

**Statement by the Minister of Finance**  
**on the Special Report of the Auditor General**  
**on the Public Accounts for the Financial Year 2023**  
**House of Representatives**  
**September 9, 2024**

Madam Speaker, I am authorized by Cabinet to make the following statement on the Special Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts for the Financial Year 2023.

Following the public statements made by the Auditor General with respect to her original report on the 2023 Accounts, her baseless assertion that the Ministry of Finance sought to unethically backdate the original 2023 Accounts has been completely refuted. This Special Report does not assist in any way in clearing up the main issue in contention, which resulted from an overstatement of tax refunds, and a subsequent underreporting of net revenue, leading to a \$2.6 billion discrepancy in the revenue figures for 2023.

The main point of this Special Report, the expected scope of which was clearly outlined in a letter written by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance to the Auditor General on June 16, 2024, was to clear up that issue.

However, instead of confirming that the \$2.6 billion discrepancy had been resolved and that there was in fact no missing money, the Auditor General has avoided making any definitive statement on that very important matter in this Special Report and instead has chosen to make caustic remarks about the staff and systems in the Ministry of Finance.

What is particularly disturbing about the Auditor General's approach to this matter is the fact that at the Exit meeting held on July 22, 2024, to complete the process of meetings on the Special Report, the audit team from the Auditor General's Department, which included some of the most senior auditors in that Department, openly expressed its satisfaction to the staff of the Ministry of Finance that the adjustment of \$2.6 billion was appropriately accounted for.

However, the Auditor General in her Audit Opinion on page 25 did not state that she was satisfied that the error in the Public Accounts for financial year 2023 was corrected.

We view this omission on her part as a continuing campaign of non-cooperation and criticism of public officials in the Ministry of Finance by the Auditor General.

On a related matter, I took note of the screaming headlines in the Sunday Express of September 8, 2024, i.e. ***Central Bank denied me access*** regarding an affidavit dated September 5, 2024, filed by the Auditor General in the constitutional matter against the Attorney General over the payment of legal fees to her selected attorney, former UNC Attorney General, Anand Ramlogan. Reference in that affidavit was made to extracts from this Special Report, although on September 5, 2024, the Special Report had not yet been laid in Parliament, and the premature disclosure of its contents is in our view, a breach of process.

It is clear to us that the premature publication of that emotionally charged affidavit in the Sunday Express was designed to evoke public sympathy.

In that Sunday Express article, the Auditor General claimed that the Central Bank denied her access to the Electronic Cheque Clearing System, which negatively impacted her ability to perform a proper audit and check of the system which led to the understatement of some \$2.6 billion in revenue. We fail to see the connection between that alleged denial of access to the Central Bank's computer systems, and the confirmation that the \$2.6 billion understatement had been resolved as stated by her Audit Team on July 22, 2024.

When I saw that Sunday Express article, I asked the Governor of the Central Bank for his comments.

The Governor has informed me that following an email request made on June 24, 2024 by an official in the Auditor General's Department, to examine the Bank's Electronic Cheque Clearing System and its GoAnywhere Platform, it requested official correspondence from the Auditor General with an outline of the scope of the potential engagement. The Central Bank also indicated that it was open and willing to meet with the Auditor General on the matter at any mutually convenient time.

I am advised that to date, while it has received an outline of the scope of the proposed examination from a subordinate in the Auditor General's Department, the Bank has not yet received any correspondence from the

Auditor General delegating authority to her staff to act on her behalf on this matter, nor has it received a proposed time or date for the earlier requested meeting between the Auditor General and the Governor.

As such the Bank was unable to accommodate the request.

However, in that regard, the Bank has advised me given the historical relationship between the Auditor General and the Bank and the important role of the Auditor General in the conduct of national affairs, the Governor remains open to meeting with and discussing any matter with the Auditor General. This meeting can form the basis for a precise and properly constituted engagement that while not in the nature of an audit of the accounts of the Central Bank (which has already been completed) could be very informative as regards public sector financial transactions and processes.

It is hoped that the Auditor General will follow the established procedures and meet with the Governor of the Central Bank on this matter or, alternatively, delegate authority in writing to the Deputy Auditor General or another suitable staff member to act on her behalf.

In conclusion, it is the Government's view that the Special Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts for the Financial Year 2023 only adds fuel to the fire, creates more unnecessary public confusion and does

not satisfactorily address the core issue that arose with the Auditor General's original report on the 2023 Accounts, which is a \$2.6 billion discrepancy in revenue, and which in our view has been comprehensively cleared up.