



Emancipation Day Address 2015
By the Prime Minister
Most Hon. Portia Simpson Miller ON, MP

O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.

My fellow Jamaicans:

Today we celebrate One Hundred and Eighty One years of Emancipation. We celebrate today the struggle of our forefathers and mothers who were displaced, mistreated – whipped, chained raped and bludgeoned. Often they screamed out in pain. Yet, year after year their anguish transformed into resolve and their spirits were never broken.

These valiant men and women fought to emancipate us, their forbears, from the cruelty of slavery.

Their struggles against slavery, imposed for centuries upon African People ensured that today we would enjoy freedoms they never had.

Liberty everywhere, at every point in history, is a cherished right that all men and women hold dear. No wonder then, that countless of our ancestors gave their lives, making the ultimate sacrifice, in the fight for freedom.

In the public square of Montego Bay, Samuel Sharpe declared in 1832, just before the vile system of slavery ended that: ***“I would rather die on yonder gallows than live in slavery.”*** He gave voice to and took action on behalf of men and women including

- Davie
 - Thomas
 - Becky
 - John Dunbar
 - James Anglin
 - Kitty Scarlett
 - George Duhaney
 - Samuel Hayward
 - Bina
 - Charlotte, and
 - James Bernard
-who all died with him on that day

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These brave men and women went before us. They sought to ensure that we who came after them, would never face the horrors of slavery as they did.

My brothers and sisters,

Freedom is an absolute necessity in shaping the future of any society. We cannot grow and prosper unless we are free in body, mind and spirit. As our first National Hero Marcus Garvey told us, in order to achieve national progress we must: **“Emancipate ourselves from mental slavery.”** In this context, the history of Emancipation and current economic development discussions are now linked in a common narrative.

Plantation slavery and Emancipation are real life events in our history as a people. They are also symbols for the remarkable capacity of the human spirit to struggle and triumph over adversity.

Today, I encourage all Jamaicans to fulfill our glorious legacy by uniting, The Government, local representatives and stakeholder groups, civil society, private and public sectors must continue to pull together, now more than ever, as we move forward to achieve our mission of economic Emancipation with growth, investments and job creation.

Our historians remind us that of the 1.2 million Africans who were brought into Jamaica by British slavers, only three hundred thousand of them survived the horror of slavery. One quarter of those who made the journey, lived and were forced to toil, often under inhumane conditions. They carved their contribution into the pages of our country's history.

We are the sons and daughters of the 25 percent of those who arrived and survived. We are the great-great grand-children of survivors! Today we number more than (three) million people at home in Jamaica and in the diaspora. This is a tribute to our resilience as a people. This is an indication of a history of strength, discipline and steely resolve, particularly in the face of our greatest adversity.

We have always known ourselves to be people who have turned our hearts and faces against injustice, inhumanity, and deception.

We have stood up and demanded fairness and equality for all regardless of their race, colour, creed, gender or class here at home and across the world.

We have infused these values into our culture, as we created a modern nation out of a deep seated resistance against the legacy of the cruelty of slavery. Before and after Nanny; before and after Daddy Sam Sharpe; before and after Paul Bogle; before and after George William Gordon – before and after Garvey, Bustamante, and Manley, we have, as a people done what we had to do, to drive the injustices of slavery out of our land.

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The People of Jamaica have always seen their struggle for freedom and justice as a national, Caribbean and global fight. From time to time we have provided the necessary leadership. At other times, we have provided solidarity in the cause of justice.

We continue to celebrate with our brothers and sisters, the people of Haiti who like the Maroons of Jamaica, denounced slavery and battled for their freedom. They were the first enslaved Black people in the world to win full freedom. With their declaration of national independence in 1804 they set the Caribbean on the road to liberty and sovereignty.

The story of those enslaved Jamaicans who won their freedom and became citizens of Haiti in 1816 is worth remembering.

