

A portrait of Dr. Angela Brown Burke, a Black woman with short curly hair, wearing glasses and a pink blazer. The background is a stylized graphic with yellow and green geometric shapes and a dotted pattern.

sectoral Debate 2025

CHAMPIONING CHANGE

**in Foreign and Regional Affairs
& Labour and Social Security**

**DR ANGELA
BROWN BURKE**
SHADOW MINISTER
Foreign and Regional Affairs

SECTORAL PRESENTATION 2025

**“CHAMPIONING CHANGE IN FOREIGN AND REGIONAL
AFFAIRS & LABOUR AND SOCIAL SECURITY”**

DR. ANGELA BROWN BURKE MP

SOUTHWEST ST. ANDREW

JUNE 3, 2025

GORDON HOUSE, JAMAICA

SALUTATIONS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Madam Speaker, “Before God and all mankind, I pledge the love and loyalty of my heart, the wisdom and courage of my mind, the strength and vigour of my body in the service of my fellow citizens;”

Madam Speaker, these words from our National Pledge keep me grounded everyday as I advocate for, mediate on behalf and represent the people of St. Andrew South West who have sent me here.

In doing, this I have relied on the support, advice, and assistance of my Councillors Eugene Kelly, Karl Blake, and Devon Jackson. My gratitude also goes to my constituency Secretary, Mr. Ellis and the rest of the family, including our office staff, Lexie, Doreen, Avis, Marcia, Jubby, and Nash, and the extended leadership team.

Madam Speaker, let me use this opportunity to also extend my heartfelt thanks to the staff of the Houses of Parliament led by Ms. Colleen Lowe, Clerk to the House, for their support and dedication. Let me also place on record my appreciation for the opportunity afforded me to work with others across the aisle on issues of importance to all Jamaicans. We don’t

always see eye to eye, but you've helped me to understand how critical it is to stand with courage and on principle every time. I am pleased to have been able to count on the support of my colleagues here in the house for the past 8 years. And on both sides of the aisle.

Madam Speaker, as a descendant of enslaved Africans I believe wholeheartedly in the principle of Ubuntu and am always conscious that I am, because we are. I therefore give thanks to those on whose shoulders I stand, those who've cleared the path so I could walk.

Yes, chief amongst them is the Most Honourable Portia Simpson Miller, Jamaica's first female Prime Minister, I thank her for the faith and confidence that has allowed me to build on her legacy of physical and social development and education. I also thank her for the support and example she has set for young women in public life. Her courage and fearlessness continue to be beacons that light the way.

To the Opposition Leader, Mr. Mark Golding, thank you for tasking me with the responsibility of shadowing Foreign and Regional Affairs. Jamaicans at home and abroad are looking forward to a more consistent

and principled leadership in our relationships with the rest of the world. Jamaica deserves better.

Madam Speaker, I extend heartfelt thanks to the members of my Task Force, on Foreign and Regional Affairs, who have been assisting me to represent and articulate positions on issues that reflect OUR collective commitment to an inclusive approach, steeped in respect for the rule of law, human rights, justice, fairness, and dignity for ALL at home presently and abroad.

Finally, but significantly, I express love and thanks to my family for their unconditional support: my husband, my sons, my sisters, and other family members who have always been my safe harbour in good times and otherwise. Thanks for always being there, as I continue to serve the people of Jamaica.

A very special THANK YOU to my father, Vincent who told me just a few days ago how happy he is at 100 years old to see his great grandchild.

Thank you, Papa!

As I did in my presentation last year, I would like to pay my respect and highlight the work of our dedicated and professional Foreign Service

Workers in Embassies, Consulates, and Permanent Missions across the World. You and your families serve at great personal sacrifice often going beyond the call of duty in service of Jamaica Land we love. Thank you.

