



**MINISTRY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**STATEMENT/ CONTRIBUTION OF**  
**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE HAZEL MANNING,**  
**MINISTER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**  
**ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEBATE ON**  
**THE MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL 2008**

Mr. Speaker, I beg to move that the Municipal Corporations (Amendment) bill be read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the Municipal Corporations (Amendment) Bill 2008 is to extend the term of Municipal Councils for a period of one year with effect from the 14<sup>th</sup> day of July, 2008.

More specifically, the bill seeks to amend the Municipal Corporations Act 1990 as follows:

In Section 273 by inserting after subsection (1G) the following subsections:

“ (1H) Notwithstanding subsection (1F), for the purposes only of the elections due in the year 2008, the term of office of the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors holding office in a

Corporation on the 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2008, is hereby extended for a period of one year from the date of expiration of such term.

(11) All powers exercisable by mayors, aldermen and councilors under this act shall be exercisable by them during the period referred to in subsection (1H).”

Mr. Speaker, before I delve into the specific issues associated with the amendments being proposed to the Municipal Corporations Act 1990 I will put the matter of local government reform as it relates to the amendment in the proper perspective.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of this PNM administration let me assure this Honourable House and the nation that we are committed to modernizing and transforming the system of local government in Trinidad and Tobago as an integral component of vision 2020.

In fact Mr. Speaker, we see local government as an indispensable participatory democratic structure of our country which must be strengthened, re engineered and sustained.

We therefore need to continue to pursue relentlessly the reform initiatives started in 2004 by carefully adapting to the environmental realities presented and making appropriate adjustments along the way.

Mr. Speaker, the main reason for seeking this extension is that some of the key institutional and systematic requirements for the introduction of the new local government system are currently being reviewed and would not be completed before the constitutionally allotted timeframe for holding local government elections.

In this context, in April 2008, we published a Green Paper on the proposed Roles and Responsibilities of Local Government Bodies, inclusive of the main mandate of the Ministry of Local Government.

This document was informed by the consensual issues arising from the extensive public consultations on the Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform 2006. It was also informed by a position document and the reports of International Consultants whose services were procured through the United Nations Development Programme to make recommendations on the roles and responsibilities of Local Government bodies and the Ministry of Local Government as well as to design appropriate structures and organizations for the Local Government System.

Mr. Speaker, We took the view that the most appropriate course of action was to determine the roles and responsibilities of the local government bodies, before proceeding to determine the structure and organization of the Local Government System.

The adoption of such a course of action would provide clear guidance and the platform for designing unambiguously the nature of institutional and administrative relationship among the key institutional stakeholders in the local government system as well as the types and number of administrative sub-structures.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is committed to consulting with the public on major issues affecting the nation. We are currently engaged in public consultations on the Green Paper on the Roles and Responsibilities of Local Government Bodies, throughout the 14

municipalities in Trinidad. We have held consultations in three municipalities thus far, and these series of consultations are expected to be completed by September 2008.

Mr. Speaker, very soon we will be laying this Green Paper in both houses of Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, as soon as these consultations are completed and Cabinet considers the consensual position arising there from, we will address the important issue of the appropriate structure and organization of the local government system.

Mr. Speaker, we need to get it right, to ensure that there is clear authority, accountability and reporting relationships among the Ministry, the Council, the Executive Council and the administrative divisions. This will promote quick decision making, operational efficiency and effective administrative coordination.

We envisage that this process will take approximately four months. Mr. Speaker, we will then be in a position to bring to this Parliament appropriate legislation, to give effect to the Local Government Reform proposals.

We have already commenced preliminary works in this area; however a critical aspect to the completion of the new local government legislation is the revised boundary arrangements for the Local Government System.

Mr. Speaker, as we all are aware, the complex process of re-defining the local government boundary arrangement, involves not only determining the number and types of local government bodies but also exploring the demographic characteristics of communities, to ensure effective resource mobilization, service delivery co-ordination

and effective planning for sustainable development. This process is ongoing and is expected to take approximately six months.

Mr. Speaker, having regard to the current environmental considerations and impending Local Government Elections destined to occur within the current system of Local Government, it is recommended that Local Government Election be postponed to allow for the determination and implementation of the new systems, structures, governmental policies and legislation of the proposed Local Government Reform.

Mr. Speaker, there have been several attempts to reform the local government system in Trinidad and Tobago and we have learnt that the question of Local Government reform cannot be totally isolated from public service reform. In fact, some of the archaic institutional and regulatory arrangements have been a fetter to significant progress in the reform agenda.

Local Government Reform must therefore be incorporated into our strategy for modernization and transformation and therefore we have taken into consideration in our proposal for reform, the overarching pillars of vision 2020, which are nurturing a caring society, developing an innovative people, promoting competitive economy, sound infrastructure and environment and promoting effective governance.

We see our mandate as mainly promoting effective governance, therefore, our vision of Local Government in a reform environment is sustainable local communities, rooted in the principles of robust participative democracy : embracing all.

Mr. Speaker, this means that we must be guided by a set of core values pertinent to effective governance. We have identified accountability, transparency, responsiveness, social equity, social justice, all inclusiveness and value for money expended as our shared values.

