



**GOVERNMENT OF BARBADOS
OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER**

Address by Prime Minister The Honourable Mia Amor Mottley
at the Swearing In Ceremony
of the Members of Cabinet
and Parliamentary Secretaries

May 27, 2018

Bay Street, Bridgetown

Your Excellency Dame Sandra Mason, Governor General of Barbados.

My colleague Prime Ministers from St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves and the Prime Minister Keith Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada; Prime Minister Chastanet who has had to leave us and Prime Minister Skerrit who also joined us earlier today for lunch before coming here.

Members of the Cabinet of Barbados.

Members of Parliament, members of the diplomatic corps, specially invited guests, fellow Barbadians.

Let me begin by extending a heartfelt welcome to my colleagues the Prime Ministers for joining us on this very special occasion. It is truly, truly gratifying to us that you have chosen to take time and to spend this day with us and we shall forever treasure this gesture.

Your presence here is clear testament to the strength of the spirit of Caribbean and equally I give you my assurance that our Government is eager to restore and reinvigorate its partnership with you in pursuit of our vital regional integration goals.

Our Constitution speaks in the Barbados Labour Party to the pursuit of regional integration.

We have come here this afternoon to witness the swearing in of the new Cabinet of Barbados and to wish them God speed as they set forth to work for the people of Barbados.

We have also come here also to celebrate, with great pride and emotion, the unequivocal proof given to us on May 24th that in Barbados our democracy is strong, is resilient and is very much alive.

And so let me begin by saying thank you, thank you, thank you to every Barbadian! Thank you for standing up, thank you for speaking out, and, yes, thank you for showing up when it mattered most, to demonstrate the astounding power of your vote. Because of you, our country has just seen the most emphatic and unambiguous expression of the will of the people in its history.

Permit me to say, these fields and hills have resounded with the decisiveness of your message. You want change. You want a new direction. You want a Government that recognizes that its purpose, yes Uncle Jerry, is to serve. You want a Government that is competent and courageous enough to confront the challenges that we face as together, we begin that long walk back from the brink.

And so, finally, the new dawn is here. Collectively the people of Barbados are amazed at what has been achieved. But none more so than your new Government and your new Cabinet. We are profoundly affected by the extraordinary strength of the mandate that you have given us, and we are equally conscious of the overwhelming responsibility now placed firmly on our shoulders.

We acknowledge the solemn duty this demands of us; never to betray your trust, nor breach the sanctity of the covenant you have willingly entered into with us. For this my friends is truly a Covenant of Hope.

And it now falls to us to translate hope into action. As I have said to you before, there is no time for pause, and there is certainly no place for triumphalism and exultation. We have serious work to do and serious problems to solve. The dawn is fleeting and the soon the full glare of the tropical daylight will be upon us.

I have walked the length and breadth of this country these past few years and I have seen, first hand, how much our Nation has been battered, how dispirited our people have become. But spirits my friends can rise and wounds can be healed once we learn again to believe in ourselves, in our Nation, and in the fundamental values which have shaped us both. In what my dear friend Dr. Gonsalves has so eloquently described: “the idea of Barbados”.

Today, as your Prime Minister, I ask all Barbadians, all Barbadians, to accompany us on this journey out of the shadow of darkness and into the light. There is nothing wrong with Barbados that together, with vision and determination, confidence, and abiding faith, and discipline that we cannot make right. And I say to you, look at the sky, look at the ocean, look at the sand, look at the people, feel the breeze. Everything that is not man-made is still working in Barbados.

So we must get there if we work together, in our families, in our communities, in our schools, in our places of worship, in our places of work. We can get there with transformational policies, transformational thinking and transformational implementation.

As your leader, you know me, I subscribe to only one brand of politics: the politics of inspiration. I believe that I have shown you that I know how to leave balls outside the off-stump and I shall continue to do so.

And as for inspiration, we can if we think we can. To restore and renew Barbados doesn't require just the commitment of the 30 of us. It requires all patriotic Barbadians making a determination that divisiveness and partisan tribalism must not be allowed to destroy this nation. Must not be allowed to prevent talented people with ideas and capabilities from playing their meaningful part in nation building.

We can and we will find the common ground to build the best Barbados together for everyone.

And throughout this campaign that is now closed, I asked one night everything, for you to remember that many hands make light work.

