Diaspora Day and in Washington for Caribbean Legislative week, where I addressed a number of Diaspora members on the issues of investment in Jamaica.

5.0 Diaspora Strategy

Mr. Speaker, this administration recognizes the importance of the Diaspora in nation building and as a key market for Jamaican exports. For these reasons,

JAMPRO has developed a **Business Diaspora Strategy**, aimed at tapping into the significant economic potential of the Diaspora. Events such as Jamaica House at the O2, Meet Jamaica campaign in London, and the Jamaica 50 Independence celebrations, will be used to facilitate strategic engagements with the Jamaican Diaspora.

5.1 Diaspora Partnerships

Already, some significant Jamaica and Diaspora partnership development opportunities exist:

- The packaging of opportunities for small investors, including joint ventures with multiple investors from the Diaspora
- Building on initiatives, such as the recently launched Caribbean Marketplace Business Competition, which encouraged partnerships between members of the Caribbean Diaspora in the US, UK and Canada, with entrepreneurs in the Caribbean. The Caribbean Marketplace gives the opportunity of a grant of US\$100,000 for qualifying business ideas. The competition ends July 31st, 2012. The websites are: www.competecaribbean.org and www.caribbeanidea.org.
- Partnership opportunities also exist for the development of a clear Diaspora bond mechanism and associated marketing strategy

5.2 Diaspora Bond

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce has been working with the Ministry of Finance and Planning and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, towards floating a US\$1 billion Diaspora Bond during the current financial year. This Bond, Mr. Speaker, is seen as another way in

which the Jamaican Diaspora can make a tangible contribution to our economy to foster growth and employment. Our intention is for the bond to be offered at an attractive rate, and the funds used for small and medium enterprise projects.

Diaspora Bonds have been used by other countries, such as India and Israel. We are very confident that a Jamaican Diaspora Bond would be very successful and would definitely redound to the benefit of all Jamaicans – at home and abroad. Promotion of the Bond would be undertaken by JAMPRO in Diaspora communities in the UK, the USA and Canada.

The aim of this strategy is to give incentives to the Diaspora to take full advantage of the opportunity for investment in Jamaica, in the same way that we do for foreign direct investment.

5.3 Services Exports

Another area that we are focusing on, Mr. Speaker, is our services sector, which contributes some 74% of our GDP. JAMPRO, as one of Jamaica's focal points for services, continues to support the services sector through the Jamaica Coalition of Services Industries (JCSI). The JCSI is working towards developing an effective Services Growth and Expansion Plan, which is a part of the Vision 2030 National Development Plan, and which supports the National Export Strategy's (NES's) objective of increasing the contribution of services to overall exports by 2013.

As we move towards that objective, JAMPRO has secured US\$405,000 (\$J35mn) in funding from the Caribbean Aid for Trade and Regional Integration Trust Fund (CARTFUND) to meet the needs of the rapidly expanding services sector. A consultant has been secured and will be assisting the JCSI in developing the sector expansion plan, to be finalized by October 2012. This Plan will outline the strategies for the development of five priority services sectors over a three year period.

6.0 Creative Industries

Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague Minister of Youth and Culture on the role being played by that Ministry in creating a policy framework and in positioning the cultural and creative industries among the leading sectors for foreign exchange earnings in Jamaica. I believe there is a symbiotic relationship between both Ministries and to that extent, I would like to share with this Honourable House some of the things we are doing in terms of the creative/cultural industries.

JAMPRO will be engaging in strategic interventions within the creative industries that are less dependent on incentives, primarily in the following areas:

Film: Our main focus will be on the niche area of animation. This is in keeping with the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector strategy that seeks to propel Jamaica towards the higher value-added service offerings. JAMPRO, nevertheless, will also continue to provide facilitation services for TV productions, of which reality TV series represent significant opportunity, particularly for job creation.

Fashion: Here, we are looking at capacity development for designers and outsourcing manufacturing partnerships in the region (Haiti and Dominican Republic), as well as targeting greater access to Diaspora and other markets.

Music: We continue working in partnership with the music clusters and industry associations to facilitate capacity development, data collection, lobby efforts as well as developing and engaging with a database of producers in key UK and other markets.

Mr. Speaker, there is great potential in the creative industries. JAMPRO, in its first quarter, has already secured over US\$702,000 (unaudited figure) in linkage

contracts from this industry. This does not include what could be accrued from feature films and other incentive-dependent creative industry projects. In the development of the Omnibus Incentive Act, we must ensure that the resulting incentive framework enables the creative industries sector to continue contributing towards the country's economic growth and job creation objectives.

