

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of the House,

In keeping with a personal mandate, I have frequently updated this Honourable House and the nation on the status and progress achieved in the main negotiating theatres in which Jamaica is involved - The World Trade Organization (WTO), the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the African, Caribbean and Pacific/European Union (ACP/EU) Cooperation arrangements.

Whilst the trade issues will undoubtedly continue to preoccupy our focus and attention, I would like to devote the first part of my presentation to providing the House with an overview of the scope of activities and initiatives being pursued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, in implementation of its mandate over the past year.

Mr. Speaker,

Over the years, the thrust of our foreign policy has been to fashion a strategic vision for Jamaica's role in international affairs, which would assist us in confronting the economic, social and political challenges at home. Integral to this, has been our active engagement with other countries on matters of interest to us as a small developing country, and which enables us to respond to the imperatives of our time.

Among the priorities being pursued as a matter of urgency, is the active promotion of Jamaica's interests and development projects overseas, including our programme designed to strengthen our relationship and dialogue with the Jamaican Diaspora. We have also devoted much attention to the expansion of cooperation programmes with our bilateral partners, and the establishment of diplomatic relations with other states. We have done so while maintaining our active support for the strengthening of the multilateral process and for the creation of a more enabling environment to protect our security and enhance the prospects for Jamaica's sustained economic and social development.

Mr. Speaker,

Any review of our accomplishments or shortcomings in the global arena, must by necessity, take account of the current international situation in which we have had to operate, and which many agree, has been a very difficult and unstable world environment, presenting the most daunting challenges for small developing states like Jamaica.

We therefore remain seriously disturbed that in addition to contending with the more negative and pernicious features of the globalization process, we also face a heightened sense of insecurity, fear and instability around varying parts of the globe.

In all of this, the critical issues of importance to the developing world, including implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, have become seriously undermined or are in danger of being sidelined.

MULTILATERALISM

Mr. Speaker,

When we assumed responsibility for the conduct of our own foreign relations in 1962, we, like other countries in the international community, expressed our adherence to the rule of law and the principles of the United Nations Charter, which govern the conduct of international relations. Our commitment to those provisions as the basis for our approach and presence on the international stage has never wavered, and has served us well in the promotion of our national interests and in our defence of those relationships which we hold dear.

It is with grave concern, therefore, that we view the current international environment in which the action of a few threaten the existence of many, in which military might is used to settle international disputes and in which unilateral action replaces the growing need for multilateral responses to international developments.

Convinced that it offers us the only viable source of protection, we have promoted the need for the international community to take action to ensure that multilateralism is equitable, democratic, effective and principled. We will continue to work with our partners, and through the various fora in pursuit of these objectives.

58th SESSION OF THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In September of last year, I attended the 58th Session of the United Nations General Assembly as a member of Jamaica's delegation which was headed by the Most Honourable Prime Minister.

In our policy statement to the General Assembly, Jamaica expressed its preoccupation in the clearest terms, that the status quo does not serve the interests of Small States like ourselves, and that there is an urgent need for the restoration of faith and confidence in the multilateral system, through a return to respect for the norms of international law, the principles of the Charter and the ideals of natural justice.

There was consensus among most delegations, that a return to the multilateral process as envisaged by the United Nations is an imperative. The trends towards unilateralism - the US-UK led war against Iraq and its aftermath being a most poignant example - have all served to undermine the principle of collective security and the global order as established over fifty years ago.

Mr. Speaker,

The message which also resounded from Jamaica's presentation was that the current multilateral architecture is skewed against the promotion of sustainable policies, especially in small countries. This picture is further compounded by threats of terrorism, nuclear proliferation, spread of weapons of mass destruction, and the continued

escalation of war and violence in Africa, and in the Middle East. The Most Honourable Prime Minister called for the strengthening of multilateralism beginning with the "UN renaissance", that is, a radical reform of its organs. The debate continues, but it is our hope that talks will be translated into meaningful reforms which will benefit all countries.

In keeping with our determination to promote the development of the international legal regime governing the conduct of states, at the 58th session of the UNGA, Jamaica deposited the instruments of ratification of the Convention on Transnational Organized Crime and its three Protocols. We also signed the UN Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and deposited Instruments of Accession for the Montreal Convention on substances that deplete the Ozone Layer and the Beijing Amendment to the same Convention. The Convention attempts to restrict tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, establish label controls and "indoor" clean air control and to reduce the illicit trade in tobacco. Jamaica fully supports the Treaty and notes that the requirements set out are the minimum standards.

IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Our membership in international organizations and our alliance with groups of developing countries is in part the vehicle through which we seek our goals.

Our presence at the annual sessions of the General Assembly allows us to pursue Jamaica's foreign policy objectives at the multilateral level, to promote and protect its interest in achieving economic growth and development, and maintaining peace and security in the region. Issues which are of immediate interest to us include the maintenance of peace and security, the promotion of multilateralism, the reform of the United Nations, prevention and control of HIV/AIDS, sustainable development and international economic co-operation, international trade and development, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and the implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action.

The pandemic of HIV/AIDS, illicit trafficking in drugs and arms and transnational organized crimes are manifestations of maladies with which we cannot cope on our own, but which rather require the collaborative and global effort best pursued through multilateralism.

In addition to attending the General Debate, I participated in meetings of regional and other multilateral bodies held on the margins of the General Assembly. These include the Ministerial Meetings of the CARICOM Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR), Commonwealth, Group of 77 (G-77), Group of Fifteen (G-15) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

THE COMMONWEALTH

Jamaica remains appreciative of the significant development and other technical assistance it continues to receive from the Commonwealth. The country particularly values the extensive work of the Commonwealth in promoting the interests of its Member countries in the areas of international trade, the development of Small States, the promotion of democracy and the engagement of civil society in the development process.

In December 2003, Jamaica joined other Commonwealth countries at the Summit in Abuja, Nigeria. These regular meetings of Commonwealth leaders are important for addressing political, economic and other development issues of interest to Member countries, as well as for assessing and taking decisions on matters relating to regional and international peace and security.

