

KEVIN ISSAC INTERVIEW

Key:

EHdK: Dr Eve Hayes de Kalaf (Interviewer)

KI: His Excellency Dr Kevin M. Isaac (Respondent)

Date/Location:

12th July 2022. High Commission for Saint Kitts & Nevis, London, United Kingdom.

EHdK 00:01 I'm here with Kevin Isaac who is the current High Commissioner of Saint Kitts and Nevis to the UK. He has been in his post since 2011. Thank you so much for agreeing to this interview today. Firstly, I wondered if you could share a bit of background about Saint Kitts and Nevis for the people who will be listening to this interview?

KI 00:29 Saint Kitts and Nevis is a twin island Federation. We gained independence from Britain in 1983. Whenever I talk about Saint Kitts and Nevis, I want people to think of it as a place that embraces you if you ever go and visit. For me, each time I go back to Saint Kitts, it's a homecoming. It's almost as if the island reaches up to the plane as you're flying in and says, "Welcome home". This is the impression that I have of Saint Kitts and Nevis. But I think, more importantly, Saint Kitts and Nevis is the smallest country in the Western Hemisphere. But it's a country that has progressively sought to punch above its weight ensuring that our involvement in the world is not determined by our geography and that our ambitions are not subject to the size of the island. And so, we engage at an international level in many areas. As a matter of fact, just recently Saint Kitts and Nevis was Chair of the Board of the Commonwealth. And this is because of our continued involvement within the Commonwealth family. The fact that we recognise the value of the Commonwealth and the role that we can play within the Commonwealth. And so, we think this enables us to be a monoagricultural economy. Sugarcane was abandoned in 2005 because it was no longer cost effective or productive and we moved into tourism. But we also became the pioneers prior to that of the economic migration programme, economic citizenship. And that has been an important factor in promoting socioeconomic development in Saint Kitts and Nevis. We also have invested heavily in tourism. And unfortunately, COVID gave a black eye to Saint Kitts and Nevis in that regard because we had a thriving cruise ship industry and I think we went from about 1.3 million passenger visits in 2019 to virtually nothing. And so that has had a knock-on effect. But Saint Kitts and Nevis continues to engage. We've sought to ensure that we continue to be active at the regional, international levels so that you know that Saint Kitts and Nevis - and I always say to colleagues - might wear a fedora but we don't come cap in hand. We come seeking to engender partnership and to contribute to whatever is happening around us.

EHdK 03:36 Thank you. Tell me about your role specifically and your career progression. How did you come to be High Commissioner?



KI 03:46 No, this is a secret but I think I became High Commissioner by dint of some skulduggery in the sense that I sort of convinced Saint Kitts to have faith in me to do this. In the sense that I was perhaps the first career diplomat to be appointed at this level, Until I arrived, most of all diplomats here in the UK who were High Commissioners, ambassadors were political appointees. I came through the through the system having worked in Basseterre then serving Saint Kitts and Nevis at the United Nations as Deputy Permanent Representative and Chargé [d'Affaires] while the Ambassador was non-resident. I then moved to Washington DC where I worked also for one year as Chargé. Then I was Deputy Chief of Mission, and I took leave from Saint Kitts and Nevis and worked with the international organisation I'm sure you're familiar with the Organization of American States [OAS]. After five years they contacted me and said, you know, we would like you to come back.

EHdK 05:02 And you worked in Haiti at that time, is that right?

KI 05:05 I did some...I was supporting some of the programmes that we were doing in Haiti because during the time that I was at the OAS I was in the Cabinet of the Assistant Secretary General, but I was also coordinator for all of the country offices and we had 28 country offices around the Americas and the Caribbean. And so, I did go into Haiti on occasion supporting the efforts of the Assistant Secretary General but also managing the office that we had in...what's it called?

EHdK 05:36 Port-au-Prince.

KI 05:38 In Port-au-Prince. Voilà.

EHdK 05:39 Okay, fantastic. So, you came to work in the UK as the High Commissioner in 2011. And, as I understand it, you first raised questions around issues of access to documentation in 2014. Can you tell me what happened between 2011 and 2014? What issues were you seeing or becoming aware of?

