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**International Conference on Language
Policy in the Creole speaking
Caribbean**

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Background

Conference on Language Policy in the Caribbean

Linguists have generally complained that policy makers do not listen to them on matters of language which require the expertise of linguists. This is particularly true in the area of Language Education. The goal of the Conference on Language Policy in the Caribbean is to bring together a group of Caribbean policy makers from across the Caribbean and members of the International Centre on Caribbean Language Research (ICCLR) network. The point would be to develop a programme of activities and applied research which would both draw on the experiences across the Caribbean and the range of linguistic research available. The special feature of this conference would be the attempt to be very high profile, and to put linguists and linguistics at the centre of public awareness. Among the confirmed invitees are two linguists who are still serving as Governors-General, i.e. Sir Colville Young and Dame Pearlette Louisy. Policy makers would be constrained, in such an environment, from ignoring the quality of advice being made available.

The Language Policy Conference will take place on the 13th and 14th of January 2011 and will be hosted by the JLU/UCLR. The ICCLR has a Planning Committee which consists of 6 members, namely:

- 1) Hubert Devonish (Professor)
- 2) Karen Carpenter (Doctor)
- 3) Celia Blake (Mrs.)
- 4) Carolyn Dyche (Mrs.)
- 5) Denise Banks (Mrs.)

6) Gavin Walters (Mr.)

Conference Themes

The specific themes to be addressed by the conference are:

1) Creole and International Languages in the education system

a. Sub-theme:

i. In-school issues

1. Creole and International Languages as languages of literacy, mediums of instruction and as subjects in the curriculum
2. Teacher training in the effective use of both Creole and International Languages in the classroom
3. Testing and evaluation of language skills of children with Creole as a native language

ii. Out-of-school issues

1. Public and parental attitude to Creole and International Languages in the classroom

2) Language Rights in the Law.

a. Sub-theme:

- i. Rights in the Legal system
- ii. Rights in Public administration

3) Policy on Indigenous Endangered Languages

a. Sub-theme:

- i. Responsibilities of the State in recording and making publicly accessible Indigenous Endangered Languages in use and information about their history, structure and cultural context.
- ii. The need to protect these Indigenous Endangered Languages (by the State)

Categories of Invitees

- 1) Heads of State – Governors’ Generals
 - a. Belize
 - b. St. Lucia
- 2) Government Ministers of Culture/Education/Justice or their respective equivalents in various countries e.g.
 - a. Jamaica
 - b. Haiti
 - c. Guadeloupe
 - d. Belize
- 3) Possible invitees from outside the Caribbean e.g.
 - a. Cape Verde Islands
 - b. U.S.A
- 4) Academic and Scholarly invitees
- 5) Local groups/organisations e.g.
 - a. The Bible Society of the West Indies
 - b. Jamaica Association for the Deaf
 - c. Jamaica Teachers Association

Overall Format of Conference

The conference is scheduled to be held on the 13th and 14th of January 2011. Approximately 100 persons are expected to be in attendance. However most if not all of the persons in attendance would have already been sufficiently immersed in both the context and content of the conference. This would be as a result of them being asked by the ICCLR Planning Committee to play a consultative role in the creating of a draft language rights and Policy charter prior to the actual staging of the conference. This draft charter will therefore be the central focus of all the persons in attendance over the 2 days.

At the conference, those in attendance would be asked to form not more than 6 working groups, in which they would both review and edit the draft Language Policy document. The members of each group will be selected before the actual conference by the Planning Committee. Each group will be assigned a group leader and assigned a theme to work on prior to the conference. The hope is that a draft working document would be created by the end of November 2010 and made available to both local and regional government officials to get their feedback and set the stage for the conference in January 2011.

In brief the *International Conference on Language Policy in the Creole-speaking Caribbean*, should take the following format:

- 1) Day 1 of the conference commencing with opening remarks and presentations from Professor Devonish and other key presenters. Thereafter an outline of the draft Language Rights and Policy document presented to the attendees along with the objectives of the 2 day conference.
- 2) Attendees will then be asked to form groups, debate and critically amend the sections of the draft document assigned to those groups. The group formation is expected to last from the middle of day 1 to the middle of day 2.
- 3) After lunch on day 2 a plenary session will be held in which various public bodies and interested members of the public will be asked to give their thoughts and opinions on the draft Charter.
- 4) Arising out of the 2 day conference will be follow-ups by the ICCLR Planning Committee with each of the conference working group members. This will be done to ensure that the final amendments to the respective sections of the draft document are carried out. Also, the follow-ups will ensure that the amendments are carried out by the deadlines set by each group.

5) The final stage of this process would see the ICCLR compiling all of the sections and presenting an official Language Rights and Policy Charter to (i) fellow members of the ICCLR (ii) policy makers and academics across the Caribbean (iii) and all other interested parties/groups. This document it is expected would inform future language policy decisions in bi-lingual countries across the Caribbean.