

**STATEMENT ON HURRICANE SANDY
BY THE
MOST HONOURABLE PORTIA SIMPSON MILLER
PRIME MINISTER
IN THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT
OCTOBER 30, 2012**

Mr Speaker,

The members of this Honourable House are already aware that Hurricane Sandy made landfall at approximately 2pm on Wednesday, 24th October some 5 miles east of Kingston. Central and eastern parishes experienced storm force winds at up to 80 mph. Due to the passage of the hurricane just under 2,000 persons were accommodated in approximately 140 shelters. Most persons have now returned to their communities.

We are thankful to the Almighty who has spared us from what could have been much worse.

I extend sympathies on behalf of the Government to the family of Mr. Cleveland Scott from Bedward Gardens in August Town—an ODPEM community volunteer who lost his life in the hurricane.

We must also keep our neighbours in the region in our thoughts and prayers at this time, particularly those in Haiti, Cuba and The Bahamas; where 64 lives were lost.

Our hearts also go out to the Government and people of the United States of America where damage is still being wreaked and at the last report 29 lives have been lost. Also Canada, where one woman, I understand, if the report is true, lost her life.

We must also keep in our prayers the members of the Diaspora who have been impacted by Hurricane Sandy in the North Eastern United States and the rest of the Caribbean.

Right here in Jamaica we have seen families whose homes have lost roofs, farmers have faced crop damage and persons have suffered loss to their livelihood. There has been damage to our roads, bridges, gullies and buildings.

I empathize with all who have suffered as a result of Hurricane Sandy, from those whose homes were flooded to those who lost their dwellings and their livelihood.

As you know, I cut short my official visit to Canada where I travelled at the gracious invitation of the Right Honourable Stephen Harper. I could not have stayed away from Jamaica during the passage of the storm.

Mr. Speaker, the damage from Hurricane Sandy in Jamaica could have been much worse, were it not for the levels of preparation of our Disaster Response Teams.

Mr Speaker, before I detail the damage caused by Hurricane Sandy on our Country, I wish to commend:

- the leadership and members of the security forces and the Jamaica Fire Brigade,
- the staff and volunteers mobilised by ODPEM under the leadership of Mr. Ronald Jackson,
- public health management and staff,
- Fire brigade and health professionals,
- public officers in central and local government,
- the management and staff of the Meteorological Services led by Mr Jeffrey Spooner,

...all of whom acted with professionalism and competence to minimise disruption in the conduct of the business of the country.

I commend:

- Our private sector partners, large and small – and even private citizens for their pledges of assistance; from the large corporate entities, local and foreign to the small shopkeepers and market vendors.
- Our transport operators have all played their part.
- The Jamaica Public Service Company Workers who have worked tirelessly to bring power back to most of our homes.

It will never be soon enough for those whose power has not yet been restored to their homes and businesses. However, I ask you to be patient, although it is difficult.

We must remember that the JPSCo cannot just re-energise lines and restore power without seeing to the safety of our people. Safety has to be a priority. The JPS team has assured us that they are doing all that they can to return the country to full power as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, a significant majority of our people responded in the true Jamaican spirit to ease the pain, reduce the inconvenience and start the recovery process.

I want to commend the Mayors and the Parish Councillors, the Members of this Honourable House and the members of the Senate.

In particular I thank the members of my Cabinet who have been leading from the front dealing with their portfolio responsibilities as well as with the measures that we have to institute collectively.

The team responded quickly:

- Ministers Roger Clarke, Morais Guy, Peter Bunting and Noel Arcott spent many hours ‘on the ground’ assessing the damage and finding solutions to remedy the problems.
- Ministers of State Richard Azan, Luther Buchanan, Colin Fagan and Ian Hayles were among those who toured the areas of the country that were hardest hit.

Their findings were useful in informing the decisions that needed to be made in the Ministries of Agriculture, Transport and Works, Local Government and Community Development among others.

Mr. Speaker, I have received updates, information and even suggestions about how to address this disaster from MP's on both sides of this Honourable House – for which I am, indeed, grateful.

This is a time for us to pull together to address the challenges in the interest of all the people.

The events of the past week have tested us very seriously.

Now is not the time for political grandstanding and divisiveness.

Now is the time for all of us to work together in the interest of the people and not some but all the people who are affected. These events should remind us that when we pull together we can 'weather any storm'.

There is much more ahead of us that will require commitment, energy, creativity and sacrifice and I call upon all of us to lead in this process.

Update on Hurricane Sandy

I will now update this Honourable House on the damage sustained by Hurricane Sandy.

- The agricultural sector, particularly the banana, plantain and cocoa industries and cash crops suffered significant damage.

Preliminary estimates amount to nearly \$1.5 Billion. This also includes damage to coffee, coconut, livestock and vegetables.

- Sixty-one (61) schools were affected, including significant damage to the College of Agriculture, Science and Education (CASE). Assessments so far total \$170M. We have to bear in mind some those figures could change because these are preliminary.

- We thank the Government of Japan for generously offering to assist with repairs to CASE, other education facilities as well as the Annotto Bay Hospital.
- Several public health facilities were damaged by the passage of Hurricane Sandy and the preliminary estimate for repairs is \$160M.

All of the public hospitals are delivering full services with the exception of the Annotto Bay Hospital which sustained severe roof damage.

Funds are being allocated by the National Health Fund to address immediate repairs and needs.

