



MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC GROWTH &
INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

2026 SECTORAL DEBATE

THEME:

LAND TITLING:

THE KEY TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PRESENTED BY:

HON. ROBERT MONTAGUE, CD, MP

Minister with Responsibility for
Land Titling and Settlements



Madam Speaker,

Thank you, may I commend you and your astute, fair and determined leadership of this House, My Lady, stay strong. Firstly, I want to give thanks to the Heavenly Father for granting me this privilege. To the Prime Minister for appointing me to his Cabinet and to my colleagues from both sides, thanks for your guidance and friendship.

Let me express my appreciation to the Clerk and her staff, to Mrs. Arlene Williams, the best and hardest working Permanent Secretary and her staff at the Ministry, to Everett Hyatt, Willard Hylton, Shadae Brown, Lisa-Kay Saddler and Loraine McFarlane, thank you.

To my security team, thanks for all you do. To Natalie Mirander, Diadre Moulton Gray, Amanada Pollack, Shanna Stewart, Chedine Kelly, and Dijonnae Connage, my administrative staff, thank you. To the best management team, supervisors, Councillors and Caretakers, bloggers and Party workers, thank you. To the great people of Western St. Mary, thank you for giving me the privilege of serving you, for the fourth time.

Madam Speaker, in June last year when friends were few, the workers of Western St. Mary rallied, the people stood by me, so that, when a 19% deficit was broadcast and bandied about, some thought that I was done! But ah come mi did just ah come!!



The JLP Team, with almost no resources, turned a 19-point deficit into a 5-point victory, in less than 3 months and placed us in the top 6 of candidates with the most votes in the last election. **Madam Speaker**, this is the stuff that books are written about.

The people of Western St. Mary know that this year we will complete the water projects, so Springfield, Hartlands, Halifax, Three Hills, Tower Isle, Brooklyn Road, Kiddland, Charles Town, Orcabessa, Mile Gully, and George Town will see marked improvement. Bless you, Minister Samuda.

The clinics in Fellowship Hall and Wood Park will soon be done, so thanks to Minister Tufton and his team. All clinics have been repaired and upgraded and work will soon start on the new Hunts Town Clinic, thanks to the Allen family, from Top Pen, for donating the land free of cost. Thank you Minister Bartlett and the tourism team for all you have done and are about to do. Minister Grange, thanks for the work on the mini-stadium and we are looking forward to your commitment to the Phase 2 funds.

Minister Green, the farmers and fisherfolk say big up and the people of Hartlands say remember the commitment that you publicly gave them when you came to the potato launch in Guys Hill. Minister Morgan, all of Western St. Mary, has asked me to thank you for what you are doing, but are also asking when are you coming to tour our roads?

Mango Valley and Mile Gully say that 1PM promised them their road and they are confident that he will follow through. He has never failed them yet and they know he has spoken to Minister Morgan already.

The Tacky school community wants Dr. Dana Morris Dixon to know that they are waiting for her to purchase the land beside the school so they can be on one campus.

I also wish to congratulate Tacky High as a powerhouse in school boy cricket. Recently, the school under- 14 cricket team bowled out York Castle High for zero! In 9.2 overs.

This has never happened before, but we are still checking the records. Congratulations to Tacky High, coming from their main sponsor.

I will speak more about Western St. Mary in the other debate.

