

PM Rowley's Remarks - Post Cabinet Media Briefing

Thursday 30th June 2016

The Prime Minister, Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley, delivered remarks at the Post Cabinet Press Briefing today (Thursday 30th June, 2016) at the Office of the Prime Minister, St. Clair, Port of Spain. Read his statement below.

Good afternoon members of the media, I just want to add a comment or two on the subject that Minister Dillon, Minister of National Security, mentioned, that is the whole question on how we are viewed with respect to our effort in treating with the whole question of trafficking in persons.

The fact that we are still on the watch-list on tier 2 is not entirely a bad outcome because had we not done what minister Dillon had just outlined we would have been more than likely downgraded. However, we were able to hold our position and escape the threatened downgrade because of the actions that we have taken which have been outlined there recently. But we continue to pursue the national effort.

The watch-list of tier 2 and our position on it has been significantly influenced not by the efforts that we have made or not made but particularly by the country's apparent low level of convictions given the perceived high level of incidents of the crime that is being targeted here. It is the expectation of those who monitor us, who know in some instances a bit more than we do from what's happening around us and happening to us, that they expect us to operate at a more efficient level in treating with the incidence of this crime.

So we expect that as we put our house in order, and get more convictions relative to the perception of prevalence of the crime that we could find ourselves upgraded to tier 1 as we go forward. But to do that there is some backward linkages that need to be more effective and the government through the Attorney General's office, is holding and will

continue to hold the kind of conversation at the office of the DPP which has its own challenges and hopefully within the ear-shot of the judicial and legal service commission, whose job it is to ensure that the officers who are required to staff the DPP office are in those vacancies and that the DPP's office is able to provide the kind of back-stopping support and direction and guidance to the police service and more importantly that the police service will be more diligent and more effective in responding to it.

When all those gears are working smoothly, then we are sure that Trinidad and Tobago will be elevated to tier 1. But for the moment we have held our position in tier 2 as against being downgraded.

The conversation in front of us now is a conversation about CLICO and therefore today I simply want to say that contrary to what some persons will have you believe, the government of Trinidad and Tobago today has no horse in the CLICO race and therefore we're backing nobody to escape any sanction.

And tomorrow I make a statement in the Parliament with respect to the report that I received and next Friday the Minister of Finance will make a statement on the Ministry of Finance's position in conjunction with Central Bank whether CLICO and its relationship with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

There are two (2) statements to come in the parliament, one tomorrow and one next Friday. Today the Cabinet received information with respect to the work that has been going on with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Because we have been over the last few months literally picking up the pieces in the shattered Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Minister Moses, a very experienced person in foreign affairs has been quietly pulling together the strands, we have been quietly making our nominees to our various participating countries outside of Trinidad and Tobago and as the system requires, you make these nominations and you wait for agreement with respect to our nominees and we have quite a few and we made those appointments to New York, to South Africa, Brazil, Canada and so on.

We still have two major ones outside and we're still waiting for agreement on India and we're still to make our nominee to the United Kingdom and Nigeria. So we are going very systematically, very thoroughly in placing the appropriate and qualified persons to these positions so that at the end of it all we will have a very sound and effective foreign service system out there working toward our general benefit.

We have also in that mode made some significant changes, some people have been moved from South America back home to Trinidad , or to the embassy in Brazil, in Caracas and some FSO 5s and 3s and 2s have been moved from headquarters to missions abroad and commensurately some people have been moved, who have been abroad for some time, have been back to headquarters because rotation within the foreign service is a normal practice. So I'm just putting you on notice in the event that you hear grumblings about who was moved and who wasn't moved, it has nothing to do with individual, preferences, spite or malice.

It has to do with proper management of the Foreign Service which has been in shambles. The other matter I want to mention is that in reviewing our international profile, cabinet today agreed to the closure of our mission in Uganda because given the history of this location and the changes in the international profile and where we want to be at this time, we came to the conclusion at the level of the Cabinet guided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Uganda was not the best location to be on that part of the world and treating with Middle East.

