

ORGANISATION OF EASTERN CARIBBEAN STATES

COMMUNIQUE

43rd Meeting of the OECS Authority

21-23 June 2006

**Marriott Resort
St. Kitts and Nevis**

INTRODUCTION

The forty-third Meeting of the Authority of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) was held June 21st to 23rd at the Marriott Resort in St. Kitts and Nevis, under the Chairmanship of the Hon. Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda. The Meeting was preceded by a number of significant events held in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Basseterre, which established the OECS on June 18th 1981.

Heads of Government and Representatives of Heads of Government in attendance were:

Hon. Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda.

Hon. Roosevelt Skerritt, Prime Minister of Dominica.

Hon. Dr. Keith Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada.

Dr. Hon. Lowell Lewis, Chief Minister of Montserrat.

Dr. Hon. Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis.

Hon. Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Hon. Osborne Fleming, Chief Minister of Anguilla.

Dr. Hon. Orlando Smith, Chief Minister of the British Virgin Islands.

Senator Hon. Petrus Compton, Minister of External Affairs, International Trade and Civil Aviation of St. Lucia.

THE OPENING CEREMONY

The Opening Ceremony was held on Wednesday June 21st at the Cecil Jacobs auditorium at the headquarters of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB). A special welcome was extended to the new Chief Minister of Montserrat Dr. the Hon. Lowell Lewis who was attending his first Meeting of the OECS Authority since his election to office on May 31st 2006. As part of the ceremony, the new OECS Economic Union Treaty was

unveiled. The Treaty will facilitate the further deepening of the OECS integration movement through the creation of an OECS Economic Union.

Declaration of Intent

The unveiling of the Treaty was accompanied by the signing by Heads of Government of a Declaration of Intent to have the Treaty implemented in their respective territories following a year of public consultations.

Following is the Text of the Declaration of Intent.

DECLARATION OF INTENT BY HEADS OF GOVERNMENT OF THE OECS ON THE PARTICIPATION OF THEIR COUNTRIES IN THE OECS ECONOMIC UNION

WE, the Heads of Government of the Member States of the OECS meeting in St. Kitts on the 21st day of June 2006 who have affixed their signature hereunder;

***RECALLING** that the decision to strengthen cooperation between our respective states and peoples and establish common institutions is enshrined in the Treaty of Basseterre of 1981;*

***CONVINCED** that continued social and economic development in a challenging global environment requires greater cooperation and collaboration in the elaboration and execution of development policies for the benefit of all our peoples;*

***RECOGNISING** that the benefits realized under the Treaty of Basseterre will be enshrined through establishment of an Economic Union;*

***DETERMINED** that the benefits of cooperation resulting from an Economic Union should be shared equitably among all our members;*

***MINDFUL** that our States while being an integral part of CARICOM are a distinct group with special shared peculiarities of an economic and social nature;*

***NOW SOLEMNLY AFFIRM** our commitment to the establishment of an OECS Economic Union by 1st July 2007.*

New OECS Flag

The Opening Ceremony was immediately preceded by a Special Flag raising ceremony to raise the first ever OECS Flag. The flag was designed by Present Image Design Limited, a Total Identity Development and Image Management Company, located in St. Lucia. Representatives of the designers were acknowledged and acclaimed during the event. The

design concept of the flag and the colour scheme represent a positive celebration of the sub-region, while projecting the OECS as a meaningful and increasingly strong voice within the Caribbean sea, and its insertion into the world.

Opening Addresses

The Opening Ceremony was addressed by several speakers:

OECS Director General Dr. Len Ishmael.

Dr. the Hon. Denzil Douglas, Prime Minister of host country, St. Kitts and Nevis.

Dr. the Hon. Lowell Lewis, Chief Minister of Montserrat and the newest OECS Head of Government.

Hon. Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and outgoing Chairman of the OECS Authority.

Hon. Baldwin Spencer, Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda and incoming Chairman of the OECS Authority.

MEETING WITH THE OAS

Heads of Government engaged in wide ranging discussions with the Secretary General of the Organisation of American States (OAS) His Excellency Jose Miguel Insulza. Discussions covered issues related to funding of OAS scholarships, restoration of democracy in Haiti, initiatives for further engagement of Cuba by the rest of the OAS, and assistance with building codes policy, disaster planning and mitigation. A meeting of the OECS Secretariat and OAS officials will be undertaken soon to establish a work programme at the regional level.

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR GENERAL

The Authority welcomed the annual report presented by the Director General on the work of the Organisation. The report outlined the status and achievements of key programmes and projects being undertaken by the Secretariat including:

- The CIDA funded OECS institutional strengthening project which is expected to strengthen the operational and administrative capacity of the Secretariat to fulfill its mandates and functions in support of the development objectives of its Member States.
- A UNDP funded project to strengthen the capacity of the Social Policy Unit to provide technical advisory services and guidance to governments in key areas of social protection, social services delivery, and social policy formulation in an effort to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable human development.