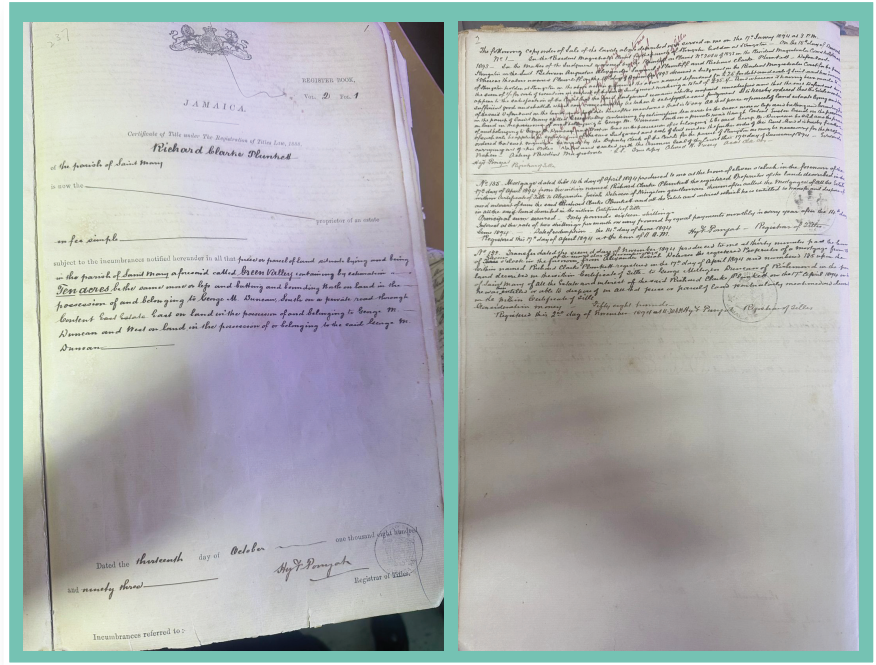
Madam Speaker, I have been entrusted with building out new systems and methods to make land titling and land settlement better, **because we are building on strong foundations to secure Jamaica's future.**

I also have a great team at the National Land Agency (NLA). One of the best agencies of government, if not the best. I wish to congratulate the NLA on their 25th Anniversary.

Please take a bow, Miss Walcott, on behalf of a great team at the National Land Agency.

So, we start at the beginning. We have found that the oldest land title in Jamaica, volume 2 Folio 1, is for 10 acres in Green Valley (Aqualta Vale) in St. Mary, dated 1894. We are appealing to anyone with an older title to come forward so that we can record it.

There are approximately 970,000 parcels of land on our valuation roll. Five hundred and fifty thousand (550,000) do have titles, but we know that there have been informal sub-divisions, so most of our lands do not have a registered title and more do not have the title registered in the current occupant's name.



We have 379 land settlements, a combination of land lease and settlements with 62,690 formal parcels of land. Our checks have so far revealed that approximately 35% have been informally sub-divided.

So, between the untitled lands, informal sub-divisions, non-owner occupants and land settlements, we need approximately 600,000 new titles to completely solve the land challenges we face.

As a result of these challenges, land cannot be properly passed through generations, there are property disputes, death, broken families and the true benefits cannot be realised from the land. Government cannot get the right amount of taxes and citizens cannot get the services they need, like regular garbage collection, fire services and streetlights.

Jamaica! We have a problem.

How are we as a government moving to solve the problem?

- We have elevated the land titling portfolio to the Cabinet level.
- We are moving to solve the lack of human resources by partnering with the Government and people of South Korea, in opening a training school, to train surveyors, draftsmen, readers and checkers and all the related professions in land matters, excepting lawyers.
- We thank the Government and people of the South Korea for signing off and funding this US\$9M project. The impact of this partnership will be enormous as the bulk of the funds will be used to invest in our people and expand the pool of available professionals. It will also introduce new technologies and increase our capacity to produce more titles.
- We have signed an agreement with the Certified Commercial Investment Member Institute (CCIMI) to further train and certify persons in the commercial real estate industry. The CCIMI is a world-recognised professional certification only available in 31 countries and Jamaica makes 32. It will result in more highly trained and skilled professionals in our real estate sector.
- We are putting on more workshops for lawyers on how to complete land applications, and these courses are accredited.
- We have increased our panel of referees from one (1) to five (5), and we intend to do more.
- We will increase our public education so persons will know how to get a title.
- We are appointing more Adjudication Committees, and we are exploring the option of referring adverse possession applications to Adjudication Committees.

- ▶ We intend to digitise all our processes including surveys, so that we can begin by next September the issuing of e-Titles. This will make the process smoother, easier and more secure. This will then allow us to do upwards of 30,000 or more e-titles per year.
- ▶ We now have a partnership with Fijitsu, to digitise our records and introduce new technologies into our processes to make them faster yet more secure. We intend by next September, as was said before, to begin a pilot that will recall old titles and replace them with an e-Title.
- ▶ The e-Title system will also help landowners, to watch their property, so that they will be alerted if someone applies for the title of their lands. This will reduce the instance of persons moving to take over your land by adverse possession. There will be a fee of course for this property watch service.



