

Delegation Visit to Jamaica

REPORT SUMMARY

7 - 10 November 2023



PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

On 7 – 10 November 2023, a CPA UK delegation visited Jamaica for a programme on UK-Jamaica bilateral issues, including constitutional questions and trade. This was the first CPA UK delegation visit to Jamaica since 2017. The delegation divided its time between the Parliament of Jamaica and Government Ministries, and engaging with areas of civil society, including food manufacturing and education.

IMPACT & OUTCOME

Impact

To strengthen the bilateral relations between the UK Parliament and the Parliament of Jamaica.

Outcome

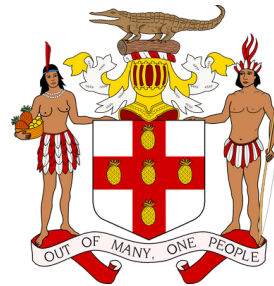
UK Parliamentarians are informed on important UK-Jamaica issues for their roles in the UK Parliament raising bilateral issues and scrutinising UK foreign policy.

LIST OF DELEGATES

The Rt Hon. Karen Bradley MP
Jo Gideon MP
Paulette Hamilton MP
Mark Pawsey MP
Lord Davies of Brixton

The UK and Jamaica have close historic and current ties. The UK is second only to the US in having the largest Jamaica diaspora population in the world. These close connections and this familiarity laid the foundation for addressing a range of issues through the programme, including bilateral trade, Jamaica's global cultural presence, UK visa requirements, the monarchy, reparations, and youth safety.

CPA UK is grateful to the Presiding Officers, Members and officials of the Parliament of Jamaica who generously hosted the delegation, and for the support of the British High Commission to Jamaica.



Parliament of Jamaica

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Jamaica Delegation Visit

FULL REPORT

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CPA UK IN THE REGION

The UK Parliament and the Parliament of Jamaica have a historically close and collaborative relationship. In February 2022, CPA UK welcomed a delegation from the Parliament of Jamaica to Westminster. This was the first in-person Commonwealth delegation CPA UK received following the COVID-19 pandemic began.

During Jamaica's previous Parliament, there were reciprocal bilateral visits between the UK and Jamaica. In September 2016, CPA UK welcomed a delegation of newly elected Jamaican parliamentarians. In September 2017, CPA UK led a parliamentary delegation to the Parliament of Jamaica.

Jamaica also regularly participates in CPA UK's multilateral programmes, including the annual Westminster Seminar and the regional Caribbean Clerks Programme.

UK Visas, the Monarchy and Reparations

Jamaica and the UK are historically intertwined and retain strong links. There remains a significant Jamaican diaspora in the UK, particularly in Greater London and Birmingham, which underscores the robust ties between the two countries.

Through the programme the UK delegation gained a greater appreciation of three particular issues that are prominent in UK-Jamaica bilateral relations. These are the current UK visas requirements, Jamaican attitudes towards the Monarchy, and the question of reparations for the UK's past role in slavery in Jamaica.

UK visa requirements for Jamaican citizens are highly contentious. Currently, Jamaican citizens require a visa to enter the United Kingdom. As the only Realm that requires a visa to visit the UK, this approach has caused controversy in Jamaica. These visa requirements also affect the level of cultural exchange that can take place between the two countries. The visa issue also feeds into changing attitudes regarding republicanism and there is the possibility of a referendum on the Monarchy taking place in 2024. Whilst Jamaicans value the bilateral relationship with the UK, people are asking the question: "How can my King be in a place I can't even visit?".

The delegation heard that Jamaicans still feel a sense of nostalgia for the UK, but that generations are changing and so are attitudes towards the Monarchy. Despite this, Jamaica remains committed to the Commonwealth.

If Jamaica were to become a republic, it would need two thirds of the vote in favour in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, alongside a referendum. Both the Jamaica Labour Party and People's National Party support a move towards being a republic, and the current Prime Minister Hon. Andrew Holness has promised that a referendum will take place before the next general election in 2025.



The delegation met with Marlene Malahoo Forte, QC, MP, JP, Minister of Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Jamaica does not have a history of referendums, and the UK delegation shared their experiences of the UK's 2016 referendum on its membership of the European Union.

On the question of reparations, Jamaica is not necessarily looking for compensation only in the form of cash payments but also in terms of support such as access to education and healthcare.

