



**STATEMENT BY MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO
SENATOR THE HONOURABLE MATTHEW SAMUDA
REGARDING THE AUDIT “NOEL CHAMBERS”**

Mr. President, the Honourable Members of the Senate are being asked to recall that in June 2020 the case of Noel Chambers was brought to the attention of the Government and the general public by way of *INDECOM Quarterly Report* (1st) January – March 2020.

Mr. Chambers, who at the time of his unfortunate passing (in January 2020) was an 81-year-old mentally ill inmate being held at Governor General’s pleasure.

The INDECOM Report highlighted systemic concerns, particularly the conditions in which persons are kept at the Tower Street Adult Correctional Centre.

Following on this discovery, my Ministry undertook an audit of the treatment of the mentally ill persons within the correctional facilities. The Senate may recall that in the sitting of the Senate in February this year, I committed to providing an update on this matter. The usual Parliamentary cycle would’ve interrupted this update, and admittedly I considered addressing it in a complete manner in my State of Nation Presentation. That is still my intention.

However, given the commitment I had made, and the wholly appropriate levels of public concern with the matter, it was the assessment that the summary findings of the Internal Audit should be brought to the attention of the public, through this Chamber.

The Senate is advised that the audit was completed January 2021 and the key findings submitted to the Cabinet accordingly. Mr. President, I hear the concern about the length of time this statement has taken to come to the Senate, but this administration is not in the habit of only announcing what is to be done, we also prefer to sometimes indicate what has been done, and here we have been able to report that consultations have been had and systems have been put in place in a bid to improve accountability in the nation’s correctional facilities and reduce the opportunity for another unacceptable case similar to Noel Chambers arising.



We are operating in a challenging environment. However, we have to be diligent in putting our best foot forward and being methodical about correcting problems, which have existed for many years.

Summary of Primary Findings of the Internal Audit were as follows: -

1. Excessive delays by courts to request mentally ill inmates to be placed before Magistrates.
2. Inadequate medical professionals on staff to provide sufficient care to mentally ill.
3. No written SOPs to guide correctional officers to care for mentally ill inmates.
4. Mentally ill inmates were housed among the general population at St. Catherine Adult Correctional Centre (St. CACC).
5. Overcrowding within the facilities.
6. No established psychiatric wing within DCS penal institutions.

The Senate is reminded that the DCS has suffered significantly from a lack of investment due to fiscal constraints and competing needs for continued demand within other critical sectors such as health, education and infrastructure since our Independence.

The findings of the internal audit highlighted what we know anecdotally. More has to be spent on improving the Correctional facilities and bringing the Jamaican Correctional system into the 21st century.

Actions to Address Gaps Identified

What is more important than knowing what needs to be done, is however actually getting things done, correctly! In light of this, the Ministry has undertaken the following to address some of the notable concerns previously highlighted. These include *inter alia*:

1. The Department of Correctional Services has since the report, began to ensure that a master listing for the respective courts are prepared and submitted accordingly. This is crucial in ensuring that we meet our legal obligations in a timely manner. The listing is update, with the last listing being submitted for April 2021.



2. To address the notable deficiencies in the Human Resource, particularly medical. A review was done and an organizational chart prepared by the Medical Unit to provide a strategic road map to address staffing issue. This was submitted for approval to the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service (MoFPS). The MoFPS has approved this (Dec. 1, 2020) and we are working to provide for the upgrade in the Specialized and Medical Services Division. DCS is working on this area, with special emphasis on engaging a Senior Psychiatrist.
3. Specialized Project is being undertaken in the interim – given the urgency of the situation. The MNS has sought assistance from our development partners to fund a specialized project. It is intended that a cadre of psychiatrists will be led by a notable psychiatrist and team to provide for requisite assessments.
4. To treat with the overcrowding issue. – the MNS and DCS are currently seeking to provide for renovations, despite the lack of capital budget. An assessment of all facilities is being undertaken, to provide for tiered approach in addressing a myriad of infrastructural concerns.
5. Leveraging partnership with Civil Society/NGOs – in recognition of the fiscal constraint and the need to urgently address this issue, the MNS has led discussions with notable NGO (Missionaries of the Poor). The discussions are currently preliminary.

Colleagues, I have provided updates, every time DCS has been brought in to focus for issues of national concern. I committed when this issue was raised, that we would not allow Mr. Chambers' death to be a nine-day wonder or for his death to not bring about the changes so desperately required for those in our custody. That commitment still stands. I will provide a complete update on the work being done in our Correctional Facilities and indeed our program of reform during my State of the Nation Address.

Thank you, Mr. President.