



Inaugural Address

by

The Most Hon. Bruce Golding, MP

Prime Minister of Jamaica

15 September 2007

'I pledge to serve diligently and faithfully'

Today, I assume the office of Prime Minister of Jamaica. I do so with deep humility, knowing well that while it is one of the highest offices of the land, it demands the highest service. The word 'Minister' is a Latin word which means 'servant'. Therefore, today, I have become the chief servant of the people of Jamaica.

I thank the people of Jamaica for the honour that has been bestowed on me to serve. I pledge to serve them diligently and faithfully, to work, as our National Pledge behoves us, "with the love and loyalty of my heart, the wisdom and courage of my mind and the strength and vigour of my body", to enable them to enjoy a better life. I pledge to the people of my country to at all times do what, in my best judgement, is right for Jamaica.

I ask God's blessings on our nation. I ask for His guidance on the government that I will lead as we face the challenges of the future. I know that we can't even walk without Him holding our hands.

Today, I pay tribute to the outgoing Prime Minister, the Most Honourable Mrs. Portia Simpson Miller. She is the first woman to lead this nation and while her tenure was relatively short, her passion for our country knows no bounds. In our two pairs of hands rests so much of the hopes of the people of Jamaica. We have a choice. Those hands can engage in hand-to-hand combat, or we can join those hands together to build a nation that is strong, just, peaceful and prosperous.

I want to sit down with you, Portia. Let's talk about Jamaica. Let's talk about the dream that I believe we share for a Jamaica whose people are at peace with each other, where equality and justice reign supreme; where - as I said so often during the campaign - every child can go to a good school and every adult to a decent job; where everyone might not be rich, but no one has to be poor.

A new approach

The result of last Monday's election has reinforced the need for a new paradigm, a new approach to governance that converts the energy generated by competitive politics into nation-building power.

While we take pride in the remarkable capacity of our democracy to effect change and facilitate the peaceful and orderly transfer of power, we must enrich the value of that democracy by seizing this opportunity to bring our people back together. We must, by word and deed, actualize the ideal that we are one nation under God, with one government serving one people. We must ensure that those who may think that they did not win are reassured that they have not lost. We must retire the culture where one set of Jamaicans speak of "the government dem" as if it were a hostile, alien force. I want to see a new order in which all the people will regard the government, no matter which party forms it, as "our government".

And what are going to be the priorities of our government?

The protection of the rights of our people.

The reduction of crime, so that Jamaicans can feel safe and secure.

The creation of an educated, productive workforce.

Attracting investments that create real jobs, generate prosperity and ensure that that prosperity is shared among the people.

Transparency and accountability in government and the elimination of corruption.

A strong Parliament and more effective political representation.

The elimination of unnecessary bureaucracy and waste of public resources and the efficient delivery of government services.

The policy initiatives to achieve these goals are outlined in the Manifesto we presented to the electorate. Over the next 100 days, action will be taken on a number of these initiatives, not only because we regard as compelling the urgency of their implementation but also because it is important for us to validate the sincerity with which these commitments were made.

I ask the Jamaican people to appreciate that the commitments we intend to honour during the first 100 days are, of necessity, those which do not require significant outlay of government expenditure. The financial constraints and fiscal challenges that we face are well known and the medium and long term solutions will have to be pursued over time. But there is much that can be done to improve the quality of governance and the quality of people's lives that do not require large spending. It requires political will. We will demonstrate that political will as we assume the responsibilities of government.

Today, I assure the nation that notwithstanding these constraints and challenges, I will this week take the necessary steps to honour our commitment to abolish tuition fees in all government high schools. I also reiterate the commitment that we have made to abolish the fees charged to public hospital patients with effect from April of next year.

One of our immediate tasks, unanticipated as it was, is to deal with the lingering impact of Hurricane Dean. There are thousands of persons who lost or suffered damage to their homes, farmers whose crops were totally destroyed, not to mention schools and other public buildings,

roads and infrastructure that were badly affected. The assessments have not yet been completed, the estimates not yet finalized.

We are grateful for the assistance we have received from friendly countries and the local private sector. We will seek to expedite the processes involved so that we can help those who were affected to get back on their feet as quickly as possible. We must move swiftly to clean up our streets, to remove the debris which Dean left behind. The government cannot do it alone. We will need the active support of the people in the various communities and within the next few days I will announce plans for a national Hurricane Dean clean-up day and invite members of the public, especially civic and community-based organizations, to join with us in a national effort to clean up our communities. We have to put the nation's house back in order.

