



# ORGANISATION OF EASTERN CARIBBEAN STATES

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## COMMUNIQUE

### FORTY-SIXTH MEETING OF THE OECS AUTHORITY

**Parliament House  
Roseau, Commonwealth of Dominica**

**16-18 January 2008**

#### INTRODUCTION

The Forty-Sixth Meeting of the Authority of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States was held on January 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> at the Parliament Building in Roseau, Dominica, under the Chairmanship of the current Chairman of the OECS Authority, Prime Minister, the Honourable Roosevelt Skerrit of Dominica. An official opening ceremony was held on the evening of January 16<sup>th</sup> at the Fort Young Hotel in Roseau.

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

<b>Hon. Baldwin Spencer</b>	Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda
<b>Hon. Roosevelt Skerrit</b>	Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica
<b>Hon. Clarice Charles-Modeste</b>	Representing the Prime Minister of Grenada
<b>Hon. Dr. Lowell Lewis</b>	Chief Minister of Montserrat
<b>Hon. Dr. Denzil Douglas</b>	Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis
<b>Hon. Stephenson King</b>	Prime Minister of St. Lucia
<b>Hon. Dr. Ralph Gonsalves</b>	Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines
<b>Hon. Evans McNeil</b>	Representing the Chief Minister of Anguilla
<b>Hon. Ralph O'Neal</b>	Premier of the British Virgin Islands

Heads of delegations from regional institutions in attendance were:

Sir Dwight Venner	Governor of the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank
Ambassador Colin Granderson	Assistant Secretary General CARICOM Secretariat
Sir Brian Alleyne	Chief Justice (Ag) of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court



## **OPENING CEREMONY**

The Meeting welcomed the new Prime Minister of St. Lucia, Hon. Stephenson King to his first Meeting of the OECS Authority, and observed a minute silence in memory of the late former Prime Minister of St. Lucia, Sir John Compton. The Meeting also welcomed the newly elected Premier of the British Virgin Islands, Hon. Ralph O'Neal, who was recently returned to office as Head of the Government of the British Virgin Islands.

In her opening remarks, OECS Director General Dr. Len Ishmael pointed to a year ahead for the OECS which will see a strong focus on advancing the sub-region's strategic geopolitical interests. She spoke of plans to strengthen relations between the OECS and Brazil; to operationalise the OECS Office in Puerto Rico which recently received official approval from the US State Department; to consider initiatives under the proposed joint OECS-Venezuela Joint Commission; and to undertake OECS tourism, trade, investment and development cooperation tours to Canada and South-East Asia. The Director General in looking at the future development directions and options for the OECS Members, expressed concern about the potentially negative impact of the current boom in property development in some OECS Member States, pointing in particular to the escalating land prices resulting from the rapid and widespread resorts development which are quickly removing any realistic chances of the average OECS citizen breaking into the land owning class. The trend by resorts to reduce beach access to locals and develop gated communities, she noted, adds to the concerns. Dr. Ishmael suggested some alternative approaches including a moratorium on the construction of resorts directly on beaches; provision of development rights as opposed to free-hold tenure for some investments; inclusion in the planning permission of clearly articulated rights of locals; and ensuring that certain types of tourism related investments are reserved for locals. Dr. Ishmael also used her remarks to express the sub-region's gratitude for the gift of grant funding from the Government of Venezuela for financing the construction of a new OECS Secretariat Headquarters building. In this regard she also praised the efforts of the current OECS Chairman in leading the way to ensuring the successful mobilization of the resources.

Chairman of the OECS Authority and Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica Hon. Roosevelt Skerit, in his welcome remarks, noted the significant international recognition which the "OECS Brand" has developed through the sub-region's many successful joint institutions, including the monetary union and Central Bank, the Civil Aviation Authority and others. Notwithstanding, he reminded the meeting that the global political power play has already demonstrated the dangers to small open economies, citing as examples the problems with bananas in the Windward Islands, sugar in the Caribbean, and Antigua/Barbuda's dispute with the US over internet gaming. He therefore emphasized the urgency and timeliness of advancing the process of Economic Union in the OECS. He told the meeting that Heads of Government, at a retreat last October gave a clear and unequivocal commitment to arouse the sub-region's people to the desirability to move OECS integration to the next level without undue delay, and he noted that public



consultations on the Economic Union Treaty is a priority item on the OECS agenda for the new year. The OECS Chairman used the occasion to extend congratulations to the newly elected Prime Minister of Barbados, Hon. David Thompson, and to acknowledge the significant contribution to the region of the outgoing Prime Minister, Hon. Owen Arthur.

