



Message from
The Rt. Hon. Owen S. Arthur, M.P.,
Prime Minister of Barbados
on the 41st Anniversary of Independence
November 30, 2007

Throughout its 41 years as an Independent Nation, Barbados has consistently been tried, tested and proven.

We have had to find our own special way of getting along in a world of turbulent change.

We have had to do a lot with very little.

We have had, like others, to cope with natural and physical disasters. Building a nation has not been easy. But at each stage, whatever the challenge has been, it has brought out the very best from our people.

And so it has been in the year 2007.

As I reflect on developments in our nation over the past year, I am left with three convictions which I am sure you share.

The first is that Barbados cares.

The second is that Barbados works.

The third is that Barbados matters.

The past year has been marked with the occurrence of a number of horrendous tragedies at Arch Cot, Joes River, Road View and elsewhere.

They all brought untold grief to the families involved, and touched the entire nation in a very special way.

In the midst of it, Barbadians were united in our mourning; united also in the caring and empathetic response which is testimony to the fact that our people have not lost their capacity to be each other's keeper.

Over the course of 41 years of Independence, Barbados has more than amply demonstrated a sustained capacity to manage its economic and developmental affairs.

We have met our people's needs, and have impressed international observers by the orderly and dynamic manner in which we cause our economy to work and to respond to change.

Economic developments in Barbados in the year 2007 added to that long and strong reputation.

Our economy is now enjoying its strongest bout of economic growth and development since the gaining of independence. Unemployment is at its lowest ever level. All around us major investments are being made to build a more modern and competitive economy.

The people of Barbados are saving more, and building more homes than ever.

Taxes on both income and property have been significantly reduced. Over 25,000 persons have been removed from the income tax roll in recent years, and over 50,000 households have benefited from the reduction in land tax.

We are also fighting rising prices with every practical means at our disposal.

We are rebuilding our highways, transforming our major urban centres, especially the centre of our capital city, and significantly improving the amenities for the enjoyment of our people.

The significant increase in our foreign exchange reserves has also enhanced our capacity to pay our way in the world, and has put the spectre of devaluation behind us.

We have also been making our own special contribution to the transformation of our regional economy into the Caribbean Single Market and Economy.

All of this has been achieved in a global economy in which a steep surge in the price of commodities and energy and the weakness of the US dollar have added significantly to the risks and uncertainties with which countries, such as Barbados, have to cope.

The full magnitude of our recent achievements in nation building is summed up in the fact that according to the United Nations Human Report of 2007 Barbados has moved from 5th to 1st place among all developing countries in respect of the eradication of human poverty.

Barbados is working, and working well; and will continue to do so once we continue to call upon the clarity of purpose, the soundness of policy and the ingenuity of response to challenges which have been the hallmark of the management of our economic affairs.

The past year will perhaps come to especially be remembered for the manner in which our nation responded to the challenge of having to take the spotlight on the global stage.

The hosting of two global events – the World Cup of Golf and the finals of the World Cup of Cricket – in quick succession would have tested the capabilities of even the best endowed societies. No other small state has ever before been asked to shoulder such a responsibility.

The excellent manner in which Barbados managed these two global events is a great credit to our nation, and reflected the pride and the industry which the entire society is always willing to invest in activities when our national reputation is put at stake.

A similar excellence is now being exhibited by Barbadians in various other activities, burnishing the reputation and standing of Barbados in global affairs.

In this respect, we salute the achievements this year of Rihanna and her emergence, even at her young age, as a major super star in the world of music.

We salute also the extraordinary achievement of Dr. Leonard Nurse in becoming our first Nobel Prize Laureate for his work on the United Nations Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change.

We should also recognize and salute the extraordinary leadership that has been exhibited by Dame Billie Miller in conceptualizing the Conference on the Caribbean which took place in June in Washington. It was a historic event that brought our people in the Diaspora together in a forum to work with the leadership of the Caribbean and the USA, and virtually all stakeholders in US-Caribbean affairs, to redefine our relationship with our citizens living abroad and with the USA administration.

It was undoubtedly for achievements such as these, and others of a similar calibre in our post-independence history that Barbados was chosen to be the voice of humanity to deliver the Wilberforce Lecture, when the global community celebrated the 200th Anniversary of the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.

The name of Barbados has come to stand for something of significance and high quality among the family of nations and we should take pride from it and draw inspiration from it as we face the future.

For it will be a future that will not be without quite considerable challenges.

Our economy is expected to continue to thrive, but it will have to do so in a global environment where the major developments, not the least being energy prices, are adverse and not in our best interest.

As we face the future there are some economic problems which we must face and fix. Chief among these is the matter of prices which we have already begun to address by policy initiatives supported by the Government and the Private Sector.

You can be assured that we will not let inflation erode the standard of living of the people of Barbados.

In respect of the Social Sectors a Special Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM in September this year called attention to the toll which non-infectious diseases such as hypertension and diabetes are taking on the well-being of people of the region. We agreed that special initiatives had to be taken to reverse this.

A special health and wellness programme, at the centre of which will be a collection of attractive incentives, and a new tax allowance will soon be unveiled to enable our people to fully address this challenge to their health.

We are in the process also of making major decisions about the future of our major hospital, the Q.E.H. It will require the building of an entirely new hospital. Taking all the relevant circumstances into consideration, we believe that it is the right and practical thing to do, and ask for your support.

The Government of Barbados has also thrown its full weight behind the impressive transformation that is taking place at the Cave Hill Campus of the University of the West Indies. Plans to reorganize our own post - secondary educational institutes such as the Community College and the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic into a University College of Barbados are in their final design stage and will soon be acted upon.

Major legislation is now before Parliament to reorganize the way in which the Public Service of Barbados functions, and to give career certainty to a large number of public officers who have languished in temporary positions for too long.

I fundamentally believe that the experience of nation building which has engaged us in our first forty-one years as an independent nation should lead us to the conviction that there is no

challenge which we cannot successfully confront once we call upon the special attributes that have been at the centre of our Barbadianness.

We must therefore now all resolve to use the recent achievements and developmental gains as the springboard from which to take our nation to the next higher level in pursuit of full development by 2020.

We can make our nation stand out as a shining city on a hill.

It is in this spirit of optimism that I greet you as we celebrate the achievement of another anniversary of our independence.

The year 2007 has been a year of exceptional achievement. I want to thank all of our people who have done so much on their own behalf, but also in the nation's interest, to make Barbados a special and a wonderful place in every respect.

I wish also to congratulate that fine cross section of our citizens who will today be recognized by the award of honour for their sterling contributions to our nation's development.

It only remains for me to bid each of you a most happy Independence, and to hope that God will continue to bless our land, now and forever.