



**29th Anniversary Independence Message from
Prime Minister the Hon. Dr. W. Baldwin Spencer**

1 November 2010

‘Antigua and Barbuda: One Family, Celebrating our Youth’ - At this time of the year, Antiguan and Barbudans around the world proudly celebrate the anniversary of our political Independence.

Our friends and partners in the Caribbean region and in other nations share with us as we mark another important milestone in the life of our country.

I thank the many friends of Antigua and Barbuda around the globe, who have sent warm messages of congratulations to our people and Government at this special time.

I thank God for having spared our lives to see our 29th Independence Anniversary.

The recurring Independence celebration theme of “One Family”, introduced since 2004, is a profound indication of the united approach that is required for effective nation-building. It reminds us too, of the common bonds that we share no matter our race, colour, creed or political persuasion.

Most of us who now inhabit these lands that are called Antigua and Barbuda, do so because our forebears arrived here many years ago under very different circumstances. The delicate

interplay of those circumstances has given rise to a contemporary society that is multicultural and diverse.

The result is that the experiences of our ancestors have passed down to us today, a culture that is proud, rich, vibrant, colourful and dynamic.

The dynamic nature of our society is represented in part, by the arrival and lawful residence here, over many years, of persons from other countries in the Caribbean and elsewhere. The vast majority of these persons continue to make a vital contribution to the development of our nation. They too, are valuable members of the true family of Antigua and Barbuda.

As a family, we have much to be thankful for.

Our various national institutions and organisations, many created since Independence, continue to grow, and are providing increasing levels of service to the people of our country. This improved service is reflected in the work of the Police Force, the Defense Force, Professional groups, and our many religious and educational institutions among others.

The natural beauty of Antigua and Barbuda is still a powerful magnet for visitors who are keeping our tourism business alive and well.

Many Antiguan and Barbudans are excelling in various professional pursuits worldwide, and they are flying our national flag high, in areas such as sports, music, academics, commerce and diplomacy.

Antigua and Barbuda is a proud and valuable member of various regional and international organisations and groups. We use this opportunity to reaffirm our membership in the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, the Caribbean Community, the United Nations system, and various other fora through which we are pursuing economic alliances on behalf of our people.

At the same time, the people of Antigua and Barbuda remain positive, industrious, creative, strong and resilient despite the fact that we are still experiencing the negative economic effects of the worst global recession in 80 years.

It is said that “When the going gets tough, the tough gets going”, and that is true of the current circumstances.

As a Government and a people, we have refused to be defeated by adverse situations.

In response to the grave economic challenges, we have fashioned an economic action plan that has been endorsed by multilateral institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and our own regional institution, the Caribbean Development Bank.

On the strength of the National Economic and Social Transformation Plan and the Fiscal Consolidation Programme, which is part of the NEST Plan, Antigua and Barbuda has successfully engaged the Paris Club group of international creditors to secure a programme of debt relief.

We are building necessary physical infrastructure with present and future value to our country.

The Government continues to provide services to the public and to expand social programmes for the most vulnerable in line with our financial ability.

Antigua and Barbuda is far advanced in establishing ourselves as the Information and Communications Technology capital of the Caribbean. The integration of ICT in development planning and implementation, is integral to our strategy for moving Antigua and Barbuda forward.

A programme to make computers, Internet access and ICT-training more readily available to children and young adults, is a critical part of our plans for the development of the vital human resources of our country.

As we celebrate the 29th anniversary of Independence, we do so in the context of significant national advances in several areas including education, health care, and national security, among others.

Antigua and Barbuda has made significant progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals agreed by the United Nations. Through localised action, we are committed to a model of governance designed to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve education for all, promote equality among men and women, and empower the women of our society.

We hold steadfast to the objectives too, of reducing child death, improving maternal health, and reducing HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

We are ensuring environmental sustainability, promoting a global partnership for development, and fighting the scourge of crime and violence. At the same time, democracy remains vibrant and strong in Antigua and Barbuda.

Independence celebrations this year, follow closely, the recent Decision of the Eastern Caribbean Court of Appeal in relation to the results of last year's general election in three constituencies. The ruling, quite appropriately, closed the chapter on a protracted court action that had served to significantly divert the national focus from the necessary tasks of nation-building. Thankfully, that matter is now behind us, and our nation can move forward with confidence.

The way has been cleared for renewed investor confidence and international support for Antigua and Barbuda.

During that episode leading up to, and following, the Appeal Court's Decision, Antigua and Barbuda has so far, demonstrated to the world that we have come of age. Generally, we have displayed the maturity and responsibility that comes with 29 years of independent nationhood.

In doing so, we have set higher standards for electoral practice and political behavior in the Caribbean and the world, by raising the bar of acceptable national conduct in these matters.

