

Hon. Minister's Address

**Administrator-General's Department Retirement &
Long Service Awards Ceremony**

Thursday, October 30, 2008

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I am pleased to share this occasion with you, as you observe your **Inaugural Retirement and Long Service Awards Ceremony**

I thank your CEO Mrs. Lona Brown, who is the 17th Administrator-General, for her kind invitation to be your guest speaker this evening.

My Congratulations to each of you being honoured and you are all deserving honorees and this ceremony is the Department's tribute to you who have contributed so much to the achievements over the years.

It is an acknowledgement by the Administrator-General's Department that its high quality of service has been based on your tireless efforts - sometimes beyond the call of duty - and your exemplary work ethic.

So the purpose of this ceremony is to recognize and thank you, for having given this department unwavering quality service.

Most of you are may not know that at one time, the Administrator-General's Department held the posts of Trustee in Bankruptcy, Stamp Commissioner, Custodian of Enemy Property, Protector of Immigrants, and another piece of information that I learnt, that in 1919, the staff complement of the Department stood at 5 persons, including the Administrator-General.

Over the past 135 years the Department has matured and grown as an organization, and today has a staff complement of 83.

Many of you have been pioneers in the sense that you have helped to introduce the modernization, and led the way for the Department to accomplish various changes that perhaps some of the new and younger members of staff take for granted today.

You share much of the credit for this small department becoming on April, 1999, a performance-based Executive Agency of Government, under the Public Sector Modernization Programme.

Specifically, it was mandated to improve customer service delivery and boost the performance of the Department's staff in terms of their work output.

I am happy to note that that mandate has been fulfilled with the Administrator-General's Department winning for 2002 to 2003 and 2005 to 2006, the "Best Customer Service Agency Awards", and copping the prestigious Prime Minister's Trophy in the Public Sector Customer Service Competition.

It also won the "Best Executive Agency Awards" for those years as well. I commend you for your hard work and dedication.

You have truly embraced your role as a protector of beneficiaries of estates both young and old. The welfare of our young in particular is of paramount importance to all who govern and one of the major functions of the Administrator-General's Department is to safeguard the interests of minor beneficiaries and in so doing nurture and foster their development especially as the Administrator-General stands in *loco parentis* for these children.

You know how precious our children are today and what is going on, that they probably need the Administrator's General Department, more and more with the crime situation, and these parents and the Department has come in.

I do hope that the Department can possibly put in structures that you can counsel and assist these children as you look after their funds; you also look after their spiritual and emotional well being. I think it is a challenge for the department.

Through your efforts over the years you have moved from closing 300 estates in 1998 to an average of 750 each subsequent year. You have done well.

You have administered intestates' estates and several Charitable Trusts some dating back to the early 1900's. You continue to manage estate funds which are invested in Government Securities. The investments I note are pooled in a Common Fund which now stands at over \$1.4 billion dollars, Congratulations.

In addition to the many varied skills of staff members you have sought to use technology as a means of performing your duties more expeditiously and many of your processes are already electronised.

The trust administration software, Trust Processor, is being customised to assist in increasing the speed with which beneficiaries are able to obtain financial information. This is being done through the preparation of beneficiary accounts and shortening the time within which you (members of staff) will be able to distribute assets to beneficiaries who have established their relationship to the deceased.

For that I congratulate you. When I started practising in Jamaica in 1973, as a lot of practitioners know, Mr. Gyles (Andrew), Deputy Administrator-General was around then.

He will recall the complaints we had, and some of the practitioners are here, the complaints we had about the Department.

Mrs. Brown (Lona) Administrator General, I must congratulate you, I can attest to the improvements in the Department and the speed with which Estates are processed now. The beneficiaries are getting there monies and their monies have been well invested.

I know that for the remainder of the year you will be working with the software providers to generate, automatically, printed cheques and receipts, following on financial transactions in estates.

This, together with general beneficiary and asset information already inputted into the system, will minimise the time frame within which you will effect final distribution of estates to beneficiaries upon reaching the age of majority.

I am aware of the problems posed by backlog files and the discrete projects undertaken to clear these cases. Through these projects with special financial support from the Government, I note you have closed some 2500 backlog cases and that the remainder will be dealt with by staff during regular working hours. This will be a huge task but I ask you to ensure that your current files are kept current, and not add to the backlog you are working so hard to clear.

You must be commended for year after year actively examining the legislative framework within which you operate and recommending amendments particularly to the Administrator-General's Act thereby ensuring that you remain relevant, not only in a Jamaican context, but also in relation to Public Trustee Offices in other jurisdictions.