And given the importance of the Middle East in today's world and especially in finance and business and energy and so on, that Trinidad and Tobago will be better served with a mission in the Emirates and service the surrounding areas from there.

So we've taken a decision to phase out the mission in Uganda in Kampala and to establish after the requisite discussions with the relevant country, a mission in Abu Dhabi which covers the Emirates, in the Middle East and also feeding off of that, maintain a presence in Dubai as we proceed to grow our international financial centre as one of the objectives of Trinidad and Tobago.

So you will see us making that shift from East Africa to the Middle East. And in the Caribbean, interestingly enough, these discussions have been going on and the note appears before the Cabinet today, having been written last week, where the Cabinet of Trinidad and Tobago has agreed to re-establish a Mission, High Commission in Barbados. Meaning that the OECS will be serviced out of Barbados. We maintain our mission in Jamaica where we already have a High Commissioner; and that Mission will service the surrounding areas of Jamaica, Cuba Haiti and so on. And this couldn't have come at a more appropriate time because as Prime Minister in Trinidad and Tobago I hear the winds of disturbances in the CARICOM and Trinidad and Tobago is resolute with respect to our commitment to CARICOM. And the mission in Barbados is but one of the expressions of our resolve to do whatever we can, whatever we must to ensure that CARICOM remains in our focus.

And having said that, I have mentioned a while ago the last time I spoke to you from a platform like this I mentioned to you the difficulties we were facing in Jamaica and my intention to visit Jamaica. Well those arrangements are almost complete and I visit Jamaica I think from the 17th and I'll be there for 3 days and during that period I will make full use of my time in Jamaica in renewing our bonds and our relationships and addressing, whenever the opportunity arises, developments of the review of CARICOM because that now seems to be an issue which wasn't in front of us 6 months ago, the question of CARICOM's presence and its relationships being reviewed on a unilateral basis.

The best decision making for the country is had by bringing together the people who are involved and those who can contribute to the best outcome in decision making and that is how this Government runs its business.

So, in October, on the 8th October, exactly one month after the Government came into office I appointed a Standing Committee on Energy and that committee I took the Chairmanship of, as Prime Minister. And the Committee included the Minister of Finance; the Minister of Energy and Energy Industries; the Minister of Public Utilities (where Powergen and T&TEC reside); the Minister of Rural and Local Development; the

Minister of Planning and Development; the Minister in the Attorney General's Office Stuart Young; the Minister of Trade and Industry; Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly, Orville London, who is also the Secretary for Energy in Tobago; Mr. Andrew Jupiter, Chairman of Petrotrin; Mr. Gerry Brooks, National Gas Company Chairman; Mr. Keith Sirju, Chairman of T&TEC; Professor Ken Julien, the architect of the execution of Pt. Lisas and expert in power systems, Professor Emeritus, UWI; Mr. Stephen Gardener, Industrial Engineer who was at the nursery when the steel industry was placed in Pt. Lisas, when the port was built – he grew up in Pt. Lisas and worked abroad in a number of commercial areas in industrialisation similar to Pt. Lisas; the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance; the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Energy and; two technical advisors of the Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries along with Mr. Malcolm Jones, a former Executive Chairman of Petrotrin under whose stewardship that GTL Plant came to grief.

Well of course, with all the names mentioned there, there are persons who are only interested in focusing on Malcolm Jones being on a committee of that size and of that nature. As though we were denying Mr. Jones something that he ought to be denied when in fact it was the opposite. I asked Mr. Jones to serve on this committee and he wasn't inclined to do so because he has serious health challenges. But I said to him, "Listen, I would want you to talk to the committee – not to me, to the committee – about Petrotrin's situation as the last Executive Chairman so we can have a very clear view and, you can be a part of a committee that is in fact looking ahead.

And it wouldn't take years; we'll get past that in a few months." And he reluctantly agreed and he came to the committee and he served from October (2015) to March (2016). What this committee does – nobody in this committee gets paid, there is no stipend, there is no salary, there is no title, just a member of a committee to participate in discussions so that the Government and people of Trinidad and Tobago could have decision making based on the broadest possible input from those who can contribute to it.

