

**MESSAGE BY HON MIA AMOR MOTTLEY, QC, MP,
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 48TH ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE**

Independence has a special meaning as it relates to countries. Certainly, as far as Barbados is concerned, the debate in 1966 on the importance of becoming an independent nation centred on our right to self-determination – the right to take our place in the family of nations confident in our ability to manage our own affairs and with a vision that offered our people a better tomorrow for themselves and their children.

Forty-eight years on, I submit that the confidence that men like the Right Excellent E.W. Barrow and H.A. Vaughan had that we, as Barbadians, could take our country forward was fully justified. The Barbados that they led into Independence bears little resemblance to the Barbados of today. Gone is the sight of malnourished children struggling to complete a secondary school education. Gone are the high child mortality rates. Long forgotten are the trips to the standpipe to draw water and the sub-standard living conditions of too many of our people.

We have as a nation, until very recently, exceeded the early expectations of a small country, of a quarter million souls, dependent on a single crop, with little or no industry, that would have to bear the cost of its own defense and its own foreign policy at the United Nations and in select metropolitan capitals, while still providing for the health and welfare of its people.

I think we can be proud of what we have achieved thus far. Game changing social and economic policies by both political parties in our first four decades of nationhood have bestowed on us the encomium of “punching above our weight.” I speak specifically of universal free education and health care, the right to tenantry land ownership and the build out of an international financial industry. When you add to this our leadership in Caribbean and hemispheric affairs Barbados stands out as a success story in the region.

What has happened to change this worldview of our beloved country and how can we get back on track? History is always our best teacher. It can take us back to the foundations of our success and teach us how to avoid repeating earlier mistakes.

There have been ups and downs in every decade since Independence. The highs have been a consequence of visionary choices and astute management of our resources. The lows have been caused largely by external shocks over which we had no control and regrettably inappropriate political decisions.

As we look back to 1966 and the mindset of our leaders, the one thing that stands out is confidence. Yes there were naysayers, but our leaders had confidence in our capacity as a people and in their own ability to harness that capacity and confidence and convert it to progress.

If there is one thing that is absent in today’s environment it is confidence. There is a decay of confidence in those who have been entrusted to lead us that is now the single largest deterrent to growth in our economy and a turn around in our collective and individual fortunes.

The absence of confidence is a particularly debilitating affliction for a country. We are now so unsure of ourselves that there is a wavering of confidence in the morality of free education and health care. I put it to you that we have not yet reached the stage where we can abandon these foundation policies. In fact we are likely to severely retard future growth and development if we do. We must find ways to sustain the state’s ability to provide them.

There is also a dilution of confidence in our system of government and governance. A system of which we once used to boast has been sullied as a thing of mistrust, with all politicians painted with the same brush. While I concede that politicians themselves bear some responsibility for this, as a nation we must believe that we still have options and we must not be afraid to modernise our systems of governance to reflect the very different times in which we now occupy.

This lack of confidence is crippling our country. Bajans want things to happen. We want things to be better, but our confidence has been so badly shattered by incompetence and failure that we labour under the misconception that no one can do any better. I urge you not to succumb to this mistrust and pessimism. I ask of you not to give up hope on our Barbados.

I have the greatest confidence in Barbadians’ commitment to our country. I am confident that with creative and compassionate leadership Barbadians have the ability to turn this country around and restore the fundamental things that matter to Bajans and that have marked our passage to independent nationhood.

On behalf of the Barbados Labour Party family and my own family, I wish all Barbadians, wherever they reside, a Happy and Blessed Independence with the assurance that better days do lie ahead.