

**O&A: SHARLENE CARTWRIGHT-ROBINSON**

# Winds of change

DESPITE A BATTERING FROM HURRICANES IN 2017, THE TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS IS BACK OPEN FOR BUSINESS, WITH AMBITIONS TO BROADEN TOURISM, INCREASE FISHING AND BUILD ON FINANCIAL SERVICES, AS PREMIER SHARLENE CARTWRIGHT-ROBINSON TELLS COURTNEY FINGAR



**CURRICULUM VITAE**

SHARLENE  
CARTWRIGHT-  
ROBINSON

2016

**Turks and Caicos Islands**  
Premier

**Previously**

People's Democratic Movement,  
leader; lawyer

**Q** What role can foreign investors play in your economic development plans?

**A** They are critical to the growth and development of the Turks and Caicos Islands. We have a very small population; there is only so much we can do in terms of taxing the population that is here and, of course, the challenge of capital among a small population is also an issue. So we do spend quite a lot in trying to attract foreign investors into the Turks and Caicos for those two express purposes. It's really critical to economic growth and development and any time we speak about expanding our economy, we speak more of how we can diversify our product to bring in more investors.

**Q** What would that diversity look like?

**A** Right now we are largely tourism-driven and we are looking to diversify the tourism product itself. We're known for [our beaches] but because of our close proximity to the US and so many other factors, we believe that we can also be one of those countries that is good for conferences, and even ecotourism and heritage tourism.

But, apart from that, the financial services industry is a strong industry that we want to continue to develop. And then, of course, on a smaller scale we're looking at agriculture and fishing to help in terms of not just looking at feeding ourselves but also in generating income for our economy.

**Q** How's the recovery from the 2017 hurricanes [Irma and Maria] going?

**A** We've moved very quickly. We were able to restore critical services within days – in fact, our electricity service provider received an award for being able to restore full electricity within 60 days. That's not been the story of any other overseas territory. Recovery is tied more to electricity than anything else.

We have just secured a supplementary approval from the UK, being an overseas territory, where we'll begin to rebuild critical government infrastructure that was hardest hit in the islands. We're looking to repair schools and areas that can double as shelter, considering we are five months away from another storm [season]. We have a progressive and more detailed plan that we are working on with the taskforce already being formed and we are also looking

at how we're going to fund the recovery.

We were beneficiaries of a UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean report that placed our damages and losses [at more than \$500m]. So we are looking at each sector to see what the damage and loss was and, of course, then address each of those sectors in detail.

**Q** The Turks and Caicos Islands has had some political turmoil in recent years [the UK suspended its government in 2009 after corruption scandals]. To what extent has that settled down, and what is your relationship with the UK?

**A** Our relationship with the UK is strong. Of course, you can imagine you have a government that is elected by the people and you want to be the governor of your own destiny. But at the end of the day it's an overseas territory, you know that there are certain obligations and, in fairness to the UK, it has the responsibility for us internationally and anything that we would engage in financially, it has contingent liability.

So at the end of the day, we believe the approach is not a loggerhead one but it's one of engagement, and we have been the beneficiaries of a very good relationship thus far. We've had, of course, instances where we've had to raise our voices, and we are satisfied that we are heard and that we are respected.

It should be reassuring to know that [government officials accused of wrongdoing] have been brought before the court and that no one is above the rule of law, and that we are strong in the application of law and the rule of law in this country. That should be encouraging to anyone who wants to invest in the Turks and Caicos Islands. ■



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