KI 06:07 Actually, it was fortuitous. At the time, the UK hadn't been...there was a lot of discussion about reducing legal aid or access to legal aid. And at the time, I had a new assistant who was a lawyer by training and who used to do some work at a law centre somewhere in east London. And one day, we were having a discussion and she drew to my attention that once legal aid disappears, it would disproportionately affect people from the Caribbean, people from Africa and, of course, some South Asians. And I said, "Hmm, that's interesting. Give me some more information on that." And then I remember going off to Thailand on vacation and her submitting to me via WhatsApp a long explanation as to some of the implications and so forth. And then I thought... I came back and I shared that information with some of my colleagues. And then we came back and had discussions on it. And I remember reaching out to the then High Commissioner of Jamaica saying, you

know, having regard for the fact that most of the people who would most likely be affected would be from the larger countries which have larger populations here in the UK. We needed to address our minds to this. And so we, between 2012 I would say and 2014, we had a number of discussions.

EHdK 07:40 Who specifically had those discussions?

KI 07:42 The CARICOM Caucus. Because we meet on a monthly basis, the group of High Commissioners here. And so, we tried to tease out the best approach to deal with this. And during that time, we discovered that a number of our nationals were beginning to have problems. And they were reporting it. So, we then...I remember we had a meeting at the Foreign Office. And that was raised. I asked at the time, I think, I was Chair of the Board. No, no, sorry, Chair of the Caucus. And I asked the High Commissioner of Jamaica [Aloun Ndombet-Assamba] if she would raise it at the meeting. She raised it and then we were told by the Foreign Office that we needed empirical data.

EHdK 08:31 Getting back to that. You said there were a number of nationals who were reporting problems. Were they coming to the High Commission themselves? Or were you hearing of this from other people?

KI 08:44 No, from what I understood from some of the High Commissioners there were in-person reports. But you also had a number of people who were calling. And I think the majority of the people were calling because they were afraid of enforcement action. They were afraid that if they came out of the shadows...Some people, bless their hearts, they had certain misgivings and they would think, okay, you know, do I trust that person at the High Commission? How much information can I get? And if they're going to report the cases, how much information they going to divulge? And because we have these quarterly meetings with the Foreign Office, we kept going back on these points saying, "Listen, people are afraid of enforcement action. They are hesitant to give their details to us because they don't know what would happen if their contact coordinates end up in the hands of some enforcement officer at the Home Office. And so, we have to find a way that we can address it." Again, we are told there is a need for empirical data. You can't take action if you don't know who these persons are and how many persons are having these considerations.

EHdK 09:59 Did you have any involvement with the Home Office or conversations with them at this time?

KI 10:06 Because our, at that time, we always...our main point of contact was the Foreign Office. We would engage with the Foreign Office and we would say okay, fine. We will take this matter to the Home Office but we need to have the data so that we can then share it with the Home Office. And so, we will then...we were asking them to have information or have access to the persons from the Home Office, so you don't look like you're bypassing the Foreign Office. But then we really didn't get much traction until when after the UK-

Caribbean Forum Meeting in Freetown, Bahamas [Ninth UK-Caribbean Ministerial Forum] when, to our surprise...because at the time Guy [Hewitt] and I had been invited as part of our delegation to that meeting. And I remember being asked by my Foreign Minister at the time, Mark Brantley, and Guy being asked by his minister, who headed the delegation to the Bahamas. I think he's [name inaudible] if we could kindly, during the meeting of the three foreign ministers meeting, if we could brief them on the considerations and concerns that we were dealing with in the UK. And I remember at that time we were both maybe telepathically aligned because we were brutally frank in our discussion of some of the concerns that we were having. And then ministers were very unhappy with what they had heard and then decided to have the frank discussion with the then Foreign Secretary who I think...he became Chancellor years later on....remind me of his name. He became Chancellor under Theresa May [Philip Hammond]. The name slips me but it will come. But he was Foreign Secretary at the time and then he agreed during the meeting that these considerations would be taken forward. We were going to institutionalise the quarterly meetings so that when we get back to London the minister responsible for Caribbean Affairs would then continue to meet with us and have us. And I think we had a good partner in Lord Ahmed who still has the brief coming up but no longer covers the Caribbean. And he was really engaged in working with us to try and move this thing forward. Philip Hammond. Yes, he was Foreign Secretary in 2016.

