

EMBARGOED FOR PUBLICATION ON AUGUST 1.



**MESSAGE FROM
THE MOST HON. ANDREW MICHAEL HOLNESS, ON, MP
PRIME MINISTER**

EMANCIPATION 2016

Fellow Jamaicans,

As we mark Emancipation Day 2016, we reflect on the heroism, awe-inspiring courage and indomitable will of our forebears, as well as the legacy they have bequeathed to us.

The daring of those who were insistent in demanding their dignity; their resoluteness in struggling against their dehumanization and their freshness of vision in imagining a new kind of life, must elicit the deepest admiration in us, their successors.

We are heirs of a great and noble tradition of struggle for justice and human rights. The boldness of Nanny of the Maroons; the fortitude of Tacky and the moral fierceness of Sam Sharpe must illuminate our own path as we trod this road to the full economic emancipation of our people.

We must draw on the rich reservoir of our history to drive our actions today. We are emancipated from the shackles of chattel slavery, but there are still some chains which hold us back. We must rid ourselves of them and break free.

Our forebears stubbornly refused to accept the mental chains which the slave-masters would impose on them. They rejected the view that they were less than their masters and that they were destined for subjugation. They did not accept that their fate was written in the stars or in the will of God. They did not subscribe to those obnoxious words in the old hymn which proclaimed:

“The rich man in his castle
The poor man at his gate
God made them high and lowly
And ordered their estate”.

No, there was no divine will to poverty and enslavement. Today, we have to similarly reject any notion that we as a nation are destined to remain poor. We have a right to prosperity. We are capable of it and deserving of it. We must eradicate this poverty mindset, emancipating ourselves from this poverty consciousness. We must never entertain any notion that the kind of economic results which have been achieved by high-performing countries are beyond us. They are not.

We are an extraordinary people who have achieved extraordinary feats. We defeated the grossest form of human exploitation. We manifested incalculable courage and resilience in the face of the most brutal and inhumane treatment. Our forebears demonstrated their love of freedom over love of mere existence. We cannot squander such a legacy.

Today we must be resilient in the face of our contemporary challenges. We must keep up our struggle against crime and violence, injustice, economic underperformance, carnage on our roads, crassness, social exclusion, intolerance and all forms of bigotry.

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PRIME MINISTER - EMANCIPATION 2016**

One of the precious things destroyed by that evil system of slavery was family life. The slave-masters destroyed our family bonds. How ironic and, indeed, tragic that some of us today with full freedom are doing the very things which our slave-masters did to us with impunity! We must use our freedom to foster healthy, nurturing families, which are at the foundation of building a healthy and prosperous society.

Our fathers must be responsible, caring and loving, providing sterling examples of good character to their children. Our mothers must be examples of selflessness and honor, modelling dignity and grace to their children. A wholesome family life is indispensable to nationhood. Let us, in practical tribute to those who fought so hard to end slavery, honour their memory by building strong families.

Slavery was an egregious and vulgar incarnation of bigotry, intolerance and disrespect. It was the ultimate disregard for freedom of speech and association. In our deliberate revolt against any vestige of that spirit, let us cherish respect for one another's views and beliefs; let us never succumb to resentment or hate because other people differ from us in politics, religion, race, class. People have an inalienable right to their views. Freedom is not something we arrogate to ourselves, while denying the same to others.

In a world today characterized by bigotry, hate, prejudice, clannishness and exclusion, let us, as heirs to a history of struggle against oppression, be beacons in such darkness. Slave society was built on division and conflict. Today, in meaningfully celebrating Emancipation, let us recommit to the fight against tribalism and all forms of division among our people. Let us always strive to emphasize our unity. Indeed, as our Emancipation and Independence theme enjoins, "Let's get together and feel alright".

Let us reaffirm that unity is strength. Those who struggled for our emancipation knew that it was important to pull together, not apart.

Celebrating Emancipation is by no means quaint or irrelevant. Its lessons are profound and timeless. We would do ourselves a disservice, not to mention the disservice to our ancestors, if we did not use this season to reflect on our history and to draw strength and inspiration from those wellsprings.

To Jamaicans at home and abroad, I say let us this Emancipation day ensure that we are worthy torch bearers of what has been handed down to us. Let the emancipation continue!

**Hon. Andrew Holness, ON, MP
Prime Minister**