

Prime Minister Mottley's Speech at Ghana's 65th Anniversary of Independence Celebrations

Thank you very much, Mr. Master of Ceremonies.

President of the Republic of Ghana, His Excellency Nana Akufo-Addo and First Lady of the Republic of Ghana, Mrs. Rebecca Akufo-Addo. Vice President of the Republic and Second Lady of the Republic of Ghana.

Your Lordship, the Chief Justice of the Republic of Ghana.

Honourable members of the Council of State, Ministers, Members of Parliament, Members of Government Officials of Ghana, traditional rulers and religious leaders of Ghana. Members of the Diplomatic Corps and indeed my own Minister of Foreign Affairs and Ambassador. Distinguished Ghanaian citizens all.

Today I am filled with such hope and I am so happy to be here with you to celebrate the 65th independence of your country. On behalf of the people and government of Barbados, I extend congratulations. Our warmest congratulations to you on the attainment of this milestone.

For us you were the beacon that shone the light almost one decade before we came to that moment ourselves. And that is why last year, when we became the youngest parliamentary republic, we asked your president to bless us with his remarks because we felt that just as you led the way in 1957 and 1960, you led that way for us with the coming of our republic.

It is almost trite to share with you that your founder-leader Kwame Nkrumah inspired so many of us across the globe after decades and in some instances, centuries of colonialism and exploitation, the capacity to rise and to be able to say that we can, we shall, we will. That simple example gave so many of us the courage that we too could and would and should.

As I indicated to you just last year on the 30th of November, we took that step. And on that occasion, we elected our first President, Dame Sandra Mason, who has asked me also to pass her warmest regards to you, Mr. President on the occasion of this 65th anniversary.

It is significant to us, sir, that when you spoke and shared your message with us as a Barbadian nation, you indicated that it was our great fortune to be able to complete this circle of self-determination at a time when the world has so readily embraced the principles of democracy and enfranchisement.

And yes, my friends and yes, the young people of Ghana in particular. I am mindful that for you, this may seem a journey that is long, long past from where it started 65 years ago.

But be assured that that anchoring 65 years ago is what allows us now to stand tall and proud, even as we see the rear, even as we see the ugly face rearing itself again of racism and imperialism across our world.

We must never, never, ever accept that there can be first class or second class citizens in this world, and we equally assert today that there cannot be first class and second class nations in the global community.

It is for that reason that we will work together in solidarity to fight the battles of our time. Challenging as there, appearing to be quickly as they're coming at us for whether it is a climate crisis that affects us or whether it is the scourge of war that has risen its head yet again, or whether it is the assertion by some who have not been elected to take power from those who are duly elected.

We have a duty to stand tall and to protect the principles of democracy and the principles that are anchored in our Constitution and the principles that we committed to in the United Nations Charter and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

These may sound like a lot of big words to many of us, but the truth is they are simple anchors that are sure that each of us deserves the right to be heard, the right to be seen and the right to be cared for.

My friends, African Caribbean Solidarity received a new boost on the 7th of September last year when we came together for the first ever African CARICOM summit. I want to let you know that it was your president's visit to Barbados in 2019, along with President Kenyatta that allowed us as I was getting ready to chair the Caribbean community to agree that we should have that first summit.

Alas, COVID visited us on what was to be the first summit of June 2020. Ultimately became the summit of the seventh of September 2021.

My friends, out of that summit, we agreed to establish a permanent forum for African and Caribbean territories and states, and that forum would be jointly coordinated by the African Union and the CARICOM Secretariat.

We agreed also to take steps that the 7th of September shall forever be known as Africa CARICOM Day and we ask you, our brothers and sisters in Ghana, as we will in Barbados, to celebrate that day with the knowledge that those of us across the Atlantic can never be divided, not even by the forces of history or the passage of time.

The establishment of this forum will allow for us to bring about synergies between the CARICOM Single Market and the economy and the African Continental Free Trade Area. And it is significant that in both of these instances, our two countries lead the effort. In your case for the Africa Continental Free Trade Area and in the case of Barbados for the CARICOM Single Market and Economy.

