

WELCOME
Third Biennial
Jamaican Diaspora UK Conference
16 June 2012

Salutations

Conference Chair

Dignitaries

Chairman of the Jamaican Diaspora UK Management Board

Diaspora Advisory Board Members

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

- It is my distinct pleasure to welcome all of you to the 3rd Biennial Jamaican Diaspora UK Conference in London. It has been five years since the last Diaspora UK Conference was held in Birmingham.

- I must congratulate Conference Organisers for bringing us together in this setting to contemplate the issues of significance to the Jamaican Community. I look forward to the vigorous debates and the action plans that will chart the way forward for the Diaspora Movement.

- Let me also take this opportunity to bring greetings on behalf of the Government and people of Jamaica. The Government is taking a keen interest in this Conference and is looking forward to the outcomes which will strengthen your relationship with Jamaica.
- This Conference bears special significance for a number reasons; it is being held on Diaspora Day, which was earmarked to celebrate the achievements and contributions of the Jamaican Diaspora across the globe. Secondly, but more importantly, the Conference is one of several events being held in celebration of Jamaica's 50th Anniversary as an Independent Nation.
- Let's pause to recognise the signal achievements of our Founding Fathers who paved the way for the country's quest for self determination. That process will not be complete until we take full control of our destiny. I will speak more on this in the afternoon session.
- Ladies and gentlemen, I am aware that there is still some amount of apprehension regarding the word "Diaspora". I hope I can bring some clarity to this.

- The word Diaspora was used originally to describe the scattering of the Jews to countries outside of Palestine after the Babylonian captivity. The definition has now morphed to describe the spreading of people originally belonging to one nation or having a common culture.
- Therefore, the Jamaican Diaspora refers to the Jamaican nationals who reside outside of Jamaica including the second, third and fourth generations.
- In terms of successful Diasporas we can look to the Israeli and Indians as models to be emulated. They have leveraged their talent, skill and financial resources for the betterment of themselves collectively, as well as for their respective homelands.
- Successive Governments have long recognised that the Jamaican Diaspora is of critical importance to the country's development. This has been displayed by your passion, as well as your continued commitment to your alma mater, hospitals, schools and your respective communities.

Government initiatives

- The Government, cognisant of these realities developed and implemented a policy of inclusion of the Diaspora in the process of national development. This policy included the following;
 - Establishment of the Charter for Long Term Residents in 1993;
 - Establishment of the Returning Residents Facilitation Unit in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, which was later upgraded to a Department now known as the Diaspora and Consular Affairs Department;
 - Appointment of a Minister with Responsibility for Diaspora Affairs;
 - Hosting a Diaspora Symposium in 2003 at the UWI, to solicit the views of representatives from the overseas Community on the path to be taken by the Government in advancing and strengthening the relations with its Diaspora.
 - Convening of the first Biennial Jamaican Diaspora Conference in June 2004 to discuss issues relating to Jamaica and Jamaicans at home and in the Diaspora. It will be recalled that I was one of the speakers wearing a different hat; and lastly
 - Establishment of the Jamaican Diaspora Advisory Board which is the bridge between the Government and the Jamaican

communities. Let me say here that the work of the Advisory Board Members is an important one. They are required to be in regular contact with the High Commission to be briefed on the priority areas for the Government and to report this to you their constituents. An example of this is the Air Passenger Duty. Conversely, they are required to brief the Mission on the developments within the Jamaican Community. This must be done in consultation with the structures in place in the respective communities across the United Kingdom.

Importance of the Diaspora Movement

- Ladies and gentlemen, I must underscore the value of the Jamaican Diaspora Movement. At a time, when Britain is tightening its belt and implementing more stringent immigration laws which will restrict the numbers of our nationals entering this country, the Diaspora Movement in the UK must be cohesive in its approach. A unified Diaspora is an effective Diaspora.
- The Movement also must become an effective lobby group on issues of concern not only to the Community here but also to

Jamaica. I congratulate all of you who lobbied your respective Members of Parliament on the effect that the increase of the APD would have on our tourism sector, in addition to the cost of an airline ticket to the Jamaica and the Caribbean. It is my understanding that there certain facilities that would be more effective and would cause the political representatives to take notice of the concerns of the Jamaica Community. I urge you to continue your lobbying efforts, in this regard.

- Lastly, I encourage you to play your part by investing in Jamaica and in so doing; you can have a personal stake in the country. There are a number of opportunities that you can take advantage of such as the junior stock exchange which gives access to equity financing to small and medium enterprises (SME). It is designed to raise equity financing to small businesses between 50 to 500 million Jamaican dollars. Companies such as Lasco, Dolphin Cove, and General Accident Insurance Company are listed on the junior exchange.

In closing, let me once again congratulate the organisers for their sterling efforts. Best wishes in your deliberations!