We have placed at the top of our agenda the creation of a new framework for good governance. It involves many elements that we regard as important for us to move forward:

The entrenchment of a new Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The establishment of a Citizens Protection Bureau to defend the rights of our citizens and secure redress where their rights are violated.

A single, independent authority to investigate instances of abuse by members of the security forces.

The reform of our justice system as recommended by the Justice System Reform Task Force.

The curtailment of the powers of the Executive and the strengthening of Parliament, so that it can exert greater control over the government.

The strengthening of the role and authority of the Opposition in that Parliament, because in our Westminster system the strength of the Parliament depends on the strength and effectiveness of the Opposition.

Corruption in Jamaica is much too easy, too risk-free. We are going to make it more difficult, more hazardous with stiff penalties for violations. We intend to:

Impose criminal sanctions for breaches of the rules governing the award of government contracts.

Establish a Special Prosecutor to investigate and prosecute persons involved in corruption.

Enact legislation for the impeachment and removal from office of public officials guilty of misconduct, corruption, abuse of authority or betrayal of public trust.

Introduce whistleblower legislation to protect persons who provide information on wrongdoing on the part of public officials.

Review the libel and slander law to ensure that it cannot be used as a firewall to protect wrongdoers.

As we begin this new chapter in the life of our nation I am mindful of the challenges that we face:

The enormous debt that we owe that must be repaid, even as we try to improve the delivery of critical services to our people;

The high level of crime that must be tackled, not just at the back end where it hurts, but at the front end where it originates;

The jobs and other economic opportunities that must be created so that our young people, in particular, are not confronted with a blank wall of hopelessness and despair.

The persistent cry for justice from so many of our people to which we cannot continue to be deaf, to which we must respond. Justice for every citizen is not a benevolent gift to be bestowed. It is a right that must be guaranteed.

But I have an abiding faith in our capacity as a people to face these challenges, to beat the odds, to be victorious. We have in our genes the brilliance of an Asafa Powell and a Veronica Campbell. But neither Asafa nor Veronica became world champions just so. Their triumph is the result of hard work, fixity of purpose, a dream of the champions they could become and a determination to fulfill that dream.

We must be no different. We must resist the temptation because of past failures to lower our expectations of ourselves, to lose faith in our own capacity. We cannot afford to excuse failure, to celebrate mediocrity. We must rate ourselves on what we should be achieving, what our competitors are achieving. We must stop taking comfort in how much worse things could have been.

I believe that we can create a social order in which that youth, whether in Majesty Gardens, Tivoli Gardens, Olympic Gardens or Arnett Gardens, whatever the colour of his skin, no matter how shabbily he may be dressed, however uneducated he might be, can be assured that his rights will be protected and his dignity respected no less than the man in his tailored suit and fancy car. That doesn't cost money. That doesn't endanger the fiscal deficit. It takes political will. We will demonstrate that political will.

I believe that the babies that were born today at the Victoria Jubilee, the Savannah-la-Mar Hospital or the St. Ann's Bay Hospital have the potential to become the best scientists, the best engineers, the best doctors, the best technicians, the best entertainers if we provide them with the right environment and the appropriate opportunities. We have a duty to do so. I don't believe that any youth in the ghetto was destined to be a gunman. I believe that if he had choices, if the society provided him with real - real opportunity - he would be a law-abiding, productive citizen, would become a good partner and a good father and that he would contribute to Jamaica's growth and development.

I believe that our farmers can be productive, that they can feed the nation and help feed the rest of the world, that hard work doesn't have to mean hard life. But they need help and direction. We must provide that help and direction.

I believe that we can construct a social and economic ladder that enables the poor and the ignored to climb their way out of poverty. We can enable the "nobody" to become "somebody", to enjoy a better life, to be assertive in his dignity, proud of himself and proud of his country. The task before me is enormous. But the Lord is the strength of my life. Of nothing shall I be afraid.

May God bless Jamaica! May God bless all the people of Jamaica!

Edited version of the inaugural address by the Honourable Bruce Golding at his swearing-in ceremony as Prime Minister of Jamaica, September 11, 2007 at King's House.

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