- An OECS Programme for Sustainable Oceans Governance which will equip Member States with the requisite understanding, information and capacity in the sustainable management and protection of their maritime boundaries, as well as maritime resources.
- The OECS Disaster Response and Risk Reduction project which helps Member States strengthen their capacities and efforts to undertake macro-economic and social assessments of the effects of disasters on the performance of their economies.
- The HIV/AIDS project, funded by a grant from the Global Fund to provide universal access to antiretroviral medications and to improve the productivity, quality of life of those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

The Meeting;

- Supported the efforts of the Secretariat to increase efficiency and effectiveness, and
- Endorsed structural changes outlined to increase the relevance of the Secretariat to the needs of Member States and build confidence in the donor community.

The Meeting welcomed an offer by the Secretariat to visit Montserrat and assist the new Administration of Chief Minister Dr. the Hon. Lowell Lewis with the elaboration of the development programme of the new Administration, in response to a request from the Chief Minister.

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

The Treaty on Economic Union

The Meeting received a presentation on the OECS Economic Union Treaty from the Task Force on Economic Union. The Meeting commended the excellent work of the Task Force to date, and generally accepted the proposed Treaty as developed to this point. The Authority however directed that some additional provisions be formulated to allow for a role for national parliamentary representatives in the form of a regional Assembly of Parliamentarians comprising representatives of government and opposition in the Member States. This body, it was felt, was necessary to act as a legislative filter to the Authority in its law making capacity. The Heads further directed that the Treaty be reviewed by a meeting of members of the Task Force, Attorneys General, the drafts-person for the Treaty and representatives of the OECS Secretariat. The Meeting agreed that the Treaty should be taken to the OECS public, following the steps indicated above, through a mass national and regional education programme with strong political leadership and direction. In their discussions on this matter, it was recognized that steps should be taken to ensure recognition of the OECS Economic Union Treaty under the

Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. Note was taken of the fact that the original Treaty of Chaguaramas had formally recognized the Treaty of Basseterre, but that this was omitted in the Revised Treaty.

EASTERN CARIBBEAN SUPREME COURT

Heads approved the budget of the Supreme Court, and took a decision to enhance the provision of security to judges. The Authority also took a decision to review the age of retirement of judges. The Authority also discussed the pilot project being proposed for the BVI for the establishment of a Court to handle commercial cases.

CSME/REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND

OECS Heads reaffirmed their commitment to sign accords which will give effect to their entry into the CSM by 30 June. In this regard they had been of the view that their Regime of Alien Lands Holding Licence, relative to the access to land by CARICOM nationals had been in compliance with the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. It had now been brought to their attention that there were a few residual matters still to be determined. OECS Member States will be fully CSM compliant as soon as these are addressed. Heads indicated their desire to have these matters resolved soonest so that they could give effective expression to their commitment to the CSME. They also concluded that, though the Regional Development Fund has not yet been established as required by the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, they were satisfied that sufficient progress has been made in that regard, to enable them in good faith to give the necessary expression to their commitment to the CSME.

PETRO CARIBE

The OECS Authority is determined to move expeditiously to ensure that the benefits of PetroCaribe accrue to the sub-region as soon as possible. A mission to move this matter forward was recently undertaken by the Prime Ministers of St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Dominica. A meeting of the OECS Task Force with Venezuelan counterparts is being planned within the next two weeks to resolve all outstanding matters with regards to implementation of the initiative.

MARITIME BOUNDARY DELIMITATION

A high level meeting between Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the OECS, and their counterpart from Venezuela has been mandated by the Authority and President Chavez to start the process of maritime boundary delimitation between the OECS and Venezuela as the former commence the process of defining its maritime space under the proposed Economic Union Treaty.

FUNCTIONAL COOPERATIVE ACTIVITIES

The Authority took the decision to establish Memoranda of Understanding between the OECS and several neighbouring states in a bid to provide more structure and coherence to functional cooperation activities between the OECS and its neighbours. These include Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Jamaica, Cuba and Venezuela. The Authority has also decided to follow through with proposals to utilize opportunities at the University of Puerto Rico for two to four year degree programmes in various fields.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Trade Negotiations

The Meeting accepted the recommendations and endorsed the proposals arising from the meeting of Ministers of Trade. In particular, the Meeting agreed on the utility of a review by the region of the generality of its stance on non-reciprocity in trade agreements. The Meeting noted the renewed energy and urgency of the developments regarding the WTO negotiations in Geneva and agreed that these should be carefully followed and monitored by the OECS.