The Summit meeting, the theme of which was “Development and Democracy – Participating for Peace and Prosperity”, issued the Abuja Communiqué and the Aso Rock Declaration, the latter containing a Statement on Multilateral Trade, which focuses on the promotion of free and fair trade. The Declaration also agreed to initiatives to address the development agenda, including increased financing for development; HIV/AIDS; international terrorism; the situation faced by Small Developing States in achieving sustainable development; increased education opportunities and the empowerment of young people in the Commonwealth.

Jamaica’s delegation is credited with playing an integral role in some of the significant decisions taken by the Summit. It is in this context that I make reference to the Commonwealth Statement on Zimbabwe, which made recommendations on that country’s re-engagement with the Organization. It is regrettable that in the wake of that agreement, Zimbabwe decided to withdraw from the Commonwealth.

NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT (NAM)

Jamaica’s membership in the Non-Aligned Movement is a longstanding and important one. We remain convinced of the continued relevance of the Movement in these politically and economically challenging times. The NAM has the ability to serve as a vital medium for providing checks and balances to unilateralist tendencies in an increasingly unipolar world. We are in full support of the outcomes of the 13th NAM Summit held in February last year, which reaffirmed the commitment of developing countries to revitalize and strengthen the movement as a forum for harmonizing positions and addressing the pressing concerns in the international world.

INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Jamaica remains concerned over the continued widening of the gap between developed and developing countries within the global economy. It is true to say that wealth is increasing in some areas. It is also undeniable that poverty is growing at an alarming rate in many parts of the world.

In its Policy Statement to the United Nations General Assembly at the 58th Session last year, Jamaica stated that while developing countries were continually told that prosperity will come with policies of liberalization, a minimalist state and deregulation, this model does not succeed everywhere, particularly in the developing world. It is our view that what the developing world needed was not "sermons about the precepts of democracy, obeying the rule of law and respect for human rights" but help in preserving these rights from erosion by the instabilities that are derived from underdevelopment and the steady deterioration in the global political environment.

It will be recalled that Jamaica participated in 2002 in the International Conference on Financing for Development held in Monterrey, Mexico and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. We believe that progress towards development requires that the pledges of Monterrey and the targets of Johannesburg are taken seriously and their commitments implemented.

Jamaica remains vigilant in supporting all efforts to ensure that these commitments are honoured. In this regard, Jamaica, as a member of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), participated in the two Annual Spring Meetings of that body with the Bretton Woods Institutions and the World Trade Organization, as well as in the High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development, which was held in October 2003. The Monterrey Consensus designates these meetings as follow-up mechanisms to the Conference.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND BARBADOS PROGRAMME OF ACTION

The attainment of sustainable development is the greatest challenge of our time. It requires development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

In pursuit of the implementation of the Johannesburg Plan of Action we have been working together with other line Ministries and Agencies in a number of areas including the eradication of poverty through increased trade, seeking to attract financial resources to fulfil internationally agreed development goals, and promoting Partnership Initiatives or action-oriented programmes between governments, business and civil society.

It is expected that later this year, the international community will undertake a comprehensive review of the implementation of the 1994 Barbados Programme of Action on Small Island Developing States, in Port Louis, Mauritius. It is envisaged that this ten-year review meeting will give countries a further opportunity to focus attention and resources on critical social, economic and environmental issues facing small states. Jamaica has been actively participating in the Review process. We have submitted our National Assessment Report, detailing our achievements to date in implementing the Barbados Programme of Action and suggesting the way forward. We have also participated in the various preparatory consultations held over the past year, and have

been able to ensure that specific issues of importance to Jamaica have been included as part of the priorities of the SIDS.

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDG)

The Government of Jamaica remains unswerving in its pursuit of efforts to overcome the challenges of poverty and the alternative of sustainable development, in the light of the new international context being shaped by the phenomenon of globalization. We are committed to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals and Targets agreed upon at the Millennium Summit in September 2000 aimed at meeting basic needs in terms of health, food security and minimum elements of social well-being.

We reaffirm the relevance of the eight principal Millennium Goals to our growth and development. These goals are poverty reduction, achieving universal primary education, gender equality and empowerment of women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability, and developing a global partnership for development.

To date, Jamaica has made substantial progress in the pursuit of these goals specifically in the steps taken towards the attainment of universal primary education, the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development.

Jamaica is in the process of preparing its report on its achievement, for submission to the United Nations.

GROUP OF FIFTEEN

Jamaica's membership in the G-15 has enabled the exchange of technical expertise and training in the field of agriculture, engineering and development. It has also benefited from scholarships and courses geared towards training in Human Resources, Public Policy and Governance, Trade Policy & International Economic Negotiations. We have also concluded Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITS) with a number of our G-15 partners with the aim of enhancing trade and investment opportunities and deepening our cooperation to promote growth and prosperity in the countries of the South.

Jamaica participated in the 12th Summit of the G-15 held in Caracas, Venezuela in February this year. The Caracas Declaration on Energy and Development adopted by the Summit, reflects the recognition by G-15 Heads of the need to develop concrete intra G-15 programmes “with interested countries, international organizations, and financial institutions, in the utilization, production, distribution, trade and diversification of modern energy sources in a sustainable manner for the benefit of developing countries”.

In the current context of spiralling world oil prices, with all its negative implications for the country, cooperation with other countries is seen as an imperative. There are plans to convene during 2004, a G-15 Meeting of Energy Ministers that would allow the development of programmes and projects to fulfill the spirit of this Declaration. The Government of Jamaica looks forward to playing an active role in the process with a view to further pursuing the development of programmes and projects in Energy Cooperation.

INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY (ISA)

Members of this Honourable House will recall the entry into force of the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea in 1994 and the confirmation of Jamaica as the Headquarters for the International Seabed Authority. On 25th September 2002, Jamaica deposited its Instrument of Ratification in respect of the Protocol on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Seabed Authority.

Mr. Speaker,

I am happy to announce that, after intense and often difficult negotiations between the Government of Jamaica and the International Seabed Authority, both parties signed, on 17 December 2003, the Supplementary Agreement relating to the provision and use of the Block 11 Building at 14 - 20 Port Royal Street to house the Headquarters of the Authority. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade played an instrumental role in bridging the outstanding areas of differences. This development now paves the way for a constructive relationship between us in pursuit of our mutual interests.

