



**24th Anniversary Independence Message from
Prime Minister the Hon. Dr. W. Baldwin Spencer
1 November 2005**

Citizens, Residents, and Friends of Antigua and Barbuda:

On this 24th anniversary of our nation's Independence, I greet you with warm good wishes.

I also greet you with deep gratitude for your continuing contribution to the development of our beloved Antigua and Barbuda.

In the year of Independence just ended, many made heroic contributions to their communities and to their country.

Not all who contributed and achieved over the past year have enjoyed the recognition they deserve.

I take this opportunity to salute all of our country's heroes.

I salute those who have been publicly acclaimed, as well as those who remain unsung heroes.

Among our nation's heroes, many have contributed simply by being worthy examples in their devotion to their families.

Many have contributed by dedicating their lives to public service and by providing care and protection to others in our communities.

Some have contributed by providing spiritual guidance to our nation.

Others have contributed by giving an honest day's work every working day.

Most have contributed simply by being good citizens.

I thank you all.

I salute you all.

As we celebrate this 24th Independence Day, we stand at the threshold of our nation's 25th year of Independence.

We are poised for the year that will take us to our nation's Silver Jubilee, which we will celebrate twelve months from today.

The next twelve months will therefore be of particular historical significance to the Antiguan and Barbudan people.

The next year will be of special significance for Antigua and Barbuda for a number of other reasons.

The fiscal and monetary measures we choose will determine how the country is affected by global perspectives on the price of oil that continue to be ominous.

Though potentially beneficial, Venezuela's PetroCaribe initiative may be several months away from practical implementation.

We will be confronted with managing our country's fragile economy in the uncharted environment that the full implementation of the Caribbean Single Market and Single Economy will bring.

The CSME will open our borders to competition of goods and services from our sister CARICOM countries, to an unprecedented extent.

This is by no means a new proposition for Antigua and Barbuda.

This country has a liberal and long-standing tradition of freely permitting our West Indian brothers and sisters to enter, work and reside here.

Under the Millennium Naturalisation Act, this Government has reduced the seven year residence requirement in granting full and unconditional citizenship to persons resident in Antigua and Barbuda on and since January 1, 2000.

The CSME will, nonetheless, be a challenging proposition for us.

To ensure the security of our skilled workers and professionals, we will have to enhance our competitiveness in the region and in the globalised market place.

We can only do this by improving efficiencies and increasing output in the production of goods, and in the delivery of services.

Should we fail to do this, we risk being a casualty of the CSME and the globalised economy, instead of being a beneficiary country.

In anticipation of the removal of duty and taxes as mandated by the World Trade Organisation, as well as by the CSME, we have no option but to accelerate the restructuring of our country's economy.

We must also strengthen the institutions and infrastructure that impact investment and trade, and those that are basic to good governance.

My Administration has already put strong institutions and apparatus for good governance in place.

The country's first Integrity Commission has been appointed, and the mandated apparatus for administration of the Freedom of Information Act is ready.

Legislation for the establishment of the Antigua and Barbuda Investment Authority is in Parliament.

The investment legislation embodies a transparent set of criteria for the approval of direct foreign and local investments.

The Investment Code that forms part of the legislation will guard against subjective interventions in the investment approvals process by public officials motivated primarily by self-interest.

On this score, I expect the population to hold the UPP administration to a higher standard of probity than was demonstrated by our predecessors.

Indeed, I sense that the population now holds all public officials to even higher standards of integrity than were demanded of the previous administration.

Quite appropriately, the bar for their conduct of the nation's public affairs is much higher now for government ministers, diplomatic representatives, officers of statutory authorities, and state-controlled companies.

To meet such expectations of the citizenry, the onus falls upon every member of the government, every envoy of the state, every director, and every officer of every state controlled entity, to be exemplars in the conduct of the people's business.

This standard calls for every such public official to take responsibility for his or her every decision and action.

There are persons in our society with a disposition to use the media harshly to condemn and criticize individuals named and implied, with unfettered licence, with no attempt at self censorship, and often with little regard for fairness and fact.

On the other hand, there are among us persons answerable to the public, with little evident inclination to acknowledge liability where appropriate, and, where warranted, to do the right thing by voluntarily withdrawing from public office.

Every person holding a position of public trust should inculcate, where it may be absent, a set of values that embrace ethics and honour, and acknowledging error and culpability, where circumstances so dictate.

These considerations are of particular relevance where public sector investment is concerned.

We are committed to the significant completion of two major infrastructural projects during our nation's Silver Jubilee year.

Thanks to the generosity of the People's Republic of China, construction of the Sir Vivian Richards Cricket Ground is well underway.

Plans for comprehensive upgrade and expansion of VC Bird International Airport are in place.

Construction is scheduled to begin in the early months of our Silver Jubilee Year.

Citizens, Residents, and Friends of Antigua and Barbuda:

As we begin the countdown to our nation's Silver Jubilee, we will be inviting the Diaspora, and indeed the world, to join us during the months preceding and following that important milestone.

I shall shortly establish a National Silver Jubilee Committee which will be charged with formulating an all-embracing Silver Jubilee agenda for Antigua and Barbuda.

One of the items on this agenda will be a "Jubilee Jubilation" which will bring together the world's top gospel performers in what will be genuinely a World Gospel Festival.

To extend the spirituality of our people in our Silver Jubilee year, Gospel selections will be included in the repertoire of participants in a Silver Jubilee Steelband Festival.

We will encourage the yachting fraternity to invite international involvement in a trans-Atlantic Silver Jubilee Sailing Race.

Twenty-five full university Silver Jubilee scholarships will be awarded to outstanding young Antiguan and Barbudans during our Silver Jubilee Year.

We will also use the Silver Jubilee activities to mount a special investment forum to showcase Antigua and Barbuda's potential for high quality investment.

Besides sampling our culture and cuisine, potential investors will be exposed to the attractiveness of investing in our twin island nation through seminars and business meetings.

An early event on the Jubilee calendar will be an official visit by the Right Honourable Owen Arthur, the Prime Minister of Barbados.

This will be the first of a series of Silver Jubilee visits by Heads of State and Governments of the region, and from other countries; as well as visits by other eminent persons from around the world.

Quite apart from the events that the National Silver Jubilee Committee will generate, there will be unlimited opportunities for private initiatives.

Silver Jubilee collectibles across a wide range of merchandise can be worthwhile ventures for small entrepreneurs.

The government's limited financial resources are unlikely to fully fund these and all the other Silver Jubilee events.

I am, however, confident that we can attract sponsors and patrons for the major Silver Jubilee events.

Citizens, Residents, and Friends of Antigua and Barbuda:

We must make our Silver Jubilee year a time when all of Antigua and Barbuda's sons and daughters, native born, adopted and resident here or living abroad come together as one family.

We must make our Silver Jubilee year a time when we put aside our differences and share the pride of a nation coming of age, even as all opinions continue to contend in the public space.

We must make our Silver Jubilee year a time when all who love Antigua and Barbuda unite on common ground to combat and defeat our common enemies of HIV/AIDS; ignorance, crime, poverty, and prejudice.

We must, in summary, make our Silver Jubilee year a time when Antigua and Barbuda comes together as a more united nation, a stronger nation, and a better place for all.

Let us prepare for a Silver Jubilee Independence Homecoming Festival that will be a celebration that will be a never to be forgotten experience for everyone with a connection to Antigua and Barbuda.

Let us work to build one another, together.

May God bless you and your loved ones.

May God continue to generously bless our beloved Antigua and Barbuda.