



STATEMENT

BY

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE KAMINA JOHNSON SMITH
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND FOREIGN TRADE OF JAMAICA**

ON

THE OCCASION OF THE CARICOM SIDE EVENT:

**“CHILDHOOD OBESITY - A DEVELOPMENT TIME-BOMB: LEARNING
FROM SIDS TO ACCELERATE MULTI-SECTORAL ACTION IN SUPPORT
OF THE 2025 NCD TARGETS AND THE SDGS”**

NEW YORK - 22ND SEPTEMBER 2017

Chair,

I welcome the opportunity provided to highlight this issue of childhood obesity.

Jamaica, as a small island developing state, continues to struggle with the high economic burden resulting from noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). The economic impact of the four main NCDs - cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes, in addition to mental health is significant and will lead to a lost output of US\$ 17 billion, by the year 2030, according to a 2016 Harvard study. This is equivalent to an annual tax rate of 3.9%.

In the context of Jamaica, the deaths of 7 out of 10 Jamaicans are related to the four main NCDs. Jamaica has conducted surveys as a part of its surveillance system for NCDs to assess prevalence of the priority diseases, risk factors and behaviours in adults and adolescents.

One of these surveys, entitled “Jamaica Health and Lifestyle II”, conducted by the National Health Fund in collaboration with the University of the West Indies, highlighted that the prevalence of obesity in Jamaica had been increasing from as far back as 2008. This increase has resulted in an influx of medical cases involving chronic illnesses, including Type 2 diabetes, and heart disease, to name a few.

In addition to the clear human cost, the economic cost of patient care as a result of NCDs is prohibitive, posing a significant constraint on sustainable growth and prosperity for our people.

With this in mind, Jamaica is working assiduously towards eliminating risk factors that increase the incidence of NCDs by promoting healthier policies and lifestyle changes to mitigate the effects on the population.

Childhood obesity is one such risk factor which continues to be of grave concern to the Government of Jamaica. Particular attention has been devoted to abating this growing epidemic, given the available data from the 2010 Global School Survey, which shows that approximately 27.7% of Adolescents 13-15 years old are overweight or obese in Jamaica.

In response to these daunting statistics, the Government of Jamaica has embarked on an aggressive multisectoral National Strategic and Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs in Jamaica, for the period 2013 to 2018.

The Government is committed to implementing this Action Plan which will further enhance its work to reduce the risks of NCDs.

In keeping with its international obligations, the country has also taken steps to integrate SDG targets on NCDs into the National Development Plan, Vision 2030, which include policy guidance on combating priority health concerns such as obesity.

The government has therefore sought to enhance its efforts by including, in the National Plan, a sub-operational plan dedicated to the Prevention and Control of Obesity in Children and Adolescents, from 2016 – 2020.

In Jamaica, it is apparent that there is a strong connection between modifiable risk factors such as obesity, insufficient physical activity and nutrition deficient diets.

In March 2017, the government, in tackling the recognized impact of NCDs on the quality of life, established a National Food Industry Taskforce to focus on product reformulation, food labelling, marketing among other areas to address the issue of obesity and nutrition related risk factors for NCDs.

This national response to obesity will not only improve the dietary landscape; but will contribute significantly to the reduction of the burden of non-communicable diseases in Jamaica. As a part of its efforts to address the prevalence of non-communicable diseases, the Government also launched a Food-Based Dietary Guideline, which will complement the work of the Taskforce.

In order to improve the nutrition of our children, Jamaica has developed policies to promote healthier eating such as the National Infant and Young Child feeding Policy.

The Ministry of Health in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information have also been implementing a National Health Promoting School programme with flag-ship initiative called H.Y.P.E.: which means Healthy Youth for Positive Energy.

Further, the government announced earlier this week that schools in Jamaica would be mandated to undertake physical activity and exercise programmes from grades seven to thirteen, with programmes for promoting good health and healthy lifestyles in early childhood institutions. In support of this

development, a policy on nutrition, indicating the caloric content of meals served in school canteens, is on track for completion by the end of the year.

It is envisioned that this intervention will improve the government's ability to educate children in primary and secondary schools on the benefits of physical activity and health eating along with other healthy lifestyles.

On World Health Day, April 2017 the Ministry of Health launched the "JAMoves" campaign aimed at reducing NCDs with a focus on prevention via promotion of physical activity, and healthy eating including screening, early detection and public awareness about NCDs, among other areas.

Notwithstanding the advances in combating NCDs, Jamaica underscores that there remains major impediments to effective implementation of global commitments such as "push – backs" from industries, slow implementation of regulatory framework to address risk factors and lack of resources, particularly due to inadequate Official Development Assistance.

Jamaica's position remains firm on the importance of the UN to redouble its efforts to support effective actions to arrest the NCD epidemic. We also encourage greater cooperation with our bilateral partners for the greater good of our future generations, citizens and the world.

Jamaica continues to promote physical activity and healthy eating with our implementation of national policies and action plans, food-based dietary guidelines, promotion of physical activity to eliminate this scourge which continues to deprive our children of their undeniable right to a healthy life.

We aim to be an example to encourage other states in a similar situation to do the same.

I thank you.