

# **Independence Message 2014**

**By the Leader of the Opposition**

**The Hon. Andrew Holness, MP**

**6 August 2014**

Independence marked a major milestone in our journey towards nationhood and the creation of our Jamaican State. That journey started with the arrival of Columbus in 1492 and the subsequent conquest, exploitation and establishment of a system of enslavement and a plantation society under European colonial rule which lasted for 470 years until our Independence 1962.

After World War II European Empires receded as their economies and armies tried to rebuild and nationalist fervour in the colonies grew.

Colonialism as mechanism for social, economic and political control of conquered or claimed lands had outlived its usefulness in the context of emerging poles of power in America and Asia. The process of redefining the World order had begun with former colonies claiming their independence either through struggle or negotiation or both.

Independence in this era did not mean that former colonies were now on equal power footing in the international systems. Though colonialism as a practice ended. Imperialism as a political force would continue to drive the relationship between newly independent states and the established power poles of the world. For all practical considerations Independence is always constrained by our global relations and more importantly obligations.

For small independent states like Jamaica, the global context has a significant impact and poses serious challenges to our aspirations for self determination and economic development.

On Independence Day 52 years ago, such consideration would not necessarily be a driving concern. It was a euphoric time when the ideals of building a just and prosperous nation were foremost in the minds of all Jamaicans. It must have been an optimistic time when our children believed that their future was secured.

The Independence Decade was a period of economic boom, growth and expansion, unparalleled since. It was a period of time when Jamaicans believed they were going to build a new Jamaica. Jamaicans were positive about Jamaica.

More than 80% of the Jamaican population was not around when Jamaica gained Independence. The values, dreams and aspiration of the Independence generation have largely disappeared. The positive and optimistic outlook is gone, and has been replaced with cynicism and lack of trust. There is a great deal of uncertainty about our future. We have not yet realized the new Jamaica we conceived 52 years ago.

What does Independence mean to the post independence generations of Jamaicans? What have we done with our independence and what do we want to do with our independence. What is the spirit, vision and ethos of the Jamaican citizen towards our country and nation now? Today we must reflect on what has happened in the 52 years since Independence.

The post independence generations of Jamaicans must now start the next phase. We must craft a vision for the next 50 years of Jamaican statehood. The youth of Jamaica must become more vocal and active defining the future they would want to see for Jamaica. Those who prefer to criticize project Jamaica from their verandas, I urge you to rise up and among other actions walk to the polling stations instead. The post independence leaders must now emerge and take charge of piloting future and rekindling the hope and optimism about Jamaica.

Our Independence is precious, regardless of the constraints of the global order of things. Within that global order Jamaica has opportunities and prospects which we must use to our advantage to spur growth and development. For example we have a significant and influential Diaspora in the power centers of the world which can contribute much more than remittances. In our vision for the next 50 years, for Jamaica must find direct and deliberate ways to include and leverage our Diaspora.

Brand Jamaica has been spoken of time and time and again, it is very influential in sports, in pop culture, and in content generation for art film and music, the next phase of the independence vision must build an industry around this and secure the benefits for our people.

We must take a second look at where our trading advantage lies. Historical and sentimental linkages may not be relevant, useful or even necessary in changing world. Presently our strongest regional political ties are not aligned to our largest and nearest potential markets. We must now seek to build stronger trading alliance with the Northern Caribbean region, and we must position ourselves strategically to benefit from the growth which will take place in Africa particularly.

Finally, the leaders and planners for the next 50 years must commit to ending poverty in Jamaica. It is not an impossible task. We must first change our materialistic outlook on poverty. We must come to the understanding that loving the poor is not enough, we must go further to lift people out of poverty, and the poor must not shy away from the desire for

prosperity. We must reject any excuse or protector of poverty. We have no reason to be poor.

On this Independence Day, you must reaffirm to yourself that we will build a Jamaica where every Jamaican can “step up inna life”.