

ALOUN NDOMBET-ASSAMBA INTERVIEW

Key:

EHdK: Dr Eve Hayes de Kalaf (Interviewer)

ANA: Her Excellency Mrs Aloun Ndombet-Assamba (Respondent)

Date/Location:

15th September 2022. Grierfield Great House, Moneague, Saint Ann, Jamaica.

EHdK 00:02 I'm here with Ambassador Aloun Ndombet-Assamba who was the Jamaican High Commissioner to the United Kingdom from 2012 until 2016. First of all Ambassador thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me today.

ANA 00:20 Thank you for inviting me to meet with you and thank you for coming out here to meet me.

EHdK 00:25 Do you want to explain maybe where we are right now?

ANA 00:28 Okay. We are in Saint Ann which is on the north coast. A lot of people will know about Ocho Rios which is in Saint Ann. Actually, in a little town outside of Saint Ann called Moneague. That's the town. I am in a village called Grierfield. My house is the Grierfield Great House, and this is where I live. My son and my sister both live with me. My son has his own quarters, so to speak, and he farms. He's a non-chemical farmer. We don't use any chemicals. And if you look around, you will see lots of wasps' nests. My son says the wasps are the hardest working animals on the farm, so we don't kill them. The only thing they don't do for us is give us honey. But they do all the other things. They eat the pests, so we don't have to use pesticides and they pollinate because they go from flower to flower. So, we are very protective of our wasps. We know that if you get bitten, we know what to do. We just cut an onion and rub it on the cut, the bite and there's no swelling, no pain. You're fine.

EHdK 01:53 I understand there's a bit of history about this beautiful house and the area we are in at the moment. This was a plantation, is that correct?

ANA: 02:03 Yes, this was a plantation. They actually used to grow corn and [have] cattle here. In the back, you will see some barns where they would store the corn. Also, we do not get public water. We have this water from the rain, and we have huge tanks. I think we have a tank which holds over...huge tanks. We manage the storage and we also purify our own water. And we have two levels of purification. One level which we use for household and washing purposes and so on and the other level, the next level, which we use for drinking and cooking. We're self-sufficient insofar as water is concerned as long as we get rain. Please God. Some of what we do here we get energy from the sun. Solar but not everything. We're moving towards that. You know we're on a hill. If you notice, it's a Georgian house and where we're sitting now is a Georgian porch of houses that we built in the 17th century.

This house goes back to the 17th century. All this stone that you can see there and all the wood that you see came from this property.

EHdK 03:42 There were enslaved persons at this property as well [pause]. You've had a really interesting career. You've been a lawyer, politician, a diplomat, a High Commissioner. Do you want to tell the people who will be listening to this interview a little bit about yourself and this history?

ANA 04:05 Well, let me...I'm from a family that epitomises the Jamaican motto which is, "Out of many, one people," because on the one side of my family I have enslaved persons and slave owners. On the other side of my family, I have persons who came to Jamaica as indentured workers. I grew up being taught that people from India who came to Jamaica were...they volunteered to come to Jamaica. It is not true. They were kidnapped just like the slaves from Africa. My great-great-grandmother was kidnapped when my grandmother was six weeks old and put on a ship out of Madras. The ship was called the SS Peerless and she landed in Old Harbour Bay. And came off. Knew no English. Knew nobody and had to make a life with her young child. A few years ago, when we commemorated the 150th anniversary of the Indians arriving in Jamaica, I had to take my grandmother and my mom down to Old Harbour Bay where they enacted...they reenacted that particular thing. It was very emotional for us. On the other side of my family, my great-great-great-grandmother was born in a cave because it was just before emancipation. And somehow the enslaved persons had heard that freedom was coming. And my great-great-great...my ancestor...was pregnant and didn't want her child to be born a slave and so she ran away. The baby was born in a cave. So, most Jamaicans have this kind of memory of our past. Some of us don't want to think about it and some of us have no choice but to think about it.

EHdK 06:26 We are here at a very historic time as well. We were recently talking about when I was on the London to Kingston flight and mid-flight was when we heard that the Queen had died. So, it is an incredibly important moment, I think.

