



INDEPENDENCE MESSAGE

1998

BY

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PRIME MINISTER

On the occasion of the celebration of the thirty second anniversary of our independence, coming as it does on the verge of a new century, it would be useful for us to reflect on what this independence means.

I am very happy that the Barbadian public is now treating the celebration of our Independence as a joyous thing that should involve the entire community, and should be reflected in the use of positive symbols such as lights that best capture how we feel about ourselves and see the future.

But the meaning of independence must be for us much deeper than the symbols we use to celebrate it.

The gaining of independence was a political and constitutional action that gave us the right to self-determination over all of our affairs, and carried with it the obligation to build a nation.

It carried the obligation to build a strong economy; to provide for the basic and material needs of the people and to open new avenues of opportunities for the creation of wealth and the sharing of that wealth.

It carried the obligation to build a strong, cohesive society, that provides for the welfare of the disadvantaged and all those who have faced obstacles and discrimination of one kind or another - whether they be the disabled, our women folk or any such formerly marginalised group.

Independence also confers upon us the responsibility to craft our own identity as a people among the family of nations and to develop a Barbadian way of life that is rooted in our best traditions and our best values.

Each succeeding generation of Barbadians will have their own special contribution to make to the building of a nation.

And so do we.

When we celebrated national heroes day this year that was an assertion of what we stand for as a people, drawing from the best examples of those who have helped to build this nation. It was an essential step in the creation of a national identity.

When in 1998 we pressed on with the task of building a stronger economy that has provided many more Barbadians with jobs to look after their families, and new investment opportunities to deepen their stake in this land, we were being faithful to one of the purposes for which independence was sought in the first place in 1966.

And when all around you see evidence of programmes to eradicate poverty, to involve Barbadians of all political persuasions in participating in the making of decisions which affect how they live and how this society functions, again those are symbols of our determination to build a nation, based on the best Barbadian traditions and values.

On this occasion of the celebration of the 32nd anniversary of our independence I am pleased, as the leader of this country, to be able to say that we are being true to the mandate of our independence - to build a nation and a great nation at that.

I wish on your behalf to congratulate all those on whom national honours will today be conferred, in recognition of their outstanding contributions to some aspect of national life.

But I wish also to say thanks to all Barbadians for contributing so wonderfully, in so very many respects to making our country such a model society and a good place to live.

I however, have a responsibility on this occasion to say that independence must not be confused with licence; the freedom to pillage or to prey upon this society and its people in any social or economic form.

We do not yet have it in our means to solve all of the problems of every individual Barbadian.

But it is undeniable that we are creating a land of opportunity. We are in fact a society whose 32 years of independence have been characterised by a continuous expansion of the economic, educational, training, health, welfare and social opportunities afforded to the citizens of this country.

It is therefore difficult for me, as I am sure it is for the majority of our people, to accept that there is any need or justification for any section of the Barbadian population, no matter how small, to prey upon the rest of our society because of lack of opportunity.

Furthermore, I strongly deprecate those who would want a small cult to believe that there could be any justification for them visiting any violence on the society because decent Barbadians refuse to accommodate their illegal wants rather than their legitimate needs.

I go further. There is no such thing as unlicensed guns being legitimate tools in the hands of anybody in this country. Let us be very clear about that, and let us also be clear that those who live by such standards and those who encourage them to do so, will find the vast majority of Barbadians united in firm opposition to that depraved mindset.

We did not progress from bondage to independence only to become victimised and enslaved by a new lawless and indisciplined minority. They must be found out and be subjected to the full weight of the law.

For our independence can only have a meaning if Barbadians are made to feel free and safe in their homes, on the streets, in places of public entertainment, on the beaches and everywhere our people meet to carry on their lawful business.

And this we are resolved to achieve.

The year ahead will be an interesting and challenging year.

It is not a secret that we are preparing to face a general election, we should do so in a manner that embellishes Barbados' image as a strong and stable democracy.

We also face challenging times economically as the world's economic situation continue to be one characterised by great turmoil.

We have done quite well in setting the economic framework to protect ourselves from falling into a crisis, but the challenges that test our principal trading partners are very real.

You can be sure that I will spare no effort to keep this country on its successful economic course, and that I will put the interest of this nation above the interest of my party in the charged political atmosphere in which decisions will have to be made.

I am confident however, that in the New Year good Barbadian commonsense will continue to prevail. I have great faith in our people's ability to use their best judgement and to resist those temptations and extravagances that can so quickly visit terrible conditions upon a country.

A Barbados that has done so well during the past year is a Barbados that must be no less vigilant and prudent in its affairs in the year ahead.

This is a Barbados that is resourceful beyond the mere impression that is often created by its small size.

This is a Barbados that will want to continue showing the world how admirably it is served with citizens who cherish the best democratic ideals, and whose pride and industry consistently enable them to meet and overcome the challenges of life in a rapidly changing world.

A very happy independence to you all.