We've also agreed that we should collaborate and work much closer to the United Nations because many of our objectives are the same and our mission is the same. We may have different routes by which we must get there, but if we have the same destination and then we have the same purpose, then we have a duty to collaborate and cooperate with each other.

We've also agreed that that collaboration should be heard as we raise our voices against the inequity of vaccine distribution that has bedeviled our world as if there were truly First-Class and Second-Class nations of the world.

We reject that.

We reject that.

We ask ourselves to cooperate equally on the matters of the climate crisis, and we do so conscious that each of us is affected.

You here with the same coastal erosion, whether in the Volta region or the Greater Accra Region, or with the flooding that has regrettably taken lives here in your own country in 2019 and as recent as last year in August, affecting your ability to produce food, affecting your ability to buy food because the costs continue to rise.

And now that it is compounded by the realities of the pandemic and the realities of the war in Ukraine. We expect, regrettably, that there will be difficult times, that there will be increases in prices continuing.

And I say to you, the people of Ghana, that in the same way that we have in Barbados to explain to our people that the cost of living that now choke so many of our people is regrettably not national but global in nature.

For we only need to look at the impact that will be happening soon as we get our next shipments of oil, as we get our next shipments of food, as we get our ability to negotiate, whether we can in fact get the shipping arrangements to receive that which we want to buy.

But we know that we come from a proud and resilient people and not even the combination of the pandemic and the climate crisis and the consequences of aggression in Ukraine can cause us to bow and to lose focus.

Yes, the times will be hard, but our ancestors are showing us that even in hard times, we can rise above this and hold firm to the view that we are a resilient and dominant people capable of moving strong ahead. It is for that reason, Mr. President, that when we look at the global architecture and the lack of fairness in the structure of it, we to echo your own calls and that of others that the African Union should be given a chance to become part of the global leadership if it is to be legitimate and if it is to be morally accepted by us all.

The G20 cannot remain to the G20 must become the G20 one.

For we know that in the African Union, you constitute the fifth largest economy in the world, with just under three trillion in production on an annual basis and we know that the 1.3 billion people of this continent actually have the greatest demographic dividend to be reached in the 21st century, with the largest percentage of young people on the planet Earth today to be found on the continent of Africa.

If there is to be a future for these young people in Africa, then that future must be shaped not just by those who tell us what to do, but must also be shaped by those who experience what it is to provide for the 1.3 billion people on this continent.

My friends, we stand in solidarity and in unity with you on these great issues. And I can do no better than to quote your own founder, leader and his wise words as he addressed the EU summit in May of 1963. When your president said and I quote, do we have any other weapon against this design but our unity?

Is not our unity essential to guard our own freedom, as well as to win freedom for our press brothers, the freedom fighters?

Is it not unity alone that can, well, listen to an effective force capable of creating our own progress and making a valuable contribution to world peace?

We must stand united now more than ever, and the calls to remove a member of the P5 this week only served to remind us of the absolute injustice and inequity of the P5, the permanent five in the Security Council in the first place. And that is why we say there can be no first class or second class nations of the world.

It came to a head, an absolute head when the one that was given the power to veto literally this week ensured that that veto literally made the United Nations almost useless in its capacity to save the people of Ukraine as they faced down the weapons of Russia.

We said today that it is not only there, that there must be change. We ask the world to also recognize that the international financial institutions cannot accept that two countries, namely Greece and Ghana, can go to the market to borrow money, have the same credit rating.

But Greece must be able to borrow and regrettably, at a fraction of what Ghana must now pay for the cost of capital that is and cannot be part of a fair and just world in the 21st century.

And why must change?

Because in a very real sense, even though we settled the individual rights to protect each and every one of us at the formation of the United Nations, we preserved an all colonial order of empires having the right to determine what the global community should look like.

We now know that it does not work, and we now know that the time has come to work together to change it for the betterment of the nations of the world all together, yes, but in particular for the betterment of the people of our nations who were suppressed and colonized regrettably, for too long.

