



OFFICE OF THE
PREMIER
CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

Remarks at the breakfast celebrating the

Cayman/Jamaica/UK relationship –

By Premier Hon. Alden McLaughlin

29 June, 2019

Good morning,

I thank you for joining me today on this very, very important occasion as we celebrate both the 60th anniversary of the Cayman Islands' first written Constitution as well as the important historical and cultural relationship we share with Jamaica and of course the United Kingdom.

Lord Ahmad, Prime Minister Holness, and Minister Vaz, on behalf of my Government and the people of the Cayman Islands I wish to wholeheartedly thank you and your delegations for joining

us over this important weekend of celebration and thanksgiving.

I am also grateful to my fellow Overseas Territories leaders and members of their delegations who are in attendance and indeed have been here most of this week to attend our annual Pre-Joint Ministerial Council Meeting and the inaugural UK/OT Trade Summit. And of course thanks also to the members of the Cayman Islands All Party Parliamentary Group who are here – Lord Northbrook, Sir Michael Fallon and Sir Graham Brady. Sir Graham, I am pleased that you were able to have Lady Victoria join us on this visit.

It is indeed good to be amongst so many friends.

Prime Minister Holness, Jamaica recently lost a great leader when The Most Hon. Edward Seaga passed away. But as you know, with the passing of Mr. Seaga the Cayman Islands also lost a very good friend. I was honoured to have been able to attend and participate in the funeral ceremony last weekend in Jamaica,

along with the Speaker of the House, Hon. McKeeva Bush and Councillor David Wight.

As we celebrate our 1959 Constitution, our first constitution Prime Minister, I note that 1959 was the year that Mr. Seaga first entered politics and thus he was part of the political establishment in Jamaica at the time we received our first written Constitution.

Sadly, as each year passes we lose more of those nation builders who helped shape the future of our two countries in the late fifties and early sixties. Earlier this year we lost Charles Lindbergh Eden. His service from 1954 – 1959 as a member of the Assembly of Justices and Vestry was during a very important part of Caymanian history. Happily Capt. Owen Farrington and Arley James Miller, who also served in the Assembly during that historic period, are still with us. In January of this year the Cayman Islands honoured the achievements of Capt. Owen, Mr. Eden, and their entire fellow Vestrymen and Justices of the Peace

who ably represented the people of the Cayman Islands during a time of transition. I am very proud of the fact that my Grandfather William A. McLaughlin was also a member of the Assembly during those historic years and indeed was also a member of the very first Executive Council under the 1959 Constitution.

The late 1950s and early 1960s were certainly a time of great change in the UK, the broader English-speaking Caribbean and especially in Jamaica and these Islands.

In the UK Harold McMillan was returned in the General Election as Prime Minister in 1959. In 1960 he gave what is today still considered to be an important historical speech when he addressed the whites' only South African parliament and noted that *"The wind of change is blowing through this continent, and whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact. We must all accept it as a fact, and our national policies must take account of it."*

These words were prophetic not only in the African context but certainly also for those British territories in the Caribbean, including the Cayman Islands and Jamaica. The West Indies Federation that was promoted by the UK after the Second World War, was eventually formed in 1958, but dissolved by 1962 as Jamaica and Trinidad opted for independence and self-determination rather than federation.

But despite the post-war trend that saw a number of UK colonies opt for independence, the Cayman Islands was determined to not just be swept along in the wake of our larger neighbours.

It is worth noting here that it was not just the recognition by the UK of the inevitability of the drive for change in its colonies that was important; rather it was also the willingness of the UK to sponsor and facilitate the process in order to ensure that all of its former colonies were able to establish themselves, ready to face

the future in the best possible way. This was in part the rationale for the UK to promote and to assist its Caribbean territories in the formation of the West Indies Federation.

Even more important, I believe, has been the willingness of the UK to maintain its help and support for all of us over the subsequent decades. Whether it has been through the Commonwealth or through what is now United Kingdom Overseas Territories Association, the UK has been steadfast in its role and the benefit that we all have received as part of the global Britain family has been truly significant. Of course as in all families, we have had our disagreements through those years, but we have always found that the values that bind us together have been stronger than the occasional challenges that have threatened to drive us apart.

