

Remarks

**Senator the Honourable Aubyn Hill
Minister of Industry, Investment and
Commerce**

Briefing to the Diplomatic Corps

Wednesday, March 9, 2022

@

2:30 p.m.

**Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign
Trade**

2 Port Royal Street, Kingston

Kingston

Salutations:

- **Senator the Honourable Kamina Johnson Smith**, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade
- Other Colleague Ministers
- **Ambassador Sheila Sealy Monteith**, Head of the Jamaican Foreign Service
- **Her Excellency Lum Ka E Yengeni**, Dean of the Diplomatic Corps,
- High Commissioners and Ambassadors
- **Her Excellency Ms Marianne Van Steen** Head of Delegation of the European Union

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

I join the Most Honourable Prime Minister Andrew Holness and the Honourable Kamina Johnson Smith, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, in welcoming you all here to this important engagement on key sectors of the Jamaican economy. I especially welcome those of you who have recently been accredited to serve in Jamaica and wish for you, your families and the rest of your delegations, a fruitful and enjoyable time in service among us warm and welcoming Jamaicans. Since I assumed my new role as Minister of Industry, Investment and Commerce, I have had the pleasure of meeting with some of you, and I look forward to broadening our engagement the coming weeks and months.

Ladies and gentlemen I firmly believe that - Jamaica is an attractive and welcoming investment destination. Our strong economic performance in the face of a devastating, once-in-a-century Covid-19 pandemic, signifies Jamaica's resilience, strategic location, connectivity, readiness to

do business, natural resources all wrapped in a cultural package that is appreciated and sought around the world.

Climate for Investment

Jamaica has a very favourable investment climate. Our Long-Term Credit Rating and Local Currency debt are rated B+ by international rating firm, Moody's, and our financial institutions are among the most sophisticated across Latin America and the Caribbean.

A couple of weeks ago **Massy** of Trinidad and Tobago – maybe the largest business conglomerate in the twin island state – cross listed on the Jamaica Stock Exchange (JSE) because the exchange is so well regulated and internationally recognised as such. Jamaica has no currency controls in place and so investors from the Caribbean, Latin America and across the world can trade **Massy** shares on the JSE. Just recently, we made our central bank independent of government, signalling our commitment to financial system stability.

We have also taken the bold step to develop a Central Bank Digital Currency, and Jam-Dex, as it has been named, will shortly be introduced to the full market, after the pilot testing phase to provide faster, safer and more discrete transactions between merchants and consumers.

Jamaica's economy continues to benefit from a successfully implemented Economic Reform Programme, which resulted in entrenched macro-economic stability evidenced by relatively low unemployment and, still, single digit inflation rates, as well as a declining debt-to-GDP ratio.

Our geo-positioning is also advantageous. Jamaica is the most centrally located island within the Caribbean region, in the midst of the main East-West shipping lanes between the Far East, Europe and Eastern North America. This offers the distinct advantage of direct access to a nearby and most powerful market of 300 million people. We have independent judiciary and legal system which brings comfort to investors.

We are party to several bilateral agreements that make doing business in Jamaica easier for foreign investors. These includes several bilateral tax treaties which aim to avoid double taxation with countries including the United States, Canada, France, and Germany, as well as those in CARICOM.

Investment Policies and Legislation

The Andrew Holness administration has implemented measures at the policy level to make it easier to do business in Jamaica. Our National Investment Policy (NIP) is a strong indication to potential investors of our commitment to business efficiency, public sector cohesiveness, global competitiveness, and transparency. Two main elements of the NIP are the Jamaica Economic Residency Programme and the Priority Project Designation. Both have already been individually approved by Cabinet, and implementation is underway to allow them to strengthen the ease with which our investors do business in Jamaica.

A complementary programme to the NIP is the National Business Portal, which will provide a one-stop shop for investment information as well as the relevant forms and procedures for establishing or expanding operations, secure approvals, and allow to access incentives.

We have also taken steps to establish Jamaica as a centre of excellence for international financial services. An agency of my ministry, the Jamaica International Financial Services Authority (JIFSA) is mandated to create a robust and sophisticated legislative framework, formulate a competitive tax regime, and build consistent transparency into its various processes.

