

**Tuesday June 21<sup>st</sup> 2011**, At the recently concluded 53<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Authority, held in St. Vincent and the Grenadines from 19-20 May 2011, Heads of Government agreed to the closure of the OECS High Commission in Ottawa, Canada by December 2011.

The High Commission for the OECS in Ottawa was established in 1982 for the principal purpose of maintaining and promoting the political, economic and social interests of Member States in Canada.

Against the background of the international financial crisis and global recession, OECS Heads of Government have been engaged in a critical review of the Organisation aimed at the rationalization of its operation. Overseas representation was one area subject to this review in light of the extraordinary burden which it constituted for the treasuries of Member States.

In respect of Canada Heads of Government concluded that the continued operation of the joint High Commission in Ottawa could no longer be considered sustainable or viable. It was to be noted that increasingly, the focus of engagement between Canada and the Member States of the OECS had shifted as a result of Canada's policy of decentralisation in respect of CIDA. This policy saw the relocation of key CIDA personnel and related operations to Canada's High Commission in Barbados. As a result, collaborative efforts involving Canadian and OECS Member State officials had shifted to the region, and in particular, to Barbados. When taken together, these factors raised serious doubts about the wisdom of maintaining the High Commission in Canada, and as a result, OECS Heads of Government agreed to the closure.

It is the intention of OECS Member States is to consolidate and strengthen their consular operations in Toronto in order to satisfy the growing consular demands of OECS nationals resident in Canada, and to be in a position to respond adequately to the expanded range of economic opportunities in Canada for OECS nationals. Heads of Government have noted with interest, the opportunities which present themselves, especially in the areas of trade and service provision and have indicated their intention to broaden the scope of operations of the Eastern Caribbean Liaison Service in Toronto so that it may be better equipped to provide the necessary support to the commercial sectors in the OECS, as well as private nationals in the

region who may wish to explore and avail themselves of these opportunities.

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