

GOVERNMENT OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA

DIASPORA POLICY

MINISTRY OF TRADE, EMPLOYMENT, INDUSTRY AND DIASPORA AFFAIRS

2010

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DEFINITIONS

Diaspora: refers to non-resident nationals and persons of Dominican origin residing overseas. It also refers to the areas where they reside

Dominican Origin: refers to the children and grand children of Dominican nationals

SECTION 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 DIASPORA/HOME COUNTRY RELATIONSHIPS

The importance of Diaspora populations in the social and economic lives of their countries of origin has come into sharp focus in several regions and among several agencies. High priority is placed on tapping the latent potential in Diaspora communities. This is indicated in the dialogue that is being held between sending countries and their non-resident populations.

It has been recognized that the non-resident population accounts for a significant percentage of a country's citizens and often out-numbers the domestic population in small countries that have suffered heavy out-migration. Moreover, it has been noted that, based on their emotional ties to their countries of origin, these populations have unreservedly contributed to the latter in a number of areas, chiefly through:

- Providing remittances to their families mainly for use in the consumption of food and clothing, for housing as well as donations for charitable causes. Remittances from developing countries exceeded receipts from exports and official development assistance(ODA)and fell just short of receipts from foreign direct investment(FDI)in 2004 (World Bank in Ruiz-Arranz)
- Investment and skills transfer. In the case of India, for example, the non-resident population has contributed in the area of investment, particularly in the dynamic software development industry. It is noted that 19 of the top 20 software companies were either managed by or established by professionals in the Indian Diaspora (Asian Development Bank, 2004). In addition, Diaspora professionals have contributed to the expansion of the technology sectors in countries such as Taiwan, the Republic of Korea and the People's Republic of China. It is estimated that 60 per cent of all FDI to China during the 1990s (over US\$ 100 billion) was provided by the Chinese Diaspora (Carlo Dade, 2006)
- Contribution to tourist expenditure by those visiting family and relatives (VFRs), mainly through their utilizing restaurants, entertainment and other services

It is with regard to realizing the potential for investment, trade and skills transfer that most regions have been strengthening links with their Diaspora populations. For, while remittances have contributed to poverty alleviation, foreign exchange earnings and balance of payments support, to date there has been no definitive evidence that they have propelled output growth. It has been argued that, while remittances have in some cases been used to set up micro businesses, they have tended to encourage high consumption. Moreover, it has been suggested that higher and continued levels of consumption, generated by remittances, could work to the disadvantage of long-run growth (UNB, 2007; Ruiz-Arranz; IMF in Hindustan Times, 2008). It has also been noted that for most countries in the Caribbean, the total losses due to skilled migration outweigh the gains from remittances (Mishra in Growth and Social Protection Strategy (GSPS) 2006, Rev. 2008). Nevertheless, countries are increasingly inclined to regard the brain drain with more optimism than pessimism and to view the non-resident population as having a store of brain power.

1.2 DOMINICAN DIASPORA

The Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica has outlined a number of policies in various documents, the most comprehensive being the Growth and Social Protection Strategy (GSPS). These policies, plans and programmes seek to promote the social and economic development of all citizens and to encourage their partnership in the development of the Country. Government is committed to

"Leveraging all the human, natural and financial resources available to the country, in order to realize the vision for Dominica as a place characterized by economic success, and by the much-enhanced quality of life of its people, through their own empowerment, and through policies of Government geared to facilitating an environment within which private enterprise can flourish" (GSPS Rev. 2008).

The following are among the challenges that the Government seeks to address in the medium term:

- Ensuring the income and employment generating potential of its natural industries - water, energy and the environment
- Implementation of the Tourism Master Plan
- Productive and efficient investment in the country's agricultural sector, including agro-industry
- Formulation and implementation of a comprehensive policy for the development of small and micro businesses
- Administrative reform to improve the business climate with a view to making it more investor friendly (GSPS, Rev. 2008)

These and other development imperatives suggest that a space be given to Dominicans, at home and abroad, to contribute meaningfully to the Country's social and economic development, even while recognizing that non-resident Dominicans have responsibilities and obligations (such as work, taxation and other commitments) to their host countries that would limit the type of relationship that they can have with their Country of origin.

Government is conscious that Dominicans abroad have generally kept abreast of developments in their home Country and have contributed in many ways, particularly in advancing social causes. They have provided substantial sums, estimated at EC\$ 80 million per annum, in the form of remittances to family, as well as for charitable causes.

