

**EMANCIPATION DAY 2022 MESSAGE FROM
THE LEADER OF
THE OPPOSITION,
MARK J. GOLDING, MP.**

Emancipation Day is of great historical significance to Jamaica and many other countries across the world that were formerly part of the British Empire. Plantation slavery came to an end at midnight on July 31, 1838, and so the 1st of August is the anniversary of the day when slavery came to an end.

It is the day on which we celebrate our freedom as a people, a day of very great national importance, as the vast majority of our ancestors came to these shores in bondage.

Today we remember the contributions of our ancestors to the freedoms we now enjoy, many of whom suffered and died in the fight for justice from the oppressive system in which they lived. As we remember, we also renew our commitment to defending the rights and freedoms won through our ancestors' blood, sweat and tears over centuries of courageous struggle.

Our history must fully recognize the central contribution and value of the resistance to slavery by the slaves themselves. Our own people were our principal liberators. It was not willingly given to us by others, despite what they would sometimes have us believe. Great heroines and heroes of our people, Nanny, Tacky and Sam Sharpe, led the way to freedom from slavery.

The observation of Emancipation Day as a public holiday was reinstated in 1997 to ensure that we never forget the significance of the "First of August" celebrations. I continue to believe in the power of that observance. It is distinct from, and as significant as, the 6th August when we celebrate the anniversary of our political independence.

When the 311,000 former slaves left the plantations 184 years ago as free men and women, they received no compensation for their and their fore-parents' unpaid labour and abuse. This underscores the justice of the claim for reparations, a process that has received bipartisan support from successive Governments for over a decade, and is being pursued through the National Commission on Reparations, and at the regional level by the Caricom Reparations Commission. As Dr Martin Luther King reminded us, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice".

I recall that last year, the Government through the Minister with responsibility for Culture said that they would be embarking on a separate initiative to seek compensation by way of a petition to the Privy Council seeking billions of pounds in reparations. The country has not been told anything more of this since that announcement, and we would like to know the present status of that petition.

In addition to the outstanding claim for reparations, land remains an unresolved issue in our country. Other than in a few historic free villages, the emancipated former slaves received no land or other assets to start their new lives. Even today, many hundreds of thousands of Jamaicans continue to live in informal settlements, without security of land tenure or adequate supporting infrastructure. This is why Government must step in to regularize their ownership and give these Jamaicans the fundamental economic opportunity and sense of dignity that come with owning the land where they live.

Slavery was an exploitative system rooted in violence. Violent crime continues to sap our national energy, driving high levels of fear and the dimming the flame of hope in our people. It is preventing our nation from achieving its full potential. We must emancipate ourselves from that aspect of mental slavery which makes us too quick to anger and too willing to use violence in our everyday lives. Emancipation Day 2022 is a time to recommit ourselves to peaceful coexistence, to tolerance for the views of others, and to love and respect for all.

In celebration of the indomitable the spirit of our fore-parents who “would rather die upon yonder gallows than live in slavery”, I wish you a Happy Emancipation Day.

God bless Jamaica and God bless us all.