Certainly in Cayman's case our ongoing developing relationship with the UK has been absolutely central to our

increasing success and prosperity over the last 60 years. The UK's willingness to nurture our fledgling democracy; to encourage our emerging economy, certainly in those early years; and to provide support through good times and bad has been a vital ingredient in Cayman's success story.

We have been, and we remain, grateful for our links to the UK and committed to our future partnership.

Prime Minister and Lord Ahmad, our three countries share a common history and we also share a connection to Her Majesty the Queen, who has reigned for some 67 years and was sovereign when Jamaica became independent and the Cayman Islands became a Crown Colony.

However, as I have said, the route for both Jamaica and the Cayman Islands traversed a difficult and rocky road that was the formation of the Federation.

Initially as a dependency of Jamaica, the Cayman Islands was keen to ensure that our interests were being protected. Members of the Assembly at the time, the late Ernest Panton, National Heroes T.W. Farrington and Ormond Panton led by Duncan Merren traveled to the discussions in Jamaica and made it clear that the Cayman Islands would join the Federation only if we had direct representation in the Federation.

Unfortunately Cayman's position was eventually rejected by members of the Standing Closer Committee of the Federation and instead it recommended that the Cayman Islands should continue as a dependency under the administration of the Governor – General of the Federation.

But the Cayman Islands remained resolute and on April 7, 1955, six Assemblymen sent a petition to the Colonial Secretary through the Governor of Jamaica. They stated that *“while...we look forward to strengthening ties both with Jamaica and with the*

other territories of the British Caribbean...we wish to restate, as clearly and as strongly as we can, three main aims. First, we wish to retain the right to control entry to our islands. Secondly, we wish to retain our rights to decide what taxes should be imposed upon us. Thirdly, we wish to retain our right to maintain our established channels of trade and employment overseas.”

Cayman's position remained unchanged in the run-up to the start of the launch of the Federation and the Jamaica Government led by Premier Norman Manley became content to let the British Governor of Jamaica resolve the Cayman Islands issue. Locally, however, there were divided opinions - some preferred obtaining and retaining increased local control over Caymanian interests whilst some factions favoured a break with the United Kingdom and a closer relationship with Jamaica within the framework of the Federation; an issue that would not be resolved for several more years.

And so, despite the uncertainties of who the Cayman Islands would join, it was agreed by the UK that the Cayman Islands would receive our first written constitution by a Royal Order-In-Council. The constitution came into effect on July 4, 1959, and was the first step towards political advancement for the Cayman Islands, as the Islands were now specifically exempt from the control of the Jamaican legislature and were placed directly under the authority of the British Governor of Jamaica.

There also followed radical changes to the Legislature. After 129 years, the Assembly of Justices and Vestrymen was replaced by two new bodies, the Legislative Assembly and the Executive Council (which has now evolved to the Cabinet today). The members of the Legislative Assembly were also reduced from thirty five to eighteen members, which included twelve elected members, three nominated members and three official members. ExCo consisted of two official members, two elected members and one nominated member.

National Hero T. W. Farrington, speaking in the Assembly on July 3, 1959, the day before the new Constitution would come into effect, reflected on the coming changes and said to his colleagues:

“I must also thank and congratulate members of this Assembly for their individual contributions to all the deliberations in this House for the preservation and continuity of the best traditions which we Caymanians hold so dear. It is obvious that some faces that are here today will of necessity be left out of the new House but for those of you who will be returned I would say – Be Watchful! Be Vigilant! Be Wise! Let us not lower the flag but press on with courage and determination that as we go forward into the future we shall always be proud to be called Caymanians!”

Those are indeed mighty and suitable words from our venerable statesman at a most momentous time in our history.

I wish to also note that when the new Legislative Assembly met for the first time in October 1959 in what we know as the George Town Town Hall, present in the audience was the Jamaican Minister of Home Affairs Hon. William Soivright who was representing the Premier of Jamaica the Right Hon. Norman Manley. Also present was the Leader of the Opposition of Jamaica at the time, Sir Alexander Bustamante. So even at that auspicious moment in our development senior Jamaican parliamentarians graced us with their presence – which makes it even more poignant for me, Prime Minister, that you and Minister Vaz have joined us this week to commemorate and recall the events of those days.

