



Any reply or subsequent reference to this communication should be addressed to the Contractor-General and the following reference quoted:-

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For Immediate Release

NEWS RELEASE

CONTRACTOR-GENERAL TO MONITOR GOVERNMENT CONTRACTS IN WHICH MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT ARE INTERESTED PARTIES

In an effort to promote greater transparency and public confidence in the Government contracts award and procurement process, newly appointed Contractor General, Greg Christie, has announced his intention to commence the routine monitoring of all government contracts in which Members of Parliament, their spouses, parents, children and siblings, are interested parties.

The new development was disclosed in a recent letter which was written by the Contractor General to the President of the Senate and to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and in which the Contractor General is formally seeking the assistance of Parliament.

The Contractor General is empowered, by law, to monitor the award and implementation of all Government contracts to ensure (a) that they are awarded impartially and on merit, (b) that the circumstances in which they are awarded or terminated do not involve impropriety or irregularity, and (c) that their implementation conform to their terms.

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In his letter, Mr. Christie alluded to Section 41 of the Constitution of Jamaica, which requires a Member of Parliament to vacate his seat if the Member or any firm in which he/she is a partner, manager or director, becomes a party to a Government contract.

However, Members of Parliament, who wish to enter into Government contracts, may seek from Parliament, an exemption from the application of Section 41.

Christie has therefore proposed that Parliament should establish effective mechanisms to ensure that whenever a Member seeks an exemption, the relevant information is immediately conveyed to the Office of the Contractor General, whereupon the monitoring of the subject contract will commence.

The Contractor General has also asked Parliament to consider extending the ambit of Section 41, albeit notionally, to require Parliamentarians to disclose to Parliament, the particulars of any Government contract which is known to them to be a contract in which their spouses, parents, children or siblings are interested parties.

Mr. Christie has explained that these categories of contracts have never been routinely monitored or investigated by his Office in the past. He said that, for the most part, the contracting parties in these contracts are believed to be entities in which Members of Parliament and/or their relatives are interested parties. This, he said, has strengthened the case for enhanced transparency, assistance in identifying the contracts and for routine monitoring and/or investigation by the Contractor General.

In his letter, which was copied to the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the respective leaders of Government and Opposition business in both Houses of

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Parliament, the Contractor General emphasized that he wanted to "... make it abundantly clear, that none of his proposals were actuated by any inference whatsoever that Government contracts to which Members of Parliament or Related Persons are parties, are *ipso facto* suspect."

"Rather", he said, "I am of the fervent belief that if transparency and the public's confidence in the Government contracts award and procurement system are to be effectively secured, there can be no better way of achieving this than for Parliamentarians themselves, as the servants of the people, to hold up their own commercial transactions with Government (together with those of their immediate relatives) to the light of public scrutiny."

And in a positive response to the initiative of the Contractor General, the Prime Minister, The Most Honourable P.J. Patterson, has written to the Contractor General expressing his endorsement of the proposals "for the reasons and on the bases proposed in the said letter". The Prime Minister, the Contractor General said, is "... prepared to support urgent consideration of the proposal by Parliament, so that it could become operative in cases where an exemption is being sought pursuant to Section 41 of our Constitution."

The Contractor General, who paid a recent courtesy call on the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Bruce Golding, has also stated that the Opposition Leader has conveyed his support for the proposals.

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