Delegates heard about the way that Jamaica would like to approach this issue and particularly placing emphasis on the importance of listening to the victims. Victims, or survivors, then articulate for themselves what they want from the process of reparations. It was shared that the path to justice should be legislated and properly managed.

Jamaican Trading and Cultural Ambitions

Jamaica is keen to show to the UK and the world that it is more than 'just music' and wants to be known for its food, sport, and art, and particularly its revivalist movement. Revivalism blends elements of African spirituality, Christianity, and indigenous Jamaican beliefs. Revivalism has played a significant role in shaping Jamaica's cultural and religious landscape, providing a space for spiritual expression and cultural continuity.

COUNTRY PROFILE

Capital: Kingston
Area: 10,991 sq. km
Population: 2,749,000
Official Language: English and Jamaican Patois
Prime Minister: Hon. Andrew Holness

The Parliament of Jamaica consists of three elements: the Crown, the House of Representatives and the Senate. The meeting place of the Parliament of Jamaica is Gordon House.

The Senate is composed of 21 appointed Senators and the House of Representatives is comprised of 63 elected Members of Parliament.

Jamaica follows what is sometimes termed the 'Westminster system' of government. The country is divided into 14 parishes, and 63 constituencies.

The 14th Parliament of Jamaica was sworn in on 15 September 2020. The governing party is the Jamaica Labour Party with 49 seats, and the opposition is the People's National Party, with 14 seats.

On trade, delegates heard that in 2016, Jamaica's GDP to debt ratio was a matter of concern. Since then the economy has improved and unemployment is down to 4.5%. Now Jamaica is looking towards the Commonwealth for trading opportunities, following these recent economic challenges, and is looking forward.

Delegates heard that there is potential demand in the UK market for Jamaican food products, such as spices, sauces, ackee and yams. Participants discussed the importance of promoting Jamaican goods to a wider market, because currently the demand for those products is concentrated in specific areas such as Brixton and parts of Birmingham.

The delegates visited the Walkerswood Caribbean Foods factory, in the parish of St Anne to see the workings of a factory within one of Jamaica's largest industries. The factory is important to the local area, employing over 80 people, the vast majority from the local area. The company also works closely with local farmers. Its key export destinations are Australia, Germany and the United Kingdom.



The delegation participated in a tour of Walkerswood Caribbean Foods

Following new data-protection laws recently introduced in 2020, Jamaica is also looking to enter certain business markets and legal process outsourcing. UK-Jamaican collaboration might be possible in this area.

Education and Youth Safety

Two of the key challenges in Jamaican society are improving educational attainment and ensuring the safety of young people.

School children in Jamaica are significantly affected by youth violence. This is partly caused by the influence of harmful material being spread via social media, and for this reason mobile phones are usually confiscated from pupils at the start of each school day. Metal detectors have also been installed in most schools.

These are some of the ways that schools are combating violence, although according to a recent survey most people are concerned about violence taking place outside of schools, for example whilst commuting to and from school. The survey also showed that one in five students know a student who is a member of a gang.

As part of a wider approach to support children and families, the Education Ministry is working in collaboration with the National Parenting Support Commission, to engage 100,000 parents in parenting sessions by the end of the academic year.

The delegation visited Denham Town High School in Kingston, a school facing significant challenges in Jamaica, with only 1.7% of its students attaining 5 subjects with English and Mathematics at CSEC level. The delegation met with teachers and students and observed some of the lessons taking place. It watched an anti-violence concert, performed by police officers and students. The concert was a way of engaging with students about violence in schools and breaking down the barriers between law enforcement and students.



The CPA UK delegation meets with students and staff during a visit to Denham Town High School

Next Steps

CPA UK looks forward to continuing to engage with Jamaica in future bilateral and multilateral programmes. In January 2024 officials from the Parliament of Jamaica participated in the Caribbean Clerks Programme and we look forward to welcoming Jamaican delegates to our annual Westminster Seminar programme in London. Future delegation visits between Westminster and Kingston are anticipated after the next UK General Election.

A world map with several regions highlighted in a dark purple color. These regions include North America (USA and Canada), the United Kingdom, India, and Australia. Other regions like South America, Africa, and parts of Europe and Asia are shown in a light grey color.

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