

# Independence Message 2004

By Prime Minister

The Most Hon. P.J. Patterson, ON, PC, QC, MP

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My Fellow Jamaicans and friends:

This forty-second anniversary of our Independence is a time for all Jamaicans to reflect and to be ready for the next phase of our nation's development. I believe we can do so with assurance and optimism.

At the dawn of Independence, we boldly embarked on a mission, confident in our ability to chart our own destiny. We had good reason to believe that we possessed the vision, the intellectual acumen, the courage and the determination to give form to a society capable of promoting peace, economic prosperity, security, hope for individual advancement and our collective well-being.

We realized that Independence was not the end but the beginning of a new journey and that there were still many rivers to cross in order to meet our goals.

In these first four decades, we have successfully created the institutions and systems essential to the functioning of a democratic society in the modern world. As a nation, we have developed a worldwide reputation, not only for the natural beauty with which God has blessed us, but also for our resilience, talent and creativity. For a country of our size, the worldwide respect which we enjoy in international political, economic, academic, professional and cultural circles, is truly remarkable.

The world is not static. New times require new thinking and innovative solutions.

## **Globalisation**

As we continue on this exciting journey of nation building, we are faced with the major challenge of this twenty-first century: how to cope with the demands in a competitive global marketplace.

During the past year, we have continued to make considerable progress in this regard.

The major players in our economy – worker and management alike, in the public and private sectors - are now all conscious of the major adjustments we need to make. We are all working together as we re-focus our development priorities. This is essential so that our goods and services can become competitive in the open trading arrangements that have replaced the traditional preferential markets in this globalised era. We have all agreed that we must harness our skills as we take advantage of new technology and develop new products and services in which we enjoy a comparative advantage.

A major aspect of this strategy is to move ahead decisively to strengthen and deepen our long-time partnership with our regional brothers and sisters in the Caribbean Community. We are committed to creating a single market for our products. We seek to achieve collectively what, because of the small size of each member country, we cannot accomplish individually.

This is why we have put such great emphasis on the Caribbean Single Market and Economy. An important arm of the CSME is the establishment of the Caribbean Court of Justice.

Just last week, Parliament passed the necessary legislation for the establishment of the CCJ. The time has come for Jamaica and other countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean to have our own ultimate Court of Appeal. I view this Court as an affirmation of our independence and sovereignty. Our self-respect demands it. We cannot continue to rely forever on others to determine how we interpret our own Laws and Constitution.

Why should we question our own integrity and our ability to manage the most critical institutions that affect our daily lives?

If we cannot dispense justice for ourselves, we are unworthy of the intellectual and spiritual heritage of our ancestors who sacrificed so much to achieve the freedom that led to our independence. We are unworthy of their legacy if, we consider independence as a vehicle only for material development and fail to free our minds.

## **The Economy**

As we celebrate independence this year, we are enjoying a major upturn in our economy, thanks to the economic strategies we have diligently pursued and in large measure, to the meaningful, active partnership between government, and our entire community of citizens. A new spirit of unity and confidence is in evidence throughout our land.

All our economic indicators reflect that our strategy for closing the fiscal deficit is yielding positive results.

The building of infrastructure on which we have embarked has begun already to pay dividends in terms of attracting both local and foreign investment. This is a tribute to all of us; to an

Administration, which has taken the lead, and to the many working individuals in public and private sector institutions who have been involved in the repair and building of our roads and highways; in the modernization and upgrading, including new security measures at our harbours, ports and airports which are all so essential to trade and investments.

### **Crime and violence**

With so many of us agreed on the way forward, it is deeply regrettable that our efforts continue to be threatened by the twin affliction of crime and violence, much of it associated with the illegal trafficking in drugs. This has become the borderless monster roaming the entire Planet and jeopardizing the peace and prosperity of our country.

We are determined to defeat this malady and its disastrous consequences. But in this fight, we need the support of every single citizen everywhere ...in town and country alike. This is crucial.

I sincerely thank all of you who, in many different ways, continue to support this struggle, whether in the line of duty or as conscious, caring individuals and organizations.

Social sector In addition to the economic upturn we are experiencing, we must also advance our social wellbeing. Our social programmes seek to ease the burden of the economically disadvantaged and the vulnerable in our society. Our housing programmes are on target. We have made great strides in the enhancement of healthcare delivery, so as to ensure a healthy nation that will be shielded from the ravages of lifestyle diseases, including the dreaded HIV/AIDS pandemic now threatening the entire world.

### **Other Aspects of National Life**

We must ensure the deepening of our cultural life; the social stability, which goes with non-confrontational politics. We must promote values of mutual respect, self-esteem and self-discipline. All of this depends heavily on the collaboration of family, school and church and all other socializing agents so that we will eventually fulfill the rich promise which our Independent status offered. In this way, we will prove to ourselves and to the world that we are indeed the creators of our own destiny.

On this Independence anniversary, I am greatly encouraged by the cooperation, support and dedication of all our people who have collaborated and assisted us to ensure that Jamaica remains a land to love and cherish, a place we are proud to call home. I especially thank those of you who, despite the problems and obstacles which so many of you are facing on a personal level, continue to make a positive contribution and to keep hope alive.

## **The Diaspora**

I include not only those of us here at home but our compatriots in the Jamaican Diaspora on both sides of the Atlantic. They hold a special place in our nation without borders.

## **Our Young People**

I thank all those, in particular our educators and creative artists, who have helped in the preparation of our young for life through critical thinking and in the use of the imagination. They have certainly helped those of our people who wish to be productive human beings and worthwhile, law-abiding citizens to find a sense of place and of purpose.

As we pass another milestone, I am particularly mindful of our post-Independence generation and especially those born over the past twenty years or so. I invite these young people to become more active participants in the planning of Jamaica's political, social and economic future. I challenge all who now hold leadership positions in our nation, to reach out more creatively and aggressively to these young citizens since it is in their hands we must leave our beloved country. We must prepare them to assume this responsibility.

## **Conclusion**

As we spend the next few days enjoying the festivities of this season, as we welcome home our family and friends from abroad, as we enjoy the feast of Jamaican music which will fill the airwaves, let us pause for a while from the hustle and bustle of our daily activities and enjoy this special time in our nation's life.

I say to every Jamaican in town and village, in factories, on farms, in offices, in schools and churches, in hotels, in health care institutions, to the hard workers who are engaged in maintaining our roads, in preserving our environment in keeping our communities clean; to those caring for the very young and the elderly in homes across Jamaica; to those on our roads transporting our people and our goods across our island, to our NGOs, our volunteers – let us all be inspired and invigorated by the new spirit of unity in our society and the growing evidence that our nation is on track.

My fellow Jamaicans, we have good reason to enter our 43rd year of nationhood assured of our ability to build a strong, vibrant, caring and peaceful nation.

May God bless us all and bless Independent Jamaica, this precious land we love.