



MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

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NASSAU, THE BAHAMAS

Speaking Notes By

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Budget Debate

Before The Senate

Wednesday, 24th June, 2015

BUDGET DEBATE

Madam President, Honourable Members, Good Morning. I rise today in full support of this Budget and the compendium of Bills, in the midst of much debate and discourse on this government and its work and the continued strength and vitality of the great Progressive Liberal Party. We see debates within, debates outside, and we have parted ways with some. And yet, Madam President, remain steadfast and resolute in our drive to improve this Country – to make a **S**tronger Bahamas, a **S**afer Bahamas, a Prosperous Bahamas, a more **M**odern Bahamas!

Madam President, before making my substantive contributions to this debate, I must first (as always) express my thankfulness to my God, my wife, my family and my fellow Bahamian people for their full and unequivocal support.

Indeed, I remain grateful to my Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Perry G. Christie for allowing me to serve in this capacity. I am also privileged to work with the Hon. Dr. Bernard Nottage in the Ministry of National Security, who has been given the very difficult task of delivering our crime initiatives as promised in our Charter for Governance.

Madam President, we recently celebrated Father's day and I wish take this opportunity to extend greetings to all Fathers.

Madam President, over the past weeks, I've had the privilege of attending a number of graduations. At each event, I was impressed by the talent and intellectual prowess of our young people. Public Schools, Private Schools, Rich and Poor- I saw irrefutable and consistent evidence that our next generation will surpass our achievements in building a stronger Bahamas. For this, we should all be very proud.

Madam President, at one such graduation, I was asked by a young student- Is the Bahamas Stronger? That was the question, Madam President.**IS THE BAHAMAS STRONGER?** Out of the mouth of children as the Scriptures says.**Is the Bahamas Stronger?**

In answering, I said a resounding "yes". I told the graduate yes and did so without equivocation. Yes! The Bahamas is Stronger Madam President, under this Progressive Liberal Party Government led by the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister. The Bahamas is indeed stronger!

Madam President, today we are here to debate this Budget and the compendium of Bills which support it. We have seen over the past weeks much debate from various quarters on the Budget and the reforms which we seek to introduce.

In a democratic society, these debates are healthy and vital. Notwithstanding, Madam President, in a world where austerity is the new norm, and countries strain under the burden of their debts, the Minister and the Minister of State for Finance and their team must be congratulated for their stellar performance in transforming this Country's finances.

Madam President, just last year, we saw the Opposition rant and rave with respect to the Budget and this Administration's fiscal policies. They went so far as to take the unprecedented step of voting against the National Budget of all things! All of the FNM Senators voted No. In true form, No alternative budget, no concrete proposal, just "NO".

Madam President, such a position simply shows an astounding lack of leadership and ability to govern. In explaining why, they stated **"they will stand with Bahamians who have been bamboozled and deceived by this government"**. Further and more troubling Madam President, in presenting and passing the 2014/15 budget, they told the public that the PLP administration was acting in an unconstitutional manner.

Madam President, a government acting against the framework of its Constitution is one of the highest condemnations one can pronounce upon a government.

Madam President, as if that was not enough, they then opposed and voted against the Value Added Tax Bill. Again, no concrete proposal.

Madam President, what a difference 12 months makes. Today, the storyline has changed. In the face of a deficit which has been slashed, the successful implementation of the most significant reform to our system of taxation in our history and a clear pathway to eliminate deficit spending, I watched with sheer amazement, their esteemed Leader voted in favour of this Budget. Imagine that Madam President. He too recognized that we are indeed building a **Stronger Bahamas!**

This Budget is being presented in the same fashion following the same financial principals and includes as a significant revenue source VALUE ADDED TAX. Same provisions, same methodology-but they voted yes in that other Place.

Madam President, I still don't get it. If you believed it was unconstitutional last year what makes it constitutional this year? Or was voting against the 2014 budget a mistake or was voting yes in that other place last week a mistake? Which is it? Have Members Opposite decided that the Budget is now constitutional? What about next year, would they revert to the previous position?

It has long been said that a double minded man is unstable in all his ways. The same can be applied to groups.

Madam President, first they said they would repeal VAT, now they have backtracked and seem to be saying they will keep VAT but increase exemptions. Well that was proposed, analysed and assessed with the Government, Chamber of Commerce and other stakeholders agreeing that the proposal is not viable. I would comment further why the proposal will not work but as their proposals are “subject to change without notice”, I will leave such analysis and recommend that they get better advice Madam President before their next ‘flip-flop’.

Madam President, consistent with our commitment to building a **Stronger Bahamas**, this Budget not only makes significant inroads in addressing our strained public finances, but also stimulates growth and development. With respect to the economy, this Budget sees the deficit (meaning the shortfall between the funds collected by the government and funds spent), slashed by some three hundred and thirty-two million dollars - **\$332 Million**. Yet, Madam President, the FNM and their allies would have you believe the Country suffers as a result of them being voted out.

Nonsense! Madam President. Utter Nonsense. We are Stronger, Stronger under this Progressive Liberal Party Administration.