ANA 06:44 For us, we knew no other sovereign but the Queen for the last 70 years. So, the majority of Jamaicans only know the Queen. Now we know a King. The King has been to Jamaica several times. I actually met him in Jamaica for the first time in the same way that I met the Queen in Jamaica for the first time before I went to the UK. There is a picture of my meeting with the Queen. I was a senator at that time. She and her husband, Prince Philip, as he was then, had visited Jamaica in 2002. I had met Prince Philip before in 1986 in Australia when I participated in a programme that he developed for future leaders of the Commonwealth which was called the Duke of Edinburgh [Commonwealth] Study Conference. Thursday morning when we woke up and heard what was happening, because of my experience of being a High Commissioner in the UK, I knew where we were going. It was just a matter of time before the announcement would have been made. I actually had said to a few people that I thought it was going to be made at six o'clock British time and it

was made shortly after, before 6:30 actually which would have been 12:30 our time. So, we're seeing history unfold here.

EHdK 08:14 We are. Literally. I also see that you were Jamaica's Minister of Tourism, Entertainment and Culture. Is that correct?

ANA 08:25 Yes, in terms of politics I was a senator in the government of Jamaica. In my final year as senator, I was appointed Minister of State in the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, Science and Technology. And then I ran for elections as a Member of Parliament in this very same constituency where I live, and I won my seat. It was very strange because I had no job. Because when the elections were called you had no job as the Minister of State or as a minister. Then I won the elections and, yes, I was going to be a Member of Parliament, but I said I had no job other than being a Member of Parliament until I got the call from the Prime Minister to say that he was appointing me at the time. My first appointment was Minister of Industry and Tourism and then when Prime Minister P.J. Patterson retired and Prime Minister Portia Simpson Miller became the Prime Minister, she reappointed me to the Cabinet as Minister of Tourism, Entertainment and Culture.

EHdK 09:48 Did that entail, for example, links with other countries, links overseas?

ANA 09:58 No. I was Minister of State in the ministry responsible for technology. We were doing a lot of work. This is, what, 2001? We were doing a lot of work with improving our technology infrastructure. We were involved with the Caribbean. There's an organisation called the Caribbean Institute of Technology, so I was involved in that. I went to different conferences. I even, at that time, went to California and toured in Silicon Valley and the Apple setup.

EHdK 10:44 That is really fascinating because I know there have been concerted efforts within Jamaica to improve citizen registries and to improve the ways in which people's documentation...

ANA 10:57 ...You mean NIDs [National Identification System]? That is a different discussion altogether.

EHdK 11:02 I just wondered if you were having conversations around that in the early 2000s?

ANA 11:05 Not around that. In the early 2000s, we were having conversations about breaking up the monopoly for telephones. We had a monopoly. At the time, the company was called Cable and Wireless which later became Flow. We broke up the monopoly that allowed for a company like Digicel to come in and get a licence. We set up the OUR, the Office of Utilities Regulation. We set up the Fair-Trading Commission. Those kinds of

regulatory agencies to enable us to look at the issue of competition and how we were going to deal with competition.

EHdK 11:53 Why does the issue of competition continue to be so important for Jamaica?

ANA 11:59 Because competition is something that matters. For example, you'll see something advertised in the press or you hear it on TV, on the radio, and it says the cost is \$100. And you go into the store or wherever to buy it and when you get there the cost is \$150. That is called misleading advertisement. Or you go and you expect to get a particular item because it is advertised as being there and it is not there but they sell you another item. And that is called bait-and-switch. I've spoken about those two in particular because those are the two that touch on the concerns of the normal, ordinary Jamaican. And, of course, the issue of keeping others out of the market so that you can maintain a pricing policy that is detrimental to the consumer. So those are issues. Our law does not say we can't have a monopoly, but it speaks to how you manage that monopoly. You understand? Then we were doing the work to enable us to break the monopoly that Cable and Wireless had at the time to allow other mobile telephone operators to come in. Also, as Minister of Tourism I was involved in the Caribbean Tourism Organisation and went to their meetings. I would go with the Jamaica Tourist Board who has responsibility for marketing Jamaica. I would go on trips with them all over the United States, Canada and Europe to sell Jamaica. During my time as Minister of Tourism, I established a fund which is called the Tourism Enhancement Fund which allows us to have funding for major tourism projects. Now this is very important because we knew that we could not get that kind of money out of the consolidated fund, out of the budget for the year. Also, our private sector did not have that kind of funding. I came up with the idea of having every ticket that was bought outside of Jamaica to charge \$2 per day. A total at the time of \$10. We worked it out that a visitor, a tourist, would spend probably five days in Jamaica and so \$10. And \$2 the cruise ship passenger would spend in one day. We started to develop this fund. I went to Prime Minister Patterson who was the prime minister at the time, with the idea and he thought this was great and said go with it. So, I worked on that. And given my experience as a lawyer, I was able to assist in the drafting of the legislation. The Chief Parliamentary Counsel told me, if we had to put it through our regular process here, we wouldn't get to it for a while. And I wanted it to be done within a year. So, I got somebody to assist me and we drafted the law and got it passed.