7.0 Food Safety

Mr. Speaker, the safety of our food supply is not only critical for our domestic market, but equally so for our food exports, which in 2011 had a value of US\$133.9 million. The United States, the main market for Jamaican foods, under the Food Safety Modernization Act (January 2011), requires the implementation of more stringent food safety control systems by foreign suppliers of food. Failure to implement satisfactory preventive controls could result in many of our food exporters being unable to enter the US market, resulting in a loss of valuable foreign exchange and jobs.

Initiatives taken by the Bureau of Standards (BSJ) to assist local firms in becoming compliant with the requirements of the FSMA include:

- Collaboration between the BSJ and the University of the West Indies in the conduct of an FDA-approved course of study – Better Process Control School in January 2012. This had an 88.7% success rate. A second course is currently underway (July 16-20, 2012) with some 24 participants from Jamaican firms

Other BSJ initiatives include:

- Provision of 50% discount on laboratory and other technical services, under agreements with JAMPRO and the MSME Alliance, and

- Strengthening the organisation's food safety regulatory inspection procedures by aligning food processing inspection approaches with the requirements of the US Code of Federal regulations

Further, in continuing support for our food safety system, the Bureau now has the ability to test for *Listeria Monocytogenes*. This organism presents a serious food safety risk, as evidenced by outbreaks in Canada in 2008 (22 fatalities) and as recent as 2011 in the United States (30 fatalities). This capability is a significant addition to the food safety arsenal in furthering our efforts to produce safe and wholesome products.

7.1 Jamaica National Agency for Accreditation (JANAAC)

The Jamaica National Agency for Accreditation (JANAAC) has also been working assiduously to implement a strategy to ensure that by 2013 a set of Jamaican laboratories will be accredited and capable of dealing with the range of tests required by food exporters to the United States. This, Mr. Speaker, requires the utmost urgency as currently, there is no accredited food testing laboratory in Jamaica.

To this end, JANAAC has:

- Identified the scope of tests that need to be done on food products for export to the USA
- Identified laboratories currently involved in testing food for exporters
- Conducted a readiness for accreditation survey on these laboratories, and
- Introduced a cost sharing mechanism in which JANAAC will bear about 50% of the cost of accreditation.

To-date, five food testing laboratories have applied for accreditation and are going through the process, which takes between 7-24 months, depending on the readiness of the laboratory.

7.2 Caribbean Cooperation in Accreditation

JANAAC has also been working with the CARICOM Regional Organization for Standard and Quality (CROSQ) and Trinidad and Tobago Laboratory Accreditation Service (TTLABS) to develop the Caribbean Cooperation in Accreditation. This entity, which is a regional accreditation mechanism for facilitating trade in the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), was approved by the Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) at its Thirteenth Meeting in June 2010.

The formation of the CCA is expected to help minimize Technical Barriers to Trade (TBTs) between the different islands in the CSME and in facilitating cost effective accreditation solutions for the region.

7.3 Increased Fines

In addition to these developments, Mr. Speaker, the fines for food safety breaches have been increased, due to repeated violations and contraventions of the regulations governing processed foods.

- Under the Standards Act, fines have been increased from \$500,000 to a maximum of \$3 million, and/or imprisonment for a term of twelve months
- Under the Processed Foods Act, fines have been increased from \$200,000 to \$3 million, and/or imprisonment for a term of twelve months.

We anticipate that these amendments will act as a more effective deterrent to food safety violations.

8.0 Consumer Issues

Mr. Speaker, in the environment that we live today, consumers would be at a serious disadvantage without the existence of the Consumer Affairs Commission (CAC), which plays a critical role in areas such as market surveillance, consumer/business education, complaint resolution, and consumer protection and advocacy.

8.1 Complaints Resolution and Outreach Services

In dealing with consumer complaints, the Commission continues to achieve a high resolution rate. For the last financial year (2011/2012), 1,960 complaints were handled, of which 1,739 or 87% were resolved. The CAC also secured compensation/refunds amounting to \$12,973,942 on behalf of aggrieved consumers.

8.2 Amendments to the Consumer Protection Act (2005)

One of our immediate objectives, Mr. Speaker, is to make the Commission more effective in carrying out its responsibilities. To that extent, Mr. Speaker, amendments are being sought to the Consumer Protection Act (2005). The aim is to facilitate increased efficiency and allow for broader punitive measures for breaches of the Act.

8.3 Tribunal

One of the main amendments being proposed by the CAC is the establishment of a Tribunal. This would reduce the lengthy time that matters under the jurisdiction of the Consumer Protection Act are handled by the formal court system.

8.4 Widened Power to Provide Legal Representation

The second area that we are looking at in terms of amendment to the Consumer Protection Act, Mr. Speaker, is wider powers to provide legal representation. In its current form, the Commission may sue only on behalf of complainants falling within section 7(2) of the Act (i.e., where the complainant is a minor, or is unable to act for himself due to his death, or to infirmity), or where it (the Commission) is personally aggrieved. As such, the CAC has no locus standi to sue on behalf of members of the public at large. The proposed amendments seek to empower the Agency to represent all categories of complainants, and allow enforcement proceedings in the public interest.

