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MESSAGE BY CHAIRMAN OF OECS  
AUTHORITY,  
DR. THE HON DENZIL DOUGLAS  
UPON OPERATIONALISATION OF OECS  
ECONOMIC UNION

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JANUARY 21, 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen, Citizens of the Member States of the OECS,

It is a great privilege for me to address you as Chairman of the OECS Authority on this truly exciting and defining moment in our history. Today, January 21st, 2011 the Revised Treaty of Basseterre Establishing the OECS Economic Union enters into force, officially marking our region's transition to an Economic Union.

The OECS Economic Union constitutes a single financial and economic space within which all factors of production, goods, services and people will move without hindrance. No longer will physical frontiers and nationality serve as barriers to the pursuit of business or professional opportunities, or of opportunities for socio-cultural, people to people contact.

The Economic Union will also allow for institutions designed to facilitate greater coordination of regional policies, as well as to foster good governance. As the principal Organs of the Organisation, entities such as the Authority of Heads of Government, the Council of Ministers, the OECS Commission, the OECS Assembly and the Economic Affairs Council, will contribute to the formulation and development of regional policy while serving as critical links between Member States and the Organisation itself. The OECS Secretariat will make the transition into the OECS Commission.

With the operationalisation of the OECS Economic Union, we embark together on a journey full of opportunity and promise, confident that our needs, hopes, dreams and aspirations will be realized through the process. The OECS Economic Union will empower OECS citizens by making possible greater freedom of movement and of economic action, by engendering a greater sense of belonging and of pride in their achievements, and by offering a wider array of social and economic possibilities

The OECS has been able to arrive at this important milestone through the deep and unwavering commitment of its Member States to the OECS model: that of the pooling of resources for the common good. In this connection, Member States must be congratulated for the tremendous effort and energy that they have invested in this enterprise. In similar vein, you the citizenry of the Member States must be commended for your steadfast commitment and invaluable contribution to the deepening of the integration of our region.

Since June 18, 2010, the official date of the signing of the Revised Treaty, Member States have been working diligently to complete the legal and other requirements for the operationalisation of the Economic Union by the January 21, 2011 deadline which was then established by the OECS Authority. That the process has been completed within deadline is testimony to the dedication and commitment of our public officials at both the national and regional levels.

My fellow OECS citizens, History is shaped by significant events such as these. Our commemoration of today is about the future, our potential as a tightly knit group of Small Island Developing States, and our pride and determination as a people. But it is also an opportunity to reflect upon, and to acknowledge the past, for the foundation of that which we enjoy today was laid yesterday.

The Founding Fathers of our integration arrangement pursued decisions and actions which have had a profound impact on the region, and the legacy which they have left us is both rich and enduring.

Today the OECS stands as the World's only integration grouping of micro-states. With a total land area of approximately 1000 sq miles and a population of just under 600,000, it boasts a record of success in integration far greater than its physical size and resource capacity would lead one to

expect. This success can be measured by the high quality and international reputation of its flagship institutions.

For the last forty years, long before the formal establishment of the Organisation, the people of the OECS have benefitted from the operation of a single, fully functional regional judiciary, the OECS Supreme Court. This institution finds no parallel in the world, except perhaps with the European Court of Justice. Quite apart from its excellent record within the region, it has had a long and proud record of contributing to the development of international jurisprudence, with some of its best legal minds being pressed into service toward the resolution of problems in various parts of the world.

Since 1965, long before it was ever contemplated by our friends in Europe, OECS Member States have enjoyed a single currency, the Eastern Caribbean Dollar, which stands today as one of the most stable currencies in the world, having maintained a fixed rate of exchange to the US Dollar since 1976, thirty-five years ago! This currency, the associated institutional arrangements, and the entire banking system within the OECS is managed and regulated by a single authority, the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank. This institution which had its origins in the 1965 establishment of the Eastern Caribbean Currency Authority is today a Central Bank of the highest international repute!

Another institution of long standing is the Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority, which boasts a successful record in the management and regulation of the airspace and civil aviation within the OECS.

