

**Independence Address given by
Prime Minister The Hon Dr. Kennedy Simmonds**

19 September 1983

Your Royal Highness Princess Margaret, Countess of Snowdon; Your Excellency Sir Clement Arrindell and Lady Arrindell; Honourable Prime Ministers; Honourable Premiers; Honourable Chief Minister; Your Lordship the Chief Justice and Lady Peterkin; Your Lordships; Honourable Ministers; Excellencies; Delegates; ladies and Gentlemen; Fellow Citizens.

Across the Universe, the sun is setting on colonialism and in the soft amber glow of dawn's first light there is born to the world a new nation. I express this nation's gratitude to Her Majesty the Queen for doing us the honour of sending Your Royal Highness to open our gateway to sovereignty, and to you, Your Royal Highness for so graciously presiding over this the greatest moment in our nation's history. I will now ask that you convey to Her Majesty the Queen, the sincere thanks of the Government and people of St Kitts and Nevis for the most gracious message of congratulations and good wishes for our future happiness and success.

Your Royal Highness has been kind enough to refer to our success in reaching this milestone in spite of the world-wide political and economic difficulties. Your own people have contributed, and I am sure that our continued participation in regional and international forums will also be of considerable benefit to us.

I feel moved also to express to the President, Prime Minister, Premiers, Governors, Chief Ministers, Ministers, Ambassadors and other representatives of states and international and national organisations the nation's heartfelt thanks for the massive and exceptional display of solidarity and friendship which is characterised by the presence of representatives of 52 States and 20 international organisations.

Then I thank you my people who have struggled over the years to reach this day, and have kept the faith and have

finished the course.

There are two symbols of independence which are the focal expression of every nation's sovereignty. They are its flag and its anthem. This nation owes a tribute and a debt of gratitude to Miss Edrice Lewis who designed our flag and Mr Kenrick Georges, the author and composer of our National Anthem. I now express that tribute. Their names are indelibly inscribed on the pages of our history.

The islands of St Kitts and Nevis, which now join the world community as a sovereign nation, have had a rich history.

The original inhabitants, the Caribs, called St Kitts Liamuiga, the fertile land and Nevis, Oualie, land of beautiful water. Relics of their civilisation still remain.

Christopher Columbus and his sailors first made the islands known to Spain and the rest of Europe, but the English were the first colonists and their influence has been dominant in the establishment of our main institutions.

The French shared the island of St Kitts with the British up to 1713 and their influence remains in the name of the capital Basseterre, and the French Governor De Poincy gave his name to our national flower the poinciana.

Though the Dutch never settled here, as the shippers they played a vital role in ensuring the survival of the early colonists.

Africans were brought to these islands as slaves, and it is upon their sweat, tears and toil that the early prosperity of these islands was built. It is fitting, therefore, that pride of place now falls to the descendants of the African slaves who now lead this nation out of colonialism to independence. It is not so much, therefore, that we are free at last, but rather that we are free again.

We have served our apprenticeship well. We have created a stable society committed to the preservation of high moral values and fundamental human rights. As so succinctly and aptly stated in the preamble to our new Constitution which Her Royal Highness has so graciously presented to me:

'Whereas the people of St Christopher and Nevis-

1. Declare that the nation is established on the belief in Almighty God and the inherent dignity of each individual;
2. Assert that they are entitled to the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms;
3. Believe in the concept of true democracy with free and fair elections;
4. Desire the creation of a climate of economic well-being in the context of respect for law and order; and
5. Are committed to achieve their national objectives with a unity of purpose;'

This epitomises the character and ideals of our nation. We call upon our citizens to be loyal to this nation which belongs to us all. Our concept of loyalty does not preclude healthy differences of opinion political or otherwise. It, however, expects each and every one of us to place

'Country above Self'. Let us direct our energies in concert as a people to keep our land stable, and productive.

Today as we, the people of St Kitts and Nevis proudly take our independence with eager, and outstretched arms, let not the joy and euphoria of the moment numb our senses to the arduous responsibilities which lie ahead. Ours is the task of developing from our slender resources a heritage to be enjoyed by the present generation and by generations yet unborn. We must commit ourselves to work harder and be more productive. We must make our hills and valleys produce the food we need for our own use and for the needs of industry and tourism. The sea around us must be made to give of its bounty, whether it be animal, plant or mineral.

We cannot achieve these objectives without effort and sacrifice. This period in our history is not a time for sluggards. It is a time for the intelligence, initiative and creativity of our people to blossom forth in all its fullness. Intelligence and initiative will be necessary as we seek to learn and use technologies developed by others which are suited to our special needs. Our creativity will be fully tested as we ourselves seek to develop technologies appropriate to our needs.

We must be united in our objectives and purposeful in seeking to bring a better quality of life to all our people. As St Paul said –

Now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.'

The lesson must not be lost on us. Each one of us, no matter what our abilities may be, must contribute to the success of this nation. It is our duty to do well whatever we are capable of, and we must all be prepared to recognise the value of the contribution of each one of us.

Loyalty, productivity and unity can better be achieved where mutual respect and equal justice for all pervade the society. We have worked towards the creation of a totally just society. We will strive with more fervent endeavour towards this end. We do not seek for a legal justice, but economic and social justice as well.

There must be economic justice which recognises that the worker is worthy of his hire, and must share adequately in the fruits of his labour. I call for greater understanding and willingness to compromise between employer and employee. I trust they will both recognise that they will succeed in their endeavours only to the extent that the country succeeds.

This country is further committed to social justice which embraces the elimination of discrimination on grounds of sex, race, religion, political opinion, accident of birth or any other divisive precept. We seek to provide the widest possible educational opportunities for all, so that we may first develop the people and they, in turn, will develop the country.

Today, in humility and sobriety, we savour the joy of our independence fully aware of the reality of the interdependence of all mankind.

We in this country have always supported the joy of our regional integration in CARICOM and the OECS. I reiterate our full commitment to these ideals and these organisations.

Now we launch out into waters further afield as we become members of the Commonwealth and the United Nations.

I will say to my international brothers and sisters that we join your ranks fully respecting the sovereignty of every nation, and insisting upon the same respect in return. It is our firm belief that respect for human rights, human dignity and human life must play a greater role in the conduct of international relationships. These principles we hold dear, because, by adherence to them we can settle our disputes without resort to the needless violence of war. We are prepared to be friends of all, and we seek no ideological converts, and the converse also holds true.

We will work for the establishment of a world where, in our time implements of war can be turned into instruments of production, and where all men recognise that the world's bounty should be shared by the world's people.

I know that our own people gathered tonight, like me, are overcome by countless competing emotions, among them awe, pride, humility, and joy in that moment when we saw our own flag rise for the first [time and heard our anthem. It is an anthem which captures and epitomises the innate character of our land and people. It lyricises in eloquent terms of -

This land of beauty!
Our Country where peace abounds
Thy children stand free
On the strength of will and love.
With God in all our struggles,
St Kitts and Nevis be
A nation bound together
With a common destiny
As stalwarts we stand
For justice and liberty.
With wisdom and truth

We will serve and honour thee.
No sword nor spear can conquer,
For God will sure defend,
His blessings shall forever
To posterity extend.

Let history record, Your Royal Highness, the gratitude of the people of St Kitts and Nevis for your participation in this moving moment of history. You have ushered in for us, in symbolic manner, the dawn of a new day. We must now go forward together, one people, one country, one destiny. With God's help, we shall overcome.