



His Excellency Sir Rodney Williams, KCMG

Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda

Delivers the Speech from the Throne

**RE-POSITIONING TO ADVANCE THE REBUILDING
OF
OUR BELOVED NATION**

Thursday, January 14, 2016
Parliament Building
Queen Elizabeth Highway
St. John's, ANTIGUA and BARBUDA

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

I wish each and everyone a healthy and prosperous 2016. Each New Year begins with new challenges and new possibilities. My Government views the New Year 2016, as a critical juncture in its first five-year term. The New Year will be determinative of its overall success, leading to 2019, for this year's end will mark the half-way point of my Government's first term.

My Government has adopted the reasoned approach utilized by medical doctors to determine its successes. This process was employed when examining the seven months of successes of 2014. Judging from the results of the year just ended, my Government views 2015 as a very successful year.

The challenges that were identified, the solutions that were applied, and the outcomes which were measured, have led my Government to conclude that the **rebuilding of a broken nation** is well underway. My Government is now **repositioning its focuss in order to advance the rebuilding of our beloved nation.**

I begin that annual examination with a history, diagnosis, and reporting by sharing the story of a fifty-year old industry.

REVIEWING 2015

On January 1, 2015, the West Indies Oil Company (WIOC) was still a privately-owned enterprise. WIOC had been present in Antigua since 1965, or for 50 years. In 1965, the introduction of this industry singularly changed the economic landscape of our country; the diversification of our nation's economy began in earnest, and so did the drive towards regionalism.

The high incomes WIOC paid, the new skills that it spawned, the new housing that it generated, the increased savings and the new banks that joined in the race to greater prosperity, increased our gross national product (or GNP) in one felled swoop. Yet, the products that the refinery distilled from imported crude exceeded the capacity of the local market to consume. This absorptive inadequacy led to the creation of CARIFTA on December 15, 1965, exactly fifty years ago.

On that December day in 1965, Prime Minister Forbes Burnham and Premier Errol Barrow flew to Antigua where, under the leadership of Chief Minister Vere Cornwall Bird, the trio of leaders from Guyana, Barbados and Antigua and Barbuda brought to life the Caribbean Free Trade Agreement (CARIFTA). Antigua's petroleum products from WIOC would enter CARIFTA countries without the imposition of any duties or levies. WIOC, therefore, was undoubtedly a catalyst for the improved evolution of regional relations, following the end of the discarded West Indies Federation three years earlier, in 1962. CARIFTA was transformed into CARICOM in 1973, eight years following its birth here in Antigua and Barbuda.

By August 31, 2015, the WIOC was 100% owned by the people and Government of Antigua and Barbuda, without incurring a penny in debt. It was purchased for US\$30 million dollars, brought about by expert financial engineering that reflects the genius of my Government. The outgoing administration had offered \$81 million dollars for the same enterprise.

Today, the West Indies Oil Company is owned by three principals, but Antigua and Barbuda has retained 51% ownership. Decades of ownership history were reversed for the benefit of the people of this great little country. My Government justifiably regards this outcome as a tremendous success in 2015 with the acquisition of this enterprise at no cost to the people of Antigua and Barbuda.

My Government first separated out 130 acres of desirable land from the core business, and transferred the valuable real estate to the Government-owned National Housing and Urban Development Corporation; it then retained 51% ownership of the core enterprise and, by so doing, sourced new capital and expertise for WIOC's expansion.

The WIOC tank farm will be expanded by adding 500,000 barrels of additional storage capacity. This expansion project is expected to generate 120 new jobs, and to impact the suppliers of goods and services in Antigua since more than \$40 million dollars will be invested. The entire purchase and resale undertaking of this venture can best be described as outstanding. It allowed my Government to acquire valuable land and an on-going business without incurring any debt to the country or expending one penny of taxpayers' money. Simultaneously, the negotiators ensured that the prospect for greater profits would be realized. That

capacity for imaginative approaches to addressing challenges was exercised again in resolving a severe test of leadership that my Government inherited.

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

In 2007, there began a very sad set of circumstances that would jolt the people of Antigua and Barbuda into a state of self-doubt. In that year, the Antigua and Barbuda Investment Bank (ABIB) was identified as a failing institution. The largest indigenous bank, that gave us so much pride in our ability to outperform foreign-owned capital and expertise, was classified as a failed experiment. It was felt by my Government that such an ending broke many hearts.

Unfortunately, as years passed without a resolution, the institution's failures become magnified to such an extent that in August 2011 the East Caribbean Central Bank (ECCB) intervened by taking over the management of the ABIB. On coming to Office, my Government lead the process to resolve the problem within eighteen months. On December 1, 2015, the problem became history.

The good assets of the ABIB were transferred to the Eastern Caribbean Amalgamated Bank (ECAB); and, by way of new legislation, a new asset management corporation was created to recover the bad debts. The step-by-step process of fixing the crisis took a little longer than initially anticipated. But the problem was solved, seamlessly and without much of a ripple to the financial well-being of Antigua and Barbuda. My Government regards its management and resolution of the ABIB crisis as a resounding success.

Why did it take longer than anticipated? Firstly, there was a need to pass harmonized legislation that would strengthen the ECCB's role in fixing other banks, in the East Caribbean Currency Union (ECCU), that were as challenged as the ABIB. The drafting of the law and the negotiations that followed—among the Finance Ministers of the eight-member institution—took almost one year, following the ascendance of my Government to office.