The Meeting also noted the difficulties of the EPA negotiations, especially with regards to the development dimensions of those negotiations, and underscored the critical importance of this aspect of the negotiations to the OECS. The Meeting agreed that this must inform the stances taken by the OECS in these negotiations.

Demand and Supply of Cement

The Authority endorsed a proposal from the meeting of OECS Ministers of Trade to seek the removal of restrictions on the importation of cement through appropriate changes to the CARICOM CET. The decision comes in response to the critical shortages of cement now being experienced and the attendant negative consequences on development in the OECS. Further there were complaints from the OECS construction sector about the reliability of quantity and quality of supplies from the regional producers

Committee of Heads of Bureaux of Standards

The Meeting accepted the recommendations of Ministers of Trade on a request from the OECS Bureaux of Standards, on the establishment of a Committee of Heads of Bureaux of Standards within the institutional framework of the OECS, with no additional cost to Member States.

Tourism

The Authority endorsed recommendations from the third Meeting of the OECS Council of Tourism Ministers, including improvement to tourism statistics, the development of a joint marketing programme, a study into the feasibility of an Eastern Caribbean tourism brand, establishment of an OECS School of Diplomacy and studies into development of harmonized tourism incentives and standards legislation.

Agriculture

The Authority mandated that an early meeting of OECS Ministers of Agriculture be convened to review the OECS Plan of Action and to take all necessary measures to advance this. The Authority emphasized that this must be a matter of top priority.

Committee of National Authorizing Officers

The Meeting agreed that the National Authorising Officers of the OECS should be constituted into a Committee of NAOs to collaborate on matters relating to the implementation of EDF and other related programmes at national and regional levels.

Strategic International Development Issues

The Meeting endorsed a proposal for a high level seminar of top foreign and development policy officials to be convened by the Secretariat to further refine and make recommendations to the Authority on possible foreign policy stances for the OECS, arising out of a paper that had been mandated and prepared for the Authority.

SOCIAL AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Issues Facing Youth in the OECS

The Authority noted the work being done by the Education Reform Unit in several areas of youth in education and welcomed plans to present a policy paper on school discipline to the next OECS Ministers of Education meeting later this year. The Authority also accepted plans for several youth related activities in commemoration of the OECS 25th anniversary, including an interschool debating competition, and a conference on youth. The Meeting also welcomed plans for ethnographical research on “Youth on the Block” later this year.

HIV/AIDS Programme

Heads received an update on the implementation of the Global Fund financed project for the care and treatment of persons affected by HIV/AIDS. The Secretariat, as principal recipient for the grant, works along in targeted areas with national AIDS programmes in Member States. The Meeting also welcomed the collaboration between the Secretariat and the Regional Coordinating Mechanism (RCM) in the execution of the project.

LEGAL MATTERS

The Meeting received a report on the work of the Legal Unit and noted the ongoing work in several areas including the judicial and legal reform initiative, the proposed OECS Competition Authority, and the OECS Family Law initiative.

MEETING BETWEEN OECS HEADS AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

Prior to the formal opening of the Authority Meeting and as part of the OECS 25th anniversary celebrations, Heads of Government engaged in an exchange of views with representatives of international and regional Development Partners, in St. Kitts and Nevis.

Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer of Antigua and Barbuda, incoming Chairman of the Organisation, outlined to the Development Partners the OECS vision for the future social and economic development of Member States. He emphasized in this connection, the importance of the decision to deepen OECS integration through the establishment of an Economic Union referring to the Declaration of Intent to be signed at the Opening Ceremony of the 43rd Meeting of the Authority.

There was an exchange of views between OECS Heads of Government and Development Partners on the draft Work Programme for implementation of the Economic Union, among other matters. The Meeting recognized the importance of adopting suitable guiding principles for more effective coordination of aid to the OECS.

Heads conveyed their appreciation to Development Partners for their many expressions of support for the establishment of an OECS Economic Union. The Development Partners provided updates on their programmes of assistance to the region.

‘BEST OF THE OECS’ TRADE EXHIBITION

Heads of Government participated in the Opening Ceremony and a walk-through at a 25th Anniversary Best of the OECS Trade Exhibition, coordinated by the OECS Export Development Unit (OECS EDU). The Exhibition attracted about fifty export-ready

producers of goods and services, and a number of buyers primarily from the hotel/hospitality and distributive sectors. Exhibitors were urged by the outgoing OECS Chairman to step up their efforts to penetrate available markets, and make use of opportunities provided by the coming on stream of the CARICOM Single Market and next year's Cricket World Cup.

DATE AND VENUE FOR NEXT MEETING

The Authority agreed that the next meeting of the Authority will be held on the 9th and 10th of November 2006 in Antigua and Barbuda.