Madam President, with no tangible evidence to support their illogical position that this country was stronger under their last disastrous administration, the Opposition and their allies have now resorted to trying to manufacture crisis, red herrings and smoke screens. No concrete plans for reform, no concrete plans for national development - NOTHING.

Madam President, the Value Added Tax which was rejected by the FNM and which at one point they suggested that they would repeal, is expected to produce some \$150 Million in tax receipts which is being used in part to pay down our enormous debts.

Madam President, to grow and develop thisCountry, we must not just rely on foreign direct investment, but we must encourage local investment and development. In this regard, this Budget introduces significant reforms designed to create economic stimulus through tax concessions.

The Family Island Encouragement Act is being extended with the addition of Eleuthera, Abaco, and East and West Grand Bahama.

For the benefit of those listening, this law allows persons on qualifying islands to import all the materials needed for the construction of their homes duty free. DUTY FREE! Madam President, this significantly reduces the cost of construction on those islands and I encourage persons to take advantage of these opportunities.

In addition to the Family Islands, this Progressive Liberal Party Government is giving 'over the hill' communities some of the same benefits which are given to Bay Street. Yes, Madam President, just as mostly wealthy landowners receive concessions under the City of Nassau Revitalisation Act, so too will those with homes under 1,500 square feet or commercial structures under 6,000 square feet. The Tariff (Amendment) Act allows for qualifying individuals to apply and receive an exemption on the customs duties on building materials for approved projects. It is my hope that Bahamians take full advantage to improve our depressed communities.

Yes! Madam President, this Christie-led PLP administration is ploughing full steam ahead to build a Stronger Bahamas; a Safer Bahamas, a Prosperous Bahamas, a Modern Bahamas. As for me, my task is to produce empirical data which unequivocally show that we are building a safer Bahamas through our policies and initiatives.

Madam President, we accept that this is no easy feat. However, with God's grace and guidance, we are determined to building a safer Bahamas by:

- (1) Protecting our borders through our unprecedented capital expenditure in our RBDF;
- (2) Redoubling our efforts through the RBPF in Project 'Safe Bahamas' in making our streets, our businesses and our homes safer places; and
- (3) Refocusing our efforts and redirecting significant resources to The Bahamas Department of Correctional Services (formerly HMP) to ensure that it moves from an Institution of 'incarceration' to one of 'rehabilitation'.

Ministry of National Security and Agencies

Total Budget 2013 – 2016

Head	Agency	Recurrent Expenditure Actual 2013/2014	Approved Estimates 2014/2016	Estimates 2015/2016
11	Department of Correctional Services	22,204,310	23,252,666	26,413,527
12	Parliamentary Registration Department	1,206,446	1,136,851	1,057,264
29	Ministry of National Security	4,533,857	5,107,588	13,129,063
31	Royal Bahamas Police Force	126,947,284	129,249,756	126,138,421
32	Royal Bahamas Defence Force	50,302,981	57,453,283	60,042,323
	TOTAL	205,194,878	216,200,144	226,780,598

Ministry of National Security and Agencies

Personal Emoluments 2013 - 2016

Head	Agency	Recurrent Expenditure Actual 2013/2014	Approved Estimates 2014/2015	Estimates 2015/2016
11	Department of Correctional Services	18,309,639	20,026,323	22,240,809
12	Parliamentary Registration Department	560,506	592,150	621,950
29	Ministry of National Security	1,586,869	1,670,968	1,901,200
31	Royal Bahamas Police Force	107,344,775	109,941,753	109,552,079
32	Royal Bahamas Defence Force	42,054,366	47,280,656	48,854,223
	TOTAL	169,856,155	179,511,850	183,170,261

Ministry of National Security and Agencies

Capital 2013 - 2016

Head	Agency	Recurrent Expenditure Actual 2013/2014	Approved Estimates 2014/2015	Estimates 2015/2016
11	Department of Correctional Services	331,428	650,000	-
12	Parliamentary Registration Department	-	-	-
29	Ministry of National Security	500,000	500,000	-
31	Royal Bahamas Police Force	15,682,333	19,308,003	16,586,342
32	Royal Bahamas Defence Force	68,568,634	39,250,000	47,600,000
	TOTAL	85,082,395	59,708,003	64,186,342

Ministry of National Security and Agencies

Other Charges 2013 - 2016

Head	Agency	Recurrent Expenditure Actual 2013/2014	Approved Estimates 2014/2015	Estimates 2015/2016
11	Department of Correctional Services	2,904,544	3,226,343	4,172,718
12	Parliamentary Registration Department	546,469	544,701	435,314
29	Ministry of National Security	2,787,322	3,436,620	11,227,863
31	Royal Bahamas Police Force	15,682,333	19,308,003	16,586,342
32	Royal Bahamas Defence Force	6,670,438	10,172,627	11,188,100
	TOTAL	28,591,106	36,688,294	43,610,337

ROYAL BAHAMAS DEFENCE FORCE

Madam President, I am proud to say that this Progressive Liberal Party government is overseeing the largest expansion exercise in the history of the Royal Bahamas Defence Force-largest in its history!

From Bimini in the North to Inagua in the South and everything in between, the Defense Force has been mandated to protect our sovereignty and national resources. To facilitate this, we have put in place in the Defence Force a comprehensive development plan in respect to capital investments and additional staffing.