Adverse Possession

Madam Speaker, some people are abusing the adverse possession arrangement. Some have made an industry out of it. While we as a government support the productive use of land, we do not support wholesale, and speculative possession.

Equally landowners here and abroad cannot have lands and do not exercise ownership. We appeal to you to visit your lands, fence it, use it productively, pay taxes or sell it! But do not just abandon it. Do not leave it to chance. However, we are examining how we can refer adverse possession applications to the local Adjudication Committee, for their input on these applications.

This along with the property watch service, will help to level the playing field. But the best remedy is for you to use the land productively. We want our lands in production.

We want to encourage landowners that they must watch their properties and make economic use of them. Paying a little tax does not solve the adverse possession challenge, landowners must also occupy and use their lands.

It will also help the Government by more accurately identifying idle lands. Digitising the processes will also help us to identify and flag informal subdivisions whenever we are updating the valuation rolls.

Systematic Land Titling

Madam Speaker, it will take us about two (2) decades to get our titling issues resolved if we have the full cooperation of the public. Longer without it. We have two (2) major streams for titling, systematic and voluntary or Ad Hoc.

Under the Systematic Land Registration process, the Government declares an area, and provides surveyors to survey every parcel, pays for the lawyers to do the applications and produce the title. A caveat is lodged against the title until the money is paid back, however, no interest is applied and you can pay in instalments.

The voluntary or Ad Hoc process is when you have land in an area that's not declared as systematic, so you do your own survey, pay your lawyer or the Land Administration and Management Programme (LAMP) to do the application.

Under the systematic land process, the Government pays upfront and in the Ad hoc land process, you pay upfront.

Surveyor's Loan

Many of our small land occupants find it a little challenging sometimes to find the surveyors' fees. So, the Prime Minister has instructed that we find a solution. We are therefore proposing a revolving fund where land holders, of two (2) acres and below, can apply for a surveyor fee loan. Once the applicant applies through LAMP, an NLA-trained lawyer or recognised land management services company, they will qualify and the funds will go directly to the surveyor and a caveat lodged against the title, so that taxpayers will recover the money.



Churches

In our drive for partnership, we have taken our manifesto and election promise forward, we have met with our churches, and we are working with them to utilise the window that has been established to help get untitled church lands titled. We have trained their lawyers, have listened to and helped to identify the issues as they refer the parcels to us. We are confident that church-owned lands, including schools, clinics and



community playing fields will eventually be titled and we hope the churches will join us in encouraging others to get their titles.

Vendors Mortgage

The National Land Agency, through the Commissioner of Lands, will expand the vendor's mortgage window. This will allow persons who have bought government land to immediately get their titles with a registered vendor's mortgage. This will allow them to continue paying their instalments, but have their titles in their hands.

Squatting

Madam Speaker, we are in the middle of intensive consultations and discussions as to our squatting challenge.

We know that there is a need for land for the landless and for orderly development. There is also the need for respect for property rights.

Some of the issues under discussion are:

- (1) Should we reduce the time for adverse possession of crown lands?
- (2) Should we increase the time for private lands for adverse possession?
- (3) How do we balance the various needs?

But we are settled on these points.

No MP, Councillor, JP, bigman nor area leader can sell government lands.

So those persons scamming people and saying it's the MP send them, stop.

Because it nuh go soh!

We are removing the incentive for land scamming. Remember, government land belongs to the people and is bought for development. People are squatting on land for schools, clinics, roadways, and even historic sites.

There is a massive cost to rehabilitate and resettle areas.

We have met with all MPs with a squatting challenge. So, as of June 9th, people who go on to crown lands will no longer be considered for a settlement programme, and after further investigations, those who sell crown lands will be prosecuted and will lose their money.

We have done drone and spatial surveys and know what is already on our lands. So, if you go on the land after today, you will face consequences. In the meantime, we will soon announce a major programme to address land for the landless.

CONTAINERISED HOMES FOR HURRICANE RELIEF

After Hurricane Melissa, this government moved swiftly to acquire containerised houses to help those whose houses were completely destroyed. The Prime Minister has recently asked me to give some oversight towards the completion of this project. We collectively express support to the families that were affected by Hurricane Melissa and deepest regret to those who mourn the loss of loved ones. As I gather the facts, examine the systems and move to build out the units for our fellow Jamaicans, I make an appeal for us to be united as a nation in this effort. I seek consensus not confrontation, I seek help not hinderance. I seek solutions, not setbacks. The people need solutions, solace and stability.



