



ORGANISATION OF EASTERN CARIBBEAN STATES

33RD MEETING OF THE AUTHORITY

VUE POINTE HOTEL
MONTSERRAT

22-24 NOVEMBER 2000

COMMUNIQUE

OPENING CEREMONY

Volcano-ravaged Montserrat put on a grand display to welcome OECS Heads of government to a three-day summit starting Wednesday, 22nd November 2000.

Chief Minister David Brandt told the opening ceremony at Montserrat's Vue Point Hotel, that there is a lesson for the Region to be learnt from the resilience and commitment of Montserratians who have been living under the threat of volcanic eruptions for several years. The volcanic activity has deprived the population of half of the island and forced the relocation of a number of families.

Wednesday's opening ceremony was also addressed by OECS Director General, Mr. Swinburne Lestrade who praised the commitment of Montserrat to the regional integration movement, and lauded their efforts to host the OECS Summit.

The audience also heard from new Dominica Prime Minister Mr. Pierre Charles and the OECS Chairman Dr. Keith Mitchell.

ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

OECS Heads of Government have decided to set up institutional arrangements for the more effective co-ordination external relations matters.

This decision comes against the background of growing participation in international trade organizations and regimes, such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the Cotonou Agreement – successor to the LOME conventions.

The Heads have agreed that the private sector must be included in these arrangements and that there should be a public education programme on the issues involved in external negotiations.

The Heads have mandated the Secretariat to carry out a study on the of the OECS Single Market and Economy, in light of activities taking place under the CARICOM arrangements, with a view to avoiding any possible duplication of effort.

They have also agreed to conduct a regional study on the implications of introducing the Value Added Tax (VAT) in OECS Member States.

ECTEL MODEL FOR OTHER UTILITIES

The Authority received a progress report on the operationalisation of the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority (ECTEL), which was launched in October of this year to regulate the soon-to-be-liberalised telecommunications operations in five OECS Member States. The regional regulatory body has been praised as the first of its kind in the world, and the World Bank, which funded the project, has indicated it may use the model for other regions in the world.

The Authority was informed that there have been a number of local and international applications for licenses to operate telecommunications companies. ECTEL expects to begin granting licenses after March 2001, i.e. after the end of the current monopoly of telecommunications provider Cable and Wireless.

The Heads have agreed that revenues earned from electromagnetic spectrum fees will fund ECTEL.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The meeting received a report on issues affecting the EU Banana Regime and Sugar Protocol. The Heads of Government expressed concern over the apparent decline in support to Caribbean banana producers and the apparent slow release of funds to support the Windward Islands Banana Industry. The Authority agreed that a meeting should be convened urgently with high-level representatives of the European Commission to address these concerns.

NEW AIR, CRUISE AND DISASTER POLICIES

Cruise tourism, air transportation and disaster management in the OECS will soon be governed by co-ordinated regional policy guidelines.

OECS Heads of government endorsed plans for the creation of policies for the three areas, at their summit in Montserrat, Thursday.

The Authority agreed that OECS Ministers of Tourism at the meeting scheduled to be held in January 2001, should seek to formulate a common strategy for dealing with the cruise industry.

The region's Civil Aviation Ministers and the OECS Secretariat will work jointly on proposals for an air transportation policy. The move towards an air transportation policy comes amid a rapid increase in the number of airlines serving OECS Member States.

The OECS Heads agreed that steps should be taken to strengthen the national disaster capabilities and expressed the hope that a strengthened CDERA will be better able to concentrate on special needs of the OECS countries, which may require greater attention than the wider region.

OECS HEADS FOR RETREAT

OECS Heads of Government will meet for a one-day retreat early next year to strategise on integration and the way ahead for the OECS Secretariat.

Agreement to hold the retreat in the first quarter of the new year was among highlights of the first working day of the OECS Summit at Vue Point Hotel in Montserrat, Thursday.

Heads of the nine Member States will examine a Paper on "OECS Integration – Review, Prospects and Governance". The Paper is seeking to have the OECS Heads take a long-range view of the OECS integration movement.

The Heads are also expected to discuss a related strategic and institutional development plan for the OECS Secretariat.

The retreat will also give consideration to, and endorse, the OECS Strategic Development Framework, which sets out the policy initiatives required to foster economic and social development in the Member States.

NEW HEADQUARTERS FOR SECRETARIAT

Plans for a new Headquarters building for the OECS Secretariat in St Lucia have been taken a step further.

OECS Heads of Government were presented with the architectural brief and schedule of accommodations for the new building.

The Meeting congratulated the St. Lucia Government for its commitment to this project and for its show of confidence in the regional integration movement.

The new headquarters building will be located in St. Lucia's second town of Vieux Fort, close to the Hewanorra International Airport.

NEW OECS LAW SCHOOL

Law students in the OECS may have their own school to complete legal studies some time in the future.

OECS Heads of Government meeting in Montserrat, have agreed to examine the feasibility of an OECS Law school to ease the problem of lack of places in the existing Caribbean Law schools.

The Heads mandated the OECS Secretariat to employ a consultant to examine the feasibility of the school.

They argued that the school would give the OECS Region a greater degree of control over the provision of classroom places. They also felt that a joint training institution is a natural addition to the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court which is shared by all nine OECS Member States.

Heads of Government have also agreed to undertake a joint review of their respective constitutions. A Joint Commission will conduct constitutional reviews in St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, Grenada, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Antigua and Barbuda has started its review, while Dominica has already completed a similar exercise.

STATEMENT ON OECS CRICKET TEAMS

The Heads of Government issued a statement congratulating the Windwards and Leewards Cricket Teams for their excellent displays of sportsmanship and professionalism in reaching the finals of the premier Caribbean one-day championship and especially to the Windwards Team for emerging the eventual champions.

MATTERS OF SPECIAL INTEREST TO THE NON-INDEPENDENT COUNTRIES

Heads of Government considered the relationship with Britain, of the Non-independent countries of the OECS – Anguilla, Montserrat and the British Virgin Islands. The key elements of the new relationship are set out in the White Paper entitled “Partnership for Progress and Prosperity”. The main elements of this new arrangement focus on Partnership, i.e. constitutional matters; British citizenship; good government and sustainable development. Special attention was paid to financial services and British proposals for regulatory standards which are internationally acceptable. Financial services, it was noted, are particularly important to the BVI and Anguilla with the BVI having a 45% share of the global market in international business companies. The strengthening of links with the independent members of the OECS community was likewise reviewed.

LEGAL AND JUDICIAL REFORM

Heads of Government reviewed ongoing initiatives aimed at reforming the legal and judicial systems in Member States and reaffirmed their commitment to the process. They further underscored the need to accelerate the reforms.