

SETH GEORGE RAMOCAN INTERVIEW

Key:

EHdK Dr Eve Hayes de Kalaf (Interviewer)

SGR His Excellency Mr Seth George Ramocan (Respondent)

Date/Location:

16th September 2022. Rok Hotel Kingston, Jamaica.

EHdK 00:02 I'm here with Ambassador Ramocan who was the Jamaican High Commissioner to the UK from 2016 until 2022. Ambassador, I believe you returned to Jamaica last week. Is that correct?

SGR 00:20 That is correct. And it was interesting. A very important moment because having served for 5 years and 8 months in the United Kingdom, my departure was, for me, very significant in the sense that I met Her Majesty on my arrival. And it was just such a wonderful opportunity to have a dialogue with her. And to know that I was departing. In other words, my tenure was kind of the rest of her lifetime. Because it was just within a week of my departure that she passed. And we are forever saddened by her passing. And I found her to be such a dignified human being. And one of the things that struck me is that I have known her as a Queen since I was a baby. And so, it kind of brought you the whole sense of immortality that she's been living for so long. And has maintained that composure all the way. And so, for me, and I'm sure for all of Jamaica, we certainly express our condolences to the British people and to the Commonwealth as a whole because she was Queen of the Commonwealth.

EHdK 01:56 It's a big question to start our interview with then but what next for the Commonwealth given this very important moment that we find ourselves in?

SGR 02:06 Well, I believe the Commonwealth is such a unique arrangement being a voluntary association of states around shared values. And what this does is to distinguish it from pretty much every other organisation that has brought together countries whether it's the United Nations or it's the various regional bodies. And, of course, it stretches so far across the globe. And it embodies a third of the population on the globe. Well, now it is a quarter, roughly, because we're about eight billion and it's two point something billion people. But, you know, has served to maintain a sense of stability. And despite the issue of countries seeking to become republics, particularly the realm countries moving away gradually. The fact is that the Commonwealth remains and they remain members of the Commonwealth and therefore the dream of the Commonwealth is something that should not go away. It really should remain. And I know the King, King Charles III, has had a very deep interest in the well-being, the future of the Commonwealth. I've had many occasions in which to meet with him and to hear him speak about his own dream and passion for the

survival of this great body called the Commonwealth. And it also, you know, I'm also happy in the sense that the United Kingdom is no longer part of Europe.

EHdK 04:27 Well, the EU. It remains a part of Europe.

SGR 04:30 The EU, that's what I meant [laughs].

EHdK 04:34 And, of course, you arrived in the UK...

SGR 04:37 Yes. Just about when Brexit was...

EHdK 04:40 Just before, right? Or was it right after? I can't remember...Right before Brexit was at a really pivotal time as well. So your career was....

SGR 04:50 ...All of that period, you know, all of that period. Not knowing whether it would or wouldn't happen and what would be the consequences of international relations with both Britain and the EU. All of this were sort of contemplations along the way to determine what steps should be taken in the meantime in preparation for the outcome. And the outcome, of course, Britain is no longer part of the EU. But the trade relations we had with the EU included our trade with Britain because it was just one. And now that is out there, what sort of relationship would we have in terms of trade with Britain and so on? It turned out pretty well because, I think, there was good foresight and our Foreign Ministry in negotiating with the British Foreign Ministry were able to arrive at a consensus that there will be a sort of carryover of the same plan so there wouldn't be any difference.

EHdK 06:11 And were you involved in these conversations around Brexit and its impact on Jamaica, specifically?

SGR 06:16 Certainly. Our foreign minister, of course, was foremost the person but on her visits and her arrivals and the dialogue that we had, I had to be part of it.

EHdK 06:30 Are we talking about Kamina Johnson?

SGR 06:34 Oh, yes. Kamina Johnson Smith. And, you know, we worked together. And I think that it was a great experience because it finally, sort of, was not disruptive in terms of neither the Jamaica-EU relations or the Jamaica-UK relations. It went well. So, we were very, very happy.

EHdK 07:02 Okay, I'm sorry to go back to the big issue of the Queen just dying. But I think it's a very important moment to capture as well for this project. What have been the reactions of people? I know you've been back a very short time but what have been your general impression of how Jamaicans on the ground have seen this event?

SGR 07:29 At a government level, and I would say the wider society, there is remorse. We have known this fine monarch for so long. She has actually visited Jamaica some six times.

EHDK 07:51 And was the last time...it was the early 2000s, I believe?

