



## **INDEPENDENCE MESSAGE**

**2001**

**BY**

**THE RT. HON. OWEN ARTHUR**

**PRIME MINISTER**

*Fellow Barbadians,*

Thirty-five years is but a moment in the building of a nation.

On this 35th Anniversary of our Independence I am honoured once again to have the opportunity of sharing this occasion with you, as we celebrate our progress as a sovereign state.

It was fitting that last January we celebrated the conferment of the Barbados Centennial Honour on 100 Barbadians, living in Barbados or elsewhere, who had made outstanding contributions, without previous recognition, to national or community life.

And it was good that we should have done so. For despite our short history as a nation, we do have a rich history of service as a people, which is not always given its true worth.

Later today, we shall have the great pleasure of witnessing the conferment of national honours on another group of our citizens in recognition of their national achievement and merit in service to Barbados.

We celebrate with our honourees the deserving distinction which today's tribute to their contribution gives them.

I especially applaud, on your behalf, the members of the Royal Barbados Police Force, the Defence Force, the Prison Service and the Fire Service who will today receive Services Medal of Honour for their diligent service and exemplary conduct in the service of our nation in sometimes difficult and trying circumstances.

And I salute Mr. David Simmons on his receipt of our nation's highest honour, and on his appointment to the position of Chief Justice of Barbados. By this appointment, all Barbadians can continue to feel assured that the responsibility for the administration of Justice in our nation will be reposed in only those of unblemished calibre and those best qualified to carry out this most important function.

It has been our good fortune to have embarked upon the new millennium with excellent prospects in a society which has an outstanding democratic inheritance.

It is in such a context that the celebration this year of the 50th Anniversary of the first occasion in Barbados when all adults were legally able, by their votes, to chose constituency representatives to sit in the House of Assembly, should have a special meaning for all of us.

We too easily forget that as recently as 1943, no women in Barbados had the right to vote, and that the franchise was limited to only 6000 men, based on qualifications of income and property.

We dare not forget that this right to vote was not conferred on us by an act of nature but was secured only by a determined struggle, sustained over many years by Barbadians of the calibre of our national heroes - the Rt. Excellents Samuel Jackman Prescod, Charles Duncan O'Neal, Sir Grantley Herbert Adams, Sir Hugh Springer and Sir Frank Walcott.

The integrity of the electoral process in Barbados has been unimpeachable, and has come to be reflected in the workings of other central institutions of our civil society; to such an extent that the principles of our electoral process have become the foundations of the smooth ordering of our society.

Nowhere in the world is there a superior example. It is that which we celebrate this year in acknowledging the 50th Anniversary of the attainment of Adult Suffrage.

It is that which should inspire us as we go forward.

For we now seek to continue to build a society that can withstand the challenges to small states in a global society where no one is owed a living.

My Government has operated on the premise that we shall not always have sunny days, but we should aim always to make them happy.

Indeed, it is our view that the apparent storms of life serve merely to toughen our resolve to remain focused, and to pursue a steady course for progress.

This year has been one that has tested our souls.

Events of last September 11 have dominated the world, as that tragedy shattered the peace and security of all nations and has raised the spectre of grave social, economic, financial and political dislocation.

For us it has especially meant testing new economic circumstances.

Our economy had established formidable strength over a record eight years of continuous growth; the result of careful husbandry, sound and imaginative management.

At the first signs of a slow down in the growth of our economy earlier this year, my Government moved with despatch to embrace new economic and financial measures for all of our productive sectors, to provide substantial resources for our enterprises, and other measures to mitigate any harsh consequences of more challenging economic times on our most vulnerable citizens and those who have been laid off.

The events of September 11 have meant that we have had to take a new economic guard. And this we have done with the institution of new economic and financial measures to safeguard jobs, stimulate the economy and ensure the viability of local businesses.

It would be too much to expect Barbados to survive a full blown global economic crisis, such as that triggered by the events of September 11th, unscathed.

I am, however, pleased that Barbadians have reacted positively and assertively to our new economic circumstances, and that there is very good evidence that our worst fears about a severe economic downturn will not be realised.

Our tourism sector now has every prospect of resurgence with new vigour and strength. Our present economic circumstances have inspired us with a new appreciation of the value and quality of Barbadian production and craftsmanship, and should herald a brighter future for our

agricultural, manufacturing and small business sectors. And there has been no lay offs in the public sector, as I have pledged.

We are a resilient and resourceful people.

While there may have been a slight downturn in our economic circumstances, there has been no recession in the spirit of the Barbadian people nor in their goals and ambitions.

I am confident that Barbados will rise above our present economic adversity, and indeed will emerge as a stronger, more productive, more resilient and more competitive economy in the years ahead.

In a way, I have seen it all this year - the struggle with the OECD, the effort to get a fair deal for the small states of the world, the effort to ensure that our own small craft is not swamped by the surging tides of trade liberalisation.

Through it all, I have been greatly fortified by the willingness of Barbadians of all persuasions and in all spheres of our civil society to come together and to act in unison in support of the greatest national good.

I am proud to be the Leader of a people of such character.

As we leave this year, to go to brighter circumstances I have a duty to remind Barbadians that the events of September 11th reflect the horrors that can ensue from the triumph of intolerance.

Intolerance is a serious disease. In its own way, it is a product of selfish beliefs and prejudiced inhibitions about others. It is often reflected in an unwillingness on the part of the individual to bear any sacrifice, and an indifference to any consideration other than private profit.

Sadly, we are beginning to see a new virus of intolerance emerging in Barbados. It is shown especially in the unwillingness of some to accept that our betterment can only be achieved at a cost and sometimes amid some inconvenience.

For instance, when badly needed roads are now being built or repaired some are prepared only to see the temporary inconvenience of the dust rather than the permanent improvement that will come from improved social and physical amenities.

The year 2001 should always remind us that every improvement, every inch of progress achieved has a cost. I would therefore sincerely hope that, before long, our social ethos and ethics will cease to dictate that working for progress should induce pessimism or nourish a culture of complaint and criticism.

A perpetuation of this culture of complaint will run counter to the significance of the real progress we have realised this year.

The year 2001 could have been a year of considerable crisis for Barbados. That it has not been such a year has been due to the resourcefulness and speed with which as a community we were able, public and private sector, labour movement and civil society alike and together cooperated in order to hammer out the programme of action for the initial ninety-day period after the events of September 11. That we were able to achieve this reflects the hard work and dedication of a number of Barbadians in all sectors and we should all join in recognising and appreciating a truly significant effort and success.

We must thank God that, as much of the world outside reels from one crisis to another, our stability and security will serve to shield us from those convulsions which other countries are experiencing and will allow us to retain our reputation as one of the most democratic of nations.

A note of sincere joy is this opportunity to salute the great achievement of Miss Stephanie Chase in winning earlier this month the inaugural award for Best Talent at the 2001 Miss World Beauty

Pageant in Sun City, South Africa. All Barbadians will wish to congratulate Miss Chase for what was, by all accounts, a distinguished performance on a highly competitive occasion involving 93 contestants. She was proud to be able to attribute her success in South Africa and throughout her life to the support and love of her parents. We wish her well in her career. We pay tribute to her parents for true parenting and a just reward.

I sincerely hope that this Independence Day will bring immense happiness and fulfilment to all Barbadians within and beyond our shores and that our visitors and guests will share our satisfaction in attaining another milestone in our great record of progress as a nation.

Have a marvelous and happy Independence Day.