**Opening Statement of the Commonwealth of Dominica to the Human Rights Council as part of the Universal Periodic Review Process**

**May 9th, 2019**

Introduction:

Greetings Colleagues.

We are pleased to be back in Geneva participating in this 3rd cycle universal periodic review.

Since the Commonwealth of Dominica last participated in this review process, we have suffered the impact of two truly devastating storms, a regretful reality of climate change.

In 2015 Tropical Storm Erika significantly damaged infrastructure and some businesses and destroyed two communities, leading to many deaths and the forced abandonment and relocation of inhabitants. In 2017 Hurricane Maria, a category 5 storm, completely devastated the entire island. 90% of homes suffered damage and thousands were rendered homeless. The majority of schools and other public buildings were destroyed or badly damaged, the entire phone network was down. The island was without electricity and tap water for months, economic activity ground to a halt. These two storms caused loss and damage estimated at 90% of GDP and 226% of GDP respectively. As a small island developing state with limited resources, we anticipate that it will take several years to recover fully from these storms

In response to this new reality Prime Minister Skerrit announced a new vision for Dominica, to build the world’s first climate resilient nation. While the storms have had significant impact on the country and its ability to pursue many of its plans and programmes, the Government recognised that these storms had the potential to drive the most vulnerable in our society, deeper into poverty. The Government therefore took a deliberate decision to continue its social protection programmes, of support to the elderly and most vulnerable.

I take this opportunity to reiterate Dominica’s commitment to the fundamentals of our human rights obligations, the basic tenets of which are enshrined in our Constitution. We continue to work towards fulfilling our obligations, constrained as we are by limitations on financial and human resources.

Permit me to supplement information already provided in our National Report dated 18th February, 2019.

At the moment there is no national mechanism responsible for coordinating and implementing accepted UPR recommendations. Individual Ministries are responsible for undertaking the work relevant to their portfolio. We recognise however that this method is not the most efficient, however due to rationalisation of the use of resources post disaster, it will not be possible at this time to establish a human rights institution. A proposal will therefore be made to the Cabinet within a few weeks, to appoint a national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow up (NMIRF) to include representatives from the Attorney General’s Chambers and Ministries responsible for Education, Health and Social Services, Justice, Immigration and National Security, Gender and Family Affairs, Kalinago Affairs, Finance and Foreign and CARICOM Affairs.

While we have been tardy in our reporting obligations, I am pleased to inform that the Report on the Convention of the Rights of the Child has been completed and approved by the Cabinet and will be submitted shortly. We acknowledge with thanks the assistance of UNICEF in assisting with its preparation.

The draft report on the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women has been prepared with assistance from UN Women and OHCHR for which we are grateful. Fifteen (15) key stakeholders have received training to complete CEDAW reporting. This draft will soon be submitted to Cabinet for approval.

**Social protection:**

In 2017, prior to Hurricane Maria, Dominica performed a comprehensive review of its social protection system.  The review revealed that the country has achieved relatively high levels of social development - its indicators compares well with its neighbors and other Upper Middle Income Countries (UMIC).  Over the years, Dominica has made important progress in developing the social protection system (SPS) by implementing an array of social assistance, social insurance and active labor market programs, that work together to deliver resilience, equity, and opportunities for the diverse population.  Most of these programmes have wide coverage and good reliability and benefits are distributed through food, in-kind and cash transfer options. For example, Dominica spent 7 percent of GDP on social protection and labor programs in 2015/16, excluding the spending post Tropical Storm Erika.

Between 2014 and 2018, a few new interventions were introduced or revisited:

1. A social pension scheme launched in 2014 which provides non-contributory benefits for persons 70 years and older without a pension or other source of income, this allowance was increased from $200 to $300 effective 2016;

1. In April 2017 a National Health Insurance Pilot Programme was launched. This facility aims to help poor pregnant women and infants of single mothers aged 35 years and below with medical bills.

