

**SPEECH FROM THE THRONE BY HER EXCELLENCY THE HON.  
SANDRA MASON GCMG, DA, QC**

**Mr. President and Members of the Senate;  
Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly;**

**Specially invited guests, ladies and gentlemen;**

This Parliament reconvenes today, in circumstances that none of us could have imagined. It is therefore appropriate for us to pause as a nation and give fresh thought to our future.

In March of this year, Barbados like most countries across the globe, was forced into a national lockdown propelled by the onslaught of the coronavirus pandemic that continues to plague the world. With over 29 million cases worldwide and almost 1 million deaths to date, Barbados stands among the countries that have attacked this silent enemy head on. Having conducted 18,000 tests, and with less than 200 confirmed cases recorded nationally, although regrettably 7 deaths, Barbados has been lauded by the World Health Organisation (WHO) for this country's resolute fight against this deadly and crippling disease. When we, as a nation, consider our economic standing on the global stage, this is nothing short of a phenomenal achievement. However, we recognize that this would not have been possible without the work and sacrifice of Barbadians and the assistance of our global and regional partners. To you, we wish to convey our heartfelt gratitude.

While we as a people, should be very proud of the way we have sought to address the pandemic thus far, we must remain vigilant. With England, and other countries in Europe beginning to experience a surge in cases over the past two weeks, we are constantly reminded that the virus is still very much with us. This is of particular concern to us, especially when we juxtapose it with the reality that our tourism industry is very dependent on the European market. With thousands of tourism industry workers currently unemployed, this pandemic becomes a frightening reality for us as it relates to our economic recovery, but particularly, to our ability to feed and provide for our families.

Indeed, there are many reasons for our stability and success during this trying period. Grounded in our resolve as a nation and a people, to fight this pandemic, is our belief that success comes when we all play our part to make Barbados better. As a people we may differ in many ways, but we are fundamentally the same when it comes to our commitment to the continued development and safety of this nation. Operating under the global recession brought on by the pandemic that has brought economies

to screeching halt worldwide, Barbados continues to be an example to the world of what resolve, kindness and being our brothers' and sisters' keeper can achieve.

The present global challenges, coupled with the prorogation of Barbados' Parliament, have created the occasion for my Government to reaffirm its commitment to the country; take stock of the national circumstances; report progress to the nation; take fresh guard and articulate a new vision for repositioning and protecting our citizens and country.

### **My Government's Commitment**

It is in this vein that I reiterate that my Government is committed to the people of this country. This Government knows that the pressure under which COVID has put our citizens, is real. We will take all steps necessary to ensure that every Barbadian is protected from the worst impacts of this global crisis. Not only will we keep faith with the people of this great island nation, we will not let Barbadians descend into despair, nor allow Barbados to slide into disrepair. Where propitious, we will partner with the private sector and work closely with the Third Sector, or non-governmental and philanthropic organisations to achieve social development goals.

Our circumstances may have changed, but our commitment to you, the people of Barbados, to make this country a global force of the 21st Century, has not altered. This Government will ensure a protected environment, a stable society and a sustainable and resilient economy. In the current global crisis, Government will stimulate a vibrant national economy with a level of activity that ensures the circulation of capital domestically. We pledge to maintain this approach until there is an influx of foreign exchange from a heightened level of economic activity, particularly tourism.

The Barbados brand will symbolise and be constantly burnished by the excellence, effort, imagination, innovation, creativity, and productivity of our citizens, at home and abroad. Barbadians must not think of just hunkering down and waiting out these frightening and uncertain times. Instead, it is my Government's goal to ensure that our country and citizens fight to thrive, despite COVID and all its calamitous consequences.

Despite reduced tax takes and revenues, my Government is determined that we will hold the hand of every Barbadian who is in fear; every family that is under threat; every man who is trying to stand up to his responsibilities; every single mother fighting to provide for her children; every young person hoping for a bright future; every worker who is unemployed; every poor person fighting for dignity; every middle-class person who is in danger of having everything for which they have

struggled snatched from them; every business person and home owner whose dreams of ownership and upward mobility are turning into a nightmare; and every senior and vulnerable citizen for whom the risks of getting lost in the muddle of social and economic decline, are greater. My Government's goal is that not one single Barbadian will be allowed to fall through the cracks. **We are in this together! Every Bajan Matters!**

Barbados must have no second-class citizens. This country, our country, cannot afford that. Every citizen is valued and valuable. Every citizen must live in dignity. Every citizen deserves to be given an opportunity to contribute to the full range of their abilities. Every citizen must enjoy what this country has to offer and the fruits of their labour. Every citizen must be protected in the times of trial.

No one is coming to rescue us. The solutions to the present circumstances are ours to find, ours to craft and ours to implement. Every Barbadian, no matter who they are, where they live, or what they do for a living, must understand that responsibility for the rescue and recovery of Barbados rests with each one of us. Indeed, the current difficulties require us to go back to the Bajan basics of caring, sharing, and a sense of community.

It was and remains the intention of this Government that, by achieving these broad objectives, Barbados should become the premier global brand and destination to live, work, have recreation and visit.

A short 27 months ago, I addressed our nation from the august chambers of Barbados' Parliament and outlined the plans and programmes of my newly elected Government. We understood as a people that tough times were ahead. Barbados had been bruised by the severe social, economic and environmental impacts of a lost decade, but we were buoyed by a new sense of hope, by the promise and expectation of a higher level of caring for the concerns of our citizens, by the hope of increased and open communication with our citizens and by the prospect of measures that would bring the genuine enfranchisement and empowerment of our citizens. We felt confident that we were capable of the work and sacrifice it would take to get this country back to social vibrancy, sound economic recovery and growth.

My Government was well on its way to fulfilling the commitments made in its manifesto, of reversing the downgrades of the economy; rebuilding our foreign exchange; reducing the crippling debt to GDP ratio- the third highest in the world at 176% at the beginning of 2018, to 117% by the beginning of 2020 – halting the social malaise, the decline of social goods and services and tackling some of the more intractable problems which affect the wellbeing and quality of life of

Barbadians. At home and abroad, with Barbadian nationals and the nationals of other countries, amongst technical specialists and the man in the street, my Government had inspired a renewed sense of confidence in Barbados' economy and the future of our country.

**And then COVID-19 stuck.**

## **Taking Stock -Health Society And Economy**

### **The Invisible Hand of COVID-19 and Its Economic Fallout**

No one truly anticipated the destructive maelstrom that COVID-19 has become. Even more sobering, is the fact that the principal, international health and development institutions caution that in all likelihood, the global family of nations will have to live with COVID-19 and its consequences for at least another year, or even two. This is a time of great peril and uncertainty for global society and economy, and for the future of the human family. Global economic activity has been significantly reduced. We now operate in a world where virtual platforms for work, general recreation and social activity have become the new norm.

Men and women the world over, are in great fear. Families are in turmoil. Homes are at risk. Businesses are collapsing. Global trade and supply have been disrupted. Livelihoods are being lost. Lives are under threat. Billions of people are now falling into the pit of poverty and the mire of despair. For us here in Barbados, the effects of COVID are even more dire. This disease has decimated the global tourism product. Barbados, like the rest of the Caribbean, ranking as we do amongst the top 20 tourism dependent destinations on the planet, is in particular peril. The future of global society and economy is uncertain. However, we know that even in this uncertainty, life must go on. It is with this in mind, that my government has embarked on this nation's road to economic recovery with a sense of fortitude and commitment.

### **Taking Stock – Maintaining A Healthy Society In the Era COVID-19**

Government responded to the COVID pandemic with alacrity, decisiveness and sensitivity. The management of the assault by COVID-19 has been one of the clear successes of my Government. With our Barbadian health care system, the use of local expertise and the private sector constructing rapid-build facilities, close monitoring, strict protocols, management of all cases, rigorous contact tracing, and the cooperation and discipline of the public, Barbados has so far, averted community spread. While our country has done well, it is critical that we do not let down our guard, because as the old people caution us, "*what aint miss ya, aint pass ya.*"

My Government has fought and is fighting against COVID's potentially deadly and debilitating health, social and economic impacts. COVID-19 will not defeat Barbados. My Minister of Health and Wellness put it best when he framed the fight in military terms. "There will be no retreat and no surrender" by my Government.

