



Former United States (US) Secretary of State, General Colin Powell, says Jamaica can be proud of its heritage and numerous achievements, despite the problems facing the country.

“Keep believing in yourself; keep believing in the strength of your society and your culture. Keep being proud of your heritage, but recognise that there are problems that we all have to deal with. The US is facing the same kind of problems, and those are infrastructure, the education system, and creating jobs for people,” he said.

He was addressing a press conference, held at the National Stadium on Monday (August 6), shortly before the start of the Grand Gala commemorating Jamaica's 50th year of Independence.

General Powell, who is of Jamaican parentage, was part of a high level delegation that was sent to represent the US at the grand gala. The delegation included Congresswoman, Yvette Clarke, also of Jamaican parentage, and US Ambassador to Jamaica, Her Excellency Pamela Bridgewater.

Sharing his thoughts on some of the nation's most significant achievements, General Powell said “nothing compares to August 6, 1962 when the Union Jack came down and you gained your Independence. I remember that day vividly.”

“I have watched, over time, how Jamaica has made (its) democracy more stable, how you have eliminated violence in your political elections, how you have fought violence in your society, and how you have worked on economic development,” he added.

However, he expressed the view that “a lot more has to be done in this regard,” but that he has been assured that Prime Minister, the Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller “will be focusing very heavily on economic development and I am quite sure she can

count on the support of the United States of America in that regard."

General Powell said Jamaica and the United States have had strong diplomatic ties for the past 50 years, and that he and the rest of the delegation were pleased to be in the island representing the US, and that “to be here on this occasion means a great deal to us."

“I think that the very fact that I am here along with the Congresswoman and the continued presence of the Ambassador...reinforces once again the closeness, not only the political closeness, but the common interest that we have in fostering democracy and bringing economic development to (this part of the world), especially in Jamaica," he said.

“We never once lost our commitment and our connection to this country, those of us who have Jamaican parents. But it is not just our Jamaican heritage that makes us important. We understand the importance of Jamaica in the Caribbean region and it’s for that reason why we have had such great relations over these many years,” the General said.

For her part, Congresswoman Clarke said she too was honoured and privileged to be a part of the presidential delegation.

“President Obama recognizes the relationship between Jamaica and the United States and would not miss this opportunity to send what we call distinguished 'Jamericans' to be a part of this very important benchmark in the life of the nation,” she said

Meanwhile Ambassador Bridgewater said she was also honoured to celebrate Jamaica’s 50th anniversary of Independence.

She noted that the US Embassy has been celebrating the relationship and friendship with Jamaica “through a series of many wonderful cultural activities and we selected the theme: ‘Celebrating the Ties that Bind: 50 Years of Friendship’,” she said.