

**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY AMBASSADOR BAYNEY KARRAN
TO THE
THIRD ANNUAL IMMIGRANT HERITAGE WEEK SYMPOSIUM
NEW YORK CITY, APRIL 19, 2008**

SALUTATIONS

I am delighted to be here in New York City, this great melting pot of peoples and cultures, to mark this Third Annual Immigrant Heritage Week which has been so designated by His Worship Mayor Michael Bloomberg's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

In this metropolis where the Statue of Liberty beckons poor and tired immigrants, where diverse groups conmingle to face their common challenges, opportunities and aspirations, interaction and conversation among different groups is vital to the well-being of the community and to social stability. The Mayor's office must be commended for giving recognition to Immigrant Heritage Week and for facilitating this kind of dialogue among the immigrant communities. Encounters such as these can play a vital part in achieving the level of tolerance and acceptance necessary for accommodating social and cultural diversity, a trait which the rest of the world finds so interesting about New York City.

Guyana, known as the land of six peoples, bears many similarities to New York in this respect. There, too, society composed of diverse peoples from four different continents have fashioned a shared destiny in their common homeland. Their autochthonous culture has been blended like music from the different instruments in an orchestra; and similarly as in New York City, although the different notes may not always be in total harmony, the social instincts which underlie the human spirit have forged the bonds of assimilation from our indigenous and immigrant communities.

Guyana is also known as a country with a flow of migration outward and with a significant immigrant community in New York. According to the New York City Department of Planning, Guyanese are among the city's top four foreign born population numbering some 150,000. Slightly over half of this number live in Queens, some 36 percent are in Brooklyn and 11 percent in the Bronx. The growing presence of this community is exemplified by the fact that 25 Guyanese nationals perished at the World Trade Centre in the 9/11 terrorist attack. It is believed that, proportionately, Guyana sustained the highest number of fatalities from those horrific incidents.

That Guyana should be accorded a place in this encounter between Caribbean and Hispanic immigrant communities is only fitting for ours is a Caribbean country with an important and integral South American dimension. Increasingly, Guyana is serving as a bridge linking the peoples of the Caribbean and Latin American through measures which include events such as the hosting of the 20th Summit of the Latin American Rio Group, last year in Georgetown.

The Guyanese community like the rest of the Caribbean community in New York has produced individuals who are making noteworthy contributions to this city and to the wider American society in every field of human endeavour. A number of important organizations and institutions have also emerged out of the Guyanese and Caribbean diaspora in New York City, particularly in the area of culture. I am particularly pleased to recognize the Guyana Cultural Association, organizers of the annual Folk Festival, and the Rajkumari Centre here today. Caribbean culture unveils its splendour each Labour Day in New York City at the Brooklyn Carnival while the food, music and culture of our Hispanic brothers are evident everywhere.

Human migration is as old as humanity itself. The history of the human race is largely the story of the dispersal of mankind. Migration has created benefits for every country. Virtually all the nations of our hemisphere, even some of the poorest ones, are both producers and receivers of migrants. But the major reason for the general flow of migrants in our hemisphere is inequality within and among our countries. Courage, determination and resilience are qualities which often unite migrants in a common search for greater economic, social and political freedom.

Here in the United States immigration is an important political issue. It is hotly debated and a growing anti-immigration movement is emerging.

Among Caribbean peoples, one of the most important issues in relations with the United States is US deportation policy, particularly the effects of these policies on the deportees, US-based family members and on the recipient countries. It is noteworthy that His Holiness Pope Benedict urged President Bush this week in the White House to promote humane solutions to the problem of illegal immigration.

The United States acknowledges the importance of the Caribbean and Hispanic immigrant communities by observing Hispanic heritage month between September and October and Caribbean Heritage Month in June.. Last June, the leaders of the CARICOM nations attended a groundbreaking Summit with President George W. Bush at which the issues of importance to the Caribbean nationals were high on the agenda. In June of this year a follow-up to that Conference will take place here in New York City at which Caribbean leaders will have the opportunity to dialogue directly with the Caribbean diaspora in this city.

It is time for the Caribbean community in New York City to acknowledge its worth and recognize its own importance. From the Founding Father Alexander Hamilton to Secretary of State Colin Powell, Caribbean people and their descendants have enriched the tapestry of America. It is time to take stock of the strides which the Caribbean diaspora has made in academia, in science and technology, in sports, art and culture, in social and political activism, indeed, in all aspects of life in this city.

Back in the region, the establishment of institutions such as the Caribbean Single Market and Economy and the Caribbean Court of Appeal are advancing the integration process. Last year's Conference in Washington strengthened the relationship with the United States and this year's Conference will give an impetus to the Caribbean diaspora in New York.

These developments, which by themselves will serve to advance the interests of the Caribbean immigrant community, would also serve to leave these groups better prepared and organized to find common ground with other groups such as the Hispanic immigrant community.

Hispanic and Caribbean groups belong largely to the same geographic region and share many common influences and challenges at the broad, political, economic, social and cultural levels in their countries of origin. As immigrant communities in New York they share common interests and face common challenges in a country where regional loyalties and characteristics are better recognized than national and ethnic ones. It is therefore imperative for Caribbean and Hispanic organizations to seek out the means

of collaborating with each other. It is time to begin building the platforms that would facilitate your interactions; and it is time to begin the dialogue about how to meet your common challenges, how to promote your common interests and how to embrace each other's causes. As the organizers have put it, practical ways should be found to create and strengthen the bridges of commonality and understanding among diverse groups.

Hopefully, this Third Annual Immigrant Heritage Week would serve to advance this process. I therefore extend best wishes to the participants for a productive round of activities and a successful Immigrant Heritage Week.

Finally, I wish to once again congratulate His Worship the Mayor and express my appreciation at having been invited to be a part of this activity.

I thank you.