



**ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA
THRONE SPEECH**

**DELIVERED BY
SIR JAMES BEETHOVEN CARLISLE, GCMG
GOVERNOR GENERAL**

**AT
THE STATE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT**

ON FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2005

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

For a number of reasons, this State Opening of the Parliament of Antigua and Barbuda is of particular moment.

This State Opening of our Parliament has its origins in long tradition.

The Speech from the Throne affirms the British Monarch as our Head of State, and the Governor General as Her Majesty's representative.

Transcending this, however, *The Speech from the Throne* recognises the sovereignty of the people and the Government's obligation to give account to the populace.

Through *The Speech from the Throne*, the Government accounts to the people for its intentions, as well as for its actions.

In this sense, rather than being monarchical, *The Speech from the Throne* is, in essence, populist in its intent, and in its effect.

This State Opening of the Third Session of Parliament in my Government's first term is a timely overture to our country's Silver Jubilee year as an independent sovereign State.

Our nation's Silver Jubilee year is a fitting time for our parliamentarians to rise above partisanship and share common ground, in the interest of the common good.

This is a time when we can greatly serve the common good by embracing the things that unite us, instead of accentuating those which may divide us.

This Twenty-Fifth year of our Independence will culminate on November 1, next year.

However, as a nation, we have abundant cause for thanksgiving and celebration throughout our Silver Jubilee Year.

The dawn of our Silver Jubilee Year of Independence is a time for reflection, as well as for anticipation.

This is, as well, a time for aspiration and for preparation.

For all who serve a public purpose, this is also a time for reaffirmation.

In this context, it is worth our while as legislators to reflect upon the character of the nation that we have fashioned since Independence.

The Preamble to the Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda, which came into effect on October 31, 1981, definitively defined the character, the ideals, the objectives, to which, as a people, we aspired at our nation's birth.

Let us, at this, the dawn of our nation's Silver Jubilee, revisit the aspirations we envisaged as a People at the birth of our nation, on that first Independence Day.

I quote, with mild emphasis, the Preamble, which summarises the spirit of our Constitution:

Whereas the People of Antigua and Barbuda-

Proclaim that they are a sovereign nation founded upon principles that acknowledge the supremacy of God, the dignity and worth of the human person, the entitlement of all persons to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, the position of the family in a society of free men and free institutions;

Whereas the People of Antigua and Barbuda-

Respect the principles of social justice and, therefore, believe that the operation of their economic system should result in the economic resources of their community being so distributed as to serve the common good, that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all, that labour should not be exploited or forced by economic necessity to operate in inhumane conditions but that there should be opportunity for the advancement on the basis of recognition of merit, ability and integrity;

Whereas the People of Antigua and Barbuda-

Assert their conviction that their happiness and prosperity can best be pursued in a democratic society in which all persons may, to the extent of their capacity, play some part in national life;

Whereas the People of Antigua and Barbuda-

Recognize that the law symbolizes the public conscience, that every citizen owes to it an undivided allegiance not to be limited by any private views of justice or expediency and that the State is the subject of the law;

Whereas the People of Antigua and Barbuda-

Desire to establish a framework of supreme law within which to guarantee their inalienable human rights and freedoms, among them, the right to liberty, property, security and legal redress of grievances, as well as freedom of speech, of the press and of assembly, subject only to the public interest.

On these beliefs and aspirations, which form the spirit of the Constitution, the provisions that establish the supreme law of the land are then framed, and then followed.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

We may each see some degree of divergence between certain of those aspirations and our ongoing experience, to date, in our national life.

Whatever our respective perspectives, a review of the preamble to the Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda should move all Members of this Parliament to occasional recalibration of the standards by which we formulate laws and manage the affairs of the State.

Were we in a position today to amend the Preamble to the Constitution, we would almost certainly insist that though it might be implied, a corresponding responsibility should be explicitly attached to every individual entitlement defined therein.

Such an assertion, if recognised by the People, would conduce immeasurably to the common good.

Reform of our Constitution should also speak explicitly and definitively to the obligations of transparency and truth, which are the virtuous sisters of accountability and integrity, which my Government, with its historic trilogy of integrity legislation, has embedded permanently in the conduct of public affairs in Antigua and Barbuda.