The Authority continues its work on drafting the regulations governing the exploration of polymetallic sulphides and cobalt-rich crusts, and in protecting the biodiversity of the deep sea. The Authority's Tenth Session, which runs from 24th May to 4th June 2004, is a very special one, as it incorporates the Organization's Tenth Anniversary celebrations. Let me take this opportunity to reiterate to the International Seabed Authority, the sincere congratulations of the Government of Jamaica on the achievement of this significant milestone, and our commitment to continue to support its activities.

UN HOUSE

We are pleased that Jamaica continues to host a number of the agencies of the United Nations System. Negotiations are under way with these bodies with a view to establishing a centralized location for their operations. The Government has made space available in the Block 11 Building, 14-20 Port Royal Street for that purpose. It should be noted that in addition to the Headquarters of the ISA, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is already located at the Block 11 Building.

Following the bombing of the UN Offices in Baghdad, the United Nations Organization has been carrying out Security Risk and Threat Analysis in all countries hosting UN agencies. On 3rd February 2004, the UN carried out a security risk assessment at 14-20

Port Royal Street. Based on their findings, the City of Kingston has been officially classified by the International Civil Service Commission as a "B" duty station. This is considered to be a very good rating in the global classification scale, which ranges from "A" being the least risky to "E" being extremely risky.

I wish to underscore the commitment of the Government of Jamaica to provide a hospitable and secure environment for these bodies.

I now turn to two other important areas of our mandate – Marine and Air policies.

NATIONAL MARINE POLICY

The National Council on Ocean and Coastal Zone Management has continued to work at implementing various aspects of the White Paper on Ocean and Coastal Zone Management.

The Council has been working on the construction of a marine beacon on South West Rock, Pedro Bank, which is crucial to our maritime delimitation programme. The beacon is required in order to reinforce Jamaica's declaration as an Archipelagic State.

In respect of other projects listed in the Action Plan attached to the White Paper, a meeting of interested donors is being planned in order to attract interest in funding.

The Council has also been working at making fully operational, a Recompression Chamber which had been donated by the British Government, to be used for the treatment of diving illnesses, with potential for a secondary use for the treatment of other ailments such as burns and gangrene. The Chamber is located at the Headquarters of the JDF Coast Guard. A second Recompression Chamber is located at the UWI Discovery Bay Marine Laboratory.

Acting on the instructions of Cabinet, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade has, during the past year or so, collaborated with the Maritime Authority of Jamaica, the Ministry of Transport and Works and the Ministry of Land & Environment to put in place regulations to bring about safer shipping within our territory. We have become a Party to the following International Conventions & Protocols:

1. The Basel Convention on the Control and Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Waste and Their Disposal (Instrument of accession dated December 2, 2002)
2. Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides (Instrument of accession dated August 21, 2002)
3. Protocol of 1988 Relating to the International Convention on Load Lines (Instrument of accession dated April 14, 2003)

4. International Convention on Civil Liability for Bunker Oil Pollution Damage -

(Instrument of accession dated April 14, 2003)

5. Protocol of 1988 Relating to the International Convention for Safety of life at Sea (Instrument of accession dated April 14, 2003)

We commend the Maritime Authority of Jamaica, the Ministries of Land and Environment and Transport and Works as they strive to enhance the safety of our shipping environment.

NATIONAL AIR POLICY

Turning to our National Air Policy, the Ministry continues to be integrally involved in all negotiations on Air Services Agreements.

A final draft text of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) Multilateral Air Services Agreement, acceptable to Jamaica and other CARICOM States, has been concluded. The text, which has been opened for signature, will be signed by Jamaica, subject to a Declaration that we will submit at the time of our signature, as to our interpretation of Article 2, paragraph 1(d) (ii), i.e. that Fifth Freedom Rights may only be granted through bilateral agreements concluded between States Parties concerned.

The passage of the Terrorism (Prevention) Act and Jamaica's accession to the 1988 Protocol for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts of Violence at Airports Serving International Civil Aviation will facilitate Jamaica's signature and later ratification of the "OPEN SKIES" Agreement with the United States of America. The Agreement is being provisionally applied with effect from the 2nd October 2003. This means that, based on reciprocity, there are no restrictions to the number and types of services offered by carriers on the Jamaica/USA routes.

REGIONAL AND HEMISPHERIC RELATIONS

With the continuing impact of globalization and a rapidly changing international political and economic environment, the need for closer links among the countries of the Caribbean Basin and within the hemisphere cannot be over-emphasized. This has necessitated a compelling response from the Region, in view of our small size and vulnerability to external developments. In addition, the changing nature of diplomacy demands a more integrated approach with a greater level of harmonization in our policies and decisions. Against this background, Jamaica remains committed to the regional and hemispheric integration processes.

CARICOM

At the regional level, significant emphasis is being placed on developing a network of alliances with shared goals and interests. Jamaica continues to play an important role in Caribbean integration, making CARICOM relations a central element in its policy-making framework.

The Most Honourable Prime Minister assumed the Chairmanship of CARICOM at the 24th Meeting of the Conference of Heads held in Montego Bay in July 2003. Jamaica's hosting of the Meeting as well as its Chairmanship, were of particular significance as they coincided with the 30th Anniversary of the establishment of the Caribbean Community. The Rose Hall Declaration emanating from the Meeting has provided new impetus in our quest to deepen the regional integration process and to make it more relevant to the everyday lives of the people of our Region.

The major initiative that has been vigorously pursued over the past year is the implementation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) including the establishment of the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ). Progress in these undertakings is critical to the future of the Community, and Jamaica's commitment to commence implementation of the CSME one year ahead of the agreed schedule is testimony to the importance we attach to its successful realization.

HAITI

Mr. Speaker,

Jamaica has within CARICOM sought to remain actively engaged in facilitating a resolution to various crisis situations within the region. The situation in Haiti continues to occupy our attention. The Region played an active and constructive role in seeking to bring about a lasting solution to the political crisis. As Haiti prepared to celebrate its Bicentennial Anniversary in January, the increasingly volatile and deteriorating political climate prompted CARICOM to intensify its engagement. In his capacity as Chairman of CARICOM, the Most Honourable Prime Minister Patterson launched a process of consultations with a view to promoting a framework for cooperation between the Haitian Government and the main opposition parties.

