

OECS Heads End Watershed Meeting

May 27th, 2009



OECS Heads of Government wrapped up their 49th Meeting in Tortola BVI, May 22nd, calling it a watershed in the historical evolution of the organization.

Heads noted the enhanced international profile of the Organisation which has resulted from the repositioning of the OECS to be outward looking in pursuit of its strategic interests around the world. In recent times new relationships have been formed or are in the process of being formed at the regional level with Brazil, Venezuela, Austria, Turkey, Finland, Spain, Mexico, Cuba, France, the

US Virgin Islands, the European Union, Puerto Rico and Trinidad and Tobago.

During the just ended 49th Meeting, the Heads of Government engaged the Governor of the US Virgin Islands, Mr. John P. de Jongh Jr. in discussions on closer functional cooperation. The Heads mandated the OECS Secretariat to work along with the USVI Administration to complete a Memorandum of Understanding in the shortest possible time to facilitate the closer ties. Areas of cooperation are expected to include tourism, education and training, security, emergency management, health, sports, arts and culture, trade, agriculture, and preservation of historical sites and documents.

The Heads also engaged the Ambassador of Spain to the OECS Mr. Jesus Silva on building closer ties with that European nation. The OECS and Spain signed a Declaration of Intent in April 2009 to pursue cooperation in several areas, including, training in diplomacy, oceans governance, legislative drafting, the OECS Economic Union, environmental management and economic development. Spain has been assisting with the training of foreign service officers in the Foreign Ministries of Member States and has offered scholarships at the Masters level for training at the prestigious Diplomatic School in Spain.

The Meeting also welcomed a Memorandum of Understanding between the OECS and the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) which makes provision for OECS nationals to study at UPR with the same status as Puerto Rican students. This means significantly reduced fees for tuition, accommodation, medical and other requirements.



The Heads engaged in wide-ranging discussions with the Prime Minister of Barbados Mr. David Thompson on matters of mutual interest including the regional financial crisis, the Regional Security System (RSS), intra-regional travel, and financial sector development. The two sides agreed that this interaction at the highest level should be a regular feature of the relationship between Barbados and the OECS.

In responding to the growing challenges facing the region from the international economic meltdown, OECS Heads agreed to support a recommendation from their Tourism Ministers to set up a regional marketing fund for the critical tourism sector, to be funded by a levy on each airline ticket purchased for travel into the OECS. This marketing drive will be implemented as part of a wider Caribbean initiative to be administered jointly by the Caribbean Tourism Organisation and the Caribbean Hotel and Tourism Association.

OECS Heads of Government indicated they remain committed to the ongoing process of deepening the regional integration movement, and decided that the inauguration of the OECS Economic Union will take place on June 18th 2010, the date which marks the commencement of the 30th anniversary year of the signing of the Treaty of Basseterre which gave birth to the OECS.



St. Kitts and Nevis announced at the Meeting it will join fellow OECS Member States in launching its Economic Union public education campaign on June 23rd. The campaign has already been launched in Montserrat, Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Lucia, and Grenada, and other Member States are expected to hold launches in the coming months. The public awareness campaign is giving OECS nationals an opportunity to comment on and make inputs into a draft OECS Economic Union Treaty. The amended draft Treaty will go before national parliaments in Member States for ratification.

The OECS Member States are Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Anguilla and the Virgin Islands (BVI).

For a full report on the Meeting, see the Communiqué on the OECS website, www.oecs.org