

CHARLTON MCFARLANE INTERVIEW

Key:

EHdK: Dr Eve Hayes de Kalaf (Interviewer)

CMF: Charlton McFarlane (Respondent)

Date/Location:

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EHdK 00:01 I'm here in Birmingham in the UK with Charlton McFarlane who is the Chief Executive Officer of the Registrar General Department which is based in Spanish Town, Saint Catherine in Jamaica. Is that correct?

CMF 00:14 That is correct.

EHdK 00:15 Well, thank you so much for speaking with me today. We're at quite an interesting event here in Birmingham. Do you want to tell us a little bit about where we are?

CMF 00:23 Sure. We are the Legacy Centre of Excellence, Potters Lane, Birmingham. And we are here as part of a wider government initiative called the Access Jamaica initiative. Essentially, it is a programme to bring certain civil registrations and civil status services to members of the Jamaican diaspora who obviously are residing, in this particular case, in the UK. It's interesting because it is said that the size of the Jamaican diaspora is the same as the size as the Jamaican population living in country. So, while we will have, you know, moved with the times and moved with technology, and several of our services are online, what we do is still try to come at least once a year, visit the members of the diaspora and provide these services because sometimes there may be some technicalities that a customer would not be able to resolve on their own. And they require the expertise of the Registrar General, for example. It's interesting that the demographic in England, where the demand is highest is really for persons who are second and third generation Jamaicans. So obviously, those persons, they don't require a birth certificate but what they actually require many times are citizenship documents. But in order to obtain those citizenship documents they need to show evidence that their relative, i.e. their mother, their father, was born in Jamaica.

EHdK 02:24 So, for Jamaicans, Jamaican citizenship is passed down via descent. Of both parents? Either the mother or the father. So, and as you're saying, it's interesting here because a lot of the cases that you're seeing are second and third generation people who were born in the UK who may or may not have been to Jamaica who are now accessing their Jamaican documentation. And there's

something special about this event that we're seeing that was organised yesterday and today. This is kind of part of a roadshow. Where have you already been to?

CMF 03:10 Since the start of the calendar year, in March we would have been in Orlando, Florida. In July, I believe it was, we would have been to Toronto and Canada. We are here in the UK doing two cities. Birmingham and London. Interestingly, this is the only country this time around where we are doing two cities. And in November, we will be in Atlanta in the US.

EHdK 03:45 Okay. And that's strategic, right? Specifically, the idea is to organise events where there is a high Jamaican diasporic population?

CMF 03:59 It's to penetrate the most populated Jamaican communities across the diaspora. And obviously Birmingham and London is one.

EHdK 04:15 And how's it going?

CMF 04:17 So far, pretty good. Pretty good. Yesterday, we didn't have a crowd, but we had a steady turnover of individuals. Today so far, we are seeing more persons. So, we would have improved on yesterday's turnout.

EHdK 04:37 And that's to be expected, right? I just spoke with Andrew Wynter who is the CEO of PICA [Passport, Immigration and Citizenship Agency]. Once people...there's word of mouth and people start accessing the services then maybe start telling their neighbours or their friends or their contacts or their communities then more people come. So, it's been impressive already. I think the numbers he said is you've already had 800 people. So how many more do you expect?

CMF 05:16 We expect those numbers to increase by at least twofold. I'm talking for the rest of the day and for the days in London as well.

EHdK 05:27 What is the main aim of why you're here in Birmingham in England? And what's the main thing that you want to achieve?

CMF 05:32 The main thing that we want to achieve is just to provide the services that our Jamaican population living overseas need. That's the aim. As I said, these services are largely available online or through the Jamaican consulate. However, we do recognise that there are, you know, certain gaps in that because, let's face it, the Jamaican consulate are not employees of either PICA or RGD and hence may not have the specific expertise to resolve technical issues.

EHdK 06:09 At the moment, you have a representative from PICA who is based at the Jamaican High Commission in London. Is that correct? So, what would that person's day-to-day responsibilities be and how does that differ then from...?

CMF 06:23 The best person to speak to that would be Andrew as I'm not in charge of PICA so I would not want to speak on behalf of other agencies.

EHdK 06:33 Okay, but you specifically then...What is your role here today? And what would you like to see come out of this?

