

**Welcoming Remarks by
Senator the Hon. Maxine McClean
Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade
at the Barbados Network Consultation 2010
August 6th, 2010**

Acting Prime Minister, the Hon. Freundel Stuart, Cabinet Ministers,
fellow Parliamentarians, distinguished guests, Overseas Barbadians,
Returning Barbadians, friends of Barbados:

To those of you in for the Crop Over festivities or who have flown in
specially for this event: welcome back to Barbados! To those who
have again made Barbados your permanent home; those who have
never left that home, and those who consider yourselves Barbadians
at heart: thank you for being a part of these historic proceedings.

Today we inaugurate Barbados' first ever Diaspora Conference, the
Barbados Network Consultation 2010 under one simple theme:
“Strengthening the Bonds that Unite us”. That phrase sums up
our single purpose over the next few days: reconnecting with the
essence of what makes Barbados such a special place, and defining

what we can do together, as patriotic Barbadians who truly love our country, to keep it strong and growing.

As many of you already know, this Consultation was the initiative of Prime Minister David Thompson. Within months of assuming office, the Prime Minister identified the strengthening of our relationship with the tens of thousands of Barbadians living overseas as an urgent priority. He understood clearly that while not every Overseas Barbadian intended to return, they were all anxious to find avenues to contribute to our national development. To respond effectively to this interest he recognised that we needed to create a comprehensive structure to embrace the Barbadian diaspora as an integral part of the economic, social and cultural development of Barbados.

The Prime Minister made it his special mission to reach out to Barbadians in every foreign jurisdiction that he visited and urged them to become part of this new journey. He designated them as Barbados Networkers and encouraged them to share their ideas and experiences with the policy makers at home. He also committed to the holding of the Barbados Network Consultation in August 2010,

and biennially thereafter, to help distil their contributions, along with those of Government, into a new policy framework. He mandated his Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade to coordinate a Country Team effort within the Barbados Missions abroad to make this engagement a reality.

That in a nutshell is why we are here today. Only illness could have kept Prime Minister Thompson away from the launch of the process that he conceptualized, and to which he is so deeply committed. Such is the priority he attaches to this Consultation that he would not entertain the idea of a postponement to a time more favourable to him. Instead, he gave both the Acting Prime Minister and myself the firmest instructions that the momentum must be maintained and the Consultation held as scheduled. He has continued to follow our progress and is eagerly awaiting the results of our deliberations.

I believe that each one of us here today has a solemn duty to work to make this Inaugural Consultation a resounding success. The programme has been designed to encompass a wide range of expert presentations in the areas of tourism, investment, philanthropy, and

the cultural industries all of which we believe are of significant interest to Overseas Barbadians, and all of which offer real opportunities for us to develop mutually beneficial partnerships.

We have also left a considerable amount of time after the presentations for inter-active dialogue. This will ensure that the Government's primary objective for hosting this Consultation, that is to listen to your concerns, learn of your experiences, and receive your ideas, will be realised. We will then ensure that we find appropriate mechanisms for incorporating your viable proposals into the mainstream of Government's plans and policies for the development of Barbados. It is for this reason that we have decided to begin our substantive work with a Town Hall session, so that we can identify your priority interests and concerns at the outset, and factor them into the presentations and dialogue that takes place in the thematic sessions.

Our ultimate intention is to produce a clear plan of action for the future, based on our interaction over the next two days, as well as the many comprehensive suggestions and submissions our Embassies

and Consulates have received directly from you. To ensure that there is sustained follow-up to this Encounter I have made arrangements for attendance by the six Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Consuls General from the countries with the greatest concentration of Barbadian nationals. On my instruction, they have each designated an officer in their Mission to be the focal point for Diaspora Affairs. Those officers will also be participating fully in the sessions.

This Consultation, which has been coordinated jointly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, the Barbados Tourism Authority and the Lloyd Erskine Sandiford Centre has benefited significantly from the support of both public and private sector partners. We are particularly appreciative of our platinum sponsors, Invest Barbados, the Barbados Public Workers' Cooperative Credit Union and the City of Bridgetown Co-operative Credit Union, our gold sponsors, the Barbados National Bank, the Insurance Corporation of Barbados and LIME, and our silver sponsors, the Barbados Manufacturers Association. We urge you to make time between the sessions to visit their booths as well as the exhibits of goods and services that have been mounted by many other partners who are keen to do

business with Overseas Barbadians. These exhibitors include members of the Barbados Manufacturers Association and the Barbados Small Business Association, as well as the Barbados Association of Retired Persons, the NIS, Cricket Legends of Barbados and the Constituency Councils.

I also wish to thank the many Government entities that have offered their assistance, including the Prime Minister's Office, the Office of the Attorney-General, and of course the Royal Barbados Police Force Band, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Community Development and Culture and the NCF, as well as the Ministries of Finance, Economic Affairs, Social Care, Health and Labour.

I am delighted that the Acting Prime Minister, the Hon. Freundel Stuart has graciously agreed to launch the inaugural Barbados Network Consultation, by delivering the keynote address at this Opening Ceremony. I know that all participants are eager to hear from him the details of Government's policy proposals for engaging with Barbadians living overseas. I know that you are also eager to

help shape the final vision and to play your part in translating it into reality.

I do not intend therefore to keep you from that important project any longer. It merely remains for me to thank you all most sincerely for your presence with us here today and to hope that you will be motivated to participate fully and actively in this most important process, and in so doing to enrich its final outcome, to mutual benefit.

I thank you.