

Anthony Johnson - A Good Appointment

By Professor David P Rowe, Esq.

Anthony Johnson, who has served Jamaica both as a Civil Servant and as a member of the Senate, is an appointment that Jamaicans in the United States welcome. Mr. Johnson has the steady hand and the solid expertise that only years in government service at the highest levels can confer.

Some Jamaicans in the United States think that the American Diaspora has not been particularly well served by diplomatic appointments over the last decade. So Anthony Johnson's appointment will be refreshing news. Jamaica has not had the best bi-lateral relations with the US over the past decade.

The most recent dip in U.S./ Jamaica relations must be the lawsuit filed by the U.S. Department of Justice against Air Jamaica. For the U.S. Department of Justice to file a civil suit against the airline and to seek US\$600,000 in penalties is quite serious. The Department is clearly sending a message to Jamaica.

The lawsuit is of public record. It was filed on February 1, this year in the Eastern District Court of New York and can be read under Case #1-2008CV00461. The Presiding Judge is Judge Brian M. Cogan. The suit alleges that Air Jamaica failed to immediately correct damage to a plane and subsequently flew the plane 58 times in an un-airworthy condition.

The suit further alleges that, as a result of Air Jamaica's negligence, an A310 aircraft flying to Kingston was forced to make an immediate emergency landing shortly after takeoff from New York's JFK Airport on Dec 17, 2001. The flight carried 218 passengers and crew. The flight number was 016 and the cause of the emergency was the improper installation of some panels on the plane's air conditioning system. This caused the panels to unexpectedly separate and led to a loss of hydraulic power to the doors over the landing gears.

A subsequent inspection of the A310 showed that parts of the plane exhibited cracks which unless repaired could have led to catastrophe. The U.S. Attorney, Brenton Campbell, in an interview with the Los Angeles Times on February 8, indicated that although there was obvious damage to the aircraft, the airline did not correct the problem till a month later, after the plane had made 58 flights. This is the type of problem that we hope with proper diplomatic involvement will disappear.

When Ambassador Johnson is aware of all the matters with respect to this suit, I would hope that he would make the appropriate comprehensive report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to the Office of the Prime Minister. This was a serious enough matter for the US to file a lawsuit.

The Ambassador will be faced with many other problems including the aggressive U.S. deportation policy, the large numbers of Jamaican nationals in U.S. jails, etc.

I doubt if Americans will want to invest in Jamaica until our crime rate is radically reduced and until greater confidence is reposed in Jamaican institutions and organizations such as our national carrier.

I believe that Anthony Johnson has the mettle to focus resources on the resolution of all of the problems; he certainly will have his hands full for the first few months of his tenure.

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