



WASHINGTON, D.C. — President of the United States, Barack Obama, has recognised the critical role played by Jamaicans in the building of the American society.

Mr. Obama, in message to mark Jamaica's 50th anniversary of Independence, said that the fabric of America has been strengthened by the rich and diverse culture of people, who have come to the country to pursue their dreams, including those who trace their roots to Jamaica.

“As artists, entrepreneurs, scientists, engineers, public servants and service members, Jamaican Americans have played an important role in shaping the character of our union and driving the progress of our country,” he stated in the message read by Director of African American Outreach, White House Office of Public Engagement, Heather Foster, at the Jamaica Nationals Association's (JNA) 50th anniversary Independence gala.

The event was held on Saturday (Aug. 11) at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Washington DC.

President Obama, in his message, said the US and Jamaica share a bond that is “not only based on the ancestral ties of our people, but on a friendship rooted in trust and mutual interest shared by our two nations”.

He said he looked forward to building on this strong foundation in the years ahead, as “our nations continue to work together to create a more peaceful and prosperous future”.

Former Jamaican Ambassador to the US, Dr. Richard Bernal, who delivered the keynote address, urged Jamaicans to pay homage to those who fought for the rights and freedom they now enjoy.

He said that while “we can never repay the immense debt we owe to them, we can pledge to uphold the lofty principles they used to govern their lives. These are giants upon whose shoulders we stand today. To forget them is to forget history.”

“We should also remember to acknowledge and encourage those who continue to defend our hard won gains, like our teachers, farmers and healthcare professionals. Let us be inspired by the work of our cultural ambassadors, our athlete’s performance at the recent Olympics and the many others, who fearlessly and tirelessly represent our country on the international stage,” Dr. Bernal stated.

The former Ambassador called upon the large audience to resolve to join and work together for a better Jamaica, one with increased prosperity and enhanced social well-being.

Among those, who brought greetings at the gala, was lieutenant Governor of Maryland, Anthony Brown, who is of Jamaican heritage. Maryland House of Delegates representative, Shirley Nathan-Pulliam, presented a resolution to the President of JNA, Milton Nicholas, recognising Jamaica for attaining 50 years of Independence.

A number of awards were presented to Jamaicans, who have distinguished themselves in the Washington metropolitan area, while several Jamaican restaurant owners were recognised for their excellence in preparing local cuisine.

Among those, who attended the gala, were Chief Usher of the White House, Angella Reid; Deputy Chief of Missions at the Embassy of Jamaica, Cheryl Gordon; and Ambassador and Mrs. Curtis Ward. Just over 500 Jamaicans and friends of the island turned out for the event.