

THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH EVENT OF DIASPORA HOMECOMING 2024

Good afternoon and welcome to the official launch event of Diaspora Homecoming 2024. It is truly an honour to stand before you today as we embark on this celebration, now in its third year, of the vibrant and dynamic Trinbago diaspora.

Diaspora Homecoming is not just an event; it is an opportunity to bring the TDON motto to life - Research, Recognise, and Engage. This gathering allows us to celebrate the endeavours of the Trinbago diaspora on a consistent basis, giving us a snapshot of TT diaspora engagement through return visits that typically last between 7 to 14 days.

This year, our celebration is made even more special with the introduction of the Diaspora Patriot Awards Dinner, a recognition event that honours the meaningful contributions of our diaspora. This activity is preceded by Acts of Kindness Day, which reflects the volunteer spirit often associated with our diaspora community. The two-day conference is a diaspora-led forum on TT soil intended to measure previous and ongoing efforts and formulate new strategies for deeper and systematic engagement. By organizing this academic conference at City Hall, TDON seeks to explore pathways for systematic engagement with eager and skilled diasporans of TT heritage, aiming to elevate our people in various fields of endeavour.

As part of Homecoming 2024, we will rediscover our authentic cultural traditions and leisure activities, which are often desired when our diaspora members return. The festivities include a pan yard lime and a boat ride from San Fernando pier with music sensations to complement the scene. Additionally, a tour for our visitors will allow them to experience the diverse attractions of the southland.

Reflecting on my own experiences, I'd like to share a personal story with you all.

"I've lived away for 17 years. Back then, the internet was not what it is now, and we longed for the Express or Guardian that we used to buy at the Chinese

Mayor's Remarks - His Worship Councillor Robert Parris,
The Mayor of San Fernando

grocery or a West Indian store. We got the papers a few days after, or we read it in the Caribbean News. That was like gold to us. Unfortunately, the news isn't what I would want it to be, and we have also allowed outsiders to come in and sensationalize through foreign YouTube vloggers, showing all the negativity of our country. But now, with the advent of technology, persons from the Trinidad Diaspora, if they are interested, get instant news in the US and Canada. This can adversely affect the growth of our economy and GDP, as we depend extensively on the return of our foreign-based nationals, especially for national festivals and celebrations.

We cannot understate the contributions of successful Trinidadians who migrated for more opportunities, and they want to give back to the country of their birth. I recently read in the newspapers about a foreign-based national who, after retiring from his IT job in Florida, came back to Trinidad and built his dream home, living a comfortable life after working so hard abroad. Unfortunately, not all stories of those retiring to our shores are positive, and he was killed under circumstances that are still being investigated.

We need to form effective lobbying groups that can effect change in Trinidad and Tobago, in various aspects of development and governance. And I ask the question: if Haiti, which is in social and political turmoil, can have mail-in ballots for general elections, why can't those who live abroad have the same opportunity to vote for the government in their land of birth, in Trinidad and Tobago? This may be a controversial question, but if those from our diaspora are entrusted with being the foreign ambassadors of our culture, selling our diversity, food, and unique culture, surely they should have a say in the governance of our country."

As we move forward with Diaspora Homecoming 2024, let us remember the importance of our diaspora's engagement and the profound impact it has on our nation's development. Let us celebrate their contributions and work together to create a brighter future for Trinidad and Tobago.

Thank you.