



My fellow Jamaicans at home and in the Diaspora, our visitors and our well-wishers, warm greetings to you on this the day of Jubilee!

Today we mark a momentous milestone in the history of Jamaica land we love. Fifty years ago we embarked on a mission to exchange our status as a colony for that of independent nation. We have received congratulations and good wishes on this anniversary from all across the globe.

The warm sentiment in those messages from like-minded nations, confirm the rightness of our decision to pursue the independence mission.

As a nation we have much to celebrate. Across the country our patriotism is seen in the vibrant Jamaican colours everywhere. In this spirit of patriotism, every Jamaican must “find the flag in our hearts” and wave it high.

Wave high your flag; with its strong and solid black, its verdant green and its brilliant gold!

- Wave it high as a beacon of freedom across the majestic Blue Mountains, the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean.

- Wave it high accompanied by the strains of the melody and the words of our National Anthem

- Wave it high to invite ancestral and celestial blessings on this nation on a mission with a vision.

- Wave it high! Celebrate Jamaica 50!

Allow me to take you on a short journey of remembrance along Jamaica's pathway of progress. Let us reacquaint ourselves with the reasons why we must celebrate this milestone of 50 years as an independent nation.

The struggle for freedom did not begin in 1962 when we obtained Independence. It did not even begin in 1944 when we gained Universal Adult Suffrage; nor with Internal Self-Government in 1955.

The Jamaican struggle for freedom began long before that. It started with the struggles and the spirit of resistance of the indigenous Tainos, our enslaved African brothers and sisters, in our Maroon communities and among the indentured Asians.

Inspired leaders such as Nanny, Sam Sharpe, George Taylor, Ann James and Amelia Murray said "no" to continued enslavement and apprenticeship. Later, Paul Bogle, George William Gordon, Elizabeth Taylor and Caroline Grant said "no" to the injustices of the post-slavery period. They continued the fight for justice.

Then there was Marcus Garvey. Martin Luther King Jnr said about Garvey: " he was the first man on a mass scale to give millions of Negroes a sense of dignity and destiny ... he gave us a sense of personhood and a sense of somebodiness".

Bob Marley could very well have been referring to our ancestors when he sang:

"We refuse to be, what you wanted us to be;

we are what we are;

that's the way it's going to be.

We've been trodding on the winepress much too long; and we have been taken for granted, much too long."

At no time did our fore-parents sit still. Their resistance paved the way for our long history of opposition to domination here in Jamaica and across the world.

That indomitable spirit remained strong throughout the twentieth century. In the 1930s and 1940s Jamaican men and women became heavily engaged in the struggle for the right to unionization, collective bargaining and universal adult suffrage.

They insisted that our nation must have a constitution of its own. Stalwarts such as Iris King joined Norman Washington Manley, Florizel Glasspole, Donald Sangster, David Coore, Alexander Bustamante as members of the Independence Constitution Committee. Today we salute the only living member of that Committee the Most Honourable Edward Seaga. In London it was agreed that August 6, 1962 would be the date for independence.

As we anticipate our celebrations, close your eyes for a moment, visualise with me the official Independence ceremony at the National Stadium. Imagine the excitement and anticipation of over 25,000 people on the night of August 5, awaiting the moment when they could call themselves citizens of an independent nation.

At five minutes to midnight the lights were turned off. "God save our Queen" was played for the last time. The British flag, the Union Jack, was lowered.

The lights were then turned on. The Jamaican flag was unfurled in all her glory. The brilliant black, green and gold took its place as a national emblem in the family of independent nations.

Imagine the excitement! Consider the emotions – the pride, joy, patriotism and wonderment. What a jubilation...what euphoria! We had been formally released from British control. A new nation emerged. Finally, following centuries of struggle and decades of agitation and work, we could say as a people, “I come from Independent Jamaica”!

Then, on August 7, 1962, Her Royal Highness Princess Margaret who was representing Queen Elizabeth the Second at the first session of Parliament of Independent Jamaica, said:

“My government in the United Kingdom has laid down its responsibilities and has ceased to have any authority in and over Jamaica, after more than 300 years”;

One who could truly say “mission accomplished” with satisfaction was the Chief Architect of our Independence, Norman Washington Manley. He said with pride:

“So out of the past far away and the past near at hand is born the present, in which a people coming to maturity and nationhood can look back and give praise, look around and give thanks, look forward with prayer and in humility but with confidence and strength”

Sir Alexander Bustamante, the first Prime Minister of Independent Jamaica said in Parliament:

“Independence means the opportunity for us to frame our own destiny and the need for us to rely on ourselves in so doing. It does not mean a license to do as we would like. It means work and law and order. Let us resolve to build a Jamaica which will last and of which we and generations to come will be proud, remembering that especially at this time the eyes of the world are upon us”;

In telling the independence story, Lord creator sang.

Manley went up to England so seek for independence,

and although Busta was late, he still attended the conference.

Although from two different parties it was still good to see,

How these two politicians were shaking hands when they gained victory.

During the last fifty years the country has made significant progress:

- Jamaica has one of the most stable democracies in the world;
- We have had significant infrastructural improvement – our airports, seaports, telecommunications, and our highways;
- We have expanded and improved health care delivery and education,
- We have achieved comparable world standards in areas of infant mortality and life expectancy;
- We have charted an independent foreign policy – this was what led us to be one of the first countries in the world to impose a trade embargo against apartheid in South Africa; and
- In the area of sport and music, we are the toast of the world;

Our 50th anniversary comes at a time when our athletes are participating in the Games of the

30th Olympiad in London. They are following in the footsteps of those who blazed the path to international sporting glory for Jamaica from the 1940's until now.

My fellow Jamaicans, across the city of London, with every stride that they made, our Jamaican spirits soared. With every jump high or long, we heard a proud Jamaican roar. With every stroke that was swam we felt Jamaican more and more. I say to our sportsmen and women their managers and coaches, their families, schools and their communities ; on behalf of a grateful nation I thank you.

We have come a long way in these fifty years.

On this our fiftieth anniversary:

- Let us pause for a moment.
- Let us take stock.
- Let us say a prayer of thanks.
- Let us celebrate our wonderful mix of cultures – Chinese, Indian, Middle Eastern, European and African in keeping with our motto “Out of Many One People”.

- Most of all, let us be proud of ourselves, hold our heads high and stand tall because, in the words of Eric Donaldson

I will always believe in the black, the green and the gold I say.

All nations greater for their trials, we must face the test of time,

And our people they are strong and we going to get along...

...Let us stop for a minute,

count our blessings one by one,

We should never be disloyal but stand up and keep strong.

This is the land of my birth, this is Jamaica, my Jamaica.

The land of my birth.

Eternal Father Bless our land,

Guard us with thy Mighty hand

Happy fiftieth anniversary Jamaica

God Bless you all