



*The following speech was presented by the Minister of Education, Youth and Culture, Maxine Henry-Wilson to the Chicago Concerned Jamaicans on Saturday, November 25, 2004, in Chicago*

The poet, Edward Kamau Brathwaite in immortalising the Jamaican diaspora, says “you can find them ...on seaport quays; at airports; anywhere there is a ship or train, swift motor car or jet to travel faster than the breeze...you see them gathered...Canada, the Panama Canal, the Mississippi plain fields, Florida, or on the dock at hissing smoke locked, Glasgow...”

Such is the geographical spread of our Jamaican brothers and sisters, who live overseas.

Indeed all realise, the Jamaican diaspora consists not only of those who actually migrated, but also of a large number of second and third generation dependents, born in the host countries. I know that many of you have instilled in your children the values and culture of the Jamaican homeland that you hold so dear.

I see this assertion of our unique cultural identity as nothing short of a sacred trust. It is a precious heritage that must be preserved. It is this identity, which provides our successor generations with the ability to confront and overcome the many negative alien influences, which are a normal part of the migrant experience. By instilling in them, the sense of who they are and the roots from which they spring, we give these new generations a gift of incalculable value. Our relationship with the diaspora has been one that spawns more than just financial remittances, contributions and investments.

Indeed, it is one in which we have placed very high premium on your intellectual capital; your reservoir of talent, imagination and creativity; your ingenuity and capacity to image Jamaica as the preferred place of destination in the Caribbean.

The premium we place on our relationship with you is best expressed in the organization of the first conference of the diaspora in June of this year under the theme: unleashing the potential

The conference formed part of an action plan, which has been developed as a means of providing further direction to the process by which we strengthen our ties and give structure and form to the connection between the 2.5 million Jamaicans at home and the 2.5 million in the diaspora.

Several major pluses have emanated from this conference. These include among other things:

- The commitment of the government of Jamaica to building a borderless nation to ensure that the interests of all Jamaicans at home or in windy Chicago are treated with urgency.
- Launching of the Jamaica diaspora foundation aimed at deepening cooperation between stakeholder groups.
- The establishment of trade councils throughout the diaspora.

- The assignment of a representative to the Jamaican overseas mission to deal with concerns of students studying overseas.
- The establishment of a website at [www.jamaicandiaspora.org](http://www.jamaicandiaspora.org). On which relevant information on Jamaica and the diaspora can be accessed.

I can assure you that all the recommendations coming out of that conference have been considered carefully and the implementation of many is well underway.

Our mutual relationship gives primacy to the social and economic development of our country and our people.

Our challenge is to create not just the opportunities for you to participate, but to ensure that we maintain a stable social and economic environment, which you will be proud to show off to investors and one in which you yourselves can invest with confidence.

Let me assure you that we are well on the way to meeting our objective of transforming the economy into one that is knowledge-based, generating value-added exports and sustaining wealth creation. We are using local, regional and foreign private investment as a strategic tool to meet the development goals of building human capital, improving productivity, increasing job creation, technology transfer and export diversification.

Indeed, we have taken some bold steps - including a regulatory system- toward creating an enabling environment for investors and entrepreneurs. We want to make sure that your investments, remittances and savings are safe, secure and profitable in your own backyard.

Our success in creating an investment environment of world-class standards has been recognised in a recent World Bank report that named Jamaica among the world's top ten best countries with whom to do business. Perhaps the most telling indicator however, is the fact that over the last five years, we have recorded the largest inflow of direct foreign investment since the 1950's.

Positive growth indicators are evident in all sectors, including services, goods, telecommunication, electricity, and tourism. This growth was driven by investment in air and seaport, information, communication and technology. Jamaica is also enjoying significant development of new products in finance and communication.

The inflation rate, which has stubbornly remained at double digit for years, is now back under control and the investment programme now on stream is expected to lead to zero deficit in 2005/06.

The tourism product — the largest component of the overall investment — has become more diversified: in addition to the creation of major and minor resort developments, expansion of existing hotels and cruise ship port developments.

There are millennium projects such as the Maroon Heritage Park; the Vernam Field Cargo Aerodrome; Milk River Pool Museum and Spa Hotel.