Investment Opportunities

Jamaica has an internationally respected Public-Private Partnership (PPP) institutional framework, with strong technical capacity and the government is committed to privatising government assets that can be better run by the private sector. In fact, INFRASCOPE 2019 index ranked us 4th in the LAC behind Chile, Colombia & Peru for our Public-Private Partnership programme.

Over the period spanning 2009-2020, we have had 25 successful privatisations, totalling over US\$1.7B across the Energy, Tourism, Logistics, Agriculture & Transport sectors. Current additional opportunities include solar energy, potable water production and distribution, wastewater treatment and management, and solid waste management.

World Free Zones Organisation

Annual International Conference and Exhibition (AICE 2022)

On June 13-17 this year Jamaica have the distinct and unique opportunity to host the World Free Zone Organization (WFZO) conference in the Montego Bay Conference Centre. The Jamaica Special Economic Zone Authority (JSEZA), an agency of the Ministry of Industry, Investment

and Commerce, successfully competed in Barcelona in 2019 to host the World Free Zone Organization's Annual International Conference and Exhibition (AICE) 2022.

This will be the biggest event in Jamaica since the onset of the pandemic. We expect about 1,500 delegates from about 140 WFZO member countries, as well as exhibitors and state officials and academic representatives. This is my personal invitation for you all to participate and ensure that other relevant participants from your countries attend the conference in June. The WFZO has not had an annual conference in two years and they are seeing their 2019 choice of Jamaica as almost providential in its wisdom and they are expecting Jamaica to put on a really fabulous "Welcome Back" show. We aim to match and possibly exceed their expectations.

We hope to see all your countries represented and showcased at this landmark event. The website for registration is now open and all relevant government agencies are fully engaged to ensure that representatives from your countries will have seamless entry to Jamaica, as well as a rewarding, productive, and pleasant week for the conference and exhibition.

As you might be aware, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) offer tax benefits and fiscal incentives. Jamaica's SEZ currently houses over 70 outsourcing companies, many of them from your countries, and we will be showcasing several SEZ opportunities at the conference. They kept growing through the pandemic and employ about 46,000 persons.

These include:

Caymanas Special Economic Zone (South Mandela Park)

The Caymanas SEZ South Mandela Park is conceptualized as a master planned lifestyle community integrated with hi-tech industrial and commercial development that can accommodate diverse industries. The Project will have globally competitive tax incentives and is conceptualised as an integrated development of an upscale mixed-use urban centre, including light industrial, logistics and distribution, commercial, residential, educational, health and recreational facilities. The project also seeks to incorporate the supply and use of clean and/or renewable energy. The South CSEZ has 176-ha/(435-acres) of serviced industrial land, 14-ha/(34-acres) of land devoted to common and open space as well as green buffer areas to create a comprehensive, sustainable, and eco-friendly SEZ.

Vernamfield Aerotropolis

When the current expansion of the P.J. Patterson highway is completed later this year, the planned Vernamfield Aerotropolis in Clarendon will be less than an hour away by road from Kingston. It will be about 14 flying hours away for Dubai, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. And a few hours more to Singapore and Beijing. What will Jamaica be providing. Less complicated visa and travel arrangements and a modern transshipment and logistics centre.

Kingston Logistics Park

Our readiness to attract investments includes strengthening our capacity to respond to our investors' need for a trained pool of competent and proficient local employees. In this regard, we have partnered with the Inter-American Development Bank on a five-year undertaking, the Global Digital Services Sector Taskforce, that will train our workforce in knowledge process outsourcing (KPO), information technology outsourcing (ITO) and business process outsourcing

(BPO). I will chair that Task Force. This project is intended to improve the skills development system in Jamaica to provide the GSS with better skilled workers in order to secure higher level value-added jobs.

CLOSING

Jamaica remains open and ready to do business with each of your countries. We are pleased that your countries have established diplomatic posts here is a privilege we treat with respect and favour. Jamaica is at a strategic location, and we look forward fostering even stronger bilateral and multilateral relationships with you all. The Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce is mandated to create a facilitating and enabling business environment, and I, along with my team at the Ministry will serve you with the graciousness and enthusiasm that is uniquely Jamaican.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, thank you.

Senator the Hon. Aubyn Hill
Minister