

Report of the Diaspora conference held at the St. George's University

August 5, 2010

The Government of Grenada in an effort to engage all Grenadians in nation building has stated as policy its intention to engage the Diaspora in a more meaningful and sustained manner. As a result an Office of Diaspora Affairs was opened at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to operationalise this vision. One of the objectives of that office is to hold a Diaspora conference in the summer of 2012.

In this regard, on August 5th 2010, the Office of Diaspora Affairs within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hosted a Preparatory Diaspora Conference at the Bourne Lecture Hall, St. George's University. The purpose of the conference was to provide an opportunity to initiate discussions, exchange opinions and present proposals by the Government of Grenada and members of the Grenadian Diaspora throughout the world.

In his address at the formal opening of the preparatory conference the Prime Minister reiterated his government's commitment to this process. The Prime Minister indicated that the conference was yet another manifestation of his government's fulfillment of its articulated policy of engaging and enhancing the socio-economic well being of all Grenadians where ever they are located. He went on to state that in the pursuit of the transformation, growth and development of our beloved country, it is the Government's view that all Grenadians should be embraced and offered the opportunity to participate and contribute to the process.

During the Conference, there were policy presentations by the Ministers' of Education, Culture, Finance, Health and Youth and Sports. The various presentations addressed ensuing plans and programs as well as some of what has already been undertaken. Additionally, the presentations highlighted areas in which the Diaspora can be greater involved. Some of these include:

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION:

- Provision of technical knowledge – summer programmes and one off lectures from professionals in the Diaspora
- Training in specific technical areas
- Scholarships (such as Medger Evers and Mr. Glean at the Midwestern State University)
- Material benefits – donations, books, equipment, computers
- Sponsoring school programmes – food and transportation
- Sponsor a student or school
- Sponsor a school department such as the home economics department in schools

MINISTRY OF CULTURE:

- Establishment of a film commission which would provide new economic avenues through the commencement of documentaries and advertisements
- Development of the fashion industry which is an untapped area and business opportunity
- Music laboratories in every school from primary to secondary which will need musical instruments and tutors

MINISTRY OF HEALTH:

- Seeking medical professionals in the Diaspora willing to work in the health sector in Grenada
- Refurbishment of old facilities – brand new teaching hospital with a 400 bed capacity to be undertaken in conjunction with the public and private sector by 2015
- Upgrading Princess Alice Hospital to include provision of minor surgeries

MINISTRY OF FINANCE:

- Continue to send remittances
- Invest in lead sectors (Save in local banks and credit unions)
- Inject entrepreneurship and innovation in the local economy
- Transfer new technology
- Offer their advice and skills using VC technology and short term visits (encouraging persons in the Diaspora who encompasses competence, passion and belief in core technical team via teleconferencing to provide ideas and resources)
- Participate in the Diaspora Bond

MINISTRY OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT AND SPORTS:

- Assisting with the national employment of the GAT programme which includes a component of on the job training – (assistance requested of those who have businesses at locally)
- Providing or sourcing training and educational opportunities/ sports scholarships for young people
- Encouraging student exchanges
- Providing coaches and/or organizing or assisting to organize seminars for developing effective coaches
- Organizing friendly sporting competitions between locals and nationals in the Diaspora

Contribution by Ambassador June Suma:

Ambassador June Suma of St. Lucia was invited to the conference to share on her experiences related to the implementation of the Diaspora initiative in St. Lucia.

Ambassador Suma indicated that the conversation on the engagement of the Diaspora should include three major issues:

1. Engaging Grenadians locally and abroad in the discussions on the Diaspora
2. Engaging with other Caribbean Diaspora initiatives/entities
3. Engaging the international (donor) community

The issue of identity was also raised by Ambassador Suma. She opined that in the process conversations must take place with Grenadians locally. She noted that it is important that locals feel equally a part of the process and that it should not be seen that opportunities and incentives to invest and partake in nation building are only given to members of the Diaspora. In other words the process should be a holistic one involving all Grenadians.