It may be somewhat clichéd, because the truth is this country belongs to all of us, but I know that when all of you recognize that we have been given this overwhelming mandate, some became anxious at the final outcome that their actions had produced in the results given at the electorate.

I have already announced the steps my Government will take, through a constitutional amendment, to allow for the two Opposition seats in the Senate to be filled by nominees from the main opposition political party securing the largest number of votes in their election, notwithstanding their failure to secure a seat in the House of Assembly and I have had discussions with Her Excellency to ensure that we create this opportunity for their voices are heard in our Parliament.

That is in the Senate.

As for the situation in the House of Assembly, you will clearly understand that I have no legal power to remedy that deficiency of their absence, nor indeed would I wish to even try to do so, because this abundance of riches derives directly from the expression of the will of the people, whose infinite wisdom I wholeheartedly receive and accept.

But I do however assure the people of Barbados that their recent generosity towards the candidates of the Barbados Labour Party will not be misused nor abused. We have seen that it is sometimes possible, even without commanding the totality of the membership of the House of Assembly, for dictatorial and lawbreaking tendencies to emerge. I give you this evening, my solemn word that it will not be so with any Government under my leadership.

On the contrary, I have already warned some of my Parliamentary members that if I ever find it necessary, in the interest of fair play and balance, I am perfectly willing to convert myself into the most formidable Leader of Opposition to this Government. For we now have an even higher duty to contend with; to transact our legislative agenda, to conduct our parliamentary debates in such a way so as to ensure that different perspectives and points of view are brought to the floor of Parliament and to give consideration they deserve.

The absence of a formal Opposition in the House provides my Government with a unique opportunity to evolve other institutional arrangements for ensuring inclusive dialogue and participation by a wide cross section of Barbadian stakeholders in the business of governance.

These will include an innovative use of the Committee system of Parliament to co-opt external participation and input, and an enhanced consultative process with an expanded and re-energized Social Partnership, and through the structure of the proposed People's Assemblies and National Dialogues. We will also consider the introduction of "question time" where Members of Parliament will respond to pertinent queries not only by members of Parliament but submitted by members of the public.

We are deeply conscious of the example set by Prime Minister Mitchell in managing the Parliament and the country effectively in the absence of an opposition.

In short, the checks and balances function that is expected of a Parliamentary Opposition can be carried out by you, the people of Barbados. So my friends, the Government I have the honour to lead has pledged to uphold the highest standards of transparency and accountability, discipline and fairness. We therefore welcome, and encourage the active public scrutiny of our performance both in the legislative and the executive branches of Government.

And let me turn to the Executive Branch and the purpose that brought us here this evening: the swearing in of the Cabinet. You are already familiar with some of our more experienced members, and in the recent weeks have been exposed to the capacity and talent of many of the first timers.

The composition of the Cabinet reflects a careful balance between experience and youth. Its size, as I have indicated previously and upfront, responds directly to the enormity of the task we face in rebuilding Barbados, and the urgency with which the Cabinet must now act in leading the national response to and the prompt resolution of the Mission Critical issues outlined in our manifesto. Since its publication, three more matters have been added to it leading to 20 Mission Critical matters that require our urgent attention in the days and weeks ahead of us.

There will be deadlines for action and constant follow-up and evaluation. And I have made it clear and do so again, that I will be holding Ministers of the Crown of Barbados to the highest standards of efficiency and productivity. The people of Barbados will accept nothing less; neither will I.

All Cabinet Ministers, and indeed all Members of Parliament, will subscribe to a Code of Ethics that will guide us in the performance of our duties. Pending the enactment of the Integrity Legislation which we have already placed and made public since November and the consequent establishment of an Integrity Commission, all Ministers will submit a declaration of their assets in a document to be held under sealed envelope and in confidence by the Cabinet Secretary, until the establishment of the Integrity Commission.

The hallmarks therefore my friends of this Cabinet will be accountability, transparency, fairness, discipline and unity. We do not and will not subscribe to the notion of Government by stealth. As

we declared in our Covenant of Hope and I quote: “you shall always have the confidence of knowing how we as a government will take decisions and how we will act in your name.”

No Ministers will be signing important deals or contracts on your behalf behind your back, or behind indeed the back of Cabinet, or without the mandatory advice or opinion of the relevant public service professionals and legal professionals. That is not how responsible Governments behaves. There will be no dodging nor hiding from the people of Barbados nor travelling the highways incognito.

