



**28th Anniversary Independence Message from
Prime Minister the Hon. Dr. W. Baldwin Spencer**

1 November 2009

Fellow Antiguan and Barbudans;

Residents and Visitors:

I greet you with warm wishes as we celebrate the 28th Anniversary of Antigua and Barbuda's Independence.

I also greet you in the name of the One who showers us daily with His Blessings and gives us strength, enriches us with faith and empowers us with loyalty.

Today we must give thanks to our Creator for his faithful love and His wonderful deeds to Antigua and Barbuda.

It is my hope that today, everyday and always, that as a nation we remember to sing songs of Thanksgiving to our God for His Grace and Mercy.

Our celebration of Independence gives us the opportunity to reflect on our history as a people. To reflect on where we have come from as a nation and the struggles of those who have gone on before us, with their work paving the way for us to aspire and achieve great things as a people and as a nation.

Today we acknowledge with gratitude those who are being honoured this Independence for their outstanding contributions to the building of this nation of Antigua and Barbuda. On behalf of the Government and people of this great country, I congratulate all of our honourees and wish God's continued blessing on each one.

As we celebrate under the theme, "Antigua and Barbuda - One Family Reviving our National Pride," let us all realize that national pride is not a mere emotion; it is a call to action; a call to national service. Like faith, a profession of national pride which is not accompanied by tangible action is dead - it is nothing more than platitude and rhetoric. May the shining examples set by the honourees past and present motivate all of us to strive to be better citizens and true patriots.

My Fellow Antiguan and Barbudans;

Residents and Friends of Antigua and Barbuda:

As we celebrate our nation's 28th Anniversary of Political Independence, our nation is being tested by the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. In the face of these unprecedented challenges, the words of our national anthem ring true. It is indeed imperative that we all gird our loins and join the battle.

Steering the ship of state through these turbulent waters is not for the faint of heart; all hands are required on deck; there is no room for spectators. In fact, I challenge all citizens and residents to take to heart the words of author John Renesch who boldly stated "Democracy is a team sport; it is not like going to a ballgame where you sit passively and decide if you like the players and evaluate their abilities after watching the game. We are the players, we are the team, in a democratic nation or a democratic world."

You might hasten to state that these problems are the responsibility of your government to solve. Indeed, you have elected us to serve and to take responsibility for the stewardship of this blessed country. However, each and every Antiguan and Barbudan and all those who have chosen to call this land their home - whether on a permanent or temporary basis - must join

forces to address the challenges that come in the form of this global economic crisis that has thrust itself upon our pristine shores and is threatening to reek untold damage on our economy if we do not act and act now.

Citizens and Residents:

One of the quintessential elements of independence is the willingness and ability to make difficult decisions provided that such decisions are in the best interests of the country. As a responsible and independent government, having fully assessed the challenges presented by the global economic crisis and the debt burden and having engaged in widespread consultations, we have decided to present a fiscal consolidation programme to the IMF in an effort to secure technical and financial assistance in implementing the policies and measures identified in our National Economic and Social Transformation Plan.

I wish to say to you the citizens and residents of this nation, that the programme we will embark upon with the assistance of the IMF is not an IMF dictated programme. It is our programme. It is a programme conceptualized by an independent and responsible Antigua and Barbuda.

A few weeks ago, IMF representatives visited Antigua and we have agreed in principle on the parameters of the Fiscal Consolidation Programme, however there is still the need for some fine-tuning so that the targets presented by the government and endorsed by the Fund are manageable and attainable. The IMF will therefore return shortly to conclude arrangements.

As we move forward as a nation, we will encounter many challenges. That is an inevitable element in any process of growth and development. As parents we have seen our children struggle to overcome increasingly difficult challenges. However, we know that we cannot - and should not - shield them from these challenges. We know that in overcoming life's challenges, they grow stronger; they become more independent. The growth of our nation is no different. Therefore, as your Chief Servant, I call on each and every citizen and resident to renew your commitment to this fair land; to renew your national pride; to renew your commitment to becoming a part of the solution.

Citizens and Residents, Brothers and Sisters:

Prepare yourself to answer the call to action! Your government will present in further detail the contents of the country's Fiscal Consolidation Programme during the new parliamentary session on November 30th when the Budget Speech will be presented.

Our nation has survived serious crises and we have overcome momentous challenges. Whatever the challenges ahead, we shall overcome. Your government is fully prepared to face the challenges. We face them with a positive outlook and with the determination to overcome them. If we work as a family - it can be achieved.

My Fellow Antiguan and Barbudans;

Residents and Friends of Antigua and Barbuda:

Of recent times, Antigua and Barbuda has been gripped by a spate of unsolved crimes. With these developments and with security being uppermost in our minds, your Government will redouble its efforts to strengthen law enforcement and enhance security in our state.

The law officials in partnership with the Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force will step up the frequency and intensity of street patrols, stop and search and the removal of illegal tint from motor vehicles.

