

**PRESS RELEASE
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JCC supports proposal for continued Opposition Oversight of Parliamentary Committees, while ensuring productivity and advancing the GoJ Agenda

Kingston, Jamaica. October 2, 2020:

The Jamaica Chamber of Commerce (JCC) is of the view that great care should be taken in the conduct of the nation's affairs to ensure that initiatives designed to heighten transparency and accountability are not compromised.

In that context, the JCC is supportive of the government's decision to maintain the convention of having the chairmanship of the Public Administration & Appropriations Committee (PAAC) - in the hands of the parliamentary Opposition. The Chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee by the Opposition is already provided for by law.

The organization acknowledges the data provided in Parliament earlier this week by the Leader of Government Business, indicating that the majority of the oversight Committees that were chaired by Opposition members over the preceding five years had been derelict in the execution of their responsibilities by meeting infrequently. However, it believes that the decision to have the chairmanship of the relevant oversight committees revert to the government members, should be re-considered, with the appropriate steps taken to ensure that they better function in the manner for which they were designed.

The JCC has noted and supports a compromise solution put forward by the National Integrity Action (NIA) that it believes will achieve the objective of Committee productivity without sacrificing Opposition oversight.

This compromise envisages the maintenance of the principal committees under the chairmanship of the Opposition, and are tasked with meeting according to a pre-set agenda at least once monthly. The NIA's proposal also allows for the appointment of deputy Chairs from the governing party who are authorized to convene meetings if the Opposition Chairs are derelict in their duties.

The JCC believes that such tasking would better enable the oversight committees to execute their responsibilities on behalf of the citizens of Jamaica, and points to Clause 77(8) of the Standing Orders of Parliament which indicates that while the Committee Chair sets the first meeting, committee members are expected to set the others.

“The introduction of the Oversight Committee mechanism with a clear and necessary role for the Opposition was a far-sighted step forward in the pursuit of transparency and accountability”, JCC President Lloyd Distant noted. “While it hasn’t worked in many respects, let us not abandon the principle when we can fix it”.

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