

First let me say thank you to the Honourable Peter Milliken, Speaker of the House of Commons, for co-hosting this evening's reception with the Jamaican High Commission and the Canada-Caribbean Parliamentary Friendship Group.

I would like to officially welcome to Canada the Jamaican Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, the Honourable Ronald Robinson, who has come to Ottawa to join us in celebrating the 45th anniversary of Canada-Jamaica bilateral relations. Your presence here tonight is a clear signal of the importance your government attaches to its bilateral relationship with Canada.

As a Canadian and on behalf of the government, let me say that we truly appreciate your visit.

The orderly and well-managed conduct of the recent elections in your country provides an important example of democracy in action. The fact that they went forward in spite of the damage inflicted by Hurricane Dean is particularly worthy of mention.

Canada's response to Jamaica in this context, through the provision of assistance and emergency supplies, is a further signal of the strong ties between our people and our countries.

Minister, as you will have witnessed during your visit, Jamaica is very much "alive" in Canada. Our very active Jamaican-Canadian community numbers well over 200,000 people.

We are here to mark a significant milestone. In August 1962, Jamaica first hoisted its flag as an independent nation.

One month later, Canada established a High Commission in Kingston. Today, the Jamaican flag is proudly shown in homes and offices, on T-shirts and bumper stickers right across Canada.

But many Canadians may not know what the colours of the Jamaican flag symbolize: Black for the strength and creativity of the Jamaican people. Gold for magnificent sunlight. Green for hope and for a land of bounty.

The presence—I should say omnipresence—of the Jamaican flag in Canada speaks volumes about the depth and character of our relationship. As neighbours, partners and friends.

Millions of Canadians have enjoyed the sunshine, music and beaches of Jamaica over the years, but I think this could be more of a two-way relationship. The world's longest freshwater beach is right here in Canada, and Jamaicans should feel free to take full advantage of it.