



His Excellency Sir Rodney Williams, GCMG, KGN, KSt.J, DSc, PhD(hc), MBBS

Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda

Delivers the 2022 Speech from the Throne

MANAGING THE COVID-19 CHALLENGES:

Growing the Economy and Building Resilience

Thursday, January 20, 2022

Parliament Building

Queen Elizabeth Highway

St. John's, ANTIGUA and BARBUDA

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

Lady Williams and I wish you our fellow citizens and residents of our fair land, a healthy, safe and prosperous 2022. We are both hopeful that the lessons and experiences from 2021 will enable us all to carry out our various responsibilities with greater confidence.

A. THE CHALLENGE – COVID 19

1. Few would deny the fact that during 2021, our nation continued to be severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. This disease, which first made its appearance in 2019, has since wreaked havoc on economies across the globe. Millions of workers lost their jobs; many were forced into poverty as economies collapsed; over 331 million contracted the virus as it spread rapidly and more than 5 million died. Antigua and Barbuda was not spared any of these negative impacts but my government responded rapidly by enhancing its social protection programmes for the vulnerable and those in need of health care and other forms of support. In spite of these efforts, over

one persons were reported as casualties of this dreadful pathogen. My government joins in extending our sincere condolences to the families of those who lost their loved ones to this virus. Thankfully however, many of us have either survived to tell of our experience with the virus or have been able to escape its grasp. This was very likely due to our personal health profiles, adherence to the protocols of appropriate distancing, hand sanitation, mask wearing and very importantly inoculation against the virus. The data gathered to date indicate that vaccines have saved us from the worst ravages of the COVID 19 disease, enabling many to recover more speedily and reducing the risk of severe symptoms or hospitalization and/or death. Regrettably, even with this life saving measure becoming available, many developing nations have not been able to meet the vaccination-needs of their own populations, clearly placing their people in grave danger.

2. My Government, on the other hand, ensured that the latest and most reliable scientific information was disseminated to the public through the efficient services of the Ministry of Broadcasting. This information was then translated into law as needed through the clinical capabilities of the Office of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Legal Affairs. Further, the

collaborative efforts of our Ministries of Health and Foreign Affairs, our overseas and resident missions spurred on by my Government's policy to leave no stone unturned, procured sufficient supplies of five different vaccines to enable the inoculation of all residents over 12 years of age. My government's approach to the challenge we faced, has resulted in an impressive 62% of our estimated population of 100,000 being inoculated against the virus, with many of these recipients already proud carriers of a beautifully designed, security sensitive vaccination photo ID. This photo ID, which is the envy of other regional and international jurisdictions, is the brainchild of the Minister of Information and his team, who must be commended for their creative genius. While my government has not yet recorded its desired target of 75-80% vaccination of our populace, this level of vaccination compliance far exceeds that of other Anglo-Caribbean states. My government considers this a noteworthy achievement, which with the agreement of only 10,000 more residents can be translated into maximum community immunity. My Government calls upon all residents and citizens to make the COVID 19 protocols a way of life and to become vaccinated or boosted in accordance with the recommended guidelines. This is a very important call for those who perceive themselves to be immune, as well as

those of us who recognize our vulnerability. Of particular concern to my government and myself as a family physician of many years, is the large sector of our population who have been diagnosed or are struggling with non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular and other metabolic conditions. Scientific data has shown that this group has a higher risk for contracting the COVID 19 virus. We must take action now to protect ourselves. We are truly only all safe when each one of us is as safe as we can be.

3. My government applauds the steady leadership of our Minister of Health and the yeoman service provided by our frontline workers in the health care sector to include doctors, nurses, orderlies and staff at the Sir Lester Bird Medical Center; the EMS, the Central Board of Health, the community clinics, private medical offices and other health facilities. Applause is also in order for the Minister of Social Transformation and his team, the Social Protection Board, NGO's, Churches, Social and Community Clubs, Philanthropic and Corporate entities at home and abroad who went above and beyond the call of duty to assist the vulnerable and those affected by the negative impacts of the disease. The work continues, as does the

need. The maintenance of law and order during a time when panic and anxiety levels were at their highest was made possible by law abiding citizens as well as our hard-working officers of the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda and the military men and women in the Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force. We thank you all.

4. In just two years, COVID 19 has earned the title of being the biggest challenge faced by human civilization. The infectious nature of this virus requires more than just an aggressive domestic response by Antigua and Barbuda. It also requires the consistent implementation of appropriate policies and practices by our neighbours and the developed world, if the virus is to be eradicated, neutralized or relegated to a manageable state of existence with minimal impact. Until such time, my government encourages its citizens and residents to embrace the fact that we must learn to live with and protect ourselves against the Covid 19 virus in its various forms. Let us all commit to assigning this virus to the path which mumps, measles, rubella, smallpox and polio were forced to take when preventative measures including extensive vaccination programmes were implemented. Let us unite to fight the virus and all its ill effects.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