My friends, I ask us also to recognize that in today's world, technology mix, geography and size almost irrelevant, and therefore it gives us that unique opportunity and certainly as we have done in the Caribbean and in my own country, to assert that the time has come to reclaim our Atlantic destiny.

That the time has come for strong strategic leadership, and that is why we have come to look to you on so many things a partnership as you have with us. I stand here today on your Independence Day to thank the people of Ghana for being able to support us in our need for nurses, with the first nine to five nurses having gone to Barbados in July of 2020.

We thank you the government of the people of Ghana for that most generous gesture.

And we are heartened that they have made a huge difference to our public health care system, so much so that we have just completed interviews for just under another 200 nurses to come to Barbados in the near future.

We thank you equally for allowing us to work together to see how we can bridge the gap of travel between our nations.

It cannot be acceptable that we must all go north to come back south when we can easily go east or west to go seven hours and 50 minutes to London is much longer than if I would have come direct to Accra.

It is within our grasp, Mr. President, to change these simple facts, to connect our people and all the more so because there are too many restrictions being placed on our people, even for the simple access of transit visas even if we want to visit one another.

We are independent and we must now shift our future truly in the image of where we want our people to go, rather than being victims of the decisions of others over whom we have little control.

I am happy that we were able equally to establish in the last year a mission, an embassy in this country to be able to promote trade, culture and diplomacy. And the Barbados Embassy at Ghana in Accra is one of our first have been established in the continent of Africa, along with our embassy at Nairobi.

That it has taken 55 years for us to have a presence in Africa is a regrettable thing that it does happen is something of which we can all be proud for it lays the foundation for greater cooperation between our people in the small and the large things that matter.

Mr. President, and the people of Ghana.

Let me say that I want to share just a few two minutes with you about who we are as Barbadians and what we stand for.

We are people who are very proud and we know, as I did and said when I addressed your parliament that we were an I speak nation in the 17th century that many of our people all their inheritance to this great nation.

And it is that spirit of resilience that you have shared with us that has come through the centuries in spite of the horrors of slavery that for us on one hundred and sixty six square miles, land means everything and therefore not just the possession of land, but the ownership of land must matter that in our country and a sense of conscience that here in the Cape Coast, education has been critical to you in this part of Ghana.

Equally, education is the bedrock upon which our nation has grown and has become more stable and prosperous.

I say to you that it is our mission to erase poverty from our landscape because poverty is a cancer that takes away from our people, the right to choose and the right to be.

And I share with you two simple things that perhaps better than I could ever say for when we became an independent nation and the president of the United States of America, Lyndon Johnson, offered to pay our Jews to join the Organization of American States.

The then prime minister and father of independence, the right excellent Harold Barrow said to him, Mr. President, where I come from. If you cannot afford to pay the Jews, you do not join the club. That is who we are as Barbadian people.

And when he went to deliver the first message on behalf of our people at the United Nations, he indicated something that has remained our motto and our bedrock and which serves us well today, even as we comment on the crisis in Ukraine, that we shall be friends of all and satellites of none.

This is a spirit which was imbued among us, and we have no doubt that that spirit owes its heritage to right here where I speak today in the continent of Africa, because that is what allowed us to keep our heads high in spite of all that we had to face.

Today as we go forward we simply use the words as I've had to do over the last four years in my country, as we ourselves face serious economic difficulties and challenges as we face the climate crisis and the pandemic.

And what were those simple words, simple, simple, simple that our children understand?

Many hands make light work, and just as we are prepared to share the burden of adjustment, always, we must be prepared to share the bounty that can allow our people always to aspire and to feel that they live as owners in their own country and not tenants in the land.

My friends, I ask us once, please, before we go, and I close to reflect on the fact that it was from this course, regrettably, that many people left.

Yes, never to return at that time, but with a wish always in our bosom that their children and great grandchildren and great great grandchildren would come back to this land.

We are conscious.

It is emotional.

We are conscious that those who put your family in those castles, those horror houses. Whether here or in gory did it because they simply did not see you, hear you or care for you and did it solely for the purpose of profit and solely for the purpose of power and dominion.

