

Is our National Identity at risk

Caribbean governments over the years have continually expressed how important the overseas communities are to member countries. The difficulty has always been in communicating this.

In the UK the Barbadian sector has an organisational infrastructure which is capable of delivering this message. At the heart of it is the **NCBA** an umbrella group of 18 organisations that represents UK Barbadian nationals.

These Associations were set up in the 60s initially as a means for nationals to congregate and organise - but more often to socialise, however increasingly concern has centred on future generations and the legacy of their ancestry, heritage and culture.

In a recent High Court ruling Sir Nicholas Wall President of the Family Division supported mixed race adoption thereby heralding the demise of the same race policy of social work departments, his main point was that living in a supportive, loving and happy environment is preferable to being left often to languish in a care system. It is an accepted fact in today's multi-cultural Britain that ethnicity will continue to erode, at present persons of mixed race are the largest growing ethnic minority in the UK and it is predicted that they will be the largest by 2020.

The Late PM David Thompson recognised the need to harness the goodwill of all overseas residents and this culminated in a Diaspora Conferences in 2008 and 2010 with members from the UK, USA and Canada. He stressed the need to restore the relationship between Barbadians and the tens of thousands of Barbadians living overseas, noting that his administration viewed the Diaspora as an integral part of the economic, social and cultural development of Barbados and was determined to create a comprehensive strategy for engaging them. High Commissioner H A Arthur at a recent meeting restated the importance of the UK Diaspora and stressed the importance of supporting the efforts of organised groups.

However, the passing, ill health and senescence of our pioneers means both their numbers and influences are decreasing – the NCBA is ideally placed to address the issue of educating the next generation about their ancestry, heritage and traditions.

The upcoming Barbados Cultural Day is designed so that the young, middle aged and old can socialise and experience the traditions in a program which includes food, music, cricket and the possibility to get involved in the largest Barbadian Mass Band "The Bajan Revellers" to take part in London's Notting Hill Carnival. This should also be an excellent opportunity for businesses such as Credit unions, Travel Agencies, Hoteliers and Importers of Barbadian products to attract potential customers.

This is not a new development as a similar event takes place in London but this initiative is aimed at closing the loop where Nationals north of the Watford gap are disconnected from the Capital city.

One of the most important links apart from the associations is the “Overseas Nation” where the majority of readers are elderly. In fact the obituaries are the most popular column. The inconsistent High Commission Newsletter is also another missed opportunity to capitalise on this lack of communication.

Although the Internet is easily accessible this growing trend is a bridge too far for a large majority of older folk.

The National body and it’s website –www.ncbauk.org - has an role to play in communicating and being a political lobbying body for Nationals in England regarding areas of concern both in the UK and Barbados.

There should also be a Youth forum to find out from the youngsters themselves how best the community can, not only attract but also support them.

“Barbados Family and Friends “and “Invest Barbados” and Issues such as the Air Passenger Duty, Education, Housing and the NHS which involves many of our people can be best served by working with this National group.

An aging population means that those remittances which are so important to the country will continue to reduce and injecting funding to assist local groups will not go awry.

In conclusion the Diaspora needs a concerted effort by Government and its agencies to work closely with representative groups. Visiting ministers should not hold only hold meetings in London and the South but must be prepared to go into the provinces and meet Nationals.

The event “A Lil Bit of BIM” could be an opportunity to start a dialogue with Barbadians in the provinces to engage the missing thousands and especially the youth, but most of all it should represent a way ahead.

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