

Independence Day Message 2016

from the Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. Portia Simpson Miller

6 August 2016

My fellow Jamaicans here at home and the millions in the Diaspora, I wish you all a happy Independence.

Independence is the celebration of the best of Jamaica; our dynamic culture and the many achievements of our people.

Our people have blazed trails of success globally in many different fields. They have established Jamaica as a recognised brand and a sought after destination.

Jamaicans are excelling as scientists, teachers, doctors, nurses, chefs, business people, engineers, musicians, recording artistes, film makers, athletes, and in many other professions. Our people are the backbone of our country.

On this Independence Day I salute all Jamaicans who contribute in some way to our national life and to the stability of our nation year after year.

They add meaning to our history and embody hope for the future.

Independence is also a time when we honour the founding fathers and mothers of our nation. We pay tribute to Jamaicans who have contributed to building community and national institutions that make our country strong.

We recall the words of Sir Alexander Bustamante, who said, quote: **“Be not afraid to do your duty towards your countryman and towards humanity.”** End quote.

It was Norman Washington Manley who reminded us that, quote:

“I affirm Jamaica that we are a great people. Out of the past of fire and suffering and neglect, the human spirit human spirit has survived, patient and strong...” End of quote.

We remember those who have toiled in the political vineyards of the past, and Jamaicans who continue to see virtue in political service.

Serving one’s country should never be about personal gain. Political service is about making life better for the less fortunate.

It is also about improving conditions for all, so that the country as a whole can make progress year after year.

I know that the observance of Jamaica's Independence also has special meaning for our people in the Diaspora.

Our brothers and sisters overseas are also hosting festivities and rekindling their cultural traditions.

As we celebrate this Fifty Fourth year of our Independence, we thank God for how far we have come as a people.

He has brought us through the fire of challenging times.

Today, God continues to strengthen our hands as we seek to provide for our families. He sustains us as we strive to make Jamaica a better place now and for generations to come.

Independence this year is being celebrated as our athletes compete in the Rio Olympics. They are again flying the flag of Jamaica high with great pride and excellence.

They excel on the shoulders of the support of all Jamaicans. We send them our love and we know they will again bring glory to our nation.

The achievements of our national athletes are a lasting reminder of the importance of unity, teamwork and community.

Unity is required to surmount the remaining hurdles to national success that is the promise of Independence.

We must be our brothers' and sisters' keepers. Together, we must work to overcome the challenges that face us.

Our villages must raise our children and take responsibility for their safety, growth and development. Jamaica's children are among our country's greatest assets. They are a wellspring of hope for a better future.

That is why we must do everything possible to safeguard our Education system, which must be the catalyst for national development.

Adequate funding and equal, unrestricted access to education for all are essential. They are required in order to prepare our people to fulfil local needs and meet global skill demands.

In this effort, Government, parents, teachers, students, school administrators, businesses, the church, and all other stakeholders must play their part.

In every area of national life individual responsibility, community action and the collective will of the Government urgently are needed to move Jamaica forward.

We must face the dangers and the current public health threat of the Zika Virus and its associated illnesses as one Jamaican family.

This is a serious threat that demands urgent and consistent action by all.

As a people and a nation we can fulfil the possibilities of Independence when we work together to build our communities.

It is my hope that the celebration of Independence will rekindle the spirit of community right across Jamaica.

As we celebrate, let us do so safely, respectfully and peacefully.

Let us support the security forces as they maintain law and order to keep us safe. In our celebration, always remember to give consideration to the privacy and rights of others.

Let us respect other people's property and lives.

Respect for lives, including our own, means exercising caution when we drive, ride and walk on the roads. We want you to be around to celebrate many more Independence Days.

So, let us be responsible and careful over this holiday and always, as we get together and feel alright.

Happy Independence Day!

May God continue to bless Jamaica, land we love.