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Virgin Islands and Ghana Formalize Growing Ties With Trade and Tourism Agreement

Officials from the USVI and Ghana signed a memorandum of understanding in St. Thomas advancing cooperation in trade, tourism, and investment, following reciprocal visits and shared calls to strengthen economic, cultural, and ancestral connections.

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Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. and Maame Efua Houadjeto, CEO of the Ghana Tourism Authority, sign a memorandum of understanding advancing trade, tourism, and investment cooperation between Ghana and the USVI in St. Thomas. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM.

Just over a month after Governor Albert Bryan Jr. embarked on [an official visit to Ghana](#), the second step towards a co-operation framework between that nation and the U.S. Virgin Islands has

been achieved, with a reciprocal visit to the territory by Ghanaian trade and tourism officials.

On Tuesday afternoon, representatives from both jurisdictions signed a Memorandum of Understanding to advance trade, tourism and investment partnerships at Westin Beach Resort & Spa in St. Thomas. Maame Efua Houadjeto, CEO of the Ghana Tourism Authority, who signed on behalf of her country, remarked on the notable similarities between Virgin Islanders and her countrymen and women. In fact, she asserted that there was little appreciable difference between the two populations.

“Everybody in this room looks like a sister, a cousin, an auntie, a daughter. You look so much like Ghanaians, every one of you...What strikes me about you is your friendliness, and that is exactly how Ghanaians are. Ghanaians are sweet, friendly, warm, and you are exactly like that.”

She explained the Ghanaian philosophy towards tourism: supporting the residents of areas surrounding tourism sites in the establishment of businesses that tap into the industry. “When you make the community a part of tourism, when you make them stakeholders, they treasure tourism, and they take good care of the tourism sites.” Ms. Houadjeto noted that this is the same approach being pursued by the Virgin Islands and pledged Ghana’s support in that endeavor.

Technical support for tourism development was not the only thing on offer. “Ghana has loads of things to share with you,” declared Ms. Houadjeto, naming shea butter, cocoa and chocolate as but a few of the high-quality products available to be sourced from the country. She noted that an export of Ghana’s creative and cultural products could be beneficial to counteract the false Western narrative established regarding the painful history of the trade in enslaved human beings. “Our stories have been written for us, and we have been made to believe that we sold each other or we sold you....it is the story that the colonizer wants us to believe.”

Counter to that narrative, Ms. Houadjeto argued that “many, many, many years ago, our grandparents were distraught. Our grandparents were grieving because they had lost their children. They had lost their brothers and sisters.” It was the colonizers, she insisted, who “just came, took them away without permission, without respect, nothing...took you all over the world just for their personal interest.”

The rupture of so many years ago is being healed, Ms. Houadjeto insisted. “I’m sure they never imagined that today I would be here, [or] you would have come to Ghana,” she said, advocating for a re-establishment of the close connections of our shared ancestors. “Now that we know each other, it is better for us to trade with each other. It is better for us to invest in each other,” she urged.

Governor Bryan echoed many of the sentiments first expressed by Ms. Houadjeto. “The familial ties, the bonds are undeniable,” he noted. He suggested that a fitting tribute to the shared history that spans the Atlantic would be the creation of a reverse Middle Passage that can connect people of African descent in the Western Hemisphere back to their West African roots. “Establishing those routes are important for people to see the forced migration of Africans through the Western Hemisphere,” Mr. Bryan argued. “Charlotte Amalie is a major port. All the stuff that moved through here. Commerce, yes, but people, sugar cane, and wood.

Responding to questions from the Consortium, Mr. Bryan said that the MOU represented the point of the wedge in what he hoped would become an enduring linkage between Ghana and the VI. “If we create enough relationships, enough documents, enough friends, there will be demand from the people of the Virgin Islands that we continue along this line because it can only make sense to us,”

he said, articulating the strategic advantages of a partnership between the territory and Ghana. “The banks are bringing their investors in different industries that are looking for solutions,” Governor Bryan noted. People have requested confirmation that imports into the territory are not subject to the newly imposed federal tariffs. “We want to make sure that that conversation is resounding throughout the international community.”

“This is the relationship that we want to solidify, not only monetarily and economically, but spiritually and socially and ancestrally,” the governor declared.

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