With respect to capital investments, the 'Sandy bottom' project continues full steam ahead. The dredging and ancillary construction related to the deepening of the Coral Harbour Base is almost complete. This will allow the newly acquired vessels and those acquired by previous administrations to be able to dock at the Coral Harbour Base. Other elements of the expansion and development at the Coral Harbour Base include the construction of firefighting equipment, construction of a building to serve as an operations centre, a mechanical workshop and a supply and administration building.

Madam President, as we are a government committed to planning not just for today but also for the future, the government has acquired some 14.4 acres of additional land for the future growth and expansion of the Coral Harbour Base. We are indeed building a Safer, Stronger, Modern Bahamas!

Cognizant of the need to secure our entire archipelago, investments are also being made in Matthew Town, Inagua where dredging will take place to allow for the berthing of vessels and a mechanical workshop building will be constructed.

In Ragged Island, the harbour at Gun Point will be dredged to allow for the safe docking of the Force's vessels.

To facilitate the development of the satellite base on that island, a 9,500 sq. ft. building will be constructed to accommodate officers and marines. An aircraft hangar for the Force's aircrafts and a multipurpose building will also be constructed.

Madam President, the work being undertaken to transform the Defence Force is paying significant dividends. During the past fiscal period to June 2015, significant apprehensions and/or arrests were made by the Defence Force including:

- **Approximately 1,600 illegal immigrants were caught**
- **Apprehended 2 foreign fishing vessels from the Dominican Republic for illegally fishing in The Bahamas with a combined total of 68 Dominicans aboard**
- **Over 200 pounds of marijuana were seized**
- **Fifteen non-Bahamians were arrested with undeclared firearms and ammunition**
- **Conducting some 55 Searches**
- **Rescue at sea cases involving over 160 lives**

In April of this year, the HMBS Durward Knowles was deployed to Jamaica on the occasion of the CARICOM-USA Summit attended by Prime Minister Christie as well as President Obama and other CARICOM Heads of states. Our Defence Force therefore contributed to the safety and security of that regional event which was a first of its kind of joint operation for the Defence Force.

Madam President, also during this fiscal period, the Defence Force will acquire a 180-foot Landing Craft in January, 2015. This patrol craft will be used as an auxiliary vessel for the purpose of supplying Defence Force vessels engaged in extended maritime operations away from bases. The Landing Craft will also be used to assist with repairing aids to marine navigation such as light houses and buoys around The Bahamas. Additionally, the vessel will provide disaster relief assistance to Family Islands by transporting troops, heavy lift equipment, ice and water makers, first aid supplies, a mobile field kitchen and much more to adversely affected areas.

As part of this major Sandy Bottom Project, the HMBS A.D Hanna, Durwood Knowles, Leon Smith and Rolly Gray have all been commissioned and are now in this Country's service.

Madam President in the past months, the Defence Force has seen the largest squad in its history join its ranks. Last month, a total of 108 marine recruits were added to the ranks. This increased recruitment is to ensure that we have adequate personnel to properly utilize the new vessels. This recruitment is a systematic exercise to increase the Force's current compliment of strength of 1,346 by 140 persons in this upcoming period with a total projected complement of 2,000 men and women by the fiscal period 2017/2018.

Madam President, in April, 2015, the Ministry undertook the unprecedented exercise of commissioning the HMBS Rolly Gray in Exuma surrounded by some of the most spectacular waters. This Commissioning was significant not just because of its location but because it represented a grateful nation honouring one of its great sons in his community.

Madam President, in addition to their duties relative to patrolling our waters, let us not forget the significant role RBDF officers play in Military Aid to the Civil Authorities. For over a year now, Officers of the RBDF have given critical support to the Police Force and a number of Government Agencies to augment their operations. This assistance will continue as it enables the Police Force to focus more on crime fighting.

Perhaps the strongest investment in building a Stronger, a more Prosperous Bahamas, Modern and Safer Bahamas is through our investment in our youth. The Royal Bahamas Defence Force has been involved in youth development for decades. I am referring to the RBDF Rangers Program.

The Rangers Program was first introduced to the Donald Davis Secondary School. Its initial goal was to redirect the pathway of challenged male students at the junior high level toward becoming more productive members within their school and community.

Since that time, the RBDF Rangers program has evolved into a vibrant youth organization with students participating from (25) twenty five schools in New Providence and (11) eleven schools in Grand Bahama and Abaco.

The objects of the Rangers Program is to train and mentor students in becoming patriotic and productive citizens through character building activities, leadership workshops and team building exercises. It facilitates leadership development and principles, promoting the core concepts of the Defence Force.

To date, the Royal Bahamas Defence Force has inducted some 5,000 students into its Rangers Program. Many of these individuals have graduated and continue to make valuable contributions toward national development. At present, there are approximately 1,200 active members representing 36 schools in New Providence, Grand Bahama and Abaco. This program continues to raise the bar, setting high standards of excellence in mentoring future leaders.

Madam President, Bahamians and indeed, the world watched our Rangers as they performed their duties with excellence and military precision at the Carifta Games and IAAF World Relays.