B. GROWING THE ECONOMY IN A COVID 19 ENVIRONMENT

5. From the start of the pandemic, my Government recognized that a fitting response to the threat of COVID 19 to our most important economic sector would be the further stimulation of the construction industry across Antigua and Barbuda. When our people's health and well-being called for the closure of our borders in March 2020, tourism arrivals came to a screeching halt. As the state of affairs became more dire with the grounding of airlines and the mothballing of cruise ships, my Government galvanized its efforts to keep our gasping economy afloat. Everything was done to complete unfinished construction projects, to build-out the infrastructure and to allocate additional parcels of Crown land as a mechanism to encourage the building of new homes. Construction, my Government concluded, would be the practical strategy for achieving economic sustainability, while tourism was forcibly put on hold. Continued construction activities at PLH in Barbuda,

private homes on Jumby Bay Island, the Mill Reef Club, and at a myriad of other prime locations helped to grow the economy. Construction did indeed grow by 13% and served to alleviate some of the pain which the shuttered tourism sector inflicted. The economy of Antigua and Barbuda grew by more than 4% in 2021, despite the persistence of Covid 19. Commendations are in order for our Ministers of Works, Investment and Finance, their teams and the many private investors who opened their pocketbooks when it mattered most. Their joint efforts kept our nation afloat during one of our darkest moments.

6. Less than 10 weeks after the closure of our borders, Antigua and Barbuda reopened for business on June 1, 2020. Since then and into 2021, the sun has been emerging from behind the dark clouds to create our unique island vacation space. In the past months, many of our well-established hotels have experienced very high occupancy rates. Over the Yuletide Season, mid-December 2021 until early January 2022, the number of cruise vessels and the arrivals at V.C. Bird International Airport surpassed even my Government's highest expectations.

7. Although the new Omicron-Covid variant threatens Antigua and Barbuda's source markets, those seeking respite from the disease came in droves to enjoy the safety and beauty of this destination. Our country's relatively low infection rate before Christmas, the near absence of hospitalized Covid patients, and the extensive and excellent training of our frontline workers in the hospitality sector, built visitor confidence in Antigua and Barbuda. It is interesting to note that at a recent investiture ceremony at Government House where a Faithful and Meritorious Service Medal- Gold was presented to Mr. Bob Osborn for his dedication to our yachting industry over the years, he said and I quote, I want to congratulate the Government and People of Antigua and Barbuda for their mandatory vaccination policy because our sailors felt safer coming to Antigua and Barbuda than staying in their own home countries'. This speaks volumes. My government is convinced that with a further increase in the vaccination uptake by residents, visitor confidence will soar to even higher heights.

8. Congratulations are in order for the Ministries of Health, Tourism, National Security, Finance, the Air and Sea Ports, Customs, Immigration and

their teams. Their joint efforts have helped to keep our nation's ports operational and our heads above water as we faced our biggest challenge.

9. On behalf of my Government, I express heartfelt thanks to all those who played a role in keeping the vast majority safe and Covid-free. Leadership has always mattered. The nation expresses thanks to the Cabinet and the Parliament of Antigua and Barbuda for the superb leadership which all have witnessed.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

C. TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE, WATER SUPPLY AND FOOD PRODUCTION

10. Another global challenge faced by the people of Antigua and Barbuda is the earth's changing climate. It influences the fierceness and intensity of storms and hurricanes, the erosion of our shoreline from groundswells; it causes unwanted Sargassum weed to invade our beaches and can be blamed for the reduction in annual rainfall. My Government is fully aware that having

a sufficient supply of fresh, potable water for our homes, our hotels, our businesses, schools and other institutions is an achievable goal which the APUA would have already overcome-- but for the Covid pandemic.

11. My Government wishes to present its national water production report to the people it serves. Seven years ago, when the current administration was first elected, Sembcorp produced a maximum of 3.5 million gallons of potable water daily and was owed more than \$22,000,000 by the APUA. Fast forward to today when as part of its capacity building policy, APUA is now the sole owner of the Sembcorp plants. Further, APUA has through its strategic planning process, doubled potable water production to 7 million gallons per day by bringing more reverse osmosis or R/O plants online. The reality is that sustained drought conditions and an expanding economy have resulted in an increased demand for water from 6 million gallons per day in 2013 to 8 million gallons per day in 2020. Additional reverse osmosis plants therefore had to be commissioned. These units include:

a. The Pigeon Point R/O, installed in 2016 with a daily production capacity of 300,000 gallons.

APUA's intervention with this plant saved the yachting industry from the negative impacts of another long and harmful drought. The owners of the yachts had plans to relocate to another jurisdiction which offered free water, but my government's intervention saved this important sector;

b. The Ivan Rodrigues R/O plant at Shell Beach, was installed in 2017 with a daily production capacity of 1.7 million gallons.