So, he came and like everybody else, especially somebody like him who want to point to a spectacular failure under his stewardship of world GTL, but if one is to be fair, can point to a lifetime of experience elsewhere. Nobody points to methanol, nobody points to TRICTOC, nobody points to – as a person coming out of our soil, reaching where has reached and the skills that he brought over the decades. Forget that. A government sets out to persecute him and of course, when it comes down to the punch to the court house door, no witnesses, no witness statement and they ask this government and the new board to continue the persecution without witness statements, without witnesses and so on and so on.

I beg to differ that the policy of the last government is to be slavishly followed by this government because you didn't elect us to continue with the ridiculous behaviour of the UNC.

And that is why this new board of Petrotrin was able to take the belated legal advice which we outlined in great depth and detail in the Parliament where the board of Petrotrin ended the matter. They could talk the persecution if they wish but let me tell you how it goes in this government. So by March, having been appointed and reluctantly agreeing to assisting us in the discussion so we can get a clear picture as to what is happening in Petrotrin. By March, on the 23rd of March, I received from Mr Jones the following communication:

“I refer to the communication of October 27th, 2015 from the Cabinet Secretariat, Office of the Prime Minister informing me of my appointment to the Standing Committee on Energy under your Chairmanship and would like to inform you that I'm resigning from the Committee effective immediately. The opportunity to serve in this capacity was greatly appreciated but primarily, my health concerns will not allow me to continue at this time. If I can be of any assistance in the future, please let me know.”

This is against the back drop of me persuading him to serve for a while so that we can at least have his involvement in the early discussions which involved Petrotrin's situation,

successes and failures. On that note I wrote to the PS on the same day, I said “PS, letter please to thank Mr Jones for his service to the Committee, for my signature.”

That letter was written on the 8th of April to Mr Jones and it says

“Dear Mr Jones,

RE: Letter of Resignation.

I hereby accept your letter of resignation dated March 23rd 2016 from your position on the Standing Committee on Energy. I thank you for your dedication and service to the Committee and for your contribution to the development of the energy sector in Trinidad and Tobago. Please accept my best wishes for your future prosperity and health.”

That is how the PNM deals with people; so that is how we dealt with Malcolm Jones. And if it is that there are people who believe that they would have dealt with it differently then that is reasonable and that is their option. We know how they dealt with it, we know what the outcome was. But I think for it to be a national conversation, that there’s something that ought to be lauded in persecuting a person who served this country in a way that Malcolm Jones has done, all that does is to ensure that nobody else of his calibre comes into the public service if they can help it.

As we set about to pick boards now, I’m Chairman of the Board’s Committee, picking people. But when the people who wants to serve on Boards, and not everyone who wants to serve on a Board should be on a Board. And as we look at the skills that we need, and the character of the person you need to run the state enterprise sector, invariably, we are confronted by many citizens, who in an earlier time, would have agreed to provide public service as part of their old national giving back and development saying to us now, as they have said to previous governments in recent times, “they will have nothing to do with the public service” because if that is the kind of behaviour they will get where a Board takes a decision, a decision that fails, and a government comes in and the Attorney General singles out an individual for individual persecution because he’s a

friend of somebody they don't like, then many people in this country will have nothing to do with the public service and the country will be poorer for it.

And it's a good idiom that says that when people of quality don't want to participate, then we end up being governed by our inferiors.

That is what is happening. So we are not, all that is being said on the other side, we are not going to be encouraged into persecuting anybody because we make a distinction between prosecution for wrong doing and persecution for political benefit. And if there are those who believe that by persecuting Malcolm Jones it will involve their political coming, second coming, I wish them well. And as for Professor Julien, if there's one citizen who is owed a debt of gratitude in Trinidad and Tobago, it is Professor Kenneth Julien. But, that is my position as an individual, I'm sure there are others who think differently.