

**The Devisive  
Blanket Between  
Diaspora  
Nationals and  
Grenadians Back  
Home**

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Many Grenadians in the Diaspora have always retained strong links with Grenada either through family ties and or memories of the beautiful volcanic island which nurtured and sustained us before leaving to live in the Diaspora. These links have been a catalyst in preserving the memories of Grenada and wanting to be a part of the Grenada experience and nation-building from outside of Grenada. However bad feelings and tensions between some Diaspora members and some Grenadians back home exist which can threaten progress.

The Diaspora Consultative Committee UK (DCC) was formally constituted on July 22 2010. The purpose being for Grenadians in the Diaspora to play a role in nation-building; to contribute to Grenada's economic growth and social welfare in cooperation with the Office of Diaspora Affairs in Grenada. Even before the formation of the Diaspora Consultative Committee in the UK, the issue of inherent tensions and bad feelings between Grenadian Diaspora and Grenadians on the homeland had been highlighted. Some would prefer to regard the issue as a complaint and not tensions as such. Regardless of the perspective of seeing and labeling the problem, it exists nonetheless.

It is quite common nowadays to find Grenadians in the Diaspora when they meet, angrily and passionately discussing tales of disrespectful and negative attitudes directed towards them from Grenadians who have remained on the island. Significant amounts of time are spent in meetings providing examples of the hurtful behaviour and bad attitude that have been directed towards returnees. They say this is directed towards us when we return to either offer our services and skills to build the nation, or we experience this when we return as retirees to live. This even occurs when we step on the shores of Grenada for a short visit. The questionable behaviour stems from compatriots who have remained on the island and who are moulded from the same dust, who should share the same bonds of culture, identity and nationhood.

Some examples of the behaviour and attitude which have been highlighted are that some Grenadians are unwilling to engage in conversations about pertinent Grenadian issues with Diaspora members as they are currently not living in Grenada. They feel Diaspora members should not have the „right“ to give opinions and suggestions. Other examples are of compatriots picking arguments and fights with Diaspora members to remind them that they, “do not belong here,” and to “go back where you belong. You are not one of us.”

This is not only a concern of the UK Diaspora. In March 2011 when the Foreign Affairs Minister, Karl Hood visited the Grenada Diaspora in New York, it was pointed out to him that Grenadians in the Diaspora need respect. Chairman of the Grenada, Carriacou and Petit Martinique Day Committee in New York, Michael Vincent said, “I think many people are willing to provide support in whatever way possible but they need courtesy, respect and recognition from home.”

On the other side of the coin, many Grenadians who have remained on the island working hard to build the nation, believe the disrespect comes from returning Grenadians. Indeed Grenadians who have remained on the island, living, working tirelessly and building the nation from within, have their own perceptions about Grenadian Diaspora nationals. The

feeling by some (not all) is that they remained on the island to cope with nation-building on a continuous cycle of struggle and sacrifice. That they stayed during harsh economic, social and political upheavals. Yet returnees fail for the most part to recognise and acknowledge this.

The feeling is that returnees return with the same measuring stick used to assess and evaluate economic and social conditions in more prosperous and developed countries. Too often it has been said that returning nationals come with their own brand of intolerance and misunderstandings of the limitations of resources and skills that those who have remained on the island have to work and live with. The assertion is that they come with Western idealism which is at times incompatible with the level of growth, development and dynamics of the island. “Arrogant” and “contemptuous” are how Grenadian nationals in the Diaspora are described by some Grenadians living on the island. Apart from this it is the perceived superiority complex from returnees towards Grenadians who never left Grenada which they feel is the hardest to bear. It is felt that returnees look down on them.

In 2006 the then Minister for Tourism, Brenda Hood officiated a meeting and presentation in London for Grenadian nationals. One of the objectives of the meeting was to attract as many Grenadians as possible to return to Grenada to live and work. However, the well of anger and hurt erupted and spilled over in the meeting as many present voiced their deep feelings over the negative experiences they had endured while visiting Grenada. The main complaint was over the derogatory terms used by many Grenadians in Grenada to describe Grenadians in the Diaspora. One of the main derogatory terms, the disturbing Just Come Back or JCB, seemed to be the one which caused and still has the power to cause the most offence. During the meeting an explanation was provided: the source of the derogatory JCB was started by a well-known DJ on one of the radio stations in Grenada. The JCB mantra was then subsequently adopted by many on the island to be used as indiscriminately as the most venomous mantra found outside of Grenada in parts of the world where hatred and prejudice flourish. Assurances were given during the meeting that the matter had been addressed with this particular DJ. Whether the issue was addressed or not, it is apparent that the offending epithet is still used.

Whether the obnoxious JCB mantra was started by this DJ (or anyone else for that matter), the fact is that it seems to have appealed to the sensibilities of a great proportion of compatriots on the island. Perhaps this DJ had tapped into the feeling and mood of Grenadians on the island over real and imagined unacceptable behaviour and attitudes of Grenadians in the Diaspora towards them. But even so why did it become acceptable for any group to engage in the use of unacceptable and derogatory language knowing it would be offensive?

