

## **DRAFT NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE 2021**

**We welcome 2021 with hope and optimism, giving thanks to God for sparing our lives to see this day. I am privileged and grateful to lead this great nation, small in size but large in stature, with endless potential.**

**As difficult and challenging as it was, 2020 demonstrated that our greatest problems can only be solved when we cooperate and unite in common cause.**

**Jamaica has done well, in managing the pandemic, relative to its resources. Our objective was always to flatten the curve; that is, to contain the number of persons in need of medical treatment, so as not to overwhelm the health care**

**system and to do this for as long as possible until a vaccine became available. Our healthcare and other frontline workers have done an outstanding job of keeping us safe and we all owe them a debt of gratitude.**

**However, now is not the time for complacency. Let us all continue to do our part so that the tremendous sacrifices that we have made in 2020 to protect lives and livelihoods are not squandered.**

**Vaccines are now available and our Government has set up a committee to plan and operationalize the distribution logistics involved. Jamaica has had a**

**long and successful history in administering national vaccination programmes through our primary healthcare system. I certainly recall my time receiving vaccines in primary school. The Government will engage in a public education campaign and strongly recommend and urge Jamaicans, particularly those who are vulnerable to get vaccinated. The vaccine will be free of cost to those who seek to obtain it through the public health system.**

**The pandemic has had far more than just health implications. It has laid bare the fragile world in which we live. Our economies have been affected at every level - globally, nationally and, most importantly, the economy of your**

**household. Many Jamaicans watching this message are now unemployed; many business persons and small entrepreneurs have had to close or are contemplating closing their business.**

**The pandemic has also taken a toll on our education system. The society has not yet fully contemplated the impact psychologically and functionally on our children, teachers and parents.**

**The pandemic has also highlighted our infrastructure challenges; particularly broadband internet connectivity.**

**One of the profound impacts of the pandemic is that it has brought to the fore the expectation for social justice and equity; both in the economic care**

**response of the Government to the pandemic fallout and in the application and enforcement of the measures implemented to control the spread. This Government is sensitive to these concerns and we have been quick to respond with critical support for those affected and with measures that are evidence based, situationally appropriate and proportionate, at all times being transparent, equitable and rights-based.**

**The pandemic has caused us to rethink the organization of our society and has provided the basis on which long desired but feared change can take place. The need for a digital society, greater financial inclusion as we move**

**towards cashless transactions and a national identification system for accountable distribution and access to services are all imperatives as a result of the pandemic.**

**The Government is responding to these imperatives and, in 2021, we will:**

- advance the development of a digital currency;**
- pass the National Identification Bill;**
- continue to expand and intensify the programme for financial inclusion; and**
- expand broadband internet access.**

**We will focus on measures to regain employment and keep businesses going. We will continue to implement the plans developed under the COVID-19**

**Economic Recovery Task Force. We will diversify our economy, and improve our efficiency and competitiveness through institutional and regulatory reform. We will take steps to build 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as coding and programming to support the high demand for these skills in the Global Services Sector.**

**We see and feel the energy in the Construction and Real Estate Development sector and recognize its potential to create jobs, transform the built environment, modernize infrastructure and improve quality of life. However, proper regulation is needed; otherwise development will be chaotic. The Government is sensitive to social, environmental and property rights tensions that are emerging. In 2021, we**

**will bring greater development, enforcement and regulatory focus to this sector.**

**We will transform our education system. The Education Transformation Commission has been working and is on target to deliver their report during the first half of 2021. This will give us a roadmap towards transforming the system and making it fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution.**

**The pandemic has also shown the need to have a strong well equipped and fully mobilized security and law enforcement apparatus. The JCF and the JDF have supported the front line health workers and helped to man our ports, deliver**

**care packages, secure quarantine facilities, in addition to managing States of Emergency and Zones of Special Operations, while conducting their regular duties. I want to give special and heartfelt commendations to the hard working men and women of the JDF and the JCF.**

**Our plan to secure Jamaica is a long term plan. However, we are beginning to see results. Last year, all serious crimes except shootings were down and we managed to flatten the homicide curve.**

**We will continue to :**

- modernize technology and systems in the JCF and JDF;**

- **strengthen the legislative framework to support enhanced crime fighting and security measures; and**
- **expand Zones of Special Operations to transform crime plagued communities.**

**Integral to the success of our strategy is building trust among our citizens. We continue to see an improved relationship with our security forces, moderation in police action, and enforcement within the law and without violence.**

**Despite our best efforts in fighting crime, our successes will be limited unless we recognize that we have violence problem. We use violence as**

**a primary means of conflict resolution. We use violence in our domestic relations, intimate partner relations, correction and education of our children, in our music and entertainment and in settling daily social transactions.**

**Regardless of what we do with the reform of our security apparatus, if our society does not reduce violence, we will not have the sustainable growth and development that we need to progress.**

**The National Commission on Violence Prevention is progressing and based on its report the Government will implement its recommendations through legislation, public education and civil society mobilization.**

**Our goal is to increase the socio-emotional intelligence of our citizens and build a kinder, gentler and more caring society.**

**The pandemic cast a long shadow over 2020 but let us not forget that there was much that we accomplished.**

**2020 marked:**

- the lowest levels of interest rates for mortgages and consumer loans in the history of Jamaica;**

- **the most stable period of low inflation to benefit consumers and fixed income earners;**
- **the introduction of the tourism workers' pension scheme;**
- **new opportunities for ownership of the economy with 30,000 Jamaicans becoming shareholders of Trans Jamaican Highway;**
- **the abolition of the minimum business tax and the introduction of the \$375,000 MSME tax credit;**
- **the reduction in GCT of 1.5 percent;**
- **the implementation of the CARE programme, the largest ever social intervention programme in the history of Jamaica to cushion the effects of the pandemic; and**
- **the recognition of the global community in our handling of COVID-19**

**2020 was a challenging year but it strengthened us. In 2021, we will build forward stronger and better together.**

**Happy New Year! May God bless Jamaica, land we love!**