Government is also aware that substantial out-migration has occurred and with this, the loss of a cadre of skilled persons. Of particular concern for the Government and people of Dominica is the large number of persons of a working age who now reside abroad. In fact, Dominica could be faced with a population that is skewed towards the very young and the old, resulting in a high dependency ratio. The vanishing of the middle tier has implications not only for the availability of human resource, but also for fiscal buoyancy and market size, so necessary to stimulate and maintain economic activity. As stated in the GSPS, Government policy has to be addressed as much towards retaining resident, highly skilled Dominicans as towards attracting the input of their counterparts in the Diaspora.

In recognition of our non-resident population as a critical resource that should be accorded the necessary space to participate in the Country's development, Government endorsed the preparation of a Draft Diaspora Policy Paper by the Dominica Academy of Arts and Sciences (DAAS) in 2004. In the period that has elapsed since the Paper's submission, Government has formulated the Growth and Social Protection Strategy (the GSPS 2006, Revised 2008) and a number of sectoral policy papers which have created a framework for the more meaningful articulation of a Diaspora Policy. The Diaspora Policy has drawn on a number of sources, including some of the findings of the DAAS Policy Paper.

The Diaspora Policy, which has benefitted from a consultative process, including circulation to missions, consular offices, ministries, other agencies and overseas organisations, has been finalized against the background of a crippling international financial and economic crisis, that has had its genesis in the housing mortgage defaults and steeply rising oil prices that have adversely impacted developed and developing economies. These financial and economic developments could have negative implications for our non-resident and resident populations alike and underscore the need, now more than ever, to channel our efforts to engaging all segments of our population in the Country's development.

1.3 RELEVANT INITIATIVES

The Policy not only signals Government's intent, but also serves to formalize existing arrangements in support of the integration of the non-resident population into national development. Relevant initiatives include the following:

- Annual meetings of the Cabinet with visiting overseas nationals during Independence celebrations to address concerns and receive their suggestions and comments
- Meetings in the host countries between the Honourable Prime Minister or other Government Ministers and non-resident nationals
- The establishment of a Ministry and Unit to deal with matters pertaining to the Diaspora
- The recognition of outstanding overseas Dominican individuals and organisations during the National Awards
- Provision of professional and other services by skilled non-resident nationals on a short term basis, based on need
- The provision of fiscal incentives for returning nationals and the publication of the Returning Residents Information Manual
- The declaration of 2008 as the Year of Reunion with a full calendar of events specifically targeting non-resident nationals
- The hosting in 2008 of the Development Conference which targeted the input of resident and non-resident Dominicans
- The preparation of the draft Diaspora Policy in 2008 and the organisation of a Dialogue in November 2009, where non-resident nationals were invited to discuss and comment on the draft Policy

1.4 ROLE OF EMBASSIES AND CONSULATES

- Government commits to expanding the role of its Embassies and Consulates beyond that of the provision of consular services to include appropriate aspects related to the implementation of the Diaspora Policy
- Consulates and Missions should be forthcoming in the dissemination of information about issues affecting Dominicans living abroad.
- Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Consuls' General must be very active in assisting Dominicans in the Diaspora to prepare for participation in public policy discussions in their host country as they relate to policies affecting Dominicans in the Diaspora and the developmental needs of Dominica.

1.5 ROLE OF THE DIASPORA

The potential of Dominicans residing overseas should not be underestimated. Some of the areas which should be explored further re Dominica-Diaspora relationship include;

- Recognising and strengthening of the Diaspora's potential to act as lobbyists on behalf of Dominica in the host countries.
- Utilising the skills and knowledge of the Diaspora in policy development and national development matters, especially where our national development is influenced by the host country.
- Providing information on areas of expertise for the development of the Diaspora database.
- Sharing of skills and knowledge with Dominicans at home in the interest of national development.

1.6 ROLE OF THE REGIONAL INTEGRATION & DIASPORA UNIT RIDU

Among its other functions, the RIDU has been designed to facilitate the Government's mandate to increase investment and participation of the Diaspora in Dominica's development and to encourage Diaspora Dominicans to work or retire in Dominica.

To date one of the most significant manifestations of the Government's mandate was the designation of the year 2008 as Reunion Year. The major intention was to give priority during the year to engagement with Dominicans living overseas or the Dominican Diaspora.

Some of the key roles of the Unit, as relates specifically to the Diaspora, include:

- Build networks between the Diaspora and Dominica in areas that will stimulate socio-economic development.
- Encourage and foster the participation of Dominicans overseas in all aspects of national development.
- Liaise with overseas Diplomatic and Consular Missions as well as with established
- Diaspora Associations for the channelling of information to the Dominican communities abroad.

