

EMANCIPATION DAY 2020

“We are going to have to emancipate ourselves from mental slavery, because whilst others might free the body, none but ourselves can free the mind. Your mind is your only ruler. The man who is not able to develop and use his mind is bound to be the slave of the other man who uses his mind”.

As we pause to celebrate Emancipation Day, to reflect on its significance to our present reality, I greet you with the words of the forefather of Pan-Africanism – our very own, the Right Excellent Marcus Mosiah Garvey.

Only a few days ago, I launched the National Education Transformation Commission, out of an acute recognition that we must transform our systems, particularly our education system, to give ourselves the best chance of developing a growing economy and thriving society in a new global order, driven by knowledge and technology. The Pandemic has only served to hasten this new global order and heightens the need for us to undergo this critical transformation.

You may be asking yourself – what does this have to do with Emancipation? Here again, I invoke the words of Marcus Garvey, immortalized in song by Bob Marley – “none but ourselves can free our minds”. Full freedom will never be truly achieved unless we free our minds. And that my fellow Jamaicans, is the link between Emancipation and Education.

The greatest enslaver is ignorance. Freedom starts with the search for knowledge and its wise use. Education is the process by which we spread knowledge and eliminate ignorance. This is how we develop our minds. The man who is not able to develop and use his mind is bound to be the slave of the other man who uses his mind.

If we are to be truly emancipated, we must develop our individual and collective minds. A key mandate of the Commission is to make recommendations for transformation of the education sector to create truly liberated, empowered Jamaicans, who model pro-social and pro-growth behaviours, who are in charge of their emotions and at peace with themselves, others and their environment.

It cannot be lost on us, in the current circumstances that our ancestors suffered the greatest indignities ever meted out to any set of human beings. It cannot be overstated that our ancestors though enslaved, never lost their desire to be free, the desire to be agents in their own cause.

Our ancestors fought back against the oppressive colonial forces in an effort to reclaim their dignity, not only for themselves but for us, their children. Our history is littered with litanies of resistance and profiles in courage, some named and others nameless, who expressed their dissent forcefully and fearlessly to the colonial governments.

We celebrate every aspect of the lives and sacrifices of our ancestors. Through them we have emerged as a resilient people, recognised globally for our unique brand and heritage.

We are known for our Reggae Music as the global idiom of resistance against oppression, and a culture that, in the words of Garvey, continues to astonish the world.

We must continue to see it as our bound duty to defend the integrity and reclaim the dignity of our ancestors through our actions in governance, justice and the spread of knowledge in our society to develop our minds so that never again will we be subject to the thoughts and products of others.

We must also ensure that the history of our struggle and the sacrifice of those who led it is accurately narrated.

That is why we promulgated the National Heroes and Other Freedom Fighters (Absolution from Criminal Liability in respect of specified events) Act 2018.

We could not continue to have recorded in our annals that our ancestors, who gave their lives for our freedoms, are identified as criminals defined by the enslavers' unjust system of laws. Our history must recognize our forefathers as freedom fighters, heroes and martyrs.

Like all well thinking individuals we are concerned that systemic discrimination continues throughout the world. As a people emerging from enslavement, with a large diaspora, we have a strong moral obligation to stand against oppression and injustice anywhere it exists, we stand in solidarity with the growing global movement to awaken social consciousness to the structural and systemic issues which threatens to place us as a race of people at a disadvantage.

Even as we cast a critical eye on happenings outside our jurisdiction, it is a blot on our system of justice that for example, a Jamaican man was allowed to spend fifty years in jail without trial. It is our responsibility to ensure that our systems and institutions work to the benefit of our people to address all forms of injustice. We owe it to our ancestors who suffered on our behalf. This requires our eternal vigilance.

As we celebrate Emancipation 2020, under pandemic conditions, we must be mindful that freedom comes with responsibility, I urge Jamaicans to continue to observe the infection prevention and control measures which have kept us safe so far. I understand that there can be great fatigue in adjusting our normal activities to this new normal, as well as the natural psychological need for social interaction. However, the threat still exists and as we move about in this Emancipation period, I urge you to do so with great caution and if you do not have to go out, stay at home.

May God help us to use our hard-fought freedoms for the betterment of our people. Let us take forward with us as we confront current challenges, the resilience and determination we inherited from our ancestors, assured that as they attained true freedom we too will overcome every obstacle and attain sustainable prosperity and development of Jamaica, Land We Love.

“Take advantage of every opportunity; where there is none, make it for yourself,”—Marcus Garvey