

Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States Secretariat

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Communiqué

39th Meeting of the OECS Authority

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Conference Room
Kingstown,
St. Vincent and the Grenadines
20-21 May 2004

INTRODUCTION

The 39th Meeting of the Authority of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Conference room in Kingstown, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, May 20-21, and was presided over by the Chairman of the OECS Authority, Prime Minister Dr. Kenny Anthony of St. Lucia.

Heads of Government and other Heads of Delegation in attendance were:

Hon. Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda
Dr. the Hon. Keith Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada
Hon. John Osborne, Chief Minister of Montserrat
Hon. Dr. Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis
Dr. the Hon. Kenny Anthony, Prime Minister of St. Lucia
Dr. the Hon. Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines
Hon. Osborne Fleming, Chief Minister of Anguilla
Hon. Osborne Reviere, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Dominica
Mr. Otto O'Neal, Director of Planning and Statistics, British Virgin Islands

The Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) was represented by the Governor Sir Dwight Venner and the CARICOM Secretariat by the Assistant Secretary General Ambassador Colin Granderson.

Opening Ceremony

The Opening Ceremony was held at the Peace Memorial Hall in Kingstown, on the evening of May 19th, with presentations by the Director General Dr. Len Ishmael, recently elected Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda Hon. Baldwin Spencer; host Prime Minister Dr. the Hon.. Ralph Gonsalves of St. Vincent and the Grenadines; and outgoing Chairman of the OECS Authority Chief Minister the Hon. John Osborne of Montserrat.

The ceremony also included the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between OECS Heads of Government and Delegations and the Government of Puerto Rico. Secretary of State of Puerto Rico, Hon. Jose M. Izquierdo Encarnacion signed on behalf of his government. The parties reaffirmed their desire and commitment to strengthen the bonds of cooperation between their respective countries.

The Ceremony was followed by a reception at the Prime Minister's official residence at which the Puerto Rican delegation presented the OECS Director General with one of their country's highest awards, the Medal of Merit of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

OECS Secretariat Financial Matters

The Authority reviewed the financial position of the Secretariat. Member States reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring the financial viability of the Organisation, and to meeting their obligations in a timely and satisfactory manner.

The Authority approved the new programme budgeting format introduced by the Secretariat for the 2004/2005 financial year, and complimented the Secretariat for this initiative. The Organisation's budget for 2004/2005 was approved.

Economic Integration Issues

The Authority noted that a Technical Committee had been established to examine and recommend new Treaty arrangements for the OECS sub-regional integration movement.

Heads of Government also noted a paper on design elements for governance under the proposed economic union and received an update on the constitutional reform initiative underway in Member States.

The Authority agreed to the convening of a meeting of the Prime Ministerial Sub-Committee on Economic Union to further guide the work of the Technical Committee and relevant consultants.

The Heads of Government reviewed the findings and recommendations of a Report on the OECS Prison Service and agreed that this report will be considered at the next meeting of the OECS Authority.

The Authority reviewed presentations on the proposed OECS Passport from the key suppliers of passports to Member States.

Legal Matters

The Authority reviewed the status of Judicial and Legal Reform initiatives and other legal programmes being implemented by the Secretariat. These include areas of local government, and the harmonization and reform of a wide range of legislation.

External Economic Negotiations

The Authority considered the need for the OECS sub-region to strengthen its diplomatic involvement in the area of external trade negotiations.

The Heads agreed to the recommendations of a Committee under the Chairmanship of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in relation to more effective participation by OECS Member States in this important area.

The Authority agreed that a meeting of OECS Foreign Ministers and officials should be convened to develop and refine OECS core positions.

The Authority discussed the implementation of the CSME. These issues will be further considered at the upcoming Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of CARICOM.

The Heads of Government noted Member States' concerns about the future of Article 56 industries in OECS countries within the framework of the Revised Treaty of Chagaramas.

The Authority noted Antigua and Barbuda's successful challenge within the World Trade Organisation, to United States' measures on Internet gaming.

The Heads of Government noted that status of OECS negotiations in the WTO, FTAA and EPA/EU.

The Authority noted the progress being made for the establishment of an OECS Mission in Geneva by 1st July this year.

Banana Conference

Heads endorsed plans for the holding of an international banana conference in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, June 8th to 10th 2004.

Oil Prices

Member States expressed their deep concern over rising oil prices, and signaled that they may have to consider a review of energy prices at this time. They recognized that any increase in energy prices would pose serious threats to the economic recovery of the sub-region and that this in turn would impact negatively on their capacity to compete effectively in the international market place.

The Authority agreed to the establishment of an OECS Task Force on Energy Policy which will advise on, among other things, effective energy conservation management, alternative energy sources, and reform of the sector.

Economic Development Issues

The Authority noted a report from the inaugural meeting of the OECS Council of Tourism Ministers.

The Authority approved the commissioning of a study on ground transportation arrangements for cruise ship passengers.

Heads welcomed the participation of Saba, St. Martin and St. Eustatius in Meetings of the Council of Tourism Ministers.

Development Strategy

The Authority received an update on the OECS Development Strategy. Heads agreed that the OECS Development Charter should be laid before national parliaments.

Bird Rock

Heads of Government in their deliberations on this matter agreed to issue the following statement:

“The OECS Authority reiterates its concern regarding the acceptance of Bird Rock as an island by several jurisdictions in the region and the claim of Venezuela thereto, in that context.

The Authority continues to be concerned about the implications of this claim for the territorial waters and the integrity of the territorial zone of OECS Member States, individually and collectively based on customary international and the relevant legal instruments, including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

In the meantime, OECS Member States call on Venezuela to refrain from any action which violates the spirit and letter of the international agreement which relate to this matter.”

OECS Business Forum

The Authority received an update on arrangements for the establishment of an OECS Business Forum and noted the creation of the OECS Private Sector Organisation as the representative body for the business community in the OECS sub-region.

Social and Sustainable Development Issues

Learning Network

The Authority endorsed the work of the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network (CKLN) to utilize cost effective satellite technology to bring greater educational opportunities to the OECS and the wider Caribbean.

OECS School System

The Authority noted a study on the performance level of schools in the OECS and agreed that this report should be given special and further consideration by Ministers of Education and the next Meeting of the Authority.

OECS Civil Aviation Authority

Heads agreed to the urgent passage of updated Civil Aviation legislation to ensure that Member States fully meet their international obligations.

Refugee Situation

Member States expressed their concern over the growing number of OECS nationals seeking refugee status in Canada and will engage in all efforts necessary to redress this issue.

Haiti

The Authority engaged in free and open discussions on the issue of Haiti. The Authority wishes to urge the administration of Haiti to engage in confidence building measures geared at returning Haiti to the democratic fold.

Sudan Crisis

The Authority noted the human tragedy occurring in Sudan and called on the international community and the United Nations to give urgent consideration to resolving this unacceptable situation.

Next Meeting

The next Meeting of the OECS Authority will be held November 11th – 12th 2004.