

Leader of the Opposition Mr Mark Golding, MP New Year's Message, January 1, 2024

It is an honour for me to address our Jamaican family as we move into a new year.

The challenges of the past year tested the resilience of our people. The increases of the cost of living driven by higher food prices have made everyday survival that much harder. The demoralizing scourge of violent crime has continued to sap our national spirit and poses significant obstacles for the development of our nation.

On a worldwide level, the spectre of climate change looms large, with global warming and extreme weather events posing threats to vulnerable regions like the Caribbean, where we live. War and conflicts have emerged and intensified, when the spirit and intent of the United Nations ought to have made that approach to addressing our differences a thing of the past.

Our talents and creativity have allowed us to excel to greatness in many areas of life and made Brand Jamaica internationally recognized and admired. Yet we continue to lag behind when it comes to building a strong, diversified and inclusive economy that is internationally competitive and resilient and creates opportunities for all our people to pursue their dreams of a better life, right here at home in the land of our birth.

The new year brings with it a renewed sense of possibility. It is a time for reflection, and also an opportunity to commit to positive change in our own lives and in the life of our beloved Jamaica. It is clear to me that overcoming our serious challenges requires a collaborative approach that is energized by a renewed spirit of national unity. History demands that we now cast aside the divisive and selfish attitudes of the past which are preventing us from harnessing this capacity to solving the major issues that are holding us back.

I am committed to working constructively and in good faith with all well-thinking Jamaicans, regardless of political affiliation or other considerations, that have too-long divided us, towards finding the ways and means to secure a better future for our country. Our proud history of overcoming oppression and adversity is a testament to our ability to overcome challenges and emerge stronger.

Now, more than ever, we must harness that strength to address the pressing issues that lie before us. I am confident that, working together, we can achieve progress in overcoming the formidable obstacles to the Jamaica we long to see. One thing is crystal clear. We cannot move forward under the cloud of corruption. It requires absolute integrity in public life, and support for our institutions of accountable governance, to rebuild the people's trust and confidence in our leaders. The seriousness of the task at hand demands nothing less.

We must invest in education and training to empower our people to get ahead in a competitive world, as the foundation of national productivity that drives a strong and inclusive economy where the benefits of production driven by capital and labour are enjoyed equitably across the society.

We are committed to fair access to quality healthcare, a fair deal for persons with disabilities, and a more effective social safety net that allows the elderly and other vulnerable Jamaicans to live in dignity. We are in an era which requires a greater consciousness of the critical importance of sustainable environmental stewardship.

The time has come for us to be responsible custodians of our God bless natural resources, protect our biodiversity, and addressing the impacts of climate change. A sustainable Jamaica is not only our responsibility to the present generation, but it is a legacy that we must leave for generations to come.

So, all of this means that we must foster a culture of unity in keeping with our national motto, Out of Many One People. We must make the diversity of our people a source of strength and creative inspiration, rather than division.

Let us build common ground to create a society that values each and every Jamaican, regardless of background, wealth or any other factors. As we enter 2024, let this new year be a canvas on which we paint a beautiful vision of a Jamaica where every

citizen can realize their full potential. It can be achieved if we commit ourselves to this great and noble task in a spirit of oneness in our shared destiny.

Happy New Year to all Jamaicans at home and abroad. God bless you all, and God bless Jamaica.