12. To meet growing demands for potable water, APUA has reported that they have now moved beyond planning and will be in their implementation phase this year as they pursue their goal to produce an estimated 10 million gallons per day, well in excess of the expected daily demands of 8 million. The future looks promising. My government has provided the following line up for improved water supply in response to the urgent needs of our residents:

a. A Japanese funded R/O Plant which brings the complement of units at Ffreyes Beach to four, will begin its commissioning process from this weekend with the expectation to be operational within the first quarter of this year. Our nation's, production capacity will increase by 350,000 gallons per day when this unit comes online.

b. The Fort James R/O Plant, with a capacity of 500,000 gallons per day will be commissioned by June 2022. The plant has been paid for and is already containerized for shipment.

c. The Bethesda R/O Plant, with a capacity of 3.2 million gallons per day, will be commissioned in September 2022. My government has been assured by APUA that payments for this plant have been accelerated to facilitate its expeditious delivery to our shores and to avoid any delays in the supply chain.

d. These new plants will significantly enhance the units at Crabbes, Camp Blizzard, Barnacle Point, and Pigeon Point the three (3) existing units at Ffyres Beach.

13. My Government is aware that in spite of these significant improvements in production many are not experiencing the expected flow of water through their taps and a small number of households on higher elevations have water flow and pressure challenges. The APUA Water Division has given my government the assurances that they have identified a key component in the task of supplying adequate water is a fully functional distribution system. Our existing system has done its time, is inefficient and inadequate for the sustainable supply of quality. A sustainable solution, to include the installation of a sewer system in St. John's City, had already been designed but delays occasioned by the COVID 19 pandemic challenges have slowed the implementation process. My government and the APUA Water Division asks for the further patience of its residents and customers as it continues to press toward the achievement of its goal. We thank the APUA Water Division for addressing the persistent drought conditions that have left all surface-water storage-systems empty. There is no doubt that this has increased our nation's reliance almost exclusively, on the science of reverse osmosis. Reverse Osmosis water is very precious and very expensive, but my government considers its investment in water desalination both fitting and

wise. Thank you, APUA, for making an effort to reach every household in Antigua. My government and people will continue to look forward with hope to the full realization of your commitment to provide water to every customer 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, even in the absence of rain.

14. The decline in rainfall in recent years, leading to drought, followed occasionally by torrential rain and flooding, has been blamed on the global climate change phenomenon. Global warming threatens to undermine civilization by disrupting the normalcy of weather, by rapid melting of ice on the frozen continents on the North and South Poles, by the expansion of the seas, and the erosion of shorelines as millions of gallons of melted ice pour into the oceans. In response, our small island-state has joined forces with other low-lying coastal-and island-states, in every international forum in which islands have membership, to help to make our island-homes safer places on which to live for countless generations to come. Many multi-lateral institutions, such as the United Nations, the Organization of American States and the Commonwealth of Nations, are debating a set of measures put forward by the most vulnerable, to reduce the harmful effects of increases in global temperatures. Our diplomats and environmental experts, led by the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, have worked

to rescue small islands from imminent destruction. They are to be applauded.

15. The agricultural output of Antigua and Barbuda has been adversely impacted by the drought conditions, which have been severe during these past five years. While the absence of rain compelled many farmers to rely upon irrigation and modern technologies for food crop production, drought has also resulted in a significant reduction of ruminants. My Government reports that nearly 100,000 sheep and goats have been slaughtered for food but have not been replaced; the populations of these quadrupeds—having been hampered by the shortage of edible leafy vegetation and rain water—have dwindled. In egg production, however, there is no deficiency. It is noteworthy that poultry farmers are able to meet market demand for eggs. Congratulations!

16. Agriculture continues to grow in economic importance as scientific methods, taught to our farmers by Chinese scientists, the Agricultural Institute for Latin America and the Caribbean (IICA) and others, have begun to attract many young people to this emerging career path. The Minister of

Agriculture, having encouraged wide-scale back-yard farming and newer technologies such as hydroponics, has generated an inordinate interest in food production and the achievement of food security. In several secondary schools, Agricultural Science is being taught to inculcate a high regard for food sovereignty. My Government recognizes that its population of 100,000 souls expands with the arrival of every vessel and aircraft. While we must cater for the tastes and likes of our visitors, my government acknowledges the noble ambition of achieving food sovereignty in our island nation.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

D. FRIENDS OF ALL, ENEMIES OF NONE

17. On numerous occasions, my government has repeatedly declared that Antigua and Barbuda has fashioned a foreign policy that makes us friends to all and an enemy of no state. As a small vulnerable nation whose sovereignty was secured by our own initiatives and by international law, it is in our best interest to seek to build bridges to countries that are within our region, within our hemisphere, and on the other side of the globe.

18. The People's Republic of China has become an indispensable partner in my government's development drive. China's "Belt and Road Initiative" has made available, inexpensive capital for major developmental and infrastructural projects. The V.C. Bird International Airport was financed by the China Exim Bank as is the near-completed Deepwater Cargo Port. My government is aware of the global campaign to discredit the victories of China in making friends around the globe. The reality is that in every multilateral forum where it can be found, the People's

Republic of China joins with the developing world to move the pace of development forward. My Government expresses its thanks once again to the Government and people of China.

