

The Fifty-fourth Meeting of the OECS Authority was convened in Rodney Bay, St Lucia over the period January 23-24, 2012 under the Chairmanship of Dr. the Honourable Kenny D. Anthony, Prime Minister of Saint Lucia. All Member States were represented with the exception of Montserrat.

The Member States present were represented at the level of Head of Government, with the exception of

Anguilla

which was represented at the Ministerial level. The Meeting focused in the main on matters relating to the operationalisation of the OECS Economic Union, including:

1. Legislative and other arrangements relating to implementation of the Revised Treaty of Basseterre;
2. Operationalisation of the Organs of the Union including the Councils, the Commission, and the Regional Parliamentary Assembly; and
3. Financing of the Secretariat/Commission and the Economic Union.

The Meeting also addressed matters relating to the economic and social development of the OECS region, as well as relations between the OECS and third parties.

OECS Development Strategy

Growth and Development Strategy: Heads noted the progress made in respect of work leading to the preparation and implementation of a Growth and Development Strategy for the OECS. They urged its speedy completion within a broad-based consultative framework in view of the critical economic challenges being faced by the region within the context of the uncertain and unstable global environment.

Common Tourism Policy: Heads endorsed the OECS Common Tourism Policy as a guide to collective action geared to the development of Tourism in the OECS Economic Union.

The OECS Private Sector: Heads endorsed the establishment of a regional consultative process in the OECS involving the public and private sector to articulate and drive an agenda focused on recovery, growth and development for the region over the next two to five years.

Heads directed that this process should entail consideration of detailed proposals and approaches for a Consultative Forum for public/private sector engagement and collaboration to help consolidate gains from the OECS Economic Union. They further directed that this task should be completed by the 56th Meeting of the Authority in November 2012.

OECS Economic Union

Treaty Implementation: Heads received a progress report on the enactment of the Revised Treaty of Basseterre Establishing the OECS Economic Union (EU) into the domestic law of Member States and the attendant challenges faced by some Members in this regard. OECS Heads of Government also received an update on the status of implementation of the regime for free movement of citizens. The meeting considered examples of best practices and lessons-learned as useful guides towards full implementation of the OECS EU. The OECS Heads of Government urged all Member States to complete the procedures necessary for enactment of the Revised Treaty Bill, accession to the Revised Treaty and fulfilment of the ratification process.

Citizens Engagement: Heads considered and approved a proposal for a study to explore all possible modalities for receiving citizens' grievances incurred in the implementation of the Revised Treaty of Basseterre, including existing mechanisms such as the Office of Ombudsman. They noted that while the establishment of such a mechanism was not a requirement of the Revised Treaty it could provide a means for OECS citizens to seek redress outside of the existing structures at the national level, including the court system with its characteristic rigidities.

Regional Parliamentary Assembly: Heads considered a proposal for operationalisation of the OECS Regional Parliamentary Assembly, and mandated that further work be done with a view to inauguration of the Assembly by June 18, 2012.

The OECS Commission: Heads of Government met with their Commissioners from Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, Saint Lucia, Saint Kitts and Nevis and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to discuss the role of the Commission within the governance structure. They recognised that this was a new body which had the potential to become a model for other integration movements. They agreed to examine all the national and regional mechanisms that

would ensure the efficient functioning of this body. The Commission was mandated to ensure that the other governance structures became operational according to the deadlines set by the Authority.

Freedom of Movement: Heads of Government reiterated that the free movement of persons was vital to the success of the OECS EU. They all agreed that it was necessary to put in place the mechanisms for hassle free travel. They stressed the need for more training programmes for immigration and customs offices. The Heads stressed that the economic union was put in place for the benefit of all OECS citizens and that the Governments would remain committed to that goal.

OECS Maritime Governance: The OECS Heads of Government considered an approach towards good governance of the OECS maritime space. The Authority agreed on the establishment of an OECS-wide approach to commence work on the development of a regional integrated ocean governance framework, inclusive of the development of a draft ocean policy framework and action. Member States agreed to the establishment of an OECS Maritime Governance team and to identify and mandate a lead national agency to participate in this process, working closely with the OECS Secretariat in leading and coordinating activities at the regional level.

