



## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

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**Minister of Housing, Lands and Maintenance**  
**March 2021**

Mr. Speaker,

I rise to update this Honourable Chamber on the current refurbishment and repairs now being carried out on the East Wing of the iconic, historical and hallowed buildings known as the Parliament Buildings.

2. The Parliament Buildings, which were built between 1870 and 1874 some 147 years ago, have been the meeting place of both Chambers of Parliament since 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1874. The Parliament Buildings consist of two (2) buildings built in the

Neo-Gothic architectural style, reminiscent of the Victorian era of Great Britain.

3. The East Wing of Parliament features timber flooring with some sections of the ground floor area in concrete. The building was designed from those early times to be ventilated by natural ventilation, as is evident by the large windows and doors.

4. In recent years however, the building has developed several environmental problems resulting in its occupants complaining of feeling unwell when using it, which has forced in the subsequent evacuation of persons from the severely affected rooms. As a result of these problems, Parliament has therefore been temporarily resited from 24<sup>th</sup> February, 2020 and is currently operating from here at the Worthing Corporate Centre in Worthing, Christ Church. I should note here that occurrences like this involving complaints from staff and users of Crown properties about less than satisfactory environmental conditions and air quality over the years have been increasing and efforts are underway to redress these problems.

5. I will now briefly examine and discuss some common strategies and initiatives being adopted to help improve the quality of office accommodation in the wider public sector in Barbados.

6. The Ministry of Housing, Lands and Maintenance, in collaboration with the Standing Accommodations Committee, is responsible for the provision and maintenance of office accommodation for Government Ministries, Departments, CARICOM Agencies, as well as regional and international organisations as mandated by various headquarter agreements, leaseholds, and through the allocation of Crown owned properties for their accommodation.

7. The Property Management Unit of the Ministry of Housing, Lands and Maintenance holds responsibility for the maintenance of Crown properties with built assets totaling some \$3.68 billion, across 853 properties including office accommodations, schools and health-related buildings.

8. The majority of buildings under the responsibility of the Ministry of Housing have been identified as older accommodations that have been in operation in excess of 25 years. The end result is that many of the persons in these aging properties have had to be relocated to newer privately owned properties, with the result that Government now has to look for some approximately \$65 million annually to pay for private sector accommodation for its public servants.

9. As a result of this huge expense, the Government, has, from income year 2020 to 2021, provided funds amounting to some \$15 million to pay for the rejuvenation/repair of Government buildings, as well as to seek to facilitate the bringing back of some of its disused buildings into satisfactory accommodations for public servants as well as for members of the Barbadian public transacting business within these offices.

10. Having identified the nature of the problems in providing office accommodation in the public sector in Barbados, remedial measures are being adopted to enable the Government to be able to house its staff and those doing business with it, in a healthy and safe environment, as well as at an affordable cost. To this end, the Ministry of Housing, its Building Unit and the Standing Accommodation Committee are working towards the running of a pro-active scheduled building maintenance programme for Government's properties, rather than merely waiting to take action on defects when they occur. Action is also being taken to ensure that there is the timely reporting of defects in Government properties to ensure that timely remedial repairs can be undertaken.

11. Strenuous efforts are also being made by this Ministry to press for the provision of adequate funding to carry out its maintenance programme for the large number of properties on its portfolio.

Which brings me back to Parliament.

12. At the East Wing of Parliament Buildings now undergoing refurbishment/repairs an initial environmental assessment was conducted and mould had been discovered as one of the contaminants. This assessment also showed that the sealant on the walls was a contributing factor for the presence of the mould, as well as the rising moisture and dampness creeping up the walls.

13. Another environmental assessment was done by this Ministry's Building Unit, which also involved the hiring of the services of a professional environmentalist and this time the presence of another contaminant was discovered, this being, disintegrating fiberglass in the ceilings. This study also revealed and confirmed that the environmental problems that were being experienced were also caused by the concrete floors at ground level and the aforementioned sealant, as well as the damp moisture rising up the coral stone walls of the building.

