



## **Independence Anniversary Message 2013**

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

**1 November 2013**

I greet you with warm wishes as we celebrate the 32nd Anniversary of our Independence.

I also greet you in the Name of our Heavenly Father who showers us daily with his bountiful blessings and guarantees us His unconditional love and protection.

Let us give thanks to God for His gracious and caring love and the wonderful gifts which He continues to bestow upon us all, here in Antigua and Barbuda – the nation we love so dearly.

Today, everyday and always, let us sing this song of thanksgiving and praise unto God as we go about our daily endeavours and work hand in hand in making Antigua and Barbuda the proud, responsible and respected nation which He has ordained it to be.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls,

Three months ago, Antigua and Barbuda and many of the countries within our region celebrated what we now commonly refer to as Emancipation Day.

Our commemoration of that day was the celebration of the common heritage of a Caribbean people: a people who share a common history and a unique culture. This history is shaped by a combination of various factors, including the presence of indigenous Amerindian people, European conquest and colonization, the plantation system, slavery and eventual emancipation.

Emerging from this common history and culture is what we now call the Caribbean, an amalgam of peoples comprising of English, Dutch and French speaking countries with a total estimated population of over 14million.

Our celebration of Emancipation Day is a means by which we embrace the process of deepening our understanding and appreciation for the Caribbean as a Regional Integrated Community determined to

benefit from the full potential of the contemporary realities of our current economic and social attributes in the midst of the challenges which confront us in dealing with natural disasters, world economic and financial fall outs and threats to our region as a zone of peace.

Emancipation therefore is not just freedom from the dehumanizing antecedents of slavery and plantation, but freedom to chart a course and set our own agenda for the future of all our people.

This process of emancipation is therefore an ongoing phase of our evolution requiring us to become highly responsible citizens, honest, dedicated and committed leaders and uncompromising patriots, each one of us working for the betterment of our brothers and sisters and for the ultimate benefit of all.

My Fellow Citizens,

In celebrating any anniversary of Independence, it is incumbent upon us to reflect on our origins, if only for a brief moment, so that we can remind ourselves what Nationhood is all about. For it is from that point of reference that we can honestly and objectively decide among ourselves how far we have progressed in reaching that ideal of Nationhood and self-determination which we so diligently seek.

One school of thought states that "A nation may refer to a community of people who share a common language, culture, ethnicity, descent, or history" Another perspective is that it can refer to "people who share a common territory and government irrespective of their ethnic make-up."

There is a school of thought which says that "a nation is not racial or tribal, but a historically constituted community of people;" while another states that "a nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture."

So there you have a number of concepts. Which should it be for Antigua and Barbuda? Perhaps it will be instructive to glance into our rear view mirror to see how nations originated.

In examining the records some argue that "It is an indisputable fact of life that all the races are a sub sect of one race: the human race.

Further research tells us that the origins of nations can be found in Genesis 10 of the Holy Bible. As implied in verse 32 of Genesis 10, modern man are all derived from Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Also if we check with Acts 17:26 it states, "From one man, He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live," This was undoubtedly a reaffirmation of Genesis 10. And it is clear from these verses of the Scriptures that all of us regardless of our racial lineage have common ancestors who were all brothers: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

There are several characterizations as well, but, while I accept that there are varying degrees of merit in them all, here is the one which as your Prime Minister, I wish to dwell upon on this occasion. It says that "Nationhood is the will to build social bonds of genuine collective identity, heading toward a social group based on a set of cultural elements, institutions, language, beliefs, daily treats and, of upmost importance, on the perception of a common past and destiny.

Our celebration of emancipation and our celebration of independence are therefore intrinsically linked as they share a common past and a common destiny.

Out of our emancipation came our forefather's struggle for independence.