**TIME COME: FOR MORE ACTION -ORIENTED FOREIGN
AND REGIONAL COOPERATION.**

PNP: Clear Policy Position Meets Action

Madam Speaker, the history of our nation reveals that before independence, Jamaica's foreign policy was formulated and implemented by British officials in the United Kingdom Foreign Office. Thus, there was no absolute certainty that Jamaica's interaction with the rest of the world was designed to serve Jamaica's interests. Over the years, it has been up to our leaders to shape and encourage relationships, regionally and internationally to "maximize international influence to foster national development."

Madam Speaker, I stand here today proud of the outstanding leadership of the People's National Party (PNP) governments, throughout the years on

matters of regional and global issues impacting the lives and destinies of millions of Jamaicans and people across the globe.

Madam Speaker, even before matters of international relations were formally within the scope of 'Jamaica's' decision-making powers, the Pre-independence Government of our National Hero and former Premier, The Rt. Excellent Norman Washington Manley intervened, on behalf of Jamaica, in opposition to the systemic racism and brutality experienced by the people of South Africa during the Apartheid regime and in 1956, officially banned trade and travel with South Africa—even as Jamaica was in its own colonial era.

Madam Speaker, the significant impact of this action by our then Party Leader, was explained by Former South African High Commissioner to Jamaica, Mathu Joyini during a 2013 Memorial Service for the late great Nelson Mandela. She said:

“My government has asked that I convey the gratitude to the Government and people of Jamaica for the support, solidarity and bond of friendship between the two countries. Jamaica played a significant role in the

dismantling of apartheid, not only in South Africa but in the region. It is that solidarity which has carried South Africa through some difficult times,”

Madam Speaker, that is the ‘action-oriented leadership in regional and foreign affairs that we are accustomed to when we in the People’s National Party have the reins of government in this country.

Madam Speaker our presence on the international stage and in the ‘annals of history’ is unquestionable.

From the active struggles of the Most Honourable Michael Manley to shape a foreign policy ‘to improve conditions for the people of Jamaica while being concerned and actively involved in the wider struggle for the improved conditions for the poor of the world;

The integral role of the Most Honourable Portia Simpson in her contribution to various Treaty Based and Charter-Based Mechanisms of the United Nations on the rights of women and girls and the most vulnerable of the world, while overseeing the creation of the UN’s First Permanent Memorial in memory of the horrific tragedies of the Trans-

Atlantic Trade in Enslaved Africans, the Racialized System of Chattel Slavery and Colonialism;

The exhaustive list of 'firsts 'created by the Most Honourable PJ Patterson: a lead negotiator for the African Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group during the Lomé Convention era; being in charge of external negotiations involving the World Trade Organization, the Free Trade Area of the Americas and the Economic Partnership Agreement and of course his work on the Diaspora becoming the Sixth Region of the African Union, accounting for his appointment by the AU as a relevant Statesman. Madam Speaker, our leaders in the PNP have not only served our nation home but have also made significant contribution to the growth and development of our region and the world.

Madam Speaker, that is the 'action-oriented leadership in regional and foreign affairs that we are accustomed to when we in the People's National Party have the reins of government.

In recent times Madam Speaker, we have witnessed silence, a deterioration, in advocacy and action from our beloved island State

Jamaica, on critical matters facing the region and the most vulnerable in the world, Jamaica (that voice in the region) has remained silent even on matters of Customary International Principles such as “the right to self-determination” which historically has been reflected in our support of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly Resolution 1514.

Madam Speaker, It cannot be, that the only time the entire nation gets a front row seat to international action 'is when our representatives are campaigning to lead international groupings such as Ministerial Committees or to head the Commonwealth. Madam Speaker, in examining some of the main attitudes and actions which have characterized our Jamaican foreign policy over the last nine years against the best practices of our better years, it is clear that Jamaica deserves better.