The Ministry of Health has updated its dengue management plan following the passage of Hurricane Sandy.

Additional equipment, vehicles and chemicals are being deployed to all fourteen parishes with the support of the National Health Fund.

- Eleven (11) facilities including Children's Homes and Places of Safety suffered damage estimated at \$9.25M.
- Our tourism and hotel sector was not badly affected in most of the resort areas.

Portland and Ocho Rios suffered most of the damage for this sector and repairs are already underway.

Our air and sea ports are open – indeed, Jamaica remains open for business.

- A team of 120 officers are in the field conducting damage assessments to housing and personal effects.
 - 945 verified assessments have already been completed in St. Thomas, Portland and St. Mary - the hardest hit areas.
 - So far we have identified 71 homes that were totally destroyed,
 - 348 homes were severely damaged and 526 houses incurred minor damage.

These houses were primarily in Portland, St Thomas and St Mary.

The verification exercise continues. It is expected that this assessment exercise will be completed, we hope, by tomorrow.

- The Ministry of Labour and Social Security will provide some assistance through a voucher system.
- There was approximately \$31M worth of damage to roofs, the jetty at the Discovery Bay installation and other Jamaica Defence Force facilities.

- Damage to buildings, vehicles and communication systems of the Jamaica Constabulary Force totals \$6.3M.
- The Department of Correctional Services reports damage estimates of \$5.1M which include roof damage at Fort Augusta and fencing at the Hill Top Juvenile Centre.
- The Ministry of National Security is currently reallocating funds from existing resources to effect immediate repairs.
- The collection of hurricane related debris is underway in all parishes with priority being given to main roads.
- An additional tranche of \$15M has been disbursed to the NSWMA and
The CHASE Fund will also be providing funds to assist the NSWMA in the clean-up exercise.

Mr Speaker, I now turn to damage to the road and associated infrastructure. I should first raise the matter which most persons may have forgotten given the passage of Sandy - that of damage done by the heavy rains over the period September 28 to October 2.

The estimate of the damage done to roads and other infrastructure by those rains is just under \$1.1 billion.

Of that, \$300 million has either been spent or will be spent on temporary restoration works and \$770 million is needed for permanent restoration works.

We now turn to the damage just inflicted by Hurricane Sandy. The preliminary estimate, and I stress preliminary, as we have not received full reports particularly for Parish Council roads, is \$1.5 billion.

\$700 million is needed for temporary restoration works and just under \$800 million for permanent restoration works. All in all, we are talking about, as a preliminary estimate, a total amount of just under \$2.6 billion.

The Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Transport, Works and Housing are collaborating closely to ensure that all blocked roads, whether resulting from the earlier period of rainfall or from Sandy, are reopened.

This will be followed by temporary repairs to eliminate situations which pose a threat to life.

Some of the more permanent restorative works will need to be tackled almost immediately and the Government will have to seek to identify funding to support those works.

Mr Speaker, I need to indicate that in this situation, the Ministry of Transport, Works and Housing has to act with dispatch and hence the needed contractor services are being procured, utilizing the emergency procedures methodology allowed by the GOJ Public Sector Procurement Guidelines.

Mr Speaker,

In times of disaster, Jamaica has always received support from far and wide.

It is good to have friendly neighbours Mr. Speaker, and we are grateful for the support and assistance which they provide.

So far, we have had pledges of support from USAID, the Governments of Japan, Germany and France as well as the Caribbean Development Bank and the Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA).

I also wish to specially thank my sister Prime Minister Kamla Persad Bissessar for calling immediately after the hurricane and pledging support.

We thank all our partners for their concern and assistance.

Implications Going Forward

There are some issues which the occurrence of this hurricane, so late in the season, has brought to the forefront of concern. Locally, we have to find sustainable mechanisms for protecting our economy from external shocks.

These shocks include the effects of the world economic recession which remain with us four years after the onset. They also include hurricanes and flood disasters over which we have no control.

There are measures we can adopt locally to give us some protection.

Even prior to the Hurricane I instructed that the revision of our building codes and regulations be fast tracked. This will allow us to prevent persons from building in unsafe areas and to legislate enforced evacuation.

Now, we must accelerate this work, to ensure that we are even better prepared in the future.

Rallying the Nation

Even before the hurricane we faced serious economic challenges. This has been made worse by the passage of Hurricane Sandy.

Jamaicans are a determined, resilient and strong people.

- We have what it takes to look adversity squarely in the eye and face it head on.
- We have what it takes to get back to basics, where necessary.
- We have what it takes to use what we have to suit our circumstances – as our ancestors would say – to “tun we han’ mek fashion”.

Mr. Speaker, If we work together, we can overcome this. This too shall pass. But we shall... and we must overcome!!!!

Like our ancestors before us, we shall rise to the occasion.

We shall pull together

We shall work together.

We shall overcome!

I say it often...and it is worth repeating every single time.

The last four letters in the word "Jamaican" are 'I-C-A-N.'

Hurricane Sandy battered us.

But the Gospel Standard 'Still I Rise' says it clearly:

Battered, but I'm not broken

Wounded still time will heal

Heavy the load the cross I bear

Lonely, the road I trod I dare

Yet still I rise

Never to give up

Never to give in

against all odds

High above the clouds

Above all my problems

Above all my eyes can see

Knowing God is able

To strengthen me

And rise we will... Rise we must Mr. Speaker.

I Thank You.

God Bless this Nation.