



EMBARGOED UNTIL 0.01AM SUNDAY 14TH MARCH 2010

BLACK COMMUNITY SOUNDS RALLYING CRY FOR MORE ENGAGED FATHERS AS HIGHER EDUCATION MINISTER MAKES IMPASSIONED APPEAL

Higher Education Minister David Lammy MP will tomorrow issue a rallying cry for black fatherhood at an event hosted by Runnymede, the UK's leading race equality thinktank.

In a speech to coincide with Mothering Sunday, he will say *'what many women want for mothers' day can't be given by their children, it is more engaged fathers'*.

Citing the example of his own mother, a single parent, Lammy will pay tribute to the sacrifices made by many women in families where fathers are either absent or uninvolved.

The speech will be accompanied by video excerpts from recorded discussions held by the Higher Education Minister with men from the black community. Those involved include **Sir Trevor McDonald**, actor/playwright **Kwame Kwei-Armah** and **rapper Tinie Tempah**, whose single *Pass Out* reached number 1 in the charts last week.

In the speech Lammy will:

- Urge more young black men to demonstrate more responsible attitudes towards sex, arguing *'The mark of man is not how many children he spawns but how he matches up as a father.'* Figures show that 59% of Black Caribbean and 44% of Black African children grow up in single parent families.
- Call for fathers from all backgrounds to remain in touch with their children whatever the relationship with their mothers, saying: *'Between a quarter and a third of children with separated parents have little to no contact with their fathers. It is not just the structure of families that matters. It is whether fathers continue to contribute to their children's lives'*.
- Argue that *'modern fatherhood needs updating from the traditional model'*, adding that *'The "provider-protector" version is in our comfort zone but what young people also need today is an emotional bond with*

their father’. Surveys show that only one in ten children would go to their father first if they had a problem.

A renewed focus on fathers, according to the Higher Education Minister, would help tackle some of the challenges facing young black people such as educational underachievement, disproportionate exclusion levels and high crime rates.

In discussions with Lammy, **Sir Trevor McDonald** cites the influence his father had on his own ambitions, saying: *‘My father always said: “Reach for the stars and you may get to the top of the trees but you have to aim high”. When i told my father i was going to be a journalist he was terribly distressed!’*

Kwame Kwei-Armah describes how modern media culture is changing fatherhood, saying *‘My father had a lot more influence over me than i ever will over my children. I grew up in a 4 channel universe and my children are growing up in a 1000 channel universe. Of course there is going to be less control’*

Rapper Tinie Tempah draws attention to the exposure of young children to sex, saying *“Younger kids today are very overexposed to everything; whereas before when you were at school they probably didn’t talk about sex much .You’ve got the internet – if you want to find porn it will pop up in your face – porn will find you”*

Actor Femi Oyeniran, star of the films **Adulthood** and **Kidulthood** *‘Many young black guys are walking around without a clue about what it means to be a man. This is simply because many are fatherless. Even when fathers are around kids are fatherless because of time deficiency. This is not just a top-down endeavour; that is not to understate the role of policy-makers. Everyone has a part to play.’*

Tunde Banjoko OBE, founder of LEAP, comments on absent fathers, saying *when i was used to run football teams you could literally tell which kid had his father in his life and didn’t on the basis of his behaviour...It’s in the absence of that fatherhood; it’s in the absence of that strong male role model in the family that instead they get everything that will teach them how to be how a man from music’*

Young father and project manager Eugene Akwasi-Ayisi reflects on his own experience, saying: *‘I had a kid when I was 19. It wasn’t until I started being responsible for someone else then i knew how much my father loved me. You don’t understand the sacrifice until you have your own.’*

Reverend Nims Obunge describes the importance of an emotional connection between fathers and children, saying *‘I hugged an 18 year old man, dealing with gun and knife crime. He said that nobody had ever hugged him like that in his life and that the only touch he had ever had was a touch of punishment or pain Nobody had ever told him that he was loved or hugged him. For me that spoke volumes.*

Tomorrow's speech is part of a series of work by Runnymede – entitled Runnymede Platform – featuring contributions from senior politicians on race equality issues. Previous contributors have included Conservative Shadow Justice Secretary Dominic Grieve QC MP and Liberal Democrat Equalities Spokesperson Lynne Featherstone MP.

Commenting on Runnymede Platform, Runnymede Director Rob Berkeley said: “It is critical that we encourage our politicians to talk about race equality and issues facing black and minority ethnic communities. Solving the persistent challenges of racism and disadvantage needs leadership from all levels in society”

Notes to Editors

- 1) David Lammy MP will speak at 12.30pm on Monday 15th March in the House of Commons. To attend or for further details please contact Vicki Butler at Runnymede Trust on 020 7377 9222 or Duncan O’Leary from the Office of David Lammy MP on 0797 657 0168.
- 2) Runnymede is a social policy research organisation focused on race equality and race relations. We work by;
 - Investigating challenges to race equality and good race relations
 - Enabling effective action for social change
 - Influencing policy at all levels through providing thought leadership and robust evidence

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- 3) Runnymede Platform aims to create a space in which senior political figures can discuss issues of race equality, with critical comment from the academic community. Today’s speech is the second in the series following the publication of “Conservatism and Community Cohesion” by senior Conservative Dominic Grieve QC MP and “Liberal Democrats and Race Equality” by Liberal Democrat Equalities Spokesperson Lynne Featherstone MP.