## Reporting Progress

### **Our Urgent and Mission Critical Agenda**

My Government committed to addressing a list of 17 vexing issues within the first six months of coming to office. These included, rebuilding our foreign reserves; dealing with debt, bringing tax relief; addressing threats to the financial service sector; helping people to live; resuming the payment of arrears and refunds; protecting people's health; fixing the Bridgetown and South Coasts Sewerage Systems; getting rid of garbage off the streets; putting buses back on the roads; repairing our roads; alleviating water woes; ensuring citizens safety and wellbeing; empowering our young people; stamping out corruption; a new deal for the workers of the sugar industry; and preparing for a natural disaster.

Because of their complexity or technical nature, some of the items on the list took longer than my Government had initially anticipated. For instance, the fight for citizens' safety and security is ongoing; measures to deal with water woes, particularly in St Joseph and St John are in train; and integrity legislation will be brought back to Parliament. On a significant portion of the policy commitments for national transformation as made in my Government's manifesto of 2018, and on the aspects identified in my Government's Mission Critical Agenda – **we have done what we said we would do in large measure. The evidence is there for all to see!**

In treating to the COVID pandemic, fulfilling our Mission Critical Agenda; clawing the country's way forward; communicating with citizens frequently and in a forthright manner, through both traditional means, as well as social media platforms; meeting citizens' needs in the most difficult and uncertain times facing the people of our nation and the people of our planet; the approach of my Government has been to demonstrate a sense of caring. My Government has sought to be responsive to the needs of the people and to build new bonds of trust between the Government and the governed.

### **Our Foundation Stones Have Shifted**

Global upheaval from war or disease pandemics is not new. The world has always gone through turmoil. What is different now, is the threat to the world's economy

and society that has never been more connected through the globalization of economies, trade, travel, technology and supply chains.

Of equal importance at this time, is the immediacy with which technology now connects societies across the entire world. It was the power of technology that allowed us in Barbados, to witness the decimation wreaked by COVID-19, and the fear and anxiety it caused, as it felled the health care systems, citizens and economies of some of the world's largest and most powerful countries. With the occurrence of these events, there was a shifting of the foundation stones of certainty, social expansion, economic growth and billions being lifted out of poverty, with which we had lived since the last devastating pandemic of the Spanish Flu 100 years ago.

In Barbados, that uncertainty assumed a different reality with the passing of two Barbadians. First, the iconic cricketer Sir Everton Weekes whose skill on the field, like that of Walcott, Worrell and Sobers, helped a nation and a region to glimpse its potential post-colonialism; to understand that size was not a constraint to high achievement; to taste success and know that we were equal to the best in the world; that as students and the colonised, we could outstrip our colonial masters; and that greatness was within us, if we were prepared to discipline ourselves and work toward it.

Within days of Sir Everton's loss, the country's longest serving prime Minister, Professor, Rt Hon Owen Arthur, also died. Prime Minister Arthur's policies shaped our economic fortunes and landscape for a vibrant economy from which all benefited, the middleclass grew, women found new opportunity, entrepreneurship thrived and propelled many working and middle-class people upward, this country pioneered the concept of the green economy within Small Island Developing States and our national star shone so brightly that it could be seen across the globe.

With the passing of Sir Everton and former Prime Minister Arthur, the mantle of leadership falls fully to the post-independence generations of Barbadians. It is those generations who must now define how our country and citizens will dominate the world stage, create a new vision and build Barbados' future. Our national foundation stones have shifted. National and international events demonstrate that we have entered a new era. The old things have passed away.

## **Securing The Governance of Barbados and Barbadians**

### **A Fresh Guard and A New Vision Restructuring and Reimagining**

The peril and uncertainty of the times compel us to reinforce our foundation. Equally, we are challenged to shore up our traditional structures, and find stronger,

more resilient, more sustainable architecture, on which we can build a modern and enduring structure for current and future generations.

## **Government and Governance**

Barbados has developed governance structures and institutions that mark us as what has been described as, “the best governed Black society in the world.” Since Independence, we Barbadians have sought constantly to improve our systems of law and governance so as to ensure they best reflect our characteristics and values as a nation.

Barbados’ first prime minister, The Rt. Excellent Errol Walton Barrow, cautioned against loitering on colonial premises. That warning is as relevant today as it was in 1966. Having attained Independence over half a century ago, our country can be in no doubt about its capacity for self-governance. The time has come to fully leave our colonial past behind. Barbadians want a Barbadian Head of State. This is the ultimate statement of confidence in who we are and what we are capable of achieving. Hence, Barbados will take the next logical step toward full sovereignty and become a Republic by the time we celebrate our 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence.

## **Extending The List of National Heroes**

In 1998, by Act of Parliament, Barbados recognised 10 worthy sons and a daughter as National Heroes, for having “given outstanding service to Barbados .... Contributed to the improvement of the economic and social conditions of Barbados”.... and demonstrated “visionary and pioneering leadership, extraordinary achievement and the attainment of the highest excellence.” It was intended that in due course, the list of National Heroes of Barbados would be added to and my Government shall do so.

## **Increasing The Engagement of Our Governor General**

For almost 50 years, the ceremonial, administrative and social functions of the Governor General have remained largely the same. It is now proposed to add to them, the following list of activities: The Governor General’s Charity and Trust which will be overseen by a Board and support worthy national causes, the establishment Of *Fine Minds For Barbados*, a Think Tank of Barbadian academics and skilled nationals in the diaspora to ensure we use the talents of all Barbadians in support of national challenges; the Governor General’s Annual Lecture; and *Purpose Filled Youth*, a training and motivational initiative for Barbadian youth, which will

be conducted at ages 11 and 16. This programme will be continued until such time as there is further discussion on the transition to republic status.

## **Parliamentary Reform**

Upon being elected, my Government appointed the Thorne Commission on Local Governance. The Commission has had extensive consultations locally through community-based people's assemblies. It is expected to report shortly on how we may deepen the level of participation of ordinary Barbadians in how we govern ourselves.

In examining our form of government, making it better suited to modern times and more responsive to the needs of Barbadians who want a greater say in the running of their national affairs, it is to be noted that there has been no parliamentary reform in the last 49 years since we shifted from double member constituencies to single member constituencies. A Commission on the Reform of Parliament will therefore be established under the chairmanship of Sir Richard Cheltenham, the immediate Past President of the Senate, former Member of Parliament, Minister of Government and distinguished Queen's Counsel and will have representation from political parties, the Social Partnership, and the Social Justice Committee.

## **Law and The Society**

Legislation to address integrity in public life is essential to fostering greater transparency, accountability and stamping out corruption. My Government will again pursue this legislation in the new parliamentary term.

The public must have trust in our system of laws and the Courts which administer them. There will therefore be a comprehensive strengthening of the court system with dedicated court administration; expansion of the criminal courts and the introduction of a new Commercial Court has already taken place. My Government will now work toward a specialized Family Court which will be decentralized with hearings across the island and the jurisdiction to determine all family and maintenance matters.

The Supreme Court Registry will, by the end of this month, launch its e-Filing system.

This Apex filing system, which is currently used in the Caribbean Court of Justice, will allow the filing of court documents in cases before the High Court and the Court of Appeal via a secure web portal. This will significantly improve efficiency in the court system, reduce the use of paper throughout litigation, and also result in the

more efficient use of the Registry staff, who currently manually receive, scan and process all filed documents.

Furthermore, attorneys will be able to pay filing fees electronically through EZpay+, eliminating the need for the purchase of physical stamps from the Post Office.

### **Addressing Injustices Affecting Barbadians**

There are two groups of national stakeholders on which my Government wishes to focus as deserving of special attention.

- Between 1994-2008 a number of civil servants who were in acting positions were appointed as a matter of government policy. Regrettably, the situation of having civil servants act in posts for several years without being appointed and which, has come to be known as “Hollywood”, has again taken root. My Government is of the view that this is an injustice that must be corrected. It demoralises officers, affects pension rights, and their ability to get loans from the banking sector. My Government will therefore appoint all civil servants who have been acting in **established** posts for 3 years or more unless – those civil servants have started a process of medical boarding, have received poor performance reports or have criminal charges against them in the Courts. This is simply the right thing to do.
- The Sugar Industry and Workers – My Government is in discussions on the restructuring of the sugar industry for a private public partnership. The new business plan allows for shares to sugar farmers, sugar workers, private investment, BAMC and the general public. Funding for the purchase of shares is available through the Trust Loans programme, Enterprise Growth Fund, Fund Access and Credit Unions. This is Barbados’ first comprehensive attempt to broaden the ownership base of the industry that was at the core of the agricultural sector and truly give workers an opportunity at ownership of the industry that they helped to build and make world class.