19. India, the second most populated country in the world, whose Independence in 1947 set the stage for the dismantling of colonial hegemony globally, and whose leaders inspired others to seek peaceful means to establish their sovereignty has also become an extraordinary friend of the people and government of Antigua and Barbuda. Most notably, this past year India was the first to gift Antigua and Barbuda thousands of Covid-19 vaccines when all other sources could only promise but not deliver. This nation, on the other side of our planet, but known to our region through mass migration in another era, is a remarkable friend and cricketing competitor. Thank you India.

20. The Republic of South Korea has maintained a steady connection with Antigua and Barbuda by consistently making annual gifts of motorized vehicles to our state and its people for four decades. These annual gifts have benefited our young students who require daily transportation from home to school and back. These

government-to-government gifts by the Republic of South Korea are highly appreciated, my government assures.

21. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Republic of Cuba are both within our region and hemisphere. My government recalls our nation's long and friendly history with these two good Caribbean friends who have been positive contributors not only to our own, but to regional development. It goes without saying the tremendous benefits which our twin island nation has and continues to receive from the expert Cuban Medical Brigades deployed to our shores, even during our most anxious moments in the early months of the COVID 19 Pandemic are invaluable and difficult to quantify. Fully funded Cuban Scholarships provided to hundreds of Antiguan and Barbudan residents which commenced decades ago have transformed the lives of many of our citizens who are now making a meaningful contribution to our economy in a range of areas including medicine, technology and agriculture. With a similar focus on education, The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, established the Institute for Culture and Cooperation in Antigua and Barbuda over 40 years ago. This institution, which has already started classes this year, provides free instruction in the Spanish language as it seeks to build stronger connections between our peoples through culture and education.

Hundreds of residents have benefited from this free resource which has been a staple even when our two nations at various times have had to deal with internal challenges. Venezuela must be applauded for leading the charge in the establishment of the ALBA Bank, a fiscal vehicle which has allowed my government to have access to fresh capital. At this moment, there is an on-going crisis with their neighbour to the North. My government's principled stand, divorced from convenience and fear, leads Antigua and Barbuda to embrace these Caribbean countries that have always demonstrated their true neighbourliness to several Antigua and Barbuda administrations. My government asserts the fact that Venezuela and Cuba are our friends and Antigua and Barbuda is theirs.

22. The Dominican Republic, once a country to which our people immigrated, is now witnessing a reversal of that historical trend, making Antigua and Barbuda a home for thousands of Dominicans. Following the devastation in Barbuda, caused by Hurricane Irma, this Caribbean Island-Country gave its commitment to build a Primary School on Barbuda. A change in administration there has slowed the process, but my government remains hopeful. The Dominican Republic is a true friend of Antigua and Barbuda.

23. There are two friends from our hemisphere whose historical and social fabrics are inextricably linked to ours. It is a fact that many of our citizens have made their second homes in these jurisdictions and that our economy is highly dependent upon them as source markets. I refer to the United States and Canada. Permit me to briefly elucidate on this submission and the implications for our nation's future existence.

a. Governors dispatched to Antigua and Barbuda dating back to the early 1700s in colonial days sometimes came from British North American colonies, before the USA was born in 1776. Governors were also dispatched from Antigua to North Carolina and other British North American colonies, taking with them the enslaved Antiguans to serve as their cooks, household help, and servants. Private landholders who made significant profits from their estates, donated large sums to the schools their children attended. One example is the Harvard Law School which was endowed by the Royalls family who owned the Royalls Estate just east of Cedar Grove Village. In keeping with its commitment to strengthen our nation's human resource capacity, my government successfully negotiated with Harvard University to make good on reparations. As a result, Harvard has agreed to collaborate with our U.W.I. Five Islands campus to deliver on its promise with no costs attached.

b. The building of U.S. bases on our country's shores in 1941, contributed to the Allies' victory in 1945. The USA emerged as the most powerful country on earth, militarily and economically, and spent enormous sums to rehabilitate a destroyed Europe. In a similar manner, the USA is being urged to develop a Marshall Plan for our Caribbean basin in light of the climate extremes which our vulnerable island nations face annually with the resulting destruction and degradation of our environment and livelihoods.

c. Our tourism had its beginning in 1952 with the passage of the Hotels Aid Ordinance Act. The commissioning of the military runway at Coolidge, into a civilian airport, was achieved by the grace of the U.S. Government in that same year. The luxury hotels first built in Antigua and Barbuda were financed by wealthy Americans who chose to invest in luxury accommodations that formed the backbone of a fledgling tourism industry. The St. John's Deepwater Harbour, dredged and constructed over 17 months, ending on October 31, 1968, was achieved through financing of the Export Import Bank of the USA.

d. It is clear that the relationship between Antigua and Barbuda and the USA goes back 400 years and should cause the current U.S. administration to be more generous to its Caribbean neighbour. My government has learned that a country does not get what it deserves; a country gets what it negotiates. Negotiating a

settlement of the W.T.O. judgment is therefore a good place to start. My government also thanks the US administration for its two recent and sizeable contributions of Covid-19 vaccines, with a commitment of more to come.

e. Canada was once British North America, and still acknowledges Queen Elizabeth as Head of State. Its relationship with the Anglo-Caribbean fits a pattern that involved enabling migration to Canada. The largest country in the world, recognized that it was better-off inviting trained personnel to migrate to Canada. By building schools and sending teachers to assist in enlarging literacy, Canada helped to make it possible for Antigua and Barbuda to achieve an impressive score on the UNDP's human development index. In 1994, Antigua and Barbuda ranked 29th out of 157 participating states. That is a remarkable record for which Canada is applauded.

