

Barbados is a great nation and a leader in the region

BARBADOS is still one of the greatest small island developing states in the world, and is a leader in the region.

So says Prime Minister Freundel Stuart. His comments came as he addressed a host of distinguished guests, including this year's Independence Honourees, Members of Cabinet, Members of Parliament, the judiciary and members of the Diplomatic Corps, at the Toast to the Nation. The ceremony was held at St. Ann's Fort, after yesterday's Independence Parade.

Stressing that Barbados had much of which it should be proud after 47 years of Independence, the Prime Minister noted that this country had done "very, very well" over the years, and was "a respected presence in international fora", and "an authoritative and highly and respected voice in international affairs".

"So, today, we have nothing of which we can feel ashamed. There is no basis on which you can be made to feel any sense of regret about the decision those courageous ancestors of ours took 47 years ago," he told his audience.

However, Mr. Stuart admitted that the country was experiencing some "daunting challenges" at this juncture in its history, and faced some very difficult choices, because of the global economic environment.

"... Let it be made very clear, of course, great though Barbados is as a country, we're not great enough to cause any economic downturn. We are still as a nation exposed to the pull and tug of international events. And, therefore, when things happen outside of Barbados in countries far larger and far more powerful than Barbados, we feel the

effects here.

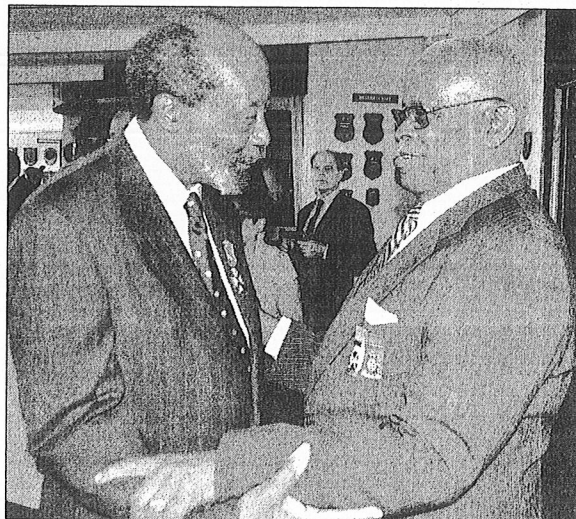
"And for the last six years, the global economy has been facing challenges which have continued to baffle and to confuse even those who lay claim to expertise, and Barbados has been able to navigate those very treacherous and very difficult waters," he noted.

Against this backdrop, Mr. Stuart urged persons to focus on the country's achievements, instead of the negatives, and reminded those in attendance that the island was ranked number one in Latin America and the Caribbean on the United Nations Human Development Index.

He said that the ranking reflected "the kind of solid achievement" that could only be registered based on the "strength of

character and on the resilience of any people". "Barbados has one of the most literate populations in the entire world. That is not going to change tomorrow, or the day after, nor was it changed yesterday, or the day before. That is an achievement that we have worked at over a long number of years. [We have] invested very seriously in our human capital, and put our country on the way to a secure future," he noted.

The Prime Minister underlined that great nations did not fall because their enemies got stronger; rather, he maintained that great nations fell because they were weak internally. Consequently, he added that "the strength of character; the values, the resilience" that have made Barbados the great nation that it is, "must be jealously guarded".



Governor General, Sir Elliott Belgrave (right), is pictured greeting 2013 Independence Honouree and Knight of St. Andrew, Dr. Sir Trevor Austin Carmichael, at St. Ann's Fort.

Mr. Stuart encouraged citizens to be united and to hold fast to the core values to which the

country had subscribed and "to steel ourselves for the challenges that lie ahead".