



Inaugural Address

by

The Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller, MP

Prime Minister of Jamaica

31 March 2006

I want to begin by recognizing the source of my strength, Almighty God. Let us stand and pray.

Almighty God, in the presence of all here attending; in the presence of the people of this land and everyone else sharing this occasion, I do pay homage to you, in acknowledgement that you are the Sovereign and Supreme Lord God in this island and all the world. As I assume the Office of Prime Minister of all Jamaica, I do so Lord, truly conscious that the glory is yours, and the office, an affirmation of my devotion to you and to all the people of this nation.

You laid the foundations of the earth. Lord, lay now, I beseech you, the foundations of the Government, that you have graciously enabled me to lead, so that its purpose be firm, its endeavors right, and its accomplishments blessed. Let it be joy to those through whom you dispense it; bless those who will receive it; and glory to you who give it.

Good Lord, let Jamaica find in me, my colleagues, and all who offer governance under our leadership, complete fulfillment of the righteous Government that you have offered to this nation; let it manifest in removal of blight and poverty; the stigma and loss due to crime and

violence; let the radiance of it raise a larger assertion of moral strength and rectitude in our public and private sectors. Unite our people with a stronger sense of compassion and love. Use us as the vessel for your purpose, and the people as instruments of your peace, and prosper us that we may know the joy of your presence and experience the pleasure at your right hand.

These we ask of you in faith, believing, giving thanks, even so, in the name of your Holy Son, Jesus Christ – our Lord, and in the name of your Holy Spirit: one God. Amen.

Today is a truly historic day in the life of this nation. A girl from Wood Hall in deep rural St. Catherine has become Prime Minister of Jamaica, a true manifestation of the Jamaican Dream. This indicates that any child, regardless of circumstances, can rise to the top.

It has been said “Hope springs eternal in the human breast”.

Ladies and gentlemen, if there were a way to quantify the intangible, it would be proven without a shadow of a doubt today that it is the spirit of hope which is most dominant here at King’s House; in homes throughout the length and breadth of Jamaica; at the Haile Selassie School and Sam Sharpe Square where people are gathered and, indeed, in many parts of the world where Jamaicans are joining us via the Internet.

I come to the Office of Prime Minister with a profound sense of my obligation to the people. Only with the help of Almighty God can I carry this weight of trust and hope that is placed on my shoulders. I will not betray this trust and I will keep hope alive.

All across Jamaica there is this hope, this positive expectancy, this hunger to believe that a new day is dawning. You can almost touch it. It is not an expectation that any one individual can fulfill, but together we can make it.

My role as Prime Minister of Jamaica will be to use this high office to facilitate change. Today I want to commit myself to certain goals.

The first pledge to the Jamaican people is to advance human rights and individual liberty. Each individual life is sacred. None is more important than the other. Money should not make one person more important than the other. Learning should not make one person more important than the other, nor should class, colour or gender. We are all equal in the sight of God. While the state has a responsibility to protect the society as a whole, it must never, in the execution of that responsibility, sacrifice individual liberty. We cannot build the harmony and peace that this society so desperately needs unless all Jamaicans know that they will be treated with dignity and respect.

We need to recapture our roots: the courtesy, the decency, the good manners and trust which were routinely practised. We need to rekindle those tested and proven values. We must practice them ourselves and demand them from others. I want to continue to lead a process for the recovery and promotion of our best values.

I want to pledge to the Jamaican people to work tirelessly to eradicate corruption and extortion. I am committed to their eradication as I am committed to uplifting the poor. I pledge to do everything in my power – with the help of the Almighty and your support – to break the power of the criminals. I will be working closely with the Minister of National Security, the Law Enforcement Officers, the Opposition and our 780 identified communities to successfully tackle this problem, in the interest of all Jamaicans, including those in the Diaspora who want to see a peaceful Jamaica.

Closely aligned to eliminating criminality and restoring power to communities, is the creation of employment and wealth-earning opportunities for people. Jamaicans do extremely well when given the opportunity. I believe that if we create the right conditions for people to flourish; if as government we see ourselves as facilitators, then we will experience the unleashing of the Jamaican creative spirit that can move this country forward. I pledge to the Jamaican people to foster and facilitate the conditions for employment opportunities and wealth-creation.

I want to say directly to the private sector both here and overseas that we treasure the gains which have been made through our macro-economic policy and international credibility. It is our intention to build on these hard-won gains of pain and sacrifice. At the same time, we have to find the way while balancing the books to balance people's lives. Indeed, both the World Bank and the IMF have recognized the need for policies which promote equity and poverty alleviation.