24. The United Kingdom, a nation with which Antigua and Barbuda has had the longest relations, remains a steadfast friend. The current Minister of Foreign Affairs along with the High Commissioner to London, have indeed nurtured a strong and enduring relationship since their tenure began. On the eve of Independence, 40 years ago, on November 1, 1981, Vere Cornwall Bird declared that a mature relationship with the U.K. would characterize the future. These 40 years of sovereignty, my Government asserts, have seen stronger bonds and closer

friendship with this important ally. My Government notes the harm which Covid-19 and its recent variant have inflicted on the economy of this great country. Nonetheless, my Government will continue to pursue reparations, with the sure knowledge that the U.K. treasures the friendship and will act to repair the painful years of history, without hurtful recriminations. The British government has also shown its goodwill with the establishment of a British Resident Commission in Antigua and Barbuda. My government expresses its thanks to the resident commissioner for her support for a number of initiatives focused on our environment and marine space among others, and look forward to a continued close working relationship.

24. There are three multilateral institutions which are dear to the heart of my government and all previous administrations: **The United Nations, the Organization of American States, and the Commonwealth of Nations.**

a. The United Nations adopted Resolution 1514/XV of 1960, declaring colonialism unlawful. That decision led to the creation of small island-state-members of the United Nations.

b. Working along with a few coastal states, that now total 39, **The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)** was created. The AOSIS has successfully brought the climate issue to the very front of the U.N. agenda, and has urged those who pollute the planet, to live up to their responsibility by meeting the cost of damages to innocent others. Polluting states are encouraged to shift to renewable energy and away from the intense use of fossil fuels. My Government applauds our Prime Minister for leading the AOSIS during these past twelve months, including the outstanding performance which he demonstrated in Glasgow, Scotland, during COP26; and, for furthering the cause of justice globally. The Permanent Representative and staff at the U.N. Mission of Antigua and Barbuda have been remarkable in their pursuit of a better world.

25. **The Organization of American States (the O.A.S.)** has escaped being labeled the footstool of any one state, in part because of the strong and independent policy decisions of several small member-states, my government concludes. Based on the principled approach to the treatment of Venezuela where Antigua and Barbuda refuses to be dragged into the internal affairs of a state, stands as testimony to the dignity of our country's self-determination. The principled stand on Haiti, a

CARICOM member State, also demonstrates the high level of competence which our representation in Washington affords. Our nation's OAS policy is brilliant.

26. This year is a special year for the Commonwealth, home to 2.4 billion citizens. It will mark the celebration of the Platinum Jubilee Anniversary of the Head of the Commonwealth, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the world's longest reigning monarch. This special occasion will be marked by a Royal visit to five Caribbean realms including Antigua and Barbuda. On this occasion Her Majesty will be represented by the Earl and Countess of Wessex. The Commonwealth Games in which Antiguan and Barbudans have participated over the years is scheduled to take place in Birmingham in July of this year. We wish our athletes best of success. The long tradition of the Queen's Baton Relay passing through each Commonwealth member country will also take place in 2022. My government remains a committed member of the Commonwealth of Nations and will celebrate Commonwealth Day this year within the context of a covid environment. Our traditional stakeholders which include the Office of the Governor General, the Ministry of Education, The Legislature, our Police and Military forces will be joined this year for the first time by the Office of the Resident British Commissioner and the newly formed national chapter of the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS). The

RCS founded in 1868, is a network of individuals and organizations committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth Citizens across the world. The President of the local chapter is the Governor General's Goodwill Emissary Lady Williams. Since their establishment the local chapter has been busy working to improve the wellbeing of citizens in Antigua and Barbuda in collaboration with the Halo Foundation and the Office of the British Resident Commissioner. I am also pleased to use this opportunity to recognize the outstanding service which Lady Williams has given as President and Founder of the Halo Foundation Inc which serves as the umbrella organization that supports the over 30 charities which fall under the distinguished patron of Lady Williams and myself as Governor General. The Halo Foundation Inc, true to the principles of the Commonwealth and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals has been making a big difference in the lives of many with a strong focus on education, the youth, civic pride, anti-bullying, environmental sensitivity and most recently food security. While the major fund raising efforts have been thwarted by COVID 19, plans are moving ahead to host the Wings of Charity event in the UK this year so that the those in need can receive needed relief. It is in the context of all these positive activities, that my government finds the disagreement over the choice of a General Secretary of the Commonwealth of Nations an unfortunate situation. The approach of starving

an institution of financial resources so that wealthier states can command the outcome they desire is not true to the enshrined principles of the Commonwealth. A case study in the notion of “equality of states” is being played out in London, and across several capitals of Commonwealth countries. Our government is hopeful that this matter will be resolved in short order.