EHdK 15:50 How did you come to arrive in the UK in your post as High Commissioner?

ANA 15:59 The party that I support, and which became the government in December 2011, they invited me. Appointed me to be the representative of Jamaica in the UK. What I need to say is that we have different kinds of High Commissioners and diplomats representing Jamaica all over the world. But there are a couple of countries and at different times the



government decides that they want either a career diplomat or a politically appointed diplomat. I was a politically appointed diplomat because I had no experience as a diplomat prior to that. But I had experience of international exposure through my other experiences as minister.

EHdK 16:58 How was that experience for you?

ANA 17:00 It was a very good experience. I remember before I went to the UK, former Prime Minister Patterson met with me and told me that my experience as a Member of Parliament would serve me very well in the UK because the Jamaicans living in the UK would consider me the equivalent of their Member of Parliament. That was definitely true which is why I learnt and had so much to do with the whole Windrush discussions and the activities and what was happening then. Because I know how to advise myself of what was happening. I had to know the history to be able to say to people, "You have been here. You need to regularise your stay." At first when I started talking about it, because I had just recently gone to the UK, there were people who told me that I didn't know what I was talking about because I had just come.

EHdK 18:10 Let's break this down a little. Were these conversations that you were having with the Jamaican community in the UK? Or were these conversations you were having in a more formal setting with colleagues?

ANA 18:22 I had the conversation with everybody would speak to me about it.

EHdK 18:28 When did this start? Did you see it as a problem before you arrived in the UK or was it something that happened very quickly? What happened when you were in the UK?

ANA 18:36 No, I didn't see it as a problem before I arrived in the UK. Let me tell you. You have to know why there are Jamaicans in the UK. First of all, and I have a personal story about that, because in my family, two of my uncles and one of my aunts went to the UK in the 1950s. Because after the war, they invited Jamaicans and persons from all over the Empire, as it was then, to come and help to build back Britain. This is something that hit me. I knew about it as a child growing up, but I didn't understand it so much. And I had been going to the UK over the years before I was High Commissioner. But I realised that there were Jamaicans who worked in the transport sector, Jamaicans who worked as nurses, Jamaicans who worked as teachers. Not so much then as now but Jamaicans were involved in the telecommunications industry. Jamaicans who were involved in all different kinds of industry in the UK. Because they left Jamaica, and they went there. What happened is that somebody from a district would go and then would send back four people from that district. So that there were communities in the UK where you would find that most of the people have their roots in Clarendon, or in Saint Catherine or in Saint Thomas.

EHdK 20:30 That was very common, right? This interview is about you but I'm from Birmingham and there are certain areas [where] people have those close links to small towns and cities in Jamaica, directly because of that migration link.

ANA 20:52 Some people would go and say, "Hey, I'm sending back to my village for more people to come." This happened. So when I went to the UK, one of the things I did as High Commissioner was for me to develop...well not to develop because the links were there already...but for me to develop my personal relationship with the different Jamaican communities in Leeds, in Birmingham, in Manchester, in Bristol, in London, the various parts of London, in Edinburgh, in Glasgow, in different cities in Wales and so on. I developed these relationships and they had very strong civil organisations in these areas. They were focused on helping back home in Jamaica.

EHdK 21:48 Can you remember the names of any of these civil organisations?

