

## **The Impact of Returnees on the Economic Life of Grenada**

I present to you on behalf of the UCFOG that is the United Caribbean Friendly Organisation of Grenada. We comprise Returnees from the U.K. and the USA.

The Grenada Diaspora was spawned in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, even before the word “Diaspora” came into usage. At that time some of our grand and great grandfathers and others left our shores to help construct the Panama Canal. Others went to the oil fields in Maracaibo, Venezuela and still others to the cane and tobacco fields in Cuba, My own grandfather visited all three. Some men died abroad, especially in Panama. Others chose not to return but many more returned with their tales of foreign lands and with valuable experiences if not riches.

Many years later the next wave began to move. This time because of the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war work was required in the oil fields of Trinidad. There our people went in droves, few returned.

Another group, a selected number, were offered work in the Refineries in Aruba and Curacao,. These later returned directly or via the UK or the USA; wealthier and wiser. They then were involved in farming, business and professions.

Following the end of the war came opportunities for work on the farm in the USA and Canada during the summer harvests. Then also came opportunities for ladies to work in Canada as maids and nannies. Many young people, both male and female were also accepted as students.

The big rush came in the 1950's, when, according to some, “England Open”. The rush was especially so after hurricane Janet in September 1955. All that could be, was sold. Money was borrowed - just enough to pay the passage. All hearts were filled with hope for betterment. Discrimination was a problem but it did not deter. Work was found in the factories, rails, buses, post offices. Later women were attracted to work as nurses, aides, and in factories and elsewhere, as education and skills allowed. This was unabated until England sought admission into the European Common Market, and then it took steps to slow and then stop the flow of migrants.

We then found other avenues and by the 70's and 80's great numbers moved to the USA and Canada. Then Canada began to restrict us due to our economic passport policies. The ease of admission to the USA continued but was stopped as a result of the aftermath of 9/11.

However all of our migrants, especially post war, had a tremendous impact on the economic life of Grenada. Firstly, by their remittances, which supported their families, repaid loans, paid for

schooling and established savings. Then even as early as the 1970's some began to return home. Thus began the Home Building boom which has continued to this day and whose impact is obvious throughout the country. Hundreds of millions of dollars built thousands of houses, providing jobs for builders, banks, hardware stores etc.

Then, as more and more of us retired and returned, our pensions and our savings followed with us. We have returned as doctors and lawyers, nurses and teachers, farmers and businessmen, technicians and politicians – engaged in every aspect of Economic Life. Our pensions and remittances account for many many millions every year. Yet we are taken for granted and are often exploited or discriminated against.

We give much to, but take little out of, the economy. We use the medical system sparingly except in emergencies. Our medical coverage is overseas and we return regularly for medical checkups and treatments and hospitalizations. Of course, not all needs can be met. For example, inadequate dialysis capacity prevents many from returning even for holidays. Heart patients and other acute care patients are wary of visiting. As we all grow older, the existing nursing homes seem to fall far short of what many of us expect.

We would like to establish the type of palliative care that can be available in assisted care facilities. To establish such facilities however would require a great deal of thought and investment and for this much help would need to come from the Diaspora as it might one day have to provide for their needs, If not the alternative is departure from sunny Grenada back from where we came.

Lastly, as we grow older, we are often perceived to be wealthier than our neighbours, and so we become victims of crime. This we must address for our safety and protection with the help of both the police and our organizations to better prepare and protect ourselves.

We have set up the United Grenadian Investment Co for members only dealing in Real Estate Investments – see us later.

Those of us who have returned enjoy the best of both worlds. We have no regrets. We live in Grenada and visit Europe and North America to see our children and grandchildren. We love our country dearly and will continue to help build it.

Thank You.