SGR 07:55 Yes. And on each occasion, it was a celebration. It was very good. Jamaica, however, as you know, has come through the whole era of being an enslaved - most of the folks who came in from Africa - enslaved people and went through brutal times and have, you know, a sort of a sense of the history of our parents, what they went through, this sort of thing. And it certainly is not something to smile about. But we are civil enough to know that history has taken its course. And the question is to look to the future. And, of course, in the context of the lessons that we have learned. And to this extent, there is no hostility what[so]ever. In fact, we have very warm relations with the United Kingdom. We certainly appreciate the quality of the relationship as it stands today. We think that there is room for growth. And we would certainly like to know that it is understood that Jamaica's involvement - although we are much smaller country and less developed - that our contribution to the well-being of the United Kingdom is, you know, really recognised and understood. Of course, a big part of that is the Windrush generation that went there which will be probably the majority of what we will talk about. But it is for this reason that I do my tenure. One of the projects that I sought to work at is to commission a book titled "Jamaicans in Britain: A Legacy of Leadership". And the purpose of this was to highlight a number of persons who have really worked and have achieved for themselves and their children but certainly have contributed to the well-being of the United Kingdom. It's a number of categories, of endeavours whether it's in the medical profession or is in the field of business or it's in the field of the professions. It has really been a good sojourn for many, many of our nationals.

EHDK 10:55 On a practical level, do you think that we're heading towards a referendum at any point?

SGR 10:59 A referendum?

EHDK 11:03 About the role of King Charles III? Do you think that's...?

SGR 11:06 Oh, in Britain?

EHDK 11:07 No, I mean, in Jamaica.

SGR 11:09 In Jamaica? Oh, in other words, if we're going to become a republic? Certainly. That's the kind of the consensus over a long time and it's a consensus that has shared the support of both the government and the opposition, whoever has been government and whoever has been opposition over a long time.

EHDK 11:27 I know that Patterson has been very vocal about that.

SGR 11:30 That's right. I think the main question about this is whether we would go towards an executive presidency or a ceremonial presidency. That's really what the difference is. But so far as republican status is concerned, I think it's quite safe to say there's a conclusion not only of the political parties but also the consensus, I think, it's there on the ground with the wider population. And I always like to remind that this is not a hostile response. It's a transition. Put it this way, it's not exactly the same. But it's no different in a sense from Britain wanting to get out of the EU in order to assert its identity and its sovereignty. As a country. I don't see that as something that is a hostile movement or anything. It's not that Britain has no further dealings with the EU, it's that it's certainly suffering itself as a sovereign nation. And I believe, of course, that that's good for the Commonwealth. It is something that, the purpose behind it, is for the good. And that's really what it is for Jamaica seeking to become the republic, to assert its sovereignty, to complete the process of independence. Which means we have a Head of State that is...originates with Jamaica.

EHDK 13:30 Well let's talk a little bit about your career now because I know that you're an entrepreneur and you also were the Consul General to Toronto from 2009 until 2014. And you are and remain a pastor as well. Can I ask how your religious convictions, how that's influenced your life and the decisions you have made?

SGR 14:00 For me, pastoral work is a work of service. We regard ourselves as servant leaders; leaders who are not bosses but are servants of the people that we care for. And so, it was not a departure from the whole philosophy commitment towards service when I took up my role as Consul General in Canada which was for upwards of five years. And neither was it a departure from service in the United Kingdom in fact. In a sense, my being a pastor has actually strengthened my ability to relate to folks because there was that dual feeling, understanding way of relating to people not just purely from a sort of political or diplomatic perspective but knowing these are human beings that are made in the image of God and have the hope of becoming part of God's family. I really felt this deeply. Hence, I worked closely with churches in the UK.

EHDK 15:47 I'm quite interested in which churches you worked with. What kind of community groups did you become involved with? And how was that engagement? I know, for example, that High Commissioners in the past have travelled from city to city and London and Birmingham and other areas to engage directly with Jamaicans living in the UK, the Jamaican diaspora, and other groups. I just wondered how the church factored into those engagements?

SGR 16:24 Jamaica is known for its having more churches per square mile, per capita basis than any other country. At least this was some time ago. It was in the Guinness Book of Records. And there was a sort of pushback that our nationals, on arriving to UK and seeking to continue in church, where they were, they did not feel welcome many of them in the



churches there. Because of, you know, the human backwardness of racism they just did not feel...they don't belong. And as a result, they started their own churches. And many of the churches within our community, they are really headed by pastors from Jamaica who are Jamaican and they have really been a sort of, for them, a kind of oasis in a country where they don't know a lot about. They were just trying to settle in. They wanted to continue to have their worship on Sundays or Saturdays, whenever it was. And to know that they actually formed their own church. So, there are a lot of churches that are called the New Testament Church of God. The Church of God of Prophecy, the Pentecostal Church of God. That sort of thing. There are a number of them that are in that category which reflects the majority of churches in the sense here in Jamaica that people would normally go to. And it was a place in which they felt a sense, they were strengthened to endure whatever were the issues. And they were in a frame of mind of being able to grow their children in the church. They have a community that they could relate to and so on. That held well for a while. And then after a while, the close knit that was there began to get a little bit loose as people became more acquainted now with the society and felt they could manage without the church and there were a number of persons who were not really attending church. But still, the church is strong for the Jamaican community there. Apart from that, Britain, which was a very strong religious society, the 1600s, 1700s, 1800s and so on. Because you can see the landmarks are there to represent that history where almost every township has a significant church building in Britain which shows that this was its history. But after a while, Britain itself became a little bit more of a secular society. And so, church, the church is not as central as it was, and I think to some extent the church is now in our diaspora. It's no longer, people are no longer attached in the way they were at first. Nonetheless, church activity and church life, it's still strong.

