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**General Debate on National Experience on Population Matters:
International Migration and Development**

To be delivered by

Mr. Easton Williams
Jamaican Delegation Member

On

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Mr. Chairman, our delegation extends congratulations to you and to the other members of your team on being elected to the Bureau. We are confident that under your leadership the work of the session will be successfully executed.

Mr. Chairman, Jamaica is characterized mainly as an emigration country. In the 19th century, Jamaicans migrated to Central America and other Caribbean territories in search of employment opportunities. Many Jamaicans died while building the Panama Canal. Today, many communities in Central America manifest retentions of Jamaican language, culture and genealogical features. In the 20th Century and at present, our main destinations have been the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. However, Jamaicans are to be found in almost all countries of the world. Jamaicans have made positive contributions to the development of our main destination countries.

With an estimated 20,000 persons migrating legally from Jamaica since the 1950's, it is roughly estimated that our migrant population may be over 50 percent of our national population. Our national population is currently estimated at 2.6 million persons. Migrants from Jamaica are mainly persons in their prime reproductive and productive years (15-40 years) and predominantly female. Recent studies by the World Bank and the IMF

indicate that Jamaica and other countries in the English-speaking Caribbean have the highest rates of loss of tertiary level graduates in the world. It is estimated that over 70% of tertiary level graduates emigrated annually from Jamaica to North America and the United Kingdom. A high proportion of the graduates is directly recruited by agencies located in North America and the United Kingdom. The studies concluded that the brain drain from Jamaica and the other English-speaking Caribbean countries to North America is quite substantial.

Given our long history of emigration, Jamaicans have established large communities in many major cities in North America and the United Kingdom. They have also established numerous informal and formal associations and networks in all these cities. In the 1990's, Government established a special department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to create formal links with our migrant communities in the diaspora and to facilitate their return and re-integration. The government in collaboration with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) implemented a very successful programme for the return and re-integration of highly skilled expatriates to fill vacancies in the labour market. Returning residents also formed a National Returning Residents Association, a non-government organization. This association is reproduced in most parishes across the island and is actively facilitating the re-integration, and creating solidarity among returning residents.

In recent years, the Government has implemented a number of innovative measures for the mobilization of our diaspora for national development. Annual diaspora conferences involving representatives of Jamaicans in all our major destination countries have been conducted. Resulting from these conferences the Jamaican Diaspora Foundation and the Jamaica Diaspora Board have been established in Jamaica. The Governor-General has proclaimed June 16 as the official Jamaican Diaspora Day. A Jamaican Diaspora website was also launched with the specific aim at forging stronger linkages with Jamaicans abroad. The Jamaican diaspora has created niche markets in all its major destination countries. Reggae music, ackee and saltfish, Red Stripe beer, jerk seasonings, bun and cheese and patties are national staples available internationally. These markets have great potential for expansion.

Mr. Chairman, the volume of remittances channeled through official money transfer networks has been increasing progressively since the 1990's. It is currently estimated at about 1.5 billion US dollars annually or over 10 percent of Gross Domestic Product. Remittance is currently the largest source of foreign exchange available to the government. Net International Reserves has also been positive since the early 1990's. The reduction of absolute poverty from an estimated 35 percent in the early 1990's to the

current estimate of below 15 percent is also linked to the increase in the level of the flow of remittances. Remittances have played and continue to play a positive role in the economy and society in Jamaica.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.