

**Independence Message 2019**  
**Prime Minister**  
**The Most Hon. Andrew Holness**

My fellow Jamaicans,

As we celebrate our 57th year of independence, we have much to be thankful for:

- The lowest unemployment rate in our history at 7.8% and youth unemployment fell by 6 percent.
- The annual inflation rate is low and stable at 4.2% and the consumer price index is trending downwards.
- Our credit ratings are positive, and our foreign exchange reserves are at historically high levels.
- We have had record breaking tourist arrivals for the last two years exceeding 4.3 million visitors with an 8.6% increase in earnings for the industry.
- The deposit interest rate is at 3.2%, which is a record low.
- Our Stock Market continues to perform well, and the consumer and business confidence indices remain high. These are always good indicators of economic health.
- The construction industry is seeing sustained growth, right across Jamaica and particularly in Kingston where we see new construction projects going up at a pace not seen in recent times. And the NHT is providing housing solutions for new homeowners like never in its history.

By the end of this month, over 12,500 new housing solutions would have been provided to the market since 2017 and we have lowered interest rates for you.

If you are an NHT contributor earning below JA\$15,000.00 per week you pay ZERO PERCENT on your mortgage. You can't get lower than that!

If you earn between \$15,000.00 and \$30,000 per week your mortgage rate is 1%. General mortgage rates are coming down steadily from double digit rates to now on average 7.5%.

We have also introduced the intergenerational mortgage to assist older persons and families to acquire a home. What better way to celebrate your independence than by having a chance to own your home?

Many positive things are happening in Jamaica right now. There is much to celebrate on our 57th birthday.

There is no question that at long last Jamaicans can feel proud that we are using our political independence to secure our economic independence.

However, I want you to know that I am under no illusion that all is well.

Notwithstanding the great performance of the government, there is no room for complacency; there is still much work to be done and pressing issues to be resolved.

Environmental issues are now of greater concern to all Jamaicans. And they should be, in the face of more frequent and intense droughts, shifting rainfall patterns and more frequent and intense hurricanes.

This government that I lead has taken more decisive actions in favour of our environment than any other government in our recent history.

We aborted the Goat Island project.

We rejected coal as an option for powering a bauxite operation in Jamaica.

We have put in place an enterprise team to oversee the divestment and modernization of Jamaica's solid waste management system; which is at an advance stage.

We instituted a ban on some plastic items.

We will shortly launch a deposit refund scheme for plastic bottles.

Early in my term I signed an order prohibiting clearing and slash and burn in watershed areas.

We have undertaken several watershed rehabilitation projects, including Yallas/Hope Watershed funded by the IDB.

We are now in the stakeholder consultation process to declare certain areas in Black River, protected areas.

Shortly I will announce a massive tree planting programme right across Jamaica

And most importantly, we have settled the boundaries of the cockpit country which were unresolved for decades. In so doing we considered the particular geological features of the area, and the ecology and biodiversity which grows from it and depends on it, the forest and all that live in it.

We also considered that the cockpit country is a water bank for Jamaica, storing vast volumes of the precious commodity in caves and caverns beneath it.

Based on the technical advice of the experts and after consultations, the boundary of the area to be protected was decided.

This is an important step in protecting this critical national asset for generations to come and ensures that there will be no mining, or any other activity that could harm the environment in the protected area.

The Cabinet also took the further step to ensure that before any mining can be done in areas outside of and close to the cockpit country protected area, as defined, an environmental impact assessment study must be done.

We are very sensitive to the concerns raised about the Cockpit Country Protected Area and we are very sensitive to the area surrounding and in close proximity to the Cockpit Country Protected Area.

The government remains committed to protecting our environment, and will only pursue projects that are environmentally sustainable.

Another area of grave concern is corruption.

At the heart of the issue is that corruption deprives resources from the poor and distorts and denies prospects for prosperity.

An important part of the independence mission is to ensure that we build institutions that are transparent; meaning that they are open to scrutiny and accountable for their actions.

This administration has taken decisive steps to create a robust anti-corruption framework and build strong public institutions where corruption cannot flourish:

- At the governance level we have developed and are about to implement a new system for the nomination, selection and appointment of board members of public bodies.

This will ensure that only fit and proper persons with the best skills are allowed to guide our public bodies.

- At the investigative level, we have just completed the legislative process to give MOCA its administrative and operational independence. The government is providing the resources to build out their capacity to thoroughly investigate and build strong cases for prosecution. MOCA now has more than 300 cases either before the court or in advance stages.

- This administration passed the Integrity Commission Act and established the Integrity Commission, which is now in the process of developing its new institutional structures.

- We have passed the new campaign financing regulations, that gives effect to the law to ensure that our democracy is not captured by special interests and that corrupt interest do not have influence on government decisions.

Ultimately however, government must act, in due process, and this government has acted:

1. We have acted to separate those accused from the institution, to create the space necessary for investigations and discovery.

2. We have acted to review and identify systemic weaknesses that allowed the corrupt act in the first place and make the necessary changes to prevent reoccurrence.
3. We have acted to facilitate the work of the independent investigative and oversight bodies. There must be no cover up, so that strongest cases can be brought to the courts, and...
4. We have acted to build a culture of enforcement of the law.

The anti-corruption framework established is still in its early stages and will definitely require more time and resources to become more effective. However, it is working.

I am confident that with the anti-corruption framework we have created and the institutions we have built to implement it, Jamaica will see appreciable improvement, not only in the perception of corruption, but in the deterrence of corruption and the detection, investigation and prosecution of corrupt acts.

At 57 we are still a young nation. The future is looking bright. We have achieved much, but there is still much more to be done.

Hardships there are but the land is green and sun shineth upon us as “One Nation, One People” under God, increasing in beauty, fellowship and prosperity!

Happy Independence Day Jamaica!