The CARICOM Action Plan, which was fully endorsed by the international community, provided an effective framework for the resolution of the impasse and for improving the security climate, binding both the Government of the then President Aristide and the legitimate opposition to specific commitments within established timeframes. The Plan was predicated on the principles of shared government and governed by the need to strengthen the democratic process and preserve the rule of law.

We therefore continue to hold the view that the circumstances under which the constitutionally elected President Aristide demitted office on 29 February was an interruption of the democratic process and set a dangerous precedent for democratically governments everywhere. CARICOM maintains that there is need for a full investigation to clarify the circumstances leading to the relinquishing of the Presidency by Mr. Aristide.

It was particularly disappointing that the UN Security Council was reluctant to act on the case I presented on 26 February on behalf of CARICOM for the urgent despatch of a multinational force to contain the increasing violence and growing rebel activities throughout Haiti. Three days after, the Council adopted Resolution 1529 authorizing the deployment of a Multinational Interim Force to Haiti. Admittedly, this was what CARICOM had requested, but the circumstances had changed with the departure from office of former President Aristide.

We remain concerned about the lingering political and constitutional issues and believe that the circumstances of 29 February must be fully investigated. CARICOM has requested the convening of a meeting of the OAS Permanent Council to undertake a collective assessment of the situation of democracy in Haiti, with a view to invoking Article 20 of the Inter-American Democratic Charter. This Article provides for such a meeting “in the event of an unconstitutional alteration of the constitutional regime that seriously impairs the democratic order in a Member State.” The meeting of the Permanent Council is now tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, 26 May.

Jamaica, in collaboration with other CARICOM countries, is currently considering the nature and scope of its participation in the UN-led Stabilization Force in Haiti. The recent establishment of a Task Force, headed by a Senior Coordinator, to oversee the Region’s contribution in respective areas, provides a good start towards the fulfillment of our commitment to the Haitian people. We also continue to provide the necessary assistance to those Haitians who have sought refuge in Jamaica, with the welcome support of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

CARICOM remains committed to participating in the efforts of the international community for the economic, social and institutional development of Haiti. Our engagement with the interim Administration will be addressed when Heads meet in Grenada in July. In this regard, the return to constitutional and representative democracy and the holding of free, fair and well-organized elections remain key objectives of the engagement of the Caribbean Community.

ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS)

Jamaica and CARICOM have sought to give new impetus to our relations in the wider Caribbean, including full participation in the work of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) in the critical areas of Trade, Transport, Tourism and Natural Disasters. As we approach the Association’s Tenth Anniversary in July, our goal is to play an effective

role in strengthening its capacity as a Zone of Cooperation for the Caribbean towards achieving sustainable economic, social and cultural development.

In its capacity as Chairman of the Ministerial Council, Jamaica is committed to working with the ACS membership and the Secretariat to ensure the early convening of the Fourth Summit of Heads.

I take this opportunity to welcome the new ACS Secretary General, Mr. Ruben Sillie Valdez of the Dominican Republic, and to acknowledge the contribution made by our own Professor Norman Girvan, former Secretary General, to the cause of regional cooperation and development.

ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS)

Jamaica's commitment to the hemispheric agenda has remained a priority. We continue to participate actively in the work of the Organization of American States (OAS) and its subsidiary bodies in promoting peace and security, democracy, human rights and cooperation for economic and social development in the countries of the Americas.

We remain actively engaged in hemispheric initiatives to combat drug abuse and drug trafficking; promote representative democracy; fight terrorism, corruption and money laundering; strengthen common approaches to security, particularly the multidimensional approach and the special security concerns of small island states.

The development cooperation programmes of the OAS continue to be of integral importance to Jamaica and to the Caribbean region with benefits accruing from projects and programmes in the areas of science and technology, education, tourism, sustainable development and culture.

At the annual Regular Session of the OAS General Assembly to be held 6-8 June this year in Ecuador, our deliberations will focus on the issue of Corruption and its Impact on Social Development and Democracy with a view to strengthening cooperation among the Member States to combat corruption in all its forms.

The Summit of the Americas process has also served to enhance the pace of hemispheric integration. The Special Summit of the Americas held in Monterrey, Mexico last January committed Governments, including Jamaica, to work together to promote economic growth with equity to reduce poverty, social development and democratic governance. The Fourth Summit to be hosted by Argentina in 2005 will provide the opportunity for Member States to review the progress achieved.

REGIONAL BILATERAL COOPERATION

At the bilateral level, our dynamic cooperation programmes with our traditional North American partners have continued to make a positive impact on a number of our priority

needs in critical areas of national development including health, education, business development, security, public sector modernization and capacity development. These relations have been firmly based on mutual respect, shared values and principles, and strong political, economic and trade linkages, at both the bilateral and regional levels.

Jamaica also continues to enjoy excellent relations with the countries of Central and South America, and remains committed to the further deepening and strengthening of political and economic ties with these countries, including the development of initiatives within the framework of established joint consultative and cooperative mechanisms.

Our relations with our non-CARICOM neighbours in the Caribbean continue to be characterized by mutual respect and friendship. We are currently exploring new initiatives towards the deepening of cooperation, transcending language barriers, to our mutual benefit.

EUROPE

The European Union (EU) is the largest provider of grant resources to Jamaica, and has been one of our most consistent development partners. Through its development fund, the EDF, Jamaica became eligible for an indicative allocation of €100 million for poverty alleviation and infrastructural development for the period 2002 – 2007.

This is to be utilized broadly for two categories – A: €73 million to cover macroeconomic support, road transport development and the private sector; and B: €27 million to cover unforeseen needs such as emergency assistance, international debt relief, and the adverse effects of instability in export earnings.

In May 2003, the European Community approved €25 million of the €27 million in emergency assistance available to Jamaica. These funds are to be granted in the form of direct budgetary support to counterbalance the negative fiscal impact of the 2000/2001 flood rains.

The Financial Agreement for Support to the Economic Reform Programme (SERP) III – was signed in 2003. It encompasses €27.0 million for direct budgetary support and €3.0 million for a Human Resources Development and Institutional Strengthening Programme to the Ministries of National Security and Justice.