27. Having served as the Chairperson of CARICOM during these past six months, my Government applauds the Prime Minister for the exuberance, competence and exemplary leadership which he brought to the undertaking. Despite Heads of Government not being able to travel, the CARICOM held its schedule of meetings by reliance on modern technology. The CARICOM played a crucial role in coordinating some vaccine acquisition for the region; brought strength to the Climate Conference in Glasgow when unity was absolutely necessary; enjoined the United Nations in the struggle to keep our climate safe; and, sought uniform approaches to other challenges, including the use of GNP per capita to determine development status, despite varying interests. CARICOM remains an important part of the matrix of foreign policy initiatives that yield substantial returns for our country.

28. The Organization of East Caribbean States (the OECS) continues to be one of the strongest institutions that arranges for its members to function frequently as a “regional state”. Despite our separate sovereignties, the six independent states, the non-independent members and the Associate Members of the OECS, frequently join together to achieve what could not be successfully undertaken by a single entity. My government describes this arrangement as “regional statehood.” The Honourable Sir Lester Bird, an originator and architect of the OECS, is to be credited for envisioning these multiple, joint roles, thereby making the OECS a significant partner in development. Whether that partnership is found in the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court, the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, the Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority, the OECS Economic Treaty, the Regional Security System, the OECS Pharmaceutical Procurement Services and other regional efforts, this generation applauds the 1980 founders of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States for their foresight and brilliance.

29. My government’s view is that the foreign policy of this nation, forty years old and counting, has been superbly conducted principally by remaining committed to the underlying creed of making no enemies and embracing all as friends.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

E. BUILDING RESILIENCE IN THE NEW PARADIGM THROUGH ALL SECTORS

30. My government will bring to Parliament the Telecommunications Bill 2022. Although the new law will be all-encompassing, the time has come to separate out the competitors from the regulator and allow improvements in telecommunications that are objectively managed.

a. The ability of customers to change their telephone carriers while keeping their existing numbers, called number portability, will soon be a reality and the provision of fiber-optic to the home will also be completed in 2022. APUA is investing more than \$100 million in an undersea cable to enable the improvement of our broadband services so that my government can fast track Antigua and Barbuda's forward trajectory to a developed-country status. Covid has caused many plans to be delayed, but my government is confident that this will be temporary and our gifted policy makers and technicians will find creative ways to work smartly within the new paradigm. The Minister responsible for Technology has been very

aggressively pursuing these important objectives with the APUA as an indispensable partner.

b. As Minister of Information, congratulations are in order for the significant change which he has brought to the Antigua and Barbuda Broadcasting Service (A.B.S.). The transformation has won the station critical acclaim, and its growing reach and audience, regionally and internationally, is evidence of its superb coverage. Throughout the travails of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Minister has ensured that A.B.S. provides superb coverage of Cabinet's weekly output, buttressing the transparency which characterizes my Government.

31. During the two years of Covid and the decline in tourism, my Government sought to make construction play an even more significant role than before. The Development Control Authority facilitated the more efficient issuance of start-up permits and licenses as a means of increasing home-building and to spur other construction projects. That plan worked exceedingly well, my government agrees. Nearly one thousand parcels of land have also been identified for homeowner distribution, and CHAPA has built more than one hundred homes. National Housing has also constructed hundreds of new homes to meet the demands for new housing. The Ministry of Housing has worked exceedingly hard to make a success

of the housing construction demand. Led by a Minister who is determined to succeed, my government extends congratulations to her for a job well done.

32. The Ministry of Social Transformation has been challenged from its very creation, attempting to meet the needs of many indigent-elderly or single-parent head of households. Its function is to meet the needs of those who are less capable of providing for themselves. The Ministry was conceived as the restorer of the breach. Given the resource restraints, the Minister of Social Transformation is to be congratulated for growing a mustard seed into a giant oak. Nearly every challenged household whose residence is badly deteriorating or burnt to the ground, whose income is fixed, and whose savings have been depleted, can count on the Ministry of Social Transformation to help fill the breach. Thank you, Minister.

