



Message Delivered by
The Rt. Hon. Freundel J. Stuart, QC, MP,
Prime Minister of Barbados
on the Occasion of the 50th Anniversary of Independence
November 30, 2016

Fellow Barbadians and Friends of Barbados.

Today Barbados completes 50 years as a member of the family of nations. I feel especially honoured to be able to address you on this historic occasion, on this our Golden Jubilee, as we celebrate our many achievements as a nation state.

One precondition for celebration is that of being imbued with a spirit of thanksgiving. We thank God for His manifold blessings so richly bestowed on us over the past 50 years. One of the greatest of these blessings has been the privilege to live in a country and region which, thankfully thus far, stand in peaceful contrast to the unfortunate turbulence which has been generated in the world around us.

Fifty years ago when Barbados became a nation, this island was a fundamentally different place. Our economy revolved around sugar; our housing stock was very basic; educational opportunities, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels, were still very limited; access to affordable health care was restricted and the health of our people, fragile; our infrastructure was just adequate enough to satisfy still undeveloped expectations; and responsibility for our Defence and Foreign Affairs still resided with our colonial master, Britain.

The pursuit and achievement of nationhood was never intended to be an end in itself. It was not just a search for psychic satisfaction. We pursued nationhood in order that we might take our destiny into our own hands and mould that destiny in such a way as would develop to the fullest extent possible the hidden potential of our people.

Today as we look back over the past 50 years, we have every reason to feel satisfied with and proud about what we have been able to achieve despite sometimes daunting odds. We have so diversified our

economy that sugar, while still a feature, now plays a role subordinate to tourism and international business and financial services.

Our manufacturing sector continues to show commendable stamina, while two new sectors, the Cultural Industries and the Renewable Energy sectors, are on the rise. Our housing stock has improved vastly, not only in respect of the conversion from wood to stone, but also because most homes are now equipped with electricity and waterborne facilities.

In the area of education we have strengthened the system at the primary level, and expanded markedly, opportunities at the secondary and tertiary levels. At the secondary level we have built the Ellerslie, St. George, Graydon Sealy, Frederick Smith, Daryll Jordan, Deighton Griffith, Lester Vaughan and Louis Lynch secondary schools.

At the tertiary level we have built the Barbados Community College, the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic and the Barbados Hospitality Institute, while continuing to support over the years increasing numbers of students both at the University of the West Indies, and at extra regional Universities.

This massive investment in the diversification and expansion of educational opportunities has equipped Barbados with a rich store of human capital for the continued development of each sector of its economy.

The story in the area of healthcare is no less impressive as we have responded to the need for a health care system that is acceptable, that is accessible and that is affordable. Over the years, too, we have trained a significant number of doctors, nurses and other health care professionals; we have increased the number of polyclinics across the country; and we have intensified investment in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital.

While health and healthcare have improved, the system is now being forced to deal with, and has been responding to, the unacceptably high incidence of a number of life-style diseases, otherwise known as Chronic Non-communicable Diseases. That concern notwithstanding, Barbados has done well in health and healthcare during the fifty years of nationhood.

The nation's infrastructure, both in terms of its roads and its public buildings, stands in stark and impressive contrast to the infrastructure that existed 50 years ago.

Our society is more inclusive today than at any other time in the history of this nation. Fifty years ago women could not get maternity leave with pay; could not get their common-law relationships recognized; had only limited rights under what family legislation was in force at the time; had little or no access to social security of any kind; and were not a relevant force at the workplace. Our move to nationhood has changed all of that.

Children born out of wedlock could not enjoy the same rights as those who were born in wedlock, and opportunities for personal advancement for such persons continued to be limited. That is no longer the case after 50 years of nationhood.

In Barbados today, people suffering with disabilities of whatever kind receive the support of many government agencies in developing their capacity in the sphere of endeavor of their choice. That too is one of the fruits of our status as a nation.

In the area of foreign affairs, Barbados commands the respect of the world on all issues, none more so than on those issues that have to do with the environment and with Small Island Developing States. We have faithfully lived our commitment given to the world 50 years ago that we would be “friends of all and satellites of none.”

On any objective evaluation of our progress over the past 50 years, it would have to be conceded that our decision to proceed to nationhood was wholly justified. The vast majority in our population, left behind then by the fact that we were a colony, was brought along over the past 50 years by the interventions of an enlightened and forward-looking state. That vast majority was, without doubt, entitled to the benefits which the state provided during our first 50 years of nationhood.

Fellow Barbadians, the world in which Barbados became a nation has changed dramatically over the past twenty-five years in particular. Many of the benefits which countries like Barbados enjoyed 50 years ago at the dawn of nationhood are no longer available. Barbados was born as a nation in a Cold War world.

The Cold War ended 25 years ago and the relationships between nations have changed. For all practical purposes, we are now effectively on our own, though to some extent buttressed by the regional arrangements reflected in CARICOM.

That means, simply, that what the Barbados and other regional governments were able to do easily as recently as 30 years ago, they do not have the ability to, and indeed cannot, afford to do now. The age of entitlement has ended. The age of personal responsibility has begun.

Those who benefitted from the opportunities created by the move to nationhood 50 years ago must now prepare themselves to make some sacrifices for the benefit of their children, and for the aged parents whose sacrifices made their own opportunities possible.

The Government must now concentrate on looking after those who are the most vulnerable and the most marginalised in the society, and on encouraging those who have benefitted to give back to society.

It is at this point, at 50 years old, that we must begin to accept the responsibilities of independence. Independence is not the responsibility of someone else somewhere else. It is the responsibility of each man and woman, boy and girl, in Barbados.

The yoke of independence was never intended to be easy, nor were its burdens intended to be light. As Barbadians we must prepare ourselves to meet this challenge. No miracles or miracle workers are available for our use – only faith in the Almighty and good works!

Yet, as we look forward to the next fifty years, we can do so with confidence. The same Lord who has been the people’s guide for past three hundred years is there to be our guide for the next three hundred. He will do His part. We must do ours.

This time of celebration must also be a time of serious reflection for all Barbadians. Let us concentrate as we seek a genuine and effective independence, not on what more we can take from Barbados, but what more we can give to it, for it is in giving that we will receive.

Let us look beyond ourselves and our own narrow interests and spare a thought and an action for the interests of others whose circumstances can benefit from our caring. In that way we will be less individualistic and more community-minded.

Let us commit to learning and teaching the difference between the short-term and the long-term. In so doing we will avoid the pitfall of placing so much emphasis on the pleasures of today to the extent that we make no proper provision for tomorrow.

Let us embrace the value of pursuing excellence in all that we do and in all that we say. That is the surest way of steering ourselves infallibly away from the muddy waters of all that is mediocre or of questionable quality. There is just no room in the Barbados of today or the Barbados of tomorrow for mediocrity in any area of our lives.

It is only by setting the highest possible standards for ourselves and determining to maintain those standards that our young people, who must take the baton from us for the next 50 years, will have ideals to inspire them, and that our homes, our schools, our communities, our churches and our places of work and business will reflect that Independence which it is our duty to attain if the dream of November 30, 1966 is to be realised.

As we do this, let us learn from the past and discard with haste those values and habits that we have acquired which are doing us no good; retain those positive values and habits that have been our source of strength; and actively reclaim those positive values and habits that we had and have lost.

Let us live up to our pledge to uphold and defend the honour of our country Barbados and our flag, and by our living to do credit to our nation wherever we may be. Happy 50th Anniversary and may God continue to bless us all!