



**PRESS RELEASE
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Anti-Gang Bill Closer to Becoming Law

The Anti-Gang Bill is one step closer to becoming law, with Minister without Portfolio in the Ministry of National Security, Senator the Hon. Matthew Samuda leading the debate on the amendments in the Senate today.

He said the amendment Bill, entitled The Criminal Justice (Suppression of Criminal Organisations) (Amendment) Act, 2021, will sufficiently augment the Anti-Gang Act, while including appropriate safeguards to bring to its full potential as a legal tool that the justice system can employ in the fight against organised crime.

In commencing the debate, Minister Samuda stated that the specific amendments are designed to address the weaknesses of the principle legislation that led to its underutilisation in the courts.

He told the Senate that the principal legislation is being amended to reflect the recommendations of the Joint Select Committee (JSC) which was established to review amendments to the Bill, pointing out that the Ministry of National Security also considered subsequent court judgments related to the 2014 Act, as well as further consultation with key stakeholders.

“Among the most important considerations throughout this process Mr President, is how seldom the principal legislation has been applied in the courts between the time it came into effect and the period of JSC review,” Minister Samuda said.

He added: **“Before the JSC commenced, the courts only handed down two convictions based on the Anti-Gang Act, as a result of guilty pleas. (the Uchence Wilson trial coincided with JSC and several people were convicted on offences under the Act). Consequently, the potential of the legislation to undermine organised crime in Jamaica has not been fully realised”**.

He said the Anti-Gang legislation has the potential to be as impactful in the Jamaican context as the comparable United States Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organisation (RICO) Act.

Minister Samuda told the Senate that Jamaica remains inordinately plagued by the activities of organised criminal gangs and cited statistics from the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF), noting that there are three hundred and seventy-nine (379) gangs present in Jamaica, of which two hundred and sixty-two (262) are considered active. He also said for the year 2020, the JCF has assessed that 802 or 61 per cent of murders were gang related.

“Mr President, the Government has been successful in disrupting and halting the activities of criminal gangs in some hotspots through the application of ZOSOs and SOEs.

Over the four years prior to the Mount Salem ZOSO, for example, that community recorded 19 murders and 33 shootings, the majority of which were gang related. In the four years since the ZOSO began, there were 5 murders and 5 shootings—a fall of 74 per cent and 85 per cent respectively,” said the Minister.

Overall, Category One offences (Murder, Shooting, Rape, Aggravated Assault, Robbery, Break-ins, Larceny) were reduced by 71 per cent in Mount Salem. Over the periods of ZOSOs, Category One crimes in Denham Town, Greenwich Town, and August Town declined 41 per cent, 27 per cent and 95 per cent respectively over comparable periods.

“As you can see, Mr President, the ZOSO and SOE measures have been effective in curtailing the activities of organised criminal groups where they have been applied so far. However, it is this legislation that will enable the justice system to play its critical part in winding up existing gangs and preventing new ones from forming,” Minister Samuda explained.

The debate has since been suspended for a date to be fixed.

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