Madam Speaker, I continue to stress the need for a clear policy position, known to all Jamaicans, on matters affecting our nation, the region, and the global landscape; and a pathway towards actions that are clearly in the best interest of our people, locally and in the diaspora. That is the ‘action-

oriented leadership in foreign and regional affairs that Jamaicans deserve. The PNP is committed to putting Jamaica first every time and that is what you can also expect when we are once again elected as government. Jamaica first every time.

ILO Standards: Jamaican Workers Deserve Better

The People's National Party has always taken pride in its rich legacy and the foundation laid by visionary leaders such as Michael Manley, P.J. Patterson, and Portia Simpson Miller, who championed workers' rights and social justice in Jamaica. Today, I want to recognize the fundamental importance of upholding the principles and rights enshrined in the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions, which serve as a cornerstone for protecting the rights of workers worldwide.

Madam Speaker I want to start by acknowledging that Persons with Disabilities face significant barriers to accessing to the Labour force with many reporting high levels of unemployment (91% in Jamaica). The issues here are complex and require that we consistently see them and plan for them as productive citizens and not objects of charity. More has to be

done for inclusion in education and training; transportation and access to modern technologies.

Madam Speaker, we are reminded of the urgency of this commitment, particularly for workers in vulnerable positions such as security guards; workers in our wholesale and retail sectors under conditions where short term contracts are the norm. As a government we must protect our workers from all forms of precarious employment arrangements which can perpetuate inequality and insecurity. It is unacceptable that with our strong record of protecting workers' rights, there are Jamaican workers today who are forced by their circumstances to accept work that does not adhere to existing minimum wage and minimum standards.

Madam Speaker, I'm sure you too must have heard the tales of workers in the construction industry, in some of our wholesales and short-term employment whose condition of work is totally unacceptable for 'a modern Jamaica'.

By ratifying and implementing key ILO conventions and protocols, we reaffirm our commitment to promoting social justice, equality, and human

dignity in the workplace. On this side, we've joined our voices to key stakeholders for the establishment of a Joint Industrial Council for Industrial Security Sector thereby providing an opportunity for all stakeholders to work through the issues that remain unresolved in the the implementation of Justice Batts 'ruling. This is particularly important as approximately 60% of security guards work directly with the Government or through third-party employers.

We cannot continue to ignore their plight, as many of whom have still not had their previous years of service recognized. In these cases, they are forced to sign new contracts under duress to ensure they can feed their families today, giving up years of accrued services, benefits and potential earnings.

Madam Speaker, just a few months ago, we saw the courage of the Jamaican hotel workers on display, when some of them protested, drawing public attention to low wages and poor working conditions. We were all pleased that after the strong intervention of Acorn Union leaders, Management and Government most of the issues were TEMPORARILY

addressed. Madam Speaker, the Tourism industry is far too important not to have greater standards in protection of its workers who are the face and the very spirit of the industry.

Madam Speaker, what we require are systems that allow for resolution without the need for protest...a proactive approach to governance. Our hotel workers are essential to maintaining our premier tourism brand and it's Time for them to really feel appreciated and valued, and for their quality of life to reflect their value and their contribution to the sector.

Time come for greater dialogue among stakeholders in the Tourism industry (JIC); Time come to ensure that the success of the Jamaican product is measured not only by visitor arrivals. This dialogue would help to identify other indicators that could be used to measure success such as average wages, benefits, job security, job satisfaction, health and safety standards, Life and Health Insurance as well as access to training and development opportunities.

Madam Speaker, on the matter of Government Traveling officers: recently, I had the opportunity to speak with a government traveling officer. She was angry and fed up with the Government. When she said to

me: “oonnu cyan mek dem win enuh”, I had to stop and inquire a little more. Turns out that she was no longer to receive the motor vehicle upkeep allowance which previously she was able to use to service and maintain her vehicle. Bear in mind Madam Speaker that her car is a tool of work, after all she is a Traveling Officer. I had to agree with her that this situation didn’t make sense.

