

**A PRESENTATION BY MR TIMOTHY JUPADIM OF THE EASTBOURNE CULTURAL COMMUNITY NETWORK ON THE OCCASION OF THIS YEARS' BLACK HISTORY MONTH (BHM) CELEBRATION IN EASTBOURNE, HELD AT THE EASTBOURNE TOWN HALL ON THIS DAY, THE 16TH OF OCTOBER 2010.**

It is my pleasure to honour the presence of the Chief Inspector Jane Dando from the Eastbourne Police, the presence of the Police Diversity Officer for Sussex, Sergeant Pheona Monro who has been very instrumental to the success of this event through her efforts and contributions in our meetings, I have to give special thanks to the Sussex Police for being the official sponsor of this event. I recognise the presence of the ECCN Chair Urszula Tompsett , members of the ECCN, distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

**Introduction**

I wish to officially welcome everybody present in this gathering to this year's edition of Black History Month (BHM), being commemorated here in Eastbourne, United Kingdom. It is my pleasure to let you know that this is another success story of Black History Month (BHM) event being written here in Eastbourne, so you should be glad to be a part of this epoch-making moment.

**Insight**

BHM is the month of official commemoration of Black History and experience in Britain. It is a time Africans in the Diaspora (in Britain) celebrate African history, art and culture. It is a period mapped out for the Black Britons to tell their story; it is also a time the world joins British Black people to celebrate their great cultural heritage. This is the month of commemorating the African British Experience.

**Aims**

Black History Month is commemorated with the aims of:

- Promoting the knowledge of Black History and experience.
- Dissemination of information on the positive contributions of Black man to the British Society.
- Making known the impacts of black man in the world we live in.
- Heightening the confidence and awareness of Black people in their rich culture and profound history.

**Historical perspective**

The first-ever BHM event in Britain took place in the year 1987. It was organised for the former Greater London Council (GLC) by Akyaaba Addai Sebbo, a special projects officer.

Akyaaba, a black man in London, was saddened by his discovery that due to the negative representation of Africans in the media, and the many distorted images about Africa, black African youths, especially in Diaspora, were reluctant to have anything to do with, or identify with Africa.

In 1986/87, Akyaaba, with the backing of several other people, organised key events that set the tone for an African History Month event. In his effort, he organised great debates with leading

historians on African contributions to world civilisation. Fallouts from such debates, among other things, raised questions on racial discrimination and called for racial harmony. It brought about the urge to further study the cultural diversity of the Greater London area, thereby making it imperative that Britons should know about African influences on Europe dating back to the medieval and renaissance era so that the accepted ideas and values about European culture and history could be understood and appreciated better.

As at the time in question, it was realised that despite the significant role Africa and Africans in the Diaspora had played in world civilization right from ages, most great African contributions were 'deliberately', either by omission or commission, omitted or distorted in most history books. There was, therefore, a great demand on the part of the Greater London Council to balance fact culture-wise in order to present a proper and fairly complete history than what existed then, which simply depicted European imperialistic footprints.

### **Image Redeeming Step**

In a drive to improve racial harmony in London, councillors passed a declaration, which billed Black History Month for October. This led to the first UK's BHM event, which took place as a part of the African Jubilee Year (1987/88) celebrations organised by the former London Strategic Policy Unit.

Worthy of note is that Akyaaba Addai Sebbo had a direct experience of similar celebrations in the United States of America in the months of February, and participated in the movement that caused the Negro History Week to be changed to Black History Month in 1976 in America.

From Akyaaba's observation of the American's February version of BHM, the celebrations in the US were mostly held indoors because the weather was too cold for outdoor displays. Again, it was a period when young people are tasked with much schoolwork.

To make the Britain version of the BHM a masterpiece, a better choice in time was made considering the fact that in the UK issues about children and future generation would always remain crucial in decision-making. So, October was picked as the right month for the British Black History Month.

### **Why October from African perspective?**

The month of October is very significant in the African Cultural calendar - the period of autumn equinox in Africa. The month is consecrated as the harvest period, the period of plenty, and the period of the New Yam festivals. Apart from that, October is a period of tolerance and reconciliation in African cosmology. It is a period of the coming together of the various bodies that entailed the African societies. Black History is therefore a reconnection with our source, hence the chosen symbol of learning from the past, with the benefit of hindsight.

October is more or less the beginning of the school year. Young people have had a long summer break, their minds are refreshed, and they are not saddled so much with homework or examinations, all these rallied to make October from its day one to 31st day a better date for Black History Month in Britain.

### **Successful kick-off**

The first BHM event in Britain, which was held on the 1st of October 1987, was highly successful. In response, the then Association of London Authorities later endorsed BHM as an annual event, leading to its official recognition on the cultural calendars of all London boroughs and several Metropolitan and City Councils around the country.

Unfortunately, majority of Africans in the Diaspora till date suffers a lack of knowledge of self and of our past and as a result, suffers from cultural disinheritance. Ironically, this has led to the internationalisation and feelings of inferiority complex, which are the direct consequences of the caricatures most Africans have turned to, thereby giving a large room for the inferior subset of human race we are in the body of Western thought.

### **Where renaissance black man is headed**

BHM seeks to restore an integral element of British History, which has been ignored and denied following the creation of racist mythologies. The need to continuously educate, enrich and challenge the content and construction of conventional history is essential in the drive to eradicate inaccurate views of world history.