In that year a ship named "Deep Nine" docked at Port Royal with dozens of enslaved persons on board. They took control of the ship and sailed her to Haiti where the Black President of that country, under their constitution, declared them to be free persons and citizens of the Republic of Haiti.

With such a selfless act of humanity written into our shared history even before our Emancipation, Jamaica has a moral and historical obligation to stand firmly with the Government and people of Haiti in their time of need.

As thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent, face mass deportation from their home in the Dominican Republic, there is the risk of a mass migration crisis being sparked on Jamaica's doorstep with major implications for us. In this situation, Jamaica continues to oppose any move to render these thousands of people stateless and without nationality.

With the knowledge of this shared struggle, our revolutionaries like Paul Bogle, George William Gordon and the great post-slavery leaders like Marcus Mosiah Garvey knew that they had to translate the promised freedom of Emancipation into a global, human and civil rights movement.

They knew that Emancipation was not a moment but rather a movement to be led and supported by generations over many decades.

As Jamaicans stood their ground and paid with their lives every man, woman and child at Morant Bay in 1865, knew that the crimes of colonialism had survived the Act of Emancipation.

They stood resolute with dignity. We are today, one nation, one people, moving forward together because of them.

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We are a resilient people, resolute in our pursuit of justice in the face of unrighteousness. We have also learned from our history to value and uphold the virtue of forgiveness. Yet, we must never, ever forget.

This year the United Nations declared 2015 to 2024 the decade of People of African Descent. It calls for a global programme of action for the uplifting and advancement of Africans who have suffered the injustice of slavery.

The UN also unveiled at its Headquarters in New York a Permanent Memorial in remembrance of the horrors of the Trans Atlantic Trade in Enslaved Africans.

I was honoured to have represented the people of Jamaica as I participated in these events. With the consistent support of Jamaica's representatives at the UN, our country promoted the idea of the memorial. In doing so, we encouraged the work of our Professor Verene Shepherd who toiled steadfastly within the relevant UN organizations to secure the declaration of the Decade of people of African Descent.

These are great achievements for Jamaica and Jamaicans who continue to be advocates and innovators in all fora of the world.

As we celebrate Emancipation Day 2015, I note that the call for Reparations has been steadily growing since Emancipation in 1834. Many have written and spoken of the massive compensation British slave-owners in Jamaica and elsewhere received from the British government.

The sum of 20 million British Pounds paid out to 46,000 slave owners between 1834 and 1840 is today valued at 17billion British Pounds. This payment served to sustain their wealth and status. The enslaved and their descendants received no compensation.

In 1938, our great Caribbean Nobel Prize Winner for Economics, Sir Arthur Lewis, reflecting on the 100 years since emancipation, wrote that the matter of 200 years of unpaid slave labour is yet to be addressed.

As we reflect on the brutality of plantation slavery, on July 30, Jamaica joined the global community in the observance of World Day Against Trafficking in Persons – Another form of slavery. It is a matter I raised earlier this week at the United Nations Security Council meeting.

Human Trafficking is characterized by the use of force or deception, transportation, and labour exploitation.

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The commitment of the Government of Jamaica in combatting Human Trafficking has never wavered.

Every trafficked person found on our soil, and every one of our citizens rescued abroad, speak of an unknown number of victims still trapped in modern day slavery. Therefore our relentless efforts against slavery in any form - past, present or future, will continue.

The Jamaican national sense of outrage against injustice, and our history of fanning the flames of freedom, will not allow us to condone human trafficking.

Today, the love of liberty burns as brightly in Jamaica as it did among the slaves who fought valiantly and successfully to abolish slavery and to herald the Emancipation of the enslaved.

Today, we move forward as one nation, under God's guidance, fulfilling our collective destiny of freedom, peace and prosperity for all.

I wish every Jamaican at home and in the diaspora, and all the people of the Caribbean, and Africans globally, a peaceful and reflective Emancipation day 2015