



Independence Day Message 2017

from Prime Minister, the Most Hon. Andrew Holness, ON, MP

6 November 2017

Fellow Jamaicans,

On the 55th anniversary of our independence, it is fitting that we celebrate our achievements and strengths while pondering our challenges.

Our independence theme this year is, “Celebrating Jamaicans at home and abroad”.

And how appropriate that we should have that theme when our athletes from home and abroad are right now holding our flag high at the World Championships in Britain, as they did for Jamaica 50 during the Olympics in London.

So they will no doubt bring glitz and glory to this little island which always stamps its weight in gold.

We can draw inspiration from our sports men and women who have quintessentially incarnated the true spirit of Jamaica: A spirit of excellence, extraordinariness, daring, resilience, optimism, faith and hope.

We have been stunning the world with our sporting prowess even before our independence.

Jamaica had the first person to make the final in all three major Olympic sprint events—the 100m, 200m and 400m sixty-five years ago.

To this day no one has equaled that Herb McKenley's record.

We were also the first Caribbean team to hold the 4 by 400m relay world record, and that again 65 years ago in Helsinki, when the Jamaican greats of Arthur Wint, Herb Mckenley, George Rhoden and Leslie Laing mined gold.

We little, but we Tallawah. Today we have both the fastest man and the fastest woman in the world.

As Usain Bolt runs his last professional race in London, an epic moment in time, Jamaicans the world over will have an unprecedented emotional experience.

There is so much in his life which parallels ours. As the recent Gleaner book published in his honour, Usain Bolt: Legend, says, Usain's history, and I quote, "mirrors Jamaica's—a history of struggle against the odds and against naysayers who have said this little country cannot fulfill its dream of Independence. ..Usain Bolt is a metaphor for Jamaica.

Our rich culture—our sport, music, dance, drama, fashion, language — represents our soft power. Culturally, Jamaica is a superpower.

How many countries in the world —not just counties of comparable size—have produced someone as internationally famous and influential as Bob Marley, Usain Bolt or Marcus Garvey?

How many countries have produced either world-famous music or sporting legends, let alone both?

Many scholars are now writing about the importance of soft power in international affairs. All over the world, people identify with Jamaican culture.

As we celebrate Jamaicans at home and abroad this independence, let us note that it is not just in the area of culture where we have made a decisive mark.

In science, we have made notable achievements. Just a few weeks ago it was announced that one of our internationally recognized scientists, Dr Henry Lowe, was granted what is called an orphan-drug designation by the US Food and Drug Administration for developing a drug from cannabis to treat myeloid Leukemia.

This drug, which could be on the market in three years, is projected to have estimated annual sales of US\$250 million dollars in the US market alone.

There are other Jamaican scientists doing cutting-edge research in North America, Britain and continental Europe.

There are Jamaicans like Dr Vincent Reid, Director of Surgical Oncology at the Mercy Medical Centre in the United States who is doing pioneering cancer research and being published in the best scientific journals in the world.

In whatever field you can mention, there are Jamaicans at home and abroad who have distinguished themselves internationally. We are a people of excellence.

As we mark Jamaica 55, let us not be overwhelmed by our challenges. Our problems do not define us. Our achievements and strengths do. Let's focus on the positives for, indeed, there are many.

Among our noteworthy achievements have been the macroeconomic reforms that we as a people have fostered. As a people, we have said "enough is enough!" with regard to debt and budget deficits.

Jamaica took the hard decisions and you made the sacrifices to strengthen our independence by putting our macroeconomic house in order.

We knew the debt trap and double-digit inflation were whittling away our independence, making us more vulnerable to external pressures.

Fellow Jamaicans, you have shown the discipline necessary to undertake the reform measures. We have achieved record low inflation rates and have significantly cut our debt-to-GDP ratio.

We now boast a budget surplus after many years of chronic deficits. Jamaica achieved a primary balance surplus of \$135.9 billion in the 2016/2017 fiscal year, 7.7%, or \$12.9 billion above the minimum 7% target. Our independence is being strengthened.

We have demonstrated as a people that we are quite able to manage our own affairs and to show economic discipline without social unrest.

Let us celebrate this fact at independence, as I salute you for supporting economic measures which secure a bright future for our children and advance our independence.

Nobody owes us anything. We seek no patronage. We are a self-respecting nation — proud, free and quite capable to be masters of our own destiny. We have something —indeed, many things— to give to the world.

We seek no special favors. There is no reason for us to be poor. With our creative human capital and fortitude in tackling our economic and social challenges, there is no problem we can't defeat. As the Scripture says, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.

We have no reason to be poor. We have valuable natural resources and wonderful people who have impacted the world.

We have the resources for an economic take off. People are flocking to our country to enjoy the Jamaican Experience. Jamaica generated US\$1.46 billion in tourism earnings during the first six months this year alone, with the industry growing by an impressive 7.5%.

We welcomed more than 2.1 million visitors up to the end of June. Our Special Economic Zone regulations are expected to be passed into law soon, opening up a significant economic opportunity for Jamaicans in terms of employment generation, manufacturing, small business development and foreign exchange earnings.

Our growth in business process outsourcing (BPO) continues to explode as we move up the value chain.

We are a tough, courageous, purposeful and determined people. We have proven over and over again in our fifty-five years that we are equal to any task, once we put our collective minds to it.

There are some challenges but I have absolutely no doubt that we can successfully defeat them.

As we celebrate our 55th anniversary as a nation, let us individually recommit to building the Independence Project.

Let us each take responsibility personally for our country. Let us turn up to work on time and give a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.

Let us increase our personal productivity. Let us ask ourselves regularly, "How can I do my job better and more creatively?"

Let us care for our children. Let us find out how they are doing at school. Let us check up on their homework—mothers and fathers.

Let us for work for peace in our homes, workplaces and communities. Use the soft word to turn away wrath and to counter disrespect.

Talk it out, don't fight it out. Forgive. For Jamaica to be a more peaceful nation, its citizens individually –you—and I—have to be more peaceful.

As our anthem says, "teach us true respect for all". Let us value people not on the basis of what they possess, where they live a or what class they are from. Let us value each person as a child of God, with just the same God-given rights as anyone else.

And those of us who have the privilege to lead, in whatever sphere, let us lead with responsibility, accountability and justice. As leaders we are stewards, not masters. Let's be good stewards.

Economic growth, social justice, social peace and strong social capital are the building blocks of a vibrant and independent Jamaica.

Happy birthday, Jamaica, land we love.