

**SPEECH**  
**JAMAICAN DIASPORA HEALTH FORUM CANADA 2014**  
**Mr. Earl Jarrett, Chairman, Jamaican Diaspora Foundation**  
Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre  
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**A New Day for the Diaspora:  
Achieving High Impact on all People in Jamaica**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Good afternoon, and thank you for inviting me to participate in this health forum to discuss meaningful ways in which members of the Jamaican Diaspora can continue to be integral partners in improving the health outcomes of the our people in Jamaica.

I thank the organisers for their foresight in seeing the need to host this meeting; and Sunnybrook for volunteering to put so much resources into hosting this conference. I also thank you for engaging the Jamaican Diaspora and for supporting the long-term health goals of the people of Jamaica.

From my understanding, Sunnybrook has developed a **Memorandum of Understanding** with the **Ministry of Health** to provide expertise in helping the Government to achieve its objective of addressing **chronic diseases**, which have now become a major challenge for Jamaica.

The data now indicates that Jamaica has a chronic disease profile, which now approximates the profile of the most developed countries in the world; and more persons are now experiencing the impact of chronic diseases, such as: cancer, diabetes, hypertension, and renal failure, as oppose to infectious diseases which are typically associated with less developed countries.

Therefore, the challenge in addressing these diseases is that: They are often not simply dealt with by vaccinations, or simple anti-viral, or antibiotic treatment; but, instead, treatment requires significant outlays, the use of highly sophisticated equipment; and expertise, in order to make a difference.

It is my understanding that there are tremendous deficits in resources in Jamaica – human, financial, and technical resources - to treat with cancers and the outcomes of cardio-vascular diseases that we must deal with... even as we pursue a strategy, to address public education and legislation, as it relates to food, alcohol and tobacco.

I must report that Jamaica has successfully implemented **Tobacco Control Regulations**; and are on the way to deal with one of the major causes of lung cancer.

It is in this regard that the ability of the Diaspora to organise and engage is and will be a critical component of our health strategy.

**It is through your organisation that we have achieved the agreement with Sunnybrook;** and, we have benefitted from many gifts and donations to the health sector in Jamaica; as well as, the professional time of doctors, nurses and other health professionals, who engage in many medical missions to Jamaica, annually.

And while I recognise that many of the protocols need to be fine-tuned, **the impact of your contribution is felt and recognised;** and although your tremendous support is not fully quantified, there is no doubt that it has supported the government's health budget in the sum of millions of dollars.

This collaboration speaks to **an unbeatable formula for success** – when Jamaicans in Jamaica, friends of Jamaica and Jamaicans living elsewhere – **have a shared vision and goal for where the country should go and what are the avenues to get there... and are committed to working together to achieve this.**

Your work as members of the Jamaican Diaspora in Canada and the USA demonstrates the power of engagement and organisation; and that engagement not only occurs here in North America, but by virtue of this meeting and your direct participation in the work with the Jamaican Diaspora Foundation, Jamaica Diaspora Institute and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Diaspora and Consular Affairs Unit.

And, through these avenues you have the ability to impact policy and the health policy direction of Jamaica.

Indeed, **our Minister Arnaldo Brown** has shared with me his objective of completing the implementation of a **Diaspora policy for Jamaica**, which hopefully will codify many of your initiatives into the operations of the Government of Jamaica. It is in this context that what you have achieved begins to shape a new agenda for Jamaica around growth and development through the growth and development of the people of Jamaica.

## **JAMAICAN ECONOMY**

I wish to briefly share with you the state of the Jamaican economy. As you are aware, Jamaica completed the **first year of a four-year IMF programme and has successfully passed the four quarterly tests**. And, in that process many Jamaicans have had to make tremendous sacrifices to have achieved these goals.

The financial sector, pensioners and investors volunteered to participate in **a national debt exchange programme which accounted for some J \$17.6 Billion in national contribution by the Jamaican people**. Public sector workers have agreed to **a wage freeze**, and generally **the entire society has come together to make this IMF agreement work**.

The indicators are suggesting that **we are seeing some success.**

- The **Debt-to-GDP ratio has declined from 140% to 132% over the past year;**
- **Inflation has stabilised at 8.3%;** and the exchange rate has been adjusted to make Jamaican products more competitive in the global space.
- **Several new laws have been passed** as part of the IMF agreement in a move to help restructure the Jamaican economy.

Examples of some these laws include the **Charities Act** which you heard about yesterday and there is an **Insolvency Act** to be passed.

These laws will have the effect of helping to **transform the Jamaican economy** from one that was constructed for the past 300 years largely around agricultural products ... to one that is a service-oriented economy. And, what we mean by services is that **Jamaica will focus its attention on logistics and transport services, tourism, offshore financial services, medical services and medical tourism, and business process outsourcing.**

Essentially what this means is that **the economy will now be driven by qualified competent people of Jamaica rather than driven by whatever crop is planted on the ground or whatever mineral is under the ground.**

In essence, if we connect back the dots -- the work of the services sector and the vision of the Diaspora initiatives tie back precisely with the plans to build the Jamaican economy around human capital. Therefore, **your focus in the Diaspora on health, education and trade promotion, are critical** while supporting the financially vulnerable in the society who need to be supported as the economy moves forward... and as our Government becomes less able to provide the financial support for many.

