

Protocol and Diplomacy: A Guide for the Modern Professional

Feature Remarks

**by Mr. Franz Hall, Under-Secretary (Acting)
Diaspora, Protocol and Consular Division
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, Jamaica
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Dr. Nand Bardouille, Manager, Diplomatic Academy of the Caribbean

Ms. Jennifer Marchand, Co-Facilitator

Mrs. Tammy Brathwaite, Participant Representative

Participants

Good afternoon,

It is certainly a pleasure for me to have been invited to deliver these remarks at the close of what I am sure has been a most informative and dynamic week. It should by now have become crystal clear that protocol lies at the very heart of diplomacy.

I commenced my career in the Foreign Service in the Protocol Department, and was assigned to the Privileges and Immunities Unit, with the responsibility for processing Identification cards and applications for refunds from various taxes. As I became familiar with the other sections in the Department, I had an early recognition that the Protocol Department was at the heart of the work of the Ministry. Back then, it may have been coincidental that the Protocol Department rested on the 5th floor of a 10 floor building, right in the middle (literally) of the Ministry.

It was drilled into our minds by the then Permanent Secretary, Ambassador Louis Boothe, CD, that our work should be characterized by excellence and there was no room for error. We were also instructed to consult files and to develop an understanding of the policy framework for the provision of Protocol services. As a former Chief of Protocol, he understood fully the importance of getting things right from the outset, as the reputation of the country could have been shattered by one mistake, if it were significant enough.

With this start, it ought not to have come as surprise when several years later, during my assignment as Consul General in Miami, the Minister suggested that upon my return to Jamaica at the end of the assignment I should consider being Director of Protocol – but it was a surprise. As I reflected on the offer, it was clear that my training in Protocol, coupled with subsequent years of work in almost all areas of the Ministry, had served me well.

I had the pleasure of chairing the roundtable yesterday, and I was struck by the fact that despite my almost 3 decades in the Foreign Ministry, there is still so much to learn about Protocol. It is a field that has its grounding in international convention and practice, but remains one that is dynamic and one that must continue to adapt and be responsive to the changing nature of relations in the international system.

The roundtable addressed elements of protocol under the theme Protocol: Substance over Form. We discussed the antecedents to current day protocol, the importance of planning, monitoring and evaluation and the application of protocol in international and regional organizations. While time did not permit an exhaustive review of all the elements that fall under the heading of protocol, there certainly was enough to demonstrate that protocol is substance over form. To illustrate, protocol practitioners should be prepared or be able to provide policy advice on a range of matters relating to an interpretation of the Vienna Convention in the context of your own national legal systems, especially in the context of unforeseen developments.

As a practical example, with the onset of the COVID19 pandemic, measures had to be implemented in Jamaica to mitigate the impact of the virus, that involved an assessment as to how best to accommodate the interests of the Diplomatic corps, while not diminishing their privileges and immunities. After careful consideration, certain exemptions were allowed, and where other extraordinary measures were deemed to be consistent with our obligations, they were implemented. Interestingly, it was during those deliberations that we discovered that health pandemics were not covered specifically by the Convention.

Our deliberations yesterday highlighted the fact that if there is no understanding of the rationale for, and history of, the practice of protocol, then the risk of failure looms large. It was recognized that Protocol is as much about execution and hands on delivery of services, as it is understanding the legal framework that governs the provision of protocol services. Yes, Protocol is form, but that form must be consistent with internationally agreed convention and

practice, as well as domestic law that should, in any case, be consistent with a state's international obligation.

For persons who work within the international system, whether as Diplomats, or International Civil Servants, it is essential for the importance and role of Protocol to be understood. There are highly developed practices that are often not understood by the public, but which lie at the heart of the practice of state craft. For example, the entire process of the appointment of Ambassadors – from requesting Agrément to the presentation of Credentials is a highly developed one and widely understood by practitioners. This fundamental process is critically important for the effective operation of the international system, and triggers recognition of the person as the duly authorized representative of a particular State and the consequent eligibility for privileges and immunities. However, if you were to ask persons outside of Protocol, they may not have an appreciation for the intricacies and nuances of the process.

In closing, Protocol is highly specialized and requires years of study and experience for one to develop mastery in the field. But, even for persons seeking to work in the field of diplomacy and international relations, it is highly recommended that they seek to understand the role of protocol in the world of Diplomacy. I therefore commend The Diplomatic Academy of the Caribbean for this programme, which will be instrumental in laying a strong foundation to support your continued professional growth.

Thank you and best wishes.