We must find a way to expand opportunities for all Jamaicans so that they can share the fruits of macroeconomic stability. When we think of the achievements of our sports men and women, of our musicians and others in the cultural field, they tell us that together we can make it. Let me recognize the presence today of our athletes, who represented Jamaica at the recent Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, Australia. They earned a record 22 medals, including 10 gold.

Thank you for adding golden value to brand Jamaica. We are proud of you. You are an example to all of us. We can use your determination, strength, courage, discipline, perseverance, loyalty to country and pride in being Jamaican as motivation to work together for the advancement of our country.

As I said before, together we can make it.

I have an abiding faith and confidence in the Jamaican people. They believe in me and I passionately believe in them.

Critical to this matter of entrepreneurship, employment expansion and wealth-creation, is education. We will only become a first-class, competitive society if we are an educated, knowledge-based society. We have to build on the progress already made and intensify our drive to transform Jamaica's education system.

Our ability to attract quality foreign direct investments is directly dependent on the quality of our human capital. There can be no economic transformation without educational transformation. I pledge to the people an unyielding commitment to education, including

programmes in character education to build a society committed to the highest ethical principles.

In this regard, we as political leaders have to set the example. I have had the finest teacher possible in this matter of consensus- building and respect for differences of opinion. I refer to none other than our esteemed former Prime Minister, the Most Hon. P. J. Patterson, to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude. I must thank him for his fourteen years of service as Prime Minister of Jamaica. His loyalty and commitment to country, his passion for service, his civility and ability to achieve consensus make him unforgettable. As a team builder, he has shown us that together we can make it.

I want to build on his legacy of cooperation. I consider it my duty not only to protect, but to build on the legacies of all my predecessors in the continuing process of nation building. I recognize today the presence of the Most Hon. Edward Seaga, former Prime Minister of Jamaica, and thank him for his contribution to the development of our country. I pledge to ensure that the interests of all our people are protected and that victimization never rears its ugly head in any way under my administration. Unity is a prerequisite for success in Jamaica and is very high on my list of priorities. I say to the Opposition, let us launch a new era of cooperation. Let us work together in the interest of all Jamaicans. Let us put the people's hopes and aspirations before our own interests.

A more united, engaged, and spiritually strong nation will provide a good foundation for dynamic integration in the Caribbean Community. Jamaica's commitment to and active involvement in Caricom, has been steadfast and this will continue and, indeed, be expanded during my tenure.

In that regard, I am happy and encouraged by the presence of so many of my CARICOM colleagues today. I am also pleased to note the presence of a large delegation from the United States Congress.

Our active involvement in the international community will continue, because Jamaica is respected for its enviable tradition of leadership among developing countries.

We will maintain respectful and harmonious relations with all states and will work with both the developed and developing nations to build a world of peace, justice and a better quality of life.

We will continue to remind the international community that security considerations cannot be divorced from development, and that poverty is the greatest threat to security. Ladies and gentlemen, there is nothing that can withstand the force of an energized, confident, united, determined and visionary people. The Bible says without vision the people perish. If we embrace one vision-not a PNP or JLP vision, not an uptown or a downtown vision not an urban or rural vision but one Jamaican vision; then we will deal with our challenges as a nation. Together we can make it.

I pledge to the Jamaican people to lead that process. I cannot do it alone. Together we can make it. I want to build a partnership with the Jamaican people.

A partnership which will involve the recognition that we all have a responsibility to lift up the poor and the downtrodden;

A partnership which will see us giving greater respect to the rights and dignity of the persons with disabilities;

A partnership to restore the centrality of family life in Jamaica;

A partnership for responsible fatherhood, motherhood and responsible sexual behaviour;

A partnership for love, honour and protection of our women;

A partnership for love, honour and respect for our men;

A partnership for the protection and nurturing of our children, who represent the future and which recognizes that children are the torchbearers of all the good that we must pass on to posterity;

A partnership to provide access to quality education for all our children;

A partnership for the empowerment of youths through education, training and economic opportunities;

A partnership for the development of our communities, for strengthening democratic governance and for truly giving a voice to all the people.

A partnership to eradicate crime and drive the criminals from our communities;

A partnership to deepen the involvement of Jamaicans in the Diaspora;

A partnership in the building of a harmonious, prosperous and vibrant Jamaica, committed to making the Jamaican Dream accessible to every single Jamaican; Together we can make it.

A partnership where we recognize that God is supreme.

I call upon all Jamaicans to join those who will worship on Friday, Saturday or Sunday to pray for the prosperity of our country and peace in the nation.

In these partnerships, I pledge to be accountable to you, the people of Jamaica. I am and will remain your servant.

Together we will make it.

Today is not only my day. It is Jamaica's day. Indeed, it is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it, for we are His People.

Eternal Father bless our land, Guard us with thy Mighty Hand.