CMF 06:44 Excellent. So, my role as Head of the RGD...what we do is provide birth registration, death registration, marriage registration. We also provide what we call a record updating services. I don't know about in the UK but in Jamaica we have a lot of informal ways of doing business. And so, for many of us, we find that persons are registered but they go around using a name that was given to them but sometimes had no idea what their official name is, so we do provide a lot of updated services. We also provide some corrections because persons may have spelled their name a particular way when they were born or it was spelled a particular way by their parent when they were born. And as that person grew there was some variation to the spelling and then that person may have established themselves in a varied spelling of their name that's inconsistent with what is on the birth certificate.

EHdK 07:57 How does that relate to people who have the right to dual nationality, then? What kind of problems can arise with a misspelt name or an incorrect, maybe, birth date? Or some form of mistake that has been generated? How does that translate then? Does this cause problems for people in different contexts?

CMF 08:17 It has the potential to cause problems because the basis for the establishment of your identity is a birth certificate. And so, while that is not the only document, or may not even be the primary document in terms of establishing citizenship and dual nationality, it is a fundamental document. So, if it is inconsistent with the other supporting documents then the question arise, are we dealing with the same individual?

EHdK 08:47 And do you see the case in Jamaica of people who have not been registered at all? Is that commonplace?

CMF 08:53 It's present, definitely. Is it commonplace? It's hard to say. We don't have the data. What I can tell you though is based on the demand for persons who were never registered versus the other services that we provide. It's about five per cent. Right? So, on a yearly basis we process about 2,000 late registrations.

EHdK 09:26 I mean, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals Goal 16.9. The main aim of that goal is to provide legal identity for all over the coming decade. I just

wondered how much...does that come onto the agenda really? Is that part of the discussions that you hold in Jamaica? What has been the push for... I think what I'm trying to establish is how has this become a priority within Jamaica to ensure that people, not just children, but people across the board have access to their birth documentation? Is that something that's been externally influenced or internally influenced? Or both?

CMF 10:11 So, let's just establish some things. Part of the same SDG goal that you mentioned also speaks to universal birth registration. And in Jamaica currently we register upwards of 98% of births per year.

EHdK 10:28 And that in comparison to other countries is very impressive.

CMF 10:31 Exactly. And one of the practices that we employ at the Registrar General, which I believe at least regionally within the Caribbean region is hailed as our best practice, is to do bedside registration where our registration officers are at the hospitals at the birthing centres with the mothers.

EHdK 10:53 And that's a practice that's been rolled out in other countries.

CMF 10:57 I know it's a practice that's been contemplated for rollout certainly in Barbados and in Saint Lucia. Right? Has it actually been rolled out? I am not certain. But we here in Jamaica, we have been doing that from 2007. That has been the main catalyst that has propelled us to 98%. Before it was less than 90%. Still relatively high.

EHdK 11:28 Can I ask the question. What about deaths?

CMF 11:30 So, death registration, that is a more significant problem in terms of coverage. And the reason, the challenge with this is that we classify deaths in two broad areas. We have deaths that are not under police investigation, and you have deaths that are under police investigation. The deaths that are under police investigations, the RGD, the Civil Registry, we don't get those records largely until those cases have been closed which, based on the capacity of the justice system, you know, the capacity of our police force to investigate those deaths many times come in a few years later. A few years after the death occurred. So, the deaths that the police have indicated that they have no interest in, the RGD moves immediately, and we capture those deaths. So, how our official statistics are captured is to look at the number of deaths that are registered by the Registrar General and then inflated by a function, you know, mathematically of what they anticipate the police would have under investigation.

EHdK 13:01 What advantages then is this increase in registering...improving registrations basically across the board? What are the advantages that's bringing?

CMF 13:16 Okay, so, essentially in order to answer that question, we must ask ourselves, what's the benefit of having a birth certificate? And the birth certificate in Jamaica is the access card for social services. It's the access card for educational services. It's the access card for financial services. So, if you don't have a birth certificate you will be challenged to get on the government's social welfare programme.

EHdK 13:45 Part of that is also related to the fact that Jamaica doesn't have a national ID card or hasn't until very recently with the proposition of NIDS [National Identification System].

CMF 13:53 We are now looking at NIDS but even so what we must understand is that you won't get a National ID card unless you have a birth certificate.