It is regrettable that those same motives are showing themselves on the landscape of the world today, and if ever there is a people who can speak out against it with a moral authority, if ever there is the capacity for global moral strategic leadership.

Mr President, it must come from those of us who are affected on both sides of the Atlantic. Those of you who lost brothers and sisters and those of us who was great grandparents and great great grandparents suffered the indignity of being treated less than human.

We have come to this point today to say to these young people who sit opposite me that it must never happen again and to ensure that it shall never happen again. We shall build monuments that you shall never forget.

And it is therefore with pleasure that I share with you today that one of your own distinguished citizens, Sir David Adjaye, has been the person responsible for designing the monument in Barbados, the country that has had, regrettably, our relationship with racism that is a blot on our history.

The parliament, which I lead regrettably, was a parliament that in 1661 passed the slave code that came to spawn all of the other laws that govern slaves in the Americas.

It is for that reason that we, the children of independence, have an obligation to build a monument such that these young people shall never forget the scars of history. And that monument shall pay tribute to five hundred and seventy slaves buried in the burial ground at Newton Plantation in the parish of Christ Church, Barbados.

We shall equally build their genealogical research center so that we can truly understand who and who is exactly family. Because Barbados has the second largest transatlantic slave records in history, only to be exceeded by the United Kingdom, who was once perhaps may not be as pristine as ours for different reasons.

The monument that he has designed shall have five hundred and seventy timber standing tall.

And we ask you, Mr. President, as we shall ask many of the other countries from where we have come and where we have gone to supply us with some of those timbers so that your presence always shall be remembered by the people of Barbados whenever they visit that Barbados Heritage District at Newton Plantation.

And simply on this last point, the discussion of reparations can never be an easy discussion.

It is complex.

It is difficult.

The heads of government of the Caribbean community have assigned me the responsibility of writing the heads of government of those European states whose governments were responsible for the extraction of wealth from our countries for centuries and who extracted wealth, I dare say from your continent and your countries do.

There are those who will say and remind us that the specter of war makes it an inconvenient time to have this conversation. But may I say that it is never the wrong time to do the right thing, and I therefore hope that we shall have the support of Africa in these difficult and complex conversations that regrettably have led to the extraction of wealth for centuries from our nations in the Americas.

Thank you, my brother.

My friends, we come to you today, conscious that we have returned, we have returned. And it is the ultimate victory to wedge against those who said that there shall be no return, that I stand here as a daughter of the Americas, a daughter of Africa, to congratulate you on what has been a magnificent display this morning by your armed forces, by your civilian persons, by the schoolchildren of this country.

And may I say, as I saw the stilt men and the masqueraders. Mr President, just as you felt when you inspected our troops in Barbados that you were in Accra.

I feel today that I am in Bridgetown at cropover over when I saw the masqueraders and I saw the stilt men move through this stadium, it is a reminder always that we are truly family.

So let us not look north. Let us look west and let us look east and let us be determined always to remove the middle man to remove the middle leg and to remove the middle passage for if we remain committed and focused on that, then I believe that we shall be the humanizing force that the world needs now more than ever.

In these great times of peril in which we live for, we will know what we must do to bring justice to the fight against climate, and we will know what we must do to bring reparations for those people who have lost.

And we will know what we must do to ensure that those in this continent and the Americas should not be deprived of vaccines at a time when other countries literally are throwing them away. As if that didn't matter for we shall know when the next pandemic comes.

How to fight it and who to protect.

Mr President, then the people of Ghana, I leave you today confident that you shall continue to light a beacon for those of us not only in the continent of Africa, but across the world. And we shall join you in holding that beacon, that everlasting fire, if only because it is the moral, unjust fire.

It is a moral and just fight that we wage, but we are equally conscious that those who live in a great cause, my brothers and sisters shall never fail.

Long live the Republic of Ghana, long live the Republic of Barbados, Long Live the Caribbean civilization.

Long live the civilization of Africa.

Thank you.