

NEW YEAR MESSAGE FOR 2020
FROM DR. PETER PHILLIPS,
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

My Fellow Jamaicans, today we welcome a new day, a new month, a new year and a new decade with new hope and faith in the indomitable spirit of Jamaicans to overcome and achieve.

As we welcome 2020, let us take a moment to give God thanks for his many blessings which sustained us through a tough year. We also say goodbye to 2019, the end of the second decade of the century, noting its many challenges, trials and triumphs.

One such triumph was the crowning of Jamaica's Toni Ann Singh as Miss World 2019. Her confidence, talent, beauty and intelligence gave the world a glimpse of the best of Jamaica.

In reviewing these two decades we recall proudly launching in 2007, Jamaica's Vision 2030. We committed ourselves to achieving four overarching national goals:

- * Empowerment of the people
- * Social security
- * Economic prosperity and
- * The health and well-being of our people.

Unfortunately, as we close 2019, it is clear that the dream of Jamaica becoming the "place of choice to live, work, raise families and do business" is not on course.

Let me remind you that in 2011, continued economic decline brought Jamaica to the brink of bankruptcy.

Thankfully, at the end of that year, the country changed leadership, creating the opportunity for the implementation of the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) in 2012.

The success of the programme restored macro-economic stability and laid the foundations for sustained economic growth.

Jamaica's success became the talk of the world!

Through leadership and the sacrifice of our people, we turned a sure disaster into a shining achievement.

Sadly, this leadership has not built on the foundations for growth set by Economic Recovery Programme since 2016.

Even more disturbing is the fact that social and economic inequality has gotten worse in our country. This is evidenced by the:

- * rise in the rates of poverty
- * murderous violence in our poorest communities
- * wide scale robberies in our cities and towns
- * and the deterioration of our hospitals.

The present minimum wage of \$7,000.00 for a 40-hour week is inadequate and a major contributor to the 30% growth in urban poverty.

With the significant fall in the value of the Jamaican dollar and the rise in prices for basic items, the low wages keep too many workers poor as does the increasingly widespread practice of treating many full-time workers as contract workers. This denies them the fair wages and benefits to which they would otherwise be entitled.

Today, I am giving notice that the Opposition will be demanding and fighting for the minimum wage to be increased to \$12,500.

The spread of violent crimes and anti-social behaviour continues to drive fear in Jamaicans from all walks of life. For many, the lack of a plan to effectively fight crime has added to their anxiety.

Together, we have to find a way to end the culture of violence. Too many of our schools, homes and communities have been scarred forever by bloodshed.

Sadly, as the levels of extreme violence increase, more children, more elderly and more women have become the victims. Indeed, the targeting of women in our commercial centres and on our roads has caused a state of paranoia.

We cannot, we WILL NOT lose HOPE. Despair and surrender are not characteristic of the Jamaican people.

No matter the challenge, we rise to every occasion and we ALWAYS overcome.

Our first National Hero, the Right Excellent Marcus Garvey challenged us to realize “that upon ourselves depend our destiny, our future; we must carve out that future; that destiny.”

To achieve that future, in 2020, we must seize the opportunity to change the course we are on. We must recommit to the vision and aspirations of our founding fathers and mothers. We must seek to build our nation on the foundations of democracy, the rule of law and the kind of economic and social development that offers equal opportunity for every Jamaican.

From all appearances, 2020 may be an election year when we will all be called on to take important decisions regarding the future of our country. We must take our responsibilities seriously and prepare ourselves to do our duty on behalf of our country and chart the course for a better future.

We must look out for the hundreds of thousands of Jamaicans:

- * Who still exist on the margins of the society;
- * And who have no access to high quality education;
- * We must remember those who are forced to rely on run-down and crisis plagued health services; and
- * Who live in squatter communities with inadequate social services and physical infrastructure.

In this new year and new decade, we must launch a national programme to foster healthy and harmonious relationships in our homes, schools, workplaces, churches and communities.

We must transform our education system to give equal opportunity for quality education to every child.

We are committed to a new national development programme that will broaden the base of ownership of land and housing. It will incorporate ALL, especially workers, farmers and small business-people, providing them with an opportunity to earn a good living.

Despite all the challenges, with the resilience, tenacity, courage and good sense of the Jamaican people we can build a better and stronger nation.

As Leader of the Opposition, my team and I will continue to be vigilant and hold the government accountable. We will continue to demand transparency, integrity and an end to corruption.

Our people deserve a government that is honest, inclusive, compassionate, respectful and caring.

I call on each Jamaican to stand up and be counted for equal rights, equal opportunities, fairness and justice for all.

My fellow Jamaicans, on this New Year's Day we call upon our Eternal Father, to bless our land and guard us with his mighty hand.

I wish for everyone a safe, productive and happy New Year.

May God bless you all!

May God bless Jamaica, land we love!