14. The entire Scope of Works of this refurbishment and repair project was initially projected to cost some \$700,000.00 which has already been provided. These works, which are expected to be completed by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021, involve the removal of the sealant from the walls, removal of the concrete ground floors, replacing of some 540 square metres (5,813 square feet) of ceiling and clearing away the disintegrating fiberglass, replacing timber flooring, refacing of damaged walls, refurbishment of ground floor bathrooms, and the refurbishment of the Members Kitchen and dining room.

15. Electrical rewiring of the entire ground floor is also to be done, and replacement of termite infested floor joists to the first floor, as well as refurbishment of the Senate and adjoining rooms. Refurbishment is also scheduled for the House of Assembly.

16. This extensive Scope of Works also calls for the rectifying of leaks on the ceilings, refurbishing of the air- conditioning system on the south side of the East Wing,

refurbishment of window shutters and the replacement of all carpeting with an approved floor covering.

17. Refurbishment and repair work commenced in earnest on the great East Wing of Parliament with the removal of sealant from the walls on 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2020, and that phase of the work was completed on 18<sup>th</sup> January, 2021.

18. Demolition works on the floors commenced on 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 2020 and is currently ongoing.

19. The Building Unit in my Ministry has estimated that at the end of February 2021, some 10% of the planned work had been completed, however, some delay with progressing with this work resulted from the necessity of having to stop work during the national pause period brought on by the COVID pandemic; however the scheduled expected completion date of this work was still 30<sup>th</sup> September, 2021.



20. Following on-going inspection of the building, however, it is now being recommended by professional advisors and the Management Commission of Parliament that there are three (3) obsolete systems in the East Wing of Parliament which are currently in need of replacement at this time, and a decision now has to be made as to whether funding is currently available for these works as follows:

- (i) Firstly, the air conditioning system which was installed just after Barbados' Independence in 1966 needs replacing at a cost of \$1,118,071.03;
- (ii) Secondly, replacement of IT cabling and re-wiring of the entire East Wing cabling/electrical wiring which was unavoidably damaged as it was plastered into the walls and got damaged during the removal of the sealant on the walls; and
- (iii) Thirdly, the replacement of the aged and obsolete camera, video and communication systems.

The total unbudgeted cost of the replacement of the above three (3) systems is \$2,746,135.31 for which a supplementary provision has been granted. Therefore, as the Scope of Works has increased to include the replacement of these 3 systems, then the refurbishment/repair cost of the East Wing will increase from \$700,000.00 to a total of \$3,446,135.31.

21. It may also be noted that innovations are being explored as to the feasibility of using photo-voltaic solar panels to provide electricity to power the Parliament buildings and the clock.

22. Before ending my Statement, Mr. Speaker, my fellow Parliamentarians, staff, my fellow Barbadians, ladies and gentlemen, it would be remiss of me not to state how proud the Ministry and I are to be able to take part in refurbishing, repairing and restoring the great East-Wing of Parliament building, within whose hallowed walls much of the historical legacy of Barbados

was engineered and discussed, leading to the political, economic and social development and advancement of our people.

23. Indeed since that building was opened for its first Parliamentary session on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1874, just 40 years after the abolition of slavery on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1834, Barbadian society has moved from strength to strength economically and socially. Within those walls were considered, discussed and processed major issues such as the labour disturbances of 1937 and the West-Indies Royal Commission (Moyne Commission) which was dispatched from Britain in 1938 to investigate social and economic conditions in the British West-Indies including Barbados, leading soon thereafter to the legalisation of trade unions in Barbados and the West- Indies.

24. Other important issues discussed in the Honourable House were the Universal Adult Suffrage which became a reality in Barbados in 1950, followed by Full Internal Self Governance being achieved in 1961, and ultimately Independence in November 1966.

25. The ill-fated West Indian Federation from 1958 to 1962 was also considered within the walls of the East-Wing of Parliament buildings, although in a moment of humor, I might argue that Barbados and the rest of the Caribbean probably were frightened when noted Trinidadian Prime Minister Eric Williams remarked that “one from ten leaves nought” and the Federation broke up.

26. In addition, further efforts to create Caribbean unity and advancement of our peoples, were dealt within the walls of our Parliament Buildings when the Caribbean Free Trade Association (Carifta) which later became the Caribbean Community and Common Market (Caricom) in 1973 were carefully debated and set up.

27. In all the circumstances, I consider it an honour to be tasked with seeing this work through to completion. I thank you.