

Morning Session

Diaspora Founding Conference

August 02, 2011

Theme: The Grenadian Diaspora: Partnering in Nation Building

Opening Ceremony

Roy McEwen –Diaspora Perspective

Roy McEwen delivered the “diaspora perspective”, through which he sought to contextualize the experience of many Grenadians in the Diaspora. Mr McEwen identified eight (8) areas that exemplify the diaspora perspective:

- (1) The overwhelming desire to return home to own homes, businesses, and contribute to Grenada’s development.
“Within the Diaspora in London, there is a confidence, live Grenada, eat Grenada”, pronounced Mr. McEwen. The speaker went on to explain that this translates in what can be described as a perfect opportunity to pursue this diaspora founding initiative.
- (2) The transfer of skills between the diaspora and locals- the speaker elaborated on the importance of “Change Management” skills to ensure that Grenadians at home are able to embrace change for the development of the Country.
- (3) On the topic of remittances, he expressed the need to reduce transaction costs associated sending monies home.
- (4) The issue of Citizenship and the need for Grenadians abroad to embrace and understand their citizenship status.
- (5) The contribution of returning nationals to the construction booms of the 90s and 2000s and the need to promote home ownership among second generation Grenadians, many of whom are professionals on above average salaries.
- (6) Diaspora involvement in Governance: “The diaspora is active in the political life of this Country, through indirect participation. We observe the elections and cannot participate without overcoming obstacles.”
- (7) The Diaspora bond as a way to turn remittances into investment to counter the problem of dependency on remittances.
- (8) Health: “The level of care, which is not finance dependent, has to be addressed as a priority”. Progress has been made, but there is still a long way to go.

Mr. McEwen called on the conference to leave all preconceived notions on what is or is not possible behind.

He proposed that it be made easier for the diaspora to send remittances. Giving the example of England, he explained that it costs about 20 pounds to transfer even small amounts of money.

He also suggested the implementation of a desk, similar to the Grenada Industrial Development Corporation (GIDC), to filter proposals for aid before they go out to the Diaspora.

On the issue of representation he encouraged decision makers to put measures in place to facilitate the participation of Grenadians from the diaspora.

Sir Paul Scoon- Guest Speaker

While not on the conference's official list of speakers, Sir Paul Scoon requested the opportunity to make some remarks.

Sir Scoon dispelled arguments that he was "too old" to contribute to the Grenadian Community and made mention of the importance of the Grenada University of Science and Technology.

He commended the initiative and wished the conference success.

Hon. Karl Hood- Remarks

Upon assuming office in 2008, the government took steps to meaningfully and strategically engage the Diaspora; cognizant of the fact that Grenadians residing abroad can make significant contributions to the social and economic development of the country. Remittances account for 10% of GDP. Consequently, the Office of Diaspora Affairs was created in 2009.

One important aspect of the Diaspora Initiative has been the creation of Consultative Committees in cities where there are significant Grenadian populations.

Minister Hood also spoke of plans to create a Diaspora Office to be run by an Ambassador to be named. Among other things, that office would collaborate with the relevant ministries to deal with the issues of double taxation and double citizenship.

Prime Minister, Hon. Tillman Thomas-Keynote Address

The Prime Minister took the opportunity to speak on what it means to be a Grenadian, and the history of the Grenadian Nation.

The Prime Minister emphasized: "What is now needed is purposeful coming together of all Grenadians, everywhere, to shape, mold and fashion a new Grenada. When all our people

come together, physically, culturally, mentally and spiritually, we multiply our potential exponentially. We qualitatively expand our bank of skills and expertise... We have a great opportunity to define and agree who is entitled to be Grenadian.”

The Prime Minister took care to explain that “The terms of engagement cannot be shaped by any one group. While Government must provide political leadership, it is for all responsible groups, parties and stakeholders to establish themselves as “coalitions of leaders” and to reach consensus on the way forward, beginning with a set of practical and urgent development issues.”

Governor General, His Excellency Sir Carlyle A. Glean-Declaration of Conference opening

Sir Carlyle A. Glean declared the conference open and reiterated the importance of change management as was discussed by Mr. Roy Mc Ewen in his delivery of the “Diaspora Perspective”.

He spoke on the importance of recognizing that change management is a partnership between “those who are initiating the change and those who are accepting and welcoming the change”.

Sir Glean also complimented the administration for accepting the challenge to bring the diaspora initiative to fruition.

Presentation Tourism, Business and Investment Kieron Lewis, Diaspora Consultative Committee (Canada)

The speaker emphasized the importance of forging partnerships with the Diaspora, given the fact that (1) the Diaspora is a hugely significant tourism market (2) it is a critically important pool of untapped financial and human resources.

The speaker explained that tourism is labour intensive and therefore growth of the sector will lead to the creation of jobs. Mr. Lewis highlighted the relationship between global tourism and customer satisfaction, in that it has led to the development of “niche tourism” -developing a well-defined product that is specially tailored to answer to the specific needs of a tightly drawn market segment. New initiatives in this category include wedding and culinary tourism.

