

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT

P.D.M

DRAFT DIASPORA SECTOR PLAN

This is the first time that a Political Party in the Commonwealth of Dominica has considered examining and preparing a plan to fully engage Dominicans residing abroad in the processes aimed at the development of our nation. It is an encouraging step forward. And it is quite unlike the contempt shown by the Labour Party Government to efforts made by overseas Dominicans through an umbrella organization, Dominica Academy of Arts & Sciences (D.A.A.S), to carve out a central role for themselves in our country's movement forward.

The following is instructive. On June 28, 2004, Government on the authority of Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit requested that the D.A.A.S prepare a policy paper on relations between Dominicans overseas and their country of birth or citizenship as a basis for action by Government. Four months later, that is to say, in October 2004, a comprehensive paper was submitted by the D.A.A.S. Today, four years later, Government is yet to respond to the contents of the document, including a series of recommendations made.

All Government has done is to place the term "Diaspora Affairs" as one of the subject-matters falling under the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Consumer Affairs, OECS, Caricom and Diaspora Affairs. It consigned some matters pertaining to the Diaspora to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. And an individual has been assigned as Co-coordinator. It should be noted that these steps were taken without any input whatsoever from the D.A.A.S. Neither, after they were taken, was the D.A.A.S officially notified.

PRESENT ROLE OF OVERSEAS DOMINICANS

Overseas Dominicans perform one major role at the present time. They send money and consumer goods to family and friends, and medical equipment and supplies to health and welfare institutions here in Dominica. Money and goods, referred to as the “barrel economy”, come from individuals. And medical equipment and supplies are collected mainly by Dominican Associations and other groups, as needs arise. In addition, several individuals and groups specialize in the upkeep of their village schools and such other institutions.

This singular role of material support is quite significant in terms of increasing spending power in the economy as well as in bolstering village activities. In fact, official records show that remittances of money sent by overseas Dominicans to relatives at home are currently estimated at about 20 per cent of our country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This amounts to more than is presently contributed by either the banana industry or by our manufacturing sector.

WHAT P.D.M BELIEVES

In our opinion, material support cannot by itself be considered as real involvement in the ongoing development of our nation. P.D.M believes, and has from the outset stated, that Dominica should accept its overseas citizens as an integral part of society and should, as a result, open its doors fully to them.

The motto of our party is “Dominica for Dominicans at home and Abroad”. This is written into our Constitution, which was ratified at our 1st Delegates Congress on April 16, 2006. Further, Principle #8 of the “25 principles” which guide our Party affirms that “All Dominicans, whether at home or in the Diaspora, are equal partners in the process of national development”. And Step # 13 of the “13 Steps Forward”, which we believe should be immediately put in place to return the economy to pre-2002 levels, reads as follows: “Involve Dominicans overseas fully in national development.”

OUR VIEW OF THE PROBLEM

Overseas Dominicans, in our opinion, have not been allowed full participation in the process of national development because of a

mindset held by resident Dominicans, and accepted by administrations in the past and at present, that perceives them to be less than patriotic. This point of view suggests that Dominicans resident abroad chose to abandon their country when their services were most needed to push the nation forward. Now that the storm has been weathered, so the argument continues, it is not fair that they should be allowed to enjoy rights and privileges now enjoyed by those who chose to stay at home.

Another point of view is this. It is the locally-based population, not those living abroad, that is best able to understand the domestic state of affairs. It is they, therefore, rather than their overseas counterparts, who are best equipped to offer solutions to the country's pressing problems.

Resident Dominicans tend to express a third point of view. It is that overseas Dominicans consider themselves to be better than those resident. That is so because of their long exposure to the life styles of developed countries. They act accordingly. This claim is made especially against Dominicans who have repatriated.

The claim as to lack of patriotism needs to be examined. It is best understood when placed within the context of the circumstances in which Dominicans, and people generally, migrate. To begin with, migration, particularly from the former colonies, is a fact not only of our history but also of our present predicament. Dominicans, like others, have not been given a choice as to whether to migrate or remain at home. They have migrated through force of sheer necessity. They have left essentially in search of a better standard of material life than they would have achieved had they remained.

Since austerity measures were introduced in 2002 thousands have left our shores. It is randomly estimated that the local population is now in the region of 50,000, in comparison to an estimated \$200,000 Dominicans living overseas. And our people will continue to leave so long as jobs remain scarce and the cost of living escalates out of proportion to what people earn. The real truth is this. If, as things stand right now, the barriers to migration to, say, the U.S.A and Canada, were removed today, our beloved country might well take on the appearance of a ghost town, tomorrow.

