

OECS Secretariat, Castries, St. Lucia, Friday February 3rd 2012 Ministers for Tourism & Civil Aviation across OECS Member States will converge on St. Vincent and the Grenadines next week (Thursday February 9

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) to discuss and devise strategic solutions to tourism and aviation issues and challenges currently confronting the Eastern Caribbean.

This Joint Meeting is in response to a decision taken at the OECS Council of Tourism Ministers at its 10th Meeting; and subsequently endorsed by the OECS Authority in May last year.

The purpose of this meeting, as articulated in the Ministerial mandate, is to address matters geared towards improving the attractiveness of the OECS airspace and accessibility of destinations, in order to increase air passenger traffic in the region. More specifically, the Ministers will seek to identify priority areas for joint action including the development of a Common OECS Air Transport Policy; and the preparation of airlift capacity studies to empirically assess the air service needs of the region, and to guide OECS Member States' efforts at attracting and sustaining airlift.

Another matter to be discussed is the implementation of relevant aspects of the San Juan Accord, which is a set of decisions taken by Ministers with responsibility for Tourism & International Transport of member countries of the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO), in San Juan, Puerto Rico in October 2007, when the Ministers met to discuss proposals for restructuring the region's air transport sector, with a view to offering safe, secure and sustainable air services in the Caribbean.

This Joint Meeting, to be chaired by the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, was deemed important given that not all Ministers of Tourism in the OECS are assigned the Civil Aviation portfolio. Whilst Antigua & Barbuda, Grenada & St. Kitts & Nevis have joint Tourism and Civil Aviation Ministerial portfolios; the Ministries of Tourism & Civil Aviation are separate in Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Montserrat, St. Lucia & St. Vincent & the Grenadines.