3. Parametric changes were made to the Dominica Social Security pensions which increased by EC$ 25 per month.

To respond to the needs of the most affected communities hit by Tropical Storm Erika in August 2015, displaced persons in shelters (many of which were schools) were placed in rented accommodation and provided with allowances to assist them in meeting their basic needs.

The 2017 disaster caused by Hurricane Maria in September, provided a window of opportunity to do a few things differently:

 (1)  Firstly to review and reorient the existing economic and social development management frameworks.

a.    In 2018, the newly developed National Resilience Development Strategy (2018-2030) was approved and publicly disseminated. Social protection and poverty reduction are two major national development objectives.  Under this strategy, Dominica aims to reduce household poverty to below 10% and to reduce the rate of indigence to less than 1% in the coming decade.

b. Development of a Public Assistance Programme (PAP) Operations Manual and Standard Operating Procedures for the Social Welfare Division.  This manual articulates existing programme management and is also intended to provide instructions to government partners and other stakeholders on the essential steps and procedures for the management of cases, effective coordination of referrals, and information sharing.

c.    Formulation of a five-year pockets of poverty reduction strategy and action plan (2018 – 2023) for accelerating pockets of poverty reduction, targeting economically disadvantaged communities and specific vulnerable groups such as women, children, elderly and the indigenous community, to safeguard their right to social protection.

d. Preparatory works have begun on a Housing and Resettlement Policy Framework and Strategy, as well as an Integrated Social Protection Policy and Strategy together with a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and a costed Action Plan.

(2)Secondly to re-orient structures and initiatives for more effective delivery of service to include the following:

a.    In 2018, the Social Welfare Division was merged with the Ministry of Health, to bring focused attention to quality, effective, accessible and affordable health and social welfare services, that meet the needs of people through the delivery of sustainable and responsive approaches.

b.   In 2018, the Rapid Response Social Recovery Agency supported by legislation, was established to provide urgent public support and relief to persons in need and for medical related matters.

(3)Thirdly, to overcome pre-crisis conditions by making Dominica more resilient.  This will include ensuring among other things, that the housing response activities address the vulnerabilities and reduce the inequalities faced by the poor and help strengthen the resilience of people and the communities to better manage future disasters and their risks.

**Gender:**

The Government of Dominica through the Bureau of Gender Affairs has recognized the significance of strengthening efforts towards the fight against gender-based violence, domestic violence and gender-discrimination; while promoting human rights and protecting the integrity of the country’s population. The following initiatives have ensured progress in protection and promotion of gender equality and equity in addition to human rights:

In 2015, the Bureau of Gender Affairs, in collaboration with the UNDP and the Inter American Commission, participated in a Human Rights Joint Caribbean Study Tour on the issue of violence against women, its causes and consequences. State and non-state actors participated in consultations which discussed State responses to violence against women and children in Dominica, and identified strategies to deepen policy response to this human rights issue. More recently, in April 2019, UN Women and the United Nations Human Rights Office of the Commissioner, provided training to key government officials with the objective of strengthening technical capacity among government partners on CEDAW Reporting, and ensuring that key stakeholders understand the progress made on gender equality at the national and regional level.

Via a Social mobilization project the Bureau of Gender-Affairs in collaboration with UN Women, implemented “Stop the Violence” campaign against gender-based violence. The campaign engaged the Dominican public in a number of activities geared towards increasing public awareness of gender-based violence and human rights, challenging stereotypes surrounding gender and gender-based violence, while increasing support for victims of gender-based violence. The campaign was executed over a three (3) year period (2015 – 2018).

In continuing the efforts at striving for gender-equality and equity, the Bureau of Gender-Affairs, has embarked on gender sensitization and mainstreaming trainings, geared towards public sector officials, non-state actors, schools, women, men, youth and communities. Public awareness through radio programs and social networking continues.

The Government of Dominica continues to empower women through the establishment of a revolving loan fund specifically geared towards women. Staffing at the Bureau of Gender Affairs, has been increased to meet greater demands of services needed to ensure gender equality and equity. The Bureau and various departments within other ministries and divisions in Dominica currently handle projects and programs related to gender and women issues.

