



OFFICE OF THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Independence Day Message 2020

Dr. Peter Phillips, MP

My fellow Jamaicans,

I greet you with love on this the 58th anniversary of our independence.

Our celebrations are affected this year by Covid-19 which is causing severe hardships and pain for our people.

Our heartfelt condolences to the families who have lost loved ones and to those who are ill, we wish you a speedy recovery.

On behalf of all Jamaicans, I thank our frontline workers particularly those in the health, security, and transport sectors. Your sacrifice and efforts continue to save lives.

We must remain vigilant in the days ahead, as this pandemic is not over. As we reopen our economy, we must do everything to protect the health of our people.

Despite the enormous challenges, we have so many achievements for which we can be thankful and proud.

For nearly six decades:

- We have maintained the basic structures of our democracy.
- The right to vote and the right to form political parties has been preserved.
- Our right to free speech, our trade union movement, and our freedom to organize as citizens whether in citizens associations or human rights groups, or as defenders of the environment are mainstays of independent Jamaica.

Unlike many other countries, we have had regular changes of government through elections, with the ballot and not the bullet.

This Independence Day is the final before we face another General Election and we are confident that Jamaicans will behave consistent with our highest democratic traditions.

Beyond those achievements, we must also recognize the tremendous impact made by our people on the global community.

Reggae music has influenced every continent of the world. Millie Small, Bob Marley, Marcia Griffiths, Jimmy Cliff, Shaggy, Sean Paul, Chronixx, and Koffee are among the many who have made a lasting impact.

Just recently, Dancehall Icons, Beenie Man and Bounty Killer made waves with an on-line performance watched by nearly half a million people.

That is the power of our culture!

Our athletes have established themselves as the best in the world.

Our culture, our language, our food, our way of life, has caught the imagination of the world.

As Buju Banton tells us in his winning festival song -

“No matter where in this world I go I am a Jamaican. Beautiful smile, Godfearing people, known across the world.”

Jamaica's status is a reflection of the innovative capacities and brilliance of our people.

To create more successes in our country, we must nurture their creativity and resilience.

Sadly, the achievements of our people have been set back by high levels of crime and violence. In each decade of independent Jamaica, we have seen an increase in violence. The shootings, stabbings, murders, and rapes shock the conscience of law-abiding citizens.

This year, it continues unabated – too many lives lost, too many families are mourning. This bloodshed must end.

Despite the efforts of the security forces and of law-abiding citizens, we, as a country, have been unable to find common cause to solve these problems which slow our progress and affect the quality of life of our people.

Jamaica has also not achieved significant sustained economic growth for decades. Only a few Jamaicans have fulfilling occupations, adequate incomes, and a world-class education. Most of our people live from hand to mouth. Thousands of our children are malnourished and in the twilight of their lives many of our elderly don't have enough food or medicine.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has placed a flood light on the living conditions of too many of our citizens who only have resources to survive day-to-day.

This is unacceptable!

To correct the economic injustice facing our people, we must urgently re-build the economy. This is not just about a return to the 'old economic model'. We must restructure our economy so that we can create better jobs, a more skilled workforce and deliver on the expectations and the aspirations of our people.

We have a duty to create a better Jamaica where people have good paying jobs, and can live in peace and safety.

To create that Jamaica, we need a national consensus about the legislative framework that will better work in fighting crime, and a strong commitment to the reform of our security forces and the justice system. I am heartened by the current efforts of civil society groups, including the private sector to help build this consensus. For close to two years we have been advocating this course of action.

The better Jamaica we seek would have a first-rate education system, giving the same quality education to all our children no matter where they come from or what school they attend.

In that new Jamaica, economic growth and economic opportunity will be driven by a system that rewards innovation and not just the few with links or money. We have to motivate the innovators and bring more players from the micro, small and medium enterprises into the formal economy.

Only a fair and equitable system will drive economic growth that is inclusive and fulfill the aspirations and hopes of our people.

To make this work, we have to utilize the most-up-to-date technologies of the modern digital economy. Reliable internet must be available, not just in every school and community center, but in every home and business. A strong

technological infrastructure is necessary to support the great creative potential of our people, and to drive innovation, and economic growth and development in the 21st century.

This New Economy must reach beyond the traditional sectors. In addition to bauxite, tourism, and manufacturing, the New Economy must embrace agricultural transformation and the search for food security. It must embrace areas of leisure and entertainment, one of the most vibrant and fast-growing sectors in the world economy. Jamaica has an advantage because our brand has already caught the attention of the world.

Our fashion designers, actors, musicians, sound engineers and computer programmers must be given focus in this New Economy. They must be supported by a national policy framework and by our education system from primary schools through to universities.

For this New Economy and the social changes to work, our people must know that they can trust the government and national leadership to look out for everyone and not just the few well connected. We have to stamp out the theft of taxpayer's resources and the misuse of public funds.

Jamaica's progress has been set back by poor governance – a problem which gets worse day by day and is all too familiar in today's Jamaica.

Governments or even political parties left on their own will not solve this problem. All Jamaicans must stand up and demand better governance and better management of our resources.

National leadership must find common cause to solve problems rather than pursue an approach which divides or marginalizes sections of our community. Leaders must not only provide good examples, they must take tough decisions that will promote the highest standards of governance.

I believe in our capacity and potential to successfully overcome the challenges we face.

I believe that we still have the indomitable spirit that led our ancestors to overthrow British colonialism and lay the foundations of our independence.

They passed on the baton of hope, freedom, and justice. The baton is in our hands and it is our job to foment a surge of national pride and optimism. Our ancestors dreamed of freedom and independence and they achieved what seemed like impossible dreams.

On this Independence Day, let us renew the dream of our ancestors to create a strong economy and a society which is progressive and fair.

Let us build a Jamaica where everyone has a place and a chance to create a better future for themselves and their families.

As we ready for the task ahead, let us believe in ourselves and believe in the possibilities of the future. This is our Jamaica to build!

May you all have a happy and safe Independence Day.

My God continue to bless Jamaica and guide our efforts.