



Message from
The Hon. Freundel J. Stuart, Q.C., M.P.,
Prime Minister of Barbados
on the 47th Anniversary of Independence
November 30, 2013

Fellow Barbadians,

I am pleased once again to salute you as we celebrate the 47th Anniversary of our nation's independence. Of this achievement we should be immensely proud since the road to this milestone was not easy. The strength of the national character has been tested frequently over the years but we have always satisfied the requirements of those tests.

Just about ten (10) months ago Barbadians once again demonstrated to the world our maturity as a people when peacefully and with decorum we came through yet another general election in which our people exercised the free choice of their government. There are many nations older than ours in which democratic procedures are still trying to find a comfortable place.

The forty seventh anniversary of our independence comes at a time of great challenge for Barbados. Ever since the last quarter of 2007, the world has been in the grip of its worst downturn in 100 years. That downturn had its beginning in the richest and most powerful

country on this planet – the United States of America, and, with the passage of time, spread to nearly every corner of the globe.

The countries of the Caribbean, mostly small island developing countries, were not spared. The world has not yet been able to recover from the effects of this stubborn downturn and Barbados, like most other countries, continues to be negatively affected.

Our economy depends primarily on Tourism, International Business and Financial Services and Foreign Direct Investment for its sustenance. It is foreign exchange and taxes earned from these sectors that enable Barbados to meet the needs of its citizens.

As a result of the still continuing downturn, there has been a fall-off in demand for the services which we export. As exports these services have to be sold in the markets of our principal trading partners, the United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada and countries in the CARICOM region. Unfortunately, economic performance in these countries continues to be sluggish.

Barbadians have had to meet this kind of serious challenge head-on before. We faced it between 1973-1975 during the first oil crisis; we faced it in the early 1980's; we faced it in the early 1990's; and we faced it again between 2001 and 2003 in the wake of the 9/11 events in the United States of America. In two of those instances, under two different administrations, Barbados even had to have recourse to the International Monetary Fund.

Barbadians were severely tested on all of those occasions. As a nation, we emerged from these challenges with the national character strengthened and intact. We did not allow Barbados then to descend into destructive and suicidal disharmony. We came together as a people across partisan, racial, class, and every other kind of divide and stood up for Barbados as a nation. We prevailed.

The present challenges require a similar response from all of us. If we try to meet our challenges individually and separately, we are foredoomed to perish together. A united

response is called for in our present circumstances. No other kind of response will meet the needs of this moment.

Barbados is a priceless gem worthy of our unstinting cooperation and effort. To ensure its continued viability, we must place nation before self.

The downgrade of our credit rating, which relates to our ability to borrow money, is not a downgrade of Barbados or of Barbadians. According to the United Nations Human Development Index we are still the number one country in Latin America and the Caribbean, and we still rank at number three in the Americas behind only the United States of America and Canada.

Barbados still leads even richer and more developed countries in the areas of transparency and in relative freedom from the stranglehold of corruption. We are still one of the most stable democracies in the world. We are still one of the most literate countries in the world. We are still viewed as a slice of paradise by the overwhelming majority of people who come to our shores whether to holiday or to invest.

Our present challenges represent a moment in time. Worrisome though these challenges may be, let us not mistake what is a moment in time for eternity.

Independence has never promised to be easy. We always knew that we would have to face daunting challenges and make difficult choices.

But we trusted our faith and our resilience to help us to answer the summons of history when it has called on us to stand up for Barbados.

The unique circumstances in which we have been living for the last six (6) years call on us, not to see what else we can take from the nation, but what else we can give back to it. Independence means freedom, but freedom does not mean the liberty to do what we want. It means the power to do what we ought, in the national interest.

Fellow Barbadians, as we celebrate the 47th anniversary of our nationhood, let us remind ourselves that the last kind freedom we can afford at this time, is freedom from responsibility.

Let us rise responsibly to the challenges now facing Barbados, steel ourselves for the sacrifices that lie ahead, and determine that Barbados will continue in the future to be the great nation it has been for the last 47 years. Together let us undertake the restructuring and transformation that are necessary for our survival, even as we continue to cling to our core values.

I should like once again to thank members of the Social Partnership, and the nation in general, for their support and cooperation over the past year.

May yours be a happy and reflective Independence and may God bless our nation as He continues to guide us on our way.