EHDK 20:23 I think those connections are fascinating particularly now as we come to talk about the specific time period that you were in the UK. You arrived in the UK, as we've said, in 2016 two years before Amelia Gentleman of The Guardian broke the Windrush scandal and this became front page news and was a really, really big issue. And I've already interviewed Guy Hewitt who was the High Commissioner for Barbados to the UK and also Kevin Isaac who was the Saint Kitts and Nevis High Commissioner to the UK. And they talked to me in depth about their work with the Caribbean Caucus. And the conversations really that were happening around that time. What do you remember from that period?

SGR 21:17 Well, actually, I arrived in the United Kingdom on December 22 of 2016. So, I had only eight days there about for the year to end. In a sense, it was a year after I arrived the break in the news with Amelia Gentlemen writing about these things. But it was never a secret that there was heavy discontent on the ground. As the lives of many people were disrupted over many years, subsequent to the arrival. At the time of the arrival of the Windrush generation, Empire Windrush, which is sort of symbolically the arrival of the generation but then that was just one ship arriving. There was this high spirits of Great Britain. In fact, I was [born?] in 1940, in the time when the Windrush arrived [inaudible] I

was born into one. Okay, so about three, yes, about three years old. And it was, I remember people, you know, when I was still young, up into the 50s, leaving to go to England, and it was real excitement.

EHDK 23:19 Excuse me. It was people of your very same age who were affected by the scandal who were born in the same time period as well.

SGR 23:31 Absolutely. They actually were very exuberant about arriving in Britain. I always look back at how these people dressed when they arrived. And it tells you that they were very in keeping with the standard of the Queen's way of dressing. They actually arrived there and they were looking forward to the good life. And, in fact, a number of the persons who actually came there at that time were there in Britain prior to the war.

EHDK 24:21 Yes. And contributed to the war effort as well.

SGR 23:31 Absolutely. So, they just went back after the war.

EHDK 24:22 Well, again, what we've discussed with this project is the problem of the framing of talking about this, the Windrush ship, right? Specifically, because the contributions of Caribbean people to the UK and beyond has been generations in the making. By framing this as one arrival of one group of people actually does a disservice, I would argue, to the impact and the huge importance of Caribbean people.

SGR 24:51 Yes, it's good to have a context. And the fact is that for many years, they were okay. They were having a difficult time settling in the cold, getting a job, all the rest of it. That was there. But I think the fundamental error or shift that created this whole thing about the Windrush crisis is...was really a creation of the parliament if you may who changed the laws in order to have created what is called the hostile...

EHDK 25:38 I mean, the hostile environment that was implemented from about 2012. But if we go back to the 1960s, it's been very well documented, particularly by researchers, that the UK systematically wanted to...be a white...to contribute to a white population. And it did that through the changing of different legislations and laws. And, for example, the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act at the same time that Jamaica became independent the same year. So, these things were totally strategic by the British government.

SGR 26:18 Absolutely. Strategic is the word. And you could see where it was going because people became sensitive to the fact that they were not welcomed. They didn't feel welcomed being in Britain. And so, to this extent, they already began to react and to feel a sense of alienation and this really was a major problem. So, when in about 2017, 2018, Amelia broke

some stories that were...it hurt and already concerned people. And so, the community at large was already doing things.

EHDK 27:24 A question I have for you, I'm sorry to interrupt, but as a High Commissioner, were people coming to you before then? Were you hearing of individual stories or people saying that...maybe they didn't know the reasons for why they were encountering difficulties but that they...were they coming into the High Commission to seek help or support?

SGR 27:45 They were. There was the situation in which persons, they were being asked for documents to prove that they are legitimately in the United Kingdom.

EHDK 27:58 Specifically by the Foreign Office?

SGR 27:59 That is correct, yes.

EHDK 28:01 And what type of documents were they being asked for?

SGR 28:04 Documents of arrival. And I thought that was so unfair...

EHDK 28:13 Documents of arrival? So, proof that they had landed or...?

SGR 28:15 That's right. Why? Because arrival for many of these folks was...they were children. And, usually, you didn't get a passport as a child. You actually arrived on your parents' passport. So, to say, "How did you arrive here? How did you come here?" They would say, "Well, I came here with my parents." "Well, where's the proof?" And there's nothing of that sort. And I think this is the most gruesome part of this hostility thing because individuals were stopped from their jobs. They were now being threatened with deportation. They no longer had access to a lot of the facilities, health care being one of them. Opening an account in a bank. Various other such conveniences that you need to survive were now hindered. They were being taken away. And so, the idea that you were...the next thing is if you did not produce your documents within a given time, you were threatened with deportation was really...

EHDK 29:41 And did you know anybody who was deported? Did you hear of any stories of people being deported?

