

MAIN ADDRESS



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MINISTER OF INDUSTRY, INVESTMENT
&
COMMERCE**

**Press Conference on the Status of the Cannabis
Industry Regulatory Framework**

Second Floor Conference Room

Thursday, 13 August 2015 at 10:30am

It has been four months since the Amendment to the Dangerous Drugs Act became law [April 15, 2015]. In my presentation to Parliament on the amendment, I stated that the marijuana industry represented a new and emergent industry that was critical to diversifying the economic base of our country whilst enhancing the growth agenda. Since then, the Government has done much to ensure that we are putting everything in place to maximize the benefits of this nascent industry. Ladies and gentlemen, I speak of our extensive work towards developing the regulatory framework for the medical marijuana, industrial hemp and the cannabis industry that will position Jamaica for increased economic growth and development.

The historical value of cannabis cannot be ignored and lays the background for the Government's deliberate efforts to move these industries forward. The fact that it has been used for medical purposes in many parts of the world for centuries is a stark reminder of that. However, it is the monetization of this important industry, and the regulation required to effect this that we are here to discuss today.

As a country, we have been heartened to see the recent development towards the decriminalization of ganja, but, as Minister of Industry, Investment and Commerce, it is maximizing the business side of things that is of paramount importance to me. As a result, in addition to establishing the Cannabis Licensing Authority, I have also appointed the Cannabis Advisory Business Council to advise this Ministry on the policy and business development issues that are critical to the proper governance – and ultimately the success – of these industries.

As mentioned by the JAMPRO President, in keeping with legislation, the Cannabis Licensing Authority has been set up with Dr. Andre Gordon as its Chairman. As an early activity in the Board's now three month life, they have engaged the support of consultants from BOTEC Analysis, who are here in Jamaica conducting research, and meeting with stakeholders in an effort to develop recommendations on the key components of the country's regulatory framework for this new industry. We are pleased to be working with BOTEC Analysis, with their team having served as a consultant for the implementation of Washington State's voter initiative to legalize and regulate

marijuana for recreational production and use, and some members having advised the state of Vermont on policy options for marijuana legalization. You will find a further background on the company in your media kits.

The opportunities for job creation and increased entrepreneurship in the areas of agriculture, manufacturing, medical research and tourism-related activities will undoubtedly act as a fillip for Jamaica's economic growth and prosperity.

The industries are expected to integrate nicely with our advanced efforts to establish Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and will offer opportunities for manufacturers that can utilize cannabis as a value added product to contribute to the development of balms and lotions among other things. While on the topic of derivatives of cannabis, I want to state categorically that whilst developing the industry potential that cannabis offers, we must be strident in ensuring that our children are not exposed to 'edibles'. These products present serious health threats to our children and would negatively impact the image of the cannabis industry in Jamaica, even as we seek to establish a respectable business sector.

There also exist opportunities in research development around the medicinal and therapeutic value of marijuana, particularly as we strive to promote the country as a location for medical tourism. The University of Technology and the University of the West Indies have already been granted provisional orders and we must be poised to utilize their patents and innovations in the development of this industry.

The provisions of the amendment have also ensured that the use of cannabis by tourists *for medical reasons* will allow us to further tap into a growing market for medical/medicinal tourism to take advantage of one of the brand associations with Jamaica that we no longer have to ignore, but can now make deliberate efforts to capitalize on. This will provide for a strong link between the tourism sector and the development of the cannabis industries.

Ladies and gentlemen, as these new industries develop, they will come under the similar systems of regulation and taxation that govern all aspects of the food and drug industry across the world today. As with every other food, nutraceutical and pharmaceutical product, the new cannabis products will have to meet specific relevant health, safety and environmental requirements, as well as the required standards for product quality, labelling and packaging. This is critical to deterring irresponsible sale and usage of its by-products, in the hope of reducing the attendant crime that is associated with the sector.

Although the work on the regulations has recently started, some general principles are already clear:

- First, is that the policy, governance and regulatory framework must be lean, evidence-based, and market-driven.
- Second, is that the Government will ensure that the rights of traditional and spiritual users and growers are also protected and taken into consideration during this development process.
- Third, is that the policy and regulatory framework is likely to present both positive incentives for the legitimate operators, in the form of access to markets and technical support, and strong negative sanctions for any who choose to remain outside the law.
- Fourth, is that the regulations will ensure congruence with the country's international obligations in respect of the global narcotics and drug trade

The various entities and stakeholders involved in the process are working diligently towards their inputs into this process and have been meeting with the consultants to ensure that, as a country, we can achieve the delicate balance between **adopting** global best practices and **adapting** these to our own cultural and historical realities, even as we develop our own path breaking contribution to international best practices for the global cannabis industry. As such, I fully expect to receive the final recommendations from the consultants by the end of September the latest, which upon review will form the basis of drafting instructions for the regulations.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is important that we remember that there remains much to be done, and this is but the first step towards establishing a successful and global competitive set of Cannabis industries in Jamaica. It was roughly 18 months after the laws in Colorado and Washington were passed, that they were fully implemented and even longer for supply chains to mature and regulations to adjust to ongoing developments. It is not our aim to copy other jurisdictions which face different circumstances, different levels of capacity and are working towards different goals. But we are learning best practices from those that have gone before, to enable us to accelerate the speed at which the legislation is implemented whilst being calculated in our movements and remaining true to our international commitments.

Our task, therefore, is to ensure that this important industry is able to grow rapidly in a sustainable manner, supplied by a standards-led and market-driven process in the full glare of the global community and media.

I thank you.