On 1 May 2004, the EU welcomed ten new members. As these countries accede to full membership, we must recognize that they and the Union will have to make internal adjustments. This will no doubt affect our relations with the Union itself and with its individual members. Although Jamaica enjoys good relations with all the new partners, it will nevertheless be a challenge for us, and indeed for our colleagues in the ACP group, to ensure that our interest and special relationship with the EU are not diminished as a result of the enlargement process.

Our traditional partners in Europe have continued to assist Jamaica through bilateral cooperation programmes in areas of critical importance to our socio-economic development. These programmes have had wide ranging impact on all levels of the society. Security enhancement, healthcare, especially HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment, scholarships and language training are just a few areas that have received assistance.

Our ties with the Kingdom of Belgium were further strengthened through the official visit of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs in November last year. One proposal arising out of the visit is for the reopening of the Belgian Embassy in Kingston by September 2004. The Belgian Government has also committed to assisting Jamaica further in the transport sector with the erection of a transport hub in Half-Way-Tree. Negotiations concerning the financing of the project are already underway. Additionally, Belgium has also offered to provide vital training in trade negotiations.

We look forward to the further strengthening of these relations at the multilateral level with our participation in the Third EU/Latin America and Caribbean Summit (EU/LAC) in Mexico later this month. Aimed at strengthening relations between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean, the Summit will focus on political, economic and development cooperation issues that concur with Jamaica's development agenda. Within the framework of bi-regional development cooperation, such issues will serve to complement the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations.

Africa

Having closely followed the establishment of the African Union (AU), developments during its first year, and also the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), we are confident that through these, and other institutions and initiatives, the continent is well on its way to the achievement of a magnificent African Renaissance.

Our relations with South Africa, a leading African member state of the Commonwealth, founder and leading advocate of the AU, were considerably strengthened through the State Visit of H.E. Thabo Mbeki in July last year. Jamaica and South Africa enjoy an increasingly close partnership and cooperate in multilateral fora such as the Commonwealth and the NAM, on a wide range of issues.

Currently, we are in the process of negotiating agreements governing cooperation in education, culture, science and technology, research, youth affairs, sports and recreation as well as air services and transport. Once concluded, these agreements will provide a framework for cooperation activities in the aforementioned fields.

President Mbeki's participation in the 24th CARICOM Heads of Government Meeting held in Jamaica July 2003, focused on the opportunities for linkages between the two regions. The AU's expressed desire to establish formal ties with CARICOM is one that is potentially rewarding and we hope that this initiative will be speedily implemented.

Jamaica's traditionally close and productive relations with Nigeria continued to be strengthened through the Nigeria Technical Aid Corps (TAC) Programme which was reactivated in 2002. There are currently four TAC Volunteers in Jamaica deployed at the Mico Teachers' College and the Surveys and Mapping Division. The Ministry of Health is in the process of reviewing one hundred and sixty-three (163) TAC volunteers to help fill one hundred and seventy-six (176) vacancies in the health sector.

Under the recently renewed contract between the Petroleum Corporation of Jamaica and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, since last September, Jamaica has received four (4) shipments of oil from Nigeria to date.

Jamaica has also extended its diplomatic reach into Africa and the Middle East with the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Republic of Mali in December 2003 and the State of Qatar in June 2003.

Asia

Jamaica is the People's Republic of China's largest trading partner in CARICOM. In addition to trading links there is also an active and vibrant cooperation programme in place which directly benefits the Jamaican people.

Assistance to the utilities sector, education, sports and technology are just a few areas in which Chinese assistance has contributed to our social and economic development.

This year marks the 32nd anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Jamaica and China. The ties between our two countries have been greatly strengthened by a recent exchange of high-level visits. During last year, Chinese State Councillor Madame Wu Yi and Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing visited Jamaica. In return, an official delegation from Jamaica, which I had the honour to lead, visited China during February of this year. This series of visits resulted in the establishment of a number of Agreements to enhance Jamaica's development in a variety of areas, particularly infrastructure and sports development.

Cabinet has agreed to the establishment of a Jamaican Embassy in Beijing, primarily for the purpose of increasing trade and investment, and it is envisaged that this Embassy will be fully operational before the end of the current Financial Year. China has enormous potential for growth and is poised to become a super power in the not too distant future. Opportunities for increased trade and tourism with China are great. World Tourism Organisation statistics indicate that China should become by 2020, the number one tourist source nation in the world.

It is anticipated that the costs of operating this Embassy will be shared with other organizations which have major interests in shipping and commercial links with China.

It is envisaged that Jamaica, given its strategic geographical location in the region, will become a manufacturing and trans-shipment point for Chinese goods entering the hemisphere. The Government of China has welcomed the decision to open the Embassy, and will provide the necessary support during the initial establishment phase.

Trade between Jamaica and Japan has expanded significantly in recent years, and our relations have been strengthened as a result of the wide range of activities between the two countries. The Japanese Government has been consistent in its commitment to Jamaica's development, through assistance in areas as diverse as vocational training, medical care, language training, fire fighting, education and security.

In July this year we will commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations with Japan. There are plans to stage a week (Jamaica/Japan Week) of major cultural events in Jamaica showcasing the Japanese art form of Taiko Drumming and exhibitions of cooperation activities highlighting forty years of friendship between the two countries. Events are also being planned to take place in Japan.

Our relations with other countries of the Asian region, most notably India, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Republic of Korea have also been developing satisfactorily, particularly at the political and economic levels, and we have a large number of projects for knowledge transfer, technological advancement and infrastructural development.

Our growing interaction takes place at both the bilateral level as well as in international organizations such as the Non Aligned Movement, the Commonwealth, and in the framework of the United Nations organization and related bodies.

JAMAICANS OVERSEAS

Mr. Speaker,

Our role as protectors and promoters of Jamaica's interests internationally include, naturally, the interests of our nationals overseas in the communities in the Diaspora, represented in almost every metropolitan centre of the world. The existence and contribution of the Jamaican Diaspora do not represent new realities. The fact is, almost every Jamaican within range of my voice has family abroad, and through values steeped in social and cultural practices, the relations in the Diaspora of which we now speak, have been sustained. The quantum of the contribution is being illustrated in many ways, capital support, social support and, yes, moral support as we strive to re-establish values and attitudes.

