

Leader of the Opposition
Dr. Peter Phillips
Independence Day Message 2019

My fellow Jamaicans,

As we celebrate the 57th anniversary of Jamaica's Independence, we salute the patriots who built the national movement and laid the foundations of our nationhood.

Independence time also provides us with an opportunity to celebrate our culture and the achievements of our country and our people.

We should always treasure the fact that we have remained a functioning democracy.

Our Charter of Rights in our Constitution provides every single Jamaican with protection against arbitrary arrest and detention and guarantees our basic freedoms.

However, despite these real achievements we must also recognize that there are still major challenges which confront us as a people and which require urgent and collective action.

We are yet to construct the kind of inclusive economy or achieve the rates of economic growth necessary to give all our people a good standard of living.

Too many Jamaicans are still earning at or below the minimum wage and barely surviving without a real stake in the land of their birth.

Despite the gains that have been made in opening up our educational system, our society is still scarred by what I call the unequal apartheid system in education.

This presently leaves the majority of our children without adequate preparation for survival and success in today's world.

Many of the rights acquired over the years by our workers have either not been fully achieved or are being eroded.

Despite the law providing equal pay for women, today our women are still only getting on average 60% of the pay for doing the same jobs that men do.

Increasingly, some businesses are using the fiction of "contract work" to deny workers, who are full-time in every other respect, their rights. These workers are denied sick leave, vacation leave, maternity leave and, for the most part, have no pension rights.

All of this contributes to an increasingly widespread view that life in Jamaica is not fair.

Perhaps nothing highlights the emerging crisis caused by these circumstances more than the persistent high rate of murder and criminal violence.

This creates a deep sense of fear and insecurity among Jamaicans.

These high rates of crime set back our economy and places pressure on our communities. Worst of all, it spreads tragedy among our families.

The problem has been with us for a long time, but it is getting worse.

Nevertheless, I continue to believe in our capacity and potential as a people to successfully overcome the challenges that we face.

It is that indomitable spirit that overthrew British colonialism.

It is that indomitable spirit that laid the foundations of our independence.

It is that creative and powerful capacity of our Jamaican people that has made us a cultural powerhouse across the world and has caused our athletes like Shelly-Ann Fraser Pryce to overcome all challengers.

In the same Jamaican spirit of “never giving up and never giving in”, my team and I have embarked on a campaign to mobilize the nation around solutions to our most pressing problems.

We recently held a National Consultation on Crime and Violence Prevention.

We brought together key stakeholders across academic, business, social, community, faith-based, diplomatic and political sectors.

We also included experts in the field of violence prevention and national security to seek solutions to this, our most pressing national problem.

This meeting was just the first step.

We will be sharing the recommendations with the Government and other stakeholders, as we work towards a national consensus that will enable us to overcome this threat to our country.

In addition, we will be organizing public discussions across the country on our new policy proposals.

We have plans to “re-imagine education and training” and change our mindset.

We have workable plans to create a legal pathway to a land title so every Jamaican can own a piece of this rock!

We have real plans to drive sustainable and meaningful economic growth, which is the empowerment of business at every level.

We have identified the critical funding to help people start up new ventures as micro and small businesses. We have plans also to help these businesses to grow to medium size, and for medium size businesses to grow to big.

This growth cycle has to be maintained and facilitated by an active government.

This is the road to economic independence of our people.

So, today as we enjoy this showcasing of the best of our popular culture, and welcome relatives and friends from abroad to join in this celebration, let us also use the opportunity to reflect on our journey thus far, and to ready ourselves for the task ahead.

May God grant Jamaica his continued blessings, and continue to crown our efforts to build a better Jamaica with success.

Have a happy and safe Independence Day.