Against this background, the following recommendations, drawn from discussions within the DCC were put forward:

- **Tourism Ambassador Program (TAP)**

The major aim of the TAP is to market Grenada as a safe, affordable and unique travel destination. Through the TAP, Ambassadors would attempt to sell Grenada to their friends, neighbours, co-workers and everyone they come into contact with. The TAP will essentially be driven by “the power of word-of mouth, advertisements and the integrity of the individual Ambassadors. The speaker noted that tourism tends to flourish in places where services are delivered using highly customized and personalized methods.

- **Food (Culinary) Tourism**

Mr. Lewis mentioned the importance of Food Tourism to the visitor who is in pursuit of unique culinary and gastronomic delights and experiences. He reminded the delegates that Grenada’s reputation as the “Isle of Spice” can be made to work for the country. Reference was made to the importance of a tour of Grenada’s culinary experience with the rituals and symbolisms that is attached to certain local food events, including Saracca (Salacca) and the Parents’ Plate- the latter is typically offered up to ancestors on the occasion of a boat launching or a tombstone feast in Carriacou.

- **Grenada as a Conference Destination**

The revenue generating ability of conferences was also highlighted by Mr. Lewis as having great potential as a foreign exchange earner. He added that concerted marketing programmes need to be developed to reach the event planners and industry leaders to encourage them to choose Grenada to host their conferences.

- **Summer Eco-Camp**

From the Diaspora to the Bush: Bringing Diaspora Kids Home for Summer. “We are the World” - an environmental camp for children between the ages of eight and 17. This camp is expected to educate, entertain and enchant its participants, who will develop a deep appreciation for nature as well as learn to respect and preserve the complex eco-system that surrounds us. Campers will also learn about biological and ecological diversity. The camp is expected to include activities such as:

- Guided nature walks and hiking
- Tree planting
- Wildlife spotting
- Outdoor games

This is an opportunity for the young campers from the Diaspora to sow the seeds of a life-long engagement with Grenada.

- **Diaspora Volunteer Youth Corps (DVYC)**

The DVYC encourages young Grenadians around the world to come home to Grenada to actively participate in the growth and development of the Country that is at the core of their personal identities. Members of the corps will become involved in a variety of community-building and tourism-related projects throughout Grenada, Carriacou and

Petite Martinique. By partnering with the Ministries of Youth and Education in Grenada and educational institutions within the Diaspora, the volunteer time can be applied towards secondary and post-secondary diplomas.

- **Roots and Branches**

Highlighting the need for keeping in touch with “ones roots”, Mr. Lewis pointed to the importance of family history research in bracing spiritual exercise which puts the researcher in touch with their ancestors; it can mend broken circles, fortify individual identities and show up group solidarity.

- **Business and Investment**

The Grenadian Diaspora plays a hugely significant role in Grenada’s economy. Studies by the World Bank have placed Grenada high up on the list of remittance-receiving countries.

The speaker emphasized that even though remittances put food on the table and they help recipients make ends meet, they have a fairly low developmental impact. Against this background, the speaker pointed to the need for investments to succeed where remittances fail. Consequently the Diaspora needs to be looked at as a source of investment money.

Mr. Lewis pointed to the lessons that can be drawn from the Susu, the Maroon and similar voluntary mutual aid institutions. Both Susu and Maroon can be modernized and re-imagined to serve our current national ambitions.

Mr. Lewis pointed to the need for changes in attitudes in order to foster a successful partnership with the Diaspora.

Recommendations on Diaspora assistance in Business and Investment

- **Institute for the Study of the Grenadian Diaspora (ISGD)**

The Institute for the Study of the Grenadian Diaspora’s (ISGD) main objective will be to conduct in-depth research on the Grenadian Diaspora and to liaise with Policymakers and other stakeholders in order to help government to devise policy aimed at promoting and effecting sustainable partnerships with the Diaspora.

- **Retirement Housing**

Grenada is the ideal retirement destination and during the past 20 years or so, many Grenadians have returned home to retire. Many more will follow suit if retirement housing, offering a good range of personalized support services is provided.

- **Export of Grenadian Fruits, Vegetables, Ground Provisions**

Caribbean cuisines are gaining greater visibility in North America and elsewhere in the Diaspora, and this is helping to drive demand for Caribbean fruits, vegetables and ground provisions. At home and in the Diaspora there is an urgent need to look at the investment possibilities that are opening in this area. The prospects for steady growth in this area appear solid, especially as Caribbean cuisine is expected to grow together with the improved self-confidence of the Caribbean communities in the Diaspora.

- **Partnerships with Major Department Stores, Apparel Outlets and Organizations**

Mr. Lewis indicated that the abovementioned partnerships could result in Grenada and things Grenadian being featured in store catalogues. Additionally, models could do fashion shoots on Grenadian beaches and in the vicinity of major tourist attractions. There also exist good possibilities for partnerships with key service organizations like Rotary Club and Kiwanis.

