

# **Dominica Belongs To Dominicans Everywhere**

(Once a Dominican Always a Dominican!)

By

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The purpose of this paper is to present the case that no individual, authority or government elected by Dominicans, have the power to deny the birth-right of citizenship to any Dominican where ever they reside, at home or abroad. This may seem evident, so why state the obvious? Because it is time to discredit and put to rest the malicious assertion by some Dominicans at home that Dominicans living overseas are not true Dominicans. However one defines true, this perception has deepened an existing chasm between Dominicans at home and overseas.

We will not regurgitate the several reasons suggested for its existence but, instead, let us consider the following realities, which will help expose, once and for all, the absurdity of this chasm. We all belong to the Dominican family and, as such, we do well to remember that as family members:

- We have responsibilities to one another,
- We are custodians of our good name, and
- We have a collective duty to maintain our family.

## **Our responsibilities to one another**

As individuals we are familiar with the structure and operations of our own families. We are born in a family, nurtured in and protected by a family. We are anchored in and derive our identity from the family. Accordingly, as members, we accept collective responsibility for the survival of our family.

What does this mean for the Dominican society as one large family, which it is? It means:

- We all share the same cultural heritage
- We are socialized by the same norms and institutions of our society
- We are all subject to, and protected by, the same laws of our society

- We all pay allegiance to, and stand in defence of, the integrity and sovereignty of our country, and
- We will do all in our power to ensure the continued stability and development of our society

Are the above responsibilities different for nationals at home and nationals overseas? Of course not! We cannot obliterate the imprint of our cultural heritage just as we cannot change the colour of our skin. We are stuck with it from birth until death. It is our heritage that distinguishes us from other societies. Thank God for our heritage, which is a rich and colourful one, serenaded worldwide in language, song, dance and literature?

Each and every one of us is a product of our institutions of family, religion, education and social upbringing. Dominicans are described by foreigners as warm and friendly. Why is that? Dominicans are recognized as one of the most literate peoples of the developing countries. Why is that? It all has to do with the way our institutions have shaped us. Are overseas Dominicans shaped differently from those who reside at home? Of course not! However, it is possible that overseas.

Dominicans can become re-socialised, superficially, as they adjust to the lifestyles of their host countries. But, as they say, a leopard cannot change its spots.

Dominicans are law-abiding and peaceful people. They will tolerate disorder up to a point for the sake of maintaining peace. Unfortunately, this noble characteristic of our people make us vulnerable to outside exploitation as when, aided and abetted by a former Prime Minister, a band of Klu Klux Klan vagabonds attempted to take over the country. But, the concerned among us will rise to the occasion in defence of our sovereignty and integrity.

Overseas Dominicans are especially vociferous about situations which appear to threaten the stability of our country. Their protestations are sometimes interpreted as negative interference in the political affairs of the country, even if they are in the best interest of the nation. Such protestations have borne positive results, albeit subtly so.

## **We are custodians of our good name**

As it is with our individual families, so in the larger society we are challenged to uphold the good name of Dominica. This charge is particularly important in our modern electronic age, where the world has shrunken into this so-called, virtual global village.

- All Dominicans, particularly those overseas, are unofficial ambassadors of our country
- Dominicans at home and overseas exemplify the character of our people

There is nothing more uplifting and patriotic than promoting the good name of Dominica internationally. In essence, each Dominican, particularly those overseas, is an unofficial, goodwill ambassador for our country. It is not surprising, therefore, that it is recommended that qualified overseas Dominicans be seriously considered for formal appointments as ambassadors instead of non-Dominicans.

Events like the World Creole Music Festival at home and the many presentations of Dominican culture by Dominica Associations overseas go a long way in showcasing our country to the world. It is an undertaking, which will continue indefinitely. In this Internet age, our island is prominently displayed throughout the world in a host of Dominican websites, in spite of the occasional, embarrassing confusion with the Dominican Republic.

## **Maintenance of the Dominican family is a collective duty**

Each family accepts responsibility for its sustenance. This we achieve mainly through the gainful employment of its bread-winners. In the same way, in the wider Dominican society, we collaborate in building a socio-economic structure capable of providing adequate employment and training opportunities for positive contributions to the maintenance of our society.

Collaboration and participation of both Dominicans at home and overseas are vital in ensuring sustained economic development. Ideally, this collaboration should encompass the full spectrum from overall planning, through implementation and evaluation. It should entail a formal policy of inclusion of overseas Dominicans as recommended in the [Diaspora Policy Paper](#), commissioned by, and presented to, the government of Dominica in October 2004.

It is recognised that the so-called barrel economy is only a temporary, uncertain and token contribution to development, which goes directly to families. This does not in any way diminish the significance of this financial contribution in its multiplier effect and increased purchasing power in the economy. However, the vast financial, technical and intellectual resources of overseas Dominicans have the potential to transform our Dominican society into a modern developed nation. This potential is yet to be fully harnessed.

In retrospect, the realities discussed above are not new to right-thinking Dominicans. The question, then, is what manner of Dominicans would attempt to deny their brothers and sisters their rightful membership of the Dominican family? Indeed, experience shows that there are members in some of our individual families, who for selfish reasons, live on the periphery of their families. They feed off the families but do not fully participate in their sustenance. They behave like parasites.

At the societal level, the description of social parasites best fits those who seek to deny their overseas brothers and sisters their rightful membership of the Dominican family. Social parasites probably believe there is more for them if they keep the overseas Dominicans out.

