

OFFICIAL ADDRESS BY
DR. THE HONORABLE TIMOTHY HARRIS, PRIME MINISTER OF
ST KITTS AND NEVIS
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 32ND ANNIVERSARY OF
ST. KITTS AND NEVIS' INDEPENDENCE
SATURDAY 19TH SEPTEMBER 2015

My fellow citizens and residents:

Today, thanks to God's mercies and love, we bear witness to another National Day, that is, the 32nd Anniversary of our Independence on this 19th day of September 2015.

Kittitians and Nevisians have, for far more years than we can quantify, been a spiritual people. Our spirituality defines who we are. Our Independence constitution captures the spiritual foundation of our society. I am happy to proclaim that our Nation is a Nation under God, truly at peace with its Judeo-Christian traditions and faith. In our moments of tragedy, disaster, infamy and shame we will seek the throne of the Most High God. Equally we shall, in times of rejoicing, celebration and victory acknowledge that Our God lives and reigns Supreme.

In this regard, I call upon all citizens to say prayer for our Nation on its 32nd birthday. As we pray, we must ponder on the kind of nation we wish to build.

I feel a sense of happiness, pride and gratitude that I am alive and well and able to celebrate as Prime Minister the 32nd birthday of this our relatively young Nation – young chronologically, and young at heart. More than 65% of our population is below 35 years.

I am grateful for those who before my time fought for our Independence – those under whose leadership it was secured and those who built upon that legacy of Independence that was bequeathed to them.

Many words are used to describe Independence: Self-determination; Self-rule; Sovereignty; Freedom; and Liberty, to name a few. But the word that stands out most to me is “Self-determination”. It stood out because the words *self-determination* accurately describes the story of our people.

Our founders were determined to live in freedom because they understood that they had a God-given right to be free. Our Nation was built on the belief in Almighty God and the inherent dignity of each individual.

Our founders were determined to build the physical infrastructure of a nation, which has become the economic foundation of our great Country.

Our founders were determined to build strong families guided by morals taught through the principles of a strong faith and a belief in an Almighty God.

The founders of our Independence were determined to give a better St. Kitts and Nevis to our generation than what was given to them. Our founders were determined to build our Nation, not on sinking sand, but rather on the rocks of justice, fairness and equality and, by extension, prosperity. It is through their experiences that we learn and understand who we are as people and as a Nation. It is through their experiences that we can understand our strengths and weaknesses, and approach our challenges as opportunities for growth and advancement.

It is through the experiences of our Nation's founders that we learnt the critical importance of Independence. Independence did not come about for self-interest. Independence came about because it was time to determine our own destiny: a shared destiny between government and its people. This destiny is shared. This Destiny is inclusive. This Destiny is defined by the people, not a political party or a despot that has lost his or her way.

Our ancestors and the founders of our great country believed that **NO ONE OTHER THAN US** can ensure that all have a fair share of this Nation's prosperity. In order for St. Kitts and Nevis to achieve that goal we needed a unified effort: all hands on deck to guarantee that all can have their fair share of this nation's prosperity. Independence was the first step in building our Nation's prosperity. For many years, the goals of Independence were stifled because, for some, Independence meant a prosperity agenda for a few instead of prosperity for all. The development of such a political class did not auger well for the rank and file of our population who was being left behind.

Our achievement of the goals of Independence cannot be predicated upon a carbon copy system of oppressive government from which we have managed to free ourselves. We must demand a new brand of politics where our people come first. There should be no socio-economic system created to oppress people by way of race, class, gender or political party persuasion.

We in Government honour those who paved the way for Independence by governing with integrity and transparency.

Our Performance

Given our performance as a new Team Unity Government, over the past seven (7) months, we can confidently attest to the fact that – by God’s grace – we have turned would-be-crises into new opportunities and handled our major challenges within our democratic and constitutional framework. It is in our darkest hour that the light illuminates brightest. In the very short period since the swearing-in of the Team Unity administration we have accomplished much for our people. These achievements bear enumerating:

1. Removal of an oppressive 17 percent VAT on food, medicine and funeral expenses. We have brought relief to all of our citizens but, in particular, we helped the poor who were in greatest need of this relief. The removal of VAT has led to a reduction in the cost of living. Life has been ameliorated for many.
2. On Friday, September 18th, our Government made a \$16 million pay-out to former sugar workers – rewarding some 2311 of them for their service not just to the St. Kitts Sugar Manufacturing Corporation (SSMC) but to the sugar industry which was the backbone of our economy for well over 300 years. With that pay-out, our Government has thereby satisfied the grievances of over two thousand former sugar workers who sweated and toiled in an industry – with scars to show – and were afterwards denied even a token payment when the industry closed in July 2005. We promised a fair share to all workers and we are delivering.
3. We have made a budgetary support to the Nevis Island Administration (NIA) of EC\$ 10 million as a good faith measure. We recently signed commitment letters with respect to the NIA’s debt to the Kuwait government. This was necessary because the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis is **only one Country**, and we cannot be cavalier in our dealings with NIA. We promised the people of Nevis and St. Kitts a Fresh Start and a Fair Share. We are delivering on that undertaking.
4. We ended the unequal treatment and discrimination in the administration of People’s Empowerment Programme (PEP) in Nevis by putting it under the control of NIA. Equally, we have brought to an end the “gravy train” of the so-called “PEP Committee” which saw well off political sycophants and party emissaries benefitting like parasites from thousands of dollars per month, in flagrant disregard for fiscal prudence and propriety.
5. We are currently devising new accountability and structural frameworks for both PEP and the SIDF.
6. We have restored dignity, decorum and order to Parliament.
7. We have begun reforms at the Citizenship by Investment Unit (CIU) – reforms which are organisational, administrative, legislative and philosophical. Some reforms will allow the most efficient ways of uploading Citizenship By Investment (CBI) applications not 5 days a week but 24/7.
8. We have recalibrated our relations with USA, Canada, the European Union and the United Kingdom, particularly as it relates to our CBI. Promise made, promise kept. We have an excellent friendship with the Government of Venezuela.