### **Locating our influence in the world – ensuring we are seen and heard and not dismissed as being dispensable.**

For 10 years, Barbados stepped back from our obligations to work assiduously with countries and institutions regionally and globally. Had we acted on these obligations, Barbados would have had a direct influence on the policies, conditionalities and international agreements that affect our world and Barbados’ place in it.

These issues range from the financial services sector and actions to prevent our being blacklisted, to the setting of criteria to assess our efforts to boost security and measures to fight money laundering. It includes what we may be permitted to do with domestic agricultural production and manufacturing, in order to enhance our ability to attain food security. If we are not at the table to represent our views, we will end up with a one size fits all prescription that removes from us the legitimate policy options which are needed to protect Barbados' people and our economy.

We in this country do not need anyone to tell us how critical is the fight to attain food security, as one of the weapons in our arsenal of policy options to protect domestic production in agriculture, agro-processing and manufacturing. We know that during World War II, when food supply chains were disrupted, legislation was passed mandating plantations to grow certain percentages of their land in food.

With the corona pandemic, the world is again witnessing supply chain disruption. Barbados is a net importer of fuel, food, and essential commodities. Should there be major disruptions in the global supply chain, particularly in staple foods, our country must be in a position to feed itself. This is one of the motivating factors that made my Government agree to become the smallest nation ever to host the United Nations Congress on Trade and Development, UNCTAD 15. Serving as host-country gives Barbados a voice at the decision-making table where we can make a credible case for ourselves and for CARICOM to the multilateral community and to a wide global audience.

We recognise the importance of our Prime Minister assuming the office of Co-chair of the Development Committee of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, along with the Minister of Finance of Uruguay. The co-chairmanship which will last for the next 2 years, is pivotal to giving Barbados and the wider Caribbean a voice on how our region and the international financial institutions will treat to the debt and development of open and vulnerable, small island developing states in a post-COVID era.

In order to realize its domestic objectives of enhanced economic growth and revenue generation, Barbados must pursue increased, strengthened and diversified external engagements which will serve to mitigate the country's vulnerabilities, build resilience, and maximize opportunities for sustainable development.

An important platform for advancing Barbados economic interests abroad is the Barbadian diaspora and Friends of Barbados community. These are under-used assets with regard to their networks, skills and resources. The power of the diaspora and Friends of Barbados, must now be leveraged systematically to facilitate and

enhance their contribution to Barbadian society and economy, especially through innovation and entrepreneurship, partnerships in various sectors, sustainable philanthropic initiatives, and attractive investment opportunities. Plans are well advanced for the establishment of a Diaspora Unit within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Barbados' diplomatic missions must be in the forefront of efforts to identify new and emerging sectors that can propel and expand the Barbadian economy. In the last 18 months, Barbados established diplomatic relations with 12 with a range of countries. We are seeking to expand our diplomatic footprint, acknowledge shifting geopolitical realities and seeking new friendships amongst like-minded countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade will now pursue the establishment of new Missions as part of the national effort toward economic reconstruction and business generation.

Plans are advanced for the establishment High Commissions in Kenya and Ghana, as well as an Embassy in the United Arab Emirates and a Consulate at Casablanca, Morocco. This will assist us in broadening our options in diplomacy, trade and investment. Barbados will now have representation at the only location in the South of globe, of the principal agencies of the United Nations, including UNEP and UN HABITAT.

The people of CARICOM are our sisters and brothers. Barbados will hold fast in protecting and advancing the interests of our regional family in every forum of importance until all people of this region have the highest possible quality of life.

### **Caring For and Securing Barbados and The Barbadian Economy**

COVID put Barbados in lockdown as it did many other countries. It will be some time before the country is again able to host the numbers of tourists which we usually do.

My Government is therefore proposing to stimulate the local economy by putting in place a number of provisions and initiatives to support Barbadians and ensure they weather this period successfully. It must be noted, however, that given the drop in its revenues, my Government cannot meet the demands of every national or give everything for which people may ask. Despite the constraints, my Government is still giving generous stimulus packages of benefits and support to help every Barbadian keep their head above the turbulent social and economic seas in which we find ourselves. My Government will not let you drown.

The new initiatives are also designed with a further purpose in mind. That is, giving Barbados a general face lift, and the improvement of health conditions, aesthetics and environment. Barbadians must start to feel that we are really living in paradise. And when the country fully reopens, we must be able to welcome visitors to a truly beautiful Barbados, for an experience that is memorable in every way. This work will make Barbados – Fitter, Stronger, Cleaner, Better, More Competitive and Just.

The support proposed by my Government will be across multiple sectors and is intended to create jobs; provide a social safety net for youth, seniors, and the vulnerable; stimulate social and economic activity; generate the movement of money within the local economy, keep citizens engaged in lawful activity, and provide much needed incomes for citizens until the country starts earning foreign exchange again.

**My Government will therefore implement:**

### **A 12-Month COVID Relief Programme**

With the Adopt-A-Family and other similar programmes, my Government’s initial response revolved around supporting households. We must now go further. People’s need to work goes beyond receiving a pay cheque. A job helps to give our lives purpose, a sense of security and promotes mental wellness. In plain language, our men and women must have options. They both have an intrinsic desire to provide for their families and to have lives of dignity. In recognition of this, my Government has settled on a \$40 million COVID Relief programme which will run for the next year.

The COVID Relief Programme will be designed to ensure that people in the country have work to which they can go. While the private sector fights to restore a level of economic activity and provide jobs, Government will play its part to ensure that the largest number of people possible is able to support their families. These jobs will be provided by contracting persons for 12 months, to carry out a range of activities across Barbados that are required to improve the quality of our life, our environment and our infrastructure.

Examples of these activities include – the hiring of Monitors in primary schools, to assist in ensuring that the children physical distance during breaks and lunch hour, as well as before and after school; engaging persons to assist the workers of the National Assistance Board in supporting services for our elderly in communities given their vulnerability in the times of this pandemic; the completion of the “Where Am I?” project, that will see signs erected across all of our roads and communities; the enhancement of our food security through the engagement of persons to work at

the island's Agricultural Stations; and the allocation of allotments for agricultural production, to persons living in urban Barbados, through the soon to be established public private partnership of the Lears Urban Land Lease and Food Security Project.

Further examples of the work that will be done under the this relief programme include – the restoration of methods to resuscitate our soils and fields by breaking the dead pan soils through deep ploughing; the prevention of water runoff and erosion, by returning to the planting of hedgerows between our fields and roads, across the country, using khus khus grass and now lemon grass; the protection of our infrastructure through the establishment of contracts to build gabions to secure the Scotland District from land slippage and erosion; the repairing of pot holes and cleaning of wells and watercourses, gullies and beaches, the debushing of unkept lots, together with the removal of derelict properties; and the repair and construction of sidewalks to accommodate all persons who want to move safely around our towns, particularly those who are differently able.

My Government is committed to easing the pain of those hardest hit by this pandemic. These individuals will be contracted as self-employed persons for this job work and will be required to also pay their National Insurance. Since the pandemic, thousands more Bajans now recognise how absolutely vital it is for them to contribute to the NIS, if they are to benefit from social security when they most need it. As my Government eases the pain of these persons, we will ensure that we fix both a number of outstanding challenges, as well as the new ones caused by COVID.

Within the context of the BERT programme it is imperative that my Government lay the platform for growth of our economy. While the macro economic framework was stabilized by the end of 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a virtual implosion of the private economy. Both businesses and workers have been thrown down, especially in the tourism sector. The need to counter the consequences of this apocalyptic reality of our tourism sector has caused my Government to work with the Labour movement and the private sector in the industry, to come up with innovative solutions that allow us to protect tourism workers and the enterprises operating at the centre of our main productive sector.

**My Government has agreed to implement a stimulus package for the productive sectors which my Government will implement. This Stimulus Package will be known as BEST (Barbados Employment and Sustainable Transformation Plan).**

Tourism accounts for 45% of Barbados' GDP. It employs a significant amount of our workforce. Some 15,000 people are employed directly in the tourism industry,

while a further 32,000 workers are estimated to be employed in tourism related jobs and services. The BEST Programme will be a maximum of \$300 million scheme for hotels and tourism facilities as a response to COVID-19. The largest fiscal stimulus package being offered to the country. It is intended to protect jobs, support the balance sheets of our companies in the tourism sector and those of direct tourism services, and ultimately, ensure that our physical infrastructure remains fit for when some level of normalcy returns. Barbados must be fully prepared for that moment.