Identifying the source of the tensions only satisfies a curiosity. It is like going up to the summit of a mountain to see the source of an unstoppable gushing river. It is identified but that is all. It is different from looking inside a flooded cupboard to identify the source of a leak and then carrying out appropriate essential repairs. But is it even necessary to try to identify the source of the present tensions? This would only be useful if the source

has the power to stop what was started. The key is finding ways of addressing the problem which has settled comfortably as a divisive blanket between many Grenadians on the island and several Grenadians living and working in the Diaspora.

One of the ways in which this issue can be dealt with is by finding means of acknowledging and recognising the input of Grenadians in the Diaspora to nation-building. By recognising that nation-building not only occurs from within. But can take place from outside.

The government of Grenada estimates the Diaspora population totals 230,000 with 120,000 in the United States, 30,000 in the United Kingdom, 40,000 in Canada and 50,000 in Trinidad. This is compared to the resident population of 104,000. Therefore Diaspora activities can play an enormous part in aiding economic stability and influencing economic growth. Prime Minister Tillman Thomas emphasized the importance of the Grenada Diaspora to the nation's economic development. He stated, "The role of remittances from our Diaspora in our development process is well known and acknowledged. It contributes at minimum about ten percent to GDP."

The part the Diaspora plays in influencing economic growth and promoting Grenadian culture is not in question. It is the lack of coordination of activities from the homeland and the Diaspora which may appear to be one of the problems which prevent cohesion. This lack of cohesion therefore allows unproductive activities and attitudes to flourish unchecked.

Interactions between the Grenadian Diaspora and Grenada are usually lacking in clear defined policies which could benefit both Grenada and the Diaspora community. Eleanor Noel, Director of Empowering People for Excellence, also a leading UK Restorative Justice Practitioner for Hate Crimes in the UK and a Grenadian living in London says, the present tensions which exist between the Diaspora and the home nation should be a wake-up call. Noel said, "The time has come for the Government of Grenada to put a steering group together which should include a government minister to convene and create policy which would encourage divergent parties in a process of constructive dialogue."

This sentiment is echoed by Lyndon Mukasa, a member of the youth arm of the UK Diaspora. He says, "If the harmful attitudes of both sides do not stop it is going to cost the economy of Grenada dearly." Mukasa believes the prevailing attitudes from both sides of the divide could deter involvement of many Grenadians in the Diaspora from even showing the slightest interest in anything remotely Grenadian; particularly with investing in the island's long term development.

A more pragmatic approach needs to be adopted. Creating policy, meaningful dialogue and government initiatives will be meaningless unless steps are taken to change present attitudes. Changing attitudes is a process and one which should be handled skillfully and sensitively. This can be done with awareness-changing activities and campaigns which can reverse the damaging effects the JCB epithet which has been injected into the psyche

of many Grenadians on the island. This can be replaced with more positive slogans about the Diaspora in the media for instance. Educating our people in the educational institutions and in the media about the valuable contributions Diaspora members make may be the key.

More articles and discussion such as this one need to be written which could highlight the positive contribution of the Diaspora and the damaging effects of conflicting polarised stances of both sides.

It works both ways. Diaspora nationals should assess the particular situation they may find themselves in. This may involve refraining if appropriate, from using standards which are applicable in the Diaspora to apply to some Grenadian situations. It may also be useful to be cognizant of the dynamics and limitations of trying to survive in a developing country. Recognising too that getting to particular stages does not happen overnight and is a process.

Roy Mc Ewen a Diaspora Consultative Committee UK member says, "Making progress requires change management from where you are to where you want to be." He says that the person with the skill who understands what needs to be done also needs to understand how to get there themselves and bring others along also." He believes all concerned need to educate themselves with knowledge and skills on how to bring change and to appreciate the opportunity to acquire skills. He says everyone should assimilate and use cutting edge skills.

Adopting approaches which can facilitate change in attitudes and practical change management skills also need to engage people who can get things done. Too often good ideas and suggestions are made. But for various reasons ranging from apathy, lack of resources, lack of utilisation of effective and suitable man-power prevent objectives from being met. Excellent ideas and suggestions never get off the ground. The Diaspora Desk could play an important role in effectively coordinating the contribution of the Diaspora and the real needs of Grenada in a way which diffuses tension and promotes integration of the two as a starting point. Any work can start with the premise and knowledge that the Diaspora around the world is different. This means that the UK Diaspora has unique features which differ from the New York Diaspora. These differences should be tackled in order to get the best from specific Diaspora groups. It is a challenge but can be done. But even this assumes that initiatives must always start with government. Compatriots back home can take the initiative to start activities which can enhance relationships between Diaspora and Grenadians on the island with the ultimate goal of nation-building.

Grenadians back home must refrain from using derogatory words to describe Diaspora members. Whether returnees display objectionable attitudes or not, this type of divisive behaviour cannot be justified under any circumstances. Whether the words are used in the absence or presence of returnees they have no place in nation-building. Deliberately causing distress to those it was intended for only serves to slow the pace of progress. Instead of alienating compatriots in the Diaspora, a welcoming position could be adopted. Instead of Just Come Back, Welcome Home Compatriot would be more desirable. As the

Grenada Foreign Minister Karl Hood said, “We have to start appreciating our own at home and abroad.”

Unless a concerted effort is made to address the very real tensions or complaints which currently exist between the Diaspora and compatriots living and working in Grenada, the situation will continue with no end in sight. Ultimately it is the long-term progress of Grenada which will be compromised. As Grenadian nationals it is in our best interests to remember:

United We Stand and Divided We Fall.

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