



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

**Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda**

**Delivers the 2025 Speech from the Throne**

**FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH AMID GLOBAL GAINS**

Thursday, 28 November 2024  
Parliament Building  
Queen Elizabeth Highway  
St. John's, ANTIGUA and BARBUDA

**GOOD MORNING, EVERYONE.**

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

**Introduction**

1. Lady Williams and I are grateful for the outpouring of empathy and well-wishes which were received following the short crisis which occurred during Her Excellency's recent trip. We are both thankful to the expertise of the surgeons and other medical personnel in China, who quickly applied their training and returned my wife to normalcy. I thank the surgeons for their caring and swift application of their expert skill. Thank you.

2. The nation was deeply saddened by the passing of the Honourable Asot Michael on Tuesday November 5, 2024. His contributions to Antigua and Barbuda's political and social landscape are indelibly etched in our history. As we honour his legacy, we are reminded of the importance of unity in times of loss. Our sympathies go out to his family, constituents and friends who loved him dearly. May his soul rest in peace.

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6. On **1<sup>st</sup> November 1981**, the new State of Antigua and Barbuda was declared sovereign, and our small island developing State joined the march of history towards a new beginning.

The World Bank, measuring our country's gross domestic product in 1981, declared Antigua and Barbuda to have an economy valued at **EC\$336,050,100** (three

hundred and thirty-six million, fifty thousand, and one hundred dollars). Today, 43 years later, the GDP of Antigua and Barbuda exceeds **EC\$5 billion dollars**. That is, the wealth-producing capacity of Antigua and Barbuda is 15 times as large as it was 43 years ago. The inclusion of Barbuda in today's economic calculation is a remarkable feat for which my government and an astute Prime Minister are to be commended.

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**The Financial Health of the Economy**

7. My government set about to make Antigua and Barbuda's economy produce sufficient jobs, while lowering taxes and attracting significant investments—building an economic powerhouse, as the ambition is labeled. These objectives, vigorously pursued on the heels of the harmful COVID-19 Pandemic, were absolutely needed.

If young school-leavers were to find employment opportunities and training, and if the adults with an entrepreneurial bent were to be able to start businesses that could yield profits, then new policies had to be initiated. In order to succeed, the expansion of the ABICE/Harrison Centre was required; the Entrepreneurial Development Fund was established; and the University of the West Indies Fourth Landed Campus was founded. A multi-pronged methodology marked the approach of my Government towards sustainable economic growth.

8. My Government also further enabled the necessary conditions for enterprises to thrive, believing that foreign direct investments are a major catalyst for growth. Barbuda is undergoing significant economic transformation through several major development projects. The Peace Love and Happiness (PLH) project, also known as the Barbuda Ocean Club, commenced construction in July 2020 and is slated for completion by 2032. To date, PLH has invested over USD 500 million, financing an international airport, an 18-hole golf course, beach clubs, 40 private residences, and staff and utility amenities. In 2024 alone, the project invested USD 85 million, in addition to the opening of Barbuda's first international airport and creation of

20 new aviation jobs. In 2025, PLH plans to invest an additional USD 120 million. Employment projections for 2025 include over 450 staff for PLH and the Barbuda Ocean Club, more than 400 contractor staff, and over 300 individuals in club operations, with more than 1,200 jobs being created by project completion.

These developments underscore substantial investments in Barbuda's tourism sector, aiming to enhance the island's appeal as a premier destination while fostering economic growth.

9. Barbuda is poised for significant economic transformation, driven by major development projects that are set to redefine its landscape. Foremost among these is the Rosewood Luxury Hotel by Murbee Ltd., which will replace the long-standing incomplete Dulcina structure. This ambitious venture represents a total investment of USD 250 million, with construction slated to begin in 2025 and conclude by 2028. To date, USD 15 million has been invested, resulting in the creation of 15 indirect jobs. In 2025, an additional USD 50 million will be allocated, generating approximately 250 construction jobs. Upon completion, the hotel is expected to provide employment for 200 individuals.

The Paradise Found Development, situated on the southeast coast of Barbuda, is a comprehensive resort project that commenced in January 2024. With a total budget of USD 63 million, the project has already seen an investment of USD 21 million as of October 2024. Currently, construction is at the superstructure and foundation stage, with grading and civil works progressing concurrently.

