

Independence Message 2008

By Prime Minister

The Rt. Hon. Hubert A. Ingraham

10 July 2008

Fellow Citizens of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas:

This year we celebrate 35 years of Independence, a significant milestone in the life of a young nation. I extend best wishes for a happy anniversary to Bahamians everywhere.

This year we mark the anniversary of our nationhood during a period of considerable unease in the global community. Indeed, external challenges are increasing, especially with regard to trade issues, environmental concerns, the supply of energy and the cost of food.

The fallout on our communities are several but principally economic and social.

It is times such as these that we must recall our past and build upon the traditions and customs and institutions that serve as the foundation of our country. We are fortunate to have a strong foundation.

In December of 1972, at Marlborough House in London, a delegation of elected representatives of the Bahamian people sat down with representatives of the British Government to agree the terms of a new Constitution for the Islands of The Bahamas.

It was the third such constitutional conference, the first in 1963 introduced responsible ministerial government to our system for the first time.

A second conference in 1969 further extended Bahamian control over our internal affairs, but it was the 1972 conference which dealt with full independence for what was still a colony of Great Britain.

The colony became a sovereign and independent state on July 10th, 1973 and assumed full responsibility for all our affairs and for all our relations with others in the community of nations.

Since 1973 we have jealously guarded the institutions that served us well in the colonial era, institutions that were the instruments of historic social and political changes, and then the transformation from colony to independent state.

So as we celebrate this 35th anniversary of our independence, it is right for us to renew our commitment to guard and defend our institutions and the principles that give life and meaning to them.

Our parliamentary institutions represent the will and desire of the Bahamian people to be governed by representatives chosen from among the citizens in free and democratic processes.

Our judicial institutions represent our firm commitment to the rule of law that guarantees access to due process and fair judgment for all our citizens and, indeed, for the stranger within our gates.

There are other institutions that we should also celebrate. I speak of an array of social, cultural, commercial, industrial, sports and charitable organizations and associations.

These are indispensable to the healthy growth and development of a nation and represent the best of a free people at work and play and nation-building.

Then there are the churches that flourish in an atmosphere of religious freedom and bear eloquent testimony to the spiritual dimensions of our people.

Last year we paid special tribute to our forebears who helped pave the way for our advancement in many disciplines and pursuits.

I pay tribute to Bahamians everywhere. I wish to pay special tribute to all those Bahamians who, over the years, have helped to put and keep our country on the international map by their work and achievements.

I speak of those who work in our diplomatic, tourism and maritime services in the Americas, in Europe and in the Far East.

Most of the service they render is quiet and little recognized but vitally important. Most of them will be celebrating independence at their posts in foreign lands.

There are others who have, over the years, brought us fame and glory by their achievements in different areas.

In this Olympic year it is fitting that we especially celebrate the spectacular accomplishments of Bahamian sports men and women and give encouragement to those who will represent us in Beijing next month.

Naturally, we hope that they will be the proud bearers of medals on their return. Regardless to their performance we know that they will make us proud by competing to the best of their

abilities, and that the world will mark the manner of their bearing by the way they conduct themselves on and off the field of sports.

And that brings me to the message I should like to leave with you this Independence Day and it is this:

We are a talented people, we are a resourceful people, we are a cultured people; and if we draw on all our talents, all our resources and all our cultural strength, we will be able to meet the multitude of challenges that face us from without and from within.

I believe that if we as a people delve deep into our positive cultural roots we will successfully meet and overcome the internal challenges we face.

The vast majority of Bahamians, including our young people, are on the right track and doing the right things, and I believe the future will be safe with them. We must let them know that; we must encourage and celebrate them.

So strengthened, we will also face external challenges, craft and implement programmes to deal with them and to together build a better future for all our people.

Fellow Bahamians, wherever you may be -- in New Providence, in Grand Bahama, and in our Family Islands or in foreign lands -- I wish you a happy and safe Independence Day and pray God's blessings upon our nation and upon each and every one of us.

Thank you.