The BEST Plan has three main features. The first is that the Government will make an investment in tourism firms which will enable these companies to re-engage all of their workers on 80% of their normal salary for up to two years should the need arise. Workers entering the scheme will not lose their existing rights to severance pay if they are laid off again at any point within the next 12 months.

The resources will only be available if tourism numbers and revenues remain below the levels required for the survival of the sector. This job support programme is a strategic intervention that is a win-win for all. It is conditional on a number of measures designed to strengthen the competitiveness of the tourism sector specifically, the economy generally, the quality of workers and the opportunities given to them. And what are these conditions?

There must be a substantial upskilling of workers in the sector. The National Training Initiative will offer training programmes for tourism staff. The training offered will be in the areas needed for their specific job, but also for the softer skills that will be provided through citizenship education. Bajans should note that this citizenship training will be offered to all Barbadian employees and employers, all students above class 3 and any other citizen wanting to benefit from state benefits. It is our intention that as many of our citizens will become “Star Bajans,” instilling a stronger sense of national pride and purpose and of course, respect and tolerance for fellow Bajans.

Second, there must be a transformation of the tourism sector by committing to greening through water conservation and water harvesting measures, where applicable and the installation of renewable energy capacity, to reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Third, there is a requirement to review all processes, payments and systems to ensure their suitability in today’s world and where necessary, to undertake a digitisation of the same. My Government will support these last two elements by the establishment of a dedicated **Green and Digital Investment Fund** for which firms that have re-engaged their workers will be eligible.

The funds will primarily be distributed through investment in the companies by way of a class of shares that mirrors preference shares. There will be some limited opportunity for grants. This method of support will help to strengthen the weakened balance sheets of these firms. This Green and Digital Innovation Fund and training will also be available to small businesses and to manufacturing and agricultural enterprises, provided that they too have retained a significant portion of their jobs. The sums available for investment and grant will be capped to ensure that as many entities benefit as possible.

My Government has indicated that it would be requiring those entities benefiting from the programme to invest in localizing the value chain and making deeper connections with our farmers, our manufacturers, our artists of all types and our contractors and providers of professional services. Investments in collaboration across the sector such as joint websites, tours, marine sculptures parks, water ferries, and similar initiatives will also be strongly encouraged. My Government recognizes that hotels or businesses which have plans to access the money needed for the purposes of refurbishing and expanding the business' plant in a sustainable way, should be encouraged to undertake this work now as their revenue is already down and there is an inevitable downside to undertaking construction. We are refining the Tourism Loan Guarantee Fund, given the reluctance of local banks to participate, in spite of the need for many of our tourism establishments to be able to access cheaper forms of capital.

Let us be clear, my Government will invest to save enterprises. This is preferable to simply paying pensions and social security for workers to remain at home. It also helps our enterprises and their staffs to remain fit for purpose while supporting employees in maintaining mental wellness. It allows Government to protect, and in some instances, to expand the nation's hotel stock and to help save our enterprises from bankruptcy and insolvency. While my Government will help these businesses stay afloat, they will not be permitted to draw dividends or unreasonably increase the compensation of management and owners before repaying the investment in their enterprises.

By providing this assistance, it is envisioned that the beneficiaries will be better positioned to retain at least 75% of the workforce, create sustainable jobs, honour their statutory obligations and manage their debt. Where will their revenues come from so that Government may retreat? Yes, our traditional sources, but we are actively encouraging competitive pricing to staycations and regional travel. Support similar to that given to the tourism sector for green energy transitions, will be extended to the manufacturing and small business sectors.

## **Tourism Is Still Our Business**

Having said that, tourism bookings for November and December look very promising and suggest that the Barbados brand is still a major magnet in the market. In terms of future tourism investment, significant bolstering of the local product will occur with the addition of the Hyatt Ziva, a \$400 million hotel, which will employ 1800 construction workers and 1200 full time staff thereafter. Sam Lords Castle will be refurbished and built out for \$400 million, employing 1000 construction workers and 1200 full time staff. Sagicor Estates is a construction project of \$200 million, which will engage 900 construction workers and later, approximately 200 full time employees.

Discovery Bay will be a \$200 million investment using 500 construction workers and there following, 500 full time staff. The Crane expansion is expected to cost \$75m, employ 200 construction workers and once completed, over 70 full time staff. The expansion of Sandals will cost \$60 million, employ 200 workers in construction and 75 full time staff when built. The price tag for Apes Hill is \$25 million, using the services of 75 construction workers and after completion, 20 full time staff.

These new investments of over \$1.4 billion, approximately 4500 construction workers for 2 years and 3275 additional jobs thereafter, speak to there still being tremendous confidence by investors in the government and people of Barbados, the tourism industry and those who work in it. The training that will be given as part of the support for existing hotels, is expected to improve the standard of service and deliver greater customer satisfaction, thus making us an even more competitive destination.

Apart from new construction, in light of the heightened use of electronic platforms for recreation and business purposes, the Ministry of Tourism will promote a virtual Barbados tourism product. The Ministry will also seek to position Barbados as a centre for private aircraft services and a Southern aviation hub for the Caribbean, as well as cross-Atlantic travel and cargo business.

The Barbados Welcome Stamp which allows entry to remote workers for periods of up to a year, has gained Barbados first-mover advantage for using this scheme as a response to COVID. It has become very popular, with about 1400 applications having been made in the first six weeks. The Welcome Stamp is creating demand for accommodation in every type of property, from ordinary communities and AirBnBs to villas. Car rental companies, realtors, public and private schools, restaurants and supermarkets are significant beneficiaries of the business which the Stamp is generating.

It is a strong initiative to mitigate the consequences from the fall in short-term travel because of the Revised Protocols for travel globally. Our experience of the Ross University Students and staff is that a 9 or 12 month stay visitor spends in Barbados more than 10 times what a one-week visitor would spend. Based on these figures, the long stay Welcome Stamp will yield substantial benefits and is a good way to set off losses from short-stay visitors.

### **Securing Citizens, Entrepreneurs and Their Businesses**

My Government is resolved that the vendors of Barbados must have a new deal. This will include refurbished markets and the construction of new areas, from Fairchild Street to Brandons and from Baxter's Road to Temple Yard, as well as a number of community vending facilities. Much of this work has started. A new Bill that will halt the criminalization of vendors, for breach of licences, will simultaneously regulate vending so there is no mayhem and disorder. We will enhance access to credit for vendors, by recapitalising Fund Access with \$20 million and also the Trust loan Programme with a further \$10 million.

Small businesses have already received benefits for job subsidies in a programme being administered by Fund Access. My Government will now assist farmers in providing food and other essential items for our tables through a low-rate financing initiative (1.5% – 2.5% under special conditions) through the Co-operative Society Investment Fund. These funds will be made available to farming and food producer co-operatives and their members, to assist them in purchasing much needed raw materials and equipment. The package will target the growth and development of six key priority sectors, namely, renewable energy; agribusiness; health and wellness; creative industries; tourism related businesses and manufacturing.

Since coming to office 2 years ago, my government has been successfully implementing the Barbados Economic Recovery and Transformation (BERT) programme. The BERT is an ambitious homegrown economic plan, supported by the Extended Fund Facility of the International Monetary Fund. It is formulated to respond to the economic mismanagement of the lost decade and has met all of its targets. Put simply, Barbados has moved from running large deficits and not being able to pay its bills, to running surpluses and being able to pay our bills on time. Barbadians can be proud knowing that my Government has been decisive and effective in the management of the fiscal affairs of this country.

The BERT has been updated to reflect the arrival of COVID and our comprehensive response. BERT is not a rigid set of targets, but a plan of action and behaviour, that is measured and monitored. My Government will hold to the course of long-run debt

reduction, strong public finances and reforms to financial transparency and accountability, but for the next two years we will need to pause on debt reduction. We can only return to the level of surpluses we were running previously and our downward path on debt, when tourism returns.

Partly as a result of the trust that we built up in the first two years of not shying away from tough decisions and sharing the burden, our development partners, including the IMF, recognise the scale of the challenge of COVID and that these are exceptional times requiring exceptional action.

Through the Ministry of Finance, my government will now embark on an accelerated series of reforms and initiatives to address the underlying cost structure of doing business in Barbados. On the legislative side, we will pass the National Payments Systems Act to make it easier for citizens to transact business of any type, whether with the private or public sector. This will equally achieve my Government's objective of greater financial inclusion across the economy.