SGR 29:47 Yes, there were...speaking with you here just adds labour and you don't have the actual names and so on...But, yes, there were persons who went out of the country maybe to visit relatives or to attend a funeral or something of the sort. And could not re-enter.

EHDK 30:12 And were stopped at the airport.

SGR 30:13 Yes. And that, to me, was a form of deportation.

EHDK 30:15 And we discussed this as well. We've discussed this with other people about why that was. And it was because the airlines were now facing very hefty fines if they agreed to carry people and arrive in the UK with people who didn't have the right to enter. In a way, the airlines themselves were becoming incredibly...

SGR 30:40 Were drawn into it.

EHDK 30:42 Yes, were drawn into it which meant that people didn't leave Jamaica anymore or leave the Caribbean or leave wherever they...that passage was being blocked by commercial organisations.

SGR 30:53 Exactly. So, it might not appear to be government but it certainly was government. And they...you know what it is, dislocations of families. A mother left to attend to some other business and coming back and can no longer see her children and various other things. You can't turn up to your job so you have lost that job. That income is no longer coming into the family and the family has basic expenses to take care of. And so, it's being thrown out of a rented house because they can't pay their rent.

EHDK 31:38 And not being able to rent a new property because they're being asked to show a passport, right? So then landlords are becoming part of this hostile environment. Because they're effectively policing people's movement.

SGR 31:51 Yes. It was quite a way of impacting a very bitter and gruesome type of punishment to cause people to say, "Let me leave. Let me go." And for that reason, the Caucus of High Commissioners thought that it was time to get squarely involved.

EHDK 32:17 Can I ask when the Caucus was established? That was already long-running by the time you...?

SGR 32:20 Of course. It's a practice. Over a long period of time even when I was in Canada we had a Caucus.

EHDK 32:28 It's an opportunity for you to talk about common aims.

SGR 32:32 Not only that but the Caribbean has a regional arrangement, the CARICOM.

EHDK 32:40 Was it strictly CARICOM countries who met as part of the Caucus?

SGR 32:43 Yes, the Caucus is strictly CARICOM countries. There were a couple of observing countries in CARICOM like Haiti. And so, they would attend although they're not

CARICOM members. But the whole idea...so the structure was around the CARICOM. And the chairmanship of the Caucus was based on the rotating chairmanship of CARICOM by the heads of government.

EHDK 33:13 Okay, so whoever the head of CARICOM would be in whatever country that would be the head. Was that just in the UK or everywhere the Caucus would meet? Would that be standard across...?

SGR 33:24 That would be across. Yes, you remain the chair of the Caucus so we defer to the chair during that period of six months.

EHDK 33:35 Who was the chair at the time when you were there? Can you remember?

SGR 33:41 Oh, my goodness. Who was chair at the time? I think at that time it might have been Kevin Isaac.

EHDK 33:56 I think possibly it was Kevin Isaac.

SGR 34:04 It might have been Kevin Isaac. However, there is a dean, the High Commissioner for Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. He is dean of our Caucus, the longest serving member as a High Commissioner within that Caucus. And there was a period when he was serving both as dean and as the Chair during that earlier period.

EHDK 34:39 I know that Kevin Isaac told me that the Caucus met with, for example, the Foreign, sorry, the Home Office to talk about some of these issues around migration and some of the problems. What were your memories of the response of the Home Office? Or were you at the meetings when they were present?

SGR 34:57 The Home Office? Yes, the Home Office listened in. But I think we really wanted to have a meeting higher up to bring this to the attention of the prime minister. And there was a request for that meeting.

EHDK 35:19 So that was Theresa May at the time?

SGR 35:21 Right. And it was declined. We were declined the meeting with the prime minister. It also was the time closer to 2018 when the CHOGM was about to be held.

EHDK 35:38 Yes. And CHOGM took place April, I think, of 2018.

SGR 35:43 Yes. And so, because the prime ministers of our countries were going to be there in the United Kingdom, we thought that we should prepare the ground for that to be an issue.

EHDK 36:02 So you strategically organised. The people I know who did that, who were very active in that was, course, Kevin Isaac and Guy Hewitt and yourself. Was there anybody else who was very vocal, let's just say, in bringing this to the attention of the British government?

SGR 36:25 It was really the Caucus as a body but there were persons who were considered to be sort of foremost in the activities. And Jamaica was among that group because of the fact that, well, the largest part of the Caribbean diaspora is the Jamaican community. And for that reason, we would have had a sort of significant role to play. I, however, was new on the block, so to speak, among the newest in the Caucus. And so to some extent, I was kind of getting a grasp of the situation with those who were on the ground ahead: Guy Hewitt, Kevin Isaac, the High Commissioner for Antigua and Barbuda, the High Commissioner...I'm trying to think of the...What happens too is that some High Commissioners were sort of not as involved because it wasn't affecting their communities as much because it's a pretty small number of persons within that.

