



Independence Anniversary Message 2004

**The Hon W. Baldwin Spencer,
Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda**

1 November 2004

My fellow Antiguan and Barbudans;

Residents and Friends of Antigua and Barbuda:

Independence 2004 possesses historical dimensions that are diminished only by our nation's first dawning.

We celebrate the 23rd Anniversary of the birth of our nation as a significant milestone on the journey to a New Independence for the Antiguan and Barbudan people.

Emerging from our nation's deeply troubled past; Antigua and Barbuda earned the admiration of an intently watching world with our peaceful transition, last March, from government by a single group for the entire life of this nation, to a new dispensation, a new political culture, and a new independence.

In short order, the Sunshine Government has changed the character of governance in this country.

I am confident that this change in the character of governance will be demanded of all governments, for all times hereafter in this country.

We experienced liberation of the human spirit in Antigua and Barbuda, this year.

This gives the Antiguan and Barbudan people reason to rejoice.

It gives the Antiguan and Barbudan people cause for jubilation.

Regrettably, the group no longer holding the reins of government has issued calls that would divide the nation in its celebration of the 23rd Anniversary of Independence.

Such an agenda renders no service to our country.

Such attempts to create cult followings around political figures, and to manipulate such followings to polarization of the society, can only lead to tragic consequences.

We cannot afford to let this happen.

We will not let it happen.

In the face of such threats to national cohesion, it is fitting, it is timely, that we celebrate this independence anniversary as “Antigua and Barbuda – One Family”.

The Independence Homecoming Festival celebrates a new dawn for our nation with the proclamation:

“Antigua and Barbuda - One Family”.

With this sentiment of unity and love, we embrace one another, and we welcome our brothers and sisters who have come home for this Independence.

Many of them have come home to what they believe to be a new nation, celebrating a new independence.

A new independence does indeed pervade Antigua and Barbuda.

Newly liberated, and with a newly independent spirit, the Antiguan and Barbudan people are now vigorous in exercise of their democratic right to challenge authority on every score.

This new independence, ignited largely by Fergie and Winston Derrick, through Observer Radio, led, in large measure, directly to the liberation of the human spirit that came with March 23rd, this year.

Directly related to all of this, the Sunshine Government has launched a number of initiatives to expand individual entitlement, to promote inclusion, to foster national cohesion, and to shape a truly participatory democracy.

These are all embodied in the concept of One Family.

One of those initiatives is the National Economic and Social Council, the NESC.

The National Economic and Social Council involves all sections of civil society in shaping government’s economic and social policy.

Now Constituted by Act of Parliament, the NESC is without precedent and without parallel.

The National Economic and Social Council is expected to be a pivotal instrument in transforming Antigua and Barbuda into a truly participatory democracy.

The NESC is only one of the ways through which governance has changed dramatically and permanently under the Sunshine Government.

We are keeping faith with the UPP manifesto undertaking for transparency, accountability and integrity in all areas of governance.

Prevention of Corruption legislation was passed in Parliament last week.

Freedom of Information legislation was also passed last week.

Integrity in Public Life legislation will be in place later this week.

All of this changes the character of governance in Antigua and Barbuda, for all times.

These measures protect the assets of the state, which are the assets of the people, from being improperly diverted for the accumulation of private wealth.

Corruption in government is, in fact, stealing from the people through the diversion of funds that could otherwise go to social programmes.

The government's policy is to ensure that the country's resources are never again monopolised and appropriated by the politically powerful.

The Sunshine Government will ensure that Antigua and Barbuda's resources are so evenly distributed as to give every citizen a chance at a decent piece of the national economic pie.

The Sunshine Government has also kept faith with the nation in already delivering social programmes that include reduced rates for utilities.

The Dollar Barrel programme begins in two weeks.

As promised, we have provided free school uniforms for all primary and secondary school students in time for the current school year.

Free school uniforms have already been delivered for more than 12,000 of the nation's children.

The introduction of the Millennium Naturalisation Act is another delivery of the UPP's campaign undertakings.

Arrangements are in place for the issuance of Registration Forms to persons qualifying for full and unconditional citizenship under the Millennium Naturalisation Act to commence this Thursday, November 4th.

The government is working on a comprehensive Blueprint for Balanced Development.

The Blueprint for Balanced Development will designate special enterprise zones in which affirmative action geared to leveling the economic playing field in this country.

This is a critical dimension to government's drive for inclusion and balance in all areas, all sections of the society.

In the drive for inclusion, for national cohesion, we wanted all in Antigua and Barbuda to celebrate Independence as one family.

To this end, the Independence Homecoming Festival was conceived as a joyous and historic family reunion.

Because we Honour God in all we do, a highlight of the Independence Homecoming Festival is “Jubilation!”, Antigua and Barbuda’s inaugural annual “World Gospel Festival”.

The Homecoming Queen Pageant which emerged from the Community Pride Programme has generated a surge in community pride.

The Classical Steelband Concert and the Independence Calypso Competition are sources of community pride, and national pride.

The teams responsible for organizing the various events of the Independence Homecoming Festival worked as members of one family.

They turned in sterling performances.

I take this opportunity to pay special tribute to Gordon Derrick, the Chairman of the Independence Homecoming Festival Task Force for his yeoman service on this project.

Though always strapped for funds, “Banks” Derrick held everything together and made it happen.

I must also thank and everyone else who contributed to the success of the inaugural Independence Homecoming Festival.

On this point, I must give special recognition to Calvin Southwell, producer of the Homecoming Queen Pageant.

Special credit also goes to Will Dorset, the producer of “Jubilation!”

I am confident that from year to year, the Independence Homecoming Festival will grow from strength to greater strength.

In this context, I expect that “Jubilation!” will become a major annual event on the global Gospel calendar.

The Independence Homecoming Festival demonstrates what we can achieve, when as a people, we go the extra mile and move to higher levels of productivity by working in partnership with one another.

We can move our nation forward and create better lives for all, once we open our hearts to one another, and once we embrace one another as brothers and sisters of “Antigua and Barbuda - One Family”.

This, we must do today, tomorrow, and for all our tomorrows.

We extend a warm and welcoming embrace to our Antiguan and Barbuda brothers and sisters, and to friends who have “come home” for the Independence Homecoming Festival and assure you of an enjoyable and indelible experience.

On this 23rd anniversary of Antigua and Barbuda’s Independence, I call upon all in our nation - nationals and residents and visitors - to commit to working together as one family, interdependent with and supportive of one another.

There could be no better way of laying the strong and lasting foundation upon which all of Antigua and Barbuda's sons and daughters, those who live here, as well as those who traverse the globe, can work together, each endeavouring, all achieving, in building a model nation that will be a caring mother to all her children.

I extend Happy Independence Holiday Greetings to you and to your loved ones.

I ask God's blessings, and the gift of love and unity, upon Antigua and Barbuda, and upon all of her sons and daughters.

I pray God's generous blessings upon you and your loved ones.