E-Government: Heads welcomed the suite of legislation which had been developed for Member States to regulate electronic transactions within the OECS. They recognized the benefits for harmonisation that could be derived from adoption of the laws by all Member States and approved their dissemination to Member States for enactment in their respective Parliaments. The Heads of Government of Dominica, Saint Lucia, St Kitts and Nevis, and St Vincent and the Grenadines signed an agreement for concessional loan financing for implementation of the Electronic Government for Regional Integration Project (EGRIP) financed by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). The Agreement had been signed previously by the Governments of Antigua and Barbuda and Grenada. The OECS Director General also participated in the signing on behalf of the OECS Secretariat in its executing function.

Relations with Third Countries

Enhanced Relations with European Union Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) and French Overseas Departments (DOM's - Martinique and Guadeloupe): The Meeting warmly welcomed correspondence from the Presidents of the Regional Councils of Martinique

and Guadeloupe indicating their desire to formally establish closer relationships with the OECS. The Meeting also welcomed additional correspondence from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France supporting and endorsing the request from Martinique and Guadeloupe. The Meeting agreed that a process of engagement should be initiated in the shortest possible time with the intention of commencing negotiations with Martinique and Guadeloupe before May of this year.

Oncology Centre- Antigua and Barbuda

Heads welcomed the presentation of a proposal for the establishment of a regional Oncology Centre in Antigua and Barbuda, and agreed that the principals of the project should forward a dossier setting out all the elements and implications of the proposal to each Member State for detailed consideration.

The Caribbean Court of justice

Heads discussed the Caribbean Court of Justice (the CCJ) and the issue of appeals to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council. They noted the important dissimilarities in the relevant constitutional provisions of each OECS country. In light of these differences, it was accepted that the possibility of all OECS States simultaneously acceding to the appellate jurisdiction of the CCJ is not now the preferred option.

It was further agreed that:

1. All member countries of the OECS are committed to acceding to the appellate jurisdiction of the CCJ within the shortest possible time and to this end, in each member country public discussion on this issue will be facilitated and intensified;

1. The States of Saint Kitts and Nevis and Dominica are best placed constitutionally to take steps to accede to the CCJ's appellate jurisdiction during the course of this year;

1. In keeping with its domestic law the State of Saint Lucia will seek from the OECS Court of Appeal an Advisory Opinion on aspects of the Constitution of that State which impact on that country's accession to the appellate jurisdiction of the CCJ; and

1. The British Overseas Territories will engage with Her Majesty's Government on the issue.

Financing of the OECS Commission/Secretariat

Heads discussed financing of the OECS Commission/ Secretariat. Heads noted and welcomed the efforts of some Member States to ensure that their obligations were met. The Meeting received and accepted the firm commitment by other Member States to take immediate action to improve their financial support. Heads agreed to engage in discussions with a view to determining (in the context of the budget approval process at the 55th Meeting of the Authority scheduled for May 2012) an approach for ensuring the sustainable financing of the Secretariat/Commission.

Article 164 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas

Heads noted the work undertaken by the CARICOM Secretariat on the review of Article 164, and that a Report had been submitted which was now being subject to technical review. In this regard, Heads noted that the continued difficulties regarding the trade in flour in the LDCs, and in particular the OECS, had called into question the utility and effectiveness of the application of Article 164. Heads expressed their firm commitment to seek the retention of Article 164 in the course of the further revision of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas. The Meeting agreed that every effort would be made by all parties concerned to bring resolution to the issues impacting the trade in flour in the OECS.

Relations with Cuba

The Heads expressed firm support for the sentiments stated in the Declaration of Port of Spain on the Occasion of the Fourth Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Caribbean Community and Cuba, which categorically rejected the "unjust and cruel economic, commercial and financial embargo against the Republic of Cuba, and the extraterritorial measures aimed at extending the reach of the embargo to include third countries."

The Hon Patrick Manning

Heads expressed regret and sadness over the sudden illness of the Honourable Patrick Manning, former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, and extended to his family, friends, colleagues and the people of Trinidad and Tobago, their wish for his full and speedy recovery.

Date and Venue for 55th Authority Meeting

Heads agreed that the 55th Meeting of the Authority would be convened on May 17-18, 2012 in St Vincent and the Grenadines under the Chairmanship of Prime Minister, Dr the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves.