

Tuesday, 14th August 2012, Castries, St. Lucia – The people of the OECS now have the opportunity for their issues to be discussed and debated publicly through the OECS Assembly. The historic Inauguration of the OECS Assembly took place on Friday August 10th

2012 in Antigua and Barbuda, the headquarters of the OECS Assembly, with attendees including students from various communities in Antigua and Barbuda.

During Friday’s Inauguration ceremony, the Honourable Rene Baptiste of St. Vincent and the Grenadines was elected the Speaker of the OECS Assembly. Ms. Baptiste, a former public servant in St. Vincent and the Grenadines including a Minister for Culture and Tourism, pledged to be the servant of the Assembly and called for the cooperation and support of all honourable members: **“...We have serious work to do. Time is of the essence. This is our occasion to write our own history with our own hands in our own words.”**

The Assembly also elected His Excellency the Honourable Walford Gumbs of the Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis as Deputy Speaker.

At the Inaugural Session of the OECS Assembly in Antigua and Barbuda, Host Prime Minister the Honourable Baldwin Spencer encouraged his colleague members to ensure that the OECS Assembly benefited OECS People: **“Let us so conduct ourselves that those who sent us here will take pride in the work that we do, knowing that we have set firmly in place the building block s of a more perfect Union for all our people”**

The Chairman of the OECS Authority, Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves welcomed what he called the absence of political partisanship in the crafting of and support for Treaty arrangements designed to deepen integration in this region: **“Across each of the OECS Member States, the governing and opposition parties are at one on this issue despite occasional dissonance on this or that detail”** The OECS Chairman reemphasized that the people of the OECS must now own their integration movement, as well as love and care for it in their own interest.

Speaking on behalf of the Non-Independent Member Countries of the OECS, Premier of Montserrat The Honourable Reuben Meade, focused on the purpose of the OECS and its relevance to the lives of the people of the region: “ ***The OECS was developed as a conscious decision among the leaders of the OECS and driven by the people of the OECS to be an organisation which we wanted, which we have worked hard to develop and which we will continue to develop for the people of the OECS.....and we pray that the youngsters here who will take over from us will continue to love and cherish the OECS so that we, continuing to work with and for our people can make the OECS great.*** ”

The Honourable Mark Brantley, Leader of the Opposition of the Federation of St Kitts and Nevis spoke for the leaders of the parliamentary opposition in the OECS Assembly and quoted part of a message from Leader of the Opposition in St. Lucia which encouraged the membership of the assembly to collaborate as a region for the improved well being of its people: “***The global environment is unfavourable to small island states like ours, and those who once sympathized with us and were generous are now fighting for their own survival. We are now left to swim against the tides of social and economic challenge and adversity. Let us come together in the true spirit of regional integration.***”

Mr. Brantley indicated that the united approach of the OECS Assembly would change the mindset of those who tend to doubt the effectiveness of the regional institution and further demonstrate willingness by OECS parliamentarians to address the needs of Caribbean people as they continuously pursue excellence. Mr. Brantley also reiterated the full support of OECS opposition parties for OECS integration, referring to his colleague leaders of the parliamentary opposition as champions of regionalism.

The OECS Assembly was established by the Revised Treaty of Basseterre. It is to comprise 5 members of the Parliament of each independent Member State and 3 members from the Legislature of each non-independent Member State, with representation from both government and the parliamentary opposition, including the Head of Government and the Leader of the Opposition. The primary function of the OECS Assembly is to support the legislative work of the OECS by acting as a ‘legislative filter’ to discuss and report to the OECS Authority and the OECS Council of Ministers on legislation developed by the OECS.