

Caribbean Strikes Back at UK Portrayal of Jamaica

Members of the Jamaican community in the United Kingdom (UK) has condemned a television programme aired on July 5 on the British television channel, ITV, entitled: 'The Secret Caribbean'.

The programme, which was presented by renowned broadcaster, Trinidad-born journalist Sir Trevor McDonald, cast Jamaica in a negative light, prompting responses from Jamaican groups in the UK. The Jamaica Diaspora UK said the programme gave a distorted picture of the island and was riddled with inaccuracies and gave wrong statistics. Advisory Board Member, Celia Grandison Markey said the Jamaican community rejected the idea of Jamaica being used to embody all that is negative about the Caribbean. "The Jamaican community is angry and unhappy at the way their island home continues to be portrayed in the British media. They reject the idea of Jamaica being used to embody all that is negative in the Caribbean, while other islands are used to convey the notion of 'paradise'. In the future, these unfair and inaccurate depictions will be vigorously challenged," she said. A release from the organisation said it was sad that the series on the Caribbean continue in the tradition of 'facile and patronising' reporting on the islands and peoples of the Caribbean. "Jamaica has produced a religion and a distinctive musical tradition, which has made an extraordinary impact on the world. It boasts sportsmen and women who have maintained a sixty-year tradition of competing and winning at the highest levels in world sport. Its emigrants and their offspring have become outstanding citizens in many countries throughout the world. Its warm people, world-renowned culture and exquisite natural beauty draw three million visitors from around the globe, making it one of the few tourist destinations that grew in 2008," the release said. Meanwhile, Jamaica's High Commissioner to the UK, Burchell Whiteman, has supported the defence of the island by the Jamaican community. He said that it is important for the community in the UK to challenge all forms of negative stereotyping and misinformation about Jamaica and Jamaicans. "Jamaica is a vibrant and diverse country. It is a small island, and that like many others across the globe, is facing challenges. However, it is not one-dimensional and there are countless positive and innovative developments taking place on the island. Any programme or report on Jamaica that serves only to highlight what is wrong, does a grave disservice to all Jamaicans, people of Jamaican heritage and friends of Jamaica," Mr. Whiteman said. JIS

Describing the programme as a clear sign of colonial conditioning of "divide and conquer", Diane Flemming, a national of St Kitts and Nevis, in a letter to the Jamaica Tourist Board's visitjamaica website, said she was gutted by the portrayal of Jamaica.

Divide and conquer

"How such a professional, celebrated journalist could present such a biased, unbalanced view of Jamaica while pitting it against the perception of idyllic utopia of wealth and luxury of The Bahamas and Barbados, as if no crime, and/or poverty driven activities exist there, were clear signs of our colonial conditioning of divide and conquer," she said.

Another concerned member of the diaspora, Chantal Miller, said after looking forward to the hotly anticipated programme for weeks, she was utterly disappointed at what was aired.

"Have I somehow misunderstood the purpose of the programme or perhaps the word secret has misled me ?" she asked.

"The Caribbean is so much more than sun, sand and sea and Jamaica is certainly more than a haven for drug pushers/con artists and gang warfare," she noted, adding that McDonald and ITV had succeeded in letting her down and, most important, the Caribbean.