MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

BY:

THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS

THE HON. PATRICIA GORDON-PAMPLIN, J.P., M.P.

ON SALVATION ARMY MOU AGREEMENT

6TH JUNE 2014

Mr. Speaker,

I rise this morning to update this Honourable House concerning the Memorandum of Understanding that was signed on June 5, between the Government of Bermuda and the Salvation Army for the use of the Bishop Spencer school premises. You may recall, the OBA government - in its election platform - committed to working with agencies such as the Salvation Army to provide good quality transitional housing and support programmes for the most vulnerable in our society.

It was recognized that to do this we must replace the Salvation Army's current **Emergency Housing Complex (EHC)** location on Marsh Lane, Pembroke - premises which are unquestionably inadequate in its current form and which is in a sad state of disrepair.

The complex has long exceeded its useful life since the original intent was to have this facility operate for only ten years - not the 30-plus years it has served so far. This aged facility develops issues regularly, which have recently included the erosion of earth in the dining area as well as the deterioration of wall boards in some of the housing units. The facility may have to close immediately unless much needed repairs are undertaken. This is simply not a safe situation.

It is our understanding that this premises was offered to the Salvation Army by the former government, through its representative, the Hon. and learned former Attorney-General Sen. Kim Wilson, in consultation with the Salvation Army, however, this arrangement was never fully completed.

Therefore, I am pleased to stand before you today to announce that the Ministry of Public Works, in consultation with the Ministry of Home Affairs, have today entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Salvation Army in respect of the use of the Bishop Spencer facility (located at Glebe Road, Pembroke) for the purpose of relocating their Emergency Housing Complex programme.

This six month MOU will enable the Salvation Army to present plans to the Government for the proposed use of the facility as an Emergency Housing complex and for other programs, with the aim of entering into a long term lease for the use of the facility.

The current co-ed complex operates as a 54-bed facility and offers approximately 20,000 nightly bed spaces annually for the homeless and marginalized of Bermuda. In February of this year, the Minister of Home Affairs and I, (along with our respective technical officers) accompanied Major Shawn Critch of the Salvation

Army and his Administrator on a tour of several potential new locations, including the old Pembroke Rest Home, the old Prison HQ, and the Bishop Spencer school. Subsequent to this tour, Major Critch confirmed that it was the position of the Salvation Army Board that the preferred location would be the Bishop Spencer facility.

Mr. Speaker, the Salvation Army has a well-deserved reputation for successfully operating residential and non-residential programmes in Bermuda, having operated various support services in our community for over 35 years. During that time the Salvation Army have been excellent social partners and have remained committed to assisting the Government of Bermuda with its ongoing challenges of meeting the needs of the homeless and those less fortunate.

For years, the Salvation Army has run the current Government owned Emergency Housing complex and run it well. However, this announcement today is crucial if we are to ensure the wellbeing of our most vulnerable.

Mr. Speaker, it was Gandhi who said, "The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members." In fact, there were clarion calls to action from former member of this Honourable House, the late Mrs. Louise Jackson on this very issue Sen. The Hon. Michael Fahy also raised concern when he wrote about this very issue in the Bermuda Sun in June **2008** and suggested that the Government at the time fulfill the vision of, and I quote from that article, "building a humane society by adequately funding the Emergency Housing Complex and assisting those in real need or, indeed, building a purpose-built facility."

This move has been a long time coming. Today's announcement is the first step in a road to providing dignified Emergency Housing for the most vulnerable in our community and in time seeing the back of an aged and decrepit facility that has long passed its useful life.

Thank You.