

Message from the Leader of the Opposition Mr Mark Golding, MP for Labour Day 2024

As we celebrate Labour Day, we must remember our historical journey that has taken us here.

What was once Empire Day and a commemoration of our colonial past, was transformed in 1961 by Premier Norman Washington Manley, who recognised the need to honour the workers of Jamaica as the true backbone of our society. So, with the stroke of his powerful pen, Labour Day was born, and with it began a new era of recognition and appreciation for the great contribution of our workers to nation building.

Eleven years after that, in 1972 Prime Minister the Most Honourable Michael Manley expanded the concept of Labour Day by adding a vital additional feature - community development through volunteerism.

This year we are continuing that vision and legacy in a special way by focusing on a critical aspect of our society - the need for greater inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities, the elderly and all who are vulnerable in our society.

The theme for this Labour Day, "***Persons with Disabilities, the Elderly and the Vulnerable***", and the slogan "***Ramp up the Access. Show that you care***", resonate deeply with me. My father was a pioneering champion of the rights of Persons with Disabilities as the founder of the Sir John Golding Rehabilitation Centre. After his death in 1996, I assumed the chairmanship of the Mona Rehabilitation Foundation and continued the support for that important institution.

Then as Minister of Justice I supported the development and passage of the Disabilities Act in 2014, transformational legislation to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and privileges by persons with disabilities. The fact that after that it took eight years to bring the Act into effect was disappointing, but I am excited that we are once again seeking to energise the society around the issues affecting this group, as well as our senior citizens.

This year's theme for Labour Day is a call to action, requiring all of us to recognize the barriers that exist for these vulnerable groups, and to take the action that is necessary to overcome those barriers. Our goal is to make Jamaica a place where everyone has equal access to the opportunities, resources and support they need to achieve their goals in life; where every individual is enabled to contribute their unique talents and perspectives without being hindered by obstacles over which they have no control. We must prioritise affordable and accessible healthcare, education and social services that cater to the needs of all citizens, regardless of age or ability.

The solutions to these issues lie within our collective efforts as a people. However, ceremonial events and speeches are not sufficient to get us to where we want to be. We must adopt an activist approach in all the critical areas where Persons with Disabilities are presently facing exclusion. This can only be driven by sustained and courageous advocacy, to ensure that these issues will not again recede into the background while other national issues are given priority attention.

As the Leader of the Opposition, I pledge to continue advocating for policies and programs that promote inclusivity and accessibility. In fact, in our new 'Road to C.H.A.N.G.E' policy for national development, the letter "A" in C.H.A.N.G.E stands for "accessibility and inclusivity". On this Labour Day, I reaffirm my commitment to leaving no one behind and empowering all individuals to achieve their full potential.

As Jamaicans come together to work on our various community projects and national initiatives, let us remember that true progress is measured by how we uplift those who are the most vulnerable among us.

Let us make this Labour Day a testament to our collective commitment to building a more inclusive and caring Jamaica.

Let us "Ramp up the access" and show that we care by executing projects that will assist our most vulnerable to actively participate in society. These include important projects to promote greater access, such as installing ramps at entrances and exits, guard rails, braille signage, and making bathrooms wheelchair accessible. These initiatives will have a significant positive impact on the lives of Persons with Disabilities and the elderly.

Let us use this Labour Day as a catalyst for change. I wish you all a safe and productive Labour Day.

God bless you!

Mark J Golding, MP
Leader of the Opposition