I highly commend our Rangers and would submit that this Program ought to be the impetus for us to truly launch our 'national service'.

BAHAMAS DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

Madam President, the officers of The Bahamas Department of Correctional Services (BDCS) led by its able Commissioner, Patrick Wright, is responsible for the detention and rehabilitation of approximately one thousands, five hundred persons who have been remanded or sentenced at the Correctional Services Institute at Fox Hill.

Madam President in this past budget cycle, the government increased the complement of the institution staff by an additional ninety-nine (99) Correctional Recruit Officers to meet the pressing manpower requirements. All ninety–nine of them have successfully completed their training and are deployed throughout the Institution on probation which is expected to end later this month.

Earlier this month, the Department commenced the process of recruiting another one hundred (100) officers, which is expected to bring the staff complement to seven hundred and forty-five (745) and thirty-three (33) civilian staff. Both squads represent the largest recruitment ever in the Department's history! We are building a Stronger, Safer Bahamas!

Madam President, after years of dealing with the vexing issue of cellular phones being smuggled into the Dept. of Corrections, the installation and operation of state of the art cellular jamming equipment has rendered cellular phones at the facility useless.

As we understand there is a basic need to maintain family relationships during the detention of an inmate, seventy-six (76) paid phones were installed throughout the institution. The Inmate Telephone System allows inmates to use the telephone service during the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Calls are monitored and recorded for security purposes.

Madam President, although limited by resources, we continue to make improvements to the Correctional Facility in keeping with best practices. In this regard, there have been major improvements to the institution's compound lighting in 2015/2016, and lighting improvements are ongoing to assist with security measures.

The perimeter wall is 65% completed which will enhance security at the institution and was constructed at significantly discounted rates as prisoner labour was used.

Additionally, Proxy Guard Systems were installed for officers to make regular security checks during night duty in the Maximum Security, Remand Centre, and the Medium Security Unit. These electronic devices are used in many modern facilities throughout the United States and Canada.

I am pleased to report that some **298 officers received local training and 102 officers received international training.**

The Maximum Security Housing Unit Retro-Fit Standing Seam Roof System is completed.

The process has begun for the installation of stainless steel combination toilets throughout the Maximum Security Housing Unit. Today, twenty-two (22) have been installed and two blocks have been renovated and are considered a modern facility. In the 2015/2016 Budget year, another fifty (50) toilets will be purchased and installed. Once completed, we would eliminate the use of slop buckets at the Corrections Department which would significantly improve conditions for both workers and inmates.

We are building a more Modern Bahamas!

ROYAL BAHAMAS POLICE FORCE

Madam President, serving on the front lines of our efforts to make The Bahamas Safer are the hard working officers of the Royal Bahamas Police Force.

This Budget provides for additional funding to carry out the work of the Force and contrary to erroneous reports, the continuation of private medical insurance for officers.

Madam President just over 3 years ago, I rose in this Place to make my first Budget communication. At that time, I committed that as part of this administration, I would be relentless in my efforts to assist the Honourable Minister of National Security in his efforts to lead the government's war on crime.

This effort has been challenging and there are some who believe that we are powerless and that we should accept the status quo as the new reality.

Madam President, they would have you believe that our policies have fallen short and that the sole basis upon which our efforts should be measured is the murder rate. If the murder rate is down, crime is down and vice versa- that is the conventional thinking.

To add to this, many have said that the thinking is although the facts are there and the bodies are there, political expediency dictates that politicians do not deal with reality but rather, figure out the best way to spin facts or play with figures.

Madam President, fundamentally the reason why the murder rate is held in such a sacrosanct position in the eyes of Bahamians is because each murder represents a family's suffering and a community's loss. Each one.

This is why Madam President the Progressive Liberal Party took the strong stance which we did in the 2012 campaign. This is why the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister continues to emphasise the importance of building a safer Bahamas.

The Politicos will tell you- don't promise much. In that way you, cannot be perceived to be a failure. Promise nothing. Deliver nothing.

But this was not the direction we choose. We chose to reject conventional thinking. To be bold; to think outside the box because our Country demands it. We are at a time and at a place which requires positive action if we are going to make the Bahamas a Safer place. **Is the Bahamas Safer?**

When we look at the crime figures they show that there has been an across the board decrease in crimes- an overall decrease (table crime statistics). Yet, Madam President, the murder rate remains high.

In May of this year, a Brazilian think tank released an interactive map outlining the nations where people are most likely to be murdered. **The map compiled using the most recently available data, lays bare how a third of the world's 450,000 murders were against victims in Central America, South America and the Caribbean, despite the fact that less than a tenth of the world's population lives in this region.**

Central America, South America and the Caribbean accounts for 33% of murders worldwide, even though our populations represent just 10% of the world's people.

Madam President, in reviewing the information relative to the project, the facts were sobering and disconcertingly similar to our challenges here.

Robert Muggah, the Brazilian founder of the think tank behind the report, explained in the report that violence tends to be highly concentrated.