EHDK 38:08 I think that's part of the reason why the scandal maybe took such a long time to build because this clearly affected - overwhelmingly, the majority of people affected were of Jamaican descent - that goes without saying. But I think maybe it was the smaller cases as well that meant that the issue wasn't seen as being as important. I think it's only as a collective really. And only once the Caucus started organising and discussing this as an issue that was affecting people across the Caribbean that the CARICOM voices then were able to actually bring light to this desperate situation.

SGR 38:58 Absolutely. As a collective, it made a difference. And we were able to see the problem for what it's worth rather than simply in isolation.

EHDK 39:14 And the Home Office knew this was happening, correct? But they were dismissive of the examples that were coming to them? What reaction did you get from them?

SGR 39:29 Of course, the Home Office was not particularly concerned about the issue in the first place. And, in fact, the Home Office was deliberately instituting policy to get people to begin to take a flight and go back to their countries.

EHDK 39:56 And this was part of a broader plan? The British High Commission in Jamaica since 2008 was already investing in a rehabilitation-type programmes to create an infrastructure whereby local Jamaican NGOs and different community groups would welcome Jamaicans who were being brought on deportation flights. I think that structure was happening far beyond the UK. It was far beyond the hostile environment policy and far beyond UK policy. It was actually something that was linking up to the UK diplomatic actions that were taking place in situ. Not just in the

Caribbean but across the world, I would argue, at different points to have this reception point for the people that it was effectively expulsing from the UK.

SGR 40:57 Right. There was an effort to create a perception that this was good for the community. And that you will even find there are some persons within the community who thought that this was a kind of corrective action. Not understanding what really these folks were going through. It also somewhat coincided with some issues of individuals who were involved in criminal activity. And that was kind of used as the reason for these deportations. But it just happened that many persons who were not involved in any criminal activity were drawn in because it's kind of a fishing net thrown out there and you just pull in people who were not related to any of those wrongdoings.

EHDK 42:25 And Sajid Javid, his response to even, you know, once the scandal had kind of erupted. The response was...oh, but if you've had a criminal record at any point, we won't be granting you British citizenship. That line of criminality. And also the cruelty, I think, of a system that would punish someone for a misdemeanour or something very minor that might have occurred three decades ago. So, they weren't able, I don't think, at any point...the British government wasn't able just to say sorry or just come out and actually acknowledge...

SGR 43:04 Absolutely. And, it is so in a sense un-British much of what was happening. Because Britain prides itself on human rights, promoting human rights and serving the best interests of the less fortunate. And it was quite contrary to that.

EHDK 43:31 Well, it's the killing with kindness model, right? It's creating an image of tolerance and understanding. When you scratch the surface and see what was actually happening. It's ugly. It's quite shocking. So, what was the role of the church while this was going on? What conversations were you having?

SGR 43:51 The role of the church...the church generally wanted to be involved without seemingly stepping into the politics of the country in a sense. It didn't want to be going against government because government has so many ways of penalising and I think was pretty cautious but church leaders spoke up for their community and their people. [It] identified with the problems that they were going through.

EHDK 44:47 Did they help people with the practical aspects of this? Helping people filling out forms or making copies of documents?

SGR 44:56 At a point when the issue is being formalised where there was an acknowledgement that this was wrong. And there was a commitment to right the wrongs and, therefore, individuals now had to complete documentation and so on. At this point it was more practical for the church to be involved and to help members who would fall in at risk with the government. So, the church was very active, very caring in seeking to help its

members and non-members too. People in the community who were really facing very difficult times. Not only the church but the legal community was very much involved. And I'm amazed at the level of support from the legal community without any charges to the individuals to help them through. And we have so many evidences of this within the community. So, a number of persons who were able to either not to be deported or being able to get some documents in place. They were able to do so because of that legal support and the support of the church.

EHDK 46:43 So there was a network really of people who were advocating for helping people on the very community-based level. Was it informal? Or was it more organised? Let's just say...because I know that there were lots of workshops that were being held. Public meetings as it gained momentum.

SGR 47:07 We tried to structure because there are organisations in the community on the ground that are in touch and who understand the problems. You have a number of organisations in terms of seeking to give support to Jamaica as diaspora organisations. What they do is to try to incorporate in their activities, helping people on the ground because they were asked, and the Home Office was being... showing some sense of wanting to get the documents in. So, they provided the necessary documents that were to be completed for compensation and all of that sort of thing. And to that extent, the community rallied around it. But these were what you would call voluntary organisations who were charities...of charitable status that were doing fundraiser events to support projects whether it is in the health service in Jamaica or in schools. They were doing that sort of thing. So that's what these organisations are about. But they actually carried over by helping people on the ground.

EHDK 48:59 And what involvement did you have for the Wendy Williams report? Because I know that there was a review of that report that came out earlier this year which was fairly damning to be perfectly frank. Did you did you meet with Wendy Williams at any point?

SGR 49:13 Several times.

EHDK 49:14 Were you involved in any boards or committees or discussions around the scandal?