I must commend the Jamaicans who make up this Diaspora community and **commend you all for your spirit of volunteerism** that underpins these entire two days of deliberations. I recognise that the spirit of volunteerism is essential to Jamaica. In my travels, I have rarely come across a set of people as helpful as Jamaicans who are willing to work for nothing in support of a wider cause.

As you reach out to Jamaica and support new generations of Jamaicans, I again encourage you to work with the people, particularly the young people, and transfer the spirit of volunteerism.

Many years ago I had suggested that the opportunities are there today for online mentoring and support for the development of young people in Jamaica even while here in Canada. **Major Reece** of Jamaica Customs recently told me that **he now interviews returning residents who are applying for duty concession via Skype**. And so, there is no reason why we cannot **mentor a group of students, particularly nurses and doctors from the universities and colleges via Skype**.

The Ministry of Energy, Mining, Science and Technology is on a drive to expand internet access across the country by rolling out **Community Access Points** – C-A-Ps - where citizens can access internet free, as part of the development of the human capital of Jamaica.

These two days demonstrate that prosperity is possible, and that Jamaica has the potential to leverage not just:

- **the US\$2 Billion of remittances...**
- or the **money spent by the approximately 1.8 million Foreign Nationals and Non-resident Jamaicans who return home each year...**
- or **the construction and investments in Jamaica** that are oftentimes not properly quantified and attributed to Jamaicans in the Diaspora...

...but we also have the potential to leverage what we have described previously **as I-Remittances**, which are the ideas and intellectual capital of our people in the Diaspora.

Jamaica and its Diaspora can **benefit from increased transfer of intellectual knowledge**. Our young professionals – medical personnel, educators, business administrators, and information technology specialists – are among a long list of Jamaicans in the Diaspora who can bring significant **I-Remittance**, or intellectual skills and support to Jamaica.

You can remit your ideas and experiences to support the development of the people of Jamaica... particularly now that it is recognised that the future of Jamaica rests in the development of its people, and enable them to be equipped and confident to face the global space.

However, it is clear that, in shaping that new destiny, we must also properly address those laws in Jamaica such as those required by the IMF to ensure that the Government remains fiscally responsible...such as the **Charities Act** which seeks to limit the leakages of taxes through charities... or the **Banking Services Act** to ensure that banks will not fail again in Jamaica... or the **implementation of fiscal rules** which will **set limits on the government's ability to borrow**.

At the same time, we must also look at **those pieces of legislation** that will **liberate the people of Jamaica** so that we can **take advantage of the opportunities here in the Diaspora**; and the **opportunities that will arise from the Logistics Hub**.

And so, we may well have to **consider specific rules** as it relates to the Diaspora. Many of the accommodations that we discussed in this conference which rest on the forbearance of Ministers and Ministries could possibly become a part of law; **whereby, by law, the incentives, duties and rules for Diaspora engagements are codified**, I note the approach adopted by India that recognize "persons of Indian descent" and allows them privileges in India regardless of where they were born, they enjoy immigration access and the right to conduct business in India, maybe we should have a "person of Jamaican Descent PJD" which would solve the immigration concerns on arrival and the customs issues.

Given the size and impact of the Diaspora and the contribution to the Gross Domestic Product of Jamaica, the impact on the Society in general, that we consider establishing **a special agency to focus on Diaspora matters**.

I know that these thoughts are consistent with the Minister's objectives; and, I urge that the relevant taskforce be put in place to ensure that the efforts of the many in the Diaspora are aligned closely to Jamaican needs

and that: **the engagement is codified in the rules of the society,** going forward.

With specific reference to Health, there are opportunities to achieve improved Health outcomes by working with the diaspora, it requires organizing and coordinating in the following ways:

1. Agreeing the priorities,
2. Aligning the activities in the diaspora to the Priorities,
3. Conducting a surveillance of the potential approved charities to work with in Jamaica.
4. Develop an effective communication plan between Diaspora and GOJ and Diaspora and beneficiaries.

## **CONCLUSION**

**I am optimistic about the future of Jamaica** recognizing that the **transition on which we have embarked will not happen overnight.**

But, I am confident that, step by step, including the big steps taken over the past two days, **Jamaica will see a new future**, adopting what I describe as the '**One Jamaica**' strategy, that is: **Jamaicans at home and abroad, plus friends, driving one agenda for the country.**

It is this strong bond of '**One Jamaica**' that we celebrate at this meeting, as we **examined ways in which we can unite this powerful, global**

**Jamaican family... and bring together all Jamaicans and friends of Jamaica from anywhere to positively impact the Jamaican economy and the people of Jamaica.**

Thank you.