This means victims are most likely to be young, black or mixed race men who live in poor communities. Muggah went on to suggest that in these areas with the concentrated violence, there are several common themes:

- (1) **There is quick expansion which is compounded by poor regulation;and**
- (2) **There is an apparent lack of interest from local authorities.**

Poor Black Men in depressed areas which lack interest from local authorities. Their words not mine.

Madam President, the findings of Muggah's research does not surprise me and is the reason behind the Urban Renewal Programme and the PLP's comprehensive plan to address not just crime but the social issues which breed crime and criminality.

Madam President, although the Muggah Report was sobering, it was not without hope. **IT IS NOT WITHOUT HOPE.** As we fight, so did Brazil. They increased their focus on public safety and murder rates in cities once synonymous with death have dropped significantly over the past two decades including Medellín, Bogotá, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

Two decades, Madam President. This suggests, Madam President, that complex issues which are deep rooted often take years or decades to address.

The final point from his report which I wish to discuss is their recommendation on short term strategies. Now as I have said this Report was written in 2015. The report recommends that communities dealing with high murder rates deploy large numbers of law enforcement numbers in areas with high concentrations of murders. This programme which they indicate was proven successful in Sao Paulo as ‘hot policing’ is identical to the programme of “**saturation patrol**” implemented by this PLP administration.

Madam President, when the Rt. Hon Prime Minister directed the creation of Urban Renewal and the social programmes accompanying it, it was an evidence-based decision. These programmes were not manufactured or pulled out of thin air, they were created based using the best resources and proven strategies.

Madam President, ultimately a government must govern and is responsible for the safety of its people. It is a fundamental purpose of having a government- to keep citizens safe.

In this regard, we must also realise that issues which are complex and deep rooted will require years if not decades to resolve in the absence of a **STOP, REVIEW AND CANCEL POLICY. Positive Programmes which are reaping measurable positive results cannot be stopped and cancelled because there is a change in administration.**

I believe this is why Father James Palacious recently opined that Government is to blame for crime. This is not necessarily to say that the government can successfully eliminate all crime. However, I am satisfied that through a sustained, consistent and deliberate government effort, we can reduce crime.

Madam President, this is why I personally feel so passionate about speaking of the harm caused by the Ingraham administration's policy of Stop, Review and Cancel policies as they related to the anti-crime and social initiatives created by the PLP government in its last term in government. Deep rooted policies require sustained and consistent responses.

Take for example the cancellation of the School Based Policing Programme. For what purpose? In the face of overwhelming evidence that it was essential given the state of some of our young people and schools, why would any administration seek to cancel it? And to do so without a meaningful replacement.

Madam President, the same holds true for our Witness Protection Programme. Why would you stop the programme? Today, prosecutors continue to struggle to obtain the assistance of witnesses as many know well that they live in a country where the government may change and critical programmes could be cancelled.

They know of the persons who were left to fend for themselves after the Opposition made arbitrary policy pronouncements after 2007.

Madam President, it does not end there, Urban Renewal Programmewas gutted; the Tourism Based Policing programme was abandoned and despite going through four (4) Attorneys General between 2007 and 2012,Swift Justice became 'Slow Justice' as reform efforts grounded to a halt.

Madam President, crime in this society is a deep rooted issue whose causes are complex and will require years if not decades to resolve. This resolution will only happen through sustained policy initiatives. Each time an initiative is stopped or suspended, criminal forces exploit the apparent weakness.

As we look at the information relative to homicides over the past quarter century, the number of murder cases which have resulted in convictions during that period and the number of persons released on bail, a sobering reality emerges.

Madam President, that reality is that there are far too many homicides in our communities. There are far too many accused murderers on bail and we have a small group of dangerous, damaged criminals who wreak havoc on our society.

Madam President, when Father Palacious expressed that the government is responsible for crime, I interpret that to mean that a government is there to govern its people through the formulation of policies such as Urban Renewal, School Based Policing and Swift Justice to ensure that a breach of society rules and regulations are followed by firm and fair actions. A failure to act would give rise to anarchy and chaos in society. This statement is borne out in our ability to ensure that dangerous criminals who break our laws are appropriately punished in a timely manner through our Criminal Justice System – this unfortunately did not happen under the former FNM administration.

Between the years 2007 and 2011 some 7,541 persons was released on bail from Her Majesty's Prison (now BDCS).

I have said before and will say again, any government's ability to address crime is limited by our constitutional arrangement. The reality is our law gives an accused person the right to obtain bail- with the presumption of bail being well established.

Madam President, if an accused person is not brought to trial by the state in a timely manner, then the Courts must enforce the now well established constitutional provisions and grant bail. This is why the Swift Justice initiative is so important. The ability to detain an accused person has strict time limits which our system is strained to meet. As a consequence, persons proceed to obtain bail with often deadly consequences.

Madam President, in 2014, we had 123 murders. Of those persons murdered, some 30 of persons were on bail for various serious offences including rape, armed robbery and murder. That is a rate of almost 25 % of our murder rate.

For the year 2015, 16 persons on bail for various serious criminal offences have been murdered. That represents a rate of some 22 % of the murder rate.

Whilst the Honourable Attorney General continues to make inroads through our Swift Justice Initiative, we are confined by our laws and the capacity of the system.