The Government of Dominica continues to strengthen the protection and promotion of human rights through its institutions, legislation and public policies. Since Dominica’s independence in 1978, a number of pieces of legislation have been enacted to eliminate direct and indirect discrimination on the basis of sex, promote positive action for women, and advance equality and equity between women and men. This includes most recently the amendments to the Sexual Offences Act in 2016 which among other things now criminalizes marital rape; ensures harsher sentences for perpetrators of sexual violence; and provides legislative authority for the mandatory reporting of suspected abuse of minors.

The political arena in Dominica has always had the support of women as voters and supporters of the various political campaigns since it gained independence in 1978. Dame Mary Eugenia Charles was the first female Prime Minister in the Caribbean region and served for fifteen consecutive years. Currently 21.9% of parliamentarians are women. The Dominica Labour Party has fielded 21 candidates for the next general election of which 38% (8) are women. So far 3 of the candidates for the United Workers Party (the main opposition party) are female, however not all of their candidates have been named, so there is a possibility that this figure may change.

**Education**

Dominica has achieved both universal primary and secondary education and has been working on universal access for Early Childhood Education (ECE) since 2012. Within primary schools where space is available, action is being taken to facilitate the accommodation of ECE centers. Where there is inadequate space at some locations, extensions are being built to accommodate the Centers.

In a span of two years, Tropical Storm Erika and Hurricane Maria damaged the infrastructure of the Education system, severely impacting 84% of schools. The rebuilding process has started with efforts to build back better and that will follow recently developed guidelines for Multi-Disaster Resilient School Buildings. In rebuilding, due account is given to physical access for children with disabilities. Plans are in progress to build six (6) new schools with support from China, to replace those most severely damaged. Six other schools will undergo major rehabilitation with support from Canada.

Dominica is working not only on access but also on the quality of education. We continue to implement activities under the OECS Education Strategy 2012-2021 which includes teacher professional development.

Through a continuous professional development plan, all teachers engage in, in-service teacher professional development covering a variety of topics, identified through a Needs Assessment. During two weeks in July when students are on vacation, over 300 teachers follow in-service training programmes. The data presently shows that in 2017/2018, 60% of the teachers at primary level were trained while 50% were trained at secondary level. Under the leadership and accountability component, 28 school leaders at the primary level were pursuing a certificate in Educational Leadership. The job description and appraisal for the school principals are also being reviewed and aligned with leadership standards. Under an Education Enhancement Project, 26 school leaders obtained a master’s degree in Educational Leadership and Management in 2017. To date the data shows that 50% of primary school principals and 73% of secondary school principals have a degree in Educational Leadership and Management.

The achievement levels within the National Assessments at Key Stages 2, 4 and 6 have shown increases, notwithstanding Hurricane Maria. For example, in the academic year 2018-2019, 75.3% of students are reading at grade level compared to 61.5% in 2016-2017. At the secondary level students’ performances have also been on the increase with a 3.6% increase in the overall percentage pass of students receiving acceptable grades of 1, 2 and 3 in the 2018 examinations. There has been an increasing trend in the overall pass rate for the past six years with overall performance in 2018 being 12 points above the regional average.

Corporal Punishment is still provided for in the Education Act of 1997 but should only be used as a last resort. However, over the past decade, the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development, through the implementation of the Effective School/Child Friendly School initiative, has been embarking on efforts to offer alternative approaches to discipline, including the use of School-Wide Positive Behavioural Practices. This is in an effort to decrease the need for corporal punishment and for its eventual elimination.

