

STATEMENT BY IAN POITIER
IN RESPONSE TO STATEMENT IN THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
BY THE MINISTER OF TOURISM
HON. DIONISIO D'AGUILAR
June 18th, 2017
FINAL

Early on Friday morning, I was made aware of statements made in the House of Assembly last Thursday night (June 15th) by the Minister of Tourism, Hon. Dionisio D'Aguilar.

Although he did not mention me by name, taking together all the details mentioned, I surmised that he was referring to me. Others have clearly concluded the same.

In his remarks relating to me, the Minister made the following allegations:

- 1) That there was something 'fishy' about my consultancy with the Governemnt
- 2) That Executives at the Ministry of Tourism think that whatever work I've done doesn't represent value for money
- 3) That the Minister couldn't find any evidence of what I've done
- 4) That I have been paid outrageous sums of money
- 5) That the Minister could find no evidence of a signed contract, implying that no contract exists

Because of the damage that the Minister's remarks have had on my reputation, in this statement I wish urgently to refute each of these allegations in turn. Taken together, the Minister's statements paint a picture which is inaccurate, incomplete and misleading.

My statement is extraordinarily long, but these are for me, the most extraordinary times. I wish to be as fully transparent as possible.

I remain mystified as to what motivated the Minister to make such statements to parliament, without first having had a single conversation with me. In fact, we were due to meet at 4pm last Thursday, when the meeting was abruptly cancelled. I had a full presentation prepared to show him all the work I have been doing. I was especially excited to discuss work in progress, which has laid the groundwork for what I understand to be his agenda.

That said, even though the Minister has not extended the courtesy to me of speaking with me or meeting me once since his appointment, I feel constrained from entering into too much detail in public at the moment, as I still have an effective consultancy agreement with the Government. And I will continue to offer the Minister all the respect and courtesies and discretion due to him, as I did to members of the previous administration.

At the outset, I should emphasise that I am an independent person, a private citizen. As such, I will continue jealously to guard and defend my reputation, by whatever means necessary.

Also, I did not hire me. If the Minister's quarrel is with the previous administration, then it is regrettable that he did not make that clear. I hope that members of the previous government will issue appropriate statements setting out the facts for the Minister.

1. Something Fishy

I left The Bahamas in 1980, aged 15 yrs-old, after I graduated High School. Since then, I have been living and working abroad, mostly in London, for 34 years. At the invitation of The Government, I returned home in October 2014 to undertake a three-year consultancy.

Throughout my entire career, never once, not once, has my integrity ever been called into question. I have worked on projects for the British Government, Buckingham Palace, the European Commission and some of the largest corporations in the world eg. the BBC, Coca-Cola, Levi's, Sky Television, American Express, GlaxoSmithKline etc. I have also worked for some of the smallest start-ups, and have my own established entrepreneurial ventures. I have sat on the Boards of charities, and been engaged in a number of non-governmental organisations. Never once has my character been called into question.

I don't tell lies.

I have never de-frauded anybody.

I treat people with courtesy and respect.

I work hard, and always above and beyond the call of duty.

I produce work that is world-class and of the highest quality.

I deliver.

The suggestion that I would be involved in anything crooked, or under-handed, or not above-board, or in any way dishonest, is profoundly upsetting and offensive. I reject it in the strongest possible terms.

My reputation is spotless, and having been drawn into this kind of scandal, deeply saddens me.

2. Value For Money

I will summarise below my achievements during the past 2 ½ years, but first allow me to demonstrate that by my Education, Experience and Expertise, I am well-suited to the role for which I was contracted.

I have been fortunate to be educated at some of the finest institutions in the world. I was born and raised in Nassau, Bahamas, and graduated as Head Boy from St. Anne's High School in 1980. I was awarded a prize for having achieved the highest marks in the GCE Exams. I won a scholarship to attend the Lester B. Pearson United World College, Canada, where I completed my International Baccalaureate. Afterwards, I was the first black Bahamian undergraduate to attend the University of Oxford, graduating from The Queen's College with an Honours Degree in Law.

With the encouragement of my mentor Winston Saunders under whom I had been a law student at the McKinney, Bancroft & Hughes Law Firm, I went on to train in Musical Theatre at The Arts Educational Schools, London. Afterwards I spent seven years in the UK, performing, choreographing or directing almost fifty productions ranging from classical theatre to musicals and dramas.

After deciding to take a break from the theatre, I joined the National AIDS Trust to co-ordinate the World AIDS Day Programme for two years. I led the UK Launch of the Red Ribbon as a national symbol of Aids Awareness, and co-ordinated the royal programme of HRH Diana, Princess of Wales.

