



THRONE SPEECH 2012-2013

Nation on a Mission

Delivered by

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Governor-General

Ceremonial Opening of Parliament

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Honourable Members:

Almost fifty years ago, this great nation officially came into being, born out of the vision and heroic efforts of generations of illustrious forefathers and foremothers.

Fittingly, the year's activities will be highlighted by the commemoration of this historic 50th Anniversary of our political Independence.

The journey from 1962 has been eventful and challenging, as well as rewarding. We have made significant gains in some of the measurements of development, such as life expectancy; access of our people to primary, secondary and tertiary education; improved road infrastructure connecting the principal towns; and much greater access to electricity and potable water.

Of special significance is the fact that we have preserved and strengthened our democracy.

Notwithstanding the progress made, we still have a long way to go to achieve the level of development our people deserve and expect. In undertaking this next stage of the journey, and seeking to advance the rate of progress, we must overcome two main challenges.

One challenge is that the rest of the world is not standing still, holding back development while waiting for us to catch up. Several countries which were, more or less, our equivalent in respect of economic development at the time of Independence have gone well ahead of us. We have to move forward with speed.

The second challenge is the rising expectations of our people, stimulated to a large extent, by the rapid advances in information and communication technology, and more frequent travel. There is quick, easy access to global standards and points of reference so our people are becoming more informed and more insistent on better services and on achieving a higher quality of life.

This is the backdrop against which we will celebrate our 50th Anniversary: proud of the progress we have made but very aware of the need to achieve world-class standards in all areas. We must make our good better and our better, best.

In celebration, this year we will present a series of programmes, rich in creativity and spirit, but relatively modest in cost, in light of the limited financial resources available and the need for prudence. We shall also endeavour to create lasting memorials of these celebrations.

The Administration, has taken office in an international and domestic, economic climate which, despite some reports of imminent recovery, remains unsettled. Globally, some of the countries which are the major markets for our goods and services, and the main sources of foreign direct investments and remittances, are still struggling to put the 'Great Recession' behind them. It goes without saying that an open economy, like Jamaica's is vulnerable to these external developments.

Among the undesirable features of our economy are: (a) an unsustainable level of debt relative to the country's GDP; (b) anaemic growth rates over many years; and (c) too high a level of unemployment and poverty and declining incomes affecting the middle class and the 'working poor'.

In this Legislative Year, there is much to be done. In an effort to overcome the obstacles to our Nation's progress we have re-engaged with the International Monetary Fund with a view to concluding a new programme. We anticipate that the IMF, together with, other multi-lateral financial institutions, our bilateral partners, the financial markets here and abroad and the stakeholders in our country will be supportive in enabling us to achieve the nation's principal objectives within a medium-term economic framework.

These are:

(a) appreciable and sustained economic growth;

(b) the restoration of our fiscal accounts to sustainable levels; and

(c) protection of the vulnerable, poor and working poor to the maximum extent possible.

In turn, the Government will maintain tight expenditure controls and will implement a Tax Reform Programme to, among other things (a) widen the tax net, (b) introduce more equity in the system, and (c) stimulate investment, growth and employment. Substantial effort will be exercised in ensuring better compliance and enforcement of the tax laws.

The Public Sector Transformation Unit and its Modernisation counterpart, will pay special attention to making it easier to 'Do Business' in Jamaica generally, and, in particular, allied with the Tax Reform Programme, making it easier to pay taxes.

Special focus will be given to entities such as JAMPRO, the Companies Office of Jamaica, Jamaica Customs, the National Environmental and Planning Agency and the National Land Agency, which are in the 'front line' in facilitating 'Doing Business' in Jamaica. The priority areas of the focus will be business processes and technology to achieve greater efficiency.

The Public Sector Transformation Unit and the Ministry of Industry, Investment and Commerce will be facilitating private sector focus groups, broadly defined, to ascertain their specific concerns in 'Doing Business' and to get their views on ways to improve the current system or laws to enhance efficiency.

The existing Jamaica Portal is being reviewed by the Public Sector Transformation Unit, the Central Information and Technology Office and Fiscal Services Limited. It aims to improve content management policy and technology architecture, with special emphasis on 'Doing Business' in Jamaica.