A struggle to ensure a united Antigua and Barbuda;

A struggle to ensure that race, creed or gender does not divide us;

A struggle to ensure that the creativity and enterprise of every citizen and resident are practiced fully and freely;

A struggle to ensure that every man, woman, boy and girl is touched by the hand of progress and development;

A struggle to ensure that every citizen and resident can live a life of decency, dignity, self-respect and hope;

A struggle to ensure that every citizen can say with pride – I am Antiguan and Barbudan.

My Fellow Antiguan and Barbudans;

Residents and Friends:

The architects of Antigua and Barbuda's Independence were also visionaries for a united Caribbean.

This vision has resulted in Antigua and Barbuda possessing a demographic unlike any other CARICOM member state.

Over the years, our liberal immigration and labour market policies have given Antigua and Barbuda a population profile which is a kaleidoscope of citizens from many foreign lands including our CARICOM Member states.

Antigua and Barbuda has always been at the forefront of regional integration and we cherish the contributions made by our brothers and sisters from CARICOM and around the world, who have made Antigua and Barbuda their home.

As we celebrate our nationhood, the government extends its appreciation to those who work tirelessly to develop our twin island nation.

My government's record in ensuring that our brothers and sisters who have adopted Antigua and Barbuda as their homeland live lives of decency, dignity, self-respect and hope, is unmatched.

The hundreds of our brothers and sisters from abroad who have been waiting for over ten to fifteen years to become Antiguan and Barbudans, became citizens of their adopted homeland upon my administration assuming governance in 2004.

Since 2004, a total of 4, 519 persons became citizens of Antigua and Barbuda. This figure is outside of the over 1500 who became citizens under the Millennium Naturalization Act introduced by my government.

It is also government's intention to amend the Millennium Naturalisation Act to facilitate the children of those who became citizens under the Act, to acquire citizenship by descent.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls,

Today, as we look back at the 32 years since independence, we can all say with pride and distinction that despite the challenges of a global economy in crisis, the British American/CLICO fiasco, the improprieties of previous administrations, and the traumatic collapse of the Stanford empire, that we as a people are still moving forward – in safe hands.

Yes. As a government, we have stumbled at times, we have taken small steps when, in hindsight, big ones may have been more advisable and we have been slow in moving forward on some occasions due to circumstances over which we did not have complete control. However, we have had an unparalleled record of successes which have benefited all Antiguan and Barbudans in one way or the other.

We, as a people, have continued to make strides in our efforts to improve our economic conditions in the wake of the global economic and financial crises.

Over the past year, your Government, in its absolute wisdom, has continued to control expenditure and sought to improve overall fiscal management, in keeping with the objectives of the Fiscal Consolidation Programme.

The fiscal policies pursued by the Government have resulted in a significant improvement in fiscal performance. There was significant improvement in the overall fiscal balance as the deficit declined from 5.3% of GDP in 2011 to 1.4% of GDP in 2012. A phenomenal accomplishment by any standard.

The primary balance, a key measure of government's debt sustainability, has also improved from a deficit in 2011 to a surplus of 1.2% of GDP in 2012. However, for the fiscal year 2013 both the primary and overall fiscal balances are projected to decrease. This is due to the Government's determination to move forward with the economic stimulus aspect of the NEST Plan, under which work would proceed on several major capital projects, despite lower than budgeted revenues.

With respect to growth, Antigua and Barbuda recorded real economic growth of about 2.8% in 2012, the highest rate of growth in the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union; another mark of distinction of which all of us should be justifiably proud. This improvement in GDP is an indication that the efforts taken to improve fiscal management in Antigua and Barbuda have begun to bear fruit and will lead to further economic improvements, in the years ahead, as the global economy rebounds.

The increase in economic activity in Antigua and Barbuda was due to a growth in the tourism sector and a nearly 10% expansion in the construction sector. This growth in the construction sector is due in no small measure to the Construct Antigua and Barbuda Initiative.

There has also been significant progress with regard to a number of structural reforms. Over the past several months, a number of initiatives were initiated to improve operations at the Customs and Excise Division and the Inland Revenue Department. These include a new Customs Control and Management Act, introduction of the HS 2007 Customs Code for classifying imports, streamlining procedures for the payment of taxes, and introducing the use of electronic systems to allow payment of taxes with debit and credit cards.