Madam Speaker just a few weeks ago the Minister made reports on the progress of the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations (OSHA). The truth is that the realization of OSHA has been too long in coming. Our workers are crying out for protection through these measures. Time come to give workers ’issues the urgency they deserve.

The Minister also reminded us that Minimum wage is a floor below which the employer cannot pay. Every time I hear that explanation in response to our call to establish a ‘liveable wage ’for workers, I am reminded that they just don’t get it! But then again this is the same government telling us that poverty has decreased when you know how many times you went

to bed hungry last week or struggled to find a decent meal fi dem pickney yesterday.

Madam Speaker let's not forget the most recent survey shows that 2 million Jamaicans cannot afford one balanced meal per day, if any at all".

We talk about two Jamaicas like it's a joke sometimes. But believe me Madam Speaker it is real!

Madam Speaker, as we strive to build a more just and equitable society, we acknowledge the critical role that labour standards play in ensuring that all workers, regardless of their occupation or status, are treated with dignity and respect. As Peter Tosh says " Equal Rights and Justice".

Regardless of their occupation or status, they should be able to work in safety and security.

Our workers, in all fields, in all spheres in public and private life deserve better. Time come now!

IDPAD: The Global Call for Local Cultural Recognition

Madam Speaker, on November 29, 2024, I had the privilege to attend High-Level talks convened by the United Nations Permanent Forum on

People of African Descent (Geneva) and was able to interact, share my own ideas, along with members of civil society from around the world, around the priority areas to be considered for a United Nations Second Decade for People of African Descent.

In this exchange of ideas at this global level, I was reminded, Madam Speaker of the interconnectedness of all peoples of African Ancestry and the benefits we reap when we see the issues and solutions as interconnected. I was also reminded, Madam Speaker of our own cultural realities in our nation and our region and the constant need for a decolonized approach to our cultural practices while we move towards full recognition, justice, development and reparation for all people of African descent, including our indigenous populations.

Against this backdrop, Madam Speaker I pause to congratulate the United Nations and the efforts of all of civil society organizations. Madam Speaker, I was part of this team that included members from the PNP Foreign Affairs Task Force, local and global scholars, advocates, activists, cultural practitioners, UN Fellows and institutions as we discussed and

secured our Second International Decade for the People of African Descent early this year!

We in the PNP recognize the gains of the first Decade (2015-2024)—such as raising global awareness about the historical and ongoing challenges faced by people of African descent, while providing a platform to address the legacies of enslavement, colonialism, and systemic racism—Acknowledging one of its major outcome—the establishment of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, which serves as a platform for advocacy and dialogue.

Countries have made progress in enacting legislative measures, action plans, and policies to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, and related intolerance. The ongoing work on the UN Human Rights Declaration to promote and fully respect the human rights of people of African descent is also notable.

Madam Speaker, despite progress made, challenges remain. Matters to deal with our own cultural identity, the lingering remnants of colonialism and slavery and reparation for the historical injustices, such as enslavement and colonial exploitation should be at the heart of our efforts

during this Second International Decade with government prioritizing the need to address long-standing socio-economic and cultural harms.

Madam Speaker, our culture is the base for our tomorrow. At each of historical turning point in our Jamaica, it was our culture our collective expression of self and attendant values of equal rights and justice that lit the way forward. In the 1860s, it was the Great Revival that revised our concept of spirituality and social life. In the 1930s and 40s, it was cultural resistance that contributed to a greater demand for labour rights and representation and the growth of the Rastafari Movement. This period also gave birth to political parties out of the labour movement. In the 1970s and 80s, it was the Roots Reggae movement that carried messages of justice, resistance, and hope to every corner of this island and the world. At every juncture, our culture shaped our society.

This brings me, Madam Speaker, to a matter at the heart of our national identity: the imperative to embrace bilingual education that equally values Jamaican Creole and English Language.

Language is more than a tool for communication; it is the vessel that transports our identity, history, culture, and worldview to one another as a people. In Jamaica, the coexistence of Jamaican Creole (Patwa's) and English reflects our rich heritage and diverse experiences.