Children with disabilities are mainly educated within an inclusive setting. However, the Government of Dominica provides support to private institutions that cater specifically for children with disabilities. The Alpha Centre and the Isulukati Special Needs School in the Kalinago territory, caters for Children with moderate to severe mental challenges, while the Achievement Learning Centre caters for children with varying types of special needs. An office has been established to coordinate the work in special education and involves the psychological, academic and behavioural assessment of children as well as support for the implementation of intervention programmes to cater to their needs. Children with disabilities are also involved in sports and are regular participants at the Special Olympic Games. They performed very well this year, receiving three gold medals, three silver medals and fourth and fifth ribbons.

The Government of Dominica has been steadily increasing its support for Early Childhood Development in recognition of its importance as the foundation years for growth and development. An Early Childhood Unit was established with an increase in human resource capacity. Three new positions were established. One of those positions is devoted to early stimulation programmes for children from zero to three years. The Roving Care Givers Programme, which uses a blended home-based and centre-based model to provide early stimulation for vulnerable children from zero to three years was integrated into the Ministry of Education. Since the passage of Hurricane Maria, ECE facilities are being included in schools where major rehabilitation is being undertaken. The Maria Holder Memorial Trust has also built five new facilities for the early childhood sector in areas where there was no or inadequate access.

I turn now to the Human Rights Report.

**Responses to the Human Rights Reports**

We have had an opportunity to review the Reports, namely the Compilation on Dominica and the Summary of Stakeholders’ submissions on Dominica, prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights dated the 22 February, 2019 and 18 February, 2019 respectively.

I wish to touch on a few areas referred to therein, in particular some areas where it is necessary to provide some more factual information.

**Compilation on Dominica**

Right to life liberty and security of person:

As relates to paragraph 17 dealing with the death penalty, Dominica voted at the UN last year, in favour of the moratorium on the death penalty. Additionally at his Independence Address on the 3rd of November, 2018 the Prime Minister made the following statement and I quote:-

*“At age 40, there are also some adult conversations we need to have, as a nation. Capital Punishment is one of them. Is it still a deterrent? Is it inhumane? What objective does it achieve? Is it desirable? Is there another and a better option? This is an issue that we have to confront, sooner, rather than later, and adopt a position. Your government will, in the months ahead, seek out perspectives from various enlightened groups internationally and share them all with you. In this way, the position we finally arrive at can be informed and sound; based on reason and facts, rather than emotion.”* End quote

We are open to having assistance to facilitate a national dialogue on this issue.

**Administration of Justice, including impunity and the rule of law**.

I refer to Paragraph 21- While it is true that for many years a major concern at the Magistrates Court was lack of space, backlog of matters and an absence of a full complement of magistrates, prior to Hurricane Maria these concerns had to a large extent been addressed. In 2014 the Magistrates Court expanded into another building that allowed for an additional courtroom and additional facilities for staff.

In 2016 the complement of Magistrates was increased from 6 to 8 and all positions filled. These initiatives contributed to a marked reduction in the backlog of cases. In October 2017, Hurricane Maria caused major damage to all court facilities. The Magistrates Court in Roseau resumed sitting for mainly criminal matters in November 2017. The juvenile court, and civil, family and other matters resumed in March 2018. Court rooms are still being repaired and it is expected that all courts will be functioning normally by the end of the year.

The High Court similarly experienced extensive damage to its premises and loss of case materials which impacted on the ability of the Court to resume hearing of matters. Staff were adversely affected some of them having suffered damage to their homes. Additionally the homes of the Judges were damaged and they had to be evacuated from Dominica, until appropriate arrangements could be made for their return.

Prior to Hurricane Maria, but for a very few outstanding indictable criminal trials pending and those for which depositions were being typed, the Criminal Division of the Supreme Court was to a large extent up to date in dealing with criminal trials prior to Hurricane Maria. The criminal court was able to resume operations in January this year.

As regards to the Civil Division of the Supreme Court, in recent times because of the increase in Public Law cases being filed, coupled with an increase in Civil Litigation matters, this has resulted in a very heavy case load for that Division of the Court. This has been exacerbated by the delays occasioned by the hurricane for which a second Civil Court Judge would help to clear the backlog.

