



Government of Bermuda

Ministry of Labour, Community Affairs and Sports

Ministerial Statement

By

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Minister of Labour, Community Affairs and Sports

Mary Prince Day

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Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to a piece of symbolically important legislation being tabled today: the renaming of Somers Day to Mary Prince Day.

Mr. Speaker, as you will be aware, Cup Match is currently comprised of two consecutive holidays: Emancipation Day as the first day of Cup Match, and Somers Day as the second day of Cup Match. Cup Match is unarguably one of the most important holidays in the Bermudian calendar. Although the annual Cup Match Classic cricket match between Somerset and my beloved St. George's is the highlight of the holiday, it is also a time when Bermudians celebrate in a number of ways: camping, picnics, time spent at the beach and on the water, parties, relaxation, and family time.

However, **Mr. Speaker**, this holiday also has a rich history steeped in the efforts of Bermuda's black lodges – the Friendly Societies – to help build and lift our community during the post-Emancipation era; and the game of cricket between lodges that came to symbolize this important moment in the Bermudian story. It is why the Cup Match holiday has been formally paired with Emancipation Day, as a way of observing this essential point in our history.

Mr. Speaker, national days are an important part of our cultural identity: what we celebrate and how we celebrate speaks directly to who we are as a people. Bermuda's Emancipation Day, as established by the Slavery Abolition Act 1833, commemorates the day that people of African descent in this country were recognized as citizens rather than as property; no longer forcibly working for others, or legally sold as an object, rather than accorded basic rights as a human being, though it is recognised that the struggle still continues. For these reasons, **Mr. Speaker**, it is fitting that the second day of Cup Match be renamed after our National Hero, Mary Prince, who is recognized on the world stage for the crucial role she played in the abolishment of slavery throughout the British Empire, by telling the painful story of her life.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize that there are some who will not be in favour of this change. It is an unfortunate reality that because of our country's history of racial discord that some Bermudians do not always see the history that celebrates the accomplishments and contributions of black Bermudians as belonging to them also.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to note that the history of Sir George Somers and the founding of Bermuda does not belong to white Bermudians alone – it is the history of all Bermudians. Likewise, the history of Emancipation and more importantly abolition does not belong to black Bermudians alone, it too is the history of all Bermudians.

Mr. Speaker, we have a moral responsibility to lead change on this outlook; and one of the ways we can do that, **Mr. Speaker**, is by ensuring that the history of the different segments of our community, regardless of race and ethnicity, is appropriately respected and honoured as our collective history.

Mr. Speaker, the origins of Cup Match lay squarely in an observance of Emancipation, and by returning Cup Match to the observation of Emancipation and the abolition movement, that it was always meant to be, we show both a respect and understanding for that pivotal moment in our history as Bermudians. Our complete history must be told.

In this year that we will now celebrate our 400th Anniversary of Parliament this helps to serve as a reminder and crucial reason why we must recognize the efforts of all who have contributed to the growth of our society, making it more democratic. Mary Prince Day is just one way of reaching this aim.

Thank you **Mr. Speaker**.