The issue of how to achieve meaningful participation of the Youth was a point of major discussion. The following suggestions were made:

1. Engaging clubs and groups to coordinate youth summits
2. Establishment of a youth declaration to guide youth locally and overseas
3. Exchange programmes to share local culture at home and abroad
4. Mentorship (peer) programmes in areas such as sports
5. Diaspora youth conference

In the plenary session a number of issues and concerns were raised. Some of these include:

1. The importance of Agriculture in the development of the economy
2. The reintroduction of technical programs in schools
3. Improvement of literacy rates in the primary school and teacher training
4. Diaspora and local community; what can each group contribute to and benefit from each other
5. Removal of labels; returnees, JCB's etc

Statement by the President of the GBSS Alumni Association in Toronto:

The association believes that the Diaspora Initiative be considered as a national undertaking where all sections of the community at home and abroad should be involved. Diaspora intimates a dialogue between both factions and those abroad have never been indifferent about the fortunes of those at home.

With this in mind, the Association made the following recommendations:

1. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Office of Diaspora Affairs should prepare and disseminate a discussion paper on the Diaspora Initiative.
2. A discussion paper should be made available no later than three (3) months following the close of the Preparatory Conference.
3. The idea of the Diaspora Initiative should be debated in the House of Representatives.
4. A parliamentary committee consisting of representatives from the Government and Opposition should be created to oversee the work of the Office of the Diaspora.
5. A report summarizing the major decisions of the Preparatory Conference should be prepared and disseminated within six (6) weeks of the Conference.
6. The Conference report should include follow up strategies and a post conference feedback survey.

THE WAY FORWARD & FOLLOW-UP MECAHNISMS

What is expected next year at the 2011 Founding Conference scheduled for August 2nd and 3rd, 2011?

1. Adequate communications within the Diaspora.
2. Suggestions should be incorporated in a Draft Framework based on location and a coordination unit be implemented to work on a Preparatory Framework.
3. The Draft Framework should be prepared according to sector and not location.
4. A skills audit should be conducted within the Diaspora to cluster/group people based on thematic schemes.
5. Locals and nationals in the Diaspora should be on the same page (informed adequately) so that next year the conference can move forward.
6. Youths both locally and abroad should be included in the conference next year.
7. Implement more mechanisms to interact with our people in the Diaspora whose first language is not English.
8. There should be a clearly defined purpose (theme) for next year's conference.
9. When Grenadians return abroad they should engage in or form local community groups and pool ideas together for the way forward based on thematic areas.
10. Logistics for the conference should be effectively carried out and subcommittees arranged by local community groups to encourage more participants next year.
11. Experiences should be shared through networking and resources made available in sign language, foreign languages especially for nurses and scholarships.
12. Immediately establish a website
13. Creation of a theme (for next year's conference) based on the national development strategy to guide thematic subcommittees.
14. Circulate a concept paper/note on the following:
 - a. "How prepared are you to include the Diaspora in the local governing processes?"

- b. “Issues of Double Taxation”
- c. Issues of Multiple Citizenship”
- d. “Maintenance of Networks”

ESTABLISHMENT OF ADVISORY COUNCILS IN MAJOR CITIES

It was agreed that advisory councils should be established within the major cities, closely affiliated with the Grenadian Embassies. There is an existing Diaspora Consolidating Committee in the UK and requests were made for council models from London and Toronto to be shared with other cities.

THEMATIC PLATFORMS

It was agreed that subcommittees should be formed in the different cities based on the thematic areas.

CONCLUSION:

The Conference was well attended with representatives from different parts of the world including London, Toronto, New York, Washington and Caracas. Many of the participants offered suggestions, comments and proposals on a number of pertinent developmental issues. These suggestions were noted as the Conference was aimed at promoting an integrated policy framework for involving the Diaspora in Grenada’s national development.

The conference ended with the Minister for Foreign Affairs Honourable Peter David expressing words of gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of the ground breaking preparatory conference.