In this vein, voluntary organisations, local authorities and museums depict aura of BHM in their various activities. Meanwhile, libraries and archives are in the vanguard of reeling out materials and programmes that help in the realisation of the aims/objectives of BHM since its successful kick-off in London in 1987.

There is a richness and diversity of programmers, who plan imaginative and thought-provoking events, storytelling, walks, theatrical productions, comedy and all, who have history as an integral part of their productions. Eastbourne, being the sunshine city, a prominent holiday town in the UK and a place where majority of holidaymakers from different parts of the world would want to visit, the BHM in Eastbourne is targeted to rank among the best in the UK. We have to note that, whatever we do here has the potentiality of reaching a wider foreign audience than what may be obtained in most other cities.

### **Who should participate?**

Black History Month is open to everyone, who desires racial harmony to be achieved the world over, especially in Britain. It is for every lover of peace and brotherhood. It is educational, sporting and celebration spheres are broad enough and accommodate varying degrees of interest, age groups and gender of all colours.

### **Why we need BHM**

In an ideal world, we wouldn't have needed a special month to celebrate the Black Heritage since the 'normal course' would have fully recognised and appreciated in equal proportion the contributions of different classes of people to human history. But on the other hand, we the Blacks especially, need a History Month to correct the injustices done to our heritage. We, the Black Race need an occasion like this to share among ourselves and with the world at large our incredible contributions to the development of the planet earth. We need a history month to

help us appreciate, so that we can be proud of our creativity, so that we can respect our intellectual prowess and so that we can celebrate our culture as a people.

That being said, we need to have at the back of our minds that the whole essence of BHM is to balance history. That should present to us the intrinsic meaning and the need to pursue the realisation of one world with the entire humanity in one God. Better still, the history of life is never complete with the exclusion of any. Therefore, we owe a lot to one another as we complement each other.

### **Let's join hands and rise**

We have to move forward by pulling our resources together and looking at the world from a global perspective. Thank goodness, with technological advancement, the world in which we live has automatically transformed into a global village. Human beings from all races are gradually being knitted together socially, politically, economically and otherwise. We are living in a fast changing world where each individual has a bit of his divine deposit to contribute to sustain emerging technologies and new ways of doing things.

New problems come everyday and there is a great need for us as one people to look beyond the past - the period of our ignorance, the period of individualism and begin to get over our perceived differences and set our eyes on what our individual and collective contributions should be to proffer solution to the common human needs. The current economic down turn is a great challenge before every set of people in this our generation. And we need as a people to work together in using the current situation to showcase our talent by ceasing the opportunities that abound.

The call on all of us is to use our business and services to bridge the economic gap between us. If you are a Briton or have found yourself in Britain, no matter your complexion, make Britain your home, make it your own, and give it your best. If you believe in community life, live it out here in Eastbourne and show the people here in Eastbourne what it means to have come from a culture that believes in communal living. Show your talent by bringing out what is in the inside of you. Do not be absorbed by your environment. Rather, let your presence be felt by others. Try and make an impact, do not just be a number, rather showcase what you have to add value to the system. Do not copy the person near you, especially while he is on the negative lane, but rather, present your skills and your culture to the society where you have found yourself.

Do not try to be who you are not, but bring out that which makes you a different person from everyone else, because that is the beauty we have in diversity. Let us work together and make Eastbourne a great place; let us work together and make Britain a home for all. Let us display the beauty we have in our cultural diversity to show the world the beauty nature has adorned this nation with. It is going to be for us and that should be our mindset and better approach to our challenges.

### **In Conclusion**

The Black man cries out saying, 'we have paid the price of slavery, the price of labouring in someone else's plantations, separated from our families and friends, endured horse wifes, lost

our freedom, had sleepless nights, suffered the cold of the night, the weather conditions, humiliation and total relegation, discrimination and annihilation, bound in chains, some hung on the trees and burnt at stakes'. But remnants endured and survived, not relenting in making our mark. Always ready to stand in our stead, without remorse or acrimony.

Note: We are ready to light up our identity and strive towards making complete, the distorted world history because we cannot be ignored or omitted in history.

I also hear the slave master muttering sorry, saying, 'I wouldn't have tried these or went this far'.

Note Again: Yes! It all happened, but what Black History Month is saying to us today is that IT IS A NEW DAY, A NEW PLATFORM AND A NEW ERA. We have to realise that we are humans, and to err is human. We should also realise that we are individually celestial gift to humanity, and we need to let our light shine on one another as that alone will help us to be the people we should be, in other to make Eastbourne a better place for all and make Britain a great nation.

It is a time to look back and be proud of yesterday, and then use yesterday's experience as a springboard for a better tomorrow.

So let every one in his or her individual capacity, get involved, make your impact known, learn to be in the right places and doing the right things at all times, assert yourselves, stand your ground, always have a positive mindset, have a sense of belonging, fill the gap, get yourself empowered by learning new and relevant skills, have a good self esteem, imbibe active citizenship. Which by so doing, we will together make Eastbourne a better place to leave and United Kingdom most desirable.

Remain blessed.

## **References**

1. <http://www.100greatblackbritons.com/list.html>
2. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/1xtra/bhm05/features/links.shtml>
3. <http://www.black-history-month.co.uk/articles/blackhistoryinbritain.html>