ANA 21:49 I could tell you another time. But, you know, there are so many...there's a Jamaican organisation...They have different names right now, I can't tell you. But we can find that out and I can tell you who they are. So, I began to develop these relationships. I would be asked to speak at their functions. I would have to leave London, take the train, depending on where they were, overnight, and then I would also, not just overnight, but mix the visit to an area where I was meeting with civil leaders, the mayors, the Chief of Police, those people. So, I would mix up visits. Especially on my first visit.

EHdK 22:47 Essentially what you're saying is that you had a lot of diasporic outreach, right?

ANA 22:50 A lot of it. A lot of it.

EHdK 22:55 Is that typical for High Commissioners or was that more a personal choice?

ANA 22:57 No. I think that is a part of it. If you remember, I told you that Mr Patterson told me I was going to be considered the MP for the Jamaican community there. And they reached out.

EHdK 23:08 What were the kinds of things they were reaching out to you about?

ANA 23:11 Just being there to tell them about what was happening in Jamaica. To come and find out what they were doing in their inner cities.

EHdK 23:19 But did they have any specific concerns, demands or things that they were asking you to help with?



ANA 23:27 Sometimes they would have how long it take it took them to get their stay. I had to explain that this was not something that we had any control over. So, what I learned very quickly though, and I had in the back of my head, an experience where my aunt in the 1980s...In fact, I can tell you it was 1986 because I was on my way to Australia and I stopped with my aunt. And knowing I was coming she asked me to get a copy of her birth certificate because she wanted to apply for her citizenship. Now this was during Margaret Thatcher's time and at the time it was free. You could apply for your citizenship and it was free. This was in the 1980s. Then after that, they charged fifty pounds.

EHdK 24:40 I think it was five pounds at one point.

ANA 24:42 Yes, they charged different costs over the years. Until by the time I got there it was £2,000.

EHdK 24:54 It also depends if you've got dependents as well. That adds to it.

ANA 24:57 I am saying to you that I knew about this ability to become a British citizen from in the 1980s. I knew about that because of my own personal experience of getting my aunt's birth certificate.

EHdK 25:16 And were these people who had come with the British passport?

ANA 25:19 With a British-Jamaican British passport, yes. Remember they were British.

EHdK 25:29 Of course. The conversation then is around...a) that they had documents to say that they were British b) they thought they were British. So, the question there would be why did people know to go through this process? Was it because of any campaign that they'd been aware of? Were there warnings, basically? What kind of warnings?

ANA 25:52 There were warnings from then. I don't recall what it would have been in the 1980s. But in my time, in the UK, I could see it coming because of what was being said and what I had read in the news. And when I listened to people speak, I knew what the Home Office was saying. But, more importantly, they had these vans with notices on the sides of the vans going around.

EHdK 26:21 So you're talking about the hostile environment that was introduced by Theresa May.

ANA 26:25 That began to be introduced. And so let me tell you. I spoke about it every opportunity that I had. When I was speaking to the Jamaican community. When I came home to Jamaica, I would be invited by different churches to speak to say to Jamaicans who have family in the UK...you need to regularise your status.

EHdK: 27:00 This is actually fascinating because you were there in 2012. Did you see those vans with your own eyes?

ANA 27:03 Yes, I saw those vans with my own eyes. I was there when things started changing.

EHdK 27:06 Was that unexpected when you first heard about it?

ANA 27:13 I heard about it before I actually saw it.

EHdK: 27:18 What was the reaction of people when they saw those vans?

ANA: 27:20 At the beginning, people kept saying that it doesn't relate to me. They're not talking about me because we are British. We came here on a British passport, or our parents came here on a British passport, or we were born here. But they never regularised their status in the UK.

EHdK 27:44 What mechanisms would have been in place for them to do that?

ANA 27:48 You'd have had to apply to the Home Office. Everything had to go through the Home Office and the Home Office had different locations. I remember. Let me give you an example of something that started to happen. I began to hear about people renouncing their citizenship.

EHdK 28:11 Their Jamaican citizenship?

ANA 28:12 Yes, their Jamaican citizenship believing that they could now, having renounced their citizenship, go to the Home Office and apply for UK citizenship.

EHdK 28:25 So these were people of Jamaican descent, or Jamaicans who had travelled to the UK, who believed they were British to the extent that they renounced their Jamaican nationality? Effectively leaving themselves stateless.

