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Jamaica developing register of cultural places, objects

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Minister of Culture Olivia Grange (centre) listens to a comment from OAS country representative in Kingston Jeanelle Van Glaanenweygel (second right), at the opening of a three-day workshop on 'Effective Heritage Inventories and the National Registers' at The Courtleigh Hotel and Suites in New Kingston on Tuesday. Also participating in the discussion (from left) are technical consultant at Coherit Associates LLC Angela Labrador; technical project manager (Cultural Heritage), OAS, Celia Toppin; and technical consultant at Coherit Associates LLC Neil Silberman. (Photo: JIS)

THE Government is receiving expertise from the Organization of American States (OAS) in developing a national register of cultural heritage places and objects.

A team from the organisation is participating in a three-day workshop to provide training to local personnel. The session, entitled 'Effective Heritage Inventories and the National Registers', got under way on Tuesday at The Courtleigh Hotel and Suites in New Kingston.

The national register of heritage places is a list of sites, buildings, structures and objects deemed worthy of preservation for their historical value.

Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport Olivia Grange, in her address, explained that the development of the register will be undertaken through amendments to the Jamaica National Heritage Trust (JNHT) Act.

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She noted that the initiative will better position Jamaica to tap into the US\$1-billion global cultural heritage tourism industry.

“[It will] ensure that we have a well-organised system and will help us to protect and promote cultural heritage resources of all types,” she added.

As part of the process, a 'Sites of Memory' programme is being developed, where plaques will be mounted to identify heritage sites.

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Grange said that the national register project has, at its core, communities and their significant role in protecting and promoting heritage sites, monuments and traditions.

“The impact of cultural communities, including the Maroons, Rastafari and Revivalists in Jamaica, contributes immensely to 'Brand Jamaica'. Our cultural festivals and observances, such as Accompong, Charles Town, or Moore Town, set communities apart and foster a sense of identity that is seen in the local craft. All these have the potential to be the main engines for economic growth and sustainable development for communities across the Caribbean,” she noted.

In her remarks, OAS country representative in Kingston Jeanelle Van Glaanenweygel said the project will seek to engage the active participation of communities with strong cultural elements.

“We encourage non-governmental organisations, especially community-based (groups), to reap the rich benefits from the region's rich heritage,” she said.

The workshop will include the training of participants in the use of the Arches software, an open-source, geospatially enabled platform for cultural heritage inventory and management.

The OAS will undertake the installation of the software in Jamaica. When populated, the database will give complete information on the island's heritage structures.

The workshop is part of a multi-year project of the OAS, entitled, 'Enhancing the Framework for the Development of a Heritage Economy in the Caribbean'.

Its overall purpose is to strengthen the human and institutional capacity of OAS participating member states in the Caribbean in promoting their cultural heritage as a viable economic resource.

The current phase of the project (2018-2020) is focused on strengthening heritage inventories as a cornerstone in building a sustainable heritage economy in three OAS member states — Jamaica, Barbados, and The Bahamas.

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