

Brothers and Sisters of the OECS, On behalf of the OECS Chairman and Members of the OECS Authority, it is with great pleasure that I address you, on the occasion of the 31<sup>st</sup> A



nniversary of the Organisation of the Eastern Caribbean States. On this most special OECS Day, I ask you to join with me in real celebration of the proud legacy that has been bequeathed to us by our forbears who on this day, thirty-one years ago, affixed their signatures to the Treaty of Basseterre that launched us on this incredible journey. Today I join with you in celebrating their vision and foresight in coming together in a corporate strategy and plan with one noble goal in mind – the improvement and upliftment of the lives and well being of the people of our region. Today, I join with you in celebration of the phenomenal achievements birthed from the powerful idea of resilience building through regional economic integration and functional cooperation which is firmly undergirded by the principle of “strength through unity” which has been forged by the Caribbean historical experience and forms the fundamental ethos of our Caribbean way of life.

From this idea and through dedicated commitment to its achievement has sprung many of the institutions and frameworks that we all take for granted today. Institutions – such as the OECS Secretariat, the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, the OECS Supreme Court which ensures that the separation of powers enshrined in our Constitutions is guaranteed and upheld; the Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority that has safeguarded the integrity and safety of the airspace and civil aviation within the OECS for decades; the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority which has negotiated the liberalisation of our telecommunications sectors and has allowed consumers across the OECS to exercise choice when selecting a provider; or even the Joint Pharmaceutical Procurement system which allows us more affordable medications – these are all so much a part of our everyday lives that their importance and influence go largely un-noticed. But such was the intention and ambition of the courageous seven those leasers in 1981 who made this all possible. And such also is indeed the intention and ambition of the

current generation of leaders who are charged with ensuring that the Economic Union, established just seventeen months ago by the coming into force of the Revised Treaty of Basseterre, becomes a progressively operational entity. For all of us, the ultimate will only be achieved when such successes are so seamlessly woven into the institutional fabric of the societies and the lives of the people of the region that they are taken as a matter of course.

This is especially so when it comes to the exercise of the right of free movement. On August 1<sup>st</sup> 2011, celebrated in many Member States as Emancipation Day – the OECS Economic Union emancipated all OECS citizens from the boundaries of national borders by providing them all with the right to move within the single space, to look for work, to take up work, to send their children to school, to seek medical attention, to set up businesses, to stay indefinitely, and to be treated as nationals wherever they go within the Economic Union area. While there is still some work to be done in eliminating legislative barriers to the exercise of this right, these are being dealt with as a matter of priority and the administrative arrangements to facilitate the hassle-free movement of OECS nationals across the space has already been put in place.

It is hoped that these operational changes will be accompanied by a commensurate *psychological*

renaissance whereby the people of the OECS come to view themselves as *one people*

with the sea that separates us being seen as the sea that connects and binds us one to the other. It is hoped that this pan-OECS outlook will infuse and transform the way in which we all live and work. OECS nationals, regardless of who they are or where they are in the world now all have access to the benefits and resources provided by the creation of the single OECS space. The Economic Union area is ripe with opportunity not only for each OECS national to live and work wherever is most beneficial for them and their families, but also for OECS businessmen and women to expand the market in which they buy and sell goods and services. It also presents an opportunity for OECS nationals who are part of the Diaspora to choose any location within the space whereby they can make a contribution, start a business and bring their resources and expertise to bear in this process. This, with the full knowledge that what benefits one, will benefit all in the larger scheme of things.

On another front, the Revised Treaty of Basseterre also aims to transform the regional governance arrangements in ways that allow them to be more effective and inclusive. With the OECS Authority (the highest governing body comprising Heads of Government) and the OECS Ministerial Councils has now been added three new institutions. The OECS Commission, comprising Member State representatives is charged with ensuring that the process of agenda-setting and decision-making is appropriately consultative at the national and regional levels and that regional outcomes and decisions are effectively and efficiently implemented. This organ has been fully operational since 1<sup>st</sup> July 2011 and plans are underway to ensure that

the Economic Affairs Council, responsible for upholding the provisions and rules of the Union Treaty Protocol that governs the economic space, is established by November of this year.

The fifth and final Organ, the OECS Assembly: “the People’s Parliament”, is another innovation of the Revised Treaty, which will be inaugurated in August. The establishment of the Assembly is of great historical significance. Bringing together representatives of governing parties and members of the opposition as part of national delegations to make pronouncements on regional objectives and decisions, the Assembly aims to bring a level of democracy, accountability and transparency into what had heretofore been a highly centralized regional decision-making structure. As the people’s representatives, it is expected that OECS MPs will champion the views and interests of their national constituencies to ensure that all OECS-wide initiatives would be fair and balanced and redound to the benefit of all. The establishment of the OECS Assembly, therefore is a veritable quantum leap towards participatory politics at the regional level and represents an advance to a more mature regionalism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 31<sup>st</sup> Anniversary of the establishment of the OECS arrives in a moment of dynamic change within this tiny geographic space. It is an exciting time for our region, even amidst the turmoil and upheaval swirling around us nationally and globally. In these uncertain and challenging times, the OECS stands confidently as a BEACON, representing simultaneously: an illuminating EXAMPLE of what can be accomplished through the sheer power of ideas and a concerted commitment towards them; a SAFE HARBOUR for its Member States which can meet every national challenge and obstacle with the assurance that these will be resolved and overcome through unified action at the regional level; and a RALLYING CALL TO ACTION, for us all to put our shoulders to the wheel of progress in our tiny community.

It is therefore in this spirit of optimism that I wish you all a happy and purposeful OECS Day!