I wish to commend those officers who are working diligently to ensure that there is a reduction in crime in our state. I urge all officers to go the extra mile in their call of duty.

My government at the same time recognizes that we, the members of the various communities, can do much more in addressing this unwelcome development. We call on citizens and residents to become our brother's keeper; to recreate the community spirit which was a feature of village life in decades gone by. Look out for your neighbour and report to the authorities each and every unusual occurrence within your communities. If we work as one, we will certainly record a marked decrease in the incidence of crime.

My Fellow Antiguan and Barbudans;

Residents and Friends of Antigua and Barbuda:

Our celebration of Independence is equally twinned with securing a bright future for our nation's young people.

Your government, now more than ever, remains committed to the welfare of every child in this nation. It is my government's intention to remain focused in ensuring that all citizens of this nation have access to the necessary educational opportunities to enable them to realize their full potential and to become functional and contributing members of society.

The quality of the education that is obtained and each student's commitment to diligently pursue such opportunities will determine the measure of their contribution and ultimately, the amount of economic development that will take place in this country.

We also remain committed to ensuring that the Early Childhood sector is fully developed. Much time and effort are spent in ensuring that the education received by our children is one of quality. With the assistance of UNICEF Antigua and Barbuda has been able to publish our Standards and Policy Guidelines booklet that will act as a guide for Day Care and Pre-school providers. UNESCO has also provided funding to assist with the licensing of facilities and the groundwork that is to be done in having teachers trained at the Associate Degree level in Early Childhood Education.

In our steadfast pursuit of the elimination of illiteracy your Government has implemented a number of programmes that will assist young primary school children to read and solve problems through tutorials.

Of equal importance to our policy of developing the child is the opening of the national Library. On a personal level, I have been both saddened and frustrated by the inordinate delay in bringing this project to fruition. However, I have been given every assurance that these delays were required in order to ensure that, once commissioned, the new public library will provide a safe and comfortable environment conducive to learning and research.

I am further advised that in a matter of months the Library will become fully operational. In our efforts to adequately prepare our students to attain the highest possible educational qualifications, your government will continue the drive to ensuring that the University of Antigua becomes a reality.

Already, the Antigua State College has been granted the permission to deliver the Postgraduate Diploma in Education from this year. Antigua and Barbuda is the only non-campus territory that has been granted this privilege.

Already, the Antigua State College delivers courses for the 1st and 2nd year Bachelor degree programme for the University of the West Indies. Efforts can be made to have the final year courses taught here. Even if the University of the West Indies remains the degree granting institution, citizens of Antigua and Barbuda will be able to remain at home and earn a degree. The same can be done for the degree in Nursing.

Efforts such as these are what make a country and its people great. It gives us reason to be proud to be an Antiguan and Barbudan.

My Fellow Antiguans and Barbudans;

Residents and Friends of Antigua and Barbuda:

Our relationship with the outside world must be one that will be of benefit to our nation's development.

With this in mind, my government's foreign policy has always been and will continue to be about meeting long-term challenges and dealing with the unexpected.

This is particularly true at this time when the international community is faced with various crises, growing insecurity and tangible threats at the global level, thereby putting my government's foreign policy to a very severe test.

Ever mindful that this generation of Antiguans and Barbudans is living through the fastest ever period of change in our twin-island history, my government has sought to ensure that the consistent objective of our foreign policy was and remains better lives and livelihoods for our people and rapid and inclusive economic development of the nation.

This single-minded focus on economic development becomes all the more important in these exceedingly difficult times, when the international economy is taking a merciless beating from the global financial crisis, causing great difficulties to growing numbers of People around the world. In particular, our relationships with the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Cuba and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela have proven to be beneficial to the development of our nation. Antigua and Barbuda cherishes the relationship that currently exists between us and these countries.

We will continue to promote partnerships with these and other countries in support of our development on principles of respect for sovereignty, equality and a genuine desire to effect social and economic development of all.

My Fellow Antiguans and Barbudans;

Residents and Friends of Antigua and Barbuda:

Today as we celebrate, we are also being called upon to be patriotic. We are called upon to put our nation First after God.

Our patriotism must be pronounced. It must be as pronounced as the words from the Song "Antigua Land" by Edna Bridgewater, which proclaims that our country is a jewel within the Caribbean. That all of its sons and daughters should always rejoice in that which makes us great. Our patriotism must rise in honour of, and in service to our native land - Antigua and Barbuda.

Your Government today, on this Independence Day, renews its commitment to continue with an agenda that will continue to make our land and people proud. An agenda that will ensure that the interest of our people remains first in every thing that we do.

Your government renews its commitment to building a more economically vibrant and socially cohesive nation.

We can do it only with your help.

Let us move forward together to achieve a better future for all of Antigua and Barbuda.

May we all answer this call.

May we all continue to be proud Antiguan and Barbudans.

May God continue to bless you and your families.

May God continue to bless our beloved Antigua and Barbuda.

A Happy 28th Anniversary of Independence to you all.

Thank You.