

Speaking Notes

**Senator the Honourable Sandra Falconer,
Minister with responsibility for Information**

**Meeting of the
National Digital Switchover Steering Committee
Held on April 4, 2012 in the
Banquet Hall, Jamaica House**

Co-chairmen and members of the National Digital Switchover Committee, I am struck by the awesome privilege and responsibility we have to frame in partnership, a critical component of Jamaica's response to the vast possibilities of the digital age which beckon us.

We are doing so in our 50th year, we must reflect on the failures in order to correct them and the successes to replicate them. Ours is the task.

I know we will make this as seamless as possible so the impact on our people will be positive. (With the benefit of our mixed experiences and with our shared goals) to *take stock; address challenges; and take informed, sure footed strides towards Digital Switchover (DSO).*

Let us *switch Jamaica onto:*

- ***multidimensional opportunities*** to seek, consume, digest, enjoy, create, manipulate, provide and exchange information;
- ***multidimensional access*** to diverse services; and
- ***multidimensional avenues*** for upliftment, empowerment and fulfillment of the promise of greatness which resides in every Jamaican.

This matter of Jamaica's DSO therefore is not one to be understood as a mere transition from analogue transmission of broadcast signals to digital (*just a pretty picture*), but rather, we must all be alive to the ***audio-visual, social and economic benefits to be derived from this transformation.***

Our engagement must therefore be focused around getting public input and ensuring that Jamaicans will anticipate and take full advantage of the broad ***and enriched media experience*** that digital transmission brings.

This must be characterized of course by high technical quality; new features delivered through the utilization of multimedia applications; and high levels of interactivity *in step with the Jamaican culture, demand and vision.*

Jamaicans must be made aware of the tremendous prospects DSO hold for **inclusiveness**.

This medium widens the portal (among other things) for the participation and contribution of the disabled community and minority interests.

The Nation must be seized of the fact that DSO allows for the **expansion and streaming of content** from existing and new content providers; and that its advent heralds the **opportunity for more diverse domestic commercial services**.

The implications for **job creation** must also be examined. The **efficiencies** in the management of Jamaica's Spectrum resource must also be examined alongside the **uses to which the saved spectrum is to be put**.

The **economic returns to be derived from the saved spectrum**, have to be focused.

We as members of this Committee must work diligently and creatively in progressing the DSO Agenda, with the full awareness that undue delays will position our island home on the wrong side of the Digital Divide.

Many of our global partners have already made the switch. In this transition it is important that we protect people from the dumping of analogue TV sets on the market, while ensuring that our ability to continue to attract investment, business and even to grow our visitors will not be eroded.

It is appreciated that this is a costly undertaking and one requiring precision. As such, our approaches have to be evidence based.

I am pleased to tell you that I have identified funding for the DSO Study which will garner information with respect to Jamaica's readiness and our carrying capacity.

The DSO Study will ventilate public policy considerations and will have substantive economic analysis of the market with projections for the future of the digital TV market, consumer take up of the different platforms and consumer willingness to pay for new services.

Attention will also be given to the matter of the potential impact of analogue 'switchoff'; the estimation of the value of the released spectrum; cost benefit analysis of the digital switchover process (from launch of digital transmission to analogue 'switchoff'); cost points and options for funding; and importantly, technology selection, access and usability by persons with disabilities or other vulnerable groups and environmental considerations.

I also mention that the government has applied to the International Telecommunications Union for funding to establish a dedicated DSO project unit to be housed at the Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica's (BCJ) Secretariat.

Having said that, I must return to the imperative of keeping the public informed about digitalization. Here it is significant that the BCJ has embarked on a media literacy project, supported by UNESCO and the Joint Board of Teacher Education and MOE.

The Ministry of Education. Ten (10) instructional videos have been completed for use along with other supporting material which have been developed for primary and secondary schools.

Fifty (50) Teacher College trainees and In-Service teachers have been trained in grades 1-3 and 4-6 media literacy curriculum and another batch is currently undergoing training.

There is also the BCJ's "Schools' Outreach Programme" around the theme "**The Future is Digital**" which is another key link in public education.

I note with delight that this programme involves Primary, Secondary and Tertiary institutions across the length and breadth of the country and in all socio-economic groupings.

I encourage the expansion of the programme, noting that media and digital literacy are handmaidens of the switch to a fully digital platform. This is important if we are to be a country of net uploaders of content rather than being 'downloaders'.

I also encourage every partner around the table, to begin in earnest, to engage with the public about the inevitability of the digital switch.

In particular, we must sensitize the public to the reality of dumping and the need to avoid expending limited disposable incomes on the acquisition of analogue television sets and other communication devices which will become.

Be assured that engagement with industry will continue to be a hallmark of the DSO process.

I note that the last such was a BCJ technical Seminar on DSO held on March 21 which was supported by over 40 technical personnel from the subscriber television and broadcast television sectors.

This is an important context for creating the best platform for Jamaica to unleash its creative, innovative resources.

I also acknowledge and commend the pioneers around this table who have already deployed digital technology in the cable industry, and broadcasters, who have begun to make the necessary investments for completely digital operations.

I commend you because I know the economic constraints you face and the challenges you have.

In closing, let me signal that I intend to take an interim report to the Cabinet seeking a definitive policy statement on 2015 as the date to begin transition, on an evidence-based plan informed by the comprehensive DSO Study which is about to commence the BCJ's study on industry and, the BCJ's DSO (consumer) study just concluded by two (2) UTECH Mphil students.

These studies and actions will lay the groundwork in 2012 for a steady march towards the transition in 2015.

Once again, I thank members of the DSO Steering Committee for the work carried out since its establishment in 2009 and I look forward to making the journey with you into the Digital Future.

This is an important initiative towards our vision of a Jamaica which is the place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business. This is our duty and a call to action in order to honour the legacy of our forefathers.

I thank you.

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