

National Honors and Awards – The Pride of a Nation

On National Heroes Day, Monday, October 15, some 157 Jamaicans will be presented with national honors and awards, for outstanding contribution to the country's development through their service in various fields.

The annual ceremony, held on the lawns of King's House, takes on even greater significance this year, as it is being held at a time when the country is celebrating its 50th Anniversary of Independence. Persons have been selected from a wide cross section of fields this year, including, medicine, the judiciary, religion, politics, sports, science, the arts, philanthropy, community development and public service, among others. As these proud Jamaicans walk up to receive their awards from the Governor General, in recognition of their meaningful and significant contributions, many will be wondering just how were they chosen? Chief of State Protocol in the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), Ambassador Elinor Sherlock, explains that there is a nomination process and "anyone is free to nominate, who they consider to be a deserving individual." She says that nominations are open from January to March 31 each year. The nomination forms are available at the Chancery, OPM, on the OPM website, and are also sent out to all Government ministries, departments and agencies, as well as missions overseas. To apply, one must fill out the nomination forms and attach a resume and justification for the award, outlining the achievements of the individual, so that a fulsome consideration can be given to the nominee. Ambassador Sherlock says that the nominees are shortlisted by a sub-committee of Cabinet, and the list is submitted to the Prime Minister for review. The Prime Minister then presents the nominees to Cabinet for approval, after which, the list is sent to the Governor-General for assent. Under the National Honours and Awards Act of 1969, formal recognition of service to Jamaica and its citizens may be given by the conferment of the six Orders of the Societies of Honour, and the two national awards. They are as follows: Order of National Hero; Order of the Nation (ON); Order of Excellence (OE); Order of Merit (OM); Order of Jamaica (OJ); Order of Distinction, Commander Class (CD) and Officer Class (OD); and by the award of the Badge of Honour and the Medal of Honour. The Orders are the highest of the national awards, and recognise merit in terms of achievement and service, while Decorations and Awards are used to recognise gallantry, meritorious, and long and faithful service to the nation. Ambassador Sherlock says that each year, over 300 nominations are received for awards, but this year, with the nation celebrating its jubilee, more than 500 nominations were received. Moving up in class A quick look at the list of honourees announced by the Government on August 6, reveals the names of several persons, who have already received a national honour. Ambassador Sherlock explains that, "an awardee might receive a lower category of award (one) year, then get nominated for a higher award in future years based on significant contribution made further to the initial award." This is the case of Professor Henry Lowe, who is being upgraded from a CD to an OJ for his outstanding contribution to Science, in particular, the field of Nutraceuticals. Also being upgraded from CD to OJ are: late Sports Administrator, Howard Aris, for outstanding contribution to Jamaica's Sports Development (posthumous); Musician Neville 'Bunny Wailer' Livingstone, for pioneering contribution to Jamaica's musical development; and Politician Enid King, for outstanding contribution to Politics. With the exception of the OM, the Ambassador explains that there is no set limit on the number of persons, who can hold an award in any specific category. The OM may be conferred on no more than two persons in any given year and have a total of 15 living members, other than honorary members. The OM is awarded for eminent international distinction in the field of science, the arts, literature and any other endeavour. Internationally acclaimed poet and retired Professor at the University of the West Indies (UWI), Hon. Mervyn Morris and iconic musician, Hon. Jimmy Cliff, hold the honour. It can, and has been bestowed, on foreigners as in the case of former Cuban President, Fidel Castro; and Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott from Trinidad and Tobago. This year, there is only one OM honouree and that is internationally recognised reggae musician, Winston Hubert 'Peter Tosh' McIntosh. He is being recognised posthumously 'for his seminal contribution to the evolution of Jamaican popular music.' A thing of pride Jamaicans take pride in their national awards and it is not uncommon to see recipients throwing huge parties to celebrate their achievement with family, friends and colleagues. "Clearly, a national honour is the highest honour that a country can accord to its citizens. National honours take precedence over any foreign honour, which may be conferred," Ambassador Sherlock points out. President of the Jamaica Olympic Association, Hon. Michael Fennel OJ, CD, is one outstanding Jamaican, who knows the feeling of pride attached to these awards. He keeps his Certificates of Award mounted on his wall at home while the emblems are safely tucked away. Mr. Fennel received his first award in 1984 just before the Summer Olympics in Los Angeles. "The CD was for my work in Sports and Industry because I was heavily involved in industry and organisations such as the PSOJ (Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica) at the time." He recalls feeling surprised on receiving the call that he would be awarded a CD. "The whole thing was very mysterious and for somebody like myself, it takes you by surprise. You do a lot of service work in various areas and you don't do it for reward or recognition, you do it for the benefit of what you are doing," he tells JIS News. He was again taken aback 21 years later, in 2005, when he received a letter from then Prime Minister, the Most Hon. P.J. Patterson, to say he was getting another award. "There are some people I know, who have expectations, but I don't have any expectations, because it is not something that you get by right. It is something that somebody considers you worthwhile for and the fact that the Government considers you worthwhile to receive such an honour (gives) a feeling of recognition, respect and reward for what you have done voluntarily; for something you like doing and have enjoyed doing," he says. Taking it away However, with great honor comes great responsibility

and once bestowed, an award can be taken away. "Yes an award can be rescinded. This is done by the Governor-General, who is the Chancellor of the Order, acting upon the advice of the Prime Minister. If the Prime Minister sees that there is reasonable cause for an order to be withdrawn, the Prime Minister may ask the Chancellor to inquire into the matter and then the Chancellor can give approval for it to be rescinded," Ambassador Sherlock says. She outlines that notification must be made in the Jamaica Gazette so that the person's name can be erased from the register for National Honors and Awards and the insignia must be returned to the Secretary-General of the Chancery. "Also the Chancellor, on the advice of the Prime Minister may restore an honor of the Order to any person, who was deprived of this. Again, notification must be made in the Jamaica Gazette so that the person's name can be restored to the register," Ambassador Sherlock says. In addition to the National Honors and Awards, the Prime Minister's Medal of Appreciation for Service to Jamaica will be awarded this year. This is a commemorative award issued on special national anniversaries such as 21st, 40th and now 50 years. In May this year, while announcing this Award, Prime Minister, the Most. Hon. Portia Simpson Miller, noted that: "within each community are persons who, through selfless service, have been a force for upliftment and good, and I invite Jamaicans to help identify such persons so they can be given the recognition they deserve." For this year, the award will highlight contribution in the fields of innovation, creativity, community involvement and outstanding service, and made based on the significance of the contribution to the economic, social, cultural or political development of Jamaica. Source: JIS