

## **NAJASO, West Indian Social Club (WISC) of Hartford Present at Jamaica Diaspora NE USA Regional Conference**

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The Jamaica Diaspora Regional conference was held this past weekend at the JFK Hilton Hotel, Jamaica, New York, June 10-11, 2016. The final day of the conference and the evening awards Gala attracted an audience of over 200 that packed the banquet hall on this historic occasion to receive the first Jamaican woman Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Senator, The Honourable Kamina Johnson Smith. Earlier in the day during the conference, attendees heard from The Minister of Health The Honourable Dr. Christopher Tufton who spoke about the 10-point plan for the Ministry of Health, Charities, and the Adopt-a-clinic program. Minister Tufton, who attended the conference due to his availability at being in New York on another engagement, was very generous with his time, took questions from audience members and after his conference speech, met privately with key diaspora members in the medical and health communities to hear their concerns and explore options and opportunities for greater involvement and communication with the diaspora.

### **Conference at a Glance**

Important discussions were had and information provided through panels on Diaspora voting, Trade and Investment, Immigration and Deportation, Future Leaders, Role of the Church, Health Care, Social Work Panel, Public Safety, Education, and making the transition from Jamaica to the USA.



L-R: Fmr. NY Councilwoman, Dr. Una Clarke, Lincoln Downer, Asst Diaspora Director, MFAFT, Ambassador Sharon Saunders, Director, Diaspora Affairs, MFAFT, Erin-Lue-Hing, JDNEUSA Future Leader, Dr. Robert Clarke, VP. NAJASO, Minister MFAFT Johnson Smith, JDNEUSA ABM, Joan Pinnock, Esq. Mr. Leslie Clarke, US Congresswoman Yvette Clarke, Acting Consul General NY, Derron McCreath Rev. Andrew Bennett, Consul General California, Lorna Johnson (background Oliver Samuels).

The Investment panel led by WISC member Mark Milward, featured two other WISC members, Dr. Gary Rhule, MD, Director of Health and Human Services, City of Hartford and Lynroy Grant, PhD., Director of EDSN. The two panelists were joined by Rudi Page, CEO of Making Connections Work from the UK. The panel titled: ***Logistics-Centered Economy, Diaspora Perspectives on Economic Growth, Job Creation and Skills Development*** provided insight on these perspectives from the viewpoint of international trade, health/medical industry development opportunities and micro, small, medium enterprise (MSME) business development, as well as an emphasis on developing skillsets and a workforce that can meet the demands of competing with Singapore, Rotterdam and Dubai as Jamaica has been for the past 7 years to become a major transshipment point. With the support of \$US50 million dollars funded by The World Bank, Jamaica has been pursuing foreign direct investment (FDI) dollars to develop its infrastructure and establish itself as a major supply chain hub in the global supply chain of the movement of goods, services, and people that connects to a 800 million consumer market in the Americas and driven by the

Panama Canal expansion. Jamaica's Logistics Hub initiative has been a national effort undertaken by the Jamaican government to transform the economy, create jobs and national wealth for the country. The panelists offered their perspectives on how this can be accomplished within the various industries that would become support services to the centralized logistics based economy. Singapore now a leading logistics based economy with a current unemployment rate of less than 2% had the same logistics performance index (LPI) that Jamaica has now in the early 1960s. The LPI measures the on-the-ground efficiency of trade supply chains, or logistics performance and includes freight transportation (air, land, sea), warehousing, border clearance, payment systems and many other functions outsourced by producers and merchants. The panelists gave examples of opportunities for economic growth and national wealth creation driving the point that the opportunities for Jamaicans in the diaspora to invest in business development projects in Jamaica was a promising venture where investment returns would see significant benefits and particularly in light of the fact that the initiative is well-funded and supported by The World Bank. A Master Plan for the Jamaica Logistics Hub was announced last month in Kingston.

### **Award Gala Honorees**

Honorees for the Awards Gala were Rev. Calvin McIntyre (Lifetime Achievement), Rev. Dr. Jacqueline McCullough, (Faith Based), Congresswoman Yvette Clarke, (Politics), Devon Harris (Sports), Ed Robinson (Arts), and Michael Seaton, Roxann Chin, (Future Leaders).

### **Minister Johnson Smith Address to the Jamaican Diaspora**

Arriving late to the Gala due to flight cancellations and delays Minister Johnson Smith expressed her deep regrets at missing the opportunity to have more dialog and engagement with the diaspora. On hand for the historic occasion of her address was the Executive Vice President of the National Association of Jamaican and Supportive Organizations (NAJASO) and cousin of US Congresswoman Yvette Clarke, Dr. Robert Clarke, MD. Dr. Clarke presented Minister Johnson Smith with the book *NAJASO: A Catalyst for Change*. NAJASO is the umbrella organization of all Jamaican and supportive organizations in the USA, Bermuda, and the Caribbean and the brainchild behind what is known as the "**Jamaican Diaspora Movement**". The book written by Carol Muschette-Kirk details the history of NAJASO (1977-Present) and its many contributions to Jamaica and Jamaicans at home and abroad. An excerpt from Minister Johnson Smith's speech reads, "I welcome this opportunity to continue my engagement with our Diaspora in the North East USA, to share the Administration's vision for achieving growth and prosperity for all Jamaicans, and to assure them of our commitment to working with them. In that context, I look forward to hearing their views on how this process should go forward," The Minister offered congratulations to the organizers of the Jamaica Diaspora North East (JDNE) Regional Conference on this important activity. Ambassador Sharon Saunders, Director, Diaspora & Consular Affairs, who delivered the conference keynote address at the opening commented, "There is a universe of possibilities for Diaspora partnerships and value to be derived from the relationships, and as with any relationship, it is a two-way street." Those within the Diaspora communities and particularly those within the NAJASO member organizations look forward to this dialog.



Dr. Robert Clarke, NAJASO VP presents book *NAJASO: A Catalyst for Change* to Senator Johnson Smith, Minister of Foreign Affairs & Foreign Trade.