Major infrastructure components have been secured, with deposits paid, and the procurement of finishes and Mechanical, Electrical, and Plumbing (MEP) items is underway. A notable feature of the development is the esteemed Nobu Restaurant, soon to be complemented by the Nobu Beach Inn Clubhouse.

The project is on track for completion in May 2026, with the grand opening scheduled for later that year. In 2025, an additional USD 30 million is projected to be invested, further advancing the construction. Upon completion, the development is expected to generate approximately 200 jobs, contributing significantly to the local economy.

This endeavor underscores a substantial investment in Barbuda's tourism sector, aiming to enhance the island's appeal as a premier destination while fostering economic growth. Collectively, these initiatives signify Barbuda's evolution into a net contributor to the Treasury, reducing its reliance on central government subventions. Infrastructure advancements, including a new airport with an extended runway and plans for a deepwater harbour, are positioning Barbuda as a strategic port of entry for container cargo.

The government's commitment to integrating Barbuda into the nation's economic framework underscores its dedication to progress, despite opposition. The island, once considered a "diamond in the rough," is now being meticulously refined.

10. When my Government took over the leadership of Antigua and Barbuda in 2014, the debt to GDP ratio stood at 104%. Today, because the GDP has grown and the debt has been paid down, the debt to GDP ratio is estimated at approximately 60% - the ideal level proposed by the Bretton Woods multilateral institutions and the ECCB. My Government is thankful to the professionals and the debt managers in the Ministry of Finance, gratified for the informed guidance set by the Minister of Finance, and grateful for the unstinting support of the Cabinet in fiscal decision-making.

### **The Health of the Nation is the Wealth of the Nation**

11. A cliché that is globally accepted asserts that a sick nation is unlikely to be a wealthy nation; conversely, a healthy nation is a wealthy nation. Several Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) are threatening our nation's economic health, and every effort is being made by the Minister of Health to address this crisis frontally. Leadership matters, my Government asserts.

i. **Hypertension**, triggering organ failure, has resulted in an increase in the demand for dialysis treatment, and significant outlays for medicines of a varied sort to treat the resulting illnesses. Strokes and heart attacks are also triggered by hypertension.

ii. **Overweight** humans are more likely to suffer from high blood pressure and other non-communicable diseases. In 2022, it was estimated that 62% of the adult

population in Antigua and Barbuda was obese or overweight. Diet and sedentary lifestyles are to be blamed for this outcome; alcohol consumption and lack of exercise are contributory factors.

iii. **Cancer of the prostate and of the breasts** inflict emotional and physical pain and early death on too many men and women, resulting in tremendous loss to their families and friends and the nation. My Government is determined to ensure that the Cancer Centre is resuscitated and that services are again offered to the sick and afflicted right here in Antigua. Healthy diets and exercise retard the onset of these cancers.

12. My Government's campaign to address the NCDs that plague our people has been built around public announcements that raise the consciousness of the population. Additionally, an increased number of dialysis machines and expanded space-- to be completed at the old Holberton in order to accommodate more patients-- will soon be in operation, engaging the Medical Benefits Scheme to provide more resources, and seeking assistance from our hemispheric neighbours and the World Health Organization have buoyed my Government's efforts. Thank you, PAHO, WHO and the MBS.

13. My Government will also cause a Cardiology Treatment Centre to be added to the offerings at the Sir Lester Bird Medical Centre; the machines and the medical experts will help to save the lives of those who are afflicted with narrowing and clogged arteries that prevent the heart from working as it should. Diet and exercise are among the strategies which the doctors recommend to prevent this ailment, in the first place, and my government encourages all to "get moving".

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**Foreign Affairs and Climate Change**

14. My Government has moved Antigua and Barbuda from obscurity in the multilateral institutions of which our nation-State is a member, to being a very vocal and justly participative leader in setting their agenda. **The SIDS4 United Nations Conference**, held in Antigua and Barbuda during the last days of May 2024,

clearly demonstrated the new leadership presence which Antigua and Barbuda is establishing in its enhanced foreign policy drive.