I then moved into advertising, starting as an Account Manager at Bartle Bogle Hegarty (BBH), London, which twice won the award for international 'Agency of the Year' at Cannes during my time there. One of my award-winning campaigns for Levi Strauss, (photographed by Nick Knight) was selected by the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, as one of the '100 Best Campaigns of the Twentieth Century'. During my 10-year agency career in advertising and PR, my clients included: Coca-Cola, Sky Television, GlaxoSmithKline and the United Bank of Switzerland.

I later spent three years setting up and managing the Creative Industries Investment portfolio at the National Endowment for Science, Technology & The Arts (NESTA) on behalf of the UK Government. Among some of the early stage investments we reviewed was Last FM, which went on to become the largest UK IPO of its time. We reported directly to the Prime Minister's Office at Downing Street as the development of the creative industries was of prime importance to the UK government. The sector now generates approximately £80,000 of revenue per hour.

Since then, my portfolio has ranged across directing, writing, choreographing & producing theatre, film, radio, and live events, as well as providing strategic advice in number of policy campaign areas, notably for the European Commission on ending anti-Roma discrimination in Europe. I have written & directed a feature film (Oh Happy Day), commercials (eg. Amex), dance videos, theatre in New York and London, and written and presented for the BBC and so on.

I am proud to be a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (nominated for my achievements in advertising) and a member for ten years of BAFTA, the British Academy of Film & Television Arts (and also a juror for the BAFTA Awards).

It should be clear, then, that my education and career has spanned an almost unique blend of the creative industries, law and public policy.

I have a lot of valuable experience, which I was happy to offer for the benefit of the Bahamian people.

I will move quickly to complete my personal website so that my work and achievements are available for all to see.

I say all this not to boast, but to show that these are the achievements of an ordinary Bahamian, someone from humble beginnings, who grew up in a loving home, where the emphasis was on education, and a clear distinction made between right and wrong.

3. "No evidence of what I've done"

Firstly, I wish to correct the false impression left by the Minister that I was merely a 'cultural consultant' to the Ministry of Tourism. This ignores the substantial body of work that I have delivered over the past 2 ½ years which does not relate to culture or to tourism, work considered by many to have been of high quality.

It is extremely disingenuous of the Minister to claim that he could find no evidence of what I've done. He could have asked his Permanent Secretary, who I recently

updated several weeks ago with a full list of my accomplishments and achievements. He could even have asked me!

I am a proud Bahamian. I have always kept close ties with family and friends at home. Since 2007, I was grateful to be occasionally invited back to direct the Cacique Awards, initially under three FNM Ministers of Tourism: Neko Grant, Bran McCartney and Vincent Vanderpool-Wallace. I was grateful that they sufficiently appreciated my work to keep inviting me back.

When I met former Prime Minister Christie for the first time in London in 2013, I was impressed with his call for Bahamians to come home and help. When he spoke of his vision for culture and the creative industries, and said that my name had been among those suggested, I was delighted. It then took a full year before I could make the move.

During that time certain opportunities were left behind, others let go of. Thirty-four years of friendships, established networks, a way of life, and a standard of living - these were all left behind.

After living abroad for thirty-four years, I was pleased and excited and grateful to have been invited to move back home to help with national development.

Initially I was based at the Ministry of Tourism, but from the outset also worked for the Office of The Prime Minister, and the Ministry of Youth, Sports & Culture.

The broad focus of my work was to research and lay plans to develop the cultural infrastructure. In order to have a sustainable cultural sector, we need to ensure that the necessary structures and processes are in place, so that our talent, our creative content, our cultural and creative spaces, our creative economy, our cultural diplomacy AND our cultural tourism, are placed on a sustainable footing.

Such a structure will facilitate ALL Bahamians in making their cultural contribution, whether as professionals or amateurs.

My work has the potential to add real value to the Bahamian economy. In the short term, with a focused strategic effort, the creative industries can add another \$100 million to the economy, by bridging the gap in tourist spend from cruise ship passengers alone from \$67 per head to approx. \$120 per head. Longer term, we can grow the revenue to \$1 billion by increasing that spend to \$200 per head from all tourists.

Because of my experience in mounting productions, I was also asked to lead on national events, and to support Ministry of Tourism events. This hadn't been a part of the contract discussions, but I was happy to oblige.