EHdK 14:00 The birth certificate essentially has...United Nations-type rhetoric would say it unlocks rights. It leads people into being able to access a whole range of services.

CMF 14:18 And in addition to that, we must also understand how the courts have ruled on NIDS. NIDS was originally proposed to be compulsory. The court struck it down. And it's now voluntary. Time will decide what the take-up will be like.

EHdK 14:45 Where did that pushback come from? Why were people resistant to the idea of having a compulsory national ID card?

CMF 14:53 This is just my opinion, not in my official capacity. I believe there's a trust deficit with state agencies, right? I also believe that Jamaicans on a whole don't necessarily like to be monitored. So, I think those two things. And then while NIDS is common, it's a civil ID. But Jamaica already has a number of functional IDs such as your voter's ID, such as your passport, such as your driver's licence. And so, while there is a definite gap that needs to be filled, for persons who already have one of those functional IDs, they may have a bit of a challenge to see the utility of getting a fourth ID. And so, the question of utility comes into play. What will NIDS, what will this national ID unlock for me? Who is already established? Who already has a driver's licence or passport, what will it do for me? So those were the questions persons asked. However, the court obviously cannot make a ruling based on opinion. I'm not a lawyer but I am certain that the court would have looked at what's been proposed versus the Constitution and see if there is an alignment or misalignment. And the court in its wisdom made the ruling.

EHdK 16:30 Broadening it out now for somebody who is Jamaican by descent. What benefit would there be for this person to obtain a Jamaican birth certificate or, sorry, Jamaican documentation to ensure that they could access their Jamaican citizenship? They wouldn't have obtained the Jamaican birth certificate if they were

born in the UK but they would need their UK birth certificate to then submit to part of the process so that they could access...So what benefits would that be?

CMF 17:06 The benefits would essentially be...when you would have received Jamaican citizenship, you get the same benefits as the Jamaican who was born in Jamaica. So, in terms of the ease of doing business, the access to services, you can now access social services. It's easier to open businesses. You can remain in a country indefinitely. So, all of those are benefits that persons who want to be able to access when they want to access it, you know, so a benefit is not just something that you use immediately. A benefit is also seen as something that when you are ready, you can tap into it. Right? And so, I think for a lot of persons, they want to have the ability to tap into these things when they are ready.

EHdK 17:57 And here in Birmingham at this event. What has been the talking point? What has been the motivation for a lot of people to access the services that are an offer today? Why are they here? What's drawing them in?

CMF 18:12 Most of the persons that we would have processed, there are persons who want our services to go and facilitate their citizenship. Right? And two main reasons, one for the older folks, they want to retire in Jamaica.

EHdK 18:31 Would they be entitled to a pension?

CMF 18:34 If they were working in Jamaica prior to when they migrated and contributed to the National Insurance Scheme then they will be entitled to a government pension based on the arrangement in terms of their employment. Prior to their migration, then they might also be entitled to a private pension. And, of course, they would still be entitled to their pension that they would have earned here. So, yes, they are still entitled to their pension once they have been contributing to the relevant schemes. The other reason in terms of the motivation for persons coming out to access these services. From the younger folks, one, they have an interest in Jamaica, you know. They want to be able to trace their roots, they want to be able to track their heritage, where they are from, who they are related to and for some reason that appeals to some of the customers that we are seeing. And the final reason that I've seen so far is persons actually want to invest in the country. You know, so persons they have said they have designs on opening a business in Jamaica. But they don't want to open a business as a foreign national. They want to open it as a Jamaican. That brings certain benefits. That in itself will spur economic activity.

EHdK 20:13 There's definitely an economic argument for engaging with the diaspora and for encouraging people to obtain the documentation that they're entitled to...that they've always been entitled to. What are the other arguments that might...What might be some of the other motivations for people to get their documents?

CMF 20:36 You know, some persons even went as far as to express to me that...some persons believe, not so much the first and second generation...they actually want to have their Jamaican citizenship because they feel more Jamaican than British. And in feeling more Jamaican than British, they want to have that full expression of being Jamaican. Having that full expression of being Jamaican then it motivates them to come in and to sort out those documents.