In September 2013, Antigua and Barbuda concluded arrangements with the World Bank for a US\$10 million loan to finance a Public and Social Sector Transformation project. This is Antigua and Barbuda's first loan with the World Bank. The project will assist us in achieving a number of goals:

One of these is that it will strengthen the capacity of the Government in managing public policies and the public service;

It will also enable us to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the social safety net programmes, developed to protect the most vulnerable sectors of our community. This will be achieved through an integrated monitoring and targeting system, to guarantee that those most in need are the ones who will deservedly benefit from the programmes.

And thirdly, it will also improve the income and employability of the vulnerable population through temporary employment and training programmes.

Additionally, The Government is making it easier for Antiguan and Barbudans living abroad to invest in the country. Under the Antigua and Barbuda Investment Authority's Diaspora Investment Partnership Program, Antiguan and Barbudans living abroad will receive a waiver of the Revenue Recovery Charge (RRC) when importing approved Construct Antigua and Barbuda Initiative building materials. This is in addition to concessions granted to investors.

The pace of economic recovery in Antigua and Barbuda will depend largely on economic development in major advanced economies especially in the EURO region and the United States.

Given the small size of our economy, its openness, and our resultant dependence on our major trading partners, it is imperative that we remain on the path of fiscal consolidation to make sure that we continually position ourselves to benefit from the eventual improvement in world economic conditions.

At the same time, the Government will continue to develop and implement programmes that stimulate economic activity and provide economic and social relief to the population.

Fellow Citizens, Residents and Friends:

Permit me to turn my attention at this juncture, to the dreams and aspirations of those who make up the youth population of our beloved country. It is in their caring hands that the future of our nation lies.

It is their inalienable rightful expectation of a society which caters for their intelligence, their wealth of knowledge, their energy, their needs their creativity and their youthfulness.

Our celebration of Independence must be seen as a call for us to work towards ensuring that our nation's young people have a bright and productive future.

The celebrations, particularly those activities that involve our children, teens and youth, not only give us a sense of pride in the future of our country, but they are a reflection of the vision that we have for the future of the nation.

When we plan for our young people, we envision a future that is secure with a cadre of educated and well-trained professionals. That is why the government remains committed to ensuring that the greatest number of our young people is given the opportunity to gain university level education. Our future will be secure if our vision for the future is paralleled with our programmes and policies.

It is your government's pledge to continue our social programmes for our young people ranging from the school uniform and school meals programmes, the Cadet initiative, the computer tablets and 4GLTE Broadband internet programmes under the GATE enterprise, to our scholarship agenda.

Our Leadership through Excellence Award Programme (LEAP) and the Work Experience Programme have seen successes. In the Leap Programme, young graduates are given a three-month attachment to a Ministry, Department or Agency within Government. During their three month attachment the participants are mentored and exposed to the operations of the Public Sector. Each LEAP candidate receives a monthly stipend and is eligible for a \$5000 award upon successful completion of the programme.

The Work Experience Programme, operated through the Ministry of Labour also provides on the job training and development for our young people with the option of full employment after their period of attachment.

In addition, government in collaboration with Petro Caribe Antigua and Barbuda Limited, will introduce in the coming weeks an Enterprise Achievement Challenge (EACH) programme that will target non-skilled to low-skilled persons in the age range of 16 to 35 years who are citizens of Antigua and Barbuda.

Enterprise Achievement Challenge (EACH) is a full time 21-week programme, 20 weeks of which will comprise attachments to expert practitioners across fifteen trades for a fifteen to twenty-four hour work-week.

The trainees will be under the guidance of the expert practitioners who will be evaluating them over the period. Additionally, trainees will be exposed to in-class sessions dealing with understanding basic contracts; basic money management for business purposes; business communication and customer service; and ethics.