ANA 28:45 But it couldn't happen that way. There is a section in our Constitution that speaks about renouncing a Jamaican citizen and you have to apply to the government to renounce your citizenship. And there is a process. But somehow, and I am going to say this, it was really bad but there were a group of notaries public, in particular, in Croydon because I've seen those documents that created a document which they called 'renunciation of citizenship' and they charged people like £500 to do it. And let me tell you, they used language like "herein after" and "wherein before" and put on this red seal and all of that. And let me tell you. It meant absolutely nothing, and people were duped into paying them money to produce that document.



EHdK 29:49 That's desperately sad what you're just telling me because people were not only essentially being given documents that had no value. Renouncing a citizenship that actually they couldn't do. I think the saddest thing in this is thinking that meant they would somehow then be British.

ANA 30:19 That somehow having renounced their Jamaican citizenship, then the British would accept them. So, the tone and the words that I started using in my speeches to the Jamaican communities is that this is not how it is done. You have to apply to the Home Office once you satisfy the requirements to become a citizen. You do not need to renounce your Jamaican citizenship because Jamaica allows dual citizenship. And Jamaica would never agree to a Jamaican renouncing their citizenship unless they had become the citizen of another country, of course, because then they become stateless.

EHdK 31:07 That creates a statelessness crisis which is also a whole can of worms.

ANA 31:11 Part of the challenge that I faced. What I was saying to the Jamaicans in the UK is something that they had never heard before. Something that they had never had to deal with before. Because everybody who went prior to our independence, which is 1962, went as a British citizen. Now all of those people, if they were alive at that point...very few would have still been alive. No, 1962 was not that long ago. There were some that I met who had gone on their parents' passport and they never, ever got another passport in their own name. So, there was a channel to become a citizen and there was a channel to have...what is the word again? Extended stay? Indefinite leave to remain! But it didn't make you a citizen. If you had indefinite leave to remain, and you broke the law, for example, you could be deported. But people didn't understand that, and I tried, the High Commission, we tried.

EHdK 32:35 So people were getting indefinite to remain thinking that meant they had regularised their status without realising that it didn't recognise them as a citizen? And they would have to naturalise.

ANA 32:48 And they would have to do that, yes. So, I spent a lot of time working on that.

EHdK 32:56 Who were the people that you spoke with at that time? Because part of this project is...we're very interested in understanding - I'm not sure this is the right term - but the diplomatic conversations that were happening at that time. The influence of High Commissioners and senior officials in actually saying, acknowledging that this was an issue and bringing it to those in power at Westminster, for example, or at the Home Office to say that there is a problem.

ANA 33:28 We did that. There is a Caucus of Caribbean High Commissioners and this is something that we worked on. And we had meetings with representatives from the Home Office because it was something that was happening to all the Caribbean islands. Granted,

Jamaica had the largest number of Jamaicans, by far, so we had a great interest in ensuring that that we spoke to the Home Office. But every time you had a meeting with somebody in the Home Office they would tell you there is nothing they can do because that is the policy. That is the policy.

EHdK 34:12 Did you think it was helpful...the conversations with your Caribbean colleagues?

ANA 34:16 It was helpful insofar that we all were on the same page. But we could not get the Home Office to cooperate.

EHdK 34:26 Were you aware of the extent of the scandal? I'm thinking back to 2012.

ANA 34:30 No, at the time that didn't happen.

EHdK 34:33 For example, I've spoken to other High Commissioners and they can maybe remember an example of an individual case but actually understanding or comprehending the extent of what was going on, that wasn't clear at that time.

ANA 34:46 No, it wasn't clear. Not at that time. Not up until 2016. But you see because of the experience that I've had otherwise and my legal experience and so on I knew where this was going once I heard what the policy was I knew.

EHdK 35:01 Do you mean the hostile environment policy specifically?

ANA 35:03 Yes! Once I knew that is where they were going with it, I knew that there was going to come a time when they were going to just deport people. Which is why I had been preaching. Preaching is the word? Yes. That people needed to go and get their citizenship in order.

EHdK 35:23 Why do you think people didn't do that?

ANA 35:26 Because they trusted the UK government not to do this, honestly.

EHdK 35:33 Do you think that was part of it? Do you not think perhaps people were also afraid of coming forward?