To help our brothers and sisters in need must be our sole aim, our sacred objective and our national goal.

It is the first time Jamaica has attempted this type of project in such a big way, so, let me admit that we will not always get everything right, every time. We are humans.



But we must use all resources, all safeguards and oversight to implement the project.

We have just established and signed a Memorandum of Understanding, with other ministries, agencies and stakeholders to share data on damage beneficiary information. This will prevent duplication and delays.



Housing

So, to that end, we launched a broad-based housing committee to not only deal with containerised housing but housing in Jamaica in general, the type, the needs, standards, affordability, etc.

We have invited people from both local and central government, professional bodies, the private sector, our universities, contractors, developers, HEART/NSTA Trust, and agencies that deal with housing; the Integrity Commission, and we have also extended an invitation to the Auditor General.

The Opposition is an integral player, and I wish to publicly thank Mr. Mark Golding for his gracious and kind letter, in which he brought to my attention that the person we had listed as the Opposition representative had not been named by him. We acknowledged this and added his nominee while retaining the original person.

We wish to place on record and thank all the Committee members for their contribution. So much can be achieved when we work together.

This Committee produced a repair manual, based on the building codes, suggested no-build zones, and we will be segmenting this code to better meet the needs of the people.



The Prime Minister, from early in the process, had mandated that the bases and accompanying works for units should come from donated funds.

This is so that people who donated their hard-earned cash can clearly see and know how their money was spent and on what.

Furthermore, in years they can come and look at the bases to these containerised homes and feel satisfied that their donation helped to bring comfort to a family, shelter after a storm and a home for a child.

The Auditor General's Report on the donated funds has vindicated the Prime Minister's wise decision. As you go through the Report, it has not said any funds are missing or misappropriated. The spend has been slow, that's true because we are following other processes and navigating uncharted waters. But the hard-earned donations of Jamaicans, foreigners, agencies, companies, and partners, are all accounted for.

All of Jamaica should take a bow!

This is a proud moment in our journey as a young nation. Having been hit by the most devastating weather event, thousands of people were displaced, many government systems and people affected, prolonged period without some basic services and food shortages. In some areas, farms were destroyed, but nevertheless, we have held our collective head high because people's hard-earned money that was donated is all accounted for, no thought, suggestion or conclusion of irregularities.

Prime Minister, congratulations, once again, you have demonstrated the type of leadership that continues to make Jamaicans proud.

Big up yourself, mi Boss.

The audit was not only about how much was unspent or spent, it showed some gaps and showed up weaknesses. The country can be assured that our Prime Minister has already moved to implement the recommendations, strengthen the weaknesses and close the gaps.

The report is good for Jamaica.

It shows that the Government can account for donated money. It helped our organisations, charities and institutions who also received funds, lighting the way to accountability.



Maybe some of these bodies should at least say how much was donated, how much was spent and how much is left. And of course, what you are going to use it for. Accountability requirements are not just for the Government, but for all Jamaicans.

It was originally felt that over 12,000 houses were needed but many people pulled on insurance, family, community and their own resources to begin to rebuild. The Government also assisted thousands under the ROOFS programme. This Government has already spent \$67 billion on hurricane relief and recovery, whilst still maintaining the fundamentals of the economy. The sacrifice of our people, the wise leadership of our Prime Minister and team has allowed us to invest \$67 billion in our people, while not ruining the economy. This is not 'run with it', this is management.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Security and the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development now estimate that approximately 2,000 to 2,500 people need this solution.

We have on order 2,524 units and the government and people of China donated 200 units; for a total of 2,724 units. Of that amount, 924 are on the island. Nine hundred (900) are being held by the Jamaica Defence Force (JDF) in Western Jamaica. 1,200 of these, now in the Island, were bought by the NHT and more will come to take it to 2,500. We thank the National Housing Trust, and this kills the argument that the National Housing Trust is not providing for Jamaicans.

When we moved to build out the bases, for the units in Westmoreland for some persons in shelters, we had already completed five (5) bases when an Agency rightfully questioned an issue, and we had to stop and re-work the matter. That incident provided valuable insight, and we are moving to give the beneficiaries a grant and allow them to build their own bases, but they must be inspected by the Municipal Authorities.

