

33rd Independence Anniversary Message 2014

**Dr. the Hon W. Baldwin Spencer,
Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, Antigua and Barbuda**

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My fellow citizens and residents, as we commemorate the 33rd Anniversary of Political Independence of our beloved Antigua/Barbuda, let us, to begin with, give thanks and praise to Almighty God for the blessings He has bestowed upon us over the past year, despite our challenges and human frailties, and wish for the continued showering of His blessings upon us as a Nation and as a People.

Thirty three years in the life of a Nation, to write in comparative terms, is not a long time; but it gives us an opportunity to look back with some measure of pride and satisfaction that, in many respects, we have accomplished much but still have much more to do.

As we celebrate, we must all be mindful of our individual and collective responsibility to strive for excellence in everything we do, with the aim of contributing positively, not only to our individual advancement, but, by extension, that of the community and the Nation as a whole.

Our 33rd year of Independence, though, is being held against the backdrop of discontentment and uncertainty. We have come out of a political campaign that saw a change of Government, and that new Government would have promised a lot but has delivered very little. The Society is clearly on edge, particularly in light of what has transpired by the Government's actions, reactions and inactions, which have led to a more divided country and a politically-charged atmosphere.

The spate of political victimization, discrimination and marginalization which has attended the change of Government does not bode well for giving credence and true meaning to the theme of this year's celebrations of "Rebuilding Our Nation with Togetherness, Commitment and Perseverance." Where is the rebuilding when hundreds, if not thousands, have been wantonly and unwarrantedly sent home to "twiddle their thumbs," to grieve, to be "starved into submission" and become a permanent part of the growing band of unemployed and disadvantaged? Where is the "togetherness" when the level of victimization, discrimination and marginalization has reached unprecedented proportions over the last four (4) to five (5) months? How can we have "commitment" and "perseverance" when nepotism, graft and crafty political partisanship have become the order of the day? What has become of the laudable pronouncements about healing and reconciliation?

Celebrate we should and celebrate we must! Our forebears – and many of us alive now – fought long and hard to bring this Nation to where it is today. We must cherish, but at the same time understand and fully appreciate, what Independence should mean to a young emerging Nation-State in an interdependent but, nevertheless, harsh and sometimes unkind world.

Let us use this 33rd Independence celebrations not only to reflect on what has transpired but to move as a united and committed people across the political, social, religious and economic divide to arrest the

divisiveness, the breakdown in social order, and the escalation of crime, especially among our youth, among other ills.

Let me close by calling on the Nation, as a whole, to earnestly pray to Almighty God to guide, guard and protect this Nation from harm, and that we, as a People, will respond by showing continuous love, care, commitment and togetherness, going forward.

Happy Independence!