

INDEPENDENCE MESSAGE FROM THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION, MR. MARK GOLDING, M.P.

My fellow Jamaicans, it is a great joy as our Nation comes together to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of our political independence from colonial rule.

As we observe this diamond jubilee along our journey as a nation and a people, I wish a Happy Independence Day to all Jamaicans, at home and abroad.

It is a time to celebrate the achievements of Jamaica in a plethora of human endeavours – in academia, music, the arts, education, commerce, cuisine, science and, of course, our sporting glory.

This is an appropriate occasion to specifically mention our sporting prowess. Our consistently high performance in World Track and Field, most recently at the World Athletic Championships in Eugene, Oregon, has the world in awe. Our Reggae Girlz have again qualified for the World Cup. There is no doubt that the 22nd Commonwealth Games now in progress in Birmingham, England will see our black, green and gold flag, and hear our national anthem, rippling and echoing across the stadium.

Over the sixty years, the Jamaican people have our mark in global affairs, and built our reputation of being little but ‘tallawah’. We have much for which we must be thankful and, as Koffee wisely said in an epic song, “gratitude is a must.”

In international diplomacy and politics, Jamaica has impressed others most when we stood up for principle, even at times when some would prefer we do otherwise. Jamaica’s name should always be associated with consistent adherence to the principles of non-alignment, non-interference, self-determination, the rule of international law and the pursuit of equity and justice among nations. These principles are the foundations of our nation’s democracy. They were bequeathed to us by our Heroes and Heroine who remain

an inspiration to our people. We should never abandon them for perceived short-term gain.

But as we revel in our many glorious achievements, we should not allow Jamaica 60 to go without reflecting on the future of our country, and what it will take to overcome the adversities and challenges which confront us in our daily lives.

Crime and violence, inequality and under-performance in education, as well as poverty and hunger amidst the terrible cost of living crisis, remain deep and persistent challenges, that will require a great unity of purpose to overcome and improve the quality of life of all Jamaicans. We must put our people at the centre of development as we launch out on our sixty first year and beyond. Social transformation requires investing in our people, to build our capacity to compete and excel among the nations of the world.

Even after 60 years of standing on our own, there are a few out there who still believe we are not ready. It is time to cast aside such negative self-doubt, and come together to achieve these outstanding aspects of our national independence. Anything less is an affront to our nationhood and self of self.

Jamaica 60 is also an opportune time to recommit to full political independence by removing the last vestiges of past colonial rule.

It is time to come together to achieve the constitutional reform required to have a Jamaican as our Head of State. The Opposition continues to be willing and ready to work with the Government to finalize the required legislation, pass it in Parliament and put it to a vote by the people in a referendum, as soon as possible.

This step is logically connected to another, which is ensuring greater access to justice for our people by embracing the Caribbean Court of Justice as our final court of appeal. There is nothing to stop this proceeding now, even as we go through the steps of becoming a republic.

Let us once again demonstrate that spirit of nation building which led our forefathers and mothers to fight for our freedom and lay the foundation for independence. If we can achieve these final acts of political independence together, it will provide an historic example of national maturity and solidarity, and provide a strong psychological platform from which to move forward to overcome our other challenges. Let these acts of unity become a source of continuing strength and resilience for our people.

I close this message by asking Almighty God to grant the foresight and fortitude as we continue on our national journey. Greatness is our destiny. We can achieve it by joining together in the common cause of building our beloved Jamaica.

Enjoy your Independence celebrations peacefully and safely.

God bless you and God bless Jamaica.

Mark J. Golding, MP

Leader of the Opposition