8.5 Consumer Protection in the Caribbean Project

I would also like to take this opportunity to update this Honourable House on the Consumer Protection in the Caribbean Project, which Jamaica entered into in 2009 with Consumers International, the Inter-American Development Bank and two other CARICOM member states – Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago.

One of the primary deliverables of the project is implementation of a code of conduct for banking services in the region. The draft code was published in April 2011, outlining minimum service standards expected of stakeholders. At the very outset, it was expected that our local banks would have collaborated with the Commission in creation and implementation of the Code. To date, the requested support has not been forthcoming.

9.0 Competition – Enforcement and Advocacy

Mr. Speaker, we continue our efforts through the Fair Trading Commission (FTC) to ensure a competitive landscape and protection of consumers from unfair business practices. The FTC, during the period April 1, 2011 to March 31, 2012, investigated a total of 349 complaints, of which 224 were resolved.

In terms of competition advocacy, Mr. Speaker, the FTC has conducted a number of critical market assessments. These include an assessment of the effect of the Common External Tariff (CET) on the cost of fuel in Jamaica. This study revealed that removal of the CET on automotive diesel oil and heavy fuel oil would reduce Petrojam's ex-refinery price by 8.3% and 4.4%, respectively. Secondly, based on the recomputed ex-refinery Petrojam price, the effect of the removal of the CET would result in a 4.2% reduction in the cost of electricity.

The FTC also conducted an assessment of the extent to which consumer complaints about the JPS's back-billing practices can be investigated under Section 37 of the FCA. The FTC concluded that a breach may be established where the under-recording or understating of consumption is not attributable to the consumer, such as in cases of inefficiency or malfunction of the relevant meter, provided the consumer had no knowledge or notice of the inefficiency or malfunction.

10.0 Intellectual Property Rights

Mr. Speaker, protection and enforcement of our intellectual property rights must be accorded the necessary primacy. This is critical to the role being played by the Jamaica Intellectual Property Office (JIPO) in ensuring that our intellectual property laws and systems contribute to national economic growth and development, and that the benefits of rights holders are recognized.

10.1 Enforcement

In terms of enforcement, JIPO along with the Organised Crime Division (OCID) has been involved in the public destruction of thousands of pirated CDs, DVDs and counterfeit Trade Mark goods.

We will, Mr. Speaker, continue to send a strong message to those persons involved in the criminal activity of piracy, that the Government is serious about the enforcement of intellectual property rights. This work will be intensified during the year, with JIPO and OCID embarking on an enforcement drive.

10.2 Geographical Indications

Mr. Speaker, extensive work and training has also been facilitated by the Government in the area of Geographical Indications, in particular for our producers of Blue Mountain Coffee, Jamaica Rum and Jamaica Jerk. The opportunity now exists to register these products as GIs with JIPO, and for the producers to enjoy the competitive advantage to be gained from these niche products.

On the occasion of the 2012 Olympics, we would also like to implore our athletes to take the necessary steps to register their trademarks and to utilize the resources available through JIPO to protect their intellectual property rights.

10.3 Training of Young People

Mr. Speaker, training and awareness building are critical components of JIPO's mandate. It is in this regard that training in the area of IP was extended to our youths, twenty of whom were selected from the maroon and rastafari communities to participate in a cultural heritage project on the preservation of traditional knowledge, traditional cultural expressions and their genetic resources. The project, undertaken with the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), the

Smithsonian Institute and the African Caribbean Institute & Memory Bank, involved digital video training and intellectual property training for indigenous and local communities across Jamaica.

This project, Mr. Speaker, will allow future generations to benefit from the rich heritage of the Maroons and Rastafari. The use of the video and recording equipment donated by the Folk Life Center in the USA will be in the custody of JIPO and the African Caribbean Institute, to ensure proper management and accountability.

10.4 Madrid Protocol

We have had, Mr. Speaker, our final consultations with the stakeholders regarding the signing of the Madrid Protocol. A recommendation will be going from this Ministry to Cabinet shortly and an announcement will be made, thereafter, by the Minister on our position regarding the signing of the Treaty.

11.0 Regulating Co-operatives & Friendly Societies

Another crucial role of the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce, Mr. Speaker, is the regulation and supervision of credit unions, agricultural societies, benevolent, specially authorized and friendly societies. Over 1.4 million persons are members of these co-operative and friendly societies.

In carrying out its role, the Department of Co-operatives and Friendly Societies during the 2011/2012 financial year performed some 152 audits, 55 inspections, 65 operational assessments, 85 pre-audit checks, and settled some 119 disputes.

