

Independence Message 2011

by Governor General

His Excellency the Most Hon. Sir Patrick Allen, ON, GCMG, CD

6 August 2011

My fellow Jamaicans:

I extend warm greetings to you as our nation celebrates forty-nine years of Independence.

It is without question that August 6, 1962 represented a watershed moment in our history. That historic date was the sum total of the contribution of our forebears to nation-building occasioned by their passionate belief that Jamaicans deserved the freedom to determine their own internal affairs and destiny, as individuals and as an independent country.

From slavery, through emancipation, self-rule, Universal Adult Suffrage and the championing of the rights of workers, the journey continued in earnest, and today we celebrate Independence as the seminal outcome of their vision for Jamaica.

The Jamaican journey is a journey of hope which ultimately lands us at the station; – our station, our destination. We must enjoy and celebrate our achievements on the journey, for we will not get there together; just as many of us did not start the trek together in 1962!

Fundamental pillars of development

As we proceed, we would do well to continue to focus with much urgency on the areas of education, family and youth. These are key indicators to the success we hope to realize as a nation, whether in the social, economic, cultural or governance arenas.

Statistics indicate that many of the obstacles to the development of our society can be categorized under these three broad areas, especially giving regard to the implications of crime and violence and our economic and growth targets.

The stability of the family is under serious pressure particularly with the alarming number of children in single parent households. This places a responsibility on our churches, schools, communities and other institutions, to serve as the 'village' to train our youth who are faced with additional challenges.

At present approximately 50,000 young people in Jamaica between the ages of 15 and 23 are regarded as 'at risk' and 'unattached,' that is, not engaged in any formal education, social or employment activities. This number is larger than the population of service men and women in the Jamaica Defence Force and the Jamaica Constabulary Force combined.

While there are commendable pockets of excellence in education, many students graduate from high school each year without the minimum prerequisites to matriculate to tertiary level institutions, and their social and technical skills are inadequate for the limited job market.

I Believe

Although these statistics may appear disheartening, I believe that together we can strengthen the social structures to prevent further social decline.

There are so many things that are right with Jamaica which must be harnessed, affirmed and encouraged. The time has come, and indeed it is now, when we must, in every facet of life, accentuate the positives and discourage the negative things that are happening. We cannot afford to be destructive; we must unite to secure our success.

That is the purpose of the I Believe message embedded in the values-based initiative which I urge Jamaicans to embrace. The IBI is the outcome of my Inaugural Address which appeals to Jamaicans not to lose hope but instead believe in our ability to achieve our individual potentials and build a great nation.

Professor and poet Edward Baugh reminds us in the poem 'Responsibility':

"I too some distant morning shall rise responsibly to set my house in motion."

I believe that 'distant morning' has arrived, and all of us, wherever we function must rise and be active in the service of Jamaica.

Consider the amazing feats of our young people who are blazing a trail of excellence in sports and education and other areas too numerous to mention here. Our young people in high schools and universities rank among the best in the world in law, Information Technology, track and field and other areas. We cannot sufficiently thank their teachers, coaches and professors for the invaluable time invested in them.

Hope for the future

Today, as we stand on the cusp of half a century of Independence, we can reflect on our achievements with pride and hope, knowing that despite the challenges, setbacks and despair, the combined efforts of dedicated and hard working Jamaicans have laid a foundation on which we can build a brighter future for our country.

Because we have a duty of care to each other, I ask of you to assist in the mentoring of our young people. Help them with their homework, assist in a youth organization or at church where youth membership is rapidly declining, volunteer in some activity for the elderly, or give public service in whatever way you can.

The future of this nation is embedded in the creativity of our people, the dedication to quality service and our productive use of the natural resources bequeathed to us by God and nature.

Let us enjoy another Independence Day, then go back to work understanding fully that "we are on our own now," and it is up to us to make this nation great.

God bless you

Happy Independence Jamaica!