Such matters, however, are for the framers of a new Constitution; as and when the nation arrives at consensus on appropriate constitutional reform.

Related to this, my Government is of the view, after a quarter of a century, that serious consideration should be given to the repatriation of the 1981 Independence Constitution, which is an Order of the Crown, and to replacing it with a Constitution authored in Antigua and Barbuda and sensitive to our current realities.

To this end, my Government will, during our Silver Jubilee Year, place before the Antiguan and Barbudan people, the February 28, 2002 *Report of the Constitution Review Commission*, which the Governor General appointed on December 17, 1999, initially, and which he subsequently supplemented on June 14, 2001.

Public consultations, which will include the views of all units of civil society, will ultimately determine whether and when, in what ways, and by what means, a Twenty-First Century Constitution, authored here in Antigua and Barbuda, will replace our Independence Constitution.

My Government contemplates that in our nation's Silver Jubilee Year, a yet unused provision of our Constitution will determine Antigua and Barbuda's ultimate relationship with the Caribbean Court of Justice.

Only through exercise of the constitutionally mandated majority in Parliament and in a special referendum, will my Government be in a position to commit to replacement of the Privy Council with the CCJ as Antigua and Barbuda's final appellate court.

Should the population veto such a proposition, the jurisdiction of the Caribbean Court of Justice will be limited, in Antigua and Barbuda's case, to adjudication of disputes arising from CARICOM treaties.

In all matters, my Government unwaveringly recognises the Constitution as the supreme law of the land.

My Government's spoken and written words and actions convincingly demonstrate respect for and fidelity to the letter and the spirit of the Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda.

This is manifest in my Government's working policy document, *Agenda for Change*, in its legislative programme, and in its economic and social policies.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

My Government recognises the difficulty the majority of the population faces in invoking the protection of constitutional entitlements, and the redress that our Constitution provides where those entitlements are denied.

Equal Opportunity legislation, which my Government pledged in *Agenda for Change*, will be an effective remedy, by providing all citizens with ready access to formal sanctions where public officials violate constitutional entitlements of the citizenry.

My Government will introduce an Equal Opportunity Bill in Parliament in our nation's Silver Jubilee Year.

When given formal assent, the Equal Opportunity Act will outlaw any act of discrimination based on race, religion, gender, age, physical disability, political affinity, or place of origin.

Equal justice for all, with social justice at its core, is the primary ideal and objective of my Government.

My Government's legislative and economic agenda is geared to these ends.

In the Second Session of this Parliament, my Government brought an ambitious legislative agenda to Parliament.

Indeed, my Government can be held responsible for increasing the workload of Honourable Members of Parliament well beyond previous levels.

I commend Honourable Members of Parliament for the insight and effectiveness of their contributions, and for the volume of legislation enacted in the Second Session of this Parliament.

I must make particular reference to **The Barbuda Land Act**, which will be introduced in the Third Session of this Parliament.

The **Barbuda Land Act** is landmark legislation, which will ensure that all land in Barbuda is owned, in perpetuity, by native Barbudans, and by none other.

Government's legislative agenda for this Third Session of Parliament includes measures to support Antigua and Barbuda's transformation to a regional centre in information and telecommunications technology.

The **Telecommunications Act** will call for full liberalisation and open competition in our Telecom and management of the frequency spectrum in the interest and to the benefit of the Antiguan and Barbudan people.

As has been the experience in other jurisdictions, this can lead to a wider, more affordable range of IT services, and to dramatic reductions in the cost of doing business in Antigua and Barbuda, particularly for our international business sector.

Antigua and Barbuda has begun to position itself as a leader in the use of information technology in bringing government closer to the people.

All Government Ministries are now online, the Inland Revenue Department, the Land Registry, and the Cadastry have been digitized, and the Passport Department is now equipped with the capability to produce and process machine readable passports.

Related to this, my Government will introduce a **Data Protection Act** and an **Electronic Transactions Act** in this Session of Parliament.