The Ministry has played a structured role in the enhancement of the relationship with the Diaspora since 1993. We believe, however that a more deliberate, scientific approach is required. Indeed a qualitative approach is being demanded by our nationals overseas as they demonstrate an eagerness to become more deeply involved in national development efforts at all levels.

We expect to deepen the symbiotic relationship which has always existed, and to establish a framework which should see a heightened and more beneficial relationship through partnerships at the private sector level, between individuals and organizations and within the government sector. We are confident that the collaboration which is now taking place between the Government of Jamaica and the various stakeholders, and the synergies locally and overseas, will result in the development of new architecture to facilitate a directed programme.

For, Mr. Speaker, while we understand the mechanics of the process and appreciate the nature of the Jamaican Diaspora in general terms, I think most would agree that we are still far from tapping into the full potential that exists. In recognition of this fact, the Government of Jamaica has approved a series of activities starting with a symposium on 28th October 2003 which was the precursor to a Conference of the Jamaican Diaspora scheduled for 16th-17th June 2004, involving a broad cross section of the Jamaican Diaspora. As part of the scientific approach mentioned earlier, commissioned studies and demographic surveys will also inform the policy development process. Additionally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade has been mandated to ensure the design and implementation of appropriate strategies and policies in tourism, investment and trade, information management and social welfare contributions, to facilitate and foster the engagement of the overseas Jamaican community.

Conducive policies are essential to the process. It is arguable that the liberalization of the Jamaican economy by this administration enabled the creation of financial instruments and operations which encouraged the inflows of foreign exchange to unprecedented levels. We are more than aware of the significant contribution of overseas remittances which in 2002 represented in a pillar of the economy second only to tourism realizing US\$1.2 billion. Similarly in 2003, foreign exchange inflows via remittances, as reported by the Bank of Jamaica, reflected receipts of US\$1.3 billion. There is scope for the development of other models, mechanisms and viable formulae which denote inclusiveness, as nationals at home and abroad find common ground for support. Indeed countries such as Israel, Ireland, Mexico and India have experiences from which we can learn, even as we develop our own Jamaican engagement platforms.

Jamaicans everywhere view their homeland with pride and a keen sense of patriotism which must not be undermined nor taken for granted, but rather harnessed so as to release and realize the positive energies therein. We have grown tremendously as a nation and have done so through the collective support of Jamaicans everywhere. It is now time to move beyond merely acknowledging it and put in place tangible mechanisms to catalyze the relevant processes based on empirical evidence and guided by academic research and practical experience.

The Jamaican people will be the ultimate beneficiaries.

FOREIGN TRADE POLICY

Mr. Speaker,

Let me now turn to the Foreign Trade agenda, which has continued to fully engage the attention of the Ministry over the past twelve (12) months. As these issues are of great importance to our economic development strategy, I have sought to adhere to a policy of transparency.

In the period under review, the Ministry's focus was on the implementation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME), preparations for the 5th World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference, held in Cancun, Mexico, 9-14 September, 2003; the negotiations in the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA); the negotiations between the African Caribbean Pacific (ACP) and the European Union (EU); the finalization of a bilateral agreement between CARICOM and Costa Rica, and later, the Sugar dispute. In addition, the Ministry continued its efforts to strengthen the consultative process and to advance its public awareness programme.

Mr. Speaker,

I will now briefly review the developments in and outline the status of each of the negotiations.

THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION (WTO)

I begin with the World Trade Organization (WTO).

It will be recalled that as the end of 2002 approached, there was discontent about the pace and direction of the negotiations in the Doha Development Agenda. Many of the deadlines were missed including those related to the development issues (TRIPS and Public Health, Special and Differential Treatment and Implementation). As the WTO turned its attention to preparing for the Cancun Ministerial Conference, the stage was being set for the failure of that Conference.

We regret that having invested so much in preparing for Cancun, no decision was possible. In our view, the meeting was not simply about arriving at an agreement, but rather about arriving at an agreement which reflected the interests of the Caribbean. Nevertheless, we witnessed developments which give us encouragement for the future, particularly the unity and level of preparedness of the various groupings of developing countries.

Mr. Speaker,

Following Cancun, the WTO negotiations went into a period of hiatus. The timeline of December 15 set by Ministers in Cancun for recovering ground lost there can also be considered as another missed deadline. The Doha negotiations were resumed in February of this year. An accurate description of the situation in the WTO since Cancun is, indeed, plenty of activity, but little progress.

The major players have placed on the table their proposals for taking the negotiations forward. In January, the United States Trade Representative, Ambassador Robert Zoellick, wrote to all 146 Members of the WTO outlining his proposals for progress. This month, the EC's Commissioners for Trade and Agriculture, Pascal Lamy and Franz Fischler, have also written to the now 147 Members of the WTO making their proposals for the way forward. As countries give indications of their willingness to re-engage and to compromise, as meetings are held with various groups, of which there are now many, the G20, G10, G33, G90 and the CAIRNS Group, and Mini-Ministerials are convened, I have to say, Mr. Speaker, that the situation in the WTO remains very fluid.

For progress to be made in these negotiations, a great deal of work needs to be done between now and the end of July when the WTO recesses for the summer holidays. It could be said that the developed countries have given up some ground on the Singapore issues indicating that investment and competition policy will be dropped if trade facilitation and government procurement are retained. This still goes beyond Jamaica's stated position which is to consider only trade facilitation.

Agriculture remains a very sensitive issue and continues to be the key to determining whether the negotiations can come anywhere close to being concluded by the end of December. The primary issue in the agriculture negotiations remains the treatment of the reduction of subsidies applied in the European Union, the United States, Japan and other developed countries. The European Commission has made it clear that they are willing to reduce export subsidies on products of importance to developing countries. Although this sounds favourable, it could have very negative implications for Jamaica's sugar exports. These agriculture negotiations and the proposals being tabled are very important to Jamaica as they impact on our agricultural sector.

In these WTO negotiations, on both agriculture and non-agricultural market access, we are negotiating to ensure that in tariff measures and in other aspects of the negotiations, there will be sufficient room to manoeuvre.

