



BARBADOS INDEPENDENCE DAY MESSAGE

FROM THE HON. DAVID J.H. THOMPSON, Q.C., M.P., PRIME MINISTER

30th NOVEMBER 2008

Fellow Barbadians, I consider it a distinct honour, privilege and pleasure to address you as Prime Minister of Barbados on this our 42nd anniversary of Independence.

Barbadians everywhere should be proud of the progress this nation has made. A mere 42 years ago, a great man with a vision and with the support of Barbadians and friends, led this small undeveloped country to Independence.

It was clearly understood that the path to true "Independence" would be strewn with the social and psychological obstacles that resulted from over 300 years of colonisation.

Under enlightened leadership, Barbadians have gone about the business of removing these obstacles. Every Government since Independence has been elected with the mandate to improve the conditions under which Barbadians live.

They have focused on the development of our human resources as a means of transforming the society. From the inception, education was chosen as the tool for development, and used by successive administrations with spectacular results.

Today Barbados provides free primary, secondary and tertiary education, with participation rates of almost 100 per cent at the primary and secondary levels and about 40 per cent at the tertiary level. Barbados is now the highest ranked developing country in the world, according to the **United Nations Human Development Index**. This index measures the quality of our lives.

Today as we look around Barbados we can see the fruits of our labour. No doors are closed to ordinary Barbadians. Political barriers have been removed. Class barriers have by and large

been dismantled. Key positions in every area of life are now open and occupied by people of humble origins.

Indeed the gap between the social position held by the adult generation 42 years ago and that now occupied by their children is the widest possible by any standards.

Sacrifices

I salute those parents and educators who made sacrifices and encouraged our children to pursue education. They are the unsung heroes of Barbados!

Naturally we still have a long way to go to fully achieve our vision of a just, proud, industrious, prosperous and happy Barbados. However, the fact that we have overcome many of the challenges that confronted us during the past 42 years suggests that Barbadians have the confidence and the potential to address whatever comes our way. There is something unique about our ability as a nation to bounce back from adversity and to cope with change.

Today, Barbados faces its most profound challenge yet – that of economic enfranchisement. The collapse of the world's financial markets will undoubtedly lead to a contracting of major economies with a devastating effect on small open economies like our own.

Our high standard of living is based on industries that are linked to the troubled economies of the United Kingdom and the USA. It is predicted that tourism and financial services, two of the pillars of the Barbados economy, will be the first to be affected. The levels of unemployment are therefore likely to rise. In the midst of this turmoil we have to try harder than ever before, to become firm craftsmen of our fate.

Since we are a resilient, resourceful, and creative people, there should be no barriers to Barbadians wishing to use their talents and skills to become self-employed and earn a living from whatever gift God has bestowed on them. The time for all Barbadians to take greater responsibility for the economic development of this country is now upon us.

Government has already taken a leadership role by adopting measures to soften the impact of these global challenges – the true extent of which we do not yet know.

We have recently introduced some measures to stimulate economic activity, including the review of fiscal policy, heavy investment in the development of our infrastructure.

New markets

We are increasing our promotion of Barbados in new tourist markets and giving support to international business and agriculture. Most importantly, we have refocused our attention on

the Barbadian Diaspora – the thousands of Barbadians and their descendants who live throughout the world and who share our dreams.

We have also begun to put in place the legislation, the structures and the resources to increase the number of self-employed entrepreneurs from about ten per cent of the working population to 20 per cent by 2016.

We are committed to the creation of new enterprises through training, direct subsidies and easier access to capital for investment. We are doing so because small and medium-sized businesses are the providers of the majority of jobs, and the engines of growth after a recession.

Moreover, we believe that in the emerging global market place, small jurisdictions will survive and prosper by identifying niche markets, such as the cultural industries, and capitalising on them. Now is therefore the time for us to become more enterprising. Now is the time to use our education and skills to create employment and wealth.

I would therefore like to make a special appeal to all Barbadians at home and abroad to consider this crisis as an opportunity to use your ingenuity to overcome the last hurdle on the way to developed country status. While my Government is creating the conditions for economic enfranchisement, ask yourself what you can do to make a positive response to this challenge!

So, as you relax and reflect on **Independence Day**, as you enjoy the best that this country has to offer, I want you to give God thanks for the blessings He has showered each of you, and on all of us as a nation.

I wish you a happy 42nd anniversary of Independence. Enjoy the celebrations organized to mark the day. Best wishes in all your endeavours. May God bless you all; and may God bless Barbados.

I thank you.