- Assist Returnees with the resettlement process by providing relevant and up-to-date information.
- Encouragement and facilitation of visiting overseas Dominicans seeking to share their skills and services.

SECTION 2.0 POLICY OBJECTIVE

The Diaspora Policy is intended as a transparent and unambiguous statement of Government's Policy with regard to non-resident Dominicans and will indicate the areas in which the latter can be incorporated more meaningfully into the development agenda. The Policy also seeks to define the rights, privileges and obligations of Dominican citizens in the Diaspora.

2.1 APPLICABILITY AND SCOPE

This policy shall apply to all aspects of the relations between Dominica and its citizens in the Diaspora. It is addressed to those citizens resident or naturalized in countries abroad and to persons of Dominican origin.

2.2 EFFECTIVE DATE

The effective date for the Diaspora Policy is October, 2010.

SECTION 3.0 POLICY STATEMENT

3.1 CITIZENSHIP, RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS

- Persons of Dominican Origin shall be regarded as citizens of Dominica
- The children or grand children of Dominican citizens shall be considered as persons of Dominican Origin
- Citizenship, however, does not confer the right to vote on non-residents
- The right to vote is contingent on the citizen being registered to vote
- Eligibility to register is contingent on the citizen having resided in a polling district for three (3) continuous months prior to registration and the elector being at least eighteen years old at the date of registration
- Entitlement to vote is preserved, even if the registered voter is not resident in the polling district on polling day
- The elector's name can be deleted from the register in the case of an absence from the country for a period exceeding five years
- Provision is made to assist the re-settlement of Returnees (See Returning Residents Information Manual, (October 2009) for procedures on the application for a passport, facilities available to returning residents and provisions on investment incentives)

3.2 FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC INCENTIVES & REGULATIONS

Government is committed to a policy of non-discrimination between domestic, foreign and Diaspora investors. Provisions and application procedures are contained in the Returning Residents Information Manual (October 2009). In general, an approved investment is entitled to:

- Tax holiday of up to 20 years
- Waiver of import duties on machinery, vehicles and materials used in the production of a good
- Exemption from import and other duties on construction materials used in construction of buildings used for housing the enterprise
- Waiver of duties on materials used in construction or furnishing hotels, guest houses
- Exemption from VAT for initial capital investments up to the time of commencement of operations

(Provisions under the Fiscal Incentives Act 42 of 1973 (amended in 1983 & 1990), the Hotel Aid Act, Chapter 85:04 of the Revised Laws of Dominica, the Income Tax Act, Chap. 67:01 of 1990 Revised Laws of Dominica and the Value Added Tax Act, No. 7 of 2005).

Government has established the Invest Dominica Authority which serves as a "one-stop shop" with a view to increasing the efficiency of the investment approval process.

3.3 INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- Non-resident Dominicans are invited to invest in any legitimate area
- Notwithstanding this provision, there are certain sectors that appear particularly suited to their investment, given their proximity to markets. These include the tourism sector, agricultural products particularly with appeal to exotic and ethnic market segments, information technology-based activities, housing and time share accommodation
- Dominicans in the Diaspora are encouraged to enter into joint ventures with local business operators

3.4 DEVELOPMENT FINANCE

- Government will work with Dominicans in the Diaspora to develop financial instruments through which overseas Dominicans might contribute to funding projects at national and community levels

3.5 SKILLS RETENTION

- Government is committed to creating an environment that is conducive to retaining skilled Dominicans

3.6 SKILLS TRANSFER - BRAIN GAIN

- Government will work with Diaspora organizations to establish databases of skilled and qualified non-resident Dominicans. Each mission and consular office will also maintain databases of skilled and professional non-resident nationals in their host countries
- Government is committed to encouraging skills utilization on temporary and volunteer bases, e.g. short term visits/ attachments by qualified members of the Diaspora
- Government will establish a Diaspora scholarship - open to Diaspora youth - to support studies in key strategic fields, determined by areas of national interest such as water engineering, geothermal engineering and road engineering
- Government will promote initiatives to facilitate visiting medical teams to supplement the provision of health services
- Government will, through the various Missions, advertise vacancies
- Government will work with Missions, Consular offices and Diaspora organizations to recruit persons who might perform representational and lobby functions in host countries
- Government will institute the registration of individuals and companies that may be eligible to provide consultancy services that may be required from time to time. Diaspora individuals and companies will be given due consideration consistent with regional and international obligations
- Government will facilitate the establishment of structured technical networks to facilitate ongoing technical consultations between Diaspora and resident technicians in fields such as education, health, tourism, agriculture, trade, science and technology. Consultations will utilize modern information and communications technologies and these networks will be hosted on Government's e-Government sites
- Government will mandate the State College to keep a Directory of qualified, Diaspora academicians with a view to their involvement in programme design and delivery
- Government will facilitate the participation of skilled and professional non-resident nationals in capacity building programmes at the national level
- Government will work with regional bodies, OECS and CARICOM to establish databases with the assistance of key international agencies for the recruitment of qualified members of the Caribbean Diaspora