My Government is considering new legislative measures to introduce new standards in Corporate Governance, with emphasis on shareholder and consumer interests; and, in the state sector, with particular concern with procurement processes.

For the Second Session of this Parliament, my Government had formulated an agenda geared to significant law reform.

However, a number of legislative initiatives were linked to collective measures among OECS countries.

Proposals for Family Law Reform, Reform and Revision of the Magistrates Court Act, and a new Legal Profession Act fell into that category, and was not, therefore, concluded.

Legislation for these and other Acts will be introduced in this Session of Parliament.

Family Law Reform, will bring relief to single mothers in matters of child maintenance and will place emphasis on child protection, juvenile justice, social service support, and will mandate the establishment of a Family Court to deal with family issues.

Reform and Revision of the Magistrates Court Act, will provide for increased monetary jurisdiction in civil matters, a better system for enforcement of judgments, alternative sentencing for young offenders in the form of community service, and security of tenure for Magistrates.

A new **Legal Profession Act**, will institutionalise the Bar Association as a vehicle for continuing legal education and for the maintenance of ethical standards and a self-regulating disciplinary mechanism, that will include non-lawyers.

The **Antigua and Barbuda Labour Code** and the **Industrial Court Act** will be amended to provide a better balance between the rights and obligations of employees and employers; to protect reasonable recognition of employees' equity for faithful service; and to respond to the need for a regulatory climate conducive to direct investment and to business viability.

A **BuildUp Business Enterprises Act** will facilitate new entrepreneurs and stimulate growth and development in micro, small and medium size enterprises and will offer special incentives to our

creative producers; and will require my Government to reserve 25 percent of all state sector procurement for such small enterprises.

An **Insolvency Act**, will provide failing businesses with temporary relief from creditors and give such enterprises an opportunity to re-organise and re-fuel without the burden of unmanageable debt.

A review of the **Representation of the People (Amendment) Act**, will address residual shortcomings in the voter registration process.

A new **Education Act**, based on the OECS model to provide for better management of students and a deeply rooted curriculum to expand the horizons of our future leaders will be a key component of my Government's agenda for development of our country's human capital.

My Government's legislative programme for **Criminal Law Reform** will focus on the specific areas of traffic regulations - where my Government will call for zero tolerance for violators - on enforcement, evidence, jury selection, capital punishment, imprisonment terms and conditions, and societal rehabilitation.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

My Government is committed to equality of opportunity so that all in our nation can share prosperity.

To meet this goal, recovery of our nation's fiscal sovereignty is a critical imperative, and remains our major economic challenge.

In this pursuit, my Government remains unwavering in the application of tight fiscal discipline as the fundamental to economic revival.

Stringent controls, with new standards of accountability will be applied to public expenditures and revenue collection in all Ministries, all statutory authorities, and all enterprises controlled by the government.

Discretionary waivers of duties and taxes will be sharply reduced, if not totally eliminated.

My Government will continue to pay down debt while working to restore fiscal balance to the economy.

Rationalisation of the public service is central to our country's economic revival.

My Government has devised a compassionate programme that offers public servants the onus to consolidate their entitlements, together with bonus payments for voluntary withdrawal from superfluous positions, with no options for advancement.

Through the Employment to Ownership programme, such persons will enjoy high priority for development funding for micro and small business enterprises.

My Government's concern for the vulnerable in our society is underlined in a number of significant policies.

Every child in our school system is now entitled to free school uniforms.

From the next school term, for a token fee, children in selected government schools will receive nutritious luncheon meals delivered at school.

To the delight of families across the country, and across the Diaspora, the generous *Dollar Barrel* programme is again available to the population for their Christmas gift packages of food, clothing, toiletries, toys and infant items.

My Government will make a meaningful reduction in the stamp duty payable on the transfer of property from a parent to a child.

After significantly increasing the level of pension payments to our senior citizens, my Government will make a grant of \$50,000 to assist in the operation of the Pensioners Association.

Through these and by other measures, my Government continues to keep faith with its fundamental commitment to put people first.

My Government is conscious that the quality of the life enjoyed by the Antiguan and Barbudan people, job opportunities for all who want to work, and the capacity to support our social goals, all rely on a domestic economy that is globally competitive.

