



His Excellency

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

Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda

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 medical crisis which occurred during Her Excellency's recent trip to represent Antigua and Barbuda at a conference in the People's Republic of China. We are both thankful for the expertise of the surgeons and other medical personnel in China, whose swift action resulted in ensuring that her life was saved. I wish also to express profound appreciation to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Antigua and Barbuda, and the Antigua and Barbuda Embassy based in Beijing for their caring and considerate intervention. 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.

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:

3. On **1st 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.

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:

The Financial Health of the Economy

4. 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.

5. Barbuda is undergoing significant economic transformation through major development projects, driven by the government's efforts to create favourable conditions for foreign direct investment. Key projects include the Peace Love and Happiness (PLH) project, Rosewood Luxury Hotel, and Paradise Found Development.

The PLH project, launched in July 2020, has invested over USD 500 million to date, financing an international airport, golf course, beach clubs, residences, and utilities. In 2024, PLH invested USD 85 million, with plans for an additional USD 120 million in 2025. By 2032, the project is expected to create over 1, 200 jobs, including over 450 staff for PLH and the Barbuda Ocean Club, more than 400 contractor staff, and over 300 individuals in club operations in 2025 alone.

The Rosewood Luxury Hotel, a USD 250 million investment, will replace the incomplete Dulcina structure, with construction from 2025 to 2028. In 2025, the project will create 250 construction jobs, and upon completion, it will employ 200 individuals.

The Paradise Found Development, launched in January 2024, with a total budget of USD 63 million, will be completed by May 2026. This project will generate approximately 200 jobs upon completion and includes a Nobu Restaurant already in operation and a Nobu Beach Inn Clubhouse, which is soon to be constructed.

These initiatives, alongside infrastructure improvements like the new airport and planned deepwater harbour, are positioning Barbuda as a strategic economic contributor, reducing its reliance on government subvention. The government remains committed to integrating Barbuda into the nation's economic framework, transforming it from a “diamond in the rough” into a polished, thriving destination.

6. 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

7. 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. The 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.

8. 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 Medical Benefits Scheme.

9. 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”.

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:

Foreign Affairs and Climate Change

10. 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.

11. The 55th 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.

12. 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 Bolivarian 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.

13. 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.

14. 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 GraysGreen, 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.

15. 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.

16. 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.**”

17. 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.

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:

Public Utilities and the Provision of Water

18. The Antigua and Barbuda government emphasizes the importance of public utilities and technology in supporting national growth. The Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA) provides essential services, requiring skilled leadership. The Honourable Sir Robin Yearwood, who has served in Parliament for over 48 years and previously oversaw APUA, is acknowledged for his dedication and long-standing service.
19. Our growing economy demands more electricity, water, telecommunications, and technological innovations. Water supply remains a challenge, with reverse osmosis (R/O) plants currently providing 8 million gallons of the 12 millions gallons needed daily. Contracts for portable R/O plants are gradually reducing the deficit. Long droughts and outdated infrastructure also contribute to shortages, and plans are in place to replace old cast iron pipes with more flexible polyethylene pipes, which will help reduce wastage. The government acknowledges the inconvenience this re-piping exercise will cause, particularly in St. John's and asks residents for their continued patience during these essential improvements.
20. The government highlights the importance of both water and broadband services for modern living. Consideration is being given to establishing an independent sub-sea cable to reduce costs. The Minister of Public Utilities is to be commended for his clear thinking on this matter. These initiatives aim to strengthen and modernize Antigua and Barbuda's utilities to meet the needs of its growing economy.

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:

Roadways and Housing, Education and Sports

21. 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 are in need of 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 expended and millions more are earmarked for the repair

of our roads, the speed with which the repairs are taking place might appear slow. More equipment is being purchased, new methods of resurfacing have been adopted, and new employees are being recruited in order 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.

22. 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 are 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.
23. 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.
24. 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—such 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.

25. 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.
26. When principals of the 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 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.
27. 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.
28. 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.

29. 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, a number of 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.

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:

The Incredible Leaps of Tourism

30. The Antigua and Barbuda Ministry of Tourism has achieved remarkable success, attributed to assembling an effective marketing team and delivering the right message. The Minister of Tourism was recognized by the Caribbean Tourism Organization as "Minister of the Year" for achievements in filling hotels, expanding the cruise sector, and running successful campaigns. Major projects are planned in 2025, including the Nikki Beach project, the Hyatt at Yeptons and the One-and-Only at Half Moon Bay – a \$300 million luxury resort set to employ over 400 workers during construction and 550-

600 staff upon completion. The government aims to exceed one million tourists arrivals in 2025.

31. Our readiness to receive a larger number of enlarged 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 delayed 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.
32. 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 expand its role at every juncture, and a youthful Minister of Agriculture has demonstrated great competence in the assigned portfolio.
33. 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. The CARICOM is a larger expression of this ambition.

The Laws that Require Attention:

34. The Antigua and Barbuda government is committed to modernizing its legislative framework to adapt to the ongoing revolution in information technology, particularly the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Recognizing the transformative impact of AI on society, the government is taking proactive steps to ensure that its laws adequately address the ethical and secure use of this technology. The Ministry of Legal Affairs, in collaboration with other CARICOM ministries, is working to draft appropriate laws to regulate AI use, focusing on the technology's benefit while minimizing potential harm. This collaborative approach aims to reduce costs and ensure efficient regulation across the region, emphasizing the protection of businesses, institutions, and government bodies from the misuse of AI.
35. In addition, the government is focused on modernizing and strengthening law enforcement and crime prevention efforts. In 2025, amendments to legislation will enhance the service orientation of law enforcement agencies, and His Majesty's Prison will be renamed the Antigua and Barbuda Correctional Facility. Updates will also be made to the Police and Prison Acts, and the Fire Brigade will be rebranded as the Antigua and Barbuda Fire and Rescue Services.
36. The Government has also renovated the Magistrates' Court and is preparing dedicated facilities for the Family Court, while streamlining the child support process and introducing measures for greater parental responsibility. New Legislation and or policies will be introduced to hold parents accountable for the conduct of minors, protect the elderly from abuse, and make the system for collecting child support payments more accessible.
37. 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 and other agencies like ONDCP, continue to lend invaluable support to our police, reinforcing our collective efforts in the fight against crime ensuring that Antigua and Barbuda remains one of the safest jurisdictions in the region.

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 them into society as productive citizens. Additionally, the Harrison Centre is playing a pivotal role in providing skills training to 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.

38. The Companies Act, will also be strengthened to prevent shell companies from shielding assets from bankruptcy or sale, reflecting the government's

commitment to protecting workers' rights and benefits, which has been a hallmark of governance since 2014.

39. Furthermore, abandoned properties posing health and security risks will be removed, with costs borne by the owners. Legislation is being prepared to address the confiscation, demolition, and sale of such properties, with costs – including unpaid taxes – deducted from any forced sale. I should however note that my government is committed to respecting property rights throughout the process.

40. Overall, the government of Antigua and Barbuda is focused on adapting to technological advancements, modernizing its legal framework, enhancing public safety, supporting rehabilitation, and safeguarding citizens' rights to foster a progressive and secure society. The leadership of the Attorney General is commended for these efforts.

41.

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:

CONCLUSION

42. 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 from a very heart-rending decade of mismanagement. In the past two years, my Government has had to make governing more nimble with a smaller team; and to keep thrusting the State forward in the drive to safeguard all small islands globally from the existential threat of global climate change.

43. 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.

44. 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.
45. 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.
46. May the Christmas season be good to all of us. And may 2025 witness extraordinary growth in the country which we all love.
47. I say blessings on all of us. I thank you.