- i. Our country's leadership of the Alliance of Small Island States (**AOSIS**) at the United Nations has marked the island-State as a leader in the fight against global climate change. Its role in the numerous Conferences of the Parties (now up to **COP29**) signifies its unrelenting place in leading the world to a successful outcome.
- ii. Antigua and Barbuda's leadership of the **COSIS** (the Commission of Small Island States) in its challenge to the major polluters, whose behaviours have led to global climate change, cannot be underestimated. Our island-State's leadership role in taking the issue of pollution of the skies, by major greenhouse gas emitters, to the **ITLOS** (the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea) serves as an indicator of the readiness of Antigua and Barbuda to lead. The diplomats at the Permanent Mission of Antigua and Barbuda to the United Nations, under the direction of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, are to be applauded.

15. The 55<sup>th</sup> Regular Session of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (**OAS**), scheduled for June 2025, will be held here in Antigua and Barbuda. It will be the very first time since the organization's essential founding in October 1889 and Antigua and Barbuda's membership since 1981, that Antigua and Barbuda will host this OAS annual conference. This step after 43 years of sovereignty signifies a new place for our small island-State in the management of the affairs of the OAS. Again, my Government applauds the Antigua and Barbuda diplomats at the Permanent Mission to the OAS for their outstanding leadership.

16. My Government continues to condemn the exclusion of Cuba from the OAS since the eruption of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, and the constructive expulsion of Venezuela since the drive to achieve "regime change" in that brother Caribbean State. Antigua and Barbuda continues to be a signal friend of the Cuban Government and its people; and, of the Republic of Venezuela, its Government and its people. Despite the economic hardships spurred on by an embargo and cruel sanctions, these two friendly countries have extended their hands of friendship to the small island-States of the Caribbean, including Antigua and Barbuda, for decades. My Government applauds Cuba and Venezuela for their resolute brotherliness. My Government's support for Haiti, in this time of crisis, is unrelenting. Kenya is to be congratulated for sending a battalion of Police to assist with bringing peace to our troubled neighbour.

17. My Government draws attention to an alarmist article appearing several months ago in a leading magazine that draws millions of subscribers to its publication each week. The writer examined the four decades of friendship that exists between the People's Republic of China and Antigua and Barbuda and set about to do as much harm to the deep and abiding relations which endure between our two countries. The most important developmental partner of Antigua and Barbuda was unjustly characterized by wild speculation and incoherent falsities, reminiscent of the cold-war propaganda of a previous age.

18. China has for decades provided scholarships to our youthful citizens who are desirous of learning from a civilization that is many thousands of years old. The China Export/Import Bank has stepped forward to provide resources that have led to the modernization of our airport and our seaport through its Belt and Road Initiative. China will have gifted the nation of Antigua and Barbuda most recently with 350 resilient homes that are to replace the warren of Booby Alley, the shanties of Grays Green, the hurricane-destroyed homes in Barbuda, all at its own expense. Yet, the writer could see nefarious and degrading motives in that level of cooperation. My Government condemns that writer, that magazine's editor, and that magazine for attempting to sell such misguided falsity as fact. Our friendship with China, underscored by my Government's immutable One-China Policy, is a permanent fixture of the Antigua and Barbuda foreign policy choices.

19. My Government expresses its eternal thanks to the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and the European Union for their continued contribution to the development of Antigua and Barbuda. The correspondent banking relations between the domestic banks here and the national banks in those countries remain an indispensable element in the trade relations of our small island developing State. My Government treasures the good relations that exist among us as sovereign States and will continue to nurture cooperation and goodwill. In the fight against drug trafficking, my Government stands resolute in fighting this illicit trade and has placed one of our most trusted sons to help lead the CICAD (the Inter-American Drug Abuse Commission) over the next two years.

20. The Commonwealth of Nations, a multilateral institution headquartered in London that springs from our long history of relations with the United Kingdom, is another of the multilateral institutions in which my Government has wrestled for



leadership. The current Secretary General may have been born in another Caribbean country but was fathered by a national of Antigua and Barbuda. When efforts were made to unfairly displace this intellectually gifted daughter, my Government conducted a successful struggle to maintain her leadership. In celebration of this outstanding achievement, Antigua and Barbuda is honoured to host the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (the **CHOGM**) in October 2026. My Government is satisfied that “**Leadership Matters.**”

21. The leadership of our Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been placed in very competent hands, and its success is to be measured by the many accomplishments of the Minister, who has shown an indomitable spirit encapsulated in our national motto: ***Each Endeavouring, All Achieving.*** Congratulations.