With the implementation of the Caribbean Single Market and Single Economy in 2006, Antigua and Barbuda's borders will be open to capital, goods and several categories of workers from other CARICOM countries.

World Trade Organisation rulings will open our borders to capital and goods from virtually all other countries.

No longer can we limit our capacities to the boundaries of our two islands, or to those of the OECS.

We have no option but to think global and to prepare our country to compete with the rest of the world.

Ever-evolving technology and unrelenting global competition demand of us a commitment to excellence, the delivery of greater productivity, and a vision directed outward to the challenges and opportunities the world presents.

We must invest, generously, in our people, our greatest source of creativity and economic strength.

My Government is therefore committed to investing in assisting workers to continuously enhance their skills, and in preparing our young people for the knowledge workplace of the 21st century.

In this context, my Government will intensify its efforts to secure and fund scholarships for young Antiguan and Barbudans in disciplines that are relevant to our country's economic and social perspectives.

My Government is committed to expanding and upgrading educational facilities on our two islands.

In this regard, my Government is grateful to the Stanford Group of Companies for generously funding a new \$25 Million institute of excellence.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

It remains our compelling reality that Antigua and Barbuda's economic survival is linked to direct foreign investment and multi-lateral cooperation.

My Government therefore continues to vigorously mend fences with the international community.

We continue to reconcile the debt this country owes to nations and institutions around the world.

Two months ago, Antigua and Barbuda became the 166th member of the World Bank's Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency, MIGA.

MIGA promotes foreign direct investment in developing countries geared to economic growth, poverty alleviation and the improvement of the social and economic welfare of citizens of developing States.

MIGA provides guarantees to investors initiating investment projects in developing countries and offers technical assistance to improve the investment climate and promote investment opportunities in such countries.

My Government has strengthened Antigua and Barbuda's relationship with the Government of the United States of America through a bilateral programme that will support activities that contribute to sustainable economic growth and assist Antigua and Barbuda in succeeding in the open global trade environment.

The Government of the United States of America has agreed to make financial resources available to Antigua and Barbuda through the United States Agency for International Development, USAID, which will provide meaningful financial support and technical assistance to Antigua and Barbuda over the next four years.

USAID will support our efforts to reduce economic vulnerabilities, eliminate barriers to competitive global trade and investment, increase competitiveness in the private sector, improve domestic employment, and enhance our capacity for sustainable growth in the face of external circumstances.

My Government's foreign policy focus is riveted on extensive strengthening of bilateral relations and expanding economic cooperation.

Through our Permanent Mission to the United Nations, my Government has mounted a coordinated effort to strengthen bilateral relations between Antigua and Barbuda and other member states of the UN.

My Government has established diplomatic relations with a number of new European Union member countries.

Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia are among these countries.

My Government has sought direct engagement with Brazil, India, Singapore and Thailand with a view to increased bilateral assistance.

India has committed to providing valuable assistance to Antigua and Barbuda in the area of telecommunications technology.

My Government is pursuing broader engagement at the multilateral level, for increased development assistance from donor countries and from the UN system.

Our country's principal interest in these engagements is in securing assistance in building human and technical capacity.

To reinforce Antigua and Barbuda's position in the international arena, a new Maritime Shipping Act will bring our country in line with the most exacting international standards in maritime security.

This will enhance Antigua and Barbuda's standing among the the countries operating international ships registries.

In keeping with my Government's manifest commitment to transparency and integrity in all the conduct of public affairs, an Act of Parliament will shortly establish **The Antigua and Barbuda Investment Authority**.

The Antigua and Barbuda Investment Authority Act will embody a transparent Investment Code and will pre-empt subjective intervention by public officials.

The Antigua and Barbuda Investment Authority will be responsible for the country's investment profile and for facilitating approvals on investment projects proposals.

This development is already being lauded by the international investment community.

All of this contributes to my Government's broad agenda for economic development and sustainable growth.

My Government has strengthened and deepened our country's ties with China, which is the emerging global superpower.