33. a. My Government applauds the Minister of Education and Sports for addressing frontally many of the Covid-19 challenges which faced our school plants, and which continue to pose a problem for parents and teachers and students. The responsibility to protect the youth is imposed on every adult in Antigua and Barbuda. That responsibility in the face of Covid is not a simple task. When the Cabinet required all teachers and other staff on school compounds to be

inoculated, there appeared to be much opposition. Wisdom, however, was the winner; over 90% of students, 12 to 18 years and older, and nearly 95% of teaching staff regarded it their duty to keep their charges safe from infections. The restorers of the paths have acted. Today, inoculation of the school population can be considered an inimitable success, and the Minister of Education and his team is to be applauded for securing a high level of cooperation.

b. My government recognizes that competitive school sports have not yet made their way back to the playing fields; despite this unfortunate situation, all is being done to ensure that when re-started, the infrastructure to achieve this objective will be repaired and in place.

c. Applause is also forthcoming for the completion of the new science wing of the Sir Novelle Richards Academy. Another of Antigua and Barbuda's wealthy friends is to be thanked for this important gift.

d. The school meals program has been extended to cater for all, and no payment is required of either student or teachers. The school uniform grant programme has also continued. The University of the West Indies at Five Islands continues to grow its student body, despite the discouraging political commentaries aimed at denying the Five Islands Campus a reality. My Government is very pleased that the Vice Chancellor won re-appointment despite the public effort to humiliate this

outstanding West Indian. I am also pleased that in this our 40th year of political independence, Vice Chancellor Professor Sir Hilary Beckles also received the highest award of the Governor General's Faithful and Meritorious Service Cross & Plaque for his 40 years significant contribution to the Caribbean region.

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

34. My government welcomes the achievements of the Ministry of Works. It has become a revenue-earning Ministry with resources that allowed it to respond meaningfully to the hundreds of demands made of it for better roads and bridges, healthier buildings in which to work, and improved infrastructure for the growth of the expanding economy. On all government-building projects, the Ministry of Works has provided many of the non-imported building materials required to finish the project. The ADOMS Building, for example, renamed justifiably the Sir John E. St. Luce Finance and Conference Center, was a Ministry of Works completion-project that did not require the millions which the previous management team was requesting for the successful end of the project. That building, intended originally

to cost EC\$17 million to construct, was plagued with inherited cost overruns that would have enabled government to construct two such buildings using the monies expended. The removal of the old management team was actually carried out by the Cabinet, since the Board refused to act, despite the evidence of inflated costs, my government reports.

35. The floods of November 8 and 9, 2020, that dumped 21 inches of rain on Antigua in two days, undermined many of the roads which had deteriorated over time or had outlived their usefulness. Potholes appeared almost everywhere, following the downpours. The cost of those repairs exceeded the budgeted allocation that was set aside; and, the Covid pandemic, having impacted the economy, impaired revenue collection significantly, in the months following. Yet, my government has persisted and has achieved outstandingly because of excellent leadership. Congrats to the Minister of Works and his team.

36. The Attorney General, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, Justice and Public Safety are applauded for the remarkable achievements they registered in 2021. The Parliament met at least once each month and sittings frequently consumed two days, in several busy calendar months. The timely amendments to the Laws of

Antigua and Barbuda, and the passage of new laws as the circumstances required, made the Attorney General's Office one of the busiest Ministries within the government. New lawyers were hired in order to meet the demand for draft legislation. New circumstances such as Stem Cell Research and Application, Medicinal Cannabis, Crypto Currency, and Digitalization by many government and private entities required completely new laws, contemplated by my Government. In 2022, the legislative agenda is also anticipated to be a busy one and will include the Telecommunications Bill 2022, the Road Traffic Amendment Act, the repeal of the Praedial Larceny Act with its replacement by a more relevant and long-awaited piece of legislation and the replacement of the Medical Treatment Act by the Mental Health Act of 2022. The Attorney General rose to the task 2021 and will do so once again in 2022.

37. My government also registers its pleasure with the performance of the Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force and as the Commander and Chief of our military, so do I. 2021 witnessed the ABDF providing enhanced support to the Ministry of Health response to COVID 19 by supporting its work at the poly clinics as well as the SLBMC. The expectation for 2022 is to enhance its medical capability in order to provide greater support. Additionally, in 2021 the force was able to acquire an

aircraft. This new addition to its arsenal will be incorporated into the force's maritime surveillance system in 2022 allowing our military to improve its ability to conduct maritime search and rescue missions, while providing enhanced support to the government's efforts of building a blue economy. 2021 also saw improvements in the ABDF's Agricultural program. This food production machinery not only serves to support the internal needs of the ABDF, but it supplements the needs of external partners such as the Fiennes institute and the Clareview Mental Hospital. The ABDF will continue to work closely with the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda and the National Office of Disaster Services in 2022.

38. Rising to the occasion, the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda has performed admirably during the year just ended, keeping us safe from criminal activity aimed at our person and property. The curfew which was imposed to curb Covid seemed to have had a diminishing impact on criminal behaviour. For this reason, the 16 murders that occurred last year shocked us all. My government believes; they are sixteen too many. We strive to create a society that has the capability of settling differences peacefully, teaching us to appreciate the value of human life and human dignity. Violence against women—one of the plagues of an evolving society—continues to be addressed by state and non-state actors, seeking

to isolate the violent types from victims, and bringing the guilty to face the law. The mentally ill have also become a part of the mix, becoming both perpetrator and victim of murder in the year just ended. “Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream,” my government intones.