Madam President, a person who is on bail for murder introduces an explosive situation to a community. The family (or friends or worst, gang) of the victim, the alleged killer's family and many innocent lives are now drawn into an explosive situation. Then to support their criminal enterprise, they think nothing to rob, steal or kill. After all, what do they have to lose?

Madam President, when the Hon. Attorney General and those of us on this Side speak to the need to prevent such persons from obtaining bail with such passion, it is not because we or the government wishes to detain persons unnecessarily. Rather, we wish to prevent the destabilisation of our communities and to further prevent the accused person from becoming a murder victim. When we have this, this is our unfortunate reality (table murdered persons released on bail).

Madam President, I speak not to create excuses or to pass the buck. Rather, I believe that it is important for the public to be fully aware of what we in the Ministry of National Security and our uniformed agencies face.

Further, to show the issues and challenges which we face. It does not mean that with respect to the murder rate, we are not making inroads in our crime fight.

Madam President, in my last Budget contribution, I informed the Bahamian people of the proliferation of these gangs between 2007 and 2012. During this period, various criminal enterprises exhibiting unseen levels of violence rose up and destabilised entire communities. For these gangs bloodshed was seen as a 'right of passage' with corresponding increases in the homicide rate. Unfortunately, there was no policy to deal with these criminal enterprises and disrupt their growth.

For me, the point was and remains a simple one - new criminal enterprises emerged and there was no adequate response. Hence, the society is now paying the price.

Madam President, the crime statistics also clearly show that in almost every other crime category, we are stronger and that our policies are producing dividends. Where then do we go from here? The answer is we must stay the course and redouble our efforts. We must be strong in the face of this challenge and unrelenting in our efforts to take our Country back.

The Honourable Attorney General is leading the effort to strengthen the Justice System. There is much greater co-ordination between the state agencies and the Attorney General's Office has had increased successes in having the Courts deny bail. The Constitutional Review Commission has proposed a constitutional amendment (which I wholeheartedly support) which would abolish the right to trial by jury which would allow for a more efficient system where an accused person could be tried by a Judge alone.

Madam President, those strategies will produce results in the longer term. However, in the immediate term, we know people are tired of bloodshed.

Indeed, we are all troubled by each murder and I have seen too many young people die, several of whom I know personally.

In this regard, Madam President, I must emphasize that our law enforcement agencies and in particular, the Royal Bahamas Police Force is alert and has intensified its efforts through our Operation 'Safe Bahamas' initiative to reduce the bloodshed. I would submit however, that public perception is being fuelled by our media and social outlets who sensationalize the incidents of homicides but give little or no coverage to the many successes. But what are these successes?

Commendably, in 2014, overall serious crimes against the person and property have decreased. This reduction is significant.

However, homicides remained a major challenge for law enforcement in both New Providence and in Grand Bahama. It was a year that tested the courage, strength, resilience and professionalism of the men and women of the Royal Bahamas Police Force, as it tested us all. But we remain inspired by the message of hope, of the good news, in God's word that we can continue to keep The Bahamas a safe and peaceful Country in which to live.

Hence, the time has come for us to look beyond the media accounts of crime and criminality, and the fear of crime; to empathize with victims of crime and families of victims of crime; to make a renewed effort to prevent crime, bring perpetrators to justice and rehabilitate offenders; to take responsibility by speaking up and speaking out, and by continuing to make a positive contribution to creating a safer Bahamas!

The time has come for us to prevent criminals from setting the terms and agenda of our national dialogue, and from putting us one against the other; to ensure that whether Police, civilian, otherwise, we do not subvert the purposes and principles of our

Country when dealing with crime and criminals; to renew our commitment to our children, our families and our values and traditions; and to make crime prevention and criminal justice a matter of national unity.

Importantly, we must recognize the many exemplary accomplishments of the Royal Bahamas Police Force over the past year. In 2014, for example, the Police Force gave renewed impetus to Police-community partnerships in the fight against crime.

Madam President, training, retraining and the expansion of the Force continued to be a priority.

It also continued to maintain an enviable record of apprehension of criminals, particularly in murder cases.

Madam President, the Government worked tirelessly to meet its own commitments to the Royal Bahamas Police Force by providing the resources, including human, material and financial resources required of a 21st Century Police Force. The Government continues to give its unequivocal support to the Police Force and it is particularly appreciative to those who helped to build the firm foundation on which the Police Force now stands.

Madam President, policing is a vocation; it is a call. It is what God calls one to do with his life; it is an initiative to show one the purpose of work in God's world and equip an individual to carry out his work in a distinctively Christian way. We need to genuinely and sincerely lift up our police officers; we need to hold them up and embrace them because it is a vocation; it takes a unique and special person to be so chosen.

Unfortunately, there are many who frequently double speak as it relates to our law enforcement officers. We want crime down but not when we are breaking the law. But I am here today to encourage all our police officers, all our Defence Force Officers and indeed all our Officers in the Department of Corrections to be steadfast and unmovable.

Never mind the noise in the market, Police officers; you have a record to be proud of; in 2014, not only did overall crimes decline by some 18%, but due directly to your efforts, 400 illegal guns were taken off the streets along with 7,545 illegal rounds of ammunition – do you know how many lives were saved by your efforts?