The ability to pay for any good or service digitally will allow all financial institutions to better know their customers, thereby closing the access to credit gap that has plagued too many small and medium sized businesses and entrepreneurs. Paying the coconut vendor on Sundays after church, using your mobile phone is an example of the kind of digital payments transformation my government is seeking to achieve; so that no matter how small the transaction, it can be done easily and efficiently.

My Government will also pass the Fair Credit Reporting Act to complement the National Payments Bill. This Act will transform the process of credit adjudication in the economy. Bajans by nature pay their bills. This new credit reporting system, backed by the digital payments system, will unlock the longstanding barrier to getting credit that has hindered the economic development of the small business sector for too long.

A new Bill for the Central Bank of Barbados will also be enacted to provide an enhanced governance structure, which will include the responsibility for overseeing the regulation of the payments credit reporting systems. Many people feel intimidated, powerless and overwhelmed when in disputes with large financial institutions. To help address this imbalance in power relations, my government will introduce a Financial Services Tribunal to provide consumers in Barbados an avenue to resolve disputes with financial institutions.

Building on the challenging, but successful implementation of ASYCUDA World last year, my Government will introduce modern legislation governing the Customs and Excise Department. This new legislation will further enhance the revenue

collection at Barbados' ports of entry, as well as significantly improve business and trade facilitation. Modernisation of government procurement procedures, will also form an important part of improving the transparency and accountability across central government and its various state owned enterprises. It is also intended that there will be new legislation which will deliver affirmative action provisions for businesses owned by young people, Persons With Disabilities or any other vulnerable or disadvantaged groups. This measure will form part of the economic enfranchisement of our people.

Consistent with the thrust for digital transformation of the country, my government will work with strategic partners to create a new digital banking institution through a Public Private Partnership with the Post Office and credit unions, to improve the choices of financial institution that Barbadian currently have in the market place. The formation of this banking institution will provide for a domestically owned banking institution whilst leveraging the existing assets and infrastructure of the Post Office to reach every community across Barbados.

In this very strained economic environment, my Government will work with individuals and companies to restructure their arrears of statutory obligations to the Barbados Revenue Authority, National Insurance Scheme and the government-owned funding agencies, in much the same way that my government restructured the domestic and external commercial debt. My government will offer a range of scenarios for resolution of the debts owed to the Crown to allow individuals and companies to remain compliant with their statutory obligations. My Government can, and will give relief on tax arrears, but we cannot give relief on NIS contributions.

To further provide relief to Barbadians in this COVID-19 environment and to ease the burden on households, my Government will prepay to individuals, all of the restructured bonds with values less than \$5,000, by December 15, 2020.

## **Protecting and Securing Barbados' Natural Environment**

### **The Green and Blue Economy**

The threat of climate change and the fragility of our ecosystems as an island, require us to move to nature-based solutions and a long term green growth and development strategy.

- To give effect to this strategy, my government will be expediting the implementation of renewable energy projects, with a requirement of at least 30% local ownership to all licensees. Vaucluse at St Thomas will become the

location for a \$360 million, 30 megawatt Green Energy Park. There are other projects of this type under active review. We therefore expect that in two years, over 100 megawatts of renewable energy will be delivered to the national grid from this location. These combined projects will be a contributor to Barbados achieving its goal of being fossil fuel free by 2030.

- Heavy rainfall results in flooding and creates risk of damage to property particularly during extreme weather events. In order to improve water run-off and reduce storm damage, a team will be put in place to clear wells, watercourses and gullies.
- Greater control over the use of pesticides will also be implemented. This will protect public health, the natural environment, soils and water. Further, this focus on more organic farming is in keeping with global market trends and demands.
- Work on the National Botanical Garden is ongoing at Waterford. The Garden will become a place of beauty, learning, respite, recreation and the protection of biodiversity.
- The way our waste is collected and processed in Barbados requires a complete overhaul, a transformation. We will revolutionise waste management systems across the entire process and will mitigate public health risks, improve the working environment for SSA staff and provide a cleaner and greener environment for all Barbadians and visitors to the island. We must seek a competitive advantage by making Barbados the cleanest island in the Caribbean.
- Shoreline enhancement will be undertaken at Oistins, Christ Church, Mullins, and Sandstreet, St. Peter and Clinketts, St Lucy. All designs are climate resilient. The shoreline works at Oistins will connect Bay Gardens to Miami Beach. The Richard Haynes Boardwalk will be extended. The fishing jetties at Oistins and Bridgetown will undergo substantial remedial work and a proper slipway to accommodate fishing and other vessels will be constructed. All markets will be outfitted with solar panels to generate electricity. These will be amongst other phased projects, but will have a value of approximately \$20 million. A Marine Conservation Plan will be implemented, in consultation with all stakeholders, including fisherfolk, to protect our oceans and marine biodiversity,.

## **Food Security and Farming For Barbados and Barbadians**

- At Lears in St Michael, a significant acreage of private sector lands will be made available to the public for use as allotments on which they can engage in farming. One hundred Barbadians are expected to benefit from this programme.
- **FEED – The Farmers Empowerment and Enfranchisement Drive** will be strengthened. In addition, young people will be encouraged to go freight farms which yield high returns on investment, are operated by mobile telephone, tablet or laptop and use less water in a climate controlled environment. This will be done on a lease to own basis. Some 800 people have already signed for the FEED programme, which is expected to benefit some 2000. There will be no initial set up or investment costs to the participating farmers.
- Rapid production of Black Belly lamb will be brought on stream for local consumption. Local butchers will be trained to produce specialty cuts for the hospitality sector without damaging the hides in order to develop a Black Belly leather industry. This will reduce current imports of \$14 million in lamb per annum and put that money into the pockets of local families. Increasing the production of local vegetables is also planned and anticipated to save \$25 million in the import costs.
- Cleared land at Bath, St John has already gone to the Rastafarian community ICAR for farming, more specifically for the growth and production of herbs, aloe, roots and tubers such as sweet potatoes, cassava and yams.
- Active support is being given to a 100 acre private sector pineapple farm at Turners Hall that is also going to package and can tertiary pineapple products. While at Frizers, plantains and bananas are being grown and are on target to reduce imports of bananas by almost 50%.
- The legislation for medicinal cannabis is already in place and the Regulations will soon be finished. This is a potentially lucrative industry. Access to licences and land for farming will be given to ordinary Barbadians who have an interest in this area of farming, crop cultivation, transportation or processing will be given support to invest and participate in the industry. All foreign investments must also have local participation.
- Predial larceny is a significant problem afflicting legitimate farmers and causing tremendous losses. Cabinet has agreed to repeal the Act of 2017 and replace it with more effective legislation that will include drone technology for surveillance, as well as for the application of pesticides and water. Block

chain technology will be introduced for seed to chain tracking. The Royal Barbados Police Force has been asked to consider the establishment of a unit to deal with praedial larceny.

### **Protecting Augmenting and Securing Barbados' Water Supply**

Barbados is a water scarce country and the entire Caribbean region is becoming drier. Access to fresh and potable water for daily living, tourism and development purposes is pivotal to our future development.

- My Government has commenced the laying of mains at Vineyard, in St Philip, through to Mount Pleasant, also in St Philip, to supply residents St John, St Joseph, and St Andrew, with a consistent supply of potable water. This project is expected to be completed by 2021.
- Negotiations have been initiated for the construction of two desalination plants, one located at Ealing Park, Christ Church, and the other at Six Mens, St Peter to increase the supply of potable water to communities in the south and north of Barbados respectively.
- A desalination plant at Trents, which will be a sub-plant of the one at Six Mens, will give further coverage to the most western side of St Joseph and St Thomas. After a dearth of investment in water infrastructure in the last decade, my Government is determined to erase water woes, the bucket and the tanker, from the daily experience of Barbadians and relegate them to our citizens' history.
- The level of treatment provided at the South Coast Sewerage Treatment Plant will be upgraded to allow for the reuse of approximately 2.5 million gallons per day of freshwater through the replenishment of our aquifers.
- It is anticipated that the use of reclaimed water to recharge the St. Phillip Aquifer and for crop irrigation in the south of the island will augment our scarce water resources and provide much needed water for our farmers as we strive for food security. My Government will also pursue as a freshwater augmentation strategy via two contracts issued before May 2020.
- Government plantations at River, St Philip, Bath and Wakefield in St John will also be used for water harvesting and boosting agricultural production.