EHdK 12:53 What was the major point of contention? What was the major complaint that you were bringing in these meetings? Was it that people were having difficulty in getting their documents [or] was it about people being detained or deported? Were you aware of that happening?

KI 13:13 I think at that time we had heard of a few cases of people being detained. We had heard of cases of people being told you have to leave because of improper documents and so on and so forth. I began to rationalise what I thought might have been the thing because I know if you ask me to fill in a form which says citizenship at birth...because I was born before 1973, my citizenship is British. And so many of these people who had migrated here in their minds, they came with a British passport. They had that purple or black or whatever passport...And so for them, even though the UK had entered into the EU arrangement and had changed the immigration laws retroactively for them, they were British. There was no need for them to present to the Home Office because they had a British passport saying that they were British. And so, as they were then trying to move through the system they started having difficulties. I remember one gentleman presented here. And he was seeking to get a job as a prison warden or something. He had worked prior and then I think he tried to travel. And then when he came back, he had some difficulties. And then he was told that he needed to provide proof of his British citizenship and he came to us and said he would like to have a new passport because he's always thinking his old British passport is expired. And so, it started me thinking now if we were to give him a new passport, he would have nothing to show that he had been here for 40 years. And for him to get his job back, he needed to show...because if you lose your passport, you then have to file an affidavit. You

submit all that information. So, they then said to him they can't provide him with that. He has to go to the country where he was born. But then I realised, reflecting on what we were going through, if I were to issue him a passport, I would be issuing him a passport to be deported from the UK where he had lived for well over 30 years.

EHdK 15:28 Did you issue the passport?

KI 15:31 I asked that he consider the implications of him applying for and succeeding in getting a Saint Kitts and Nevis passport. And to consider the benefit of making sure that his presence here is recognised by getting all the necessary documentation and so forth. And then a lot more of those cases started coming forth. And the more we sat down as a group, as a Caucus, the more we began to hear from the complaints that were coming from people being detained.

EHdK 16:08 Can you remember any stories from other parts of the Caribbean from your colleagues?

KI 16:13 Oh, yes, I remember cases from Jamaica. Most of the cases that we were hearing were from Jamaica. I heard of cases from Trinidad. I think Saint Lucia had mentioned a few cases.

EHdK 16:27 In reality, in Saint Kitts the numbers were very low compared to Jamaica. But Barbados, as well, which is a relatively small island, again...

KI: 16:39 ...had a number of cases because a lot of their citizens in the 1950s, 1960s had migrated here [to the UK]. In the case of Saint Kitts and Nevis, I think we had a lot of persons. But as time progressed, I realised...It's not that we didn't have a lot of cases. But the people were unwilling to come forward because of the fear of enforcement action.

EHdK 17:06 Yes and in that sense sometimes statistical data can be misleading because - and we'll talk about the Compensation Scheme a little later - the idea that people would automatically come forward and try and sort their situation is sometimes problematic because people were afraid to basically expose themselves to the authorities.

KI 17:34 It was very problematic and I think [sighs]...I can't assume that the Home Office would have been so insensitive to that. So, I began thinking that it was a constructive effort to get at the low hanging fruit. Because you said to people who believe that they are here legally, that you're not. But you have to prove to us that you have the right to be here knowing that everything is stacked against the individual. So, it's...I remember, in a meeting, I said a lot of this reminds me of a series that I watched, 'Yes, Prime Minister', where I think Humphrey spoke about inverse relevance. When you want to do nothing about something, you talk a lot about it. And so there was a lot of talk but there was no real action to remedy

the situation or to create an environment where people can really feel comfortable that their situation is going to be appropriately addressed.

EHdK 18:47 Going back to the legal aid point that you made at the beginning. What impact do you think that was having on people from the Caribbean specifically as well as efforts to reduce access to legal aid?

KI 19:01 I think...significant because a number of people relied on that. And you mentioned briefly...and we'll talk about later the compensation...a lot of these individuals needed that assistance to help them even filling out forms and dealing with some of the issues that they have in their home countries. And so, by making it available - because legal fees can be exorbitant - by giving them that legal shoulder to lean on, you're allowing them a leg up within the system. When you remove that you're saying to them whatever problem you find yourselves in then you're on your own.

