

**ADDRESS TO THE NATION BY  
DR. THE HONOURABLE TIMOTHY HARRIS, MP, JP  
PRIME MINISTER OF ST KITTS AND NEVIS  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 33<sup>RD</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF  
ST. KITTS AND NEVIS' INDEPENDENCE  
19 SEPTEMBER 2016**

SALUTATIONS:

My fellow citizens and residents, congratulations on our thirty-third Independence Anniversary. This year we celebrate our Independence under the theme “Promoting Prosperity through Sustainability and National Unity.”

This theme was chosen specifically to encapsulate how only a stable nation in unity can thrive and prosper, for the betterment of all of its citizens and residents.

Our land has seen struggles, hardships and battles for power going over many centuries. Colonial powers fought for this land because it was a prize jewel. As free men and women of St Kitts and Nevis, this is a country bequeathed to us by our forefathers and we must make it our place of choice – our prize jewel.

As an Independent nation, we have done reasonably well over the last thirty-three years of our independence journey. Our economy today is stable. We are among the best performing economies in Latin America and the Caribbean. Our fiscal house is in a very good shape – better than most. While others suffer from negligible economic growth rates, ours is projected to be above average for the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union (ECCU), the borrowing member states of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Our inflation rate is at an all-time low, thanks in part to my government’s decision to remove Value Added Tax (VAT) from food, medicine and funeral expenses. In addition, we now have a record low for the price for oil and gasoline products. Our foreign reserves are high. There are many ongoing projects where those in need of jobs can find work.

Over 200 plus have benefited from our affordable, Fresh Start Loan Programme as we attempt to provide that well needed financing for small and medium sized enterprises. We will invest another \$30 million over the next two years into the Fresh Start Programme.

Our housing programme will get started in earnest before year end bringing well needed housing solutions to our people most in need of them. The future prospects are bright and encouraging. Several hotels are to come on stream shortly, adding well-paying jobs to the economy.

Our young people are excelling, they are surpassing traditional best standards in their performances at secondary school and at sixth form. We hail the new high, set by Rol-j Williams with his 17 CXC passes with distinction. More of our people are pursuing tertiary level education in the Caribbean, the Americas, Asia, the Pacific and elsewhere in the world. Given the critical role that tertiary level education can play in the development of a country, we are happy to witness such expansion in the number of participants at this level of education and training. Our aim is to ensure that by 2030 every family household will boast a graduate.

Our sporting heroes are making us proud at the Olympics. We are especially proud of the performance of our special Olympians in recent competitions and other Olympians that keep the flag of one of the smallest countries in the world, flying high. We commend our footballers on their recent standing in FIFA. They are number two in the Caribbean and seventy-seven worldwide. I am advised their best ever ranking.

There is much for which we have to give God thanks. Our quality of life is good. Yet there are areas which require improvement. We must do more in the quest for excellence. Our labour productivity must improve. We must do more in less time and we must improve the quality of our work. Come next year, my government intends to move apace to implement pay for performance in the public sector and to encourage its application elsewhere.

Independence requires of us a higher standard of discipline, conduct, behaviour and service in order to mould the country we deserve for ourselves and that which we wish to bequeath to the generations to come.

A disciplined society must work to root out the destructive influences that retard our progress, besmirch our reputation and restrain the forward drive for prosperity for all. Crime, particularly violent crime, holds back our potential to excel. It adversely affects the investment climate and destroys job opportunities.

Over the last twenty years, the robust, comprehensive response to lawlessness has been absent. Hence our country's record of homicides has been unacceptable. My government has pledged to protect our country by all means necessary and to reverse over time the disturbing trend of homicides and violent crimes.

Like every responsible citizen and resident, we want to eliminate violent crimes in the alleyways, the byways, highways and streets, in town and country. That is why this government has given the security forces their largest budgetary allocation. Additionally we have provided extra budgetary support for their operations. We have put in place an excellent team at the helm, we have buttressed

their forensic resources. We have increased police training. We have expanded the K-9 Unit, we have provided enhanced telecommunications support and approved a Six point Plan and Strategic Plan 2016 to 2019.

However with twenty-three homicides for the year to date, we know that more must be done. We pledged that we would leave no stone unturned to keep our country safe. We will utilise all resources local, regional and international in our effort to uproot crime.

In furtherance of this public pledge, I am pleased to advise that Cabinet, after consultation with the Royal Saint Christopher and Nevis Police Force, as well as with the St Kitts and Nevis Defence Force, has sought the assistance of the RSS. The details of the operational engagement were worked out by the RSS, our own police High Command team led by Commissioner Ian Queeley, Lt Colonel Patrick Wallace of the St Kitts and Nevis Defence Force and Permanent Secretary, Osmond Petty in the Ministry of National Security. Their presence will assist the police to make a further onslaught on crime and remove elements of crime – illegal guns, arms, ammunition and so on, from the hands of criminals.

We ask for the full support of everyone to save lives. By cooperating with the security forces, the lives we save may be our very own and that of our loved ones.

Security concerns were among the matters raised at a recent forum in the NEPAC which I attended, along with His Excellency, the Governor General Sir S.W. Tapley Seaton and Premier the Honourable Vance Amory.

Our young people can play such an important role. I call upon you to not insult the pain, the daily torment and abject misery of our enslaved forefathers by using the freedom they never had, to make the wrong choices. Can you not hear the screams of pain, echoing across the winds? Not through their beatings, but because we turn on each other to rob, to kill and to seek revenge for slights we deem to be more important than the value of human life itself.

I say to you, rise up, rise above the criminality, choose dignity, choose life because if “we live by the sword, we die by the sword.”

We should craft the future like an artist who has a vision in his mind of what he wants to create. Artists will add colour, shape, form; in the same way, this is how you should build your character, define your future, and consequently shape the future and legacy of this nation.

It behoves all of us, as we seek to build a prosperous and stable nation, to ask ourselves the question: are we enablers or a blockers? Do we make things happen, energise progress or do we take the path of laziness and mischief, submitting the common good of our country to the whims of our egos.

On Friday last, we honoured our Five National Heroes and recalled how they had put “*Country Above Self*”. I want to urge every citizen of Saint Kitts and Nevis to make our country glorious and proud, by working together in unity, to achieve a greater good.

Every man, woman and child, from the highest to the lowest, from every walk of life, I ask you to be courageous, to step outside of your comfort zone, to seek new challenges and be brave enough to take the difficult path, if that is what our nation requires. This means making decisions that are difficult and not shirking from the responsibility of doing so.

As the Greek philosopher Plato said:

“We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark: the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light.”

Those who saw the light championed the fight out of the darkness of slavery into emancipation. Colonialism could not dent the resolve of a free people to take their destiny into their own hands and to mould the country to their liking.

Over the last thirty three-years through hard work, creativity and patriotism we have proved ourselves worthy of the high expectations and ideals of an independent nation.

Over the next thirty-three years, we must pursue the prosperity of our nation, enhance its sustainability index, and improve on the resilience of our people. I want to remind us that we are a nation under God.

Let us invite Him into our hearts and our minds. I pray that my Cabinet may be a worthy instrument to advance the nation.

So let us move forward together “Promoting Prosperity through Sustainability and National Unity”.

Happy Independence to my beloved people of St Kitts and Nevis. May we continue to experience the love, the mercy and abundant provision of our Almighty God.

To God be the Glory.