



MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

TO THE SENATE

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MINISTER OF YOUTH, CULTURE AND SPORT

EMANCIPATION COMMEMORATION 2021

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Madam President, Bermuda's cultural calendar highlights three events that we mark in subsequent months. May is of course Heritage Month where we celebrate our shared Bermudian identity; in June, we salute our National Heroes who have made lasting contributions that have shaped our island home. In July and August, we as Bermudians embody the spirit of the Sankofa bird of Ghana as we commemorate our emancipation from the horrors of slavery. The Sankofa bird symbolises the act of going back to the past in order to retrieve what is useful.

Madam President, during Heritage Month, our theme was Bermudian Resilience. We know that the Covid-19 pandemic

has challenged us in ways that have been unique and difficult. However, we also know that it is not the first time that our people have faced challenges – challenges more profound than those we are currently grappling with. There is a comfort that comes from knowing that we come from a people who have faced great adversity and found ways to overcome trials that bruised and crushed the spirit. For Bermudians of African descent, knowing where we came from provides an opportunity to tap into the strength of our ancestors and consider the ways in which our history, our culture, and our traditions have sustained us through generations.

Madam President, with this in mind, the Department of Culture set the theme for this year’s Emancipation Commemoration as the “Resilience of the African Spirit”. This theme has two meanings; it calls upon us to consider the ways in which aspects of African cultures have been retained in our Bermudian culture despite hundreds of years where these values, histories, and ways of living were maligned; yet somehow, survived erasure. The second meaning calls upon us to consider the ways in which this spirit of our ancestors still lives in us; and how we, as African Bermudians, reflect this gift of resilience in the present day.

Madam President, the Department of Culture, in partnership with the cultural group Jumuiya ya Afrika Bermuda, has planned a programme highlighting examples of the resilience of the African spirit. The programme, which will take place on Friday July 23, will focus on African clothing – the diversity of textiles that can be seen throughout the continent, which Bermudians in the diaspora wear now with increasing frequency. There will be a focus on food: how staple foods of certain West African cultures such as salted codfish and cassava remain in Bermudian cuisine. There will also be an opportunity to learn about some of the traditional foods of Ethiopia, including their famous coffee ceremony. Lastly, music: the soul of our celebrations can often be marked with the heartbeat and rhythms of the African drum; and the similarities with music genres of the diaspora will be explored. Although there will only be a limited number of in-person spaces available as a result of Covid-19 restrictions, the event will also be live-streamed on Facebook

Madame President, in addition to this signature programme, the Department of Culture has worked with stakeholders to put together a community calendar of events that speak to the

theme. The Department of Libraries and Archives has also assisted with the sponsorship of several of these events, most of which are events hosted by small entrepreneurs. Especially now, the Department of Culture thought it important to shine a spotlight on the work of tour guides such as Rashida Godwin at Titan Tours; as well as Maxine Esdaille, Shirley Pearman, and Charles Jeffers of Treasures of Bermuda Tours; and Dr. Michael Bradshaw of the Bermuda Friendly Societies. These founts of knowledge in our community are the ones who are telling the stories of how we emerged from the oppression of enslavement; how we fought as individuals and struggled as a community for our rights; and the history of the buildings and memorials that help to tell these stories.

Madam President, as we approach the season of Cup Match, Emancipation Day, and Mary Prince Day, now more than ever we must direct our energies in the way that our ancestors have taught us. Like the Sankofa bird, as we look to the past, what can we retrieve that is useful? What strength can we bring to bear on our present moment, and what reminders can we tap into that speak to the value of community? **Madam President**, let us spend this Emancipation Day and Mary Prince Day as a

community revelling in the resilience of the African Spirit. One-hundred and eighty-seven years after Emancipation, we are still here. We have found ways to survive, and thrive. And our journey is not finished yet.

Thank you, **Madam President.**