

KINDERGARTENS – CHILDREN – ASSAULTS (05/08/08)

(No. B/1040) Mrs F. Jeewa-Daureeawoo (Third Member for Stanley and Rose Hill) asked the Prime Minister, Minister of Defence & Home Affairs, Minister of Civil Service & Administrative Reforms and Minister of Rodrigues & Outer Islands whether, in regard to the kindergartens, he will, for the benefit of the House, obtain from the Commissioner of Police, information as to the number of reported cases of babies and/or children who have been physically and sexually assaulted whilst being thereat, since July 2005 to date, indicating in each case, if an inquiry has been carried out thereinto and the outcome thereof.

The Prime Minister: Mr Speaker, Sir, I am informed by the Commissioner of Police that since July 2005 to date, 3 cases relating to physical and sexual assault on children in kindergartens have been reported. In the first 2 cases, Police enquiry has been completed and the Director of Public Prosecutions has advised no further action into the matter. As regards the third case, I am informed that following Police enquiry, one accused was arrested on 19 July 2008 and was bailed out the next day upon furnishing a surety of Rs15,000. The case will be referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions for advice on completion of the enquiry.

Mr Speaker, Sir, I wish to add that several measures are already in place to prevent child abuse. The '*Brigade des Mineurs*' is actively conducting various working sessions and awareness campaigns to sensitise children, parents, teaching and non-teaching staff of pre-primary schools on protection, safety and security aspects of children. These persons are being encouraged to report and to provide information on suspected cases of abuse to the Police.

Furthermore, the Early Childhood Care Authority, previously known as the Pre-School Trust Fund, regularly conducts workshops and seminars for educators, supervisors and parents in different regions. Since the year 2007, thirty such programmes have been organized with a view to empowering educators and parents on child protection and other social ills.

Mr Speaker, Sir, it is the duty of every responsible Government to protect every child from abuse and, as I have already said, one case is too many. The fight against this scourge should be a priority for the society at large and not only for the Police.

I would also like to remind the House that it was in 1998, under my

Government, that the Child Protection Act and the Criminal Code were amended to reinforce protection to children against abuse and to provide more stringent penalties for offenders.

Mrs Jeewa-Daureeawoo: May I know from the hon. Prime Minister whether the Early Childhood Authority has been set up?

The Prime Minister: I will have to check. The question is not directly related to the main question. I am not aware as to whether it has been set up yet.