



# ORGANISATION OF EASTERN CARIBBEAN STATES

## MEETING OF LEADERS OF THE OPPOSITION

Royal St. Lucian Hotel  
Gros Islet

4<sup>th</sup> May 2012

### OPENING CEREMONY

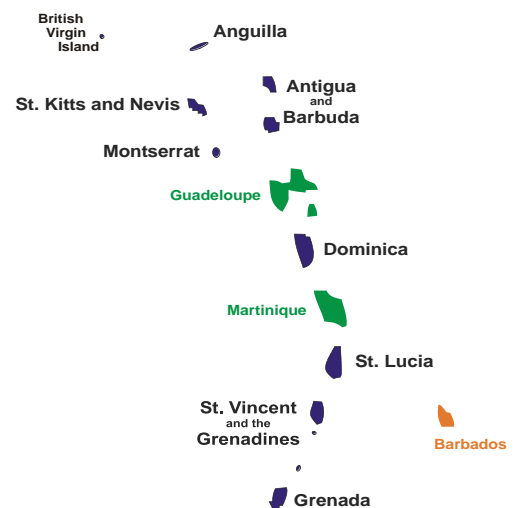
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REMARKS BY  
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DIRECTOR GENERAL

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OECS Secretariat  
Castries  
St Lucia

May 2012



Honorable Prime Minister & Chairman of the OECS Authority, Honorable Leaders of the Opposition and Members of Parliament, members of the media, my OECS colleagues - welcome. It is for me a special honor and privilege to be part of the history which is in the making today, as we gather, in one place, as one family, to discuss matters of exceptional significance to the future of this region. Permit me the opportunity to welcome you to Saint Lucia and to thank you for taking the time to make your valued contribution to this process which will lead to implementation of new aspects of the governance arrangements in the OECS under the umbrella of the OECS Economic Union. In a very real way your presence here today will both influence and shape the future of our region.

To say that we are on the cusp of making history – is no idle comment. The OECS grouping continues to demonstrate remarkable leadership, bold vision and maturity through execution of its own model of integration which today is being acknowledged in all fora as being both trailblazing and setting the “signpost” for the wider Caribbean Community in matters pertaining to integration. Indeed the momentum being experienced by the OECS in this regard is amply underscored by the recent application of both Martinique and Guadeloupe for membership in this grouping.

What is particularly heartening and must be commended is that several of the Honorable members gathered here this morning have in fact been part of the process leading to the creation of the OECS Economic Union from its very inception - as Prime Ministers. Today as Leaders of the Opposition, your support for this new modality of working together is no less wavering. Today you demonstrate publicly your commitment to the regional agenda. For this I commend and salute you. It is also worthy of note that the very Chairman of the Authority during whose tenure and under whose leadership the course was set for an OECS Economic Union, is now once again in the Chair at the precise moment of this historic gathering.

The Revised Treaty of Basseterre (RTB) was signed on June 18<sup>th</sup> 2010 and came into effect on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011. In so doing the OECS group of countries have emerged as the world's only small island developing states to take charge of their destiny by putting in place a modality to overcome some of the limitations associated with small size. The fact that this move - as practical as it was bold - has generated the admiration of many of our partners around the world is aptly demonstrated in the fact that the resources available to the OECS at the regional level have more than doubled, over the last 4 years. In the process of this journey significant milestones have been accomplished; one such early harvest being the facilitation of travel across the single space. Since August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011, all OECS citizens now enjoy the rights of indefinite stay.

The main focus of our engagement here today is two fold: first is that our meeting this morning provides an opportunity to provide a comprehensive presentation of the RTB to the leadership and members of the OECS Opposition. While some, most notably in the case

of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, have previously received such a briefing as a result of a direct request, most of the Honorable members gathered here today may not have had the opportunity to receive the Treaty in an appropriate manner. Today provides an opportunity to do so and to engage in the discussions required to ensure a more fulsome understanding of the Treaty and its associated rights and obligations which will be experienced and borne not only by the peoples of this region, but also, significantly so, at the highest levels of the political directorates across this region.

Today also provides a remarkable opportunity for engagement on those aspects of the Treaty which speak to shared responsibility by national parliaments across the OECS. Here I speak specifically to the various processes leading to the inauguration of one of the Treaty Organs envisaged under the RTB; namely the OECS Assembly.

The RTB establishes five principal Organs: The OECS Authority, OECS Ministerial Councils, the OECS Commission, the Economic Affairs Council and the OECS Assembly. Two of these - namely The OECS Authority and Ministerial Councils - have been previously established under the Treaty of Basseterre of 1981. The other three Organs are all new entities one of which, the OECS Commission, was inaugurated on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2011. It is our hope that the remaining Organs, namely the Economic Affairs and the Assembly will be inaugurated at the earliest possible time within this second year of implementation of Economic Union provisions.

The RTB makes provisions for the OECS Assembly to act as a “legislative filter” allowing for debates and discussions on aspects of regional policy before these become law in those areas under which the RTB has provided legislative competence to the Organisation. The Treaty makes provision for the Assembly to meet at least once every year, and more often, if need be. The Government of Antigua and Barbuda has very generously extended the offer to house the permanent seat of the Assembly, but like the OECS Supreme Court, the Assembly will sit in different locations across the region; powerfully symbolic of its remit as the “Peoples’ Assembly”.

As part of today’s agenda we expect to discuss the processes which will lead to the inaugural sitting of the OECS Assembly. Included in these discussions are the process of selection of national delegations to the OECS Assembly, the election of the Assembly’s first Speaker and Deputy Speaker, the appointment of the Clerk, the drafting of Assembly Rules & Procedures, the setting of the agenda for the Assembly’s first business session, and the ceremonial aspects of the Assembly’s inauguration.

In concluding, I must confess to one regret and that is the absence of our colleagues from the other non independent countries (Montserrat and the British Virgin Islands) who for various reasons, were unavailable to contribute to today’s proceedings. Each of these countries is at different stages with respect of the process leading to accession to the RTB. Montserrat has received the entrustments necessary and is working to secure a date for

accession. To this end the Secretariat is engaged with the Premier's office, the Attorney General and the Commissioner designate to provide support to the work which is now required and to engage in a process of sustained public awareness. The same process is being planned for both the BVI and Anguilla.

The fact is that the table of the OECS has been one historically governed by the spirit of inclusion. Very little differentiation has been made between full and associate members in this regard. In a very real way, we need to ensure that the rest of the family is able to participate fully in the new governance arrangements even while entering reservations in the areas of legislative competence and aspects of the economic union protocol. Indeed it was this spirit and sensibility which guided the drafting of the Revised Treaty and we are committed to working assiduously to ensure that all members of the OECS take their rightful place and are suitably represented.

Honorable Members of this meeting, allow me to delay us no further. The business of the OECS awaits, as does our date with history, which surely will be made when the OECS Assembly inaugurates its first sitting; in the not too distant future.