It is now a time of reconciliation, healing and unity in our country. We must bury the hatchet of partisan political divisions and take up the productive plough share of genuine dialogue and cooperation.

Defeat hurts, but anarchy and lawlessness would hurt our country even more. As we reflect on the true meaning of Independence, I urge those persons and groups who may want to encourage violence and intimidation, to end those unpatriotic utterances, and abandon that destructive path.

Those who persist in such misguided behaviour, will be condemned by history, judged harshly by the people, and will be met with the full force of the law.

The anniversary of Independence summons us to shun unpatriotic behaviour and to embrace nation building.

The recovery of our economy from the combined effects of the global recession, the collapse of Caribbean Life Insurance Company (CLICO), and British American Insurance; as well as the Stanford fiasco, must be the number one national priority at this time. This is a task that requires the genuine efforts and actions of all sectors of our society.

Together, we must work towards achieving the objectives of creating high quality jobs for our people and generating the revenues required to finance improved public services.

As we face the future as a confident nation, special and concerted attention must be given to the development of our youth, who account for a significant proportion of our population.

On this the 29th Anniversary of our Independence, we celebrate in a special way, the youth of our nation. With each passing day, I am more convinced of the need to plan and implement more targeted programmes designed to harness and develop the tremendous promise of our young people.

The future of our nation lies in their hands. But not only are they the future trustees of the fate of Antigua and Barbuda, they are also important contributors in determining the shape, form and substance of the nation in which we live today.

As a country, we have to accelerate and increase opportunities for their education and training, and equip our youth with marketable skills and wholesome values which will make them responsible, worthwhile and productive citizens.

The creation of more avenues for employment and entrepreneurial activities for the young citizens and residents of Antigua and Barbuda, is a compelling mission that demands urgent and decisive national action.

The Government is steadfast in our commitment to the development of our nation. We are unapologetic too, in our resolve to do more to bring our young people into the mainstream of national development.

As indications appear that the global economic and financial crisis is beginning to abate in the larger economies of the world, Antigua and Barbuda is being positioned to experience a rapid resurgence in our productive capacity and economic fortunes.

Our people are being prepared too, to take advantage of the economic opportunities that this resurgence will bring. Hand in hand with the people, the Government is laying the groundwork for recovery.

However, there needs to be a positive national spirit and a renewed commitment to nation-building by all, in order to propel Antigua and Barbuda to new heights of individual and collective achievement.

We are one people, with one heritage forged from diverse backgrounds, inhabiting one shared space.

It is in recognition of our common heritage that, on the occasion of this, the 29th anniversary of our Independence, I salute all those who went before us in the struggle for national identity and self-determination.

Representative of the earliest pioneers, is King Court, whose opposition to slavery in Antigua and Barbuda, helped bring that wicked institution to an end.

Another towering figure, who dominated the early chapters of our political history as a modern nation, is the man who is considered to be the Father of the Nation, Sir Vere Cornwall Bird Sr.

We owe an immense debt of gratitude to him and other early pioneers of our nation, some of whom have been suitably honoured with the distinction of being named National Heroes of Antigua and Barbuda.

Other great Antiguan and Barbudans, like Sir Vivian Richards, have left their indelible mark on the nation and the world in more recent times. In this context, I, on behalf of the Government and the nation, congratulate Sir Vivian on being recently included in the ESPN World Eleven of the greatest test cricketers of all times.

As is customary, the Independence celebrations this year will involve the presentation of national awards to worthy individuals who have made significant contributions to the development of our country. I extend hearty congratulations to all the recipients. On behalf of a grateful nation, I thank them for their service.

On November 5, Antigua and Barbuda will bestow a special award on the long serving and now outgoing Secretary General of the Caribbean Community, His Excellency Mr. Edwin Carrington.

In recognition of his outstanding and far-reaching contribution to the diplomatic efforts of our country and to its economic development, as well as for his distinguished service to our Caribbean Community, the CARICOM Secretary General will be presented with the award of Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of the Nation.

At 29 years, we now look, as a nation, to the dawn of a new era of national achievements and prosperity, of which the golden rising sun is symbolic.

As we infuse ourselves with the hope of a better tomorrow, we take comfort in the fact that our predominantly African heritage has equipped our people with resilience and dynamism.

Uncertainties there are, but of this one thing we are sure: with unity and confidence, there is no obstacle too great for the great people of Antigua and Barbuda to overcome, if we are focused and united.

Our nation now needs the energy of every citizen and resident of Antigua and Barbuda, and the future summons our common resolve.

I wish for all Antiguan and Barbudans at home and abroad, a happy, peaceful and safe Independence 2010.

May the Almighty continue to bless our nation and our people.