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### **Public Utilities and the Provision of Water**

22. Another of our high achievers has been tasked with the portfolios which cover the nation’s public utilities and its adoption of new technology, befitting our state’s needs. The APUA offers a complex web of services and products that challenge the very smartest among us.

23. The Honourable Sir Robin Yearwood, elected to Parliament on eleven separate occasions, once had the Ministerial responsibility to exercise control over this conglomerate. The people of St. Phillips North placed enduring faith in his abilities, as does my Government also. In 2026, Sir Robin will have served fifty consecutive years in Parliament. That is quite an achievement.

24. A growing economy, such as Antigua and Barbuda’s, requires more of everything: more electricity, more water, more telecommunications, more technological innovations, more experts. The presence of the University of the West Indies Fourth Landed Campus at Five Islands, Antigua, ensures that our human-resource needs will likely be satisfied and, as in decades past, Antigua and

Barbuda may very likely export its over-supply of trained talent to other places in our Caribbean that need scarce skills. My Government is satisfied that we are not yet at that point, but the future looks very bright.

25. The supply of potable water remains one of the challenges faced by my Government that will not completely disappear in the coming year, although its severity will be greatly diminished. The nation consumes approximately 12 million gallons of potable water daily; the reverse osmosis plants which turn our seawater into potable water are capable of supplying approximately 8 million gallons daily. That deficit is gradually being cured by entering contracts with providers of portable R/O plants.

26. Long droughts, that reduce annual rainfall to only 19 inches, are the underlying cause. Many of our dams and reservoirs can hardly store enough water before the absence of replenishable rainfall leads to a shortage. Leaks in the old pipes carry the costly substance from the R/O plants to homes and businesses, hotels and institutions, cause wastage. With the cooperation of the People's Republic of China, an assessment of the re-piping requirement by the more flexible polyethylene pipes and the removal of the old cast iron pipes beneath the streets, will surely end that waste. My Government gives notice of the inconvenience which will be caused, especially within the confines of the City of St. John's, by this re-piping exercise.

27. Water and broadband services are among the absolute necessities of a modern civilization, such as ours. Consideration has been given to having our own sub-sea cable, rather than purchase the service from an existing private carrier. Cost considerations underlie the thinking which will finally be computed into this venture. My Government applauds the Minister for bringing very clear thinking to this rather important subject. Thank you, Sir.

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**Roadways and Housing, Education and Sports**

28. Another of the important subjects that are on the minds of Antiguan and Barbudan families is the state of our roadways. There are over 400 miles of roads in our island country, nearly 50% of which need some measure of repair. Rain and heavy traffic have despoiled the surfaces, and leaking water mains have undermined the sub-surface. While millions of dollars have been spent and millions more are earmarked for the repair of our roads, the speed with which the repairs are being made might appear slow. More equipment is being purchased, new methods of resurfacing have been adopted, and new employees are being recruited to move even faster. Fixing more than 100 miles of roadway is a herculean task. The portfolio falls, however, to a Minister who is very intelligent, detailed oriented, of unquestionable integrity, and who exercises her authority with aplomb; this administration is fortunate to have the only female in the Cabinet serve in this very challenging ministerial role and to demonstrate such competence.

29. As road surfaces are repaired, there is the temptation by drivers to routinely exceed the 20 and 40 mile-per-hour speed limits on our roadways. Given the absolute increase in the number of vehicles which traverse the streets and highways, accidents have become far too frequent. Enforcement of the traffic laws is required if safety concerns are to be included in the determination to save lives and safeguard property. Cars are the second most expensive item which a family will purchase; the first is a home.

30. My Government takes note of the increase in home ownership that has taken place since 2014 when it was elected to serve. More than 1,200 new homes have been built by the ***National Housing and Urban Renewal Corporation*** established to address the demand of families and young couples. While the company's record of performance on housing cannot be assailed, it has had to divert its resources to repairing unsuitable buildings in which employees of the Government work. Given the state of government-owned buildings when elected in 2014, the monumental task undertaken by my Government has yielded remarkable results. This balancing act, between construction of new homes and repair to government buildings, has been expertly determined by the Cabinet, measured by the availability of financial resources. My Government applauds the decision-makers.

