
National Honours and Awards Recognises Meaningful and Significant Contribution

For some 40 years, the Government of Jamaica has formally recognised those Jamaicans, who, by their service and contribution, have had a meaningful and significant impact on national life.

Under the National Honours and Awards Act, promulgated on July 18, 1969, provision is made for those outstanding Jamaicans to be conferred with one of the honours of the Orders of the six Societies of Honour.

The six honours are: Order of National Hero, Order of the Nation, Order of Excellence, Order of Merit, Order of Jamaica and the Order of Distinction. There is also the Medal or Badge of Honour, which recognises gallantry and meritorious service.

The Chancery of the Orders of the Societies of Honour, located at the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in Kingston maintains the records of all national awards and the Prime Minister's medal of appreciation.

As the administrative arm, it shoulders the responsibility for processing nominations and recommendations for national honours and awards as well as arranging the inauguration and presentation ceremonies.

Chief of State Protocol and Secretary General for the Chancery, Ambassador Eleanor Sherlock, said that to receive a national honour is not something that should be taken lightly.

"It is not something that you yourself seek, it is something that...the country, the Government has seen you worthy of such an honour, so I think it is something that should not be taken lightly because it is an appreciation of what you have done, the contribution that you have made to nation building in different spheres," she says.

In outlining the award process, she explains that nominations, which open in January, can be made by anyone and must be submitted on forms obtained from the Chancery. The "forms are even sent to Jamaica's overseas missions," she says.

She says it is important that nomination forms are correctly filled in as it is the information given on the forms that is presented to a committee, comprising eight members of Cabinet, which shortlists the nominees.

"The committee reviews them and shortlists and these are presented to the Prime Minister, who then presents it to Cabinet for approval and then it's sent to the Governor-General for final sign off. The names are then gazetted and it's announced on Independence Day...but the recipients receive their instruments on National Heroes' Day," she outlines.

The Order of National Hero is the most senior order and may be conferred upon any person, who was born in Jamaica or at the time of his or her death, was a citizen of Jamaica and rendered to Jamaica, service of a most distinguished nature. A member of this order is entitled to be styled as 'Right Excellent'.

The second highest order is the Order of the Nation. This is conferred upon Governor-Generals of Jamaica or any person, who is appointed a Prime Minister, upon whom the Order of the Honour of National Hero has not been conferred. Persons in receipt of this honour are addressed as 'Most Honourable' and the spouse of the member is also entitled to be so styled. This award is not based on the individual's performance and once a Prime Minister or Governor-General has demitted office, he is still referred to as 'the Most Honourable'.

The Order of Excellence, which was created in 2003, is the third highest honour and is reserved for foreign heads of state or government. A member of this order is styled 'the Most Honourable'. This order has only been conferred once and this was to former President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki during his visit to the island in 2003.

The honour of the Order of Merit may be conferred upon any citizen of Jamaica or distinguished citizen of a country other than Jamaica, who has achieved eminent international distinction in the field of science, the arts, literature or any other endeavour.

Only two persons can receive the Order of Merit in any given year and there should be no more than 15 living members in the order.

There are also honorary members of this order that are not included in the 15-member quota. They are: Caribbean Nobel Laureate, Derek Walcott; former Chief Regional Negotiator and retired Chancellor of the University of the West Indies (UWI), Sir Shridath Ramphal; former head of the Regional Negotiating Machinery and former UWI Vice Chancellor, Sir Alister McIntyre, and former President of Cuba, Dr. Fidel Castro. Recipients of these orders are styled as 'the Honourable'.

The honour of the Order of Jamaica may be conferred upon any Jamaican citizen of outstanding distinction or upon any distinguished citizen of a country other than Jamaica. These members are styled as 'Honourable.' At age 23, Usain Bolt will become the youngest person to receive this honour.

The Order of Distinction (commander and officer classes) is conferred on a Jamaican citizen, who renders outstanding and important service to Jamaica. It is also given to distinguished citizens of other countries, who are regarded as honorary members. Members of this order are also styled 'Honourable'.

On National Heroes Day, 104 persons will be conferred with national honours and awards at a prestigious ceremony slated for King's House. Governor-General, His Excellency the Most Hon. Sir Patrick Allen, will present them with their insignias, as well as a miniature to be worn during official events.

The insignias of the various national honours and awards are on display at the Office of the Prime Minister in the Executive Building.