Icons like Miss Lou and Bob Marley exemplify the profound connection between language and identity. Miss Lou's pioneering use of Patios in poetry and performance validated the language as a medium of artistic and cultural expression. Bob Marley's music, infused with Patios, conveyed messages of unity and resistance, resonating globally and showcasing the depth of Jamaican culture.

Madam Speaker, research shows that children acquire language through mimicry, absorbing the linguistic nuances of their environment. However, the dominance of foreign media, standardized education and ingrained cultural biases, can marginalize Jamaicans, leading to a loss of cultural nuance and identity.

Madam Speaker, I am also fully aware that language supremacy is rooted in colonialism. Linguistic dominance emerged not as a mere by-product of colonialism rule but as a deliberate instrument of power and control. This was the medium used to instil their values, world view and cultural superiority- an instrument of power and control. In fact in some areas those who used their mother tongue were humiliated and beaten. The efforts of the colonizers failed in the colonies as people took the colonizers' languages and made them part of their independent local identities. That is the history of the Jamaican Patois. It falls therefore to this generation to ensure that it is made an official language.

Madam Speaker, Professor Hubert Devonish and the Jamaica Language Unit has certainly laid the foundation for a better understanding of the importance of mainstreaming Jamaican. We thank them and other advocates for their consistent advocacy, research and practice over the years.

Madam Speaker you would also have heard the Member from South St. Andrew indicate that as Prime Minister he intends to make Jamaican

Patois an official language on par with English. As a Jamaican, he recognizes that this is as much a part of the discussion around sovereignty and decolonization as any other aspect of our Jamaican-ness.

Yes Madam Speaker, it is about national identity, the concept of class, and the legacies of slavery.

Madam Speaker, I am incredibly proud to have a Leader like Mark Golding, who recognizes that teaching valuable concepts in early childhood education using Jamaican as the language of instruction can have a profoundly positive impact on young learners. By leveraging their mother tongue, we can foster a sense of identity, confidence, and pride in their Jamaican heritage.

Using Jamaican as a foundation, we can help children develop a strong sense of self and cultural awareness, which can, in turn, facilitate their transition to learning Standard English, Mathematics and more complex concepts. By embracing their mother tongue, children are empowered to grow into confident, proud, and well-rounded individuals, equipped with the skills and knowledge to succeed in all aspects of life.

Even beyond our shores Madam Speaker, this matter has resonance. It's worth recognizing Madam Speaker, that Jamaican Patois has profound influence in shaping other languages across the globe including Panamanian Patois, English in Panama, Black British English (Britwah) in the UK, black Canadian English. The same is true Madam Speaker along the Pacific Coast in places like Bluefields and Corn Island in Nicaragua, Port Limon, Costa Rica and Columbia.

Recently I had the honour of hosting one of the United Nations Fellows for People of African Descent (from the UK), Miss Ife Thompson, who was here on the island pursuing research on our language. Based on acquired knowledge Miss Thompson, in a court matter in the UK, a few days ago, instructed by Alice Dyer was able to have a Jamaican Patwa interpreter for her UK based Jamaican Client. You see Madam Speaker she argued that his rights under article 6 of ECHR (the right to a fair trial) should be upheld.

And yes, there are other jurisdictions where this could be applicable, if only Jamaican was an official language. This global impact of Jamaican

Patois underscores why it deserves to be recognized as an official language in Jamaica and not just as a cultural treasure. It is a powerful linguistic force in its own right.

Madam Speaker, this brings me to the urgent need to revive the National Cultural and Creative Industries Commission which was established by Prime Minister the Most Honourable Portia Simpson Miller in 2013. This Commission was designed to empower the sector, allowing practitioners to determine their own development.

Madam Speaker, Jamaica needs a modern cultural policy that reflects who we are and where we want to go.

