

Independence Day Message 2013

By

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31 August 2013

On this day, fifty-one years ago, our beloved Trinidad and Tobago was granted independence from Great Britain. The elder citizens among us will recall the pride, joy, optimism and atmosphere of excitement which characterised the week-long celebrations across the country. I was just a young child of nine years at the time, but I can still remember that feeling of purpose and destiny I shared with my classmates as we waved our own miniature national flags. We were no longer a British colony. We now had our very own national flag, anthem, coat of arms, national birds and flower, Defence Force and Constitution. Although fourteen more years would elapse before we would become a Republic, on August 31st 1962, we nonetheless secured very real power to govern ourselves and shape our own destiny.

On Independence Day in 1962, Dr. Eric Williams, our first Prime Minister, in his radio address to the nation, posed the testing question to all citizens: "What use will you make of your Independence?" With the benefit of over half a century of hindsight, allow me to instead ask, "What use have we made of our Independence?" In what ways are we better off now than we were before we became self-governing? Few would argue that we have produced outstanding individuals who have distinguished themselves, both at home and abroad. Notwithstanding the many achievements of our citizens however, who are we as a nation? Have we, as a nation, been true to our watchwords of Discipline, Production and Tolerance? What characterises us as a people? What do we stand for? What do we bring to the commonwealth of nations?

The central issue of fifty-one years ago, the pursuit of our nation's independence, is not the central issue today. After half a century of self-governance, the colonial master is no longer a formidable hindrance to our growth and development as a people and as a nation. Our main hindrance may well be ourselves. The self-determination which we won in 1962 must now be coupled with a recognition of the importance of every citizen to the fulfilment of our nation's destiny and to its continued growth and development.

We must take up the challenge, both as individuals and as a nation, to affirm the Independence Pledge, our National Pledge, penned some fifty years ago by Marjorie Padmore.

The following words remain relevant and continue to be an imperative and a standard that should govern our lives,

"I will strive In everything I do

To work together with my fellowmen

Of every creed and race

For the greater happiness of all

And the honour and glory

Of my country."

My family and I extend warm greetings to all citizens on the occasion of this fifty-first anniversary of our Independence.

May God continue to richly bless our beloved nation.