11.1 Merged Structure

Currently, we are moving towards the implementation of a merged structure between the Agricultural Credit Board and the Department of Co-operatives and Friendly Societies. This, Mr. Speaker, will result in a more effective regulatory framework for all co-operatives, friendly societies, and industrial and provident societies operating in Jamaica.

This move has its genesis in a decision taken in October 2008 to dissolve the Agricultural Credit Board and transfer all its regulatory functions to the Registrar of Co-operative Societies. A reclassification exercise, aimed at arriving at a merged structure between both organizations, is now well advanced.

I should also use this opportunity to remind this Honourable that 2012 has been declared as the International Year of Cooperatives by the United Nations. One of the goals of the UN in making this declaration is to increase awareness about co-operatives and their contribution to socio-economic development. For our part, the Department of Co-operatives and Friendly Societies will be hosting a two-day symposium and exhibition for volunteers and staff of the co-operative and friendly societies movement. The symposium started today, July 18th at the Jamaica Grande in Ocho Rios and ends tomorrow.

12.0 MSME Capacity Building and Support Services

Mr. Speaker, business development support is critical to the sustained growth and development of our small, medium and micro enterprises. In that regard, I believe it is appropriate that we highlight some of the activities of the Jamaica Business Development Corporation (JBDC).

- During the 2011/2012 financial year, the JBDC administered over 6,000 interventions to MSME clients in areas such as business advice, product development, marketing, and financial services
- Over 1,000 clients received technical assistance in areas such as business incubation management, plant and product engineering, branding, fashion and graphic design, etc.
- Approximately 1,800 persons benefited from over 140 training sessions in areas such as recording keeping, business plan preparation, costing, and money management. Another 192 persons benefited from training in areas such as jewelry making, fashion, and food preparation.

Mr. Speaker, these are just some of the achievements of the JBDC. For the financial year 2012/2013, the JBDC aims to deliver some 70 business development workshops to some 1,750 MSMEs; on-lend some \$120 million to 100 entrepreneurs in the productive sector, and among other projections; have fully functioning craft and agro-processing incubators, with at least 70 incubatees.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage our micro, small, and medium enterprises, as well as those starting new businesses, to utilize the services of the JBDC.

13.0 Improving the Ease of Doing Business

Mr. Speaker, one of the critical indicators used by the World Bank in its **Doing Business Report** is the time taken to register a business. Statistics show that the countries which tend to have the most improved rankings in the **Doing Business Report** undertook initiatives, such as creating one-stop shops, abolishing or reducing minimum capital requirements, simplifying registration formalities, cutting or simplifying post-registration procedures (tax registration, social security registration), and introducing online procedures.

The Companies Office of Jamaica (COJ) is certainly aware of these facts and has been focusing its attention on a number of measures to improve business registration in Jamaica. These include the development of a single business registration form (super-form), allowing for the collection of all information required by all the Government of Jamaica agencies and departments involved in business start-up – Tax, GCT, TRN, NHT, NIS, HEART/NTA – at one point.

The COJ will collect all the information and, in turn, disseminate it electronically to the various departments and agencies. Registration approvals for the various statutory payments will then be transmitted to the Companies Office and indicated in the Certificate of Registration generated by it. This will prevent those registering businesses from having to make multiple visits to these various agencies and departments – a big step forward for business registration in Jamaica. Completion of this particular project is scheduled for January 2013.

The Companies Office is also well advanced in upgrading its website to facilitate online registration of new companies and business names. This redevelopment work is now 80% complete. Implementation of these measures will also have a positive impact on our ease of doing business rankings.

I must also mention, Mr. Speaker, the Single Electronic Window (Jamaica Port Community System). This, Mr. Speaker, is an electronic platform which connects the multiple systems operated by a variety of organizations (public & private) that make up a seaport, airport or inland port community. It is shared in the sense that it is set up, organized and used by firms in the same sector – in this case, a port community.

Implementation of this system will not only help to reduce the cost of doing business, but will also aid in the whole process of positioning Jamaica as a global logistics hub for the region.

14.0 Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, in this our 50th year of independence, we must continue to place the well-being our people and the building of our nation as our top priority.

We must continue, therefore, the efforts to create an enabling environment for job creation, export growth, investments, and business growth.

We must continue the efforts to empower our people through widely available training and education, and the use of modern technologies.

We must continue to create an environment where our micro, small and medium enterprises will flourish, and where access to finance will no longer be a distant dream, but made easier and more accessible through the use of movable property as collateral, and a greater focus on equity financing.

We must, Mr. Speaker, continue the efforts to mobilize the support of the Jamaican Diaspora in building our country, through their combined resources, skills and knowledge.

Most of all, Mr. Speaker, after 50 years, we must create a new path for Jamaica's next phase of development that will provide for every man, woman and child in this country, a future full of hope and prosperity.