

Maroons to Re-trace Footsteps of Ancestors

A Jamaican Maroon group will soon be re-tracing the footsteps of their ancestors in a Canadian city, to which they were banished by the British colonial government more than 200 years ago.

The Charles Town Maroon Drummers, under the leadership of Colonel Frank Lumsden, will be visiting Canada from July 30 to August 10, as part of the Jamaican High Commission's programme for the 175th Anniversary of the Emancipation from Slavery, and the 47th Anniversary of Jamaica's Independence. Their three-city tour will take them to Ottawa, Toronto and Halifax, Nova Scotia, the Canadian city to which 540 Maroons were expelled from Jamaica in 1796. Credited with contributing to the third rebuilding of the Citadel in Halifax, they are often referred to as the first Jamaican immigrants in Canada. Although descendants of those Maroons remained in and around Halifax, many left in the 19th century to settle in Sierra Leone, Africa. The Jamaican High Commission in Ottawa and the Jamaican Consulate General in Toronto have joined forces and launched the 'One-One Coco Fund-raising Campaign', to raise funds to pay for the visit. "It is an expensive venture to bring the 10-member group here," said Jamaica's High Commissioner to Canada, Her Excellency Evadne Coye. "But, the unique cultural experience that the Charles Town Maroons have to offer is worth the effort of bringing them to Canada," she added. She noted that the current global economic situation had made it very difficult to obtain sponsorship, and lauded the Jamaica National Building Society (JNBS) for their consistent faithfulness in supporting activities of the Jamaican community in Canada, including those of the Consulate General and the High Commission. The One-One Coco Fund-raising Campaign is a play on the Jamaican proverb, 'one-one coco full basket', meaning no matter how small the contribution, every little helps. "We are asking Jamaicans to contribute by giving a little - whether it's \$5, \$10 or \$20 - to the cause," said High Commissioner Coye. The group will perform in Canada's capital city, Ottawa, on July 31; in Toronto on Saturday, August 1 (Emancipation Day), at Harbourfront Centre; and on Monday, August 3, at JAMBANA festivities. They will then move on to Nova Scotia, performing and holding workshops from August 5 to 9.

In Halifax, the programme is being co-ordinated by the African Nova Scotia Affairs, a public agency, and the African Nova Scotia Music Association, both of which readily accepted the High Commissioner's proposal. "Like me, they see this as a way of closing the circle which began with the tragedy of the Maroon expulsion, and now Maroons from Jamaica will re-trace those steps in proud celebration of freedom and independence," High Commissioner Coye said.