If we are to be guided by wave 10 of the Mori Poll, which indicated inter alia, that people perceive Local Government to be slow, unresponsive, unsatisfactory, delivering poor service and wasting taxpayers' money, then we would have got it right, in so far as our shared values for effective governance are concerned.

Mr. Speaker, the situational analysis of the local government system, suggests that there is a need for institutional restructuring and systems re-engineering of both the Ministry of Local Government and Municipal Corporations.

Mr. Speaker, at the Ministry of Local Government we need to change the way we do business, from what is now perceived as an implementing machinery, to essentially a conduit for facilitating the development of policies, standards and support services for the Municipal Corporations.

At the Corporation level, the structures and business processes need to be revamped, to focus on the provision of community services and the maintenance of community infrastructure within a participative democratic framework that allows for the inclusion of all community groups, institutions and organizations in the decision making and implementing process.

Mr. Speaker, we have identified five main focal areas of responsibility for a reformed Local Government. These are: Municipal Management, Economic Development, Social Service, Environmental Management and Resilient Communities.

Mr. Speaker, our emphasis on Municipal Management is aimed at establishing the necessary business systems, processes, procedures and techniques that will facilitate the judicious allocation and deployment of resources, thereby optimizing the achievement of results in the management sub streams of capital and infrastructural Asset Management, Financial Management, Information and Communication Technology and Human Resource Management.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of economic development we will focus on facilitating the preparation and implementation of Regional and Local Area Development Plans as well as promoting commercially viable options in agriculture, tourism and waste management. We have already commenced the preparation of Regional and Local Area Plans under the direction of the Local Area and Regional Development Unit of the Ministry of Local Government.

These plans are currently being prepared through a consultative process, involving all the various organizations, groups, institutions and sectors within the municipalities/ regions. Stakeholder consultations on these plans have been held in Municipalities such as Tunapuna/Piarco, Chaguanas, Post of Spain and Sangre Grande.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to social services we will be targeting sporting and recreational facilities, cultural activities, community policing and liaising with the Ministry of Social Development to ensure the effective delivery of Social Services. We have

already established coordinating mechanisms, to collaborate with the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Health, with a view to implementing the Socially Displaced Persons Act.

In a number of Municipalities, we have identified the quantum and categories of socially displaced persons in public places. Moreover, in conjunction of Ministry of Public Administration, buildings have already been identified, for the intermediate and long term accommodation of such persons.

Indeed Mr. Speaker, we at the Ministry of Local Government are playing our part towards the nurturing of a caring society an essential pillar of vision 2020.

Mr. Speaker, an important aspect of our reform is environmental management. We view this as critical to the development of sustainable communities and as such, beautification and landscaping, sanitary and clean surroundings, the control of insect vector and waste management, are critical to our health, safety and wellbeing.

We have already begun several initiatives in the area of waste management. We will be modernizing and revolutionizing our approach to waste management, with emphasis on reducing waste generated, recycling and reusing. We have established an effective partnership with SWMCOL to implement initiatives in these focal areas.

Mr. Speaker, significantly in the area of waste management, we recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Province of Nova Scotia, Canada. This MOU encompasses a range of activities including, consulting services for the acquisition

and installation of the latest technology, the establishment of appropriate waste management systems and capacity building and institutional strengthening.

Mr. Speaker, in the area of resilient communities, we have taken the steps to ensure communities are able to respond creatively to extreme and unexpected events such as natural disasters.

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, disasters can decimate entire communities and we see disaster management and preparedness, as essential to the promotion of sustainable communities. Disaster is not limited to flooding and earthquakes but also to events such as epidemics, including the widespread outbreak of dengue.

Mr. Speaker, we are not about “ole talk”, but we are action oriented and in this regard, we have obtained Cabinet approval for the establishment of Disaster Management Units, in each of the fourteen municipalities with a central coordinating unit in the Ministry of Local Government. We will be collaborating with ODPM to ensure consistency in policy and standards. Steps have already been taken to have these units staffed and equipped before height of the hurricane season.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker the complete package of our Local Government Reform policy prescriptions would require new legislative provisions both primary and secondary.

We firmly believe that more time is required to ensure that new systems are put in place before elections are held. This will allow the newly elected Local Government Officials to enter a newly reformed Local Government system with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, more resources for deployment to communities, opportunities for more

effective representation and decision making and a greater measure of contribution to the development of sustainable communities.

In light of the foregoing, the Government is proposing that the Municipal Corporations Act, #21 of 1990 be amended accordingly to reflect the following:

In Section 273 by inserting after subsection (1G) the following subsections:

“ (1H) Notwithstanding subsection (1F), for the purposes only of the elections due in the year 2008, the term of office of the Mayor, Aldermen and Councillors holding office in a Corporation on the 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2008, is hereby extended for a period of one year from the date of expiration of such term.

(1I) All powers exercisable by Mayors, Aldermen and Councillors under this act shall be exercisable by them during the period referred to in subsection (1H).”

We believe that given the circumstances the extension of the life of the Council is the most appropriate course of action since it would allow for continuity of democratic representation which is an essential facet of good governance.

Mr. Speaker, I urge those on the other side to support the amendments to the Municipal Corporations Act, 1990, which will allow the Councils to continue to operate, whilst, we put the new arrangements in place for more effective, efficient, dynamic and progressive system of Local Government.

Mr. Speaker, I so move.