**Fundamental freedoms and the right to participate in public and political life:**

Paragraph 24- There has been no political harassment of opposition parties by the Government. The opposition like the Government is not immune from the processes of the law. If they violate the law then there is a process for enforcement. The events of 7th February 2017 began with a political meeting by the opposition and ended with riotous behaviour after the meeting was officially closed and efforts by the police to disperse the crowd was thwarted by opposition parliamentarians and supporters. This resulted in fires started in the city, vandalising and looting of business places and shots being fired at the police. The Government under the Regional Investigative Management System requested assistance from CARICOM Implementation Agency on Crime and Security, relative to carrying out investigations into that incident. It was determined that sufficient evidence was gathered to bring charges against certain opposition parliamentarians and supporters for incitement of riotous conduct and wilful obstruction of the police in the execution of their duties. Due process was followed and those who were detained had access to legal counsel. They were charged and released. The matters are pending before the magistrate court and have been stayed pending a decision from the High Court on a related matter. It is not correct to say that äll charges have been dismissed”. I will also say further that one of the opposition parliamentarians who was charged has now disassociated himself from the opposition party in favour of national development and helping to rebuild the country post disaster. He was then invited to and has now joined and become a Minister of Government. The charges against him have not been dismissed.

**Summary of Stakeholder’s submissions:**

*Cross cutting issues:*

While Dominica acknowledges that there has not been an amendment to the laws that impact on members of the LGBTI community, it is not correct to say that . “*participation in strategic litigation before national courts against laws and statutes that discriminate against or have a negative impact on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons has exposed human rights defenders to worrying level of violence, including death threats, intimidation and violent attacks*” In fact over the last five years there were no cases of any violence, or death threats targeting LGBTI people reported to the police. Additionally access to health care is not denied to LGBTI persons. No one is required to state or asked about their status, nor denied treatment as a result of their sexual orientation.

*Civil and Political Rights*

At paragraph 8 referencing protest action in Salisbury, I would like to place on record that the police exercised tremendous restraint after being pelted by an angry mob with bottles, stones and Molotov cocktails which caused injury to police officers and damage to public property. The reaction of the Police was very measured in the circumstances.

Paragraph 13 The right to freedom of expression comes with certain responsibilities, which includes the responsibility not to defame others. The Prime Minister is entitled, as is any other citizen to take action to protect his reputation and where appropriate to seek aggravated damages when the circumstances warrant. The statement that on the 27 of April the Privy Council found the leader of the opposition guilty of defamation and sentenced him to pay the sum of £25,992 to the Prime Minister is incorrect. This judgment against the leader of the opposition was in respect of a private citizen that he had defamed.

*Rights of Specific persons and groups*

Paragraph 23- While the laws exist which permits a child to be sentenced to life imprisonment, detention during the State’s pleasure or corporal punishment, going back as far as 20 years, there has been no such sentence imposed on a child. The government remains committed to updating its legislation respecting children, to reflect current day realities. We acknowledge that there are many instances of laws dating back to colonial days, that are archaic. Constraints on resources makes it difficult to address all of these in a timely manner. In that regard it would be helpful to have the services of a drafts person(s) for a finite period who could be assigned to review legislation and prepare suggested amendments.

**Right or area 2.1. Acceptance of International Norms**

The Commonwealth of Dominica, in accepting the many recommendations made by other States, during the last UPR session in 2014, undertook to ratify several key Conventions that will allow it to be in greater conformity with international standards and requirements. Cabinet approval has been obtained for the ratification of the following key instruments and the documentation is being prepared for the deposit of the relevant instruments:-

* International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;
* International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance;
* International Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide;

We remain committed to moving forward with the others and expect that later this year we will sign on to additional Conventions and Protocols. We are thankful for the support that we have received as we undergo this process.