### **The Artificial Chasm between Resident and Overseas Dominicans**

From the foregoing discussion of the realities, whether we like it or not, the assertion by some resident Dominicans that overseas Dominicans are not an integral and contributing part of Dominican society is baseless and frivolous. These kinds of utterances serve only to aggravate and widen an artificial chasm between resident and overseas Dominicans. Whatever the bizarre origin of this chasm, the rights and privileges of overseas Dominicans have become a matter of serious debate.

Let us discuss two related major issues of this debate:

- The right of overseas Dominicans to vote in national elections, and
- The right of overseas Dominicans to offer themselves as political candidates in national elections and hold office

## **Overseas Dominicans Right to vote**

Under current legislation, overseas Dominicans can vote in national elections if they are:

- i. registered on the voters lists,
- ii. meet specific residency requirements, and
- iii. be present in Dominica to do so.

Items (ii) and (iii) are clearly outdated requirements in this 21st century for two related reasons:

- The arbitrariness of residency duration
- Absentee voting is an established procedure today

For what legitimate reason would length of residency be deemed necessary for one's choice of political party or candidate? Is it to familiarize oneself with candidates and party manifestos?

Today all major parties present their websites on the Internet with complete information. There is, therefore, no need for a residency requirement in Dominica to learn about political parties and their candidates.

Is residency deemed necessary to appreciate the socio-economic condition of the country? If so, how long should residency be and how would this knowledge inform voters' choices of candidates and parties? I daresay, even here, residency is not a factor unless overseas Dominicans are completely ignorant of the economic and social conditions of their homeland. This argument, by some, is hollow and spurious because overseas Dominicans are very much up to date, even more so than some residents, through the Internet and local radio, on the development of their country.

Is residency deemed necessary as a show of patriotism? That would be the ultimate absurdity! How would one's presence determine what is fundamentally an expression of heartfelt allegiance to one's country? And when the duration expires, what then? Needless to say, this arbitrariness of residency duration does not provide any legitimate reason in order for overseas Dominican to vote in national elections.

So, what of the requirement to be present to vote? It is clear that overseas Dominicans, who cannot afford to return to Dominica, but want to vote, have to forgo their citizen's right to vote. Unfortunately, this has led political parties to use this difficulty to

mobilize overseas voters to their advantage by illegally arranging transportation for such overseas voters. Accusations of bribery have been leveled at the political parties which indulge in this practice.

The solution to this problem is to institute absentee voting for overseas Dominicans. It is a vote cast by someone who is unable or unwilling to attend the official polling station. Absentee voting is a well-established procedure, which can be instituted for Dominica without much cost or fanfare. So, again, there is absolutely no need for overseas Dominicans to be present in person to exercise their right to vote in national elections.

### **The Right to hold political office**

We subscribe to the view that every Dominican citizen of sound mind, whether overseas or resident, has the right to hold political office in his country. If one has the right to vote he or she should have the same right to offer themselves to serve their country. This has been made problematic, based on the interrelated factors of dual citizenship and allegiance to country.

It is neither illegal nor unconstitutional for Dominicans to hold dual citizenship. You possess dual or multiple citizenship when more than one country recognizes you as its citizen. This has become a necessity for overseas Dominicans who wish to take full advantage of the rights and privileges that citizenship offers in their host countries. However, the question to which country one holds allegiance is significant.

Whenever you are in a country that recognizes you as a citizen, its laws take priority over the laws of any other country of which you may be a citizen. International treaties may, however, allow exceptions to this rule. A country may seek to restrict dual citizenship by requiring one of its citizens born with some other citizenship to renounce the other citizenship upon reaching adulthood. Similarly, newly naturalized citizens in some countries are required to renounce their previous citizenship(s); the US has such a requirement, for example, but Canada does not. And in some cases, a country will automatically revoke the citizenship of one of its citizens who acquires another country's citizenship by naturalization, even if no explicit renunciation was involved.

The above restrictions notwithstanding, as long as the Dominican with dual citizenship does not voluntarily renounce his citizenship of Dominica, there should

be no impediment to offer to serve his country in political office. Our pledge of allegiance says it all:

*"Before God and all mankind, I pledge allegiance to the flag of the Commonwealth of Dominica and to the Sovereign Republic for which it stands; my love, my loyalty and skills, in the service of Dominica and my fellow Citizens. I promise to work diligently and help build a prosperous and peaceful Nation."*

### **A Final Word**

To those who would dare to deny overseas Dominicans the right to help build a prosperous and peaceful nation, think again. You have no such power. To those who behave like social parasites, feeding off the hard work of genuine, patriotic Dominicans, it is time you got involved in true nation-building.

Accordingly, we would like to suggest the following four (4) recommendations on the way forward for 2010:

- Dominicans at home and abroad resolve to close this artificial chasm which inhibits collective action in developing our homeland
- Accordingly, we call upon all elements of civil society in Dominica who recognize the benefits of an accepted and engaged contribution by nationals resident overseas to assist in building bridges of cooperation and understanding, and to constitute itself in ways which will permit effective collaboration for the betterment of our common native land
- Dominica develops a true, comprehensive policy on Diaspora Affairs along the lines of the proposed [Diaspora Policy Paper](#)
- Dominica institutes Absentee Voting to be operational before the next general election.

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