SGR 49:17 On a number of occasions Wendy Williams, in seeking to get as much information as possible, had convened a number of meetings with both...at the group level and at the individual level...in order to pull information to get her work done. And she was very active and also quite structured in her approach. I could see that she was seeking, certainly, to be as objective as possible in her work. But the information that she required would have had to come from persons who were actually experiencing the problems or those of us who were trying to help to alleviate the problem.

EHDK 50:24 I thought her report was very interesting because on a number of occasions she acknowledged the need to educate, basically, not just civil servants but the broader British public, everybody, really, about the impact of colonialism and Britain's role in the world. For people to actually understand why the Windrush scandal, as it happened, was just so painful. I wondered what your thoughts were about that?

SGR 50:59 That was a very necessary thing because the British people, and in the schools, there isn't much taught about the history of slavery and the trauma that people went through. There isn't much taught about the fact that the folks who came into the country were there at the invitation of the British government. And it was for a purpose. There wasn't much that the average British citizen knew, or student in a school, about the fact that hundreds and thousands, in fact, of soldiers from the Caribbean participated in the defence of Britain in the war. And Britain was able to stave off the attacks, multiple attacks, because, in other words, we were partners with Britain. Despite the fact that we were former slaves so I think that is a sort of gap that the British people are not quite aware of. They see these strangers. These people who are looking very different to them and they are saying, "Well, what are they here for? Why are they here? And do we have to have them around...? I don't feel the same. I feel that we are changing as a society and we are losing the real British life". So, it was kind of an inconvenience for them but I can understand that mindset. Unless you know that had they not been here, we could have been speaking German instead of the English. If that were understood then they will say, "Boy, these are our friends. We are so sorry of what they went through in slavery."

EHDK 53:13 We began this interview by you talking about Brexit. I was talking recently about the loss of workers in terms of Brexit so the recent conversation was it's only when the British realise that the workers have gone that they're going to realise the impact. And Windrush...migration is always a story of the need for labour in whatever format. Either exploited or welcomed. But it's always about the need for manpower and womanpower to work in certain industries. And the Windrush generation as they are so termed were absolutely essential and central to that.

SGR 54:00 Absolutely. And it's been proven that unless you can have workers to continue industry and so on, then those who worked and have become pensioners, their income is dependent upon the success of the businesses, the industries that labour is required for. So, unless the labour is available, the country actually... But I don't think that very much is known about that relationship. And so, individuals were seen more as more imposters, as persons denying us of our space, our rights to live in our own culture that sort of thing. And I can appreciate that in the absence of education because if you don't know, you could very well end up having those views.



EHDK 55:05 So back to Wendy Williams and her insistence of that is absolutely key to understanding and to moving forward. I would agree with that as well. The theme of fear has come up a lot as well...of people being afraid of coming forward. And I think that's been very central to our discussions. I spoke to Ndombet-Assamba and that was very clear as well. It's not just the stories that we hear about the people that were affected by this. But it's the people that we don't hear about who are not coming forward or who are living with...you know, we've heard multiple stories of people getting threats from the Home Office or letters or not telling their own children because of the stigma attached...the shock, as well, but also the fear. I think that church networks, for example, are very important in that kind of community space to help deal with those problems.

SGR 56:09 Sure, a high level of distrust existed and continues to exist. And it is because people believe that they might be tricked into exposing themselves and be targeted.

EHDK 56:31 I mean, we had an amazing story recently about Jamaicans thinking, or people of dual nationality, for example, thinking that if they renounce their Jamaican nationality that they could become British or be seen as being more British. Whereas the reality on the ground is, you can't do that. It's not as simple a procedure. But people were being duped and being given false documents and all sorts of things, thinking that made them somehow more British or more likely to be able to stay. So, there were situations of people exploiting that situation, exploiting that fear. And people's lack of knowledge or lack of access to support meant that they were put in awful situations.

SGR 57:21 Absolutely, they felt threatened. They felt that they were without proper recourse. They felt that the aim was for deportation. And they had to do everything they could because they had a lot to protect. They had children that they had to care for and they could not be allowed to be taken out of the country and for their children to suffer the consequences. They felt that their jobs were really threatened if they were picked up as someone who does not have legitimate documents and so on. And they really felt that they were being hunted down and targeted and that laws were being changed to make them into criminals. Because before the law was instituted...the hostile environment, it was felt that "Well, I was here and I had the right of abode. But now when my status has changed because of law has been...retroactively is now making me a criminal." Then this is really where people felt we are into, not a war, but we are really caught up into a situation where we need to find ways of protecting ourselves. So, people would hide and they would not come forward even when there were legitimate reasons for them to come forward.

EHDK 59:13 And were there any occasions that maybe you yourself, particularly because of the close ties with the UK in terms of trade and investment and certain diplomatic relations, were there any times where you felt maybe that you weren't as

vocal as you could have been? Or did you use that position that you had to... bring up the issue of what was happening? How did you manage that?