### **International Business For Local Benefit**

All local business is global and all global business is local. The transformation of the Corporate Registry of CAIPO, by modernizing its operations, is therefore critical if the Office is to be brought into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To this end CAIPO is being reformed and digitised:- a measure that will lead to greater efficiency of the office by drastically reducing the timelines for completion of the services currently being offered.

To be more specific, CAIPO will be implementing a new electronic system that would not only facilitate the conduct of entire transactions from filing to issuance of Certificates of Incorporation as a “straight-through” processing system, but would also facilitate online payments without any requirement for an account deposit, and would be widely accessible and as easy to use as possible. Reform of CAIPO, the establishment of an advisory committee and introduction of new technology and modalities for servicing client class will serve in bringing about essential transformation, which is even more critical now, in light of the effect Covid-19.

My Government reinforces its previous commitment to being a jurisdiction of substance and not being a Post Office jurisdiction. In that regard, Barbados’ suite of international business legislation has undergone major overhaul and re-defining within the last two and a half years to, not only comply with the highest international taxation standards, but also to position the sector to be able to transform the country into a centre of excellence for certain niche sectors in the global financial business arena.

When my Government converged our tax rates for international and domestic companies we created a new, stable, OECD-compliant, low-tax regime for all companies. These features have attracted a number of large international companies wanting to carry out substantive activities from Barbados. Despite COVID, tax revenues from international companies remain stable. Global business is once more becoming an important and growing source of economic diversification for Barbados.

We will modify our existing Credit Funds and create an Industrial Transformation Fund (ITF). This provision is warranted to address the access to credit and finance issue that has been cited as perhaps the industrial sector’s main problem. The financial resources at present in the Enhanced Credit Guarantee Facility and other credit scheme that are on the books of the Central Bank, but which are hardly being used, should be transferred and used to capitalize an Industrial Transformation Fund to be administered by the Enterprise Growth Fund Ltd. The amount involved would total over \$70 million.

In the area of manufacturing, there will be a new industrial strategy which was drafted by the late Professor Arthur and will involve, among other things, the use of our industrial estates and the repurposing of some of our old sugar factory yards and the transformation of the sector

### **Doing Business with Ease In Barbados**

The ease of doing business plays a critical role in the economic growth of any economy. The ability of businesses to seamlessly and effortlessly navigate the processes, rules and regulations established by Government in the conducting of business has a direct impact on the ambitions and determinations of new and existing business. In creating a less bureaucratic environment, businesses can benefit by: having access to economic opportunities, lower transaction costs and are less likely to engage in bribery of public Officials.

My Government is intent on providing a business-friendly environment, which will embrace new and emerging technologies to eliminate unnecessary bottlenecks that constrain business activity, through the development of reforms to address areas of concern in the World Bank's Doing Business Report.

- An example of some of the new initiatives will be a revision of the Liquor License Act, CAP. 182 to allow persons to process applications for liquor licenses online. It would move the process from the magistrate court to a civil jurisdiction which is the Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs. It will reduce the time taken for people to apply and receive liquor licenses across the various liquor licenses categories. Moreover, it allows applicants to pay for licenses on an e-commerce platform.
- The work to formally activate fully the Electronic Single Window will be completed to enhance our trade competitiveness.
- Development of a national consumer policy to address consumer rights and responsibility.

In addition to the initiatives, outlined under the aforementioned the thematic areas, my government will also pursue the following:

- There will be increased monitoring and surveillance of retail shops and supermarkets to address any problem that there may be with price gouging especially at this time of the pandemic.

- My Government will establish a web-based collateral registry of movable assets created for entrepreneurs and/or small businesses that can be used as security when applying for loans from commercial banks and other lending institutions.
- We have also agreed within the last 2 weeks to establish a Financial Literacy Bureau as a training hub to assist businesses, households and schools island-wide in being financially literate, as well as to promote their general training needs.
- Establish a Junior Stock Exchange to encourage and promote investment in Barbados' businesses, give micro and small businesses an alternative source of financing through equity financing, while expanding entrepreneurship, employment and economic development.

## **Building Barbados, Boosting Bajan Capacity**

### **Real Hope In Housing Construction and Infrastructure**

Housing and infrastructure will be important aspects of job creation, economic development, improvement of Barbados' built environment and delivering to citizens who want to "own a piece of the rock."

- The vesting of the units of the National Housing Corporation in the residents of the government housing estates to further a property owning class amongst persons who may not have substantial enough incomes to purchase property on the open markets. Those tenants who have paid deposits on those units will have them returned by the payment of Bonds to some 450 families, at a cost of \$5.5 million.
- Reviewing and strengthening the NHC to ensure it is suited to delivering to a client class, the majority of whom will become owners and will have Homeowners Associations that must work alongside a repurposed and restructured NHC. For persons with lower incomes, emphasis will be placed on Rent to Own and for other categories, my Government will work with the private sector to keep the cost of housing affordable. NHC will concentrate on providing housing solutions for lower income families and will collaborate with the private sector, on housing solutions in the lower middle and middle income cohorts.

- **Home Ownership Providing Energy (HOPE)** is a new housing programme which will feature the construction of 1000 affordable homes. Lands of Todds plantation near Four Roads and other lands near Chancery Lane have been identified as the location for the first 200 homes. It is intended that these homes will be first offered to police, nurses, teachers, and other civil servants earning \$4,000 a month and under.

The total cost of the scheme is over \$250 million with the Government putting in \$40m. Mortgages on the homes will be less than the cost of renting similar sized homes.

All homes will be energy efficient and solar powered. The way the scheme will achieve that is by the Government using the \$40m in the Housing Credit Fund, plus lands given to it through planning gains. These are achieved when developers give land for affordable housing in return for receiving planning permission on a major development project.

Small builders who can prove they can build to the right specifications will be given priority in the awarding of the HOPE housing construction contracts. HOPE offers a real opportunity for home ownership and expands the concept of Barbadians as a property owning people with all the benefits that come with property ownership.

The HOPE scheme will operate in such a way as to reduce the cost of land, mortgages, and construction and give real value to purchasers who will get land worth \$20 or more per square foot, for no more than \$12 per square foot.

This programme will include, a training programme for women in construction fields such as electrical wiring, painting, tiling, and related fields to increase their access to jobs in the areas in which those jobs will be generated.

- Extensive roadworks, road and bridge repair is already taking place all over Barbados. There will be a number of road works programme utilising financing from the People's Republic of China, the IADB and the Latin American Development Bank (CAF)
- Signage and bus stops across the country are either sporadic or broken. A team will be engaged to build and erect signage that improves the visibility of communities and locations across Barbados.

## **Caring For Protecting and Securing Barbadian Communities**

There are communities in both urban and rural Barbados that, for years, have been plagued by problems relating to infrastructure of various types. In addition, there are communities of persons who have also grappled with long standing difficulties, preventing their full integration into Barbadian society.

A number of initiatives of my Government will positively impact communities in Barbados and address existing problems. This will be brought about through the development of essential projects that will enhance the quality of community life and opportunities available, especially for our young people. These will be undertaken by the UDC and RDC which agencies will be merged to become the National Development Commission. The NDC will better and more efficiently deliver services in communities and in the fight against poverty.

- The sum of \$2 million will be allocated for the construction of gabions in the Scotland District, as a prelude to the repair of 41 community roads, also in the Scotland District and the Ernie Bourne Highway. This project will be executed in collaboration with the People's Republic of China.
- The Belle, Ivy and Licorish Village will be sewerred to protect public health and improve the quality of life of the residents of the area, many of whom do not have pipe-borne water. This will bring stability to the residents of these communities after decades of uncertainty.
- The residents of Emmerton, Chapman Lane, and the Orleans, who live within sight of the Bridgetown Sewerage Plant but derive no benefits from it, will now be given small grants to improve their properties and will, at Government's expense, be hooked up to the sewerage system to improve sanitary conditions and ensure environmental protection.
- Emphasis will be placed on the lighting and repair of more Community Centres and Pavilions across Barbados, using renewable energy sources.
- Pit toilets are one of the last vestiges of a bygone era and the shackles of poverty from which all citizens need to be freed. They are a symptom of the increase in poverty from 14-20% during the "lost decade." My Government intends to eliminate pit toilets from the landscape of Barbados.

In addition to communities there are various national stakeholders, or communities of interest, to whom attention needs to be paid.

