



BARBADOS INDEPENDENCE DAY MESSAGE FROM
THE HON. FREUNDEL STUART, O.C., M.P.
PRIME MINISTER

Fellow Barbadians,

I am pleased to be able to greet you on this the occasion of Barbados' 44th Anniversary of Independence.

Forty-four years ago, the Democratic Labour Party in government decided to take Barbados into independence within the Commonwealth of Nations. Barbados had, by the year 1966, been a colony of Britain for three hundred and thirty-nine years.

Not everyone in Barbados at that time thought it wise to seek independence. Some there were, who thought that Barbados was too small and too poor to survive as an independent nation; others thought that nationhood would turn out to be too expensive an undertaking and should be avoided; still others thought that with nationhood would come those threats to the functioning of our democratic institutions of which we should steer clear at all costs.

We celebrate today the completion of forty-four years of independence and have confounded the prophets of doom by the great leaps forward which Barbados has been able to make in the economic, social and political spheres.

In the economic sphere, we have been able, quietly and without disruption, to transform Barbados from being an island with a one crop agricultural economy to a nation with a modern and more diversified economy in which tourism, manufacturing and international business now play a more prominent part.

In the social sphere, we have been able to use the instrument of increased and broadened access to education to release the creative energies and potential of our people in ways that continue to claim the respect and admiration of people across our region and in the wider world.

In the political sphere, we have been able to test the workings of our democracy in ten (10) general elections in which we either retained or changed governments in ways so orderly as to baffle observers.

Our Forty-four years of independence, have not been without challenge from time to time. But the strength of character and resilience of our people have always enabled us to meet these challenges with the calm, confidence and courage which the circumstances required.

Since celebrating our forty-third anniversary of nationhood last year, we have had to cope with the protracted illness and eventual death of our late Prime Minister, the Hon. David John Howard Thompson. It was not easy for us as a nation, and was less so for his wife Mara and their three daughters and his parents and siblings to have to drink from this cup of sorrow.

Appropriately, we thanked God for David's life and contribution and committed the late Prime Minister to His safe keeping. It is human for us to focus on what was taken away from us with the passing of David Thompson. A higher necessity demands, however, that we focus at this time on who gave David Thompson to us in the first place.

As we prepare to embark on our forty-fifth year as a nation we face with the rest of the world a challenge of staggering dimensions and reverberation. The world has from about September 2007 been passing through its worst financial and economic crisis in well-nigh one hundred years and the effects of that crisis are now being felt in Barbados. At no time in our post independence history have the people of Barbados been called upon to face so mighty a challenge.

Last Monday, November 22, the government shared with the country our analysis of and response to that challenge. The travail through which the economies of our main trading partners are passing is not of Barbados' making, but with the painful effects of that travail Barbados has to make peace.

I call on all Barbadians to recognise that we are not living in ordinary times or dealing with familiar circumstances. Each of us, therefore, has a role to play in contributing to the national discipline required to see us safely through this very testing period. Let us rearrange, our priorities where necessary; re-examine our preferences and tastes; and reconstruct our approaches to daily living in these difficult times.

Independence never promised only to confer rights on us as a people. It involved also the assumption of very serious responsibility. I value no responsibility more highly than that of setting the highest possible standards for ourselves and brooking no deviation from the pursuit of those standards.

If Barbados is to continue to satisfy the definition of being a great nation we must continue to insist on the highest standards of parenting in our homes; the highest standards of performance at our places of work; the highest standards in how we relate to one another both as fellow citizens and as members of the human family; and the highest standards of respect for and loyalty to our nation.

The times in which we live are giving rise to new challenges and new approaches.

The poet James Russell Lowell is right when he reminds us:

“New occasions teach new duties,
Time makes ancient good uncouth,
They must upward still and onward,
Who would keep abreast of truth”.

Happy Independence to you all and may God bless you.

Freundel Stuart
Prime Minister