EHdK 19:44 In addition to that, it's the idea around challenging people who understand and believe that they are British citizens and challenging them to prove it as well. And treating them within that system as if they are non-belongers.

KI 20:02 Precisely. You are treating them as if they're illegals. And I think there was also that sense some of the people felt that sense of shame. Because you see some of these folks from the UK, from the Caribbean, who have lived in the UK, they go home. And they have that sense of pride. They are coming from home only to be told by the mother country, they're coming home home. That you're not one of us, you don't belong. A lot of people didn't want to deal with that. The trauma that it caused and the fact that, you know, since you're in nowhere land and it has implications for your children because if you're illegal, if you're deemed to have been here illegally, what is the status for your children? You know, so people were felt forced to stay in the shadows.

EHdK 20:59 The CARICOM Caucus, the monthly meetings were taking place between 2012 and 2014. And you were beginning to really identify a major problem and then highlight that to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. When do you think the momentum began to really build? We know that in 2018 around the CHOGM [Commonwealth Heads of Government] meeting this was when the scandal really became front page news. And really, there was a spark that kind of erupted that kind of exploded and this became something that was not just being talked about or whispered about but was actually very widespread and very well-known. Can you tell me more about the build-up to the events around CHOGM? What was happening between that four-year period between 2014 and 2018?

KI 22:01 I think the momentum really picked up in 2016 after that meeting in Freetown in the Bahamas because then the ministers charged us with moving this forward. They shared with their UK counterparts that is a priority and that it needed to be addressed. And so, I

think we came back to London armed with the desire to make this thing more visible and to get action on it. And I think it was also helped by the fact that...it must have been The Guardian that got it first started. The newspapers were recognising that this is a problem and then bringing it into people's living rooms. It was saying to the UK, there is a problem here and we need to focus on it. And then these people who began to tell their stories were people who have actually now run foul of the system. And so, there was no need for them to stay in the shadows because the system is already telling them, you're not one of us. You're either going to be deported or you're going to lose your home. You're going to lose your job. You're losing benefits. You have to prove that your salary is not from criminal gains. And all these kinds of things. And so, once these stories started getting the attention that they deserved, it then added some momentum to the work of the Caucus. At least it's there and we need to move this forward. We need to push.

EHdK 23:36 It was personal testimonies really.

KI 23:39 Exactly. I think that testimonies really helped. We were in this little tussle with the Foreign Office. Hopefully, they were speaking to the Home Office. We don't know but they said that they were. To determine, how do we address it without surrendering people's details? But then you have people who are suffering the indignity of being called illegals or the indignity of having to go and sleep on somebody's couch, losing your car, losing your job and stuff in the public square. And so, we realised we needed to move forward on this faster.

EHdK 24:21 What role do you think Brexit played? Do you think there is a parallel that could be drawn with...?

KI 24:29 I think to some extent, yes. Brexit played a role because we started looking at the offers being made to Europeans. When Brexit happened, you have two years to regularise and there was an abundance of information. They had all these schemes that the Europeans can benefit from. If you have settled status, you could have this, you have that. Then we said...but these are people who have been invited here in the 1940s and 1950s who have shed blood, sweat and tears to help the UK reemerge from the ashes of war. Have spent 40 years, 50 years of their lives and you're telling them they don't belong because they didn't regularise at a time when they didn't think they needed to be regularised, so therefore get out? And so, Brexit gave us a window into the unfairness that the system was meeting out to folks who had come here and sacrificed and to those people who perhaps maybe in their minds are kith and kin and so therefore they have right to a privileged access that these guys didn't have. And that I think, in a sense, made us even more energised and say, "This is a wrong. It needs to be righted."

EHdK 25:57 And what was happening in the Caribbean at the time? Were there conversations? I know that you mentioned you had, for example, the meeting in the

Bahamas. Was this something that resonated with the news stories, for example, being picked up on by local media? Or was this seen as very much a UK issue?

KI 26:18 I think you had you had a sort of a sedate reaction to what was going on. The real impetus for Caribbean media to pay attention in a more focused, targeted way and speak to it came after we had a press conference downstairs here. When you had Channel 4, BBC, RT, all the interviews.

