



MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

TO THE SENATE

BY SENATOR THE HONOURABLE OWEN K. DARRELL, JP

MINISTER OF TOURISM, CULTURE AND SPORT

“GOMBHEY FESTIVAL WEEKEND 2024”

MONDAY 30TH SEPTEMBER 2024

Madam President, it is my absolute pleasure to speak to you today about a showcase of one of the most vibrant and dynamic aspects of our cultural heritage – the Bermuda Gombey Festival Weekend, hosted by the Department of Culture. On Saturday, October 26th, we will gather at the Bermuda Botanical Gardens to enjoy one of my favourite events on the cultural calendar.

Madam President, the Gombey Festival is more than just a performance; it is a living tradition that embodies the spirit, history, and community of Bermuda. For generations, the Gombey has been a symbol of resilience, joy, and cultural expression, rooted in a blend of African, Caribbean, and Indigenous influences that has become a uniquely Bermudian

manifestation of our cultural heritage. The Bermuda Gombey Festival Weekend is our chance to celebrate this heritage in all its vibrancy and colour.

Madam President, the main event will feature the artistry of not just one, but seven active Gombey troupes! We are thrilled to welcome the Gombey Evolution Troupe, Gombey Warriors, H&H Gombey, Place's Gombey, and the Warwick Gombey Troupe. Additionally, we are excited to introduce two new participants who will be joining the festival for the very first time: Phoenix Gombey and Vibe Tribe Gombey. The diversity of styles and expressions within these groups is a testament to the dynamic and evolving nature of the Gombey tradition. Each troupe brings its unique flavour and flair to the performance, showcasing how the art of the Gombey continues to grow.

Madam President, in addition to the performances, the showcase will feature a variety of local vendors offering an assortment of goods that presents a perfect opportunity to support our local businesses.

Madam President, I want to emphasize that this is a free event including a free fun castle for the little ones to jump, play, and revel in the festive atmosphere. This festival is about community, unity, and joy, and we want everyone to have the chance to experience it.

Madam President, while the main festival is Saturday, the Gombey Festival Weekend will be rounded out with a series of events that capture the spirit of Gombey unity. On Friday, October 25th, we will launch the “Gombey Unity Short Film,” an inspiring documentary directed by Qian Dickinson and produced by the Department’s Cultural Programme Manager Carlita Lodge. This short film explores the theme of unity within the Gombey community, offering viewers a rare glimpse into the artistry, commitment, and sense of togetherness that fuels the Gombey tradition. The film will be made available on the Department’s YouTube channel, Bermuda Culture.

Madam President, on Sunday, October 27th, we will wind down the weekend with a Chewstick Open Mic Jam Session sponsored by the Department of Culture. This session will be hosted by The Chewstick Foundation and will provide a space for the Gombey

community to connect "behind-the-mask." It's an opportunity to share music, poetry, and creativity in a more intimate setting, fostering the bonds that make our cultural traditions strong.

Madam President, this year, the festival also includes the continuation of the "Gombeys in the Gardens Community Art Program," a mural project in collaboration with The Chewstick Foundation. This initiative is an extension of the Gombey Festival, creating a lasting visual tribute to the artistic spirit of the Gombey.

Madam President, the Bermuda Gombey Festival Weekend is a powerful reminder of the cultural richness that we hold in our hearts and history. The Gombey is more than just music and dance; it is an expression of freedom, identity, and community. It tells the stories of our ancestors and celebrates the spirit of our people, past, present, and future.

Madam President, whether you are a long-time fan of the Gombeys, or a first-time attendee, we invite you to join us for the Bermuda Gombey Festival on October 26th. In the case of inclement weather, the showcase will take place on Sunday, October 27th. By coming together to support and enjoy this

festival, we are honoring our heritage and nurturing a tradition that continues to inspire and unite us.

Thank you, **Madam President.**