



**OECS Secretariat, Castries, St. Lucia, September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010.** On Tuesday, 7<sup>th</sup> September, 2010, Her Excellency Dr. Len Ishmael, Director General of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), was conferred the prestigious Order of Merit of Spain. The award was presented to the Director General by His Excellency Jesus Silva, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Spain to the OECS, on behalf of His Majesty King Juan Carlos, at an official ceremony held at the Bay Gardens Hotel. Among the guests present at the ceremony were distinguished members of the Diplomatic Corps, Nobel Laureate the Honourable Derek Walcott, and senior staff members of the OECS Secretariat.

The Order of Merit of Spain was established by King Alfonso XIII in 1962 to recognize 'civic virtues of those in the service of the state, as well as extraordinary services rendered to the Kingdom of Spain by foreign nationals.'

The Order of Merit was conferred upon Dr. Ishmael in recognition of her outstanding commitment towards the promotion of effective bilateralism between Spain and the OECS, and for her immense contribution toward the fostering of a cooperative and strategic partnership with Spain anchored in trust and a sense of mutual benefit.

In his opening remarks, Ambassador Silva conveyed his country's appreciation to the Director General for her important role in the formalization of relations between the OECS and Spain through the establishment of diplomatic relations. In addition, the Ambassador praised the OECS for its success and commendable achievements in the realm of regional integration, highlighting the establishment of the OECS Economic Union as a historic and extraordinary accomplishment that very few regions in the world have managed to attain. During his speech, the Ambassador also made reference to several areas of ongoing collaboration between the two parties, including the establishment of the OECS School of Diplomacy, the establishment of a regional (OECS) Foreign Service, and planning for new OECS Headquarters premises, designs for which are being undertaken by a leading Spanish architectural firm.

In accepting the award, Dr. Ishmael graciously thanked the Kingdom of Spain for the honour bestowed on her through Ambassador Silva. The Director General also pointed to the real benefits that relations with Spain has brought to the region, and further noted the pivotal role of Ambassador Silva in building bridges between the people of the OECS region and Spain. The Ambassador, who is known throughout the Caribbean for his assistance in securing Spanish support for the region's developmental agenda, will be leaving his post in Jamaica in the coming weeks.

The OECS and Spain have developed a close friendship based on strong and solid cooperation during the last two years. In addition to previously mentioned projects, the OECS Secretariat has embarked upon other regional initiatives through assistance from Spain. These include the signing of two cooperation agreements; the securing of scholarships for OECS nationals to Spain's eminent Diplomatic Academy; and the assignment of a Spanish professor, who will be engaged in the provision of Spanish language training to staff of the OECS Secretariat and Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Member States, as well as to support curriculum development at Sir Arthur Lewis Community College.

The Kingdom of Spain was the first country to officially establish diplomatic relations with the OECS. Mexico, Brazil, Germany, Finland, and France have since followed Spain's lead.

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