In early 2016, after I presented a comprehensive strategy to develop the cultural infrastructure, members of the Executive Team at the Ministry of Tourism suggested that, as the work covered everything from Education and Training, to using the arts to help rehabilitate prisoners as well as reduce the amount of violence in society, they suggested it be placed at the Office of The Prime Minister. Out of the blue, a few weeks later, I received a phone call, the result of which was that the Prime Minister asked me to serve as his general policy advisor. As well as continuing with the cultural development work, I was asked to provide policy advice on whichever areas were required, or which I thought necessary.

During the past 2 ½ years, this what I have done:

A. Cultural Development

Written National Cultural Development Strategy (incorporated into National Development Plan); Leading Development of new National Centre for Performing Arts; Authored Creative Industries Strategic Framework (in progress); Lead Bahamas participation in Caricom Creative Industries Development; Authored Downtown & Cruise Ship Development Strategy; Supported Development of 'Nassau Emerging and Sustainable Cities Initiative'; Authored Strategy for National Events; Supporting Business Planning development for Fort Fincastle Development (in progress); Creative & Business Planning support for Fort Charlotte Development; Advisor re Bahamian Music Song Competition; Lead on 'Commonwealth Walkways Initiative'.

B. Strategy & Policy Advisor

General Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister; Review and Comment on Third-party Proposals for Minister of Tourism.

C. Writer, Producer, Choreographer and/or Director

National Events & Productions

Bahamas Independence Celebrations; Exuma Heritage Festival; Bahamas Junkanoo Carnival Opening Ceremonies; Prime Minister's Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Dinner

International Events & Productions

Festival di Santiago di Cuba (Artistic Director for Delegation of 300 people, 10-day festival); Caribbean Tourism Week, New York; UNWTO Meeting, Siem Reap, Cambodia

(Developing policy to combine Ministries of Tourism & Culture); Kennedy Centre Programme Development, Washington DC (Developing international tours of Bahamian talent)

Ministry of Tourism Events

Cacique Awards (2015 & 2017); Nassau Accord Commemorations; Clement Maynard Building Opening (Postponed); Junkanoo Summer Festival; Goombay Summer; Sports Heroes Events

D. Communications Consultant

Communications Strategy & Plan for expanded NEMA Department; Recommendations to Reform Government Communications Operations Major Speeches for the PM (eg. State of The Nation, House of Assembly Communications, Hurricane Matthew, Successful outcome of BahaMar negotiations, University of The Bahamas Lecture, Business Development Seminars etc); Coaching of University of The Bahamas students for Tourism competitions & events

E. Providing General Counsel & Support to Ministers

The Prime Minister; Minister of Tourism; Minister of Labour & Disaster Recovery; Minister of Youth, Sports & Culture.

F. Chairman, Clifton Heritage National Park

Until the end of June 2017, I also serve as Chairman of the Board of the 'Clifton Heritage National Park', New Providence, where, under my chairmanship, we have been able to increase the commercial revenue coming into the organization by 500%. I have also written the Strategic Plan to take the organization forward for the next three years. Clifton is now being held up as a model of good practice in the public sector.

All this I have done.

It has been an exhausting time, and as colleagues have observed, it has taken a toll on my health.

On any assessment, even if only half the output were of reasonable quality, this would be a demonstration of good value. Again, this is not to swagger, merely to demonstrate that I am confident that I have delivered exceptional value.

And I do not claim the credit solely for myself. I have had the privilege of working with some of the brightest and best and most capable people in the public service, people who have a strong sense of both mission and duty. Colleagues who work

tirelessly, with dignity and discretion, even as the political landscape shifts around them, and ill-informed critics assail their work from all sides. The Bahamas has much to be grateful for from their service.

I will make available for download on my website, some of the key documents I have produced (which are not confidential), so that the public is able to see directly for themselves, what work I have done. I especially encourage people to read the 'Strategy to Develop The Cultural Infrastructure of The Bahamas', as it provides a comprehensive framework for my work.

4. Being paid outrageous sums of money

One of the most egregious allegations is that I have been paid outrageous sums of money to do this work.

Before I go further, I must emphasise that I have been providing consultancy services to The Government of The Bahamas, not working as an employee. As such I am responsible for all the costs arising out of that consultancy. These include payments to other people, third-parties, for all the work they do to support me, as well as all other business expenses.

The negotiations regarding the work I was to deliver, was predicated on me setting up a separate company to carry out the work. I set up a company for this purpose (at some cost). I was told in the meantime to invoice the Ministry of Tourism in my own name, and that once the contract was fully executed, the paperwork should be transferred to the company. This I did, and I named the consultancy in memory of my sister, who had recently passed away. As the contract was not executed, I have allowed the company to go dormant.