To achieve better management of the Fiscal budget, over the medium to long-term, the pension and leave systems in the Public Sector will be reformed.

The development agenda will be approached from several angles. Beginning in this fiscal year, and continuing over the medium term, a number of infrastructure projects

will be implemented. They will include the resumption of work on the vitally-needed North-South leg of the Highway 2000 project. Pending conclusion of negotiations with the investor, work on the completion of the Mount Rosser bypass will be resumed before the end of the calendar year. At another level, development will be pursued through a Community Renewal Programme, details of which will be provided in the Budget Debate.

In recognition of the urgent need to respond to the inadequate provisions for the lowest socio-economic groups, the Jamaica Emergency Employment Programme (JEEP) will be moving into higher gear. Activities under JEEP will range from river-training works; repairs to gullies and drains; road repairs; the installation of traffic lights; agricultural activities such as honey production, banana/plantain resuscitation; low income housing construction; training of persons as administrative assistants in the National Youth Service; and work-based training programmes. We have already reached our first phase target of 5,000 jobs.

A deliberate effort will be made to encourage participation of non-governmental groups as well as political representatives in the programme. Let it be emphasised that transparency and accountability will continue to characterize the implementation of all projects under JEEP.

This year we will put as much of our idle lands into production as possible. Turmeric and ginger production will be expanded on approximately 450 acres of agricultural land. Efforts are also underway for the resuscitation and expansion of the cocoa industry in several parishes including St. Thomas, St. Mary, Clarendon and St. James. We are going further up the value chain with agro processing of our richly flavoured cocoa beans, which are ranked among the finest in the world. Special focus will be placed on the fisheries sector this year, especially our inland fisheries, taking into consideration the continuing depletion of our aquatic resources.

There are a number of tourism development projects that are being actively pursued and will be elaborated on during the Budget debate.

The high price of energy has negatively affected our economic performance over many years. The significant rise in oil prices has not been matched by similar increases in the value of our country's exports and has had a devastating effect on our economy. Our ability to spend disposable income on other goods and services has been reduced; the competitiveness of the bauxite/alumina sector, manufacturing and, even the service sectors has also been significantly affected. Perhaps most significantly, there is increased pressure on our country's foreign exchange reserves.

As a consequence of this enormous challenge to our economic viability, the Government will lead the drive to solve our energy problem. To quote our National Hero, Norman Manley, the Government will do so with "fixity of purpose and continuity of effort." We fail to do this at our peril.

The attack on the energy problem will be concentrated in five broad areas.

- The replacement of fuel oil with natural gas and or/coal for the bauxite/alumina and electricity-generating sectors.
- Support for the use of indigenous renewable resource such as water, wind and sunlight as well as the conversion of waste to energy.
- Inculcating an ethic of conservation, with the State leading by example.
- Rationalisation of the transportation system as a means, over the medium to longer-term, of reducing the use of fuel per capita.
- Ensuring greater efficiency in the distribution of electricity.

The proper care of our children will be given special emphasis beginning this Legislative Year. In regard to Early Childhood Education, the CHASE Fund will be investing more money into training of teachers for this level of education. Additional trained teachers will be placed in early childhood institutions and many primary schools will also be utilized to strengthen the delivery of early childhood education. Starting next month, we will commence construction of more than 50 new infant schools. Improvements will also be made to the nutrition for our preschoolers.

Too many of our children have suffered from abuse and neglect. We are taking steps to heighten awareness of this issue. In particular we will place emphasis on the legal responsibilities of persons who are entrusted with the care of our children -in our schools, hospitals and homes. These issues will not be swept under the carpet and will ensure that persons comply with their obligations to report cases of abuse for prosecution. We will promote a culture of reporting child abuse which will act as a deterrent to those who would perpetrate such dastardly acts.

We will continue to fight relentlessly against the scourge of crime and violence. We are encouraged by the improvements we have seen in the reduction of major crimes over the last two months. We cannot rest as we have a long way to go. We will complete the new National Security Policy which will provide a comprehensive framework to guide the national security apparatus and criminal justice system in the realisation of greater citizen security in Jamaica. The policy will frame our cooperation and collaboration with international partners and mobilise national support at all levels in the building of a safer and more secure Jamaica.

