



Message from
The Rt. Hon. Freundel J. Stuart, QC, MP,
Prime Minister of Barbados
on the Occasion of the 48th Anniversary of Independence
November 30, 2014

Fellow Barbadians,

I am pleased to salute you once again on an Independence Anniversary, this time the 48th Anniversary of Barbados' Independence. Forty-eight years of nationhood provide the kind of elevation from which we can all look back at and assess what we have achieved in Barbados since November 30, 1966.

Socially, economically and politically we are today a more advanced and developed country than we were when we embarked on the adventure of Independence, 48 years ago. Why do I say that socially we are better off in 2014 than we were in 1966?

Today our people are better educated than at any other time in our country's history, thanks to the expansion of opportunity at the nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary levels of our education system.

We are healthier and more health conscious than we were in 1966, despite the stubborn challenge being posed to us by the high incidence of chronic non-communicable diseases. Successive governments have over the years made health care more accessible, more available and more affordable.

Notwithstanding the still unfulfilled desires of many Barbadians to own their own home, our people are better housed today than they were in 1966 and significantly larger numbers of Barbadians have had access to modern housing, complete with greater access to water and to electricity.

Our workers are much safer at the workplace today as a result of the combined efforts of successive governments and robust but responsible trade unions. A panoply of modern labour legislation now enriches our statute books.

The opportunities available to our young people to maximise the use of their God-given talents and realise their true potential are more vast and more varied today than were available to the average young man and young woman in 1966. Our young people now live in a Barbados in which it is not birth but it is achievement that counts. Talent, aspiration and steady application now win the great prizes.

The aged and disabled in Barbados are better cared for today than 48 years ago as easier access to a wider range of social interventions has lengthened life expectancies and made living more tolerable and more abundant.

Today, the vulnerable among us benefit from the existence of an extensive, highly sophisticated and reliable social safety net to which they can turn when necessity requires that they do so.

Barbadians today are more conscious of and sensitive to the importance of their environment than at any time in this country's history, proof, were any needed, of our enlightenment and our commitment to promoting the sustainable development of the people of our nation.

When we turn to the economy, again there are successes of which we can feel proud. Since Independence, we have moved our economy away from wholesale dependence on one crop agriculture. We have not only diversified our agricultural sector, but also we have diversified our economy as a whole.

Barbados, as a result of consistent efforts made since 1966, has developed a modern tourism sector and has brought to full and mature flowering our international business and financial services sector. At the same time, we continue to support the manufacturing sector that has served us so well over the years, making many products that are 100% Bajan.

In all of this, we have concentrated on the creative use rather than the crude abuse of our human resources. The economy of Barbados now benefits directly a much larger number of our citizens than was the case in 1966.

And what of Barbados politically? Since 1966, with the world as our witness, we have consolidated our hard won democracy by broadening the base of popular participation in the political life of the nation.

Not only were eighteen year-olds given the right to vote just five years after Independence, but, our democracy is now more consultative than at any time in living memory.

In the face of these developments, we have been careful not to compromise our commitment to the orderly changing of our governments using democratic means. I have given this overview to demonstrate that Independence for Barbados was a wise decision which has borne our people fruit.

We could not have achieved as much as we have done over the last 48 years had we not put a high premium on maintaining Barbados' social and political stability. That has been the most obvious sign of our maturity as a people. In spite of these admittedly impressive achievements, we still have some way to go.

Not everyone has benefited from the Independence effort to the extent he or she would have wished. Some have experienced hurt at some time or another during the last 48 years. But that is not surprising for, in every part of the world, at any time of the day, the week, the month or the year, there are people who are hurting.

The challenge facing our society is to ensure that the numbers of those who are hurting are kept to the barest minimum. I am not one of those people who believe that our best days are behind us. I believe rather that our best days are ahead of us. We cannot unmake the past but we can shape the future.

In recent times, Barbados, like most of our Caribbean neighbours, and like most countries in the western world, has been facing unrelenting economic challenges. These challenges have accentuated the need to restructure our economy in order to make it more viable.

We do not enjoy any special dispensation under the laws of international economics. Barbados is not exempt from the challenges and crises which other countries and societies have to face. For example, like other countries, Barbados has to confront the reality and impact of climate change.

We are now part of a globalised world which dispenses benefits as well as burdens. When there are benefits, we enjoy them. When there are burdens, however, we have to steel ourselves to meet those burdens and, by dint of our hard work and sacrifice, to eventually overcome them. That is the true essence of Independence.

We have done this in the past successfully because our historical experiences have made us a resilient people. Pride and Industry are for us, natural companions. As we work our way through present challenges, let us not confront life as a disordered jumble of hopes and fears.

Our present time is not the culmination of all time! We will get past present challenges not by panic-stricken hurry and worry but by a calm, a mature and a disciplined approach to what we now face. What the late Dr. Martin Luther King said of a man is equally true of a nation: "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience but where he stands at times of challenge and adversity."

On present indications, the year 2015 promises to be a better year for Barbados than the year 2014. That is as it should be and would be an appropriate reward for the sacrifices and the patient endeavour of the people of this nation.

Fellow Barbadians, as we look back over the last 48 years, we can all see what Barbados has done for us; what Barbados has given to us. As we embark on our 49th year, let us resolve to see what we can do for Barbados; what we can give back to Barbados.

Let us guard with especial jealousy the stability which we have forged over the last 48 years, and which is Barbados' emblem in the sea of disorder and chaos all over the world, evidence of which we witness on our computer and television screens day in and day out. Let us continue to set for ourselves and our children those high standards that produce the excellence for which our country is so well known.

Let us continue to adhere to that core of moral and spiritual values that have made Barbados the kind of country which anyone would want to visit; the kind of country in which anyone would want to live! May we as a nation continue to treasure the blessings bountifully bestowed on us from on High, and may God's richest blessings be yours on this Independence Day!