



**MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY, COMMERCE, AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES**

**Statement by the Hon Audley Shaw, CD, MP  
Minister of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries  
On the Tropical Race 4 Disease  
Prevention Measures to Safeguard the Jamaican Banana and  
Plantain Industry  
Houses of Parliament  
October 8, 2019**

---

**Mr Speaker,**

I wish to bring to the attention of this Honourable House a matter of serious national implication – the emergence of the Tropical Race 4 (TR4), disease previously called “Panama Disease” in this hemisphere and the potential threat it poses to the local and regional banana and plantain industry.

**Mr Speaker,**

The Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries, through our Competent Authority, the Plant Quarantine and Produce Inspection

Branch as well as the Banana Board and other relevant stakeholders, is on high alert and has taken swift action to implement preventative initiatives to safeguard the Jamaican banana and plantain industry against the Tropical Race 4 Disease (TR4).

**Mr Speaker**, it must be noted that this deadly disease of banana and plantain crops, is **NOT PRESENT** in Jamaica. The Jamaica banana and plantain Industry is, therefore, on high alert to keep it out of the island.

Mr Speaker, as a result of our monitoring and surveillance activities, the banana and plantain Industry has been aware of the emergence of the disease in several countries for some time now. The Tropical Race 4 Disease was first identified in Asia in 1964. It spread to the African continent and to the Middle East in 2013.

So it is **not** a new disease. However, **Mr Speaker**, what has heightened our response is the fact that this disease has now been reported in the western hemisphere for the first time and, on August 8, 2019, it was confirmed in the La Guahira region of Colombia, where over 150,000 hectares of banana and plantains have been destroyed in an effort to contain it.

**The Panama Race 4 disease is considered one of the 10 most notable diseases in the history of agriculture and is the most destructive disease to have affected bananas, plantains and the Heliconia plant.**

The fungus spreads through infected plant materials and infested soil particles attached to any item such as farm tools, shoes, clothes, animals and vehicles. **This means that visitors to our shores and, even, we, as residents when we travel, can bring this fungus into Jamaica.**

**As such, I am urging all visitors and residents to adhere to the guidelines as established by the Plant Quarantine and Produce Inspection Branch of the Ministry.**

### **Global Perspective**

From a global perspective, **Mr Speaker**, banana and plantain are the most exported fruit in the world and the fifth most produced food crop in developing countries. It is an important staple food or source of income for about 400 million people.

The Tropical Race 4 Disease is therefore a serious threat to the production of the crop with serious repercussions on livelihoods of smallholder producers and workers along the banana and plantain value chain.

### **Local Perspective, Industry Background**

Here in Jamaica, **Mr. Speaker**, the Jamaica banana and plantain Industry is an important contributor to sustainable rural and national development.

A 2019 study and a review of RADA's database in December 2018 show that there are 68,612 farmers operating in the Jamaica banana and plantain Industry, occupying approximately 20,822.53 hectares.

Banana and plantains are the cheapest starch or staple eaten in various forms by 98% of the population.

**Mr. Speaker**, over the past three years, the value of the Jamaica banana and plantain Industry has been increasing, moving from an

estimated annual value of production output at farm gate prices of J\$6.04B in 2015 to J\$7.4B in 2018.

Additionally, banana production for 2018 increased by 22% over 2015 moving from 54,410 metric tonnes to 66,381 metric tonnes (MT). Further, 694 metric tonnes were exported in 2018 compared to 318 metric tonnes in 2015, a 118% increase.

**Every effort has to be made, Mr Speaker, to protect this industry and to prevent the TR4 from entering the island.**

**Mr Speaker**, the best way of mitigating the impact of TR4 on our banana industry is exclusion, which is preventing its entry. We cannot allow it to enter our shores!

### **Actions to prevent the entry of the Tropical Race 4 into Jamaica**

Once this pest spreads to an area, the implementation of stringent phytosanitary measures is needed to prevent movement of the pathogen from infected areas to pest-free areas.

That is why, **Mr Speaker**, we have prohibited the importation of banana, plantains and any relatives of the banana family into Jamaica.

I wish to underscore that the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Agriculture and Fisheries, through its agencies and departments, including The Banana Board and the Plant Quarantine and Produce Inspection Branch, is working assiduously with partner agencies to prevent the entry of the TR4 Disease into Jamaica.

The banana and plantain producing nations of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), including Jamaica, are accelerating the agreed Action Plan for the prevention of the disease in the respective territories.

The most recent Regional Meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean's Agricultural Authorities and Phytosanitary Experts on August 5, 2019 resulted in the "Regional Declaration of the Agricultural Authorities on TR4".

**Jamaica is a signatory to these declarations and is acting in accordance with the action plans.** We have adopted the LAC Action Plan and a national task force is being established to develop and

monitor the implementation of strategies aimed at preventing the introduction of the deadly disease into the island.

**Two of the Major Preventative Measures Being Undertaken are:**

1. The introduction of disinfection mats at our international airports and cruise ship piers for travellers to disinfect their shoes before entering Jamaica.
2. The Banana Board has already established a diagnostic laboratory to conduct early identification of the disease so that, we are able to respond swiftly should this disease reach our shores.

In fact, **Mr. Speaker**, in January of this year, the Plant Quarantine Branch in collaboration with the Trade Board, implemented a new policy for used car dealers to ensure that vehicles are cleaned, pre-inspected and certified free from soil before entering Jamaica.

**Mr. Speaker**, I wish to assure you and the country that we are taking all the possible precautionary measures to safeguard our banana and plantain industry from this deadly disease.

I implore all our farmers and consumers to follow the guidelines laid out as we seek to protect this industry. Protecting our banana and plantain industry from the threat of this deadly disease is everybody's business and, beginning with a media briefing tomorrow, the Ministry



will also embark on an active public awareness programme to engage the nation in preventing its entry into the island.

## **FROSTY POD ROT**

**Mr Speaker,** the Frosty Pod Rot Cocoa Disease is another disease of serious concern to agriculture. As you may be aware, this disease has been ravaging our country since 2016. We are well on our way, to treating definitively with the Frosty Pod Rot disease and I will use the opportunity of the media briefing scheduled for tomorrow morning to further highlight and address some areas of concern regarding the Frosty Pod Rot disease.