

**SPEECH BY THE HON STUART A. JOHNSON,**

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on the occasion of the

Graduation Ceremony of the Training and Professional Development Workshops, a collaboration between the Caribbean Education Foundation and Interval Intl. with training provided by Louise John and Suzanne Shillingford-Brooks of Talk About Earth Solutions

Royal Ballroom, Simpson Bay Resort, Oct 4, 2019

Good morning awardees, representatives of Interval International and the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association Education Foundation.

Holding a certificate in a particular field means that you are qualified to do the work and working in hospitality is one of the most rewarding professions.

Take a moment to reflect on this fact. The industry that you are sharpening your skills to be a part of is one of the world's leading industries and generates annually over 7 trillion dollars.

Meanwhile, travel to the Caribbean continues to increase. In fact, despite the inescapable impact of hurricanes to the Caribbean each year, we in the Caribbean saw an increase of over 12% in tourist arrivals.

As you are well aware, St Maarten suffered the worst hurricane in history two years ago. Today we are still recovering from the devastation Irma left behind. Many hotels closed, and thousands of our friends and families lost their jobs.

Our nation's strength was tested. But on days like these, I am recharged with a great sense of pride to be a citizen of this country. This is because of the resilience and character of people like you. You could have given up and done nothing. Instead, you took advantage of the opportunity to improve your skillset to make you more marketable.

As we continue to rebuild St Maarten's economy and redefine its tourism product, let me remind you that you, our human resource, are the essential ingredient that will be needed.

For many years, we were known as "The Friendly Island". Our hospitality was impeccable. Those who worked in hospitality on St Maarten showed a sense of pride about themselves and in their work.

They carried themselves as ambassadors of our country, making us the best destination in the Caribbean to visit.

So today you have completed your training, and you are receiving your certificates from Interval International and the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association Education Foundation (CHTAEF). This is a great honor bestowed on you, do not take it lightly. It is given to you because you have proven yourselves to be individuals of great character with the discipline and sense of respect that is required to be excellent hospitality ambassadors.

The efforts of our private sector partners to provide you with this opportunity solidifies our collective belief that our human resource is our most precious capital.

Competition for tourists and in the travel industry is high throughout the Caribbean and the world. That is why personal training is essential. Because at the end of the day, many Caribbean islands can offer seawater and sand, but when it comes to five-star hospitality and friendliness St Maarten must remain in the lead.

I commend you all for this great achievement. Let me reiterate, do not take it lightly. Go forth into the hospitality industry boldly knowing that you are certified and truly ambassadors of hospitality for St Maarten.

I wish to extend a special thanks to Interval International and the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association Education Foundation for their continued support of hospitality and the development of the people of St Maarten. Your commitment to our economic growth and our people has not gone unnoticed and we sincerely thank you.

Congratulations to all receiving certificates today and may God continue to bless you.

Thank you.