- **Affordable and Reliable Energy Supplies**

Affordable and reliable energy supplies are crucial for the Country's social and economic growth and development. Therefore, Grenada needs to forge partnerships to pursue alternative sources of energy, including geo-thermal.

- **Adoption of Historic Site/Landmark Program**

This program will see members of the Diaspora adopt cultural/historic landmarks, like the museum, Lake Antoine, etc. for a period of 3-5 years. The adopting organization (individual/family) will then devise and fund a strategic and operational plan to develop, drive and improve the economic capabilities of such tourist attractions. The program will provide direct investment by the Diaspora and generate jobs locally.

Discussion

- Kendall Phillip of New York posed the question: "If you were to identify one of the recommendations as "most likely to succeed", which would it be and why?"
 - In response, Mr. Lewis gave credit to the hard work of Ms. Tricia Mitchell, also of the DCC in Toronto, as being the main reason he believed the youth camp initiative would be ready for implementation in as little as a year.
 - Ms. Mitchell complemented Mr. Lewis' response by adding that she would be inclined towards a project geared at encouraging people in the diaspora to select and invest in small projects such as the renovation of park space, park benches etcetera. Ms. Mitchell stated that due recognition should be given to contributors in exchange for their generosity.
- Mrs. Gloria Payne- Banfield questioned the availability of Souvenirs and handicrafts, as well as entertainment for tourists. She clarified that entertainment for tourists is not always culture based.

- Another participant expressed concern over the lack of tourism infrastructure in areas outside of St. George's. The participant also touched on the lack of facilities for children.
- Mrs. Sonia Roden of the Grenada Industrial Development Corporation (GIDC) explained that from a policy level, the GIDC is looking at the preparation of investment attraction strategy based on five transformational sectors as were identified by the Government of Grenada. She elaborated on Mr. Lewis' presentation by endorsing the idea of "niche tourism", and identified Wellness Tourism, spas and treatment centers as areas of opportunity for the development of the tourism sector.
- Mrs. Roden explained that the GIDC has started to develop "opportunity profiles" to attract potential investors.
- Another contributor suggested that attention must be paid to the cost and advantages of seeking partnerships in tourism.
- He argued that the proposed summer camps should not only focus on children in the diaspora, but also on children here in Grenada, as this may be a partnership which may result in the much needed transfer of knowledge and culture crucial to the diaspora as a sustainable entity. He proposed that the camps be "tested" locally before extending them to diaspora participants.
- On the issue of cost, the contributor implored that "every dollar must go a long way".
- With regards to languages, one contributor highlighted the importance of languages in tourism outreach initiatives.
- Merle Clarke of the Diaspora Consultative Committee in New York underscored the need to teach Grenadian History to second generation Grenadians.
- John Cruickshank former High Commissioner in Montreal spoke of the importance of languages and regretted having to use outdated French language brochures out of his basement. He also attested to the nuances of travel from Quebec City to Grenada.

President of the United Caribbean Friends of Grenada (UCFOG)-Returning Nationals

The United Caribbean Friendly Organization of Grenada represents returnees from the UK and the USA. The speaker explained the reasons for differences in the waves of migration. Post War Migrants were able to impact on the economic life of Grenada in the following ways:

- Through remittances which supported their families, some repaid loans, paid for schooling and established savings.
- Home building which has continued to impact the infrastructural development of the country.
- Pension savings
- Transfer of knowledge and expertise: doctors and lawyers, nurses and teachers, farmers and businessmen, technicians and politicians.

Dominic Charles, PRO Returning Nationals Committee- Returning Nationals

Mr. Charles spoke on the need for a review of the policy on taxes of goods and personal effects of returning nationals. He voiced concerns that persons under the retirement age were being asked to provide proof of retirement.

Mr. Charles went on to express concern that in some cases, spouses of returning nationals were given limited time to stay in Grenada.

The presenter concluded by discussing the issue of pensions and the difficulties facing returning nationals after years of service and pension fund contributions. He cited the lack of a reciprocal arrangement, resulting in pensions being “frozen” from the date a national leaves the United Kingdom.

Managing Director, Mr. Richard Duncan of Grenada Cooperative Bank-Presentation

Mr. Richard Duncan, Managing Director of the Grenada Cooperative Bank, described his bank as one of fortitude, committed to guaranteeing a safe environment for depositors' money since 1932. He spoke of the importance of the Diaspora to the Grenada Cooperative Bank, and gave the example of the sale of 17.5 million ordinary shares, in which 8% of the purchases came from Grenadians in the Diaspora. Mr. Duncan spoke of the launch of Diaspora desks at the St. George's and Grand Anse Branches of the Bank, and encouraged returning nationals to use these facilities as they were made considering their needs.