I am very proud to tell you that last year, at the end of the winter tourist season, we had over 400, 000 stop over arrivals and just under 5, 000 cruise ship passengers. This year we are projecting a 7.8 per cent increase and by the look of things, we will realize this projection since up to mid-September, we already showed a 4.7 per cent increase, clocking 572,000 stop-over arrivals.

With the ongoing construction of Highway 2000, a large portion of the island is now being opened up for the first time and developments are being planned for that corridor in relation to agriculture, water, housing and industrial activities.

Against this positive Jamaican hue, ladies and gentlemen: we are now encouraging partnerships between jamaicans at home and abroad, in the effort to move Jamaica out of the category of a developing country and on the path of being a developed state.

We believe that you are an integral part of that process. And your relevance becomes even more poignant in the face of global trends, particularly in the areas of trade. With the advent of globalisation, global trade negotiations, if left to run their course, threaten to even further marginalise developing economies such as ours. This means that we must work even harder to achieve more secure access for the exports of our goods and services.

Important though they are and will continue to be, we cannot rely simply any longer on the traditional exports such as sugar and bananas. To achieve our aim we have been following a carefully designed strategy of open regionalism. The principal focus here is to transform Caricom into a Caribbean single market and economy (CSME) by 2005. This will create a platform to negotiate external access as a single entity with groupings and countries around the world.

Caricom partnership is not only valuable in the area of trade. It is critical to the sustainability of our education system. Our graduates will now have to compete in a globalised economy for the few jobs available. It means, therefore, that our education system has to play a vital role in preparing them to take their rightful place beside any graduates from any other country in the world. We have to ensure that we are not at the lower end of the totem pole.

In Jamaica, you can get the best possible education comparable to any first-class, first world institution. However, our challenge is to make this the rule not the exception. We have been working systematically and strategically toward a transformed education system.

The national commitment to place education centre-stage and to move it beyond fractious partisan contention was evident in the consensus forge through the historic parliamentary resolution in November last year.

It was also visible in the national vision for education, which evolved out of recent consultations facilitated by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture. The findings of these consultations clearly articulate the kind of educated Jamaican, who will be able to function effectively in a globalised society and the strategic and systemic processes necessary to produce that Jamaican.

By now you may have also heard that the debate and consultations have culminated into the establishment of a national task force on education to review the education system with a view to transformational change in systems, structures, resources and programmes. The findings and recommendations of this task force pivot on several critical transformational strands such as:

- Reform of the education system
- Accountability and transparency for all in the system
- Quality teaching and learning
- Reform and restructuring of the Ministry of Education.

The process will involve the injecting as well as the redirecting of existing resources; reprioritising some of our initiatives and activities; reorganizing some of our institutional arrangements, rethinking the governance and management of the system from the top to the bottom including the central ministry. The education system and its support institutions, re-examining the curriculum the teaching and support services, the process of assessment and grading, the management of the special needs students — all are essential to a high achieving education system.

We are counting on you to help us rebuild our education system through sustained investment in education; through the provision of your expertise in academic and technical areas; funding to promote cutting edge research and development; continued provision of scholarships and psychological and emotional support for those who come to study in your country.

This is very much in keeping with your mission to ensure the educational development and success of financially challenged Jamaican students, who are academically brilliant and of sound character.

There is the opportunity for you to be in joint ventures with local companies, provide investment capital, human resources and technological skills for enterprises to be competitive in our market environment.

There is the opportunity for you to partner with us in creating additional school places so that we can realise our objective of universal secondary education in 2006. Last year Jamaicans in the diaspora contributed in excess of US\$1.3 billion in remittances to the economy. This has been translated into more than 15 per cent of Jamaica's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which was at \$7.5 billion.

We look forward to that continued support, but we also want to re-image you from simply being those persons who send remittances, to Jamaicans who are rightful partners in the debate concerning the development of our education system and subsequently, your country.

We want to re-image you as an integral part of our policy-making processes.

We want to re-position you as part of the productive capacity and enterprises within the country.

We want you to be proud to be Jamaican, wherever you are, and to love your little island.