I take this opportunity to express our nation's deep and lasting appreciation to the Government of the People's Republic of China for its continuing generosity to Antigua and Barbuda.

Our Cricket World Cup facility, the Sir Vivian Richards Cricket Ground, is the latest and most generous example of China's generosity.

Our country's preparation for Cricket World Cup 2007 will be a dominant feature of our Silver Jubilee year.

My Government is offering a generous incentives package to developers investing in new hotel accommodation and projects related to Cricket World Cup, 2007.

While handicapped by inadequate resources for funding the delivery of primary health care, my Government will place new emphasis on the promotion of healthy living; on identifying risk factors such as physical inactivity and high-risk diets; the prevention of injury; and integrated disease strategies.

In this exercise, my Government will work with the social partners to enhance sports activities at the community and competitive levels as a feature of our national Silver Jubilee programme.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

We enter our nation's Silver Jubilee Year with concern as well as expectation.

The implications of continuing increases in oil prices give serious cause for concern.

Increases in fuel prices can lead directly to increases in the cost of living.

Should this happen, the most vulnerable in the society will be the group most severely affected.

In these circumstances, Venezuela's PetroCaribe initiative is our best option for meeting the threat of rising oil prices and rising prices at the gas pump.

While my Government has cushioned motorists against increases for the better part of a year, it is simply not possible to continue this subsidy.

Like motorists everywhere, Antiguan and Barbudans will have to deal with this reality.

However, my Government is committed to a roll back in any increases in the price of utilities resulting from increased fuel costs, once circumstances permit.

In the long-term perspective, the country will have to examine renewable alternative energy sources, a number of which are currently under consideration.

Another matter of concern is the disturbing incidence of violence in the society, particularly against women.

Violence against women is abhorrent in any manifestation and will be accorded high priority by our policy makers and by our law enforcement agencies.

The increasing number of our youth who appear to be at risk of falling into anti-social behavior is of similar concern.

This is a matter of concern for all sectors of civil society.

It calls for coordinated responses from all of the social partners, including the church, in providing a network of support and opportunity for errant young people.

In other matters, the country can look forward to a number of positive developments in our nation's Silver Jubilee Year.

The National Economic and Social Council will be provided with initial funding which will enable it to finally come into its own.

Work will begin on the Caribbean Festival Park in our Silver Jubilee Year.

Efforts to attract international participation in the development, content and operation of the Park are underway.

In keeping with the intentions stated in *Agenda for Change*, my Government has initiated preliminary work, including evaluation and planning for the development of our capital city.

My Government attaches urgent priority to extensive improvement of the nation's road system and will ensure that efforts to this end will commence shortly and will be sustained until the inconvenience and hazards that have long affected road users are eliminated.

A critical, long standing, and vitally urgent need is being addressed with the development of VC Bird International Airport.

A master plan for the development of the airport is in place and funding for this project is being negotiated.

Though not complete, the facility will be significantly upgraded, with increased capacity, by Cricket World Cup, 2007.

We can anticipate dramatically increased visitor inflows well ahead of Cricket World Cup.

My Government expects large numbers of the Antigua and Barbuda Diaspora for our Silver Jubilee Independence Homecoming Festival.

Pre-Independence events under consideration include a Silver Jubilee Steelband Festival; a trans-Atlantic Silver Jubilee Sailing Race; and an international Super Twenty and One-Day International Cricket Tournament.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

The ultimate celebration of our nation's Silver Jubilee year would be for all in our nation to put aside our differences and come together as one Antigua and Barbuda – One Family.

The ultimate contribution we can make to our nation over the next twelve months would be for all of us, and each of us, to see ourselves as our brothers' and our sisters' keepers.

The ultimate contribution to our nation that as a people we can make in this Silver Jubilee year, and in every year afterwards, is that we love our God, and, as our God would have us do, that we love one another, and do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

Madam President and Members of the Senate;

Madam Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives:

As I continue to pray for God's guidance, I pray, now, for His Blessings upon your deliberations and decisions.

I pray for God's continuing presence in the hearts and lives of the Antiguan and Barbudan people.

I pray also for God's bountiful blessings upon our beloved Antigua and Barbuda.

Thank you.