We will considerably improve the number and quality of Bills passed and will strengthen all stages of the legislative process. During this Legislative Year, approximately thirty-two Bills will be passed, which would be about twice the average of the last few years. The key pieces of legislation to be passed include:

- An Act to establish the Caribbean Court of Justice as Jamaica's final Court of Appeal. This process will involve further dialogue with the Opposition.
- A Secured Transactions Act to overhaul Jamaica's antiquated system for taking security over collateral other than real estate. This will be replaced with a modern, efficient and inexpensive, mechanism for perfecting secured transactions costs and enhancing the flow of credit in the economy.
- A new Patents and Design Act to provide a modern framework for investment.
- Amendment of the Evidence Act to allow video-recorded evidence (particularly useful for child victims of sexual abuse) and evidence from remote locations via a live link (for the protection of vulnerable witnesses and to facilitate witnesses who

are overseas). The new Act will eliminate various outdated evidential requirements which slow down and increase the costs of criminal trials.

- Anti-gang Legislation to more effectively target criminal gangs and organised criminal groups, which are responsible for 70% of all murders in Jamaica.
- To facilitate the use of DNA evidence in the criminal justice system.
- To rationalise Jamaica's institutional arrangements for fighting corruption by consolidating them under a single anti-corruption agency having strong powers. There will be explicit provisions to prevent abuse of the authority.

The Government places priority on preparing and passing an Act to establish Jamaica as a Republic, within the Commonwealth of Nations. The Government will be proceeding in this regard through consensus and dialogue with the Opposition.

Jamaicans in the Diaspora are valued members of the Jamaican family. We will strengthen our connection with our family members who reside overseas. They represent a great resource in respect of their level of skills, business and technological acumen and capital, which can help develop our economy.

Foreign Policy is an important part of our governance. It is a means through which, as a country, we can make a meaningful contribution to good order, sustainable development in all countries and peaceful co-existence between the peoples on our planet.

Regionally, Jamaica will play an active role in revitalising CARICOM. The building of the CARICOM Single Market and the pursuit of functional cooperation and the coordination of foreign policy will be priorities.

Jamaica intends to strengthen its relations with South and Central America to open new avenues for trade, investment and tourism flows and to extend functional cooperation and cultural exchange. We will be represented at the African Union - Africa Diaspora Summit this month. An embassy in Kuwait was officially opened by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade last month. Our embassy will provide Jamaica with

an important link in a region that is a source of capital and a potential supplier of energy to the country.

At the United Nations, among other activities, Jamaica will be actively engaged in on-going discussion at the multilateral level aimed at addressing the illicit proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

As a member of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), we will continue to support adherence to the fundamental values and principles of the Commonwealth.

Honourable Members, given the challenges we face and must overcome, it is incumbent on us to embrace meaningful change in every area of national endeavour, for example, in the way we do business; our production patterns and levels; in respect of some of the goods and services we produce; the way we educate or train our citizens and the way we treat each other.

But in embracing this change we must be ever-mindful of the experiences and the lessons learned during the last fifty years of our Independence and even before. As our National Hero, Marcus Mosiah Garvey observed "...we are in charge of our own destiny..."

We look forward to the upcoming London 2012 Olympics where Jamaica will showcase its sporting talent and demonstrate once again our capacity to be the best in the world. As our athletes prepare to journey to London they are assured of the full support of all Jamaicans here and in the Diaspora. We pray God's blessings on their efforts.

We have within us all that we need to succeed. We are a creative people, richly blessed with wisdom, strength and courage. Confident in our abilities, we are determined in this 50th year of Independence to successfully lay the foundations for Jamaica's prosperity and progress in the next exciting phase of our journey as an independent nation.

We are fully equipped to be victorious over every challenge before us now and in the coming years.

Honourable Members, the Estimates of Expenditure will be presented later today.

May God continue to bless our People and Jamaica Land We Love