



BARBADOS INDEPENDENCE DAY MESSAGE NOVEMBER 2008

Fellow Barbadians at home and abroad, Friends: I consider it a distinct honour, privilege and pleasure to address you as Prime Minister of Barbados for the first time.

I am humbled to think that I now occupy the position once held by my great hero and mentor, as well as by some of the people I consider the greatest leaders this country has ever seen.

My natural response to this awesome experience is to pledge to uphold the principles by which they all lived and to affirm my commitment to lead this country along the pathways to progress.

Barbadians everywhere should be proud of the progress this nation has made. A mere 42 years ago, a man with a vision and with the support of Barbadians and friends, led this small undeveloped ex-colony of Britain to negotiated Independence.

It was clearly understood that the path to true "Independence" would be strewn with the social obstacles that resulted from 400 years of disenfranchisement and exploitation.

Under enlightened leadership Barbadians systematically went about dismantling the structures that blocked their progress in the land of their birth. Once Universal Adult Suffrage was achieved, the popular vote was used to break the political hegemony of the planter and merchant classes.

The political enfranchisement of the people swiftly led to internal autonomy and then Independence in 1966.

Every Government since then has been elected with the mandate to improve the conditions under which Barbadians live. They have focused on the development of human resources as a means of transforming the society. From the inception **education** was chosen as the developmental tool, and used by successive administrations with spectacular results.

Today Barbados provides free primary, secondary and tertiary education with participation rates of almost 100% at the primary and secondary levels and about 40% at the tertiary level. As a direct result of this consistently heavy investment, Barbados is now the highest ranked developing country, number 31 out of 177 nations according to the United Nations Human Development Index.

It is now generally believed that the social enfranchisement for which the people craved during the long period of oppression has been achieved. Class barriers have been removed. Key positions in all the major institutions are now open and occupied by people of humble origins. Indeed the gap between the social position held by the adult generation at the time of Independence and that now occupied by their children is the widest possible in the history of Barbados.

Today I salute those parents and educators who made sacrifices and encouraged our children to pursue education. **They are the unsung heroes of Barbados.**

Barbados now faces its most profound challenge yet – that of economic enfranchisement. The collapse of the world's financial markets will undoubtedly lead to a contracting of major economies with a devastating effect on small, open, vulnerable economies like our own.

Our high standard of living is based on industries that are inexorably linked to the troubled economies of the United Kingdom and the USA. It is predicted that tourism and financial services, two of the pillars of the Barbados economy, will be the first to be affected. The levels of unemployment are therefore likely to rise.

In the midst of this turmoil, my vision for Barbados is becoming more salient. It is rooted in the conviction that given the necessary freedom, leadership, opportunity and support, we can become ***firm craftsmen of our fate***. We are a resilient, resourceful and creative people.

There should therefore be no barriers to Barbadians wishing to use their talents and skills to earn a living. Hence, the time for all Barbadians to take greater responsibility for the economic development of this country is now upon us.

My Government has already taken a leadership role by adopting measures to mitigate the impact of these global challenges. We have recently introduced some countercyclical measures to stimulate economic activity including the review of fiscal policy, heavy investment in the development of our infrastructure, promoting Barbados in new tourist markets, and giving support to international business and agriculture.

We have also begun to put in place the legislation, institutional structures and the resources to increase the number of self-employed entrepreneurs from about 10% of the working population to 20% by 2016.

We are committed to the creation of new enterprises through training, direct subsidies and easier access to capital for investment. We are doing so because small and medium-sized businesses are the providers of the majority of jobs, and the engines of growth after a recession.

Moreover, we believe that in the emerging global market place, small jurisdictions will survive and prosper by identifying niche markets, such as the cultural industries, and capitalizing on them. Small flexible and responsive enterprises are internationally renowned for identifying and penetrating new markets.

Now is therefore the time for us to become more enterprising. Now is the time to make a paradigm shift from seeking more and more education to find a job. Instead now is the time to think in terms of creating employment and wealth.

I would therefore like to make a special appeal to all Barbadians at home and abroad to consider this crisis as an opportunity to use your ingenuity to overcome the last hurdle on the way to developed country status. While my Government is creating the conditions for economic enfranchisement, ask yourself what you can do to make a positive response to this challenge.

I wish you a happy 42nd Anniversary of Independence. Enjoy the many celebrations organized to mark the day.

Best wishes in all your endeavours.

God bless you all: and God bless Barbados.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Thompson', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Hon. David Thompson, M.P.
Prime Minister of Barbados