



OECS Secretariat, Castries St. Lucia October 28, 2009: For the first time, officials of all Member States have assembled for talks on developing an OECS Foreign Service and School of Diplomacy.

The meeting in Saint Lucia from October 26th to 28th and organized by the OECS Secretariat, saw resource persons including diplomats from Mexico, Brazil, the OECS and Spain sharing successes and challenges in training and working in the Foreign Service.

Addressing the high profile gathering, Director General of the OECS Dr. Len Ishmael described the talks as one which will help define and shape the architecture and model of an OECS School of Diplomacy and Foreign Service Corps. Dr. Ishmael said the OECS has for some time been adjusting its focus from one which was inherently introspective to one which is visibly deliberate in its active engagement with the rest of the world. Dr. Ishmael noted that global social, political and economic changes such as world trade rules and conditions of accessibility to foreign aid have impacted on small island states thereby demanding a new approach which would allow OECS countries to stay in step with changing times while maximizing opportunities such changes will bring. Dr. Ishmael added that besides the proposed OECS Economic Union another major approach towards adapting to global changes is the articulation of an agenda which is intimately linked to dynamics of geopolitical changes in the global environment. Hence the concept of an OECS School of Diplomacy: *“For some time now it has also been clear that if we in the OECS are to engage the rest of the world we must do so from a position of confidence and dignity, commanding respect regardless of our size. Unlike the other members of CARICOM, for example, our region has not the tradition of Career Diplomats and Foreign Service corps trained in the language, the art and the culture of diplomacy. As we began putting more effort into developing new strategic relationships with the rest of the world, the need for a competent and well trained corps of foreign service personnel at both the national and regional level, became all too clear, confirmed from time to time by anecdotal evidence.”*

Demonstrating her passion for an OECS School of Diplomacy the Director General explained that the dream evolved from an idea in 2005 to a reality through its launch in March 2008. This was followed by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Diplomatic Academy of Spain in 2008 under which technical assistance was to be provided for the establishment and accreditation of the OECS Diplomatic Academy. Under the agreement, Spain's Diplomatic Academy has also offered scholarships to OECS public officers to pursue the school's Masters

programme commencing in 2009. Besides developing relations with Spain, the OECS continues to build various types of relationship with other territories: *"In more ways than one , therefore, today provides vivid testimony that we are on the right track in pursuing at the regional level, exploration of relations to advance our regional interests further...We are here today as a result of the confluence of many things, at least of which has been the generosity of financing and technical support from the Kingdom of Spain in support of the OECS agenda in building up competences in the areas of foreign service and diplomacy. An OECS School of Diplomacy will be the crown jewel in that arrangement, providing the possibility of training to hundreds currently working in the field as well as providing the possibilities of a career in Foreign Service for this region's future diplomats in a comprehensive and structured way."*

-Dr. Ishmael.

The meeting complements several developments such as; growing admiration of the OECS by international organizations including the World Bank and the European Union, and recent achievements by OECS Member States through functional cooperation. Dr. Ishmael described the gathering as a very special moment in the remarkable journey of the "tiny" nine member group of countries as they continue to define for themselves the future which they wish to inherit.



Praising the event as "truly historic and ground breaking", Chairman of the OECS, Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis Hon. Denzil Douglas, placed the seminar within the context of the OECS Secretariat's pursuit of its initiative to reposition itself as a genuine centre of excellence, thereby being better able to take advantage of the opportunities presented by new global issues: *"The initiatives aiming at the development of an OECS Foreign Service and an OECS School of Diplomacy are bold and visionary, and reflect in many ways the spirit of the OECS. A primary intent of these initiatives is the establishment of a platform for the development of capacity for the effective articulation, promotion and defense of the strategic interests of the OECS. In reality, they are not merely initiatives bearing profound implications for the future of the OECS – they represent and embody that future. We in the OECS are embarked upon a most exciting endeavour involving the conscious and deliberate building of the future. We cannot and will not fail. This is why I reiterate my own sense of pride at being a part of this event."*

The OECS Chairman indicated that the competences and skills of the Foreign Service of Member States have been the source of much anxiety for the OECS Authority who have endorsed a proposal by the Secretariat to seek to upgrade the skills of Foreign Service personnel. The workshop also demonstrates the commitment of the OECS Secretariat towards

developing the potential of its various publics: *"The design workshop on the Development of an OECS Foreign Service and an OECS School of Diplomacy represents another of the activities being undertaken as part of the initiative to realize a more outward-looking orientation for the OECS. The vigorous pursuit of the strategic interests of the Organization requires a cadre of persons armed with the skills necessary to represent the region professionally, as well as to negotiate the terms of such interests. The unfortunate reality is that the Foreign Services of our individual Member States are reported to be weak in terms of numbers, skills levels and orientation. At the Headquarters level the focus is invariably on what are sometimes termed "meet and greet" activities, namely the handling of protocol arrangements and facilitating the hosting of meetings. At the Overseas Branch level the focus is usually on consular matters, and even then, on some of the most basic elements of the consular portfolio, namely the renewal of passports for nationals and the issuance of visas to tourists. Although the link between the international stature and political power of a state and its economic and commercial strength have been clearly established, and although it has been recognized that power relations between states are based on relative economic and commercial strengths, skills that are rooted in economics or commerce do not feature with any prominence on the rosters of our Foreign Ministries. Moreover, there is no systematic or credible effort aimed at the development of negotiation skills, whether in international economic relations, international politics, or the newly emerging field of environmental diplomacy which includes for example, climate change."*

–Prime Minister Douglas.



Spain's Ambassador to the OECS Jesus Silva lauded the workshop as a success story of a growing relationship with the OECS: *"This collaboration we have started has certainly produced results in a very short period because the OECS has been an efficient organization and has taken the opportunity to find areas where we could establish our joint corporation and this is the first result of it.. You have to find your own model, you have to see what is more convenient for you but we commend you for inviting us to share our experiences with you in our long standing Foreign Service and our diplomatic school."*

Since the OECS Secretariat began the process towards the OECS School of Diplomacy in 2008 over 160 persons from four OECS Member States and the Secretariat have been trained through this facility, while there are further plans to train Foreign Service professionals in the remaining Member States.