

POST CABINET PRESS BRIEFING SUMMARY - Thursday 15th September, 2016

Senator Clarence Rambharat, Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, as well as the Honourable Faris Al Rawi, Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, addressed members of the media during the Post Cabinet Press Briefing today (Thursday 15th September, 2016) at the Office of the Prime Minister, St. Clair, Port of Spain.

Minister Rambharat provided an update on the Cabinet's consideration of management arrangements for the upcoming hunting season. Following the end of the two (2) year moratorium on hunting last year, the 2015 hunting season was allowed. This generated significant discussions on the parts of hunters and conservationists alike. As a result, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries engaged with stakeholders comprehensively, beginning with a meeting last November at the Caroni Bird Sanctuary. Subsequently, reports were submitted to the Minister in January and August 2016 by a Steering Committee formed to oversee the matter.

Recommendations made by the Committee fall into three (3) categories:

- 1) Recommendations the Minister can implement immediately;
- 2) Recommendations which require legislative actions; and
- 3) Matters of administrative management

Coming out of those discussions, the cost of hunting licenses for the 2016 hunting season has been increased from twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) to one hundred dollars (\$100.00) - the maximum that can be charged according to present legislation.

Minister Rambharat also noted that there is a lack of capacity in terms of game wardens to enforce the law. At present, there are sixteen (16) wardens where thirty-one (31) are required. The Public Service Commission is responsible for filling these positions. As a result, it was decided that during this year's hunting season, one hundred and seventy-five (175) honorary game wardens will be brought on at an approximate cost of two million dollars (\$2M).

Cabinet has also agreed to refer further proposals made by the Steering Committee to the Wildlife Conservation Committee.

The Honourable Faris Al Rawi, Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, also addressed the briefing on the Commission of Enquiry into Las Alturas.

This enquiry was initiated in 2014 by former Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar and singled out Prime Minister Rowley and Attorney General Al Rawi, then members of the Opposition. The enquiry was into buildings “H” and “I” which China Jiangsu International Corp TT Limited (CJIC) was contracted to design and build.

The Attorney General emphasised that the People’s Partnership Government was advised to embark on legal action immediately lest they be barred by statute due to the passage of time. The then Attorney General, Anand Ramlogan, instructed that the matter be suspended until a second opinion was obtained. As a result, the Housing Development Corporation (HDC), under the direct supervision of the then Minister of Housing Roodal Moonilal, took no action of a civil nature against China Jiangsu Corp TT Limited (CJIC).

Additionally, Attorney General Al Rawi confirmed that, as of March 10th 2016, a civil lawsuit against China Jiangsu International Corp TT Limited (CJIC) and Geotech Associates Ltd was filed. However, it must be noted that the defense of statutory limitation has been raised.

An opinion on the enquiry into Las Alturas was sought from Mr. Fyad Hosein S.C. and a preliminary opinion, dated 14th September 2016, has been submitted. The advice noted that the report illustrates a failure of natural justice. Furthermore, the report is described as being ultra vires, biased and irrational and/or unreasonable.

The Honourable Faris Al Rawi emphasised that this enquiry was a forty million dollar (\$40M) political witch hunt and reaffirmed that it was a dereliction of duty on the part of the previous Government not to pursue legal action against China Jiangsu International Corp TT Limited (CJIC).