- In the creative economy, we are conscious that artistes of every type are not currently working or selling their art during this period, my government has developed a programme to buy literary works and serialise, or make documentaries or films of them. For the performing artists a series of concerts and shows with social distancing, will be sponsored by the NCF to ensure our performing artists. Similar programmes will be provided for the visual artists and crafts-persons. Our creatives must also live.
- Culture will be seen first as a tool of development to reinforce identity and confidence in our people. This is why it is now located in the Prime Minister's Office. It allows for synergies also with the task of reparations which has both a local and international dimension, especially at this time when the world has finally accepted that racism and anti-racism and unconscious bias, all matter and must all be confronted.
- To ensure that none of our citizens is left behind, a Commission For Improving The Lives of People with Disabilities, will be set up. This will be chaired my Member of Parliament, Edmund Hinkson.

**The delivery of social services will be restructured.** In the Ministry of People Empowerment and Elderly Affairs, my Government will prioritise how we deliver social services by focusing on lifting our most vulnerable families out of poverty. In the process, allowing them to become independent and capable of giving back individually and collectively, to their families and to their community. The focus of Government cannot just be on how the entity or department delivers the service, or indeed focus only on the individual alone needing the help. In the new approach, every social worker must become a first responder in the gathering of information and initial intervention, while reserving the role of specialist delivery of services as required by the specialists in the system.

**Education Reform** – My government kept faith with the country by resuming the payment of tuition fees for all students pursuing tertiary studies at the Barbados Community College and the University of the West Indies. My Government will continue to make strides in education reform. My Government has already announced its intention to reform the transfer from primary to secondary school. We will review the Common Entrance Examination and we will work with all of the stakeholders to make every school in Barbados a top school as promised, each specializing in different areas. We will also resume the efforts to reform our Curriculum ensuring that we produce well rounded citizens, who first understand

their responsibilities to each other as human beings and then who are trained for the jobs of the future, but more importantly to be readily retrainable at any time.

My Government will also work with all stakeholders to ensure greater accountability in our educational system at all levels from Ministry to principals, teachers to students and parents. My Government will expand the special arrangements that are available to meet the needs of students whose behavior is disruptive and rooted in deviancy. Similarly, we will expand the number of programs designed to eliminate bullying.

I have already announced earlier the introduction of a corps of persons to be known as Primary School Monitors who are expected to make a difference in the schools when the new school term starts. The Monitors will help teachers care for our young children, support children in wearing masks or social distancing, help provide care for children who may be overwhelmed by the changes and protocols resulting from COVID, as well as help teachers reinforce manners and positive behaviours.

The global economy is driven by knowledge and technology. Some \$20 million dollars will be spent to ensure there is no digital divide between those children whose parents can afford electronic devices such as cell phones, laptops and tablets and those who cannot. My government is appreciative of all donations of such devices which have helped tremendously in helping our young people attend classes virtually, get ready for exams, and ultimately equipping them to compete globally. However, our children cannot be left at the mercy of donors, no matter how magnanimous.

My Government will intervene to ensure that every school child has age appropriate electronic devices for remote learning. I encourage parents to ensure their children exercise restraint and responsibility in the way they treat them.

The broad direction of my government is to make every school a top school as promised, so that each child can be educated to the best of their abilities.

### **Healthy Barbadians Beyond COVID-19**

In the area of Health and Wellness, my government is investing in getting our citizens to focus on wellbeing and take responsibility for their own health. This is the preventive approach which will reduce the co-morbidities that are proving to be even more deadly with COVID. To support the primary care, two polyclinics will operate on a 24-hour basis. Sir Winston Scott Polyclinic is working well. We will also add the David Thompson Polyclinic in St John, as an extended hour facility..

The Accident and Emergency department is being modernized, new public private health care facilities will be established, and QEH records are being digitised.

The QEH will deployment of a team of 40 Community Health Assistants and supervisors who will also work in the community, with the approximately 2000 citizens who are the worst afflicted with the chronic non-communicable diseases, who are noncompliant, whose conditions are poorly managed, who are having poor outcomes and are significantly at risk. The idea is, to save the lives and limbs of these citizens and improve their health status.

My Government will establish a National Cardiology Project, aimed at reducing deaths due to heart attacks, which is one of the leading causes of death and disability in Barbados and the Caribbean. Obstructive Sleep Apnea is another chronic condition which adversely impacts quality of life. Left untreated, it is potentially life threatening. My Government will establish a sleep apnea laboratory to conduct in-lab sleep studies.

### **Protecting and Securing Our Young People**

As expressed in the Barbados Labour Party's 2018 manifesto, the vision of the government is "to transform Barbados into the best place in the world for young people to live, learn, create, do business, play, work, raise children and dream."

To realize this ambition, my government intends to evolve the Youth Affairs division to a Youth Development Directorate which will be transformative entity working across government ministries as well as with the private and third sectors to develop and steer high-impact ideas, policies, programmes, projects and partnerships. The core focus of Directorate will be maximizing the quality of every young Barbadian by developing better and more youth job and business opportunities, as well as better and more opportunities for civic and political participation, education and skills training and platforms for physical and mental well-being.

One major undertaking will be the evolution of the Barbados Youth Advance Corp to a National personal development and internship program – with special focus on preparing young Barbadians in new, technology driven sectors such as Renewable Energy, Software development, Design, E-Health, Smart Manufacturing, and similar activities. My government, with its ambitious goals of a modern, prosperous society built on a new national consciousness, will empower and trust young Barbadians to be active agents of this national transformation.

The Job Start scheme, a first jobs initiative for 18-25 year olds is intended to ensure young people paid work experience is ready for full roll out.

The orange, or creative economy, is critical to Barbadian youth, national trade prospects and foreign exchange earnings. Equally, Barbados must build a digital economy for our youth and for our nation's future. We must become a developer of ideas and technologies that allow us to overcome the every-day disadvantages of being a Small Island Developing State. The market place to which we sell our goods, services and the products of our creative imagination must be the virtual and cyber world, not the physical limitation of 432 square kilometres. It is primarily through the digital economy that Barbados can truly overcome the constraints of small size, a small population, and small economy.

If well used, the power of our collective, creative imagination is the only tool we need to convert the disadvantage of being small to an advantage in our pursuit in global distinction and excellence. Only when we unleash the power of our creative imagination, will we begin to see that being cut off at all sides by the sea, requires us to place greater emphasis on production and not just importation; our limited resources compel us to be innovative and efficient; that our lack of scale compels us to focus on producing quality rather than quantity; and that the constant threat of external shocks, both economic and environmental makes us global experts in resilience and adaptability, the very skills needed for survival and success in the modern world.

It's by unleashing our creative imagination using smart technology, that we will move beyond cautious incrementalism to rapid large-scale transformation. We must draw investment into Barbados by targeting and attracting the world's premier financial, technology and related services and businesses. To achieve this, my Government will equip and empower young Barbadians to navigate in the digital economy.

### **Barbados' Youth and Sports**

My government will empower the Ministry of Sport to elevate sports in Barbados beyond recreational activity, and into its globally established position as a central pillar of national socio-economic development. In short order, the Ministry will create a National Sports Policy and a Sport Development Act that will enable the establishment of a vibrant Sports Economy as well as Youth Sports and High Performance athlete frameworks.

### **Making Hard Decisions**

Against this background, we in Barbados must have a frank discussion as a people and make some difficult decisions.

Barbados has always been in the vanguard of pioneering social justice, the protection of civil rights and the battle to ensure dignity to the poor, marginalized, vulnerable and dispossessed. Our generation must do no less; for compassion, decency, empathy, kindness, fairness, and justice are what characterise us as a people.

It was the Charter of Barbados signed at Oistins in 1652 that gave rise to the expression, “no taxation without representation” which became the rallying cry for American colonists to break with Britain and precipitate the American War of Independence. It was in Barbados that universal adult suffrage and a woman’s right to vote, were awarded before many other countries. In the 1960s, our social and economic landscape was transformed when poor people in this country were given access to universal free secondary education by Prime Minister Errol Barrow, now the Rt. Excellent. In the 1980s, this country realized that “backstreet abortions” were taking the lives of our young women. In consequence, the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act which allowed for termination in defined circumstances was enacted.

In the 1980s, my government led by Prime Minister JMGM “Tom” Adams had the courage to take lands from tenantry and plantation owners and convey them at 10 cents a square foot, to poor people living in tenancies across Barbados. This empowered people, created a land and property owning democracy, and served to develop the best housing stock in the Caribbean. It was a bold and visionary move, as today, countries the world over are still looking for policy mechanisms to put land under the ownership of the poor to afford them and their families dignity. It was during this same period that Barbados outlawed bastardy and gave rights to children born out of wedlock and women living in common law unions, outside of the bands of wedlock.