EHdK 21:21 One of the reasons that Andrew Wynter gave. He very much linked some of the people reconnecting with Jamaica with Brexit, right? Is the idea that people at the moment...that Britain's not a great place to live. You know, we've got a cost-of-living crisis, we've got all sorts of political instability and issues and problems and people are thinking much further afield about where they might want to retire, the kind of life they want for their children and their grandchildren.

CMF 22:01 Essentially, it boils down back to wanting to invest, wanting to retire which I have said. The extent to which it is linked to Brexit... I answered the question in a very specific context in terms of what reasons have I heard so far in the day and a half. In all honesty, no one has really linked it...for me to say that it would perhaps be an extrapolation. And I'm not sure I necessarily would say I agree or not.

EHdK 22:30 But people are becoming more active. We can visibly see it here today. They're finding out about information. And they want to learn more about how to get access to two different types of documentation which is really fascinating in itself. You said you've already done this kind of roadshow. Is this the first time you've been in the UK doing such an event?

CMF 22:59 No, not the first time. This particular initiative may be the first time but the RGD even as a standalone agency, we visited the UK, I think, in 2019 when we had the diaspora conference. We had our services here and we would have visited the UK periodically in the past. It's definitely not the first time.

EHdK 23:27 And what about you? How did you come to work at the Registrar General Department? What interested did you have? What brought you to...?

CMF 23:36 I just needed a job! [laughing]. It's interesting because I actually studied in the UK. I studied at the University of York and then at the London School of Economics, I did some work there. Many, many years ago, you know, as you can tell. But I did health economics which is a very specialised field. And upon completion, I returned to Jamaica, and I worked in the Ministry of Health for 10 years. Having worked in the Ministry of Health for 10 years, you know, it's interesting about the government system in Jamaica. It has strict classifications and so if you are classified as a technical officer, you will almost remain at a particular salary band for the entirety of your working career. If you want to earn more, it will probably suit you to come out of the technical classification and into the management

classification. Now, when you go into the management classification, it may not support your technical case. And some persons want to still, you know, practice their technical skill set. So, for me, that was the challenge I had. And so, I opted to seek employment elsewhere outside of the Ministry and engage in private work that would still foster the development of my technical skill sets. That's when I left the Ministry. Now, when I left the Ministry, I'd had no designs on working for the Registrar General Department. It just happened that there was a vacancy, a high-level vacancy. So, I started at RGD as the Deputy CEO in 2016. And then in 2020, I assumed the position as the CEO.

EHdK 25:55 And as you were saying, the Registrar General's Department deals overwhelmingly with birth certificates, death certificates, marriage. Anything else?

CMF 26:05 The Registrar General Department has two main arms. One is the civil registration arm which you just ably explained. The other arm is what we call the Records Office arm which is also the agency that is in charge of record in deeds and wills, powers of attorney. And as you know, and I'm sure it's the same here, but for those documents to become legal documents, they must be recorded. So, we also provide that function.

EHdK 26:42 In a way, working at the Ministry of Health, the birth certificate is still a centralising document. As you were talking about the birth certificate leading to the unlocking of the rights. So, people, for example, being able to access their pension or state benefits, it also links to health services. So, there is there is some kind of logic there.

CMF 27:07 The truth is...how it is in Jamaica. Every state agency is linked to a ministry. In our case, a department. So, for many years, the Registrar General Department was linked to the Ministry of Health, and it was primarily because of vital statistics. Maternal mortality issues and stuff like that...maternal health. So, you're absolutely right. And we still have a very close relationship with the Ministry because we serve as a verifier for data, for statistics.

EHdK 27:50 And that's changed as well, right? Birth certificates used to be piles of documents that were left in government buildings. How has that differed now since you've been there because there's been some fundamental changes to the way that vital statistics have been recorded and produced and shared across ministries.

CMF 28:07 We tend to collect the vital statistics electronically. So, in some facilities, not all, we collect the data electronically. It hits our database in real time and so we are able to produce these documents much more efficiently. In addition to that, I believe we have been able to raise the awareness of the importance of having the birth certificate. So, I can tell you this much. When we started the initiative of providing a free birth certificate to parents in 2007, it started at the same time that we went to the bedside.

EHdK 28:58 So, before the parents used to have to pay?