31. The resources generated by the Citizenship by Investment Program (**the C.I.P.**) have proven to be essential to meeting many obligations. This program has

been measured for its high yield and transparent performance--led by very competent professionals of outstanding integrity--that other C.I.P. programs are being urged to follow Antigua and Barbuda's lead. We can only applaud its leadership. The Customs and Excise Department and the Inland Revenue Department, two other revenue generating bodies that collect Duties on imports and ensures compliance with the ABST and other taxes, are to be applauded for the marvelous work being undertaken on behalf of the people and Government of Antigua and Barbuda.

32. The people of Antigua and Barbuda have always held formal education in high regard. "A school in every village" was the mantra of the early pioneers who founded the trade union movement; they challenged the uncaring policies of the minority who held the reins of power. Today, education commands the largest portion of the national Budget that will likely exceed \$2 billion dollars in 2025.

33. When principals of several secondary schools, shortly after 2014, reported that classroom space was a challenge, my Government enlarged five schools, enabling more than 1,000 desks and chairs to be permanently added to the seating stock. The Sir Novelle Richards Academy was also constructed, and other improvements were made to the education plants across the country. The ABICE, or now the Harrison Centre, was enlarged by a gift from Sir David Harrison that has allowed the training Centre to register more than 800 students this year -- the largest student body ever. The Minister responsible for Education has done a marvelous job attracting youth to this Centre.

34. The gift of a new primary school by the Government of the Dominican Republic, to be constructed in Barbuda, is also to be added to the increasing stock of classrooms throughout the nation; the school's assignment to Barbuda confirms my Government's determination to ensure that Barbuda is not left behind. Our thanks to the Dominican Republic.

35. While my Government pursues the expansion of formal education as a requirement to ambitious development, the creative industries form an important ingredient in our cultural modernization drive. The Christmas celebrations that are soon to be upon us will witness the expression of culture which captures elements of the old, and expressions of the new. Carnival, which ended a few months ago, was the most joyous expression of culture -- both the old and the emerging art

forms. My Government extends congrats to all those who chose to participate and to have made Carnival 2024 the most successful. Very little prize money is owed to the participants, and every effort is being made to make payments in full.

36. Sports also encompass an approach that leads to incredibly new successes. The Antigua and Barbuda swimming team has recently captured gold in regional meets; in golf, several outstanding performances have been recorded; and, in cricket, Antigua and Barbuda's fast bowlers and batsmen, male and female, continue to make sterling contributions to their discipline. Volleyball and football provide excellent entertainment and draw large spectator crowds. The Benna Boys are working on becoming the best, and CPL Cricket is attracting talent that will produce many international cricketers from Antigua and Barbuda. My Government applauds them all, knowing that their nation stands with them, always. Although Antigua and Barbuda has not yet medaled at the Olympics, our ambition as a nation is to produce athletes that can prove the superiority of our indomitable spirit. My Government will continue to provide the necessary physical infrastructure and coaching staff needed in order to inspire Antigua and Barbuda's athletes to perform the best that any athlete can. The competitive Minister of Sports, my Government believes, embodies the spirit of victory which is contagious.

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**The Incredible Leaps of Tourism**

37. The outstanding performance of the Ministry of Tourism is not an accident, my Government has concluded. Assembling the right team for marketing and the right message by those who know the product are the first principles of success. My Government recalls that the Caribbean Tourism Organization (**C.T.O.**) declared the Antigua and Barbuda Tourism Minister to be the "Minister of the Year". My Government congratulates our Minister for filling the hotels, enlarging the cruise sector by adding homeporting, and for the excellent campaigns conducted in the source markets. More hotels and luxury rental properties are to be constructed in 2025, including the Nikki Beach project, the Hyatt at Yeptons, and the One-and-Only at Half Moon Bay, an upcoming seven-star luxury development in Antigua.

Preliminary work has commenced on the One & Only Resort, with the master plan nearing finalization. The project entails a total investment of \$300 million, with construction set to begin in 2025. During the construction phase, the project is expected to employ no fewer than 400 workers. Once operational, the resort will provide employment for approximately 550 to 600 individuals. It is only by expanding the number of rooms that more tourists will arrive for overnight stays. My Government aims to surpass again the one million arrivals by both overnight and cruise tourists in 2025.