The Prime Minister of St. Lucia Hon. Stephenson King, in his inaugural address to the OECS Authority, paid tribute to the long and outstanding contribution to the development of the OECS by his predecessor, the late Prime Minister Sir John Compton. He reminded the meeting of Sir John's urging that these states should proceed jointly to political independence, and his subsequent recommendation that even as separate independent entities, the islands must work together in wide ranging areas of functional cooperation. That recommendation, the Prime Minister reminded the audience, laid the ground work for the establishment of the OECS through the Treaty of Basseterre, signed in 1981. The Prime Minister spoke of the need for reliable and affordable air transport in the region stressing on its importance to the tourism industry. He also pointed to the need, as part of the medium to long term solution, to develop a regional transportation policy, which would include options for the development of maritime transport. He welcomed the financial support from the government of Venezuela towards the construction of a new OECS Headquarters building and pledged his Government's commitment to providing the required lands.

In his remarks to the opening ceremony, the recently re-elected Premier of the BVI, Hon Ralph O'Neal pointed to the significant benefits to the BVI from its membership of the OECS, particularly the support from the Secretariat for the conservation of natural resources. This, he said, helped the territory avoid damage to its mangrove swamps and reefs and by extension the important tourism industry. The Premier stated his gratitude to the people of the other OECS Member States who make up what he said is an irreplaceable part of the work force, particularly in the hotel sector, and the police, nursing and teaching services. Mr. O'Neal said he was also grateful for the continuing support to the BVI from the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court and noted in particular the help with the establishment of the soon to be opened Commercial Court.

## **ECONOMIC UNION**

The Authority engaged in extensive discussions on the next steps towards the OECS Economic Union and stressed the urgent need to begin the proposed consultations on the draft Economic Union Treaty, beginning with engagements with governments, ruling and opposition parties, non-governmental organizations and other interest groups with a view towards mobilizing the widest possible support for the objectives and goals of the Economic Union. Heads emphasized the fact that this consultation exercise is a political process in which the political leaders must take the lead. The Meeting appointed a sub-committee of Heads, comprising the Chairman, the Prime Ministers of Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts and



Nevis and St. Vincent and the Grenadines to assist in refining the Economic Union work programme by the inclusion of relevant political language and to determine the points of political intervention. It was further agreed that the first political engagement with the governing and opposition parties would take place in Grenada before the end of February, to be followed by similar activities in other Member States sequentially. Heads agreed to the establishment of Working Groups to provide policy support and technical inputs to the Economic Union process. The Working Groups would cover the areas of:

- Justice, Law and Order
- Foreign Affairs
- Public Administration
- Management of Human and Natural Resources
- Cooperation, Coordination and Consolidation of Economic Arrangements, and
- Transition Issues in the Economic Union

Heads agreed to establish special units within the Prime Minister/Chief Minister's office with specific responsibility for regional integration matters, including the OECS Economic Union process by the end of February 2008.

## **EXTERNAL RELATIONS**

### ***Joint Overseas Representation***

Heads expressed concern about the high cost of external representation for individual Member States. The Secretariat was commissioned to undertake a comprehensive review of the costs and locations for current external representation, Member State by Member State, for submission to the Authority at its next meeting, as a basis for consideration of the options for further joint representation for the OECS Member States.

### ***Geneva Mission***

The Authority welcomed and expressed thanks to the EC and to CARIFORUM for the approval of additional financing for the OECS Geneva Mission, within the framework of the CARIFORUM Institutional Strengthening Project (CISP) as a part of the 9<sup>th</sup> EDF Caribbean Regional Indicative Programme. Heads accepted the plans by the Secretariat to significantly enhance the staffing of the Technical Mission with this support. It is envisioned that this financial injection will enable the Secretariat, through the Technical Mission to play an even more significant role in assisting the OECS Member States in the ongoing WTO negotiations.



### ***OECS Representation in Brussels***

The Authority expressed appreciation for the services of Ambassador George “Mario” Bullen who served as Ambassador to Brussels. The Heads agreed to proceed with the finalization of the process for the immediate appointment of a successor with a view to bolstering the human resource capacity of the Mission, to adequately represent the interests of the participating states in Brussels.