39. The Organization for Drug Control and Money Laundering Policy (ONDCP) is one of the police agencies upon which my government relies in order to curb the drug trade and to take the profits out from the money-laundering which inevitably follows. The ONDCP has kept Antigua and Barbuda relatively free from organized crime and the data indicate that it is the most accomplished of similar organizations in the Anglo-Caribbean. Its systems are precise, its members are all highly trained, and it has prevented the spread of the corrupting influence of illicit drugs. The ONDCP is applauded for its successes and its superb leadership.

40. The Financial Services Regulatory Commission (the FSRC) has also kept our small offshore financial-services-sector free from criminal elements, my government is assured. The sector has been significantly reduced by the hostile action of the OECD and the punitive measures that can impact domestic banking and the movement of capital.

41. The Ministry of Finance is to be congratulated for the sterling tasks it undertook to meet the demands of an undiminished public sector whose salaries and wages were paid on-time each month and each week respectively, despite the Covid pandemic; and, all government pensioners were also paid not always on-time but within reasonable time considering the circumstances. Again, there were no lay-offs of public servants, payments serving to keep the economy afloat. The Social Security Board, whose monthly payments to recipients are always predicated on a growing workforce contributing to meeting its obligations, was severely challenged as Covid brought on massive unemployment in the private sector and diminished worker-contributions. The central government stepped-in monthly with resources from the Citizenship by Investment programme (CIP). In early December 2021, my government provided the Social Security Board with \$10 million dollars and filled the gaps, such that every Social Security recipient was paid in full by 31 December 2021. As the economy begins to recover, the burden of meeting the shortfall is likely to lessen, and on-time payments are expected to continue in 2022. My government has never borrowed any money from Social Security, and is the only administration to provide timely contributions consistent with and exceeding its financial obligations; no other government in the 48-year history of Social Security

can boast that achievement. A further \$1,000,000 have been dispatched to Social Security this past week in order to ensure on-time payments before 31 January 2022. The Citizenship by Investment Program has been one reliable source of non-tax revenue; a significant fraction of its resources has gone to the Social Security Board for payment to the recipients. My government recalls that there were several figures who publicly called for the “suspension” of CIP operations so that misery could stalk the land. On the contrary, my government is convinced that the CIP, under indigenous management, has been remarkable in its turn-around of applications, its delivery of revenue, and the multiple useful purposes to which its earnings have been put. Congratulations to the CIP!

MADAME PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE, MR. SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, MEMBERS OF THE SENATE, MEMBERS OF THE LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

42. Before I close, I am duty bound to share with the citizens and residents of our fair land, the progress made on the restoration project at Government House in 2021. Unfortunately, the restoration of a truly architectural and historical gem in the city was also negatively impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic. A major donor

was understandably forced to respond to the urgent needs of the vulnerable and the needy on the national level. We were however able to make progress on the restoration of a number of buildings in the western section of the property through donor funding from the Calvin Ayre Foundation. Our north-eastern wall which was damaged in two vehicular accidents is now being repaired through a generous gift of Mr. Ernest Letby OBE and the Caribbean Alliance Insurance Company Ltd. Our most recent donor, the Linbury Trust has also made a donation to renovate the kitchen and office quarters for the Governor General. Sadly however, Lord Sainsbury, who kept his commitment to support the restoration through the Linbury Trust, passed away a few days ago. Lady Williams and I along with the Permanent Secretary and staff extend our sincerest condolences to his widow Lady Sainsbury, their family and the Board of the Linbury Trust. There is much more work to be done on the restoration and we are hopeful that other donors will come forward to assist in making this project a reality. Once again, we express our sincere gratitude to all who have given to this worthy cause. Once completed, it is expected that the Government House will as a key element of the walking tour of St. John's for residents and visitors alike.

43. I end by noting that the challenges generated by Covid-19 have severely impacted every aspect of life in Antigua and Barbuda. The manner in which my government has had to provide leadership during the crises which Covid spawned, demonstrated outstanding management among the political directorate. The COVID driven State of Emergency was ended just before Christmas Day, and the associated curfew brought to an end simultaneously. Because of the uncertainties wrought by the new Covid variant called Omicron, my government cannot yet declare victory over the virus. However, given the record of achievement during the early days of the pandemic and until this present time, the management of this new phenomenon, by the Cabinet and the medical professionals wins my government's applause for its foresight, its calculation of likely outcomes and for placing a top priority on our people and country as always. These past 21 months have been undoubtedly challenging. Yet, the resilience and remarkable strength of the citizens and residents of Antigua and Barbuda people were tested and made manifest. Congratulations! Self-regulation will now play a greater part in our recovery from the challenges we faced in the previous months, as the lessons learned are widespread.

43. We can all agree that the future is not known; yet, based on the experience garnered during these past twenty-one months, my government demonstrated that it is a superb management entity that has shown its competence and resilience in the face of an existential threat. Its sterling service to the people of this great little country deserves unending applause. Congratulations! May God continue to bless us all during this New Year that is sure to be filled with new challenges but also new and pleasant surprises. Thank you!