

Independence Message 2012

By The Hon. Hector John

Leader of the Opposition

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Every year during Dominica's Independence celebrations, we take time in demonstrating our national pride. Be it in music, dance, dress or local cuisine, we all participate in this culturally rich national festivity. As proud Dominicans, our level of patriotism takes center stage. During our celebration, we stand at attention and sing the National Anthem with patriotic pride beaming from our faces. We also recite the national prayer and pledge as we hold our country in highest esteem. The National Anthem candidly asked us to, "Strive for honour sons and daughters, do the right be firm be fair." In the National Prayer we ask of God, "Bless, we pray Thee, our President, our Prime Minister, and other Ministers of State, our Parliament, and all who are set in authority over us and grant that under them we may be peacefully and justly governed." While in the National Pledge we affirm the following words, "I promise to work diligently and to help build a prosperous and peaceful Nation."

These powerful quotes from our National Anthem, Prayer, Pledge and the respect of our national flag strike to the core of our roles as citizens of our Blessed land. They call us to right order as we partner for the further progress and development of Dominica.

British politician, diplomat and historian, James Bryce was on point when he remarked, "Our country is not the only thing to which we owe our allegiance. It is also owed to justice and to humanity. Patriotism consists not in waving the flag, but in striving that our country shall be righteous as well as strong." Bryce, died nine decades ago but today his words must appeal to the conscience of every Dominican. We should ponder and take seriously our loyalty to our Sovereign State. To whom do we owe our allegiance? As true patriots of Dominica, are we standing on the side of our Constitution? Are we doing what is right and just in order to bring out the true potential of our beloved country?

In recent times, Dominica has experienced repeated and deliberate subversions of her Constitution, in the process of the election of a new president and in the appointment of the acting Chief of Police. Our forefathers who brought Dominica into independence never envisaged this level of contempt for the Constitution. This is surely not in keeping with the

leadership of any country who is “Partnering for further progress and development”. What is even more damaging to the sovereignty of the Nature Isle is the deafening silence of civil society. Individuals and organizations who should be protectors of the Constitution literally remained on the side and said or did nothing. To whom do you really owe your allegiance? This is a patriotic call to conscience.

To give this annual national celebration tangible meaning, there must be a concerted effort to ensure that our institutions of state are properly respected. We should make it our civic responsibility for reinforcing adherence to the Constitution without bias. The Nation Anthem, Prayer and Pledge must become an active part of our daily lives. We cannot leave such important state’s duty only for those in authority. There must be swift condemnation, rebuke, and if necessary, prosecution of those who violate the Supreme Law of the Land, including lawmakers. This will solidify the superiority of the Constitution.

As we discuss with visiting family and friends over a dish of crab callaloo or stewed manicou, let us not shy away from issues of national importance. Let us give them the prominence that they truly deserve. Let us encourage everyone to meticulously do what is right and just, as we partner towards building home, church, community and a prosperous country. Our leaders should always put the interest of the country first, whenever they are executing their mandate. Then and only then we will be, “Partnering for Further Progress and Development”. We will begin to see positive progress and development through genuine, frank and respectful partnership.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish every Dominican a patriotic, peaceful and enjoyable Independence celebrations. And may you hold this line from the National Pledge true to your heart, “Before God and all mankind, I pledge allegiance to the flag of the Commonwealth of Dominica.”

May God richly bless you and the Nature Isle.