CMF 29:02 At the time, I don't recall the cost. Now because there is still a cost to have enough to get a birth certificate, the cost ranges between 1,500 Jamaican dollars to 8,000 Jamaican dollars depending on how quickly you need it.

EHdK 29:24 Okay, we've been talking about the cost being reduced for birth certificates and also incentives being brought in for people to be able to access their documentation and get the right documents for their children. Where do you think these decisions have come from? From the mid-2000s, changes in ways that data is being stored, so it's now being stored electronically, changes in ways...or improvements really...considerable improvements in universal birth registrations and the issuance of documentation. Where do we think that's come from?

CMF 30:08 It's hard not to think that it is definitely linked to a business decision. In 1999, the RGD was classified as an executive agency following the New Zealand model where government service providers, similar to the Passport Office, were given certain levels of autonomy to make management decisions and efficiency decisions. So RGD was classified as one of such agencies. But it went deeper for the RGD in that, I believe, round about 2001 it was not only classified as the executive agency but it was classified as a type C executive agency which to this day is the only type C executive agency which means that it is completely off the books. So, type C means you don't get any financial support from the government.

EHdK 31:23 Really? So how are operations paid for?

CMF 31:27 Operations are funded by the revenue that we make. So, in essence if persons don't come in and apply for birth certificates, marriage certificates and the services, the revenue does not come in. I think that spurred us and has engendered a culture of innovation at the RGD. So, the RGD had to look to see how it can be sustainable in the business services it provides. And so, some of the things that we did was to...we began to digitise our records. We began to do bedside registrations because the more persons are registered, the more persons will apply for birth certificates.

EHdK 32:24 There really was a business argument but also an incentive then for you to register people because that was what was keeping the department going. What happens when you reach one hundred per cent and you document everybody? [laughs]. But there will always be babies and deaths.

CMF 32:42 That's the thing. There will always be deaths and marriages. And the fact of the matter is that many agencies, they require the original version of a birth certificate. There is some amount of circular demand, repetitive demand.

EHdK 32:59 So you provide copies as well?

CMF 33:01 No, we don't provide copies. If you require your birth certificate, you apply and you get an original. So that would have motivated many of the innovations. The RGD was the first...not the first but one of the first agencies to provide online services.

EHdK 33:24 Say, for example, I'm looking for my Jamaican birth certificate. Would I have to physically go to Spanish Town to access it? Or would I have to phone up? I'm thinking particularly for people who are living overseas who might need their Jamaican birth certificate for all manner of things. How easy was it or difficult was it for them to access the RGD? Let's say in the mid-2000s.

CMF 33:56 In 2006, the RGD started its online services where customers were now able to go online and apply for the birth, the death and the marriage certificates. And what we have done is to complement that service. We began to digitise our records because many times persons would require from us a particular reference number that they would not have which is what we call the birth entry number. So, our online customers they need that entry number to move forward the application and obviously many of them would not have it. And they are not in Jamaica to come down to the agency and search for it. But what we did was to enable them to search online. So, it ensured that more persons could functionally make use of the online platform. And that's what we did. And so right now, the RGD is one of the government services...government agencies with the most services online. Just since I became CEO in 2021, we actually added more services online. So, persons can apply for adoption certificates. Persons can now apply to make an amendment to their certificate.

EHdK 35:29 Let's think about the situation for people who are born in Jamaica. Who were taken on their parents' passport and who arrived in the UK. So, they would have been Jamaican by birth and/or by descent and had a document to show that. But then that document got lost so their birth certificate got lost or the parents didn't bring it on with them. And they also didn't have a separate passport because they came under the name of their parents. How would you go about looking into a case like that?

CMF 36:08 As I said, we would have digitised several of our records.

EHdK 36:14 Is that for the whole of the country?

CMF 36:17 We would have digitised about 40% of our records. It's hard to say what year it would be and the reason for that is systematically, we have digitised up to the 1950s. However, anybody, irrespective of your age, once you apply since 2000, since the year 2000, your name is in the database. Okay, so even if you were born in 1920, once you apply, subsequent to 2000, your name would have been in the database and hence your name would be available digitally for you now. It is hard to say up to one year, per se, but

systematically, because we do have a digitisation project that's ongoing, we will have digitised up to the 1950s. In addition to that, with the coming of NIDS, the government has invested in the RGD. And right now, the government is fast-tracking the full digitisation of records. So that is going on as we speak now. That priority came from the need to implement and execute a national identity programme.