EHdK 26:44 That press conference was in 2018? Was that in April?

KI 26:49 I think it was earlier, earlier than April. Somewhere between 25th March because CHOGM was taking place the next month.

EHdK 27:04 And that was strategic. I'm interested in this strategy of a press conference and the timing around that. Tell me more about who the driving force behind that was. And why were these decisions made and how?

KI 27:25 The decision was made within the Caucus that we needed to use....

EHdK 27:34 Can I ask who specifically though? Because I spoke to Guy [Hewitt] recently.

KI 27:40 Guy Hewitt was there for Barbados. Myself, Saint Kitts and Nevis. Saint Lucia, you had Guy Mayers. For Antigua and Barbuda, you had Karen-Mae. For Bahamas, you had Ellison Greenslade. For Belize, Perdomo was the former High Commissioner. I think for Jamaica, you had Ambassador George Seth Ramocan. For Trinidad and Tobago, you had Orville London. Who am I missing? In Grenada, you had...who was Grenada? I think it would have been..... No, I think they came in later. So, Grenada, slips me. Saint Vincent and Grenadines, you'd have had Cenio Lewis. But not everybody... we can say it was a collective decision. But then I remember. I was the Chair of the Board. And I keep saying board because it's fresh in my mind. That's gone from the Commonwealth. I was Chair of the Caucus at the time. And so, we had determined who will do certain things. And I remember, Guy Hewitt having been at the table in the Bahamas, having heard from the ministers and sensed what was going on. Seeing what was happening. I think he almost accepted that he had a personal responsibility to work and move these things forward. And I think he speaks in an article that he did about sort of guerrilla tactics that he....

EHdK 29:33 Guerilla diplomacy.

KI 29:35 Guerilla diplomacy, yes. And I think there were some within the group who felt a sense...there was some reticence. A sense that we had to do it in a much more sedate way. There was disagreement back and forth. Do we move forward without alerting Lord Ahmed to what we were doing because he was our interlocutor on the other side? Do we say to

them, we're going to do this. Do we seek permission, or do we take hold of this process, which is our process, and move it forward? And I think what prevailed was that we decided to move forward in the way that we did. And so on. And I know, we tasked Guy with reaching out to the Runnymede Foundation [Runnymede Trust] and some other areas that he identified as potential partners. Reach out to them and so forth and see what they're doing. See how they can be brought on board.

EHdK 30:42 I think you also spoke to Herman Ouseley, the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants. And you also had Tottenham Labour MP David Lammy. So talk to me a little bit about David Lammy.

KI: 30:59 We had charged Guy with doing that outreach and so forth. I do recall when I think David raised the issue in the Houses of Parliament. It was sort of like a collective movement forward. Get the individuals who had access or to certain levers so that you can raise the awareness. And you ask about the Commonwealth. I think the decision, despite a tortured process to getting there was that, listen, at the time of CHOGM, you're going to have that prying eye of the camera focused here. We need to take advantage of that to draw attention to a major injustice and to see how we can get some sort of attention and make it right.

EHdK 32:02 And what was the reaction before then? Because you said, for example, that you had meetings, that you tried to speak to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, that you were trying to raise... What were the official reactions? Was it that this was a mistake? Was it that it wasn't happening at all? That they wanted to see, as you said, more empirical evidence?

KI 32:20 I think there was this focus on this whole notion of empirical evidence. I think the Foreign Office, Home Office, didn't think anything was happening that was out of the ordinary. And the more engaged with the process, the more information became available. And you realise there is almost a systemic commitment to frustrating the process.

EHdK 32:49 But not just to frustrate the process but to frustrate the individual as well.

KI 32:54 Exactly. And to frustrate the individual as well. To make the experience as difficult as possible. And remember, there was that government commitment to reducing net migration. And so, I think the focus was on the low hanging fruits.

EHdK 33:13 So would you say that was a fundamental component of the hostile environment strategy?

KI 33:19 I think so. I really began to think so. These are the low hanging fruits.