### ***Special Initiative on Zimbabwe***

In response to the deteriorating political and economic situation in Zimbabwe, the Authority mandated the Chairman to liaise with his CARICOM counterpart with a view to having possible CARICOM engagement with the Zimbabwean authorities towards the restoration of political stability and economic growth in that African country. Heads also expressed deep concern over the developments in Kenya and expressed the hope that the political conflict emerging there would be brought under early control in the interest of the well being of the people of that country.

### ***OECS/Venezuela Relations***

The Meeting discussed the possibilities for the OECS in developing a structured and enhanced relationship with Venezuela on a joint basis in light of the opportunities for further cooperation that were emerging on a multi-lateral basis. The Authority appointed a Prime Ministerial sub-committee comprising the Prime Ministers of Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines to develop a framework for joint OECS cooperation with Venezuela, without prejudice to the beneficial bilateral approaches that were already established. Heads further agreed that the sub-committee would submit its proposals to the next meeting of the Authority.

### ***OECS Relations with Turkey***

Heads agreed to examine the possibility of developing a Memorandum of Understanding with Turkey. The Heads welcomed offers by Turkey to develop a cooperation programme including provision of scholarships, as well as a programme that will significantly strengthen the region’s Health and Wellness industry. Heads also agreed to engage in further discussions with CARICOM in relation to the bid by Turkey and other applicants (including Italy and Austria) to host the upcoming International Exposition and Trade Fair.

### ***Medical Practitioners***

The Authority mandated the OECS Secretariat to undertake a study of the number of medical practitioners serving the region, including those trained in Cuba and to report on the findings to the Authority at the next meeting. Heads agreed that the findings will inform



the decision making process, on the possibility that the region could be in a position to contribute to some services in needy areas in Africa in recognition of the benefits that the region has derived from the provision of training in medicine, especially in Cuba.

## **SECRETARIAT MATTERS**

### ***New Headquarters Building***

The Authority welcomed the developments related to plans for the construction of a new Headquarters building in St. Lucia, and expressed its gratitude to the government of Venezuela for its generous offer of financial support for the construction of the building. Heads also welcomed the announcement by the government of St. Lucia in its reaffirmation of its commitment regarding the provision of the required lands for the new Headquarters building in the shortest possible time. The Authority also expressed its appreciation to the government of St. Lucia for the rapid rehabilitation of the existing Secretariat Headquarters building following its extensive damage caused by hurricane Dean.

### ***Puerto Rico Office***

The Authority welcomed the information that approval has now been granted by the United States authorities for the establishment of the OECS Representation Office in Puerto Rico. The Authority noted arrangements for its full functioning, and that it will help to advance the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the OECS and the Government of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The Heads further noted that the remit of this office will cover a wide range of areas of cooperation including trade and investment, agriculture and fisheries, health, education, sports, tourism, information technology, security, disaster management and the environment.

### ***Secretariat Pension Fund***

Heads agreed to change the retirement age for Secretariat staff from 60 to 62 years in keeping with the trend in Member States in their Pensions reform process.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

### ***Trade Policy Review***

The Authority noted the successful conclusion of the second review of the trade policies of the OECS-WTO members which took place November 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> 2007 in Geneva. The meeting further noted that the OECS was commended for its success in implementing some of its commitments in the WTO since the last review in 2001, notably:



- Increased notifications
- Implementation of commitments on trade related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), and
- Liberalisation of the telecommunications sector

Heads recommended that OECS Ministers of Trade and officials review the areas identified in the review for further work, including:

- Reform of fiscal policies that are not WTO compatible including fiscal incentives programmes for investment, customs service charges and other duties and charges,
- Reform and removal of non-automatic licensing systems,
- Implementation of TRIPS agreement, and
- Review and possible improvement of offers made in the GATS

Heads mandated the Secretariat to pursue the relevant areas of cooperation arising from Meetings with development agencies in Geneva, including World International Property Organisation (WIPO), International Trade Centre (ITC), and UNCTAD.

### ***OECS Development Strategy***

The Authority, accepting the need for a review of the OECS Development Strategy in light of the significant development that have taken place in trade liberalization and economic integration, endorsed the proposed approach to revise the Strategy. Heads recommended that, as in the existing Strategy, special provision should be made for meeting the development needs of the youth and the elderly within the respective Member States. The Meeting also mandated the Secretariat to approach development partners to mobilize the necessary resources to carry out the technical work required to prepare the revised OECS Development Strategy and to support its implementation.