Services is another important area in which progress has been slow. In this area, much work needs to be done both at the domestic and regional levels to ensure that we make offers which are in the national interest, given that services now provide the substantial part of national economic activity and output. The negotiations in regional trade agreements (RTAs) will have implications for our situation in the FTAA and the ACP/EU negotiations, primarily because these negotiations involve countries at different levels of development.

The treatment of development issues, which include special and differential treatment, is also of primary concern. Since Cancun, these issues have been de-emphasized. Jamaica joined other developing countries to table a paper in the WTO making clear that the development issues remain a priority and that there can be no progress in the negotiations without positive action to address these issues.

There are differing views on how important issues, such as special and differential treatment (S&D), will be addressed. In the general treatment of S&D, the EU and USA are advocating that there should be differentiation in applying S&D among developing countries. In their view S&D should only be applied to those countries now being referred to as the G90 i.e. Members of the African Group, the ACP Group and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). While this would benefit Jamaica and its CARICOM partners, it is yet to be seen how this potentially controversial and divisive issue will be introduced into the WTO.

FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS (FTAA)

In the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), since the Eighth Ministerial Meeting in November 2003, the negotiations have basically stalled.

In order to address the impasse, Ministers agreed to a new Vision of the FTAA in the Miami Declaration which proposed a two-tiered approach for the negotiations, i.e. a first or common tier that would form the free trade agreement, and a second plurilateral tier, that would comprise agreements in certain areas entered into by interested countries on a voluntary basis.

Mr. Speaker,

The scaling down of the FTAA negotiations is welcomed by CARICOM which had, for some time, been calling for either a reduction in the scope of the negotiations or an extended timeframe.

The 17th Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC) was convened in early February 2004 and, although there was emerging consensus on a number of issues, the TNC adjourned without any agreement. The lack of progress in the negotiations, since February, has given rise to concern that the deadline date for conclusion of January 2005 may not be met. It was in this scenario that, in my capacity as spokesman for CARICOM, I recently wrote to the Ministerial Co-Chairs, Ambassador Robert Zoellick of the USA and Minister Celso Amorin of Brazil, to propose that they convene an informal Ministerial meeting to try to resolve as many of the problems as possible that are hindering the process.

Mr. Speaker,

The impasse in the negotiations, along with the move by the USA to conclude bilateral free trade agreements with a number of countries in this hemisphere, has great significance for the FTAA process. Already free trade agreements have been concluded with the countries of Central America and the Dominican Republic. Bilateral negotiations are to begin shortly with a number of South American countries, except for MERCOSUR and Venezuela, which all benefit from preferential non-reciprocal market access to the United States market, as does CARICOM.

In the light of this, CARICOM is in the process of assessing the situation to inform our decision-making. To that end, in March 2004, the Inter-Sessional CARICOM Heads of Government Meeting held in St. Kitts and Nevis, instructed the Caribbean Regional

Negotiating Machinery (CRNM) to undertake a study to “determine the implications for the region of the multiplicity of bilateral trade agreements being concluded in the hemisphere as an alternative to the FTAA.”

CARICOM has already been negotiating free trade agreements with several countries in the region.

ACP/EU NEGOTIATIONS

Mr. Speaker,

As Honourable Members are aware, the EPA negotiations with the EU were formally launched in September 2002 in Brussels at which time it was agreed that the negotiations would be conducted in two phases, a first all-ACP/EU phase and a second phase of regional negotiations. The first phase was concluded in October 2003 at which time a schedule for the phase II negotiations was agreed. Since then, CARIFORUM, under the guidance of the CRNM, has been preparing for the launch of the negotiation of the EC/Caribbean Economic Partnership Agreement by establishing guidelines and structure for the negotiations.

The EC/Caribbean EPA was formally launched here in Kingston on 16 April 2004. The ceremony was attended by the EC’s Trade Commissioner, Pascal Lamy and the Commissioner for Development, Poul Nielson, the Secretary General of the ACP, the Secretary-General of CARIFORUM as well as CARIFORUM Trade Ministers.

The negotiations will take place in four phases. The market access negotiations are scheduled to commence in September 2005.

Currently, work in these negotiations, is mainly preparatory in nature. The objective, among other things, will be to complete impact assessment studies at both the national and regional levels.

CARICOM SINGLE MARKET AND ECONOMY (CSME)

Mr. Speaker,

Let me turn to the issue of the regional integration process and specifically, the establishment of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME). I am heartened that the issue benefited from renewed interest in this Honourable House during the recently concluded 2004/2005 Budget Debate. The successful implementation of the CSME is critical to the successful integration of CARICOM Member States into the global economic system.

Mr. Speaker,

This Honourable House will recall that the CSME is scheduled to become fully operational by 31 December 2005. Significantly, Jamaica, Trinidad & Tobago and Barbados have agreed to complete the domestic requirements for CSME implementation

by December 2004. At this point in the schedule, Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that Jamaica remains on track to meet this deadline.

Some of the main achievements to date include:

- The passage of a Bill to facilitate the enactment of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas into Domestic Law – “The Caribbean Community Act 2004” - in both Houses of Parliament.
- The passage of a Bill concerning the establishment of the Caribbean Regional Organization for Standards and Quality (CROSQ) in the Senate on 13 February, 2004. The Bill has since received the assent of the Governor-General and is awaiting the designation of an appropriate date by the Honourable Minister of Commerce, Science and Technology, for entry into force.
- The establishment of an Inter-Ministerial Consultative Committee (IMCC), to coordinate the CSME implementation process. The IMCC is comprised of representatives from the Ministries of Agriculture, Commerce, Science and Technology, Foreign Affairs & Foreign Trade, Finance and Planning, Labour and Social Security, the Attorney-General’s Department and the Office of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel. In addition, a CSME Unit has been established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade to support the work of the IMCC and the ongoing public education campaign.

Mr. Speaker,

Despite its inherent challenges, the CSME offers the best vehicle for Jamaica and by extension CARICOM, to cope with the reality of a truly globalised economy. I therefore do not support the view that the process of CSME implementation could be described as a “wayward journey”. In this regard, I was grateful for the opportunity to host a Seminar on the CSME in this Chamber on 26 April 2004, for the benefit of colleagues from both Houses of Parliament. I trust that the frank exchange of views with members of my staff and representatives of the private sector, helped to ventilate the facts and dispel some of the previously held notions regarding the CSME.