To add, more than 900 lbs of Cocaine and 20,000 pounds of Marijuana were seized.

I could recall as a young officer, the significant number of young people in our Country who were hooked on drugs – imagine if you did not make those seizures –how many more young people would have been lost?

We are building a safer and stronger Bahamas!

Throughout the USA and Europe, governments are facing the tremendous task of preventing young people from using and abusing all kinds of methamphetamine drugs.

Commonly referred to as “Mandy” in the United Kingdom and “Molly” in the United States, our very own Royal Bahamas Police Force seized in excess of 18,000 Ecstasy tablets -I can’t begin to imagine our young people strung out on such drugs! All of what I have said is newsworthy and should be headline news, but it is not newsworthy.

But what about the \$487,000.00 in cash that was seized?or better yet, the \$4,322,000.00 that was forfeited to the Government in 2014? Those funds will go towards the acquisition of additional law enforcement crime-fighting tools.

To police officers listening under the sound of my voice, although yours is a thankless job, you do indeed have a thankful nation and Government.

My Government has shown that it is committed to providing the necessary resources to enable you to do your job; you continue to live up to your part of the contract and we live fulfil our end of the bargain. We have demonstrated this in bestowing upon the Police (and Defense) Force, the largest promotion ever in its history for all ranks. And we are not done yet...

On behalf of the Government and people of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, the Minister and Ministry of National Security and on my own behalf, I thank each of you, the men and women of our armed Forces for giving your best to protect this nation. I thank your families for their patience and sacrifices, and for the invaluable support they give you.

I know that together, we have the God-given power and authority to minimize crime in The Bahamas.

To add to the good work of the RBPF, you have shown that you have the capacity to take up the challenges of 2015. Already in 2015:

- (1) Some 190 illegal guns were seized;
- (2) Some 1,400 rounds of illegal ammunition were intercepted;
- (3) In several instances, known criminals were intercepted with high powered weapons.

These high powered weapons contained illegal bullets upon which were written the names of other known criminals who were the targets of the individual arrested;

- (4) A shipment of eight illegal weapons were intercepted at a major Port here in New Providence and a number of persons were hauled before the Court;
- (5) In Grand Bahama, a shipment of a cache of illegal high-powered guns were intercepted and those culprits were caught and are currently facing criminal charges;
- (6) Here in New Providence, a 37 year old male was arrested and charged with three weapons and 518 bullets. These weapons included a .40 pistol; a glock 27 pistol and an Intra-tech luger 9mm pistol.
- (7) Cracked major armed robbery and stolen car rings which led to the recovery of significant properties;
- (8) Other persons attempting to smuggle guns, drugs and people into The Bahamas have been taken into custody and are before our courts; and
- (9) As I speak, the police possibly prevented another homicide of a female who was abducted several nights ago; the males are presently in police custody.

This is all about building a Safer, Stronger, Modern Bahamas!

Madam President, I can go on much further. As a matter of fact, since 2012, more than 1,400 illegal guns and 30,000 rounds of illegal ammunition were taken off the streets by the Police. I highlight the number of firearm seizures as more than 80 % of the murders are committed with the use of an illegal firearm.

Madam President, as further evidence to our commitment to building a safer Bahamas, my Government has undertaken the complete ban of wrecked/unsalvageable vehicles and those vehicles with no clear title and over ten years from the United States of America and abroad in the 2015/2016 Budget.

This is necessary because we continue to record a high volume of stolen vehicles.

According to the RBPF, up to June 16, 2015, a total of 450 vehicles were stolen. The majority of these vehicles are of the Nissan and Honda model. These are the main types of aged vehicles imported in a wrecked manner or no title.

In recent conversations with Nissan and Honda dealers, the numbers of repairs that are made to such vehicles do not match the number of parts being sold by the respective companies. The only conclusion is that vehicles are being stolen to repair wrecked/old vehicles imported into the Country.

I must add that the revenue/monies generated by the import of these vehicles do not match the expenditure by Government to recruit police and fight this menacing crime problem.

Madam President, as a further testament to our commitment to building a safer Bahamas, my Government has undertaken to:

- (1) Consider and provide fixed scanners at our ports;
- (2) Provide for better screening of luggage and other items from abroad;
- (3) Provide training in firearms and illegal contraband smuggling for persons employed at our Ports of entry;
- (4) Review and strengthen legislation to accompany policies and procedures relating to the handling of packages, etc. from abroad;
- (5) Heighten our cooperation with our US and Caribbean counterparts regarding firearms interdiction and tracing; and
- (6) Review and strengthen our criminal laws regarding penalties relating to such matters.

Additionally, my Government is committed to providing the Police with:

- Body Armor (Bullet proof vests)
- Specialty Footwear for Mobile Patrol Officers

- Visibility vests for Flying Squad, DEU, Firearms and Gangs, Anti-Terrorist Unit
- Additional Firearms and Ammunition
- Firearm Holsters
- Handcuffs and cases
- Batons and cases
- Hand held radio and cases
- Additional Ford Taurus Patrol Cars
- Additional small cars for station duties (fuel efficient)
- Motorcycles
- Bicycles
- Jeeps and trucks for Family Islands
- 30 seat buses
- Approval for radio communications upgrade (current and three years into the future)

My Government is further committed to providing the Police with:

- Recruitment of three additional squads in 2015/2016 budget
- Recruitment of Reserves squads (30 persons each)
- Funding for local training courses for police officers of all ranks at Police Training College

We are on course to building a Safer Bahamas!