SGR 59:38 I have used my position, first of all, to build a level of trust and good relations with the Foreign Affairs Ministry, with the Home Office. But using that as a means of speaking truthfully to what the problem is. And I have always raised the issue that there is a problem of human rights violation that is at work. And it needs to be looked at very closely because it is being escalated without acknowledgement. And I've spoken very frequently about the children who came to the United Kingdom. Three, four, five...up to 11 years old and went to school there. And that's where they knew their lives. They didn't try to come there on their own. They came there because of their parents. And it was understood that prior to the change of the law, they would be a part of a family and have residence there [in the UK]. And to know that they have no place in the United Kingdom. They were being deported. And I've asked over and over in my dialogue for consideration to be made to change the position for deporting.

EHDK 1:01:24 Who specifically? Who are the people you were speaking to?

SGR 1:01:27 To the minister when it was...he was there before Amber Rudd. Not before Amber Rudd, after Amber Rudd...subsequent ministers, we've had these dialogues about how to best deal with the problem of Windrush and I thought that would have been a very good move to show compassion, to show the rights of the child which is a big thing globally. And to be able to assert the British model of upholding the rights of...

EHDK 1:02:30 As we come to the end of the interview, I wanted to ask you about the events around CHOGM. What do you remember? Were you at the table at CHOGM when people, specifically Guy Hewitt and Kevin Isaac, asked to meet with Theresa May? What do you remember of that time when it really hit the front pages?

SGR 1:02:54 That meeting, as I recall, took place before my arrival. However, when CHOGM was about to arrive and our prime ministers were about to come to UK, we had sought a meeting with the prime minister of Jamaica who was going to be here to meet with Prime Minister May at the time. Prime Minister Holness actually had a one-on-one meeting with Prime Minister May concerning this Windrush matter and was given an assurance that steps were being taken to bring this to an end. And I must say, in fairness to the British government, after acknowledging it took quite some time, with having acknowledged and giving promises to right the wrongs, that a number of significant steps were taken along the way.

EHDK 1:04:33 Not just the Compensation Scheme? Which has been highly criticised...

SGR 1:04:35 Yes, highly criticised. But was a very necessary step to take and something is happening. We believe it's much too slow. But some things have happened there. The recognition of the Windrush community with Windrush Day.

EHDK 1:05:01 The statue as well that was unveiled recently. Did you go to the unveiling of the statue?

SGR 1:05:06 The statue? Yes, I was there. The unveiling of the statue, I think, is remarkable. It gives a sort of place and recognition to this community. The legitimacy of this community. The fact that it's a community that has contributed. And not only that but a wider community of people, there are other countries, [that] are now receiving the benefits of a Windrush compensation. The Windrush is primarily identified as the Caribbean.

EHDK 1:05:41 Yes, as we've mentioned on other occasions. Really, the point being...is Windrush even the right term to be using about this issue which is a global issue? Because it's talking to Britain's former Empire, right? And its treatment globally of those people who contributed to build an Empire. An extremely important point.

SGR 1:06:04 Right so it has been used as a means of addressing those problems. And I know there might be differences of opinion on this in terms of why should it be that you are using this for that...but I think it is to the credit of the Caribbean to actually acknowledge that other people are being helped because we care.

EHDK 1:06:32 I think that's extremely important. And actually, in the Home Office figures they include not just people from, for example, Asia or other parts of the world. They also include the Brexit figures, as well, which I think is quite telling really.

SGR 1:06:48 Yes, yes. So, it gives the impression that a lot of money has been paid out. But I've always asked why don't we break this down to see what is happening, country by country, in the Caribbean? So that this large figure it's not really being received by just the Caribbean grouping. So that, for me, is important.

EHDK 1:07:14 It's an issue that continues. There needs to continue to be pressure on the issue to keep it present. But also there are difficult and complex questions to be asked about things around the Compensation Scheme, things around people who are not coming forward as well who may still be in a very precarious situation as well as people who've, I would use the term expelled rather than deported, but people who are now in Jamaica because the hostile environment has led to the point where they may have British citizenship but they have no desire to return. These are all complex questions.

SGR 1:07:52 Very complex and to understand the pain and the dislocations that have accompanied those developments is not, it's not sufficient to come to understand because a lot of people have just stayed low and have kept silent.

EHDK 1:08:12 Finally before we before we finish. My question is about how people here in Jamaica...what do they know about the Windrush scandal? Is it something that is discussed maybe in your meetings with people? Or is it something that's seen as that happened, you know, far away in the UK?

SGR 1:08:39 Here in Jamaica, we do have what is called the Jamaica Diaspora Conference. It's every two years. And it brings together members from the diaspora in Britain to the annual conference, biannual conference, here in Kingston. And that is one of the subject matters that we discuss at our conference so that people can know what is happening on the ground in the UK. Apart from that, the media has been pretty strong in raising the issues...

EHDK 1:09:18 Amelia [Gentleman]?

SGR 1:09:21 No, the media [laughs].

EHDK 1:09:21 Ah, the media! Amelia as part of the media...[laughs]. I think for a while it erupted but now I think it is very much...