ANA 35:38 Some people were afraid of going forward because they thought, if they went in to apply, then they will be nabbed and sent home. This is by the time the buses with the signs started going around. Let me give you an example of the kinds of things that I experienced. On weekends, I would go on the bus without my driver and go to places. I remember one weekend a friend of mine took me down to...what's that place there?

Peckham! There's a TV show that talks about Peckham. That's why I remember...There's another show with Caribbean people.

EHdK 35:39 Oh, yes, Desmond's!

ANA 35:40 Yes, Desmond's! And we used to watch that in Jamaica. So, we take the bus to Peckham and I'm walking along and somebody comes out of a supermarket and bounces into me. You know that expression? Bounces into me. And she says, "Oh, excuse me. I'm so sorry!" And I stopped and I said to her, "You must be Jamaican!" Now you see what I look like. I could be anybody. I could be from anywhere and so on and she says, "Why do you ask?" And I said, "Because I'm Jamaican. And I get bounced by English people all the time. And they never, ever apologise as you did. So, I know you must be Jamaican." Then finally she said she was. So, I then said to her, "Where in Jamaica are you from?" And she said, "Oh, I'm from Saint Mary, I'm from Clarendon, I'm from Saint Catherine. I'm from all over." And I said to her, "No, you can't be from all over. You must be from somewhere...There must be one place that you are from." And before she could answer, a young man came around the corner and saw me. And he said he was so frightened to see me standing upon a sidewalk in Peckham. He said, "High Commissioner! What are you doing standing up out here on a sidewalk in Peckham?!" Listen to me. You should see the change in the lady when she realised who I was. And she says, "Oh my God. I didn't realise it was you, ma'am!" And you know, when I tell the story I talk about bow and scrape. Do you know the expression bow and scrape? It means you curtsy and scrape, you know? And she started doing that and I said, "No, no, no, no." She said, "But I should have recognised you! Me daughter love you! Can we take a picture?" And I stood there on the sidewalk and took a picture with everybody who came because by then a crowd had gathered of Jamaicans who are around saying, "Look! It's the High Commissioner! Imagine, the High Commissioner walking about in Peckham!" But part of the story I want to tell you is that she would not say where she was from until she knew who I was. So, the question you asked me about was it fear? It was fear. Because that would have been in late 2015 because I left the UK at the end of April 2016. So, yes, fear. Fear of saying, if I keep quiet and keep myself in that corner, they won't find me to send me home.

EHdK 39:55 I think that's part of the picture of the voices that were silenced in all of this. The people that didn't come forward. That aren't on any records. Fear was a big thing. So, did you have any individuals then that would come to the High Commission or maybe attend an event that you were speaking at to say that they were having any problems or issues?

ANA 40:22 It is really very funny because there are times when I was speaking at these events and I would say, "For what I'm going to say now I'm going to look up in the ceiling because I don't want to be looking at anybody who thinks that I'm speaking directly to you." And again, it is because of the fear. So, there were people who wouldn't come forward because of this fear. And I kept having to say, "If you're having a problem, come and talk to

us. We will not report you. We will not report you to the Home Office. That's not what we do. We will give you advice as to how you may proceed. But we're not going to call the Home Office and say, oh, here is one person!" No, we never did that.

EHdK 41:13 I mean, did the High Commission give advice to people?

ANA 41:18 They did.

EHdK 41:19 For example, I did hear that some High Commissions were maybe putting a slip in people's passports just to say make sure you have the correct paperwork or something.

ANA 41:26 We did that.

EHdK 41:27 Were you aware of Jamaicans coming to Jamaica and then being unable to leave again?

ANA 41:33 Yes, and being unable to go back.

EHdK 41:36 So can you give some examples?

ANA 41:38 Not individuals, no. I discovered something about somebody who I had known for a long time. He, I knew him, he had come to Jamaica from the UK and lived here [in Jamaica] for a while. And when he was ready to go back to the UK, he couldn't go back because his passport had expired while he was in Jamaica. His British passport. And they would not...in fact there is a story in the newspaper about it. Probably if you do some research, you will see some stories of the people who that happened to.

EHdK 42:26 I believe you have your own story as well at the moment.

