



## **Inaugural Address**

**by**

**His Excellency The Most Hon. Kenneth Hall ON, OJ**

**Governor General of Jamaica**

**15 February 2006**

I am honoured that you have all found it possible to join us for this ceremony this afternoon. For me this is both a humbling and an uplifting experience. The Office of Governor General and its historic association with Her Majesty the Queen, has a mystique of tradition as well as the symbolism of our evolution to independent statehood. Growing up in the hills of Hanover I should confess that I never dreamed of the scene that is unfolding today. Such a thing was completely outside the range of social condition. But, in the course of my generation, times have changed, making such opportunities possible for all Jamaicans.

I feel that what is conferred upon me today is an honour and recognition of the contribution of the generation of which I am a part. We straddle the last years of colonial rule and the opening era of independence. It was a time of transition which provided a distinctive experience which has moulded a distinctive outlook. As the torch is now passed to me, some persons have spoken of this as an occasion representing a generational transition. Let me hasten to assure you that generational transition does not mean that there is no space for continuity. There should be no retreat from preserving and transmitting to future generations, the hard-won

achievements of the past. Let us instead affirm that this is a process of renewal, one of bridging and connecting the legacy of the past and the promise of the future.

Speaking specifically as a representative of the last of the generations that were born under colonialism and experienced the events of the independence era, we must express our sincere gratitude for the enormous contributions that previous generations have made to national advancement and the overall well-being of our society.

## **GIVING THANKS**

On the personal level, I wish to express my profound thanks to the past Governors General and specifically to the Most Honourable Sir Howard Cooke, for the exemplary standards they have set and which I am committed to uphold. I acknowledge the significant legacy of those who have held this office and helped to fashion an independent Jamaica for future generations.

Their varied but expansive vision of nation building will continue to inspire us because it is that vision that has helped to fashion a new political order, a self-confident people and an environment that is conducive to the exercise of our creative imagination.

We thank the leaders in other sectors for laying the foundations for socio-cultural development, particularly in the areas of education and the raising of our national consciousness. We thank them for building the infrastructure necessary for economic progress and development. We fully appreciate the efforts of recent generations to remain faithful to many of the core values and attitudes that have historically shaped the social fabric of the Jamaican society. We acknowledge and respect them for undertaking the demanding challenges of leadership in good times and in bad. We are particularly glad for the legacy of ensuring smooth leadership transitions, of which today's ceremony is a concrete example. We are indebted to those who have helped Jamaica build and sustain such an enviable position and reputation in the international community.

I hope that I will be permitted, on a point of personal privilege, to acknowledge the seminal contributions which so many of you in this audience have made to my upbringing, my

education, my professional development and my participation in public life. It has been a long journey, but at all times, and at every step of the way, I have always felt that I could take the next step because you were either behind me, beside me or ahead of me, so that I could take risks and do things differently without having to pay a high price for being different.

There is an African saying that it takes a village to raise a child. In my case it took much more than that. It took a district, Claremont; a parish, Hanover; a country, Jamaica; a region, CARICOM, and a whole continent if I include the extended periods I spent in Canada and the United States. I can now better appreciate the philosophy that governs the relationship between lenders or investors, on the one hand, and debtors or borrowers, on the other. When the debt is large, with a potential for undermining the entire system, the lender has to exercise more than the normal degree of interest in the welfare of the borrower. This afternoon, I feel like the borrower with such a huge debt that can never be adequately repaid, and to that extent I am assured that I can carry out with confidence the responsibilities that have been assigned to me, as all of you, given your significant investment in my personal and professional development will continue to provide assistance, encouragement and sound advice.

### **CHALLENGES TO LEADERSHIP**

The collective contributions and legacies of which we are all beneficiaries today, constitute real benchmarks and present challenges for my generation as well as for future generations. We cannot easily ignore the significant national challenges that we face today, but I am optimistic about the future of our country because I am confident that we have the will, the expertise and the imagination to find solutions that will enable us to continue on the path of national prosperity and social well-being. Yet, in confronting these challenges we must continue to draw upon our accumulated experience and isolate those fundamental aspects of our culture that we wish to transmit to future generations.

To that end my generation must now assume the responsibility to fashion and project a realistic and coherent vision of the future of Jamaica. As the transmitters of that culture we must continue the tradition of working tirelessly to complete the unfinished agenda aimed at

achieving national unity and peace. We must continue all our efforts to achieve the enlargement of individual rights, freedom and justice and to be the standard bearers of ethics and morality in public life.

Perhaps the most significant challenge facing us today is the need to cultivate a better understanding of our youth and to be able to capitalize on their enthusiasm and talents. They no doubt have a different orientation and even a different world view but we must accept that as a necessary part of the process of generational change. We must develop powers of discernment to be able to recognize that much of their new orientation is indeed the product of our own sponsorship of their exposure to wider influences and experiences. If for no other reason, this compels us to be more understanding and more willing to bridge perceived differences between them and us. It is the youth that possess many of the special attributes that will form part of our transformation agenda. They represent the largest cohort in our national population. They are the most educated and most conscious youth cohort in Jamaica's history. They are energetic, enthusiastic and full of new and innovative ideas, which means they are the foundation of the future Jamaica. They are also anxious to be involved in the national development effort. We must therefore find meaningful ways to engage them.

## **MY AGENDA**

I believe firmly in the creative potential and capacities of our people and I share Sir Howard's abiding optimism for the development prospects and progress of our country. Based on my experience at The University of the West Indies, I know that I can count on the young people of Jamaica to assist me in promoting this vision. I am already encouraged by the visibility of graduates from all our tertiary institutions drawn from every walk of life, many of whom are in positions of trust and leadership. I shall endeavour to provide encouragement to them and work with them to achieve our common goals.

As an educator and a historian, I have an abiding faith in the role of education in the nation building process, and the importance of establishing a robust moral order and a strong civic

culture as the essential pillars of social progress. I therefore plan to lend my support in whatever ways I can to further the development of these national goals.

As one of the symbols of national unity, the office of the Governor General will be an active participant in forging national consensus, in building social capital and projecting a self-reliant, self-confident Jamaica. In this connection I shall meet with a wide range of political, social, professional, religious, private sector, public sector, educational, cultural and, of course, youth organizations to gain a better insight into their views, their hopes and aspirations, as well as their plans for a better Jamaica. As a son of Hanover, you will of course expect that I will continue to visit family and friends in that parish. But, as those of you from those parts are aware, the road from Kingston to Lucea runs by way of the south through St. Andrew, St. Catherine, Clarendon, Manchester, St. Elizabeth and Westmoreland, and the path from Lucea by the north coast leads through St. James, Trelawny, St. Ann and, depending on whether you go through the junction, St. Mary. The parishes of Portland and St. Thomas will of course be included in the normal course of my activities. In short, I fully intend to be the Governor General of all Jamaica regardless of social status or political affiliation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Again, let me say how honoured and delighted I am to have been recommended by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to succeed the venerable Sir Howard Cooke. I also wish to thank the Opposition for its pledges of support. I am encouraged by the positive responses to my appointment that I have received from a wide cross section of the people of Jamaica. With the support of my wife, Rheima Hall, I pledge that I will do my utmost to uphold the dignity of the office and the confidence you have placed in me. Finally, in the words of an anonymous poet, I pledge to serve with an unwavering hand And thus bind my fate to this, our blessed land.

I thank you.