I will not engage in a discussion regarding my personal finances.

That said, the Minister (or his Permanent Secretary) will have the original Deal Memo, showing that the consultancy would bill for \$400,000 per year, and that the consultancy would be responsible for paying for the necessary fees to ensure that the work was done.

Thus far I have therefore been paid for 2 ¼ years. I have not been paid since March, notwithstanding that since then I wrote, choreographed and directed the Cacique Awards for the Ministry in April at BahaMar. It will air shortly, but the feedback from the attendees and the Ministry of Tourism Staff, is that it was the best ever.

On any analysis, on any comparison with other consultancy contracts entered into by the Government of The Bahamas or any other Government, this fee was cheap. I know that for the average person, this represents a lot of money, but once you take away the monies I had to pay out to support the work, it made my fee extremely cheap.

By way of comparison, I should point out that Caricom recently commissioned a Strategic Plan for the Creative Industries for the Caribbean. This is the equivalent of a small component of the work I have done. Without wishing to betray a confidence, I can say that had my consultancy earned the equivalent in The Bahamas, it would have run into several millions.

I am not ashamed or embarrassed to say that my work was not charged at a premium. But because The Bahamas is my home, I did not charge anywhere near the sums that could be charged. It is especially heartbreaking as I know that other consultants have charged full market rates for their work, and yet I am singled out with the suggestion that I have done something wrong.

As a Bahamian, am I worth less than others?

5) No evidence of a signed contract

Before I came home, I negotiated in good faith and extensively with the government to secure the best deal. In the end, I was made to understand that, what could be agreed was far less than what I could expect to be paid in London for exactly the same work - that is what the country could afford. I make no complaint about that, simply to say that, in terms, when benchmarked against the cost of either hiring a number of other individuals to complete the work, or to hire another consultancy, what we agreed was substantially less.

Coming back home and effectively taking on about six roles, has proved to be extremely demanding.

Nevertheless I have brought to the work the same passion and commitment as always. And it has been gratifying to have had such an overwhelmingly positive reaction to that work.

I do not know why my contract was never signed.

It certainly is not my fault.

And even before this unfortunate situation arose, it has created difficulties.

Every month I asked for it. After being here for six months with still no contract, I was given a letter by the Permanent Secretary, confirming that my contract would be signed in line with the terms negotiated.

I took independent advice at the time, and was told that, even without a signed contract, the fact that the letter was in place, and that everyone was behaving as though the contract was real, legally I had an effective contract.

Conclusion

Everything that I have achieved in life has been because of the opportunities that started for me in The Bahamas. And coming back home has presented a fantastic opportunity to help. There are so many talented and skilled Bahamians who also need an opportunity - that is what I came home to help to provide. And in the personal scholarships I have been able to offer, and in my support for a particular charity, I have been happy to play a more direct role.

It has been especially heart-breaking therefore, in the last two days, to read some of the comments on social media. There has been real anger and rage from members of the public, mainly from people that I don't know. People seem to think that I am some sort of crook, who has de-frauded the Bahamas Government. Nothing could be further from the truth.

People have called for me to be arrested. Someone who I once considered a friend, who used to be a respected journalist, has pilloried me and my mother and my sister and my uncle on a Facebook Live broadcast.

My family and friends are devastated.

All this has been the effect of the Minister's comments.

That said, we have been comforted by the many messages of support from friends and colleagues. It has been heartening to know that there are many who respect what I have achieved and all that I have to offer.

This situation is truly bizarre to me. As I said at the beginning, never before has my integrity been called into question. I have never been asked to publicly explain my earnings. Voters may choose to criticise a government for its decisions and actions. That's fine. But to attack a private citizen for his lawful, ethical commercial activities, is baffling.

As said earlier I will make no further comment on my personal finances.

My singular fault has been in not absolutely insisting that I was provided with a signed contract before starting the work. After many undertakings and a promissory letter from the Permanent Secretary, perhaps I accepted too easily that sometimes things just moved that slowly here. It is a mistake I will never repeat.

I don't regret coming home. It has not always been easy, but it is still home.

It will probably be more difficult now to persuade others to follow me, once they hear of my experience. To be attacked by a Minister in Parliament, and then by members of the public, when you have just always tried to do your best...it's upsetting, an aspect of life in The Bahamas that is NOT better.

Thankfully my work is still highly-valued in the UK and the United States. If the Minister specifically, and the new government generally, wishes me to continue to help, then I remain ready to work on behalf of the country.

Otherwise, as Clement Bethel advises, I shall "...look beyond the present day, this time will pass, tomorrow's another day".

END