

Jamaica 50 Celebrations Blast off on January 1

Plans for Jamaica's 50th anniversary celebrations next year are well advanced, with the activities set to begin on Sunday, January 1, with fireworks on the waterfront, downtown Kingston, and at various locations across the island.

The celebrations, with the slogan 'Jamaica 50: Feel the heart and soul of a nation', will culminate in a similar manner on December 31, 2012.

'It is what we call blast off Jamaica 50 celebrations. It is going to happen as has happened over the last four to five years on the Kingston waterfront. It's a fantastic event, pulling about 100,000 Jamaicans at the waterfront,' Project Director of Jamaica 50 Secretariat, Lenford Salmon, said today (December 20), at a Jamaica Information Service (JIS) 'Think Tank', held at the agency's head office in Kingston.

Jamaica 50 is being led by a National Planning Committee, chaired by Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture, Hon. Olivia Grange, with membership from various sectors, including culture, tourism and other Government groups; the Opposition, the private sector, youth organisations; religious and civic groups and other sectors. The Committee is supported by the Jamaica 50 Secretariat, which is co-ordinating and implementing the programme of activities.

Mr. Salmon said a series of entertainment activities will take place at the waterfront event, including a praise and worship session at midnight.

'It is really to give thanks to the one above for taking us through the 50 years and to give us strength and courage to embark on the journey in going forward,' he said, adding that the programme will last until 1:30 a.m. to herald the beginning of Jamaica 50.

He pointed out that the main highlights of the year-long celebrations will be in August 2012, the month Jamaica gained independence from Great Britain in 1962.

Meanwhile, the Project Director said the planning committee has created several 'Legacy Projects' for Jamaica 50, which will last beyond the celebrations.

'The last thing we want Jamaica 50 to be is one grand big party and come 2013, nobody remembers what happened,' he said.

Among the legacy projects are the issuing of Jamaica 50 commemorative stamps by the Post Master General; erection of the Basil Watson monument at the Victoria Jubilee Hospital; refurbishing of the Ranny Williams Centre to create an Indoor concert Hall; establishment of the Marcus Garvey Park and Museum in St. Ann's Bay and the issuing of souvenir coins and commemorative bank notes by the Bank of Jamaica.

With regard to funding for Jamaica 50, Mr. Salmon said a number of companies have indicated an interest to partner with the Secretariat. 'We have a sponsorship committee engaging them in discussions,' he said, adding that the response from the entities has been 'overwhelming.'