9. We have ended the shift system at Basseterre High School (B.H.S.) and are advancing plans to build a modern B.H.S.
10. We rescued the CPL cricket games and CARIFTA games.

We are also proud to have been able to engender a new relationship of trust with the NIA and the people of Nevis under the Team Unity Government.

We are on a course to build a prosperous society with fairness for all. We will build better lives for all in a veritable campaign that enlarges the opportunities for all of our people to contribute to the progressive development of our society.

Our Theme

This year, we celebrate our Independence under the theme “*United in Building a Stronger Nation*”. Our theme expresses the values of togetherness and unity. It acknowledges that we are better when we work together. We hope that our Independence theme encourages all of us to work productively to keep our Nation resilient and strong. If our people are our greatest asset then the Unity of our people must be the qualitative condition which we cherish most. Our humanity, our industry, our creativity and our conscience must shine through at all times.

I sincerely suggest that we must build an independent Nation it is characterised as:

- **Compassionate** - with our conscience and humanity always shining through.
- **Resilient** - a Nation able to adapt to endogenous and exogenous shocks. A Nation capable of easily recovering from acts of nature and caprices of men. A Nation capable of growing and learning, and satisfying the expectations of its people.
- **Prosperous and Highly Productive Nation**, with a well-off population, a model of a well-managed state.
- **Democratic** – a Nation that treasures democracy by enlarging the democratic frontier through greater engagement and participation of civil society. A Nation which respects the judiciary and honours the Parliament. A Nation which holds the Executive Branch of Government to account for its stewardship, and understands the importance of the free media.
- **Sustainable** - I want our St Kitts and Nevis to be the best small island state, and at peace with Nature as we harness her renewable energy to power industry, innovation, and social development.
- **Cosmopolitan in its world view** – celebrating the diversity of people, nationalities, ethnicities that make up the modern St Kitts and Nevis, and who contribute to our way of life through their trade, investments (including in our citizenship programmes), education and employment.
- **Proud** – Our citizenship is precious and a most notable element of our nationality. Our passports must come to stand as symbols of a highly progressive Nation which is proud of

its achievements, its creativity, its capacity, capability and contributions to the world. The holders of our passports must enjoy a level of dignity in belonging to St Kitts and Nevis, and they should experience convenience in their travels.

- **Safe and Secure** – We must reverse the negative developments in law and order and create a nation which is truly safe and secure.

Sir Kennedy – National Hero

Just three days ago, on National Heroes' Day, our Nation had cause to recognise and celebrate the contributions of nine citizens for their investment of time, labour, intellect and skills in nation-building. Today, we add yet another name to the Pantheon of National Heroes in the person of Dr the Right Excellent and Right Honourable Sir Kennedy Simmonds, our fourth Premier, and first Prime Minister of an Independent St. Kitts and Nevis.

It was Sir Kennedy who ushered us into Nationhood and oversaw our entry on to the world stage, and remained at the helm steering our country to highest levels of growth in the Hemisphere until we had sufficiently matured to stand on our own, and to be recognised as the world's smallest and freest Nation. We applaud this our only living National Hero who today serves as an inspiration to us proud citizens engaged in Nation-building.

Sir Kennedy you have done well for your country. We adore your character and say thank you for your sterling contribution.

As we continue to participate in the various activities marking the 32nd Anniversary of Independence I encourage us to take a moment and ponder how far the people of St Kitts and Nevis have come; where we are now; and where we need to take this Country in the future. Ours is a future that is bright and prosperous. It is also a future that will demand collective effort in order to achieve the goals we have set at both the individual and national levels. It is a future that requires wisdom and diligence in our undertakings; discernment in the use and investment of our limited resources; and guarded optimism in our approach to the daunting task of sustainable development in a vast global market for which there are no concessions and accommodations granted on account of our geographical smallness.

I salute every citizen of St Kitts and Nevis on this 32nd Anniversary of our Nation's Independence. I ask God's guidance, prosperity, correction and mercy in all of our undertakings. May God bless St Kitts and Nevis.

Happy Independence 2015!