

Aloun Ndombet-Assamba, Jamaica

Jamaican High Commissioner to the UK

On balancing responsibilities: “When you have a family it is very hard. I remember I used to say to my colleagues when I went to Cabinet meetings on a Monday morning that I wish I had a wife, because some men just didn’t have to look after a family. They just had everything done for them. It became a joke. But it wasn’t a joke to me. I had to run my ministry. I had to run my constituency. I had to go to the supermarket. I had to do everything. Some men don’t have that. It’s one of the challenges for women in politics when you are expected to be a wife and a mother.”

On sexism: “It might have existed but I paid no attention. People might have tried to put me down because I’m a woman, but I paid no attention. I grew up just feeling that I’m equal to everybody.”

On having family support: “I was travelling a lot and I couldn’t guarantee that I was going to be there to pick my son up, or be home when he got home. So he had to go to a school close by to his grandparent’s house. I had a lot of family support and a lot of support from friends.”

On the challenges women face in politics: “Being in politics is very hard. You have no private life. People, as they say in Jamaica, are in your business. They look at what you wear. They look at where you eat. They look at who you go out with. I have been single and if I go out with someone two times, people start to talk about me, so I stop going out. Your life is not your own when you’re in politics.”

On wanting more women in politics: “In terms of putting yourself forward to be a Member of Parliament, we don’t have enough women coming forward. That is something that has to change because women approach the work of being a Member of Parliament in a different way to men.”

On working harder than men: “Women have to work harder to get ahead. I have had to work very hard. People are harsher on women than they are on men in terms of your output and in terms of their expectation of you. Women are judged more harshly than men. So while there is equality in the sense that discrimination is not patently obvious, it is there, and to get ahead you have to be really strong and pay no attention.”

Lessons: “One of the things that I discovered in my life is that you should listen to your elders, listen to older people, and listen to your parents. They know a little bit more than you.”

“Prepare yourself. Get the best education that you can get. Build a network of support around you. Have people who you can call on for advice and support. Volunteer and go out there and get experience, as that is how you are going to get the network. You can’t just go to work and go home. You have to go out there and volunteer.”

“You have to have passion. You have to get up in the morning and say, ‘What am I going to achieve today?’ I don’t know anyone who has got ahead in this life without having passion for something.”



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