

Sir Sidney Poitier - best known Bahamian - honored

LOS ANGELES (August 21, 2012) -- The Bahamas Ministry of Foreign Affairs paid tribute to Bahamian actor and cinema icon Sir Sidney Poitier in an intimate ceremony that drew prominent Bahamian and American citizens in Los Angeles.

Sir Sidney, The Bahamas' ambassador to UNESCO from 2002 to 2007 and ambassador to Japan from 1997 to 2007, was thanked for his contributions to film, pop culture and The Bahamas. Deputy Prime Minister of The Bahamas Philip Davis led the tributes by presenting Sir Sidney with a crystal plaque along with Minister of Foreign Affairs Fred Mitchell.

"Every Bahamian grows up knowing of Sidney Poitier," the Deputy Prime Minister said to guests at the event. "Every Bahamian knows the greatness of the man, achieved over an extraordinary lifetime, and Americans and Bahamians can agree: Sidney Poitier is one of a kind."

Minister Davis said Sir Sidney has laid out an exemplary path that others can follow. The path suggests that those who want to be successful should work hard, study, be excellent and be honest, he said.

"His remarkable achievements in the motion picture business and in literature are a testament to what can be accomplished by a person brave and principled enough to follow this wise advice," he said. "Sir Sidney has enhanced the cultural life of his two states of citizenship- the United States of America and the Commonwealth of The Bahamas."

Minister Mitchell said Sir Sidney is the best known of all Bahamians. However, he pointed out that his connection to The Bahamas is not as widely known in the world as would be expected.

Minister Mitchell said he was grateful to have gotten to know Sir Sidney as they worked together in an official capacity over the years. The time reinforced his iconic notion of Sir Sidney, he said.

"Some in this generation have asked 'What has he done for The Bahamas?' My answer is, 'He is.' That is enough," Minister Mitchell said. "Even the blind can see. We are proud of this native son whose roots are strong in Cat Island and in Nassau."

In response to the honor, Sir Sidney recalled the lives of his parents – Reginald and Evelyn Poitier. He attributed his character and accomplishments to their training.

"I have been a very, very successful actor," he said. "But I could only be a successful actor, I believe, because I lived by the values I saw unfolding in them on a day by day basis. I honor you, our country and its citizens. I believe that there was a purpose to it all. I will not try to explain it to you because I can't, but I will tell you that at the foundation of my life are these two people."

Several of Sir Sidney's family members, including residents of Nassau and Cat Island, Bahamas, attended the event. Other guests included Mychal Thompson, the Bahamian who won two NBA championships with the Los Angeles Lakers; Rick Fox another former NBA star of Bahamian descent, who won three championships with the Lakers; and John Salley, former NBA star, actor and sports analyst.