EHdK 37:47 Was this seen from a national level? Or were conversations happening, for example, with CARICOM members, or perhaps further afield? Because we know there's been a push in the Eastern Caribbean, as well, some places like Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago and other places with support from the World Bank, in particular, to improve registrations and to roll out or to invest in national ID systems. Do you think that is part of a broader conversation that was taking place?

CMF 38:20 It has to be part of a broader conversation because, in all fairness, Jamaica has been talking about national identification from the 1970s. And it has been... in fact, there was a long-time unit in the Ministry of Health called a national registration unit. The task of that was to move forward on a national ID for Jamaica. But funding was an issue. And I believe the will to get it done. But in recent times, and again I assume because of global conversations, because the government would have worked closely with the Inter-American Development Bank who is funded through a loan facility. The national ID project for Jamaica so there is a push. There's also a push locally because our current prime minister [Andrew Holness], one of his policy goals is to transform Jamaica into a digital economy, right? And you really can't have a digital economy if you don't have a digital ID.

EHdK 39:42 So really there's an intimate link there between digital ID and investment in the economy and moving maybe towards a cashless society potentially?

CMF 39:55 Yes because funnily enough, I believe this year, certainly this financial year, the government would have launched its digital currency, JAM-DEX. So, all of those parts are working individually to get where they need to be. But it's part of a larger picture towards digital transformation. Even at the RGD, we are actively working on our database, the digitisation project is taking place. And all of that is leading to the end product of a digital certificate.

EHdK 40:32 So really, we're not talking about paper at all...we're talking about a birth entry number that people with this number can unlock basically access to a system that provides evidence of where they were born. And the evidence would it contain, for example, place of birth, gender as in male/female, as it's denoted on the birth certificate. What else? Date of birth. Full name. Parents' names as well?

CMF 41:12 It will provide a parent's name as well. Both parents.



EHdK 41:14 Does it say a parent's nationality on them as well? It doesn't?

CMF 41:24 Some countries have that. But, well, you know, let me say now it doesn't say it. But even as we speak, there's a lot of work taking place. Because our primary piece of legislation which is called the Registration (Births and Deaths) Act. That's now being revised comprehensively. In fact, the intention is to repeal and replace.

EHdK 41:50 Essentially, what you're saying is because you've created this mass database, anything that people tell you about, for example, my father was born in, let's say, Saint Ann, or my mother was born in Saint Thomas, and you could...people have searched for you, right? You could find the details. So, people who are coming to the event today, it's much easier for you...that could be really interesting.

CMF 42:18 This is exactly what we're doing. Just now, funnily enough a lady came, and she said, "Look, I know I have a birth certificate." I asked her name and we searched and we searched and we found it. And that's what I mean. So, what we're doing now really is almost paperless, right? We are searching our database and over ninety-five percent of persons who come, we have some digital...let me not say digital, we have some electronic copy.

EHdK 43:00 What would be the difference between electronic and digital?

CMF 43:04 Electronic can simply be just a photo image. Digital means that it's somewhere in a database. The nuance is a little different.

EHdK 43:19 Okay, so say I'm a person born to Jamaican parents in the UK. I know I've got a birth certificate somewhere. What would be the next step then to get in touch with the RGD?

CMF 43:39 Okay, so if you are born to Jamaican parents and you need to do some business with Jamaica, the easiest way to do it is to go on our website.

EHdK 43:54 You're talking about it from a business perspective. What about ordinary people? You've got your business brain(!) What about citizens? Ordinary people. People who might have varying motivations or reasons for wanting to access their Jamaican documentation? How do they do that as an individual? They might attend one of these events. They might access the High Commission. What other services are available to people in trying to...?

CMF 44:28 That's what I'm saying. For me, even outside of this event which is once in a year. And outside of going to the High Commission, the easiest way really to access the RGD is through our website. As a matter of fact, and this is true, the RGD has the most trafficked website of government agencies.

EHdK 44:56 And do you see where those requests are coming from? Are they coming from the UK?

CMF 45:02 A lot. In fact, I can't say the UK specifically but when we do our analytics, a significant percentage of visitors on the website comes from outside of Jamaica.