### ***Agriculture***

The Heads noted the specific issues raised in respect of the banana industry and urged the Secretariat to focus on practical measures that will alleviate problems relating to production and distribution (inclusive of transportation) of agricultural products in the OECS. The Meeting therefore directed the Secretariat to convene an early meeting of Ministers of Agriculture to consider and agree to the implementation of a practical Agriculture Plan of Action with special focus on on-the-ground initiatives relating to organization (institutional arrangements), production, and distribution for agricultural products including bananas. This Ministerial meeting will be preceded by a meeting of business representatives who are involved in agriculture-related production and marketing activities.



### ***Conference on the Caribbean – A 20:20 Vision***

The Meeting reviewed recommendations from the 2007 “Conference on the Caribbean: A 20/20 Vision” many of which are of direct relevance to the pursuit of new development partnerships with US-based technical assistance, development finance, academic and professional groupings, within the framework of the OECS Development Strategy. The Meeting requested the Secretariat to address and integrate the recommendations into the revised OECS Development Strategy. Heads also mandated the Secretariat to collaborate with OECS Overseas Missions and Diaspora Groups in North America to establish and mobilize a network of OECS development interests to follow leads obtained at the 2007 Conference on the Caribbean. The Heads further mandated the Secretariat to collaborate with CARICOM in developing and pursuing new development possibilities emerging from the Conference.

### ***Second Annual OECS Development Conference***

The Meeting received an update on plans for the second annual OECS Development Conference to be held in April 2008 with a focus on the Creative Industry (film and music) and the Health and Wellness industry given their potential impact on the future growth of the sub-region. Heads were further updated on plans by the Director General to engage high level representatives of creative as well as health and wellness industries in Canada, the US and UK with a view to obtaining technical support and inputs, and their participation in the upcoming Conference. Heads also noted initial steps taken in securing support for the conference from development partners, as well as key stakeholders within the public and private sector.

### ***Update on Visit of Prime Minister of Canada***

Heads welcomed plans by the Secretariat to stage an OECS Trade and Investment Show in Halifax and Calgary in May 2008. The Meeting noted that this initiative is in keeping with the need to strengthen the trade and investment thrust of OECS Member States within the global economy. Heads also agreed that the Secretariat should begin to formulate an approach and to identify key issues for the engagement of the OECS in the proposed negotiations between Canada and the region.



## **MINISTERIAL MEETINGS**

### ***Tourism Ministers Meeting***

The Authority welcomed and noted the outcome of recent successful meetings of Ministers of Tourism. Heads noted a proposal to engage the French Government in pursuing a joint Martinique/OECS project for the development of tourism statistics and directed that the proposed Memorandum of Agreement between the OECS and Martinique be reviewed by Member States before ratification. They accepted the proposal for the establishment of Cabinet appointed multi-agency committees in their respective country to oversee the introduction and maintenance of Tourism Satellite Accounts and related tourism data collection protocols. They further approved the recommendation for a change in format for Tourism Ministers meetings from biannually to annually in April, to be preceded by quarterly teleconferences of Directors of Tourism. The Heads further mandated the Secretariat to undertake additional work with regards to the establishment of a harmonized system for tourism and hospitality training among Member States.

### ***Health Ministers Meeting***

The Authority noted the outcome of the recent meeting of Ministers of Health. Heads noted the recommendation by the Ministers for the establishment of a Unit within the Secretariat to carry out a regional Health portfolio. In this regard, Heads further agreed that a comprehensive proposal be put forward for consideration at the next meeting of the Authority.

## **FUNCTIONAL COOPERATION**

### ***Sustainable Oceans Governance Programme***

The Meeting noted the progress made to date on the Sustainable Oceans Governance Programme which was set up to promote OECS maritime cooperation arrangements as a framework for the sustainable management of ocean resources and protection of the marine environment. Heads agreed to convene a special meeting on February 9<sup>th</sup> to discuss proposals to further advance the development of the Programme.

### ***Petroleum Stabilisation Fund : OECS Special Window***

Heads directed the Secretariat to request a review of the facility - Special OECS Window, which was set up by the Trinidad and Tobago Government in the framework of the Petroleum Stabilisation Fund to assist with poverty eradication in the region. Heads further requested that a review be conducted of the disbursements made under the facility.