EHdK 33:25 We talked about that in another interview. We talked about the diplomatic angle to that because obviously when you want to maintain relationships with places

like China or major economies then that brings in issues around immigration. I think also what we're learning with this project is how small island developing states, as you said, were seen as low hanging fruit because potentially the political and economic interests just weren't as strong.

KI: 34:03 The political, economic and social interest. And so, for instance, people coming here to work from the EU were people coming at a different stage in their socioeconomic development. They're working with banks. They're working at higher levels. And perhaps the economic footprint on British society is greater. People coming out of the Caribbean in the 1940s and 1950s were many people who were the product of a very flawed socioeconomic system. And so, some of them came here. They were driving trains. They were on buses. They endured racism and all sorts of indecencies and so they're seen differently. It was easier to go after that group. Especially because, as it was discovered later, all evidence of their having been here legally had been put in some dungeon.

EHdK 35:09 But also because they were elderly.

KI 35:10 And they were elderly and so less likely to put up a fuss. And so if you can target those and get as many of them out as possible then you can say that your net migration is decreased. I think there was a sort of a political system predicated on socially oppressed people and moving them out so that it looks good on paper.

EHdK 35:38 Tell me about the press conference that was held here at the High Commission. Who was present on that day and what reaction did you get from the media?

KI 35:51 I think then it was all of the High Commissioners. Members of the Caucus. I think at the head table we had almost all of the High Commissioners. I think a couple of High Commissioners who were still sitting waiting to get authorisation from the capitals sat in the audience. But we had a number of Caribbean nationals. You had some of the people who had been victims of the hostile environment. I remember one gentleman standing there who said that he had voted twice. And then he went to the Home Office to get his passport renewed so he could travel. I think he was going to Grenada. Only to be told that his passport and he would be separated because there was something in the file which had a last name or second name which was different from...so, you know, he was telling his story. So, you had a number of people who had really suffered. Lost jobs or who were now destitute telling their story. But I think most importantly is that the media turned up. And so, the media was beaming this and then afterwards I remember being asked by about four different networks for an interview and I then pulled off three interviews to three of my colleagues. And then I did one, I think, it was with ITV. And so, when people started hearing it, I think a lot of people were surprised and saddened that this is not the Britain that they think they knew. And to think that people who had contributed and sacrificed so much were being treated so shabbily and inhumanely, I think resonated with people. And I remember -

I think it was the BBC who said to me, asked me, because I was chairing the meeting. We had been given to understand that the Caribbean leaders requested a meeting with Theresa May and it had been denied. And my response was that we did request a meeting but we had been told that her diary was full. He asked the question again and I repeated the same thing. And I think maybe a day later, a meeting had been hastily scheduled. I think they weren't taking it seriously.

EHdK 38:14 Who is they specifically? Across government?

KI 38:17 I think across government. You didn't get the sense that there was any real commitment to seeing this as a real problem.

EHdK 38:24 It's a bit like see no evil, hear no evil.

KI 38:27 Exactly. But then once the camera starts beaming it everybody suddenly starts thinking, "Hey, okay, this is going go pear-shaped. Let's appear to do something."

EHdK 38:38 What were the conversations around Theresa May at the time of CHOGM? For example, the fact that this wasn't taken as a priority. That she refused to...the meetings that were requested didn't take place?

KI 38:52 She engaged with the prime ministers, and I didn't attend that meeting. I think Guy did. Although he was present it is a meeting of Heads of Government so he really didn't have any standing there. But I think there was discomfort that given the seriousness, given the past practice that when you have CHOGMs you've had several cases where Caribbean leaders would meet with the British Prime Minister. The apparent reluctance to engage just fell flat.

EHdK 39:25 Am I right in understanding that you met with Amber Rudd as well?

KI 39:29 Yes, I recall Guy and I had...I think it might have been two visits at the Home Office. And, you know, what we sought to get them to understand is, just look at the 1948 Immigration Act. Based on that. And I even told him the same experience I shared with you about my having a passport which says I was British at birth. So, many of the people feel that they are British and some need to regularise. So, you needed to be mindful of that and to have a system just as they were setting up something so wonderful for Europeans. Why not do something for people who have lived here all their lives?

EHdK 40:13 What was her reaction?

KI 40:16 I think [laughs]...