EHdK 45:16 And has that increased in recent years? What reasons can you give for that?

CMF 45:17 It has increased because, number one, the functionality of our website has improved. Two, the suite of services on our website has improved.

EHdK 45:40 Can people pay by credit card?

CMF 45:44 Exactly. It's complete service. In fact, just recently, as in a month ago, our minister launched a new service. Because we do what is called registry weddings. It's an affordable option to get married at the RGD. And we just launched an interface where persons can book the appointment online and pay online. And so, they just turn up for the wedding. As I say, I spoke to you earlier, persons can now apply for adoption certificates online. Persons can now do their searches online.

EHdK 46:27 How does that differ then from before the mid-2000s? Or before we got your web services up and running? Would someone physically have to travel to travel to Jamaica?

CMF 46:37 More than likely. And so, you would have one of two things. Either you would physically travel to Jamaica, or you would get someone to act as your agent in Jamaica and that would be at an additional cost.

EHdK 46:52 And what about...how does that link to voter registration?

CMF 46:59 I can't tell you the direct link but what I can tell you is by increased efficiency. I would assume that the potential for voter registration would also be positively [inaudible].

EHdK 47:16 Saying that people who want to vote in the national Jamaican elections, living overseas, are now in a much better position to influence and to vote...

CMF 47:33 There is a distinction though because a citizen by descent, I believe, would not have voted.

EHdK 47:42 And how would that be marked on their on their documentation? What distinction is there between citizens?

CMF 47:49 I believe it's somewhere denoted in your passport.

EHdK 47:54 So citizens by descent can live in Jamaica and enjoy all the benefits of other Jamaican nationals but they can't vote...?

CMF 48:03 I am not...I doubt it. But you can confirm with Andrew [Wynter] because the good thing is that before Andrew came to PICA, he worked at electoral office so he would know. He would definitely know. I was on a radio programme with him, and he said something to that effect.

EHdK 48:22 And was that...were you just on the BBC recently? I was thinking about communications for this event. What kind of outreach has there been or engagement with either the media or with the Jamaican diaspora in the UK? What efforts have people gone to to reach out and to let people know that this is happening today?

CMG 48:47 So I know that we had two townhall meetings organised by the local diaspora. One in Birmingham, one in London. I recorded something on YouTube as well. And just last night, we had a radio interview. I don't recall the name of the station, though. And we had to have one today again. The interview was not a public-facing interview. It was really promotional to tell people that we are here. To let them know what services they can come in and access. To let them know what the cost is, to let them know the time. That was really promotional. It was not a technical interview.

EHdK 49:38 Because we've got about 10 minutes of the interview left, I wondered if you could tell me what you know about the Windrush scandal. Whether that was something that has come up basically in meetings that you've had. If it's been anything that's been talked about or problematised in your workspace at all or the day-to-day kind of work of your departments. That's either something completely separate, or do you see any links?

CMG 50:15 Yes, there are some links. I wouldn't say though that it came front and centre in our focus. But there are some links. From what I understand, that the Windrush exist in, it included the possibility of some of these persons being forcibly returned to Jamaica or being forcibly sent to Jamaica. You can correct me if I'm wrong but maybe persons who have Jamaican heritage could be sent to Jamaica if an offence is linked to that person. That's my understanding,

EHdK 51:00 I think we're talking about separate...different issues. The Windrush generation were born between a specific time period in Jamaica but were seen as British citizens for all rights and purposes. They had the right to abode in the UK. But then, during the years of the scandal, found that they were being challenged on their right to remain in the UK. They were being asked to provide documentation that they



didn't effectively have. So some people, for example, might have been asked to produce a passport or a birth certificate and they weren't able to provide this specifically because they didn't have them. And I think what's interesting about what we're seeing in Birmingham is that there are people who would have been born within that time period and would have been part of a group of people who are now seeing the advantages for their children, for themselves and their children and their grandchildren, to acquire as much documentation as possible. So, essentially, we're seeing a change of people who may have spent many years either without documents or thinking that their documents were sufficient enough to mean that they were secure in saying in the UK. And that wasn't the case even though it was a mistake. And it was an awful mistake that was committed in how they were treated. But now we're seeing that lots of people connected to that that issue are also now applying for their Jamaican documentation. So, my question to you would be, why? What change do you think we have seen from going from this situation of maybe many people being without documents to trying to obtain documents?

