

cc All Ministerial Heads - Mr V. Crawford  
All Agency Heads  
BPN - Patterson, P.J. - The Most Hon.

IOJ

To Heads of Dept  
Mr. [unclear]  
Mrs. W. Hudson

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**2004 NEW YEAR MESSAGE BY THE PRIME MINISTER**  
**MOST HON. P.J. PATTERSON, ON, PC, QC, MP**

Once again, a New Year dawns, holding out the promise of a new page on which to record new personal and national achievements.

Our perennial problems will still require our attention and, no doubt, new ones will emerge; but our growing maturity and self-confidence as a people will equip us to face the tests that lie ahead.

**SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP**

As last year came to an end, I was truly pleased to see evidence of a new consciousness by all sectors in the society, of the need for a meaningful partnership for progress – a partnership which I have long advocated in my vision for a new and prosperous Jamaica.

When I took the Oath of Office as Prime Minister for the first time I cautioned that, "A nation divided against itself cannot stand". I also pointed to the need for national unity as a condition for "securing economic development and the well being of the nation".

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This call to unity was later extended as an invitation to all sectors to forge a formal Social Partnership. In an address to the nation through Parliament on February 13, 1996 I said: "The course that we are charting for the future development of the country calls for a **national effort** of commitment and participation if the country as a whole is to move ahead... To this end, the Government seeks to create, as a first step in this process, a Social Partnership around the goal of growth and development through stability."

And so, I welcome the new initiatives of the Private Sector and the responsible attitude of our Trade Unions as together, united in purpose, we begin to break down the barriers that have for too long stood in the way of achieving this partnership to improve the lives of all our people. It is indeed commendable that the Social Partners have come to the table with their own agenda of ideas and actions.

This new spirit of cooperation must embrace not only our immediate challenges but also medium and long-term goals for our nation's future in the economic, social and political realms.

The Government, for its part, remains committed to implementing measures that will gain the confidence of the financial markets, both at home and abroad. In order to achieve growth we must maintain stability, while promoting social mobility.

As we do so, we must all be conscious of the need to transform the conduct of our nation's business in face of the realities of a global economy.

We must pursue even more aggressively the advantages of regional integration in CARICOM, through other regional, hemispheric and international trading alliances. We must embrace the new technologies, and utilise all the tools available to us as we engage in the exciting but challenging task of nation building in this new era.

## **THE BUDGET**

From the outset, the Government acknowledged that the Budget for this Fiscal Year would be a tight package. We had to first reduce the Budget deficit and then work our way towards eliminating it.

Let me explain. We have curtailed expenditure.

Despite the high interest rates, we have met all of the country's debt obligations and will continue to do so.

All public sector wage payments have been made. Public sector workers and their unions are currently negotiating with the government, as together we seek to bring some balance and prevent the level of public sector wages from running ahead of the rate of growth in revenues.

Earlier difficulties with our foreign exchange system were overcome by decisive government intervention and the patriotic cooperation of some of the major players in the foreign exchange market. The market has recovered stability and our Net International reserves now stand at US\$1.175 Billion Dollars.

At the same time there continues to be evidence of investor confidence in Jamaica which will generate job creation and economic growth.

We will continue to reduce expenditure, while meeting our obligation to improve service delivery to the public and to maintain the social safety net for the most vulnerable in our society.

## **THE ECONOMY**

In the real economy, there are positive signs.

Our tourism sector is performing well. Visitor arrivals were up by 6.5% for the year December 15, 2002 to December 15, 2003. Cruise ship arrivals are creating new records, with current data indicating an increase of almost 25% for January to November 2003 over the same period in 2002. Given tourism's linkages to other sectors this is indeed good news.

Now it's up to every one of us to play our part to ensure that the current winter tourist season lives up to its promise of being our best on record.

Our other major foreign exchange earner – bauxite/alumina – enjoyed a very good year in 2003. All four (4) alumina plants are running at full capacity.

We are also in advanced discussion concerning additional investment in both the tourism and the bauxite/alumina sectors. Major projects including Highway 2000, the North Coast Highway, the Innerscity Housing Programme and the expansion and modernization of our sea and airports, will continue to stimulate strong performance in construction.

Agriculture too, has enjoyed a good year especially with regard to export of fresh produce, showing an actual increase in the volume of root crops, vegetables and horticultural items, resulting in growth in excess of 7% in the third quarter.

Worldwide, there are encouraging economic signs overall for the new year, with global growth forecast to be in the region of 3.9% in 2004. This, and the continued strong performance of our key sectors – bauxite/alumina, tourism, shipping and agriculture, as well as the entertainment industry - should provide impetus for growth in our own national economy.

### **EDUCATION REVIEW**

The education, training and well being of our children and youth are essential national priorities and personal passions of mine. Frankly, we are not receiving the kind of outcomes we desire for the level of investment we are making in this area. We must change this.

We have to place greater emphasis on ensuring quality, literacy and numeracy at the early childhood, primary, and secondary levels for human development and economic advancement. I will shortly be announcing the top quality team to support the Minister of Education in the very vital task of a thorough review of our entire education system. We have no more time to lose.

### **CRIME AND VIOLENCE**

Before closing, I must comment on one of the most encouraging developments that took place in our society in 2003 and which I fervently hope to see flourish in 2004. It has to do with the fight against crime and violence.

While the number of violent crimes is trending down somewhat, we are in no way satisfied that the battle is even halfway won. The recent acts of violence regrettably illustrate this. In addition to street crime, the level of crime and violence in our homes – within families – is a source of major concern. We must do better!

What is new and a source of deep satisfaction to me is the recognition by all our citizens of the need for the genuine engagement of each and every one of us in this ongoing struggle.

It is truly heartening to witness the new sensitivity, by Security Forces and citizens alike, to the delicate balance that must be maintained.

Within our Security Forces there is clearly a better understanding of the need for restraint and respect for the rights of victims and offenders. There is also a greater level of responsiveness to the concerns of our citizens.

Among our people, I detect greater appreciation of the dangers faced by our security forces, as they daily put their lives on the line in our defence and seek to maintain law and order.

The Police and the Citizenry, including the Private Sector, NGOs and Government Agencies, have developed a number of innovative ways to tackle some of the root causes of crime, starting at the community level and in our schools. We must intensify our efforts as a nation to support every initiative in this on-going crusade.

## **CONCLUSION**

And so, my fellow Jamaicans, we face a New Year, conscious that as we begin this next phase of our journey as a people, there **will** be obstacles in our way. But with our intelligence, natural resilience, innovativeness and the new mood of partnership, we will surmount all the obstacles. It is these attributes that have taken us through these many years of planning and careful implementation, as we began the transformation of Jamaica and the improvement of the lives of all our people. The mission must continue even amidst the challenges. We **will** realise our vision.

I wish for all Jamaicans at home and overseas, peace, prosperity and God's richest blessings throughout the New Year. May we work together to realize our individual and collective goals in this year and may the Almighty continue to bless this our beautiful country, Jamaica, land we dearly love.