EHdK: 40:19 I do know that she resigned ten days later.

KI 40:22 I left that meeting. And forget that I said this after the meeting, but I got the sense that she wasn't being served well by her team. I got the sense that there were a lot of gaps in her appreciation of the seriousness of the situation and how these people will be treated.

EHdK 40:51 In a way it was up to civil society. It was up to the High Commissioners. It was up to the survivors themselves to provide this empirical data that you are talking about. To say, "Listen. This is an issue."

KI 41:05 It was there. But it was, as they said, where it was stored wasn't economically sustainable to try and access the information. So, you're saying to me, I have to really prove a negative even though you have the information which makes it unnecessary for me to try and prove the negative.

EHdK 41:27 Somewhat Kafkaesque then.

KI 41:29. Exactly. And so, the system was structured in such a way that they were automatic police as opposed to being civil servants seeking to assist people in regularising.

EHdK 41:47 Essentially, the hostile environment was doing its job.

KI 41:51 Yes, it was. It was so hostile that people didn't feel that by going into this they could actually come out and say, "Oh, thank God I went in." They're going to say, "We're going to go in and we're going to come out with handcuffs."

EHdK 42:05 Okay. So that brings me on to the Wendy Williams report and the Compensation Scheme and some of the some of the impact of what happened after this all erupted. What was your role post 2018?

KI 42:25 I think engaging with Martin [Forde] QC...What was his first name? Who had been tasked with preparing the compensation team, He had a number of meetings with us. I think Martin is a man of integrity who has a tremendous amount of experience and wanted to do something right by the persons who had been had been left out to dry. But call me Doubting Thomas. I just never felt that the system was really being re-engineered to benefit the individuals.

EHdK 43:11 Do you think that the system was being engineered at all? Do you think it was being addressed?

KI 43:17 Not structurally. I think, going back to my 'Yes, Prime Minister' series. It's to appear to do a lot by doing as little as possible. I remember, I used to work with this lady who made doing nothing look absolutely busy! And so, for me, to them, what they were doing, is about

appearing to do all the right press coverage, making it look as though we're doing everything to help this.

EHdK 43:44 I mean, the cynic in me would say their diversity and inclusion efforts... if this is a structurally racist system that is clearly being hostile and exclusionary and treating people of colour in this way, then the problem is systemic. So, anything that's kind of added on is just purely cosmetic.

KI 44:13 Cosmetic. And that is what I feel. And then, you know, as we started interrogating the process, you have lawyers or attorneys who are contacting us individuals saying, you know, for some of these elderly folks, you need a degree to fill in these forms. And it was so onerous on some of these people that many of them then had to come back to the High Commission and we then started looking at do we get a lawyer in-house? Do we engage with a lawyer to do the applications on these people's behalf? And so, it just seemed more cosmetic than substantive.

EHdK 44:51 And also, hearing reports of predatory lawyers as well. Knowing that there's money from the Compensation Scheme and that a claim asking for however high a percentage of that money for them.

KI: 45:07 We were trying to get them to build into a sort of a legal aid to help some of these folks. And I remember one of the things that they introduced is that anybody who had a criminal record couldn't benefit from the scheme. And what we were saying is, whether the person was here legally or not is not contingent on their having committed a crime 20 years after being here legally.

EHdK 45:35 It could be somebody who's had a very basic misdemeanour. They might have been arrested at a protest.

KI 45:48 Exactly. And to retroactively punish them on the basis of something that they did 40 years later I think was grossly unfair. I remember once we had a meeting and they said that they had issued over 3,000...what do they call it? Leave to remain certificates.

EHdK 46:11 Indefinite leave to remain [ILR]. But again, not passports but indefinite leave to remain status.

KI 46:16 And so then I asked how many applications have you received because they kept emphasising that issue. And I think at that time, it was like maybe 18,000 but they had issued 3,000 but that was something to boast about. But if you boast about what you succeeded in doing, maybe I shouldn't say this, but somebody said to me that statistics are like a bikini. They reveal a lot, but they hide the essentials. And this is what that Compensation Scheme says to me.



EHdK 46:44 It's a difficult question but how do you see the future moving forward? What solutions are there or what can be done?

