

Speeches

Statement by the Honourable Billie A. Miller, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade at the Launch of the "Passport Project"

2.30 pm Monday 29th, March 1999

Ladies and Gentlemen

Last August at the Third Biennial Foreign Policy Review and Meeting of the Heads of Overseas Missions, the Ministry outlined its vision of a fully connected Foreign Service in which the new information and communication technology would be used to link officers to officers, the Missions to the Ministry and the Ministry to the World. The Overseas Service, - our Embassies, Consulates and Honorary Consuls – play a vital role as external agents of not only the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade but a number of Ministries and Departments, the Immigration Department being a major one. Over the past three years our Missions have issued five thousand, five hundred and sixty-eight passports from which an income of over half a million Barbados dollars has been received.

This information – technology – driven system which we are inaugurating this afternoon, has been dubbed “The Passport Project” – a catchphrase that is brief and easily remembered – but it embraces much more than the issue of passports; it enables the Overseas Officers to perform more efficiently and expeditiously a wide range of immigration and consular functions.

In effect the project is a computer link-up between the Immigration Department and the Overseas Missions whereby the Overseas Mission will have secure remote access to the Immigration Department’s database. Apart from facilitating the main entry of passports on a central database it also provides the missions with a wealth of information on nationals within their jurisdictions. This enhances our ability to remain in contact with our overseas nationals and to keep them informed of developments in Barbados.

As the system continues to develop, the Ministry, in partnership with the Immigration Department , will be able to incorporate other processes such as applications for citizenship, visas and the like.

Traditionally, these processes have involved extensive telephone and fax communications between the Missions, the Ministry and the Immigration Department with the consequential high cost. This new link – up provides immediate savings, which will increase as its coverage expands.

At the end of this year it is expected that, with the appropriate training of the relevant staff, all of our ten Missions will be on board this project and the cost benefits of this system will at that time become self evident.

This system will be very secure both in terms of the way in which the information is transmitted and the personnel who will be allowed access to the information. Every effort will be made to ensure that information which is personal and confidential is handled with the strictest professionalism and consideration of security.

The Ministry has as part of its work plan for the 1999-2000 fiscal year other information technology projects designed to bring us closer to fulfilling our vision of moving the Foreign Service into the Twenty-First Century. It is my hope that the close collaboration between the Ministry and Immigration Department will be extended to similar projects with other Government Departments. What we will be developing therefore is a fully connected government service.

I wish on behalf of the entire Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade to thank the Minister of Home Affairs, the Chief Immigration Officer and her staff for their cooperation and readiness to embark upon this project and make it a success. I thank you all here in Barbados and all of you participating in New York for your involvement and support.

I now invite you to join with us in witnessing the entry of the first Barbados passport to be processed in cyber-space.