Such a policy must:

- Build cultural confidence, values, and ethics;
- Address the dire state of heritage protection;
- Strengthen the entertainment, culture, and creative industries;
- Uphold freedom of expression and the dignity of artists;
- Equip our creatives with the tools to thrive in a digital economy;
- And create real, measurable, commercial viability.

This is the balance we must strike, between culture and economy.

**TIME COME FOR A MORE PROGRESSIVE, CONSCIENTIOUS
AND PRINCIPLED APPROACH TOWARDS OUR REGIONAL
AND INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS.**

International Legal Principles

Madam Speaker, there can be no doubt that legal principles (customary or otherwise) are the very foundation of our foreign relations. They shape how we engage with the world, how we uphold justice, and how we define ourselves as a sovereign nation. But, Madam Speaker, as the world evolves, so too must we. We must not hesitate to re-examine and reassess our international obligations, especially those that no longer serve the progressive development of our beloved Jamaica.

It is our duty to undertake a rigorous and ongoing analysis of the relationship between international law and our domestic legal system. Because the interrogation and integration of international arrangements (treaty-based or otherwise) is not just a matter of procedure—it's a matter of sovereignty, of justice, and of the kind of nation we are building.

Now, Madam Speaker, let us be clear: Not even the framers of our Constitution imagined that 63 years after Independence, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council would remain Jamaica's final court of appeal. That is precisely why they did not entrench that right in the Constitution.

They expected us to move forward.

They expected us to grow into our sovereignty.

And yet, we continue to hold on to a colonial institution. We speak the language of decolonization, but we maintain the King's Court as the highest authority in our justice system.

Madam Speaker, this contradiction is no longer defensible.

It places real justice out of the reach of everyday Jamaicans. And worse—it undermines our very identity as a free and independent people and makes a mockery of our efforts at becoming, in every sense, fully free.

So let us have the conversation, boldly, openly and honestly.

Let us talk about adopting the Caribbean Court of Justice as our final appellate court, our court, built by us, for us.

These are not merely legal issues.

They are national questions demanding full action in our national interest.

They go to the heart of who we are, and who we want to become.

So I say, Madam Speaker: If we are serious about building a progressive, just, and truly sovereign Jamaica, then we must have the courage to confront these issues and to act on them.

United Nations Security Council Reform

Madam Speaker, the same applies to our position on critical international discussions that can benefit the global landscape. Positions on critical matters such as the reform of the United Nations Security Council, to meet the need of an ever-changing world, should be explored and understood and discussed in a meaningful way at the national level within the mandate of the 1992 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 47/62 on reform of the Security Council. The matter of enhanced roles of developing

countries and restructuring to have equitable membership should be a priority topic due to its global benefits.

Under the PNP Government we will continue our efforts along with CARICOM and other countries in championing discussions around a more reformed and more equitable UN Security Council.

CONCLUSION: ADDITIONAL COMMITMENTS OF A FUTURE PNP GOVERNMENT

- Madam Speaker, time come for principled action-oriented leadership in regional and foreign affairs.
- Time come to face the difficult issues required for real nationhood and full decolonization;
- Time come for a progressive review of our history and culture, acknowledging how it has shaped our present and painting a true and faithful picture nationally and internationally.
- Time come to maximize the potential of persons with disabilities through technology and employment

- Time come to ensure Jamaican workers are part of the decent work agenda.
- Time come for liveable wage, so that Jamaicans can afford basic necessities and improve their living standards
- Time come to treat workers issues with the urgency they deserve.
- Time come to institutionalize dialogue amongst all stakeholders across industries, instituting JIC and other such mechanism for a more harmonious working relationship, increased productivity and improved conditions of work.
- Time come for a government that puts the interest of Jamaican workers front and centre ahead of self and cronies.
- Time come to put Jamaica first every time, and every time to put Jamaica first

The People' National Party will build a Jamaica that respects its heritage, empowers its people, protects its democracy, and secures its future.

[thank you]