

Independence Message 2007

By Prime Minister

The Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller, ON, MP

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My fellow Jamaicans, today we celebrate 45 years of political independence, a high point in the history of the Jamaican people. The struggles of a long line of freedom fighters that eventually brought us to that historic moment when the Jamaican flag was unfurled, for the first time in the National Stadium. Today, I want to pay a special tribute to two of our national heroes, great leaders, whose work and wisdom laid the foundation for an independent Jamaica, Sir Alexander Bustamante and Norman Washington Manley.

Both played leading roles in the workers' uprising of 1938, which opened the door to our eventual freedom from colonial rule.

Sir Alexander became the founder of the labour movement and also the first Prime Minister of Jamaica. Norman Manley became the advocate and activist for the right of all Jamaicans to vote and leader of the national movement for political independence.

These leaders left us the rich legacy of our two major political parties, which have been the pillars of our stable and maturing democratic system. We remember these two National Heroes with love and appreciation today.

At the time when we gained our independence in 1962, there were a few who voiced doubts about our ability to stand on our two feet as a sovereign nation. For the overwhelming majority of our people, any misgiving was completely overshadowed by the great feeling of new hope that the achievement of political independence brought. Norman Manley spoke well when he said,

"We have come to independence prepared and ready to shoulder our new responsibilities and united, I believe, in one single hope that we may make our small country a safe and happy home for all our people."

We have not yet completed that process, but this is the road on which we have been walking over these 45 years, and the few who once doubted our abilities to progress as a nation, have been proven wrong.

We have established many great social and economic institutions. Think of the National Housing Trust; the Social Development Commission, which started life as Jamaica Welfare Ltd. in the 40s, and there is the HEART Trust, now HEART/NTA, and the Electoral Commission, just to name a few.

Over the 45 years, we have maintained a democratic system of government, with an electoral system which over the last few years has become more transparent and more accountable. Our expertise and successes in tourism have placed us in the top echelons of most favoured destinations in the world.

On every continent, and especially in the Americas and in Europe, Jamaicans in the Diaspora are excelling in various fields.

We have created our own 'Brand Jamaica' popular music form, which has captured the imagination of the world. Many of our entertainers are giants on the international stage. We have become trendsetters in all areas of creativity. In the leading fashion capitals, you will see many examples of what is uniquely creative and vibrant about us as Jamaicans. In sport, we have established an amazing reputation, especially in track and field athletics. Today, Jamaica, with its modern highway network, up-to-date telecommunications systems and advances in health and education, is on the path of progress; on course to becoming a developed country.

Political Independence, like emancipation opened a new avenue that was not the end of the journey. We are on the road to realizing our full potential as an independent nation and we are now at the stage where we must put on our running shoes to move faster. In this election year, on this special day, I want to encourage you, my fellow Jamaicans, whoever you are, wherever you are, to pause and experience a sense of pride in your country. The 45 years have not been wasted. We have achieved much. Of course, there is much more ground to cover and much more work to do to fully realize the vision of our heroes. The General Elections later this month will allow us to make some fundamental decisions about the way forward.

These Elections, the 15th since our people first gained that right to vote, will give us the opportunity to demonstrate wisdom and maturity in the handling of our political affairs, in keeping with our great tradition.

As a people, we are too loving, too accomplished, too beautiful, and too sensible to let political violence defeat us.

I call on all our leaders, and everyone with a heart of love for this country, to help spread the word that violence serves no useful purpose. No one wins. Everyone loses.

Let us give the year of our 45th anniversary of Independence special meaning by making the high season of political campaigning and the conduct of our elections peaceful and dignified. Jamaicans have too much at stake for us to do otherwise.

In celebration of the nation's birthday, I encourage Jamaicans everywhere, to rise up to the highest expectations of those who went before us!

Rise to the wisdom and confidence of Marcus Mosiah Garvey whose 120th birthday we will celebrate on August 17!

Rise to the indomitable spirit of Nanny of the Maroons!

Rise to the strength and fearlessness of Sam Sharpe! Rise to the courage, conviction and determination of Paul Bogle!

Rise to the foresight and compassion of George William Gordon

Rise to the courage and patriotism of Sir Alexander Bustamante!

Rise to the spirit of democracy and bold vision for Jamaica that inspired Norman Manley! Rise to honour the investment that you have made in this beautiful country of ours, in which you live.

As we celebrate our 45th year as a nation, to God be all the glory, honour and praise! Happy Independence Day and may God continue to bless us all.