Barbados took these decisions because they were the right thing to do and because it was the correct direction for our culture, social and economic circumstances. In each case, we now accept these rights as essential, and part of the national social and legal fabric. However, at the time they were taken, each of these decisions was highly controversial and bitterly opposed.

The legal systems of modern societies recognise many different forms of human relationships. Barbados is now increasingly finding itself on international lists, including within the multilateral system, which identify us as having a poor human rights record. Barbados does not conduct business, trade with itself or give itself loan

funding. In some cases, our human rights record, when viewed against modern international standards, impacts these other issues and how we are viewed amongst the global family of nations.

On this matter, the world has spoken. If we wish to be considered amongst the progressive nations of the world, Barbados cannot afford to lose its international leadership place and reputation. Nor can a society as tolerant as ours, allow itself to be “blacklisted” for human and civil rights abuses or discrimination on the matter of how we treat to human sexuality and relations. My government will do the right thing, understanding that this too will attract controversy. Equally, it is our hope that with the passage of time, the changes we now propose will be part of the fabric of our country’s record of law, human rights and social justice.

In that regard Mr. President, my Government is prepared to recognise a form of civil unions for couples of the same gender so as to ensure that no human being in Barbados will be discriminated against, in exercise of civil rights that ought to be theirs. The settlement of Barbados was birthed and fostered in discrimination, but the time has come for us to end discrimination in all forms. I wish to emphasise that my Government is not allowing any form of same-sex marriage, and will put this matter to a public referendum. My Government will accept and be guided by the vote of the public as promised in the manifesto.

A second issue that requires compassion, understanding, empathy and the intervention of my Government, is the conviction and incarceration of scores of young men and some women, causing them to lose their jobs, reputation, opportunity to travel, and to become stigmatised over miniscule quantities of marijuana that on the street would be called “a roach” or “a spliff.” Pursuing these matters is a waste of police and Court time.

In my Government’s manifesto of 2018, the matter of the recreational use of marijuana was promised as the subject of a referendum. My Government will honour this promise. However, my government is conscious of the fact that we have witnessed across the globe, everything from the introduction of medical marijuana to the acceptance of recreational marijuana, to the lawful sale of marijuana candies, chocolates, creams and teas. In the last two years, the world and sister countries in the Caribbean, have moved decisively toward forms of liberalization, while we in Barbados remain stuck in modes of criminalisation and stigmatization – a state which did not exist in the Caribbean 100 years ago, according to the CARICOM Regional Commission on Marijuana.

A significant amount of the time of our law enforcement officers and of our Magistrates' Courts is taken up with dealing with individuals with small quantities of cannabis. In 2019, 4,295 drug and drug related criminal charges were laid against accused persons. This represented 30% of the criminal charges laid in that year and were laid against 534 persons.

A large number of these cases are minor, but required the deployment of significant police resources in investigating, processing, taking statements and taking the cases through to trial. This process has little or no redemptive value and in human terms, a large number of our young men are forever left with the taint of the drug charges and the possible conviction.

It is imperative that we take immediate steps to find an alternative way of dealing with our young men and women who are found with small quantities of cannabis, so that they are educated about, and treated for their drug use, while at the same time, not trivialising the criminal nature of their conduct.

We will therefore amend our *Drug Abuse (Prevention and Control) Act* to provide that possession of 14 grams, or half an ounce or less of cannabis is no longer an offence for which one can be arrested, charged and tried; and will therefore not result in an appearance before the Magistrates Court or in a criminal record. The possession will still be unlawful, and will still be punished, but there will be a new approach to how we treat the offender, which is already being used successfully in Jamaica and St. Vincent.

Police may issue a ticket to a person in possession of half an ounce or less of cannabis, similar to a traffic ticket, and the person has 30 days to pay a fine of \$200.00. The ticket will be called a "fixed penalty notice". A person in possession of half an ounce or less and who is under 18 years, or who is 18 years or older and appears to the police to be dependent on cannabis, will be referred to the National Council on Drug Abuse for counseling, in addition to paying the ticket. A person who smokes cannabis in public will not be arrested or detained. The police may issue a ticket to that person, who will have 30 days to pay the ticket.

It will be an offence to fail to pay a ticket for smoking in public or for possession of half an ounce or more. The offender is required to attend Magistrates Court and may be ordered to do community service or pay a fine of \$1,000. A conviction for failing to pay a ticket will form part of the offender's criminal record.

This is not a licence for lawlessness and my Government recognises the link between serious drugs and crime, but is also cognisant of international trends and the social realities of Barbados.

- My Government has **zero tolerance** for gun violence, domestic violence or any other violence, sexual offences, offences against children, dishonesty offences and corruption. Allow police to focus on these offences rather than fighting minor marijuana possession. Fighting Drugs is really a public health battle and ought not to be consuming one-third of the time of the police and our Criminal Courts.

Our police are better equipped than they were two years ago. My government has embarked on a process of ensuring that the man power resources of the Force are better utilised. My Government will continue its outreach for more persons to join the Police and the Defence Force. Strides have also been made in intercepting firearms at our ports of entry, by replacing barely functioning scanners and through the use of other initiatives. Stopping the guns from entering Barbados has been a priority and that work is ongoing. There are now more prosecutors, courts and 5 judges instead of two, dealing with other serious criminal matters, with a clear emphasis on expediting those involving guns.

My Government wishes to remind the public that we cannot ask the police to protect us, unless we are prepared to give them the information in our possession, so as to help them perform their jobs.

On other domestic matters, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) will work closely with the Ministry of Innovation and Smart Technology (MIST) to create the most efficient Barbados possible. MHA is using technological tools to make necessary services and the process as painless as possible, from the online application for passports and other services to the delivery of secure documents through the postal service's Express Courier Service. We will expand the number of services to which this will apply. The aim is to maximize productive time by eliminating unnecessary steps in critical applications. Every licensing process or service capable of being done virtually must be facilitated. Barbadians must not be made to stand in line unless absolutely necessary. All of this will be facilitated by the establishment of a Barbados digital identification that will allow Bajans to establish an authenticated digital as well as physical presence.

Further collaboration with MIST will see the introduction of legislation to facilitate the introduction of electronic monitoring and a parole system. These measures will encourage the reintegration of reformed offenders into society and reduce incidences

of unnecessary remand so that HMP Dodds will be reserved for those persons for whom incarceration is the only viable option.

My government also intends a major reformation of Immigration policies. Successive governments have acknowledged that Barbados is underpopulated and has neither the critical minimal mass nor the working population to support our social infrastructure and way of life. The recent draft report of the National Population Commission has indicated that our population is 80,000 persons short of what natural increase should have led to since 1980.

While we recognize the reality of a declining fertility at this stage the necessary increase in population cannot be left to happenstance and we do not have the luxury of time. Our work force will be smaller than it is now in less than 15 years, and most disturbing, retirees will outnumber new entrants into the work force. These factors will have significant negative consequences on our development if not effectively remedied.

In this regard, my Government will soon be bringing to parliament a new Immigration Bill which will inter alia combine very attractive options for descendants of Barbadians to obtain citizenship as well as targeting necessary skill sets for the development of our country and economy. We are very quick to recognize Bajan lineage and claim persons internationally when they excel, we must now welcome them with our policy. We only have to look at the example of Canada, one of our closest international partners, to see the evidence of the benefits of a well-managed migration policy.

## **Conclusion**

**The approach being employed by my Government is one of providing protection and security for Barbados – protecting and security our economy; protecting and securing our citizens; protecting and securing our society; protecting and securing our environment; and protecting and securing the future of Barbados and Barbadians.**

**I entreat my government to remain steadfast in its determination that Barbados shall be a country of innovation, opportunity, productivity, prosperity, fairness, equity, justice, kindness, peace and good vibes.**

**The work of building the Barbados brand, is the task of every Barbadian, working together with my Government. The narrative that defines our nation, must not be that we survived, but that Barbadians surmounted current challenges and succeeded in delivering on a bright future, in the face of**

**extraordinary and unprecedented challenges. This future is ours, not as a right, but as a responsibility. The future is ours, first to imagine and second to create and build.**

**Together always on our common mission which puts Barbados first; when times are hard we will share, when times are good we will share. Together we will make it. Together we will play our role in making our Beloved Barbados, our region and the world in which we live, better for ourselves, each other and the family of humanity.**

**May God keep his guiding and merciful hand on my Government, the citizens and country of Barbados**