38. Our readiness to receive the enlarged number of cruise tourists was made possible by the addition of the Fifth Pier. The difficult excavation of hard volcanic rock, from the 35-foot draught of the channel leading to the berth, has stalled the arrival of the OASIS Class ships. They are nevertheless coming, and even more cruise passengers will arrive Antigua in 2025. When the deepwater port is constructed in Barbuda, smaller cruise vessels will be able to dock there, increasing further the numbers to be welcomed to our shores.

39. In order to provide an authentic Antigua and Barbuda experience, foods grown on farms here are being included on menus offered by the hotels and restaurants and purchased by the cruise vessels. This provides the agricultural sector with a market that the chefs routinely patronize; many homes have traditionally relied upon farm-fresh products, also, purchased from the public markets. Although agriculture is about 5% of the economy, my Government is determined to enlarge its role at every juncture, and a youthful Minister of Agriculture has demonstrated great competence in the assigned portfolio.

40. Eggs produced by poultry farmers now account for 99% of consumption across the country. Chicken meat, though still imported, is being produced in ever-larger quantities, providing the consumer with more nutritious meat that has not been refrigerated for months -- as some imports are. Fresh fruits and vegetables are still supplemented by imports from other O.E.C.S. countries, and that is because there is a single market and single economy which our O.E.C.S. States jointly enjoy. The Eastern Caribbean Currency Union and the Regional Security System are among the most well-known of our sub-regional treaty arrangements. We are six sovereign States with a high degree of confidence in our relations that increases our influence

exponentially when present in multilateral institutions. CARICOM is a larger expression of this ambition.

**The Laws that Require Attention:**

41. My Government is witnessing a revolution in information technology that portends significant changes in patterns of civilization. The application of Artificial Intelligence (**or A.I.**) to virtually every subject and quest of humanity must ensure that the laws of Antigua and Barbuda adequately address the uses of **A.I.** This new tool is to be used for good and not to harm our State or its people. For this reason, the Ministry of Legal Affairs has been directed to collaborate with other Ministries in the CARICOM to draft the appropriate laws that would fit our circumstances. Collaboration is less costly and more efficient and does not require invention of the wheel by each State. While our small State is pursuing development by adopting the new technologies available, all must be done to protect those businesses, institutions and government bodies that could be harmed by the misuse or abuse of the technology.

42. My Government is committed to strengthening and modernizing the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda. In 2025, we plan to amend existing legislation to reflect stronger service orientation within our law enforcement agencies. The Office of the Attorney General will continue consultations to ensure that these legislative changes are comprehensive and effective. As part of this initiative, His Majesty's Prison will be renamed the Antigua and Barbuda Correctional Facility, and updates to the Police and Prison Acts will be implemented. Additionally, the Police Force will be renamed the Antigua and Barbuda Police Service, and the Fire Brigade will be rebranded as the Antigua and Barbuda Fire and Rescue Services, aligning with its expanded responsibilities.

We have successfully renovated the Magistrates' Court on High Street, relocating it from temporary quarters to updated facilities. The Family Court is also expected to relocate to new and dedicated quarters at the corner of Redcliffe Street and Independence Avenue, facilitating private and confidential hearings. Efforts are underway to streamline the process for accessing child support payments through the court system, ensuring easier access for parents. Our legislative agenda includes measures to further protect children by creating a framework that mandates parental responsibility, with consequences for non-compliance.

I now turn to address a matter of paramount importance, the rising scourge of violent crime that has recently plagued our communities, particularly among our youth. I am very happy to report that my Government has taken swift and decisive action to confront this challenge head-on. Under the commendable leadership of our Honourable Prime Minister, we have engaged in meaningful dialogue with several youth gangs, working diligently to diffuse tensions and foster understanding. This proactive intervention has yielded remarkable results, leading to an immediate decrease in youth crime and violence, a testament to the power of communication and the commitment to conflict resolution.