ANA 42:32 Oh, my story now? I have had a British passport for a long time. Not a passport, sorry, a British visa for a long time. And then when I became the High Commissioner, I got a diplomatic visa. And then I was no longer the High Commissioner. But my visa still was in place. But I couldn't use it because I was no longer a diplomat. I had a plan to go to the UK before COVID hit and I had to apply for a visa and go through all the process, notwithstanding the fact that I was a Jamaican High Commissioner to the UK. And then COVID came and I didn't get to travel and my visa expired. I'm planning to go to the UK in October, and I have had to go through the entire process of applying for a visa and it has become...it's like 13 pages that you have to fill out. And you now have to...I don't recall having done this even when I had my private visa before 2020. I don't recall having to produce the title for my house, the title for my car, bank statements, all of those things. Which I had to do two weeks ago to get this visa. I haven't got the visa yet. I hope I get it, They've got my passport. I hope I get it before the week is out.



EHdK 44:15 What reaction did that provoke in you? How do you see that process? That sounds overly bureaucratic.

ANA 44:21 I must admit that I had to pay my travel agent to fill out the forms with me because I don't do forms very well and she would know what to do. Because you can't move onto another page until you complete one page and sign off on that page. And it's all electronic. Then you have to download all these documents, you have to download your passport, you have to download all these kinds of things. Then I got a very early date so I went on a Saturday morning to fill out the forms and to send them in and I got a date for the following week Tuesday which was good.

EHdK 45:07 Where were these papers being processed?

ANA 45:12 I had to go to Kingston to do the interview and the biometrics. So, I went into Kingston to do my application with my travel agent. Then I went back into Kingston to do my biometrics and a funny thing happened. I left all my papers here at home in Saint Ann. Thank God I had put my passport in my handbag and my son was ready to jump in the car to drive in to give it to me. I had this lightbulb moment when I said but my travel agent has the papers. Let me call her and have her print them again for me. And we got them printed. I got back because I had gotten there early so I had an hour in which I could do that. So I went, and I got them, and I went for the interview. I must admit that went smoothly.

EHdK 46:09 What kind of questions did they ask you at the interview?

ANA 46:13 Everything was already there so they didn't really need to ask me any questions. They need to know that I was the person in front of them. They asked me my full name and my date of birth. I don't recall anything else. I spoke to three different people, and they all asked me the same question. And then I did the fingerprints and the picture they took...must be my eyes scan. In half an hour I was out. They kept my passport so hopefully I will get it and I will get my visa because I paid quite a bit of money.

EHdK 46:54 Was there any opportunity on the phone to say that you're the former Jamaican High Commissioner?

ANA 47:01 I think there was because they asked you for a list of all of your employment. So, I think there was a place there that says that.

EHdK 47:10 So going back to the time that you were in the UK from 2012 to 2016, which really was an important moment, the Windrush Scandal kind of erupted in 2018 but it came out of the time that you were in the UK.

ANA 47:32 As I said, I could see where it was going.

EHdK 47:35 You said you could see. You linked that to the fact that you're a lawyer and you could see the bigger picture and understand the intentions of the Home Office and what they were trying to do.

ANA 47:46 I could understand the speeches that were made.

EHdK 47:49 So can you give an example of a speech? Or the language?

ANA 47:58 The language.

EHdK 47:59 There had been a notable shift, in terms of the British government and how it was talking about and addressing it.

ANA 48:05 I must say this. Brexit. The whole period of Brexit. And my listening to it and my seeing what was happening. I linked the two things together. In the way that I heard people speaking. The funniest thing. I would talk to people who were in business in the UK, and I remember one particular person whose name I won't call but he is a peer. Non-English but he is in the House of Lords, and he has a business and I remember being at an event and we sat together. He talked about coming to the UK with 50 pounds in his pocket and developed his business and so on. He said, to me, if I employ 1,100 people, only 200 are British. All the others have come to the UK. And I found that was the case for a lot of people who were employed in business, who had businesses at a certain level in the UK. Also, when I was driving around, there are certain places that you pass and you see all these men hanging around and I would ask my driver, what is this? He would say that they were here for work, to try and get a day's work. So, people who were doing work, for example on construction sites or things like that, knew where to go to get those people. Then I heard rhetoric around Brexit and I said to myself if they are saying those things about people of the same colour as them, what are they going to say about our people? I started to join the dots together and I saw it coming. But really when it hit me that this is where we were going with those vans, with the signs on the side of the vans, that confirmed in my mind that this is where we were going.