After the collapse of the West Indies Federation in 1962 and with Jamaica taking its final steps to independence, the Cayman Islands had to make a firm decision as to who it would follow, Jamaica or Britain.

The issue was finally debated in the Legislative Assembly and decided in 1962 when a unanimous resolution was reached that:

“It was the wish of the Cayman Islands (1). To continue their present association with Her Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom; (2). To negotiate with her Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom for internal self-government, taking into account the wishes of the people of the Cayman Islands as to timing.”

And with that decision Jamaica and the Cayman Islands went our separate ways politically - with Jamaica moving on to become an independent nation and Cayman choosing to remain British and becoming a British Crown Colony in its own right.

It was the decision by the Cayman Islands to obtain our own constitution and to forge our own way as a British Crown colony that allowed our own people to begin make what were, clearly in retrospect, fundamental policy decisions and to pass the early laws on which we have built our tourism and financial services

industries. The adoption of the 1959 Constitution can rightly be considered the seminal event which gave rise to the modern Cayman Islands.

But Prime Minister Holness, even though our respective countries may have separated politically, the connections between us have remained strong, and indeed have grown stronger, these past sixty years.

From the beginnings of its settlement following the 1670 Treaty of Madrid, which ceded Jamaica and Cayman to Britain, our two countries and cultures have been intertwined.

History records that the earliest two settlers – Walter and Bowden – were British soldiers who were reputedly deserters from what was colloquially referred to as Cromwell's Army in Jamaica.

After Jamaica's independence, Caymanians continued visiting Jamaica in numbers for business, medical care, employment, education, to visit family or friends, or even to be wed.

Indeed, my forbear John Patrick McLaughlin and his betrothed traveled to Lucea, Jamaica, to get married because there were no marriage officers on Grand Cayman at the time. Fast forward a hundred and fifty years or so to my own parents, McNee and Althea who did their formal training in Jamaica to later come home to make a difference in public health; my father as a public health officer and my mother as the country's first dispenser of medicines.

And over the decades many Jamaicans came to the Cayman Islands as doctors, teachers, builders, lawyers and more to help us build the Cayman Islands that we know today. Many have stayed on to become a permanent part of the Caymanian fabric – including our own Chief Justice Anthony Smellie, Attorney

General Sam Bulgin, the late Clarence Flowers, Mr. Wellesley Howell who turned 104 years this year and is still playing his saxophone, and of course, Prime Minister, Dr. Joseph Marzouca your Honorary Jamaican Consulate who, despite the unchanged accent, is also now happily Caymanian.

We still have Caymanians benefiting from education in Jamaica but we also have a large and growing number of Caymanians also going to the UK to university.

Over the past 60 years, the relationship between the United Kingdom and Cayman has developed and matured. As I noted on Wednesday at a joint UK/OT Trade Summit, after having become a British Crown Colony in our own right we, along with our fellow Overseas Territories, were all designated by the UK as Dependent Territories in 1981 and subsequently as Overseas Territories in 2002. The shifting nomenclature – from colonies to

dependencies to finally being recognized as “overseas territories” marks the increasing maturity of our relationship with the UK.

And so, since 1959, the document that governs us has gone through several iterations, with the latest coming in 2009. Today we are again in constitutional talks with the United Kingdom with a view to further advance the Cayman Islands position constitutionally and to enhance our ability to govern our own affairs and to continue to thrive and prosper as a modern, progressive and successful democracy.

Lord Ahmad, Cayman’s success has much to do with the hard work and dedication of those Caymanian men and women who strove to build our Islands, but we had great assistance from the UK over the years, including those Commissioners, Administrators and Governors who loved this place and worked to help make it better. And yes we also had much help from the people from Jamaica and elsewhere who joined us in this grand

experiment to make three small Islands in the Western Caribbean the gem that we are today. But what has also helped us is the confidence that investors have in our links to the UK, along with our shared British common law system. As three small islands our choice to remain British was the right one for us then and despite the tensions from time to time, I believe it continues to be the right one now.

In August this year Jamaica and its Diaspora will celebrate 57 years of independence and, Prime Minister, we will once again join you in your observances, wishing you happiness, prosperity, peace and continued success.

Thank you.

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