

Independence Message 2011

By Prime Minister

The Hon. Bruce Golding

6 August 2011

Today, we celebrate the 49th anniversary of our independence. Next year, God's willing, we will celebrate our golden jubilee – 50 years as an independent nation.

We have already started planning the series of events to commemorate that significant milestone. We hope to make it a grand homecoming for thousands of Jamaicans who live overseas but for whom Jamaica will forever remain their home.

As we begin our 50th year of independence, we are thankful for the blessings that God has given us, for, despite all our challenges, we have been blessed. We are thankful for all that we have achieved for, although there is so much more that we must strive for, there is much of which we can be proud.

Small though we are, we have made a significant impact on the world. Our music, our prowess in sports, our cuisine, our attractiveness to visitors, the respect we have earned in the important councils of the world, are among the attributes that make us a proud nation.

We do face many problems. Our economy has not grown anywhere near as much as we would have expected after 49 years of independence. We have not attained the quality of life for many of our people that we had anticipated.

There are too many who are unemployed and too many who remain trapped in poverty. There is too much crime and violence among us. The dream of independence has not been realized. But it is a dream that must be kept alive for it is what will inspire us to greater effort and greater achievement.

We are not alone in this struggle for achievement. Many countries across the world are wrestling with this development deficit. The recent global recession is putting to the test even advanced, developed countries that we thought had already passed the test.

We are not immune. As a small, vulnerable island state, we have suffered setbacks brought about by factors far beyond our control. But we, ourselves, must accept responsibilities for

much of our failures. There were times – too many times – when we made the wrong turn and we have paid dearly for those mistakes. There were times – too many times – that opportunity beckoned but we dithered and argued and those opportunities moved on.

In going forward, we must learn from our experiences of the last 49 years. As a nation, we will not advance unless we find and unite behind a common purpose, an overarching objective that transcends all our differences and divisions.

We are proud of our democratic traditions that have been sustained and matured over 67 years since we gained universal adult suffrage in 1944. Most of the nations of the world cannot claim that longevity of democracy.

However, we must ensure that despite all its intensive competitiveness, our democracy leads us to a shared vision, a unity of purpose and a common agenda to make Jamaica, as we proclaim in Vision 2030, a place of choice to live, work, raise our families and do business.

The transformation that we seek, the improvement in the lives of our people that we long for will not be achieved overnight. But every journey, no matter how long and difficult, is made easier by the knowledge that we are on the right track and that victory is not only within our sights but within our reach. Our focus must be to ensure that it is firmly within our grasp.

As we approach our 50th year of independence, let us remind ourselves that 50 years from now, another generation will pause to celebrate that same independence. Most of us will no longer be around but all of us must do all that we can now to ensure that they will have much to celebrate – much more to celebrate. That is our duty. That must be our commitment.

A blessed independence day to all Jamaica.