Madam President, as I reflect over these past three years, I am indeed privileged to work in this PLP Administration as part of the new generation of leaders recruited by the Rt. Hon Prime Minister. Prior to my appointment to this place and the Cabinet, I served my country as a senior member of the Royal Bahamas Police Force and the fight against crime has been my passion over these past years.

As a new generation leader, I do not nor have I ever accepted the view espoused by some that the status quo is to be accepted and that things will always be this way. I refuse to accept this as I believe that fundamentally, it is not consistent with reality and the purpose of governance.

Madam President, I reflect on the question posed to me by the student. Is The Bahamas Stronger, Is it Safer? Absolutely. Stronger. Safer now. Stronger than we were in 2012 when we assumed office. Safer than we were in 2012 when we assumed office.

Madam President, there has been much debate on our Party over the past weeks. Much debate on the new generation leaders and if we are imploding.

People who have fundamentally opposed the Progressive Liberal Party and all we stand for have been working overtime. The vultures encamp around us. Encamp as you must however. This Party presses on. Whilst others talk, we work. We work and we press on.

Madam President, we in the PLP is no stranger to dissention. In fact, members Opposite owes their very existence to a dissention in our ranks and the subsequent formation of the Free National Movement- yet we press on.

Our Agenda unchanged- those who no longer share the vision are free to leave; our benches are deep with replacements abound. WE PRESS ON!

Madam President, the core values of our Party - to help the dispossessed, to empower the powerless – to strengthen the state of our country remain.

Others grandstand- but put their records to the test. What have you done, how have you helped?

Madam President, it is easy to complain, as they say 'talk is cheap'. But for those of us truly committed to public life, we know and understand that after talking, you have the people who need help.

Madam President, the economic transformation which this administration has led has left our harshest critics stunned. The talk of doom and gloom has failed to produce the desired results. We have successfully implemented the most significant reform to the taxation system in our history. Is it perfect? Nothing on this side of Heaven is but it represents progress. PROGRESS!

And we are not finished; our work is not yet complete.

In spite of the noise in the market, we will roll out our National Health Insurance. Healthcare Madam President. Whilst others spoke of catastrophic coverage (whatever that means or meant) we remain committed and will deliver comprehensive care.

The Great Progressive Liberal Party threads on. Dissenters departed, doors remain open. Our Party is maintained by shared vision, not chains.

Madam President, as it relates to crime we are stronger. We continue to strengthen the resources available to our security agencies to wage this unrelenting war on crime and its causes. We have ignited our Urban Renewal 2.0; we will expand our Tourism based policing; we will further energize our School

based policing initiative; we will retrofit our Forensic Laboratory; we are enhancing our intelligence capabilities (NIA is coming); We are stamping out these gangs; we are witnessing speedier trials and more convictions; We are Stronger....

Yes, we are winning. Winning because we have a comprehensive plan to address crime and criminality. We have implemented programmes to attack crime and its causes.

Madam President in addition to the funds which this Budget provides for Urban Renewal, funds have been allocated for initiatives to attack youth unemployment. Increased jobs and opportunities for our youth particular young males will produce dividends in reducing the probability that those persons will resort to lives of crime.

As it relates to crime generally, we are having great successes in this war (give examples of large gun seizures, drugs and cash in Confiscated Assets Funds). WE MUST STAY THE COURSE, WE MUST WIN THIS WAR. Our murder numbers remains high due to the challenges posed by a small group of hardened, callous criminals who are attempting to destabilise our communities.

These criminals will not prevail. We must not let them prevail.

Madam President, yes the Bahamas is a Stronger Bahamas and we continue to get stronger.

This Progressive Liberal Party led by the Rt. Hon Prime Minister is delivering much needed reforms and is transforming this Country-resolving deep rooted and long standing issues.

The Great Party remains great. The PLP is stronger. We are the party for this time and this season. We are the only Party now capable of governing.

Madam President, this Budget and our stewardship of the people's finances since coming into office evidence our strength as a Party and as a government.

The Deficit has been slashed; VAT is a resounding success; Investment Incentives have been extended to Bahamians and our least fortunate citizens; National Health Insurance is on the way; additional support has been given to our most vulnerable citizens. We are making significant inroads in crime; our borders are more secure; our economy shows positive signs of growth; our court system is becoming more efficient and its capacity is increasing; less persons are being released on bail; overall crime numbers are down.

Yes Madam President, this Progressive Liberal Party is working and has made The Bahamas Stronger.

I am a new Generation PLP and I along with other new Generation PLP Leaders seated around this Table here are committed to the work of this Party and our government to make The Bahamas even Stronger.

Without reservation, I support this Budget and the compendium of Bills to implement its reforms.

May God continue to bless the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, the hardworking members of our uniformed Forces and indeed, all the people of this great Commonwealth.