CMG 53:09 Well, the fact of the matter is that generation is a particular generation. And I'm not certain the extent to which those issues are perpetuated in subsequent generations, especially for populations from Jamaica. What I can say is that even with this outreach event today and yesterday in Birmingham, a number of older persons would come with what we refer to as a Certificate of Registration which for them, they believe that was their birth certificate. It never was. And so, even if they were to produce that to the authorities here in Britain, it would not suffice.

EHdK 54:06 And the Certificate of Registration is a Jamaican document, right? Where would they have got that document from?

CMG 54:14 We still issue that document today. It is essentially a receipt to say that your birth has been registered. Many persons confused, well, not now but back in the day, many persons confused that document with what was actually the birth certificate. They are two separate documents. They always thought they had a birth certificate but they didn't and so when they were public pressed to produce something they would produce that only to be told that this is not the document that you need. You need your birth certificate. So, we would have seen an increase in the demand for such type of service.

EHdK 55:03 At the time, a lot of misinformation. A lack of clarity over what people should be producing or not. Maybe miscommunication as well. I'm not talking specifically about the Jamaican side of things but definitely in Britain from the Home Office, from the UK government. The people weren't always aware. Some were but sometimes people weren't aware of what they had to do to essentially as the British government would call it, regularise their status.

CMG 55:40 But again, and I'll be honest with you, I don't know. I can't speak to the British system. I've never worked in it. But I have seen, to my certain knowledge, persons presented with a British passport with that document. Yesterday, I remember these two individuals. The document, the ID that they gave me, was a British passport. But they didn't have a Jamaican birth certificate. What they had was that same document. So, the question is, how did they get it? Was there some inconsistency somewhere?

EHdK 56:15 You're saying there's something that doesn't explain how you're able to hold both documents? How do you go about resolving those?

CMG 56:26 Well, we can only resolve the mistakes on our side. And certainly, what we do is to educate persons to let them know that this is not the official document. This document really actually is just a receipt to say the birth exists somewhere. And now we really must go and create the birth certificate for it. So that's what we have been doing. That's what we would have, you know, tried. I mean, because we do have our own townhall meetings, we do have our own public education campaigns and stuff like that. We would have been to the UK several times as I have said.

EHdK 57:06 My question now, as we wrap up the interview, where to next, then? What's the next plan of action? If this is a successful trip and you've already registered several hundred people. What's the next plan?

CMG 57:23 Oh, well, certainly for us, who deal with birth certificates and stuff. I think, for us, we need to sensitise more the importance, the critical importance of this. The products and services that we offer, right? So, for example, something that there has been no demand for certainly is a product that we call a No Impediment Certificate. Bigamy is illegal in Jamaica. And so, you have persons who, they go overseas and for whatever reasons, they may not be divorced. It's important to do so if you intend even to get married in the UK to a Jamaican, it's important to ask the Registrar General to provide a Certificate of No Impediment, right? Just to ensure that you are not marrying someone who is married. Or who has been married and may not be divorced, you know? So, I mean to me, that is something that is critical but I'm not sure persons are even fully aware that they can access these services. So, for me, my next steps certainly as CEO would be to go on extensive public education because when we come and, after a while let's face it, we talk about market saturation, right? If we continue to do what we are doing today, maybe increase the frequency of it and stuff, there will come a point where we would have pretty much exhausted the market for it to be really meaningful. But, saturating the market in one area does not mean that persons are capitalising on the range of services that we offer because they may not understand or appreciate the importance of those other services.

EHdK 59:25 Which is why outreach services such as the one that you're doing today is so essential for people to understand their rights, what they can access and how to go about overcoming any issues or problems that they might have encountered.

Thank you so much. Is there anything else you want to add before we wrap up the interview?

CMG 59:45 Not really. The civil registry in Jamaica has come a long way. From paper-based to now a hybrid between papers and we're on the cusp of transition. We will ensure that as we transition, we transition and we maintain high levels of integrity for our records because that's the most important thing that persons can continue to choose the credibility of our records and that's what we intend to do.

EHdK 1:00:20 Thank you so much.

CMG 1:00:21 You're welcome.

[END OF AUDIOFILE].