KI 46:54 One of the things that we had sought to do is to engage regularly with the Home Office. So we had, I think, Sajid Javid came in and we had a number of meetings with him. And I think he kept talking about the importance of righting the wrongs and there was that engagement. I think after he left, the engagements at that level more or less ceased. And so we had written a number of letters seeking meetings. And what the Home Office...they were just sending out these reports saying that we have done A, B and C. But the desire to meet almost fizzled out almost immediately. To meet at the level that we met. We were meeting before. And so, I think, for them let the people do the talking and then have as much information in the press as possible. And then I remember when they opened up the Compensation Scheme and said it was to all the Commonwealth, I thought that was a master move because what it did, it diffused the centre of gravity. And then if Caribbean countries then start saying, "Hey, why are you focusing on, say, Australia or Papua New Guinea?" It then makes the Caribbean look very [laughs]...the idea was to take the wind from the sails and so it was no longer about righting the wrongs but about the perception of doing something in terms of compensating people. So the Windrush scandal was sort of like neutered.

EHdK 48:42 The EU stats are included in the Windrush stats.

KI 48:45 Exactly. So, it has become so convoluted and diluted. In a way, you're revising history. So, it's probably good what you're doing to capture what really transpired so people when they look back will see the journey from where we started to what we're seeing now which is almost like a whitewash of the Windrush scandal.

EHdK 49:13 Do you think there has been sufficient enough of an apology? Do you think that more needs to be done to acknowledge the severity of the scandal?

KI 49:23 I think there should be. And I'm sure somebody will say, "Oh, yeah, but you put a monument in Waterloo Station." How does that compensate people who have lost their livelihoods, their reputations? Who have seen the lives and their dreams in tatters? Who feel that they have been let down by a system in our society for which they've given their whole lives? And compensation is not just about money even though that is absolutely necessary. It's about ensuring that the system which was systemically biased against them is revised to make sure that what happened up to 2019 doesn't happen again. But it's going to continue.

EHdK 50:07 Continue how?

KI 50:09 Because you still have people who say to us, we go into the Home Office and the same attitude that we had five years ago, we're still experiencing. You listen to people telling



you about their experience and you realise there's no difference. You look at the Wendy Williams report and you understand that virtually nothing has changed. Again, you go back to the inverse relevance theory. When you want to give the impression that you're doing something, you talk a lot about it. So that people are misdirected into thinking, "Oh, if you're talking about it a lot, you're obviously doing something." But essentially, you're doing nothing. And so, this policy of misdirection, I think, is an effective one for a system that doesn't want to change. But for the victims of that system, nothing changes.

EHdK 51:01 I think I've already asked this question but just come back to it. What have been the reactions of your colleagues across the Caribbean? Certainly, in the interviews that I've done, it wasn't as big of an issue for everyday people in the Caribbean, possibly, because they were more interested in what was happening in the US. So, it didn't really have that kind of pick up, the momentum with people.

KI 51:34 Except in some countries where there are people who had been deported. And so maybe in a village you have an experience of somebody who had been shuffled out and came home with nothing. And Caribbean people who have gone abroad to be able to come back. Maybe retire, buy a house, do something to show that you have made good in the time that you're away. And so, it's a generational issue because the folks that you will see across the Caribbean wouldn't remember except if you had some family. Those persons who had left the Caribbean 40 years ago. And so, they couldn't readily reconcile or treat with it. Okay, what's happening here. And there is interest, of course, and then there was also interest at the political level. But this is from people who had, even if it's a grandchild, you don't even know your grandmother who left when before you even conceived. And so, it's that gap in the awareness that, I think, would account more for the slow response that you saw in the Caribbean but I think once people began to understand it, and then the issue, there was a bump in interest and curiosity as to what is happening to our fellow citizens in the UK.

EHdK 52:58 Thank you. Is there anything else you would like to share with us before we wrap up the interview today?

KI 53:03 No, I don't think so. If I talk any more, you will tire of hearing my voice. So, I will stop here.

EHdK 53:09 Just for our listeners. It's a very hot day, one of the hottest days I think we've had in London. So, we're going to end the interview now. And just thank you very much for your time and it was a pleasure speaking to you.

KI 53:24 Likewise.

[END OF AUDIOFILE].