CARICOM/COSTA RICA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. Speaker,

The CARICOM/Costa Rica Free Trade Agreement was signed in Jamaica on 9 March 2004 will enter into force as soon as the Parties have advised each other of the completion of the necessary internal procedures.

SUGAR

Mr. Speaker,

The Sugar Industry is facing serious challenges in the international arena. The European Commission, as part of the reform of its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), is in the process of reforming its sugar regime under which Jamaica and other ACP countries export sugar. The EC is currently looking at several options for reform all of which could result in a reduction in the price paid for ACP sugar. The EC is expected to take a decision during this summer.

Members of this Honourable House will recall that in September 2003, at the request of Australia, Brazil and Thailand, a panel was established in the WTO to examine the EC's export subsidies for sugar. The price paid to ACP sugar producing countries is linked to the subsidized price paid to EU beet sugar producers. This dispute could also have the effect of bringing about a reduction in the price paid for sugar in the EU. Therefore,

Jamaica and other ACP States are third parties in this dispute.

To date, Mr. Speaker, we have participated in two substantive sessions of the panel. In the first session the Jamaica and the ACP sugar exporting countries had the opportunity to present their arguments in both a written submission and oral presentations. In those presentations we sought to make the panelists and the parties aware of the negative impact which a ruling in favour of the complainants would have on the sugar industries and economies of Jamaica and other ACP sugar producing countries.

In addition the negotiations on agricultural products in the WTO could also have a similar effect of reducing sugar prices if decisions are taken to significantly reduce agricultural subsidies in EU and other developed countries. Members would have noted from my earlier remarks on development in the WTO that the treatment of agriculture remains a highly sensitive issue.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade has been consulting regularly with representatives from the sugar sector including the farmers, manufacturers and the trade unions to ensure that they are kept informed of developments and that they are part of the decision-making process. Jamaica has also been working with the ACP in Brussels and in Geneva to ensure that the sector's interests are taken into account in consultations at this level. The Ministry is also taking every opportunity to sensitize officials and other interest groups in major EU capitals to Jamaica's concerns.

BANANAS

The Banana industry also faces challenges as prices in the EU continue to deteriorate due to oversupply in the market. The enlargement of the Union could further contribute to this oversupply. Resulting from the banana dispute, a tariff-only regime is scheduled to

come into effect on January 1, 2006. However, indications are that the EU intends to advance the implementation of the regime to 2005. The tariff level is still to be negotiated. The Banana industry is hoping that the tariff will be set at a level high enough for the country to continue benefiting from its access to the EU market.

COMPETITIVENESS

Mr. Speaker,

In light of the foregoing Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a few remarks on the issue of competitiveness. What I am about to say to this House is not a new message but it is still an urgent message – we must become competitive in critical areas if we are to create jobs, sustain industries and promote growth and development in this globalized environment.

As I emphasized in dialogue with the manufacturing, farming and export sectors over the course of the last year, we have not maximized the benefits of preferential arrangements and enhanced market access that we have secured over several decades.

We have learnt from experience that the most important issue for any trading nation is competitiveness. It is our competitiveness that will enable us to counter import threats effectively and it is our competitiveness that will enable us to exploit opportunities for export.

We must set achievable targets for export growth based not on the charity of our trading partners but on the quality and the efficiency of our productive activities.

Mr. Speaker,

In this regard, I wish to commend members of the private sector and their various organizations for the work they are doing to become more engaged in the formulation of trade policy and negotiating positions. This is a very positive development.

ENHANCEMENT OF FOREIGN SERVICE OPERATIONS

Mr. Speaker, in all that I have said before I would like to place the aforementioned areas of operation in the context of the Ministry's strategic goals as outlined in its Corporate Plan. These are to:

- Expand and strengthen relations with other countries through diplomatic and political channels
- Negotiate technical, economic co-operation and trade agreements at the bilateral, hemispheric and multi-lateral levels to facilitate Jamaica's development objectives
- Protect the interests of Jamaican nationals overseas and encourage participation in the national development process.

Six specific priority areas agreed on at the Heads of Missions meeting held in May last year are being actively pursued. These concern our need to stand firm against attacks on multilateralism; commitment to CARICOM and to regional integration; active and effective participation in trade and economic negotiations; identification of trade and investment promotion activities; intensification of our links with the Jamaican Diaspora and enhancement of the Foreign Service and its operations. Five have been dealt with earlier in my presentation and I now turn to the area of Foreign Service enhancement.

In keeping with Government's thrust to create a performance-oriented public service, the Ministry will be concentrating on implementing a performance management system which will focus on improving the Ministry's processes and structure as well as performance of staff. Renewed emphasis will be placed on training so that we develop a cadre of personnel with the requisite skills and expertise to effectively carry out the Ministry's mandate and to represent Jamaica overseas in our diplomatic missions and consular posts. The required structural changes will be made to better deliver on the strategic objectives and priorities outlined before.

To increase our efficiency, we will be seeking to enhance our level of computerization which will aid in the development of relevant databases and provide faster and easier communication with our missions. Our efforts at computerization are being supported by a generous gift of one hundred and thirty computers from the Government of the People's Republic of China.

In furtherance of our goal to expand and strengthen relations with other countries, we are looking at expanding our presence in geographic areas in which we are currently under-represented. Any expansion will, of course, carry additional costs for the Government and, in this regard, we will be exploring non-traditional, innovative ways to meet the initial and recurrent expenditure associated with establishing diplomatic missions. I am pleased to advise the House that the Government is actively pursuing the opening of a mission in the world's fastest growing economy, the People's Republic of China, and will report to the House when we have finalized those plans.

CONCLUSION

As a country we can take pride in the strides made in our foreign relations and trade policy mandate over the preceding year.

We have maintained principled positions on issues of international significance which have stood Jamaica well in the defence and promotion of its foreign policy.

We were able to attain some of the goals which have been set by the international community for the promotion of economical and social development

We continue to engage with all relevant sectors in the sensitization to the promotion of Jamaica's trade policy objectives.

Finally Mr. Speaker,

We express our deep appreciation for the unwavering support and continued assistance from all countries represented here in Jamaica, as well as from regional and international organizations, as you continue to assist us in advancing our national development priorities.

I thank you.