3.7 INFORMATION EXCHANGE BETWEEN DOMINICA AND DOMINICANS IN THE DIASPORA

- Government will ensure that all information pertinent to investment, procedures for relocation of returning residents, employment vacancies, consultancy announcements are communicated to all Missions and posted on web sites for easy access by members of the Diaspora
- Government encourages information flows, from the Diaspora to Government, that may be useful in guiding policies and strategies
- Such information should be channelled through the Executives of the Diaspora Associations and other representatives of non-resident groupings to the Missions and consular offices or to the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs

- Government will invite discussion of all major policy initiatives and programmes related to overseas nationals before signing off on them
- Government will encourage the participation of overseas nationals in discussions in which developmental matters are being deliberated

3.8 TOURISM PROMOTION

- Government will institute initiatives that promote off-season visits by overseas Dominicans
- Government encourages the Private Sector to offer packages to promote off-season visits by Dominicans in the Diaspora

3.9 TRADE PROMOTION

- Government will work with Diaspora organizations to institutionalize a system of trade promotion that incorporates the skills and knowledge of members of the Diaspora
- Invest Dominica Authority (IDA) should visit the Diaspora once or twice per year to promote its activities and services.
- Government will enlist the services of members of the Diaspora in identifying niche markets in capitals with high concentration of Dominicans
- Government will encourage potential investors/Diaspora firms planning to establish enterprises in Dominica to incorporate the marketing aspect as a critical component of proposed ventures
- Such investors should avail themselves of opportunities under the various trade agreements, such as CARICOM, CARIBCAN and the EPA.
- Government will encourage Diaspora established companies to establish joint venture projects with the local private sector that will allow the local companies to gain access to expertise, networks, trade practices and financial resources overseas that would not otherwise be available to them.

3.10 CULTURAL EXCHANGES/EXPORT OF CULTURAL PRODUCTS

- Government will support sound initiatives undertaken by members of the Diaspora to promote Dominica's musicians, dancers and other performing artistes, artists, writers as well as its festivals in host countries
- Government regards this as an area in which the Diaspora communities could take the lead
- Government encourages Dominicans resident abroad to take appropriate action to retain and promote aspects of our traditional heritage in their host countries
- Encourage more cultural exchanges between schools and cultural groups in Dominica and the Diaspora

3.11 RECOGNITION FOR OUTSTANDING SERVICE

- Government will continue to recognize members of the Diaspora for outstanding contributions to the social and economic well-being of Dominicans in the Diaspora and at home, within the framework of the National Awards.

SECTION 4.0 RESPONSIBILITY

The responsibility for coordinating policy implementation rests with the Ministry of Employment, Trade, Industry and Diaspora Affairs. Through the RIDU, the Ministry will develop an action plan, with the participation of other ministries and agencies as well as the non-resident Dominican community.

SECTION 5.0 IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

- Timeline - Establish an annual Dominican Diaspora Day in November. This could become the fixed date that Cabinet meets with visiting overseas based nationals. The implementation of the Diaspora Policy can be monitored at these meetings.
- Resources - In order to have effective implementation of the Diaspora Policy, efforts must be made to explore and secure adequate funding for the projects / initiatives in the Policy.
- Organisational / Institutional Arrangement
 - i. All stakeholders are responsible for ensuring the successful implementation of the Dominica Diaspora Policy. Therefore, all partners must at all times display the highest level of commitment, cooperation, respect and diligence for this process to enhance relations between Dominica and the Diaspora.
 - ii. RIDU in cooperation with the Diaspora should clearly highlight its roles and responsibilities to the Diaspora and Returnees.

CONCLUSION

The successful implementation of this policy will depend on a unified approach to national development by Dominicans at home and abroad. The Government therefore strongly emphasizes joint initiatives between non-resident and resident Dominicans. Attitudes that promote accommodation and unity must replace those that harbour mistrust and disharmony.

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