### ***Regional Prison Service***

The Authority noted the brief on the OECS Penal Reform Project which is designed to coordinate functional cooperation among institutions in the region involved in correction and rehabilitation of offenders, resulting in an integrated institutional and policy framework for the operation and management of corrections and rehabilitation in the OECS while leaving the actual delivery and management of corrective and rehabilitative services to national institutions. The Authority further mandated the Secretariat to execute further work including obtaining the necessary financing to secure technical support for the elaboration of action in this area.

### ***Regional Police Service***

The Authority noted the programme brief for the establishment of a Regional Police Service to coordinate functional cooperation between regional police forces in areas of police administration, police management and special police operations, in the sharing of resources, and in providing critical support and coordination of the investigation of serious criminal activity, while allowing each national police force to remain totally autonomous. The Authority mandated the Secretariat to put forward the proposal to development parties to seek assistance in advancing this process.

## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

### ***OPAAL/Biodiversity Protection Project***

The Authority noted the progress made to date on the OPAAL (OECS Protected Areas and Associated Livelihoods) project. Activities to date have included the establishment and strengthening of protected areas in the participating Member States, such as work on management plans, and provision of vessels for marine sites and vehicles for land sites; as well as information dissemination. The Meeting also noted the focus of the Biodiversity project which contributes to the conservation of biodiversity in participating Member States by, among other things, strengthening national capacities, establishing or strengthening biologically significant sites, creating public awareness on biodiversity and involving the private sector in participatory management.

### ***OECS Education Reform Project***

Heads noted the achievement of the Eastern Caribbean Education Reform Project and acknowledged the support of the Canadian Government through CIDA to the development of education in the OECS. The Meeting directed that the Secretariat should pursue efforts for further support to continue the development work particularly in relation to joint



procurement of text books, developing a harmonized career path for teachers, universal access for Secondary schools, and data gathering and dissemination.

### ***OECS Youth Initiative***

In response to a mandate from the Authority to identify and implement high impact, action-oriented, pro-youth activities to support youth development in the OECS, the Meeting noted the proposed plans for the development of an OECS Youth Initiative as developed by the Secretariat. The Meeting recommended continued collaboration between the OECS Secretariat and Ministries of Youth in Member States for further refinement of the proposed Youth Action Plan.

### ***Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network***

Heads noted the progress made in achieving the objectives of the CKLN including the rolling out of five pilot e-learning courses in January 2008, and the provision of additional funds from several institutions including the Caribbean Development Bank and the European Union to continue the development of the programme. The Meeting noted that ten million Euros from the European Union will finance a high capacity fibre optic network to connect OECS countries as well as the wider Caribbean, with some funds also going to assist Member States develop their own national networks. The meeting urged Member States to support the CKLN by making their annual contributions, and to engage the CKLN to make sure they benefit from the EU grant.

### ***Disaster Mitigation***

The meeting noted progress made with regard to the disaster response risk reduction programme, particularly with regard to community based risk reduction measures in the BVI and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Heads also agreed to facilitate national adoption of the Disaster Risk Management Benchmarking Tool (B-Tool) which is geared towards improving the ability of national governments, civil society organizations, and the private sector to proactively plan and implement effective and efficient actions that would reduce the vulnerability to natural disasters and create greater economic resilience.

## **LEGAL MATTERS**

### ***Supreme Court***

The Authority agreed to initiate the necessary steps towards securing an appointment to the post of Chief Justice, as early as possible, following the imminent retirement of the acting Chief Justice. Heads also discussed integration of the magistracy into the overall



regional court system, and requested that this work be advanced. They also welcomed proposals for the construction of Halls of Justice in Member States.

### ***Report of the Legal Unit***

The Authority noted the progress made on the establishment of the Eastern Caribbean Competition Commission in respect of the proposed Agreement (purpose, powers and functions of the Commission) governing its formulation. Heads advised that there is need for further consultation within their respective Capitals to adequately determine the impact of the proposal.

### **CIVIL AVIATION MATTERS**

Heads confirmed the appointment of Mr. Rosemond James as Director General of the Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority in Antigua and Barbuda.

### **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

#### ***E-Government and Regional Integration Project***

The meeting received and accepted a proposal for an e-government project designed to promote the delivery of high quality and transparent key e-government services within a regional framework. The project will contribute to increased competitiveness, efficiency, public sector transparency and regional integration. Heads agreed to give consideration to this respectively and to communicate with the World Bank as soon as possible.

### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Authority agreed that the 47<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Authority will be held from the 21<sup>st</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2008, with the venue to be confirmed.