While the Constitution, “the supreme law of the land” provides protection for our citizens from “cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment” we have considered ratifying the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. In that regard from April 7 to 10, 2019 we had a visit by a five-member delegation from the Convention against Torture Initiative (CTI). The visit included meetings with Ministers, site visits to the Police Headquarters and State Prison and a workshop with relevant stakeholders. This served to educate persons on the Convention and provide insight and guidance with a view to eventually leading to its ratification.

**Children:**

The following Bills have been presented to the Cabinet of Dominica for review and approval namely the

* *Status of Children Bill*
* *Children (Care and Adoption) Bill*
* *Juvenile Justice Bill*
* *Family Court Bill*
* *Maintenance of Children Bill*

It is expected that the Bills will receive approval and be taken to Parliament later this year. The provisions will not only serve to protect children and their families but also afford families the opportunity to seek redress when necessary in courts of law and also within established systems, particularly in child care and family related agencies.

Discussions are ongoing about the restructuring of the Social Welfare Division, the main child protection agency. Additionally, a review is presently underway, with regards to the implementation of A National Action Plan on Child Sexual Abuse before it can be submitted for approval by policy makers.

Since the last report submitted to the United Nations Special Committee on Children, Dominica has made significant progress on ensuring that its policies, programmes and activities relating to children are in keeping with the letter and spirit of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Government of Dominica is mindful of the challenges which mitigate against the full enjoyment of the rights of children as enshrined in the Convention but notwithstanding is committed to the effort to continue working towards that goal and to maintain the gains that have been realised.

Through UNICEF’s technical assistance, initial steps have been taken to put in place a comprehensive data collection system on child abuse. Training has been conducted. In addition, UNIFEM has provided technical support to the Bureau of Gender Affairs to collaborate with agencies on the establishment of a data bank. This would be linked to the various agencies in the compilation of statistics on domestic violence, which would include child abuse.

For almost two decades now the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica has established a separate Juvenile Court presided over by child friendly Magistrates. A social enquiry report is submitted on behalf of every offending juvenile (first time or recidivist) to the sitting Magistrate by Probation officers. This report assists in mitigating the sentence handed down on these juveniles as the recommendation made in these reports are more often than not, acceded to by the Honourable Court.

Before I conclude I would like to address some issues raised in the advance questions which have not already been dealt with.

Dominica has enacted legislation aimed at preventing, combating and punishing human trafficking. The Immigration and Passport Act provides for the offence of human trafficking and offences related to it. A number of offences relating to trafficking in persons and related matters including forced labour are also provided for in the Transnational Organised Crime (Prevention and Control) Act, 2013. Offences relating to the smuggling of migrants are also provided for in that Act. The penalties attached to the offences are substantial and reflective of the seriousness with which these crimes should be addressed. Offences relating to trafficking in persons are also extraditable offences for the purpose of the Extradition Act.

In relation to the question asked by the United States pertaining to electoral matters I respond as follows:-

The Commonwealth of Dominica has essentially been employing the same system for conducting elections since it attained independence in 1978. These elections over the years have generally been considered to be free and fair. There have been improvements recommended for the electoral system by the electoral office itself and by election observers.

The Government decided to move forward firstly with the issue of the introduction of voter ID cards. This has been occupying the attention of authorities for some time, along with the issue of sanitising the list of registered voters. One complaint has been that the number of persons on the voters list exceeds the country’s population.

Section 7 of the Registration of Electors act of Dominica creates a right to remain registered. It provides that

*“ A person registered pursuant to this Part shall remain registered unless and until his name is deleted from the register because*

1. *He has died;*
2. *An objection to his registration has been allowed;*
3. *He has been absent from Dominica for a period exceeding five years; or*
4. *He has become disqualified for registration as an elector under this Act or any other written law imposing disqualifications for registration as an elector.*

Dominica like many other countries experiences a high rate of migration. People move more freely and more frequently and while many Dominicans reside and work in other countries they return home regularly. They therefore remain on the register unless steps are taken to remove them if they become ineligible because of continuous absence exceeding five years.