EHdK 50:50 There was a hostile environment for sure.

ANA 50:52 Yes, very very hostile. And that started from...I was there. 2012/2013/2014. You could see the link up to that.

EHdK 51:01 It built into this Brexit discourse and the campaign and everything. OK. And how did that make you feel as a woman of colour and a Jamaican?

ANA 51:13 I was pained because I kept saying to the Jamaican community that we were invited here. Do not let them forget that. We were invited here to help Britain to rebuild after

the war. There are people who drove the buses, there are people who worked on telecommunications, who worked in the power company, who worked in hospitals. I had reason to go to the hospital in the UK because I tore my meniscus and I had to have surgery. And most of the people who were working in hospital were not British. They were not. They came from somewhere else. Then they started to come to Jamaica to recruit our nurses and our teachers. And I would go and speak to people in schools. I would go and speak to students, and I would see the teachers. It's happening even more now. We are losing our teachers and nurses.

EHdK 52:29 Sorry. We have a very crazy bee in the background. You can hear the buzzing. Quite an angry bee which is adding some flavour to the conversation...We're in a beautiful place. Again, I'm interested about what was happening then with the High Commissioners who were in London. You said you could see it coming, you saw the hostile environment vans, the Go Home vans. You were very sensitive and conscious of the rhetoric that was happening in and around Brexit. What was happening? Was there any strategic or organisation beyond the Caribbean Caucus?

ANA 53:18 We started to identify lawyers who would assist persons to make their applications. But part of the challenge is that by then it had become so expensive to apply.

EHdK 53:35 Which again is part the hostile environment. Is to price people out.

ANA 53:39 Yeah, to price people out of it. But remember, this was up to 2016 and they hadn't started with the flights and all of that yet. But I think since then other things have happened. I'm not up to date on what has happened since then.

EHdK 53:59 Have you met anyone in Jamaica who was deported or anybody that maybe got caught up in the scandal and they've been vocal about it or on the media about it?

ANA 54:11 I've heard but not personally. I haven't met anybody personally. But I know people who are Jamaicans who came home and who are not interested in going back to the UK. I know communities of people because usually they go back to where their community is or they buy into a community where there are other persons like them. I know people who don't go back or people who only go back because they might have need for health issues. They choose to stay in Jamaica. But many of them are citizens but even with that it's a different place for them.

EHdK 55:03 It's a big question but how do you see the future? Where do you think we're heading in terms of Jamaican-British relations?



ANA 55:12 When Britain realises that they don't have the workers that they need to do the things they need to do.

EHdK 55:20 Well, also, as we said at the beginning of this interview, it's a very historic moment. The Queen died last week. And obviously there's the issue of reparations.

ANA 55:30 There's a new King. And there's a new Prime Minister [Elizabeth Truss]. And I don't know that those of us outside of the UK...and I'm being very careful here now...have taken the measure of the new Prime Minister. No, that [the insect]'s not going to bite you!

EHdK 56:56 It's a very angry bee!

ANA 55:58 It's not a bee, you know.

EHdK 56:59 I'm very sorry. So, you were talking about the measure of the new Prime Minister?

ANA 56:03 Yes. We haven't seen the measure of the new Prime Minister yet. Although there are people who have said things that...I can't tell you what's going to happen.

EHdK 56:19 And just finally then to wrap up the interview. What conversations, what kind of discussions have you had with your political colleagues about what has happened in the UK? Everything about the impact of the hostile environment, the reach of the Windrush scandal. Is it something that resonates really here with people on a day-to-day basis?

ANA 56:46 Probably not on a day-to-day basis. It resonates with people who have family that is affected. And when the matter is brought to the government. My political arena is out of government at this time. We're in the opposition [People's National Party] and so are not being called on to do something. Except to say that in the first week of October, the leader of the opposition [Mark Golding] is going to the UK to talk with the Jamaicans there. If I get back my passport in time, I will be with him in the UK. I will be with him in my capacity as former High Commissioner and I will get a better chance to see what is happening on the ground since I left it in 2016.

EHdK 57:46 Thank you so much for your time today and for welcoming me to your beautiful home.

ANA 57:51 Thank you.

[END OF AUDIOFILE].