

Independence Message 2009

By Prime Minister

The Rt. Hon. Hubert A. Ingraham

10 July 2009

Fellow Citizens of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas:

We celebrate our independence this year in the midst of a global economic crisis. You may recall that when I spoke to you on this occasion last year I referred to external challenges that were even then increasing with great rapidity.

However, none of us -- indeed, few if any in the international community -- could anticipate the catastrophe that was about to engulf the banking system in the United States of America with calamitous consequences for the rest of the world.

Every sector of international economic activity, including manufacturing and trade in goods and services, has been adversely affected, resulting in the loss of jobs for millions of workers.

You are aware that we have not escaped this economic tsunami. In fact, we have been hard hit, especially in the hospitality sector which is the main engine of our economy. The result has been the loss of many jobs and deterioration across the breadth of our economy.

In this regard I should like to thank all those public servants who have worked so hard to put into effect the Government's programmes to provide relief to thousands of Bahamians affected by the crisis.

I should like also to thank our financial institutions for their forbearance and those employers who have tried to keep on the job as many of their employees as possible. We do not know how long the economic downturn will last but in the meantime I call on those

of us who are employed to give of our best on the job and to help our brothers and sisters who are not so fortunate.

We must not be like the Israelites of old who became ungrateful for their deliverance and complained bitterly when the going got rough.

We must celebrate in a spirit of gratitude what we have accomplished over many years in the development of our Bahamas.

Indeed, we are better placed than many other countries, large and small, to negotiate the treacherous shoals of which we are constantly reminded in our national anthem.

We must celebrate the sacrifice and resourcefulness of our ancestors going back centuries and the hard-won achievements of our foreparents in more recent times, all in the face of monumental difficulties.

It is through their struggles, resilience and spirit of self-reliance that we have come thus far. We are a proud nation with our heads held high in the community of nations, having achieved a distinct cultural identity, a stable parliamentary democracy and a large measure of prosperity.

As we go through these difficult economic times we should recall and reflect on those qualities so nobly demonstrated by our forbears and seek to emulate them in facing the challenges of our day. Let us see what we can do to help ourselves and to help one another.

Fellow Citizens:

In recent years I have taken this opportunity to pay tribute to particular categories of persons who have contributed in times past and in the present to the building of our nation.

This year I should like to express appreciation and gratitude to those talented Bahamians who have for generations contributed so much to our cultural heritage and those who succeeded them.

I believe it is true to say that over the last two decades we have been witnessing, especially among our young people, a healthy new awareness of our Bahamian cultural treasures and a desire to contribute to that heritage.

I speak of our musicians, painters, sculptors, writers, poets, humorists, performing artists and all who bring to our lives so much enjoyment and fulfillment, edification and inspiration, who make us proud to be what we are.

Indeed, many of them have taken our country to the far corners of the world and added glory to the name of The Bahamas on the international stage.

But our culture encompasses a great deal more than our art forms. It is about our whole approach to life and living, about who and what we are, and what we aspire to become.

So it is equally important for us, especially at this time of challenge, to reflect on and to reclaim our heritage as a friendly people, a gentle people, a mannerly people, a generous people.

I wish all Bahamians at home and abroad, and all our friends and visitors, a happy Independence Day. May God continue to bless our Bahamas.