SGR 1:09:28 Yes, it has subsided and so you're not hearing a lot about it. There is also a pretty large returning residents' community here in Jamaica from Britain. And they certainly are concerned and keep an ear for what is happening there. They have a lot of connections on the ground there. With today's social media, people are connected, and they are aware. So, I think to that extent it has been sufficiently aware, people on the ground in Jamaica, are sufficiently aware of the Windrush crisis. And not only that but please remember that Jamaica has a very high remittance rate.

EHDK 1:10:32 That's hugely important...the economic factor.

SGR 1:10:35 And it affects...

EHDK 1:10:40 Of course. Especially the cost of living in Jamaica. I've been really shocked by that.

SGR 1:10:44 Exactly, so persons on the ground are keen to know what is going on. So, all of this is part of the mix.

EHDK 1:10:52 And again, as well with the project that's why we're so concerned with the transnational links because something like remittances or something like trade

or policy decisions, they do have a direct impact here [Jamaica], for example, if we have a reduction in the number of nurses who are in the NHS. Or trained people who actually are contributing to the UK economy who are being forced to leave or just don't want to be there anymore. Right? This is a two way, it's a two-way thing. It is even more complex.

SGR 1:11:27 I think, as we close, it's good to be aware that there was a significant number of persons, however, who were not affected. I would think that it's more like 10 to 15% of the people who were really impacted by this because others did find a way of surviving. Of keeping out of the issues that were being raised by the Home Office or by the parliament of making people null and void in terms of their residence. They had got their papers in place. But there were so many people who...they were not as bright. They came as labourers, so to speak. And the filling out forms and having documents and all the rest of it was just not a part of it. It was terrible.

EHDK 1:12:43 But as we head towards digitisation...there's the fact that now we've got...we were talking earlier about the NIDS programme in Jamaica. The registration of people. The fact that documents are now carried digitally on people's person. We're creating the system, I think, whereby people can't circumnavigate those...they can't disappear altogether from the system because it's demanding that they provide some form of evidence.

SGR 1:13:17 Right. Much of the information that was being asked of these people, much of that was in the hands of the government. Much of that information. And it was the school system. They went to school. They saw the PAYE system in terms of jobs and earnings and whatever. So, there was a lot of records to show that these folks had been here for a long time, had been working, went to school here and all that kind of thing. The NHS and so on. So, it was terribly unfair for them to be asked to find and produce documents that would not be in their possession, per se, because...

EHDK 1:14:05 Or anybody's possession, let's be honest. I mean, who was asked for a tax document from 30 years ago? Unreasonable demands.

SGR 1:14:11 Right except the government would have had some record it could look back at but I never did see any effort to say, "Look, okay, what's your name? Where did you go to school?" And I go and do some search because I would have more reliable archives.

EHDK 1:14:37 So the onus of responsibility has now been shifted to the individual to provide evidence of their own legal identity rather than the state taking a human approach and a proactive approach by reading between the lines and actually searching for information on these people. And I think that's had a huge, huge impact.

SGR 1:14:59 And one thing that was never pursued sufficiently was the destruction of documents. Now, I don't have any evidence of it but it was spoken of...the records of arrivals that much of those documents...

EHDK 1:15:15 The landing cards, I think.

SGR 1:15:18 Yes, the landing cards were destroyed. And I don't know. That has never really come up in a big way as part of the of the problem. But I think it is something that's we've sort of skipped over. And that probably needs to be clarified as to really were the documents, the landing documents of individuals into the country, really destroyed? And it was sort of excused. It was not dealt with. So, it's really one of the limits.

EHDK 1:16:01 Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to say as we conclude the interview?

SGR 1:16:05 My overarching statement in terms of the Windrush event is that if we do not sufficiently implement the Lessons Learned document and, to ensure that much more care and thoughtfulness put in by the authorities, that you're likely to see this emerging in another way. So, this needs to be very clean, very clear of making sure that individuals who are in the country and have a legitimate right to be there, that it is...the records are kept very well. I believe that a lot of the problems came because of side issues. Other issues. And it just kind of spilled into saying we need to get these people out of here rather than it being a legitimate issue of not having residency. And I think that too many people have suffered. And it is to be...steps need to be taken. I think, Britain now being outside of the EU and not having as many migrants coming in, that also is an issue for getting workers into the country. And the means of getting these workers in can sort of recreate this problem because you will now have to have them sort of properly registered as coming into the country. As having a right, you know, to be there to work and to live. And I don't know that is being done. But the problem of Britain beginning a new kind of immigration for Labour purposes is at the doors, at the doorsteps and I hope it will not be a repeat of that.

EHDK 1:18:29 Well, Ambassador, I would just like to say thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me today. I thought that was a rich and important conversation and no doubt will be a great resource for many people. Thank you so much.

SGR 1:18:43 And I want to commend you and, of course, the University of London for the work that it is doing because to take an interest in this matter and to have it on record in the way you are doing it here, I think, is a mammoth task.

EHDK 1:19:05 And a labour of love.

SGR 1:19:06 And a labour of love. Thank you. [END OF AUDIOFILE].