There are a number of amendments proposed by your Department now before me which touch and concern issues such as, the time-frame within which the Administrator-General is required to wait for beneficiaries to prove their relationship to the deceased after they have attained majority; increasing the threshold of small estates not requiring a grant of Letters of Administration, I think that is very necessary, and looking at a solution to the all-

pervasive problems posed by multi-generational estates especially in backlog cases.

Your submission will be dealt with as soon as a few remaining matters have been settled with the Legal Reform Department.

Each year your Department takes on an average of 225 new estates with varying values. The estates with valuable assets will no doubt be able to sustain themselves but there are some which are not even able to pay administration expenses and there are young and needy beneficiaries.

You have been waiving the Department's fees in circumstances like these and I encourage you to continue to identify and single out these particular cases for special attention.

Based on the number of new intestates' cases taken on, it appears that persons are still afraid that if they write their will they are going to die soon. And from the reported cases, persons from all spheres of life seem to think that way.

You have been strident in your efforts to sensitise the public on an on going basis on proper estate planning and will help to dispel the fear and put the old myth to rest.

I know that you have been constrained in your public relations efforts by the fact that your corporate structure does not include a public relations section and so there's is not provided for in your budget and perhaps this is something we have to look at.

The more information that the public have out there the better it is for the proper functioning of your Department.

This however, has not prevented you from taking a number of initiatives like taking the 'office' to your rural clients through your "Office for a Day" which should be continued in order to improve customer access to your services. The launch of your own website in 2006 is another example of bringing your services closer to the public.

I see the need for educating all sectors and persons in the society as males make up the majority of the over 9000 cases currently in the Department. 1250 estates represent deaths caused by motor vehicle accidents while deaths of police officers account for over 300 of the total number.

You will, I note intensify your public education drive in 2008/2009 and target the various groups, entities and communities throughout the island advancing the need for proper estate planning, that too is very very important.

Integral to the development of the Administrator General's Department is the continuous dialogue that you have with other entities. Among these are the courts, through the Hon. Chief Justice, Government ministries, private sector bodies, including financial institutions and insurance companies on whom you rely for the timely and efficient administration of estates.

Good leadership leads to employees who understand what is expected of them and who are encouraged to meet and exceed those goals.

Strong leadership makes the difference between mediocrity and excellence; between success and failure; between aimlessness and achievement of vision.

In celebrating each employee's contribution to the growth and success of this organization, we cannot forget the importance of good stewardship in motivating employees to give of their very best.

I am aware that staff welfare is also high on your list of priorities.

Worthy of mention is the Agency's implementation of the Staff Revolving Loan Scheme in 2006, to allow staff access to loans covering a wide range of needs including educational and medical, the purchasing of motor vehicles and computers and other miscellaneous purposes.

In 2008, the Agency found it possible to increase the limits with respect to motor vehicle loans.

As part of its ongoing desire to motivate staff the AGD introduced a system of reward and recognition which allows for the selection of **Employee of the Quarter** and **Employee of the Year**. These selections I am told are based on nominations received from staff.

To those of you who are being recognized this evening for long and dedicated service to the Administrator-General's Department, I urge you to continue to serve this organization and this country with pride, fervour and integrity. Continue to shape and mould the lives and future of those beneficiaries who have a chance at a better and brighter future because of how you manage and invest the estate funds and how efficiently you close the estates

I applaud the AGD as tonight it recognises 677 cumulative years of service.

**26 employees 5 years
7 employees 10 years
7 employees 15 years
2 employees 20 years
1 employee 35 years**

And there are 7 retirees.

For a small Department this is indeed an accomplishment and it is a testimony to the commitment, and dedication of you outstanding Honourees.

To the Retirees, for you, this evening marks the culmination of 194 cumulative years of service to your country, with one retiree, Miss Elsie Walker, spending her entire 40 years in this institution – Miss Walker came straight from High School on May 30th 1968 and has made it her home.

What could be more fulfilling than knowing you have helped to form the character of many young children or the knowledge that you had a positive impact on somebody's life and that you did your best.

The retirees tonight would have already passed on their knowledge to those remaining and the awardees are now charged to continue thinking creatively to continue the outstanding work of the Department.

The long service awardees are a golden example of how to finish the race you have all run. When extracts of the citations are read, we will all be privy as to how each of you did in your own way; how you translated "pleasure in your jobs and put perfection in your work." (Aristotle)

Again I extend my heartiest congratulations to the management for seeing it fit to honour and recognise the contribution of its staff to the Department. I thank each one of you for your steadfastness and commitment to duty. May you continue to inspire others and draw encouragement from these awards so that you will answer the call to service wherever you are needed.

Once again my congratulations, I thank you all for inviting me here tonight.

Thank you.