



BARBADOS INDEPENDENCE DAY MESSAGE

FROM THE HON. FREUNDEL STUART, Q.C., M.P., PRIME MINISTER

30th NOVEMBER 2011

Fellow Barbadians,

It is that time of the year again when we pause to reflect on our independence. This year we celebrate 45 years of nationhood. Peculiar to this year's celebration is that it comes a mere 42 days before the 360th anniversary of the signing of the Charter of Barbados in 1652. The signing of that Charter climaxed our first attempt to declare ourselves independent only 25 years after the English had settled this island.

Significant in this 45th year also, is the fact that, for the first time in 15 years, Sir Clifford Husbands will not be part of our celebrations in the capacity of Governor General. I have elsewhere conveyed my thanks to Sir Clifford for the outstanding public service he rendered to Barbados. On this occasion, I place on record the debt of gratitude we owe to him for so discharging the functions of his office as to raise our nation's gaze to impressive and very challenging horizons. We wish him well in a richly deserved retirement.

Not to be ignored in our 45th year also, is the fact that the world in which Barbados has to do its business continues to be beset by challenges social, political, and economic which are both unprecedented in scope and startling in reverberation.

We have all been witnessing with dismay the dramatic and, very often, traumatic events unfolding in North Africa, events which have won for themselves the label "Arab Spring". We have seen dictators hounded from office by an explosion of popular power and protest with consequential loss of life for civilians and, in one case, for a leader himself.

By way of contrast, though not too sharp a contrast, in the Eurozone, we have been witnesses to the continued decline in the economic fortunes of countries on that continent. That decline has led to the voluntary surrender of office by two leaders, those of Greece and Italy, and has

dimmed the hopes of thousands of households for a better quality of life. Thousands of young and not so young people, feeling threatened by this seemingly unstoppable decline, have been taking to and occupying the streets in eloquent appeals for an economic and social system that distributes burdens and benefits more fairly.

In all of this, the most powerful country in the world, the United States of America, continues to be bedevilled by debt, deficit and unemployment.

It is tempting, is it not, to ask, "is there no good news anywhere?"

Here in Barbados, with a services economy, propelled largely by tourism, international business and foreign capital inflows, we have not been left unaffected. After all, our tourists come from abroad, our international business sector depends on attracting business from abroad, and foreign capital inflows are "foreign" because they have to come from abroad.

We have had to face serious challenges in all three of these areas over the past year, with predictable consequences for our foreign exchange earnings, government revenues, and the creation of new employment opportunities.

Faced with these daunting challenges, the pride and industry of Barbadians have not faltered. Ours has always been "a pride that makes no wanton boast of what it has withstood."

The government, therefore, has held fast to its commitment to protect jobs in the public sector; and our private sector, operating under enormous pressure and in very difficult circumstances, has been keeping faith with the population in that regard. Our Trade Unions have been impressive examples of social responsibility.

Fellow Barbadians, the outlook for the world economy in the year 2012 is not bright. We are hearing dismal forecasts from our international financial institutions and from the International Labour Organisation. Here in Barbados, therefore, it cannot be business as usual. We must meet, with confidence and determination, the challenges that are facing us.

As Prime Minister, I accept that government must set both the tone and the example in any meaningful national response. I bear in mind that government is the largest procurer of goods and services in the country and that the maintenance of jobs in the private sector is linked to that fact. That is no excuse, though, for the wastage so often evident in our Ministries and Statutory Boards. Every attempt will therefore be made to eliminate this scourge.

Barbados cannot afford to respond to present challenges by disengaging from the world and retiring into itself. We have to be alert to the existence of opportunities we may exploit for the nation's benefit. Our voice must still be raised in the councils of the world with a view to influencing the course of events.

In that context, I will continue to approve ministerial and public service travel, only if I am satisfied that a clear link exists between that travel and the achievement of our national goals. Put frankly, government's overall expenditure will be even more closely monitored and, where necessary, appropriate discipline will continue to be imposed.

I call on members of the public to exercise a little more restraint than has, up to now, been evident during this economic downturn. You have wants and you have needs. We can do without our wants; we should not be expected to do without our needs. Place emphasis for yourselves and your children on what you need. Put on hold, unless you can afford them without inconvenience, the things you just want but can do without.

I have the fullest confidence in your sense of responsibility.

We very often discover much of the hidden creativity we have within us during times of great sacrifice and challenge. Look inward and draw upon those creative reserves that lie hidden there.

Nothing I have said to you is intended to suggest that a long, dark, unending night lies ahead of us. This global downturn, like all those before it, will come to an end. But until it comes to an end, we have to be responsible; we have to be prudent; we have to be thrifty.

In any event, in all of this, we can take comfort from the fact that:

"The Lord has been the people's guide for past three hundred years

With Him still on the people's side, we have no doubts or fears

Upward and onward we shall go

Inspired, exulting, free

And greater will our nation grow

In strength and unity."

Happy Independence to you all.