

2013 Independence Message

From the Leader of the Opposition Andrew Holness, MP

6 August 2013

My fellow Jamaicans:

Independent Jamaica is now 51 years old. This is truly a day to be joyful and proud, a day to rejoice in the memories of the courage, determination and triumphs of our founding fathers and other pioneers, who re-lit the fires of freedom to achieve for us our Independence from colonial rule. This is a day to remember their struggles and sacrifices with sober reflection.

So as we celebrate this Independence Day, let us renew our national commitment to addressing in meaningful ways those critical areas of our society that remain issues of concern.

In terms of our economy, we now have an IMF agreement at long last! But this is still not the time to express relief. The IMF agreement we have is not the cure-all for our economic problems. We will not have success in our economic programmes unless we can show the political will to implement meaningful structural economic change. One such change must be tax reform, which will see a lower tax burden to all, a wider tax net and greater tax revenues.

Let us renew our commitment to improving the productivity and efficiency of our economy by ensuring that all our labour force is trained and certified and that businesses are able to retool and incorporate the latest technology into their production.

Let us recommit ourselves to ensuring that our education system is of the highest standards and that our teachers are motivated as instructional and institutional leaders. Education is the real long term solution to national growth and development. We must protect and cherish all of its stakeholders. We must seek to implement those measures that will boost performance among both teachers and students while being careful to avoid short-term measures that will have a negative impact on educational outcomes in the long run.

Regarding our energy sector, the cost of energy has continued to be a major impediment to our development. We must therefore acquire the firm resolve to examine and fix the inefficiencies in this sector. We have to develop new and efficient and environmentally safe base load production of electricity. Energy is critical to growth; in this area our current arrangements make us energy dependent. We must restructure our energy sector to be efficient with fuels on

which we are import dependent and advance our capabilities to produce energy from the sun and wind with which we are blessed.

Noted scholars Philip Sherlock and Hazel Bennett, writing in, "The Story of the Jamaican People" explained: "Emancipation gave them [our ancestors] the right to free movement, the right to choose where and when they wished to work but without basic education and training many were compelled to remain on the plantation as field hands". This continues to be the story of many Jamaicans today. Though all Jamaicans are physically free, to make whatever choices they wish, without education and training many Jamaicans are compelled to remain in poor circumstances. Let us commit to ending abject poverty in Jamaica. We will not all be rich, but no one should be poor. As a symbol of our independence and nationhood let us set as a guarantee for all Jamaicans that we will build an economy and society where all Jamaicans can have quality access to the amenities and opportunities which when paired with their freedom and effort will lead to their happiness and fulfilment.

These areas directly affect the future and hopes of all Jamaicans. So, while we celebrate our Independence, let us take the time to reflect on what we need to do to protect and enhance this Independence. Let us bear in mind these constructive words of Sir William Alexander Bustamante in 1962 on the occasion of our very first Independence Day: "Independence means the opportunity for us to frame our own destiny and the need to rely on ourselves for so doing".

Have a blessed, but also a productive day.