Look at the estimated 25,000 who have come home to celebrate Re-Union 2008 with us. That is patriotism. And think about the barrels being sent to relatives whenever the opportunity arises. It is a statement of fact that were it not for this barrel economy social unrest would have long swept not only Dominica but our sister islands in the Caribbean as well as our brothers and sisters in the developing world. That, too, is patriotism.

We are confident that once the circumstances surrounding migration are fully grasped, the gap which might now lie between local resident Dominicans and those living overseas will be substantially narrowed, if not securely closed.

What is unfortunate is that efforts to address the existence of any such gap have not been made. Neither by civil society. Nor by our Government, past or present. Of course, visiting Party leaders never fail to attend meetings with overseas Dominicans, whether here or abroad. And a meeting of Cabinet with visiting Dominicans has become a regular feature of the Independence agenda. But the question is never confronted. So, the mindset remains. Overseas Dominicans are seen by those in Government or in Opposition as no more than a commodity to be exploited at election time. And a resource so vital to national development remains largely untapped.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE.

P.D.M is committed to changing this. We now advocate and, as Government of this country we will seek, to fully engage all non-resident Dominicans in the processes of national development. Tonight, we present for consideration the following outline of our Diaspora Sector Plan. The plans undertakes to do as follows:

1. **DEPARTMENT OF DIASPORA AFFAIRS.**

We will establish a Department of Diaspora Affairs within the Ministry of Community Development under the charge of a Minister of State. The choice of its location is to recognize non-resident Dominicans as a community of our people living out of island.

2. DOMINICA ACADEMY OF ARTS& SCIENCES (D.A.A.S)

We will recognize D.A.A.S as the agency charged generally with making representations to Government on behalf of our nationals living abroad.

3. REGISTRY OF DOMINICANS ABROAD.

Through the agency of the country's Embassies, High Commissions, Consulates and Honorary Consuls, and in collaboration with D.A.A.S, we will set up:

- (1) A Registry of Dominican nationals resident overseas, and
- (2) A Registry of Dominican Professionals resident overseas.

4. NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLE OF OVERSEAS DOMINICANS.

We will immediately initiate a National Consultation on the meaning of development, the causes of migration and the role of non-resident Dominicans in nation-building.

5. DIASPORA CONSULTANTS.

As a matter of priority and urgency, we will tap the wealth of skills and professional expertise that lies in the Dominican Diaspora, by promoting the use of qualified overseas Dominicans as Consultants in the development process.

6. RESETTLEMENT INITIATIVES

To assist in the re-settlement process, we will do the following:

- (1) Review the regime of concessions allowed to citizens repatriating to Dominica, and
- (2) Encourage and support the formation of a broad-based organization of overseas citizens returning to settle in the island.

7. LINKING GOVERNMENT TO THE DIASPORA.

We will establish a joint Government- Diaspora standing body for regular discussion of matters and issues of concern to overseas Dominicans as well as issues of significance to the nation as a whole.

8. RE-STRUCTURING THE OVERSEAS MISSIONS.

We will promote a structured relationship between overseas Dominicans, on one hand, and our Embassies, Consulates and Honorary Consuls, on the other, including:

- (1) To provide a casual meeting room where experiences can be shared and general city information exchanged, and
- (2) To make available information, including in respect of legislation, newspapers and official documentation in respect of recent and more current happenings at home.

9. NATIONAL ELECTIONS.

We will, upon taking office, appoint a Select Committee drawn from the overseas Dominican community, civil society and Overseas missions to inquire into and report to Government for action on

- (1) The right of overseas nationals to vote in national elections, and
- (2) Absentee balloting for overseas nationals.

10. DUAL CITIZENSHIP.

We will, immediately upon taking office, appoint a Task Force to inquire into and report to Government for action on

- (1) Rights available to overseas Dominicans holding Dual Citizenship, and
- (2) Extension of Citizenship to embrace children of second generation Dominican citizens.

This is a draft. We present it for full discussion among Dominicans residing here as well as overseas. After full discussion we shall

prioritize the ten things we say we're going to do. That is, we'll say what will be done immediately, what will be done in the medium term, and what we'll do in the long term.

Roseau, Dominica
October 28th, 2008.

VOTE P.D.M  X