

GARIFUNA COALITION USA, INC.

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Ninth Anniversary of UNESCO's Proclamation of the Garifuna Language, Dance and Music as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity

Resurrecting the Garifuna culture in the image of its past glory

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New York - The Board of Directors of the Garifuna Coalition USA, Inc. a, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization is pleased announce the Ninth Anniversary of UNESCO's Proclamation of the Garifuna Language, Music and Dance as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. The proclamation includes an Action Plan for the Safeguarding of the Garifuna Language, Music and Dance.

The Garifuna people, although living within the borders of various countries (including but not limited to Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, St. Vincent, and the United States of America), represent a single, united ethnic community known as the Garifuna Nation. Despite the geographical dispersion, the Garifunas have kept alive their common language, oral traditions, music and dances. However, although still practiced on various occasions, these are changing considerably as the Garifuna language is less often spoken.

Therefore, the safeguarding project focuses mainly in the preservation of the Garifuna language through language revitalization, lexical expansion programs and the promotion of teaching, learning and practicing. It will also develop an inventory of Garifuna art forms (such as songs, music, dances and related customs etc.) and promote regional Garifuna festivals with a view to confronting the erosion of the Garifuna culture in the heart of modern day communities. As a general objective, the project seeks to strengthen the capacities of the Garifuna communities in order to promote the safeguarding of its heritage.

The proclamation of March 11th – April 12th, 2010 as Garifuna Heritage Month in New York, which represents the first in the world, is part of the safeguarding project and represents the highest recognition of the Garifuna Community since becoming a vital part of New York City's social, cultural and economic way of life for the past 187 years, through *The Drama of King Shotaway*, the first Black drama of the American Theatre and which had as its subject the 1795 Black Caribs (Garifunas) defense of the Island of Saint Vincent against colonization by the British.

Furthermore, the Garifuna people recognize the natural and inherent interconnectedness of language and culture and that language is the primary vehicle for the transmission of their culture. They believe that their survival depends on both the preservation of their traditional language and on social and economic development. Therefore the language policies and goals also impact and are intimately connected with their economic development and cultural survival. In order to provide greater opportunities to practice and use the ancestral language, Garifuna classes are offered at Yurumein House in the Bronx and the Biko Transformation Center in Brooklyn and by the Garifuna Heritage

Foundation in Los Angeles, as part of the language preservation project. According to the New York Times, today, Garifuna is virtually as common in the Bronx and in Brooklyn as in Honduras and Belize.

As the Garifunas reclaim their history for the sake of their future, they look forward to a future brimming with promise and hope. A future that includes a commitment to promote the Garifuna Heritage and Culture in all parts of the Garifuna Diaspora as well as collaborate in practical ways to support the Renaissance of the Garifuna Heritage and Culture in St. Vincent and the Grenadines "Yurumein" the Ancestral Homeland of the Garifuna people. Furthermore, in order to ascertain the sustainability of the language, music and dance of the Garifuna people, the Garifuna Coalition USA, Inc., has established the Preservation of the Garifuna Culture Cause on Facebook to attract attention and much needed resources that will help to assure the survival of this valuable cultural and intangible heritage.

In addition, it is pleased to announce the formation of an ad-hoc committee with Garifuna Organizations around the nation, including the Greater Houston Garifuna American Partnership, Inc. to petition the U.S. Congress to establish March 11th - April 12th, 2012 as Garifuna-American Heritage Month in the United States of America, in observance of the 215th anniversary of the exile of the Garifuna people from St Vincent on March 11th, 1797 and their settlement in Central America on April 12th, 1797.

As they celebrate the ninth anniversary of UNESCO's Proclamation of the Garifuna Language, Music and Dance as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity Garifunas would like to remind that in 2011 they will celebrate the tenth anniversary with a return to St Vincent and the Grenadines "Yurumein", where in cooperation with the National Garifuna Council (NGC) the lead organization responsible for safeguarding preserving and revitalizing of the Garifuna language, music and dance and the Garifuna Heritage Foundation, will discuss future implementation of the Action Plan for the Safeguarding of the Garifuna Language, Music and Dance in support of the Renaissance of the Garifuna Heritage and Culture in St. Vincent and the Grenadines "Yurumein" the Ancestral Homeland of the Garifuna People.

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