

My fellow Jamaicans! Today I greet you in the spirit of freedom even as we face some very serious challenges. As we struggle with the hardships that COVID 19 and economic challenges bring, let us remember that the conditions our ancestors faced were much worse.

Yet, they confronted the slave masters and triumphed,

With sheer will and determination they won the freedoms and rights we celebrate today.

So, as we celebrate the 182nd anniversary of the end of the blight on humanity - slavery, let us reflect on the freedom we enjoy. Let us never forget that the preservation and expansion of our freedom, remains our most prized possession.

Our first National Hero, the Rt Excellent Marcus Garvey warned us, that freedom from bondage is just the first step. We must continue the journey to “emancipate ourselves from mental slavery” and to break those chains of economic and social inequality that persist. For too many, those chains of inequality still limit their opportunity to achieve a better life.

Since Emancipation, Education has been the most important vehicle of progress and personal upliftment. That is why so many of our parents and grandparents sacrificed to give their children an education and a chance to succeed in life.

We believe that if Jamaica is to achieve success and if our people are to realize their full potential as human beings, we need a first-rate education system. Such a system would:

- prepare our children to achieve global standards
- drive the growth that we seek as a country and
- enable all our people to earn higher incomes, pursue more fulfilling occupations and achieve their dreams and aspirations.

Full freedom also requires emancipation from the shackles of economic hardships. For over a century after Emancipation, former slaves were kept tied to the estates as labourers, earning starvation wages. The search for land, freedom and a better life was what led to the Morant Bay Rebellion.

Sadly, that search continues today. Access to land and ownership of property, remain an unattainable dream for too many of our people. Our small farmers have no secure rights to the land on which they

work. Every day the more than 700,000 Jamaicans in urban areas without titles or basic amenities who are insultingly called squatters worry about their security of tenure.

Twenty years into this new century, too many of our people are still trying to catch up in a system, which has been fixed for generations against them. That is why so many Jamaicans say 'A suh di ting set' – they feel they will never have a chance. While some get so much, they get nothing.

It is now time for all Jamaicans to get a little piece of the pie, to get a chance to better themselves and improve the lives of their children.

To keep so many of our people poor is to dishonour the struggles of our ancestors. We must stop that right now and bring about the radical changes that will give real opportunities to the majority of our people. Tings nuh haffi set suh!

Although the Labour Rebellion of 1938, gave us voting rights, the right to organize political parties and set the stage for our independence, Jamaica still has a far way to go.

We must build an inclusive, modern economy which offers real opportunities to all our people to achieve a good quality of life for themselves and their families.

We must re-commit ourselves to the mission to transform the lives of our people that our ancestors started.

We would honour the legacy of our ancestors if we transform the lives of the 700,000 Jamaicans described as squatters, into landowners with titles.

We would honour the legacy of our Ancestors by giving thousands and thousands of small farmers titles to the land on which they work.

The land and home ownership programme, to which we are committed would:

- give over a million Jamaicans peace of mind and security of ownership.
- provide the foundation for stable family life, without which, the country will never overcome the social divisions and the violence and crime that it drives.

We would honour the legacy of our Ancestors with a transformed education system that provides real opportunity for the 50% of students that struggle in life because of a sub-standard education.

An improved education system coupled with a sustained effort at land and home ownership will provide the platform for a different kind of economic structure.

It will incorporate the thousands upon thousands of small businesses and the already established enterprises to drive growth and development. This is central if we are to create the expanded opportunities which all of us seek for ourselves and our families.

Small business and micro-enterprise will have to be nurtured by programmes that offer training, access to credit, and must be supported by the most up to-date technologies to drive a modern digital economy. In building that digital economy, we must guarantee internet in every home, in every school and in every community.

So, as we celebrate this Emancipation Day and pay tribute to the efforts and successes of the generations before, let us chart a course for the future and re-commit ourselves to the mission they started.

We must free our minds from the chains of mental bondage and establish the structures that will guarantee progress and success for every Jamaican.

In doing so, we would establish Jamaica as a first-class country:

- with a first-rate education system
- where everyone is a stakeholder
- where equal justice and personal security are guaranteed
- where people respect each other
- where the government is honest and trustworthy, and;
- where citizens in their communities live in harmony with each other.

We can and must create a Jamaica that works for all.

My fellow Jamaicans,

I wish for you a happy, safe, and reflective Emancipation Day.

May God continue to bless you and your family. And Bless our country – Jamaica, land we love.