We also wish to thank Red Cross, who has donated three hundred (300) wooden houses, as well as other NGOs and individuals for their assistance with providing housing assistance.



The Prime Minister has also instructed the National Housing Trust to build out un-utilised sections of current schemes, especially in Western Jamaica, to accommodate persons who are to be relocated. This will help in reducing the costs of supporting infrastructure. We are hopeful that each NHT scheme islandwide will have that section that our less fortunate people can be adequately catered for.

On this note, the PM has also instructed the NHT to seek their Board's consent to solve the sewage issue for the Lighthouse Road squatter regularisation project.

This issue of delayed or misaligned recommendations, advice, and slow bureaucracy makes the case why NaARRA is needed and needed now.

For any unused units this is the plan: we are going to keep some units for future disasters and store them with ODPEM. Other units will be donated to those infirmaries with space to help to reduce our social patients in hospitals and release the estimated 270 beds that are occupied in our public hospitals. These beds can be used by those who are sick and in desperate need of hospitalised care.

The New Social Housing Programme will benefit if any is left and any other social programmes, including those operated by Members of Parliament.

MINISTRY

The Government, through the Ministry responsible for Housing, owns and maintains 113 housing schemes. Some as rentals and some as freeholds, but they were never transferred. Starting this year, we will have them assessed and do corrective works on at least one scheme so that we can apply to the Municipal Authorities for certificate of completion, have them titled and titles issued to beneficiaries.





Based on the amnesty for people owing J\$150,000 or less to the Government for housing units, we have found that over 2,000 housing accounts qualify. This government, this caring government, is moving to produce and release titles for long waiting first-time home owners.

The Ministry, as part of its hurricane response, assisted over 3,000 people with copies of their documents that were destroyed or damaged, at no cost to them. We had these documents on file. We have distributed over 1,000 titles so far this year and have more to do.

This financial year we intend to produce over 5,000 titles, especially in Western Jamaica and distribute them. Our surveyors are currently doing 4,000 surveys and in partnership with the NHT, we intend to do more.

We are in discussions with the Ministry of Mining to finalise a project to create titles for the over 3,000 Jamaicans who have been relocated by the bauxite industry and cannot get titles. This government, this Andrew Holness-led government is moving to correct that, very soon.

Legislation

It is our intention during this year to pass the Registration (Shared Community) Act, which is to be referred to a joint select parliamentary committee. We also intend to introduce amendments to the Registration of Titles Act, which will have consequential amendments to the special Provisions act the Land Surveyor's Act, and the Land Valuation Act.



CONCLUSION

Madam Speaker, there are too many Jamaican families who have worked on land for years and cannot realise the full benefits from the land because it's not theirs. Too many schools, churches and clinics cannot access grant funding because they have no proof of ownership, too many wasted hours because of family fights over 'dead lef', too many lives have been lost, too much wasted potential, but **Madam Speaker**, no more!

This government is determined to right the wrongs of the past and properly title every square inch of Jamaica using technology, training and partnerships. That is how we build on strong foundations for generations to come.

To those awaiting containerised housing solutions we seek your continued patience as we work through the bureaucracy, the solution is close. Yes, we understand that sometimes the bureaucracy feels like it may kill democracy, but there are laws, rules and regulations that we must observe. We seek your understanding. We were happy to help those that needed to copy documents, happy that we have begun to issue titles or have carved a path for you in a government high-rise building to get your title. Thanks for the professionals' help in establishing suggested no-build zones as we recover forward. I also extend thanks to staff in the various government entities, as we work to improve our systems.

Madam Speaker, my father of blessed memory, has always said everyone should get their name on one of three rolls.

The roll of life, you must, he said take the golden pen and write your name up there, the voters roll, so that you can continue to vote and ensure that the Jamaica Labour Party continues in office and finally get your name in the Registrar Book of Titles. Own a little piece of Jamaica and make sure it is properly titled. **Madam Speaker, this is not just about land, it is about building strong foundations for family, community and country.**

This is a call for all of us to use our energy and efforts to get our people titles ...

"So that Jamaica may increase in beauty, fellowship and prosperity".

Madam Speaker, if it so pleases you, Thank you.