

**38th Independence Message to the OECS
by Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda
and Chairman of the OECS Authority the Hon. Gaston Browne**

Citizens and residents of the Organisation of the Eastern Caribbean States:

It gives me great pleasure to address you on this special occasion.

Today, 1st November 2019, Antigua and Barbuda celebrates 38 years of its Political Independence, a day that will always be a pivotal day in our history; a day when the people of Antigua and Barbuda forged a new path and set sail on a new trajectory towards self-determination.

I must express sincere gratitude to my OECS brothers and sisters for their well wishes and unwavering support to the Government and people of Antigua and Barbuda.

I am particularly pleased by the solidarity of the OECS Commission to celebrate with us through its flag-raising ceremony. The flag-raising ceremony assures my Government and my people of the strong bond and unity between our Member States, as we continue to be united in purpose and commitment- confidently navigating our way in the global economy.

I take this opportunity to recognize and commend the staff of the OECS Commission, who toil long and hard under difficult circumstances.

We now live in very challenging times in a very volatile world, and the unity of the OECS is needed now more than ever.

We continue to grapple with many challenges such as climate change, unjust economic blacklisting, and de-risking and loss of correspondent banking relations.

With our small size, these external pressures necessitate a call for urgent and ambitious action; a new way of thinking; and of course, a renewed commitment to regionalism.

Our Independence theme this year, “Embracing Our National Pride”, calls on the citizens and residents of Antigua and Barbuda to reflect and appreciate our cultural heritage.

Indeed, it is only from a great understanding of our past that we can determine the path we desire for our future.

As the OECS Member States share common values, heritage and colonial history, I would like to encourage us to reflect on the successes we have made thus far as an Economic Union, and re-focus on the steps necessary to strengthen our place in the global economy.

The OECS continues to be a reminder of our determination and resilience as a people.

Together, we have accomplished many exceptional things despite the challenges.

And on this path, we are poised to achieve many more.

As Chair of the Organization, Antigua and Barbuda will continue to champion for deepened regional integration and to work tirelessly for a more perfect union. We offer our unwavering support to all institutions of the OECS.

As Antigua and Barbuda celebrates 38 years of Independence, we thank the Members of the OECS and look forward to greater harmony for years to come.

I wish continued growth, development and prosperity for Antigua and Barbuda and the OECS.

Thank you.