

Independence Message 2004

By Prime Minister

The Most Hon. Edward Seaga, ON, PC, MP

6 August 2004

From time to time when the issue of Independence is discussed, doubts are raised about what we have achieved over the years. The answer is that we have achieved far less than we should have accomplished.

Jamaica is an island blessed with resources. The natural beauty of its landscape mountains, rivers and beaches - are world renowned. It is rich in mineral resources, bauxite and the processed product, alumina. The soil is not only fertile but from it we grow some of the world's top products which we sell at top prices: coffee, citrus, pimento, ginger, cocoa, peppers and others. Add to all this abundance the greatest resource of all: a trainable labour force anxious to be skilled and, where endowed with skills, anxious to work.

As if all these were not enough, our geographical location, a few hundred miles from the world's richest market place, North America, creates wonderful possibilities to market our products, which we do in tourism and mining.

No other country in this region is blessed with so many resources. The comparative and competitive advantages which these create should have put the country and its people on easy street. There are many countries with only half of the blessings we have that would have taken full advantage if they were in our position. Sadly, we have not, and we are the worse for it.

What are the reasons for our inability to find prosperity when we have so many rich resources?.

Jamaica is a country suffering from bad political policies and equally bad political decisions. The country is not on a clear and straight path. Jamaica needs to grow, but it destroys the motivation of those who can make it grow by over burdening them with high taxes, high prices and high interest rates. Under the circumstances, growth and prosperity will be minimal and the excellent resources of the country will be under-utilised.

To be fair, in two areas, policies which were detrimental have now been corrected and results are now appearing. Both tourism and mining are now on positive paths of growth. The problem which remains is to get the policies right for agriculture and manufacturing so that the Jamaican

economy can rest on four, not two strong legs: tourism, bauxite, agriculture and manufacturing. In the 1960s, this wider base was the case and the country experienced its best economic performance then. We did it before, and we can do it again.

As we celebrate this Independence we are aware that there could be more celebrations to come. Our Olympic team goes to Athens to compete at the Olympic games in different sports. The performance of Jamaica at Olympic games over the past 50 years has been exceptional. This little country has been among the top ten best performers consistently ranking higher than most of the powerful nations on earth.

Athletics have shown the way to achieve greatness. The opportunities have been seized by our athletes to do well. Let the policy makers of the country seize other opportunities also to do well by implementing prudent policies and sound management. Then Jamaicans will succeed as we should for with our abundant resources, Jamaica has no reason to be poor.

I wish you all a happy independence with your friends and families particularly those who are returning home from abroad on visits. To them I extend a special welcome.