The region's success at integration is also evident in the establishment and successful operation of other institutions of more recent vintage but of equally high international standing, such as Eastern Caribbean Stock Exchange, established upon a platform that is one of the most technologically advanced; or the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority, the single Authority for oversight of a fully liberalized Telecommunications Sector; or the OECS Pharmaceutical Procurement Service which has realized tremendous benefits for the regional Health Sector through the joint procurement of pharmaceuticals. Indeed, the OECS approach to the procurement of pharmaceuticals has attracted much interest in various parts of the developing world.

At the centre of it all is the OECS Secretariat, the principal Organ responsible for the general administration of our Organisation, and in particular, implementation of activities leading to the

formation of and now the operationalisation of the OECS Economic Union. The Secretariat is responsible for promoting such pursuits as joint diplomatic representation in major international capitals and institutions; policy harmonization and coordination in various spheres of human endeavour including critical areas such as energy, tourism, air transportation, health, education and judicial reform, as well as trade negotiations.

In recent times, and at the behest of the Authority, the Secretariat has been engaged in a process of representing the region's strategic interests through the development of relationships internationally, with non-traditional partners in different parts of the world – a move which has brought major dividends by way of the mobilization of unprecedented levels of developmental resources.

These institutions and policy approaches to which I refer, have not only contributed significantly to the vastly improved quality of life which our people now enjoy, but they have also served as models for other countries and groups of countries in circumstances similar to ours. Indeed the OECS Model of Development has been hailed by leading international institutions such as the World Bank as a model worthy of emulation by Small Island Developing States.

Ladies and gentlemen, no country or region of the world has been immune from the effects of the global financial crisis. In our case, the effects of the crisis are still very much in evidence. This notwithstanding, it is patently clear that without the institutional arrangements that are so integral to our Organisation, the impact of the global financial crisis on the economies of OECS Member States would have been much more severe.

The global financial crisis has profoundly impacted millions of lives. With uncertainty still looming in financial markets, the speeding up of global economic recovery remains a top priority for all countries. For us in the OECS it is critical that higher levels of economic growth be realised. By creating the space within which the factors of production are free to move and to realize their fullest potential, the Economic Union will provide the environment and the means through which this can be achieved.

My brothers and sisters, in a world that is characterized by constant change, adaptability must be the watchword for the Nation-State concerned about maintaining continued relevance. Thus the

OECS has been paying particular attention to ways in which it can adapt to changing global circumstances. Specifically, its response to those changes and new circumstances to which I refer, has been on the one hand, to strengthen and deepen even further, the process of regional integration, and on the other, to embark upon a process of international outreach involving the promotion of the OECS Brand, and the successes and achievements of the Organisation.

In respect of the deepening to which I refer, the OECS Economic Union represents the proud outcome of that process. The international outreach undertaken by the Secretariat has ensured that this signal achievement by the OECS has not escaped the attention of the international community, and in particular, our development partners. Indeed, it has received their praise and approbation, and has resulted in a dramatic increase in their confidence in the OECS as a political and economic entity.

In addition to international development and financial institutions which have lauded the achievements of the OECS, a number of countries of global stature have been expressing their interest in our Organisation in a variety of ways, most notably via the establishment of diplomatic relations and Permanent Representations. Within the last two years, seven countries - Spain, Brazil, Mexico, Finland, France, Germany and the United Kingdom (five of which are members of the European Union) - have established diplomatic relations with the OECS. A significant number of other countries are either pursuing internal procedures leading to the establishment of diplomatic relations, or are pursuing alternative options including the signing of Memoranda of Understanding on Cooperation. These countries include Argentina, Austria, Turkey and South Korea among others. The suggestion from all of this is that in the eyes of the international community, we in the OECS are doing something right.

Ladies and Gentlemen, citizens of the Member States of the OECS, this is a proud moment for us all, for despite our limitations and setbacks, we have achieved what very few in other parts of the world have achieved. We have accomplished a formidable task, and now we must seek to make it work for us. I am confident that the OECS Economic Union will be instrumental in enabling us to achieve sustainable growth and development, and to realize significant improvements in the quality of life of our people for years to come.

Congratulations all, and thank you.