The programme focuses not only on skills transfer, but also laying the framework for a more professional work culture, opportunities for skills development for the labour market and self-employment.

Training will be focused in areas such as auto body repair, carpentry, electrical wiring, clothes making, plumbing, refrigeration, small engine repair, welding and horticulture and landscaping.

As a government, we do all of this with a vision for the welfare and well-being of our young citizens and a vision for their future and those of generations to follow. We remain focused, consistent, committed

and full of passion in pursuing our vision for the nation and enhancing the quality of life of each and everyone.

Fellow Citizens, Residents and Friends:

Over the past nine years, Your Government has remained focused on the immense possibilities which reside in the intellectual prowess and capacity of our young people and in particular their inescapably indispensable role in nation building; It is against this background that our policies and programmes have been so clinically aligned with maximizing the potential of the greatest number of our young people.

Our education agenda has been superior and has been the envy of many.

On September 2nd this year, Antigua and Barbuda achieved Universal Secondary Education enabling an environment that is all embracing, fair and just. All students who completed primary education in Grade 6, now automatically move on to secondary school.

On our sister island of Barbuda, with the aide of the Caribbean Development Bank, work will commence, on the Sir McChesney George Secondary School for additional classrooms and specialized rooms to meet the challenges of Universal Secondary Education..

Work will also commence on the expansion of the Irene B. Williams Secondary and the St. Mary's Secondary Schools. In addition, government will break ground later this month for the construction of a Secondary school in Five Islands to be funded by the Government of the People's Republic of China. Another ceremony will take place shortly for another secondary school to be constructed in Tomlinson's.

Government is convinced that Universal Secondary Education will enhance the social and economic development of Antigua and Barbuda as more young people will have access to secondary education and will be able to make meaningful contributions to nation building.

Advancements were also achieved this year in Universal Early Childhood Education with the opening of four pre-school classes with the assistance of the Mill Reef Fund, the Board of Education and the Public Works Department. Government will continue to replicate these pre-school classes until we are satisfied that the greatest number of our young citizens have access to quality early childhood education.

Government is also cognizant that quality education to a great extent is derived from quality teachers, therefore, teachers will continue to receive training with emphasis being placed on primary school teachers and teachers in the secondary school system with first degrees.

The Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda also recently signed on to the Agreement that will allow the reclassification of teachers to come on stream in 2014. This initiative will guarantee that our teachers are adequately paid for their efforts.

With over ten million dollars spent this year in the granting of scholarships to our young people for tertiary level education through the Board of Education, the National Student Loan and the Prime

Minister's Scholarship Programme, government remains on course to guarantee that we meet the guidelines set by the OECS Education Strategy for training of the nation's youth.

Our strategy is one whereby we do not only seek just functional literacy in Antigua and Barbuda, but good quality education – accessible, equitable and available to every boy and girl who requires an education.

On our present path, education will undergo a major revolution to make certain that Antigua and Barbuda becomes a fully educated, modern, progressive nation.

One way of accomplishing this is to continue providing the thousands of students and teachers with the modern tools and services in technology. With the aide of our partners such as Digicel, LIME and iNet, we will continue to equip our young people to be on par with technological developments around the globe.

We will also continue our massive programme of granting scholarships to qualified students, particularly those who would not ordinarily because of their economic circumstance afford tertiary level education.

Your Government is, and I know that you yourselves are particularly pleased with our track record in scholarship allocations to our young people. In medical training, Government with the assistance of the Caribbean Accreditation Authority for Education in Medicine and other Health Professions, secured a three year accreditation in the first instance from the National Committee on Foreign Medical Education and Accreditation in the United States for the American University of Antigua – School of Medicine.

This paves the way for more Antiguan scholarships to be granted at this university and facilitates students accessing US student loans to attend AUA.

This new development means continued economic viability for the university and in turn means continued and enhanced financial input in our economy.

The progress in education over the past nine years is indelible testimony that your government remains committed to the development of our young people, empowering them with the tools necessary for sustainable economic development.

