

Independence Message 2011

By Leader of the Opposition

The Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller, ON, MP

6 August 2011

My fellow Jamaicans, at home and in the Diaspora, today marks the 49th Anniversary of our Nation's Independence.

For us, this is a significant milestone for many reasons. Since our Independence, we have had the privilege, the honour and the responsibility of charting our own path to development in this dynamic global community.

Some of us will remember the pride we felt in 1962 when the Union Jack was lowered, and the Black, Green and Gold hoisted. We remember the elation we felt when the first strains of the Jamaica National Anthem were heard.

We remember the overwhelming emotion we felt at the first session of Parliament on Tuesday August 7, when the Queen's representative, Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret, uttered these eventful words (and I quote)

"My government in the United Kingdom has laid down its responsibilities and has ceased to have any authority in and over Jamaica, after more than 300 years ..."

What sweet words for an emergent nation; especially, as our first National Hero, The Right Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey, tells us that nationhood is the highest ideal of all peoples.

In every sphere of national life since August 6, 1962, Jamaica and Jamaicans have attained some notable achievements.

This has been due to the patriotism and ideological commitment of those men and women who understood that decolonization was not an option – but an imperative.

Through their example we have honed our Democracy which we began to practice from as early as 1944.

We have gone beyond that initial step of symbolic decolonization to establish important self-sustaining and self-renewing institutions to:-

- Safeguard our Democracy;
- Foster Social and Economic Development;
- and Promote Justice for all our people.

These are fitting pillars on which we should continue to build our society.

Our country is blessed. The Lord has bestowed upon us fertile lands, fresh rivers and springs, fair climate and a resilient and resourceful people.

These characteristics confirm our potential. They remind us that all that is required to engineer and engender success reside within us.

The formula for our lasting success, which will place our feet firmly on the pathway to progress, is for us to optimize these strengths with a re-awakened sense of determination:

- The same kind of steely determination with which the struggle against slavery and Apprenticeship was won in 1838 by our ancestors, and with less means than we now have at our disposal.
- The same commitment to justice that caused Paul Bogle, Elizabeth Taylor and others to start the Morant Bay Rebellion.
- The same vigour demonstrated within the campaign waged for trade union representation and the right to vote between 1938 and 1944.
- The same fearlessness of the activists who struggled against marginalization and for respect for workers in the 1930s. In this regard, we remember those killed or injured in that struggle.

Among them – Caleb Barrett, Archibald Franklin, Felix, Thaddeus Smith, Midora Williams, Elsie Powel, Ann Hutchinson and Irene Campbell.

The same resolve that inspired our patriots in 1962 to secure the Independence we mark today.

My Fellow Jamaicans, over the past forty-nine years, one of the many areas in which we have distinguished ourselves is the field of music.

We have had a long and distinguished cultural history, expressing ourselves through music. It is therefore significant that the theme of this year's Independence is "The Journey Continues" and that the Emancipation Jubilee theme is "Let the Drums Talk".

One consistent reminder of our heritage along this journey from Emancipation through Independence and into the present day is the presence of those drums in our music.

From the days of slavery, the sounds of the drums were used to speak to the Africans through the common language of music.

Those drums told stories of a rich vibrant cultural legacy. They carried rhythms of a former African homeland to a new West Indian homeland.

They beat out tones of resistance, tones of victory, they welcomed new life and put past life to rest.

In our journey as a people, our artistes have used the lyrics of songs to mark and influence every important milestone.

Jamaicans rallied to the bounce of the Ska on Independence Day in 1962 when Derrick Morgan's 'Forward March' reminded us then that "we are brothers and sisters" and implored us to "gather together because we are independent".

There are lessons for us as people in the patriotic music of our time. If, as a nation, we strengthen our sense of nationalism and pride in our country, many of the negative behaviours that are exhibited would be eradicated. We would act with the patriotism and build our communities.

As an independent, sovereign, powerful people, we must create and insist that our leaders facilitate the kind of Jamaica we want for ourselves and future generations.

On the eve of our 50th Anniversary, we have to admit that there are still challenges we must overcome. Despite these challenges I encourage all Jamaicans to join Eric Donaldson and say:

This is Jamaica, my Jamaica, the land of my birth.....

I will never leave her shores

I will never run away

I will always believe in the Black, the Green, the Gold – I say.

We must remain committed to creating in Jamaica that place of choice, that quality society in which we can all be proud to say, we are Jamaicans and we come from Jamaica.

If we do this, our children and their children, will stand up anywhere in the world and proudly declare I AM JAMAICAN. They will also agree that "Fi wi island- a boom".

Jamaicans, let us celebrate our journey thus far.

Let us look to the next milestone with pride and confidence, keeping always in mind the words of Marcus Garvey that:

"Without confidence in self, we are twice defeated in the race of life. With confidence, we have won even before we have started."

These are words to propel to us to higher heights as we stand on the eve of our fiftieth Anniversary of Political Independence.

Let us, as a people blessed with rhyme and rhythm, move into our fiftieth year with a common song of peace, love and unity.

My fellow Jamaicans, I implore you to build on the strength, courage and vision of those who laid the foundation for Independent Jamaica.

I remind you that the responsibility for its development and the advancement of our people rest with us.

I encourage you to be inspired by the songs of our artistes and to sing the messages of love and unity as we "Lift up Jamaica with pride and dignity". Sing out loud! Sing out strong!

We are a nation guided by the Almighty. So on this Independence Day "Now put your hands in the air and Praise Him. Now our Pretty little Island, Praise him. Let all of the people Praise Him, because this is the land of our birth. This is Jamaica, Our Jamaica, the land of our birth.

Happy Independence Day Jamaicans and may God continue to bless Jamaica, Land we Love.