



Independence Anniversary Message 2003

**The Hon W. Baldwin Spencer
Leader of the Opposition of Antigua and Barbuda
and Leader of the United Progressive Party**

1 November 2003

My fellow Citizens;

Citizens by birth and Citizens by choice;

Residents and Friends;

Sons and Daughters of Antigua and Barbuda:

Today, November 1st, 2003, we observe the twenty-second anniversary of the birth of our nation.

Whatever we do this weekend, we must make time to give praise to the Almighty God for the blessings he has bestowed on our lives, and on the lives of our loved ones.

We must also give glory to God for the generous endowments with which he has blessed our land.

How sad it is that the Bird dynasty, which has ruled our nation from its founding, twenty-two years ago, so mindlessly continues to squander away our God-given blessings.

Indeed, in direct repudiation of the central presence of the Almighty in the affairs of humankind, the Bird dynasty framed a Constitutional caveat that specifically and explicitly bans any Minister of Religion from representing the people in our Parliament.

It is fitting, at this time, to reflect upon the way in which we defined ourselves when our nation was born.

Our Nation's Coat of Arms was a celebration of our land and our environment.

The Antigua Black pineapple, the sugar cane, Yucca plant, the Red Hibiscus, the sun, our sea, and our beaches, enjoyed iconic standing on our nation's Flag and Coat of Arms.

Our National Anthem called on the Creator to send us rain and sunshine, and to fill our fields with crops and flowers.

At the birth of our nation, we thus proclaimed our recognition of the land as our people's most cherished natural treasure.

For the ecology it sustains, for its symbolism in the heritage of the people of our islands, and for its economic potential, we would have trusted our leaders to accord due reverence to our land.

They have betrayed that trust.

Our economic exploitation of sun and sea and sand could and should have been buttressed through managed symbiosis with agricultural development.

This has not happened.

A myopic government, whose thrust in economic development is limited to tax collection from hotels and restaurants, and organised gambling, has marginalised Agriculture.

With its long domination, the Bird dynasty has come to see itself not only as governors, but also as owners of Antigua and Barbuda.

They have come to regard all of the country's assets, including the land, as their personal real estate, hiving off large chunks of this most cherished patrimony of any people, to friends and sponsors brandishing the proverbial thirty pieces of silver.

It is understandable why the majority of the people living in our twin island nation find greater cause for concern than reason for celebration at this time in the life of our nation.

In the most repugnant ways, the long-embedded Bird dynasty has followed the pattern of autocratic dynasties in other societies.

Throughout the life of our nation, only one political party has governed.

Throughout the life of our nation, only one family, the Birds, has ruled.

Throughout the life of our nation, the people's purpose has been manifestly incidental to the personal enrichment of insiders in the Bird dynasty.

An arrogant and insensitive clique who, except at election time, could not care less about the hardship so many people are suffering, rules us.

Members of a dynasty that systematically betrays every oath of office and routinely discards virtually all of its election pledges, rule us.

Members of a dynasty that has institutionalized lawlessness and lust, rule us.

Members of this dynasty have transformed themselves into tyrants who increasingly misuse and abuse power in victimizing and attempting to suppress independent voices in the society.

Unscrupulous politicians and their zealous functionaries, who systematically conspire to violate our electoral laws and frustrate the will of the electorate, rule us.

Leaders who are manifestly unfit to govern - and whose defining legacy is misrule and continuing chaos – continue to rule and ruin our country.

Cause for spontaneous celebration will only come to our land when Antigua and Barbuda finally exorcises itself of the decaying and corrosive dynasty that has ruled by means more foul than fair, for two generations.

Fortunately, we have ample cause to believe that regime change is imminent in Antigua and Barbuda.

Heartened by this certainty, let us ready ourselves to work together for the rescue, reconstruction and renewal of our nation.

On this twenty-second anniversary of Antigua and Barbuda's Independence, I invoke the aspirations of our national anthem in calling upon every patriotic and right-thinking Antiguan and Barbudan to commit to the People's Crusade to Rescue our country from a dying dynasty that has long ceased to see itself as servants of the people:

"We commit ourselves to build a true nation, brave and free;

"Gird your loins and join the battle 'gainst fear, hate and poverty."

Contrary to the aspirations we express in our national anthem, fear, hate and poverty are precisely the instruments that the crumbling Bird dynasty will attempt to use in the forthcoming general election.

This time, we will not permit them to get away with it.

As we gird our loins to battle for righteousness and social justice across the nation, it is well for us to again raise our voices in supplication:

"Deliver me, Oh Lord, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of evil and cruel men."

In concluding, I pray God's blessings upon you and your loved ones, and upon our beloved homeland.