Education remains on a structured and dedicated course and in safe hands.

Fellow Citizens, Residents and Friends:

Independence and development could mean very little to those who are not touched by the hand of progress.

However, the greatest deterrent to progress is crime.

Security of our people remains paramount on the government's agenda. It is our pledge to continue to improve on our efforts to strengthen the capabilities of our law enforcement bodies.

In this regard, progress is being made to acquire and install CCTV cameras across the state with concentration in vulnerable areas in St. John's. This will be realized in a matter of weeks.

Business owners can now obtain duty free concessions on closed circuit television cameras and burglar alarm systems. This is in addition to the initiative announced for homeowners.

The Crime Task Force established earlier this year will have an extension of its mandate to achieve the reduction in gun related crime and the effective execution of search warrants.

To further augment the crime fighting capability of the police force, seventy new recruits joined the Royal Police Force and the Fire Service following an extensive training session. Preparations are on the way for the selection of new recruits for training. Twenty-five new prison wardens also commenced training recently as part of the crime management programme being implemented by the Ministry of National Security.

Throughout the year, the crime fighting measures of the force have resulted in a reduction in crime on the sister island of Barbuda.

In 2012, there was a 36% decrease: from 58 reported in 2011 to 37 reported crimes in 2012. The figures for 2013 so far show that the decline trend is continuing.

The successes recorded by law enforcement agencies in fighting crime can be further improved with the assistance of citizens and residents.

All citizens and residents are therefore urged not only to do all within your power to legally protect yourselves and property but also to provide assistance to law enforcement personnel in their quest to fight crime.

If we work as one, we will certainly record a marked decrease in the months and years ahead.

Fellow Citizens, Residents and Friends:

Your government remains committed to the economic, social, political and educational empowerment of our people.

Your participation in the recently conducted re-registration process not only highlights the uniqueness of our democracy, but it remains a constant symbol of our independence - Your right to choose a government that keeps the nation in safe hands.

Within four months you would have exercised your right to choose a government that continues to keep Antigua and Barbuda's flag flying high and continues to maintain a good name for our Nation among the committee of nations;

Within four months you would have exercised your right to ensure that businesses continue to function in a state of independence without threats and shakedowns;

Within four months you would have exercised your right to ensure that Antigua and Barbuda continues to be blessed with a government that remains steadfast in its commitment to the economic development of our nation.

As responsible members of the electorate, we have a responsibility to ensure that our nation's future remains on a firm footing and in safe hands for our children's future.

This anniversary of Independence summons us to abhor and reject unpatriotic behaviour and to embrace nation building in the interest of our nation's future.

The economic recovery which our nation is now beginning to experience following the still lingering global meltdown, the damaging effects of which no country was spared, and the negative repercussions brought upon us as a Nation by the CL Financial and Stanford disasters, must be seen by all of us as a clarion call. It imposes a demand on all of us to be aggressively and intelligently proactive and to grab hold of the wide range of opportunities now being placed at our door step by your Government for the continuing journey toward self determination and sustainable economic development.

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 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.

In our quest for a caring, sharing and an inclusive society, we must develop the spirit of good neighborliness with every man, woman, boy and girl within our society. Our strength lies in our unity in diversity.

Our strength is in our unity, despite our diversity. It is that unity which gave us our Independence. It is that unity that gives us our strength as a nation.

This was the dream of our founding fathers. This is the vision of our Constitution. We should not move away from this vision, and must face the future with courage.

Let there be no doubt in anyone's mind that Your Government is firm in its resolve to continue to develop this nation of ours.

Let us all come together and work resolutely as one family for the welfare of our people and for the development of our nation.

I wish you and your loved ones a truly enjoyable Independence celebrations, and God's bountiful blessings, as you join your Antiguan and Barbudan sisters and brothers at home and around the world in celebrating our nation's 32nd Anniversary of Independence.

May God Bless you and May God Bless Our Nation.