In addition to these critical engagement efforts, my Government has made good on its promise to enhance the crime-fighting capabilities of our law enforcement agencies. Recently, we welcomed sixty-nine new graduates into the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda, bolstering our ranks with dedicated individuals ready to serve and protect. We have also introduced cutting-edge technology, including several crime-fighting drones, and enacted anti-gang legislation to provide our law enforcement officers with the necessary tools to combat this issue effectively. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Minister responsible for the Police for his unwavering commitment to making our communities safer. Additionally, the Antigua and Barbuda Defence Force continues to lend invaluable support to our police, reinforcing our collective efforts in the fight against crime.

However, my Government recognizes that addressing crime is not solely about enforcement; it requires a comprehensive approach that includes rehabilitation and support for our youth. My Government is committed to reviewing and strengthening our existing rehabilitation programs within our penal institution. We are excited to announce the reopening of the Boys Training School, which will now focus on rehabilitating young inmates and equipping them with the skills necessary to reintegrate into society as productive citizens. Additionally, the Harrison Centre is playing a pivotal role in providing skills training for our youth, ensuring they have access to meaningful opportunities. We also acknowledge the critical link between mental health and violence, and in this regard, my Government's timely acquisition of suitable real estate in Sea View Farm for the purpose of establishing a new mental health facility to replace the Clarevue Hospital is worthy of high praise. Our mental health legislation will also be modernized to keep pace with the changing



times. Together, my Government is forging a path toward a safer and more caring future for all our citizens.

43. The Companies Act, which requires that the beneficial owner of the firm be identified, shall be strengthened in the New Year so that shell companies that have no assets cannot be the employers of staff, where the intent is to shield assets from sale or bankruptcy of the enterprise receiving the profits. In Antigua and Barbuda, both the governing and the opposition political parties have their roots in trade unions. Protecting workers' rights and benefits has characterized my Government since 2014.

44. Abandoned properties that scar the City and prove to be a breeding place for rodents and a security threat to surrounding households will be removed at the owner's expense. The safeguard of property rights is enshrined in the Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda. Hence, extreme care will be taken when confiscating and destroying these rotting houses and buildings and selling the land on which they sit to a new owner. The Ministry of Legal Affairs is working diligently to table the appropriate legislation in the early months of 2025. The property taxes owed by the owners, the cost of the removal of the condemned building, and other costs incurred by the evident neglect for years, will be computed and deducted from any forced sale or exercise of eminent domain by the State. The sanctity of property ownership will be preserved throughout, as the new law will adumbrate. My Government applauds the leadership of the Attorney General in these endeavours.

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### **CONCLUSION**

45. My Government has now exercised its authority in the governance of Antigua and Barbuda for ten consecutive years. As indicated, every attempt has been made to rebuild Antigua and Barbuda during this period. In the past two years, my Government has had to make governing nimbler with a smaller team. Nonetheless, My Government has made significant strides in directly involving youth in shaping policies. The recent appointment of two young senators as

Leader of Government Business in the Senate and Minister of State, as well as another young senator as Minister of State, demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that youth voices are heard in decision-making processes.

46. My Government is committed to keep thrusting the State forward in the drive to safeguard all small islands globally from the existential threat of global climate change. Tax incentives on the importation of electric vehicles, along with the increased use of electric buses for transporting school students and the public, reflect our dedication to addressing environmental concerns and promoting sustainability.

47. The national debt which strangled the former administration, driving it into the arms of the I.M.F., has been expertly managed and reduced to 60% of GDP -- the level at which the global financial institutions regard as appropriate. The debt-reduction strategies of small-island States are an integral part of the global climate change debate, as our SIDS demand climate justice for the extreme climate events that destroy infrastructure and plunge islands into further debt as they seek to recover.

48. The practice of measuring development status and determining that per capita GDP is an accurate measurement, is false. The Multi-dimensional Vulnerability Index is far more appropriate, my Government asserts. As economic tools evolve, the adoption of the MVI shows that GDP per capita is antiquated and wrongheaded.

49. Many burning issues have now occupied both the national and international agenda. The challenges which my Government faces are not beyond our experts' ability to address successfully. History has taught us that reliance on our own intellect and leadership can only benefit the entire nation. The New Year, 2025, when it comes around, will require all hands-on deck. My Government therefore extends its welcome to anyone who wishes to join in finding solutions.

50. May the Christmas season be good for all of us. And may 2025 witness extraordinary growth in the country which we all love.

51. Blessings to all. Thank you.