In 2011 the Government informed His Excellency the President with a request for onward notice to the Electoral Commission, of its decision to introduce a National ID card that would include all the features requisite in a voters’ identification card. In June 2011 the Commission indicated its approval and proposed the model used in St. Lucia. It was also determined that if the cards were to be used for voting they should be issued by the Commission. In July 2013, His Excellency the President requested financing for the issuance of the card. The Government responded positively in August 2013. By December 2015 the draft amendments to the laws required for the introduction of voter ID cards were submitted to the Electoral Commission for scrutiny and comments. The Commission was assisted in this exercise by an expert from the Commonwealth. In September 2016, the Electoral Commission’s reactions to and recommendations on the draft amendments were submitted to the Government. In February 2017 at the request of the Electoral Commission, the Government approved over two million dollars ($2,043,108.80) for the procurement of the ID Card Management system. In May of 2017 the Government authorised a further sum of $91,402.08 for staff adjustments for the Electoral Office and the sum of $3,995,789.49 for the cost of the confirmation process and to purchase additional equipment.

In May 2017 the Government tabled the amendment Bills in Parliament. The Bills provided among other things for

1. It to be mandatory for identification cards to be used for voting
2. It provided for a confirmation process to be undergone in respect of voters on the voters list.
3. It presented a solution to the unique circumstances of persons displaced from their community as a result of Tropical storm Erika
4. It provided for the codification of the law on bribery and treating as it has been interpreted by the Courts.

Before the Bills could be debated by the Parliament, the opposition and its supporters it called to protest outside Parliament, disrupted the proceedings and the Parliament had to be adjourned. The complaint expressed then, was with the provisions in the Bills relating to bribery and treating.

Those provisions were eventually removed from the Bills and the Bills were resubmitted to Parliament. They were due to be tabled in Parliament on September 17, 2018. On September 10, 2018 a consultation was organized by the Government to go through and discuss the Bills. It was open to all persons and all members of Parliament and a wide range of civil society was specifically invited. This event was carried live. At the end the Attorney General invited the submission of comments and recommendations on the Bills. These Bills were made available on the Government website. No substantive comments were received. An individual petitioned the court for an injunction for the Bills not to be heard by the Parliament and for declarations that clauses in the Bills are unconstitutional.

It bears noting that on the 7th of September, 2017 the Electoral Commission issued a Press Release that stated “The Electoral Commission is satisfied that the proposed amendments are in the best interest of the democratic process in Dominica and urges all stakeholders to give effective support to the speedy passage and implementation.”

The Government has made available all of the funding requested by the Electoral Commission for implementing an identification card system and a confirmation process that would lead to a rationalization of the voters list. The process to move forward is currently stalled.

I am sorry that my response on this issue had to be so lengthy but I thought it important, since this matter was raised, to set out all of the actions that the Government has taken in an effort to have the voters list revised and national ID cards issued before the next election.

In concluding we would like to reiterate that the Government of Dominica remains fully committed to the UPR process and to our obligations under the various conventions which we are party to. We assure member states that our tardiness in reporting and the delays in implementation are not reflective in any way of a lack of commitment on Dominica’s part, but instead reveals the severe capacity constraints faced by our country. As a small island developing state, Dominica is challenged by a lack of adequate financial and technical resources. This has been further exacerbated by the recent economic devastation of our country and economy because of recent storms.

We thank member states for their participation and support in our UPR process and thank all those who have assisted and continue to assist Dominica with fulfilling its international requirements and those who have worked with us in preparing for this review. There is always the danger in singling out persons that you forget others but I will take the opportunity to particularly thank the staff from the Commonwealth for working closely with us these last few days and for making the small states office available to us here in Geneva and of course the staff of the various Ministries guided by Ms. Keisha Lewis of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who collaborated in providing information for this process.

We thank the distinguished members of the Troika, - China, Uruguay and Nigeria - the UPR Secretariat and the Working Group for your support during this process and we reaffirm our commitment to the United Nations Human Rights Council.

Thank you.