We will institutionalize the holding of regular post-Cabinet briefings to keep the public informed and up to date on all major decisions not only they have been made but where possible in the process of consultation in the making of decisions.

To further enhance transparency, we will enact ‘fit for purpose’ Freedom of Information legislation and will remove the current provisions in the General Orders that effectively prohibit senior public servants from engaging with the media. Our Government must respond to the people of Barbados.

But if we are to be a Cabinet of fairness, then we must be prepared to lead by example. And so, one of the first items of my Cabinet’s meeting and we will have two this week; the first one on Tuesday, will be to ask this BLP Team 2018 to continue to share in the sacrifices being made by our Public Servants and other sectors of society.

For the last year, as a matter of principle, these men and women joined with me as BLP Parliamentary representatives and declined to accept the 10% which the previous Government took back by legislation. We took a decision to have our back-pay and our continuous 10% monthly pay go to charitable organizations such as The Salvation Army, the Diabetes Foundation of Barbados and a number of other entities on one simple principle: that we will not accept it until the public servants of Barbados issues relating to terms and conditions are appropriately resolved in this country.

Consequently I shall similarly recommend to my colleagues a continued commitment that that 10% will not be accepted until the public servants of Barbados receive their due.

The Cabinet my friends under my chairmanship will be a Cabinet of ideas, of problem-solving and of action. But it will also be again a Cabinet of collective responsibility. I will encourage vibrant dialogue and healthy exchange of robust points of view. But once we have discussed it, agreed and decided the message we convey, we will be unified and consistent, because the country needs certainty from its Government.

Given the prevailing circumstances I know that we will have to make a number of tough judgment calls and very early in this Administration. In all things we pledge to act diligently and responsibly and to make decisions, not on the basis of peoples’ wants, but first and foremost on the basis of needs of our people, always seeking at the same time to expand opportunity and to create greater equity in our society.

And let us be real. Sometimes we will make mistakes, Sometimes we will need to change course. But when this happens, I give you the assurance that we will always, always level with you. If we act in your name then it is your right to know and to understand always, the reasons behind our decisions and our statements whatever the problems, whatever the difficulties, we will not conceal the facts unless it is a matter of National Security.

My Cabinet colleagues are eminently qualified, energized and fully committed to the challenges ahead. We are eager to work first thing tomorrow morning in the full service of the people of this country. Indeed, the situation was so urgent that we started on Friday evening and our first action was for the Attorney General, myself and Senator Walcott, Minister Straughn, Minister Caddle, to hold a series of meetings, Dr. Mascoll, to be briefed on the economy on where we are.

This has allowed us to understand, to begin to understand, the scale of the dire situation in which we find ourselves. Tomorrow morning we shall meet with the Social Partnership and as I promised you and particularly in the absence of an opposition, that I shall meet with the leadership of the Social Partnership twice a month until we have gotten Barbados back to a position of safety and stability.

And similarly, tomorrow afternoon after that, we confront the issues of our debt and foreign reserve issues to allow all ideas to contend because we accept that our decisions and our action must now be urgent to stave off the worst.

After that similarly, we meet with the South Coast Sewerage issues. I mentioned these things to let you know that the notion of Mission Critical things are not pretty words on a piece of paper but they are literally required by members of this administration, literally from their first day in office.

And as for the rest of the week, we will deal with the issues of getting buses and public transport back again. We will deal with the issues of getting garbage trucks where the country has only a handful of trucks working the country and we will deal with each and every one of our commitments starting first with our commitment to the pensioners of Barbados who we will secure the increases that we have promised.

My friends, we will hit the ground running for we do not have as a country, the luxury of time.

In my message in our Covenant of Hope I said then: “we must, all of us, agitate for more visionary, compassionate and responsible leadership from all who would govern. We must return to the values that sustained and distinguished us as Barbadians. The time for a new politics is upon us.”

My friends, you agitated, we agitated, and now the Barbados Labour Party is your Government. It is therefore up to this team to reflect these values, to become visionary, compassionate and responsible leaders that we all yearn for and with your continued support and with your joining us on this journey from darkness into light and with above all else, God’s help, we can, we will, we shall.

I thank you.