



2024 LABOUR DAY MESSAGE

**FROM THE MOST HON. ANDREW HOLNESS, ON, PC, MP
PRIME MINISTER OF JAMAICA**

Labour day in Jamaica is recognized as a time to volunteer your labour for the upliftment of our communities.

It is a time I personally look forward to because I love to lend a helping hand while interacting with community members.

Today as we celebrate Labour Day 2024, under the theme **"Ramp up di access...show you care"**, our focus is on inclusion and support for our fellow Jamaicans with disabilities, the elderly, and the vulnerable. Our observance today is a call to action—a reminder of our collective responsibility to uplift every member of our community.

I encourage every Jamaican to embrace the theme and participate in one of the many Labour Day projects taking place across the island. Volunteering on Labour Day and beyond is a tradition that reflects our shared values. Since 1938, Jamaican workers have left us a legacy of volunteerism and social activism. Your actions can make a difference in your community.

For Labour Day this year, Municipal corporations across Jamaica were allocated a combined total of Fifty-Three Million Dollars (\$53M) to support Labour Day projects. This investment underscores our commitment to making public spaces accessible to everyone, in line with the Disabilities Act, which came into effect on February 14, 2022.

I urge all building and planning committees of the Municipal Authorities to prioritize accessibility in their approval process, ensuring that we meet the needs of our physically challenged and our elderly family members.

Now I'm pleased, that we have managed the economy so well that we can meaningfully provide social protection and support for all members of our Jamaican family who need a social safety net.

Good economic management has enabled us to implement effective policies and programs for persons with disabilities, the elderly, and our most vulnerable. Now, I would like to share a few examples of these initiatives with you.

Safeguarding Jamaica's Community of Persons with Disabilities

- The Child Development Centre is now serving 223 children with developmental disabilities.
- The Jamaica Council for Persons with Disabilities provided Rehabilitative Grant support valued at \$21,926,180.75 to 382 persons with disabilities in Jamaica.
- The Registrar General's Department began issuing birth certificates in Braille on May 1st, 2024

- In 2021, we introduced the Social Pension Programme, providing a guaranteed income for vulnerable Jamaicans aged 75 and older who are not NIS contributors. This year's budget increased the allocation for the social pension by 65 percent.
- In the coming year, to ease the electricity bill burden on public sector retirees, the NHT will expand its Home Grants to include the installation of solar panel systems on the houses of qualifying Public Sector pensioners, up to a maximum of \$1.5M each.
- Now, the Annual Pension Exemption and Age Relief Exemption have been increased from a mere \$80,000 JMD to \$250,000 JMD for each exemption, providing significant relief from taxes and putting more money in the pockets of the pensioners.
- Effective April 1, 2023, pension benefits under the National Insurance Scheme increased by 23%, from \$3,400 to \$4,200 per week for the full-rate pensioners.

The benefit for the three-quarter-rate pensioners increased by 37%, from \$2,550 to \$3,500 per week.

Half-rate pensioners saw a 76% increase, from \$1,700 to \$3,000 per week.

- Since 2016, the minimum wage has moved from \$6,200 to its current \$13,000, representing a 110 % increase over the seven-year period. Effective June 1, this year the minimum wage will be increased once more, from its current \$13,000 to \$15,000 per week.
- We created the New Social Housing Programme, which aims to improve housing conditions for our poor and indigent population. Over 200 houses have been built under the programme, with additional homes at varying stages of construction. We aim to construct 500 social housing solutions this fiscal year.
- A total of \$6.03B was expended on PATH benefit payments as of December 2023, with \$372 million spent on back-to-school expenses for 106,000 students.

- 458 clients from PATH households received entrepreneurship grants under the Steps to Work Programme, totalling \$73.2 million.
- This year's budget has increased the allocation to PATH by approximately 30%.
- The NHT, in partnership with the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development, will construct 14 homeless shelters on government lands across Jamaica.
- New male wards have been built at the St. James and Portland infirmaries, costing \$45M each.
- At the St. Ann's Bay Infirmary, \$50 million was allocated for renovations.
- The Falmouth Homeless Shelter in Trelawny opened at a cost of \$25M.

- The Ocho Rios Night Shelter in St. Ann was opened to accommodate the homeless.
- A drop-in center and night shelter, adjacent to the Clarendon Infirmary, was opened.
- Phase-two of the Desmond McKenzie Transitional Centre for the Homeless in downtown Kingston commenced to increase its occupancy to 100.
- We will be making our social safety net even stronger by introducing unemployment insurance. Losing your job through no fault of your own, even for a short time, can place you and your dependents at risk. You will recall that 150,000 of our Jamaicans lost their jobs during the COVID pandemic. The government stepped in with a massive CARE programme which cushioned the blow and prevented most households affected from falling into poverty. The Unemployment Insurance will ensure that our Jamaican households will maintain a minimum standard of living during a period of unemployment of the breadwinner.

Now, I know there are those listening who are surprised at the many programmes of the government targeted at the vulnerable. Yes, we are doing quite a bit, but I also know that there are those as well who would say it is not enough. From being in the field and managing your affairs from the desk of the Prime Minister, I see the extent of the need and I agree that much more needs to be done and many more vulnerable persons need to be protected by our social safety net.

However, it is undeniably true, and must be acknowledged by even the most biased observer that we have provided more programmes and more resources than ever before, and it is our commitment to increase the pace at which we deliver benefits to you while being accountable and efficient with your resources.

So, as we celebrate you, our workers and we thank you for your great effort in building Jamaica, we recognize that we must move our economy from a low wage model to a high wage high output economic model.

We have taken the first step in increasing public sector compensation by over JA\$200 billion, the largest increase in public sector wages ever in the history of Jamaica. Again, there are those who would say it is not sufficient, and again I remind, it is the start of a bigger plan to transform our economy and it is better than what had gone before.

Now, I salute the workers of Jamaica, and I encourage you to go out and lend a helping hand to persons with disabilities in your community, a retiree or just someone in need.

I wish everyone a happy and productive Labour Day 2024!
May God bless you and richly reward the sweat of your brow.