Secondly, the law could only be deemed ratified after four governments had their parliaments adopt it. In Antigua and Barbuda's case, my Government made a

concession to workers at the ABIB and altered the regionally-uniform legislation to guarantee severance payments to workers. Although beneficial it was time consuming.

Thirdly, as much as \$10 million dollars in cash had to be available to meet depositors' demands in the event of a run on the bank. Finding investors who were willing to risk their capital, and who had an interest in a failed bank, was itself a challenge. My Government nevertheless succeeded in doing just that.

Finally, a crisis that grew out of imprudent decisions made by the Directors of the largest indigenous bank was finally resolved on December 1, 2015, without the panic that had been anticipated. Everyone involved in the resolution acted responsibly and there was no run on the bank.

The assurances offered by my Government—to guarantee up to \$500,000 of deposits, and to make 2% interest payments annually on the remainder that exceeds \$500,000, for an eventual payout in 10 years—gave the ABIB depositors the comfort they sought. Although the law required only a \$200,000 guarantee to depositors, my Government measured the impact of the larger number and determined that there was wisdom in exceeding the lawful requirement. There was no attempt to withdraw funds from the Bank; there was no panic; there was no longer a crisis. My Government justifiably regards the handling of the ABIB challenge as one of its outstanding successes in 2015.

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

On New Year's Day 2016, one of Antigua and Barbuda's brightest stars, 16 year-old Shaveesa Gasper, was severely burnt over 60% of her body. The professionals at Mount St. John Medical Center (MSJMC) and the Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda immediately acted to save this brilliant, young, talented citizen's life. The Military in Martinique, at my Government's request, dispatched a helicopter that landed at the MSJMC, flew her back to Martinique, and shortly thereafter the young victim was flown to Paris to be treated for her burns. My Government has agreed to meet the costs associated with her treatment.

The tragedy in this story cannot be missed. According to reports, a young talented 16 year-old was doused with a flammable substance and set on fire. This single act has the capacity to abruptly end a life from which greatness is expected or to significantly altered the quality of one's life. In this case, my Government acted quickly by turning to a neighbour in the OECS and pledged the resources of the state to save this victim's life and to restore her to good health. This is a demonstration of the priority which my Government places on human life.

The successes flowing from the WIOC deal, the smooth rescue of ABIB, and saving the life of Shaveesa Gasper fit into a method of governance that reflects ingenuity, speed of decision-making, and compassion. These actions by my Government, in 2015, were matched by the securing of pledges of billions of dollars in investments, scheduled to flow into Antigua and Barbuda in 2016 and beyond.

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The creation of a single permanent job requires approximately \$250,000 dollars of investment. Four jobs are therefore created when \$1 million dollars are invested, using this formula. When one billion dollars or the equivalent of 1000 million, are invested, then 4,000 jobs are created. My Government has succeeded in attracting more than \$3 billion dollars of investment with the expectation that 12,000 or more new jobs will be created in our economy.

THE PARADISE FOUND PROJECT ON BARBUDA is a winning development conceptualized by Robert Di Nero and James Packard—two well-endowed and well-known global personalities. The property formerly known as the K-Club which has been derelict for the last ten years, and adjoining prime lands, will be transformed into a vibrant 5 star entity following the injection of upwards of US\$250 million dollars. The result should provide an increase in the number and quality of villas and rooms, thereby improving the tourism product of our sister isle Barbuda and by extension Antigua.

Di Nero and Packard purchased the K-Club property for US\$15 million dollars and paid off the remainder of the lease. That lease money went directly to the

Barbuda Council, who in turn paid outstanding salaries and wages to Council employees. The developers will also pay in advance the aggregate sum for the additional land that is being leased, providing the Council once again with resources to meet its outstanding financial obligations. My Government expects that other benefits will flow to the Barbudan economy from this initiative. These are expected to include the construction of a new runway, air terminal, roads and other infrastructural developments that will benefit both the people of Barbuda and this project. Despite opposition to this magnificent project, my Government is pleased to report that the investors are moving forward with the Paradise Found development. My Government justly regards these as successes.

In order to forestall any postponement of its start-up—deemed likely to be brought about by legal interventions and appeals—this Paradise Found Project has been turned into law by the Parliament, making its terms and conditions transparent.

THE YIDA PROJECT was negotiated by my Government the day following the last general elections in Antigua and Barbuda, or on June 13, 2014, eighteen months ago. The principals spent US\$65 million dollars to acquire the property from the receivers; and they have since spent an additional \$15 million dollars to complete the engineering, architectural and environmental impact studies that must be approved before the start of construction.

My Government believes that there are those who would seek to scuttle this investment, which will exceed US\$2 billion dollars when the various phases are completed. However, my Government believes that once this project advances, it will silence the opposing voices.

Without a continuous inflow of new capital in the form of foreign direct investment, the new jobs required for school-leavers, for newly-minted college graduates, and for the few who have been made redundant by the private sector, will not materialize. My Government shall not relent in its efforts to attract new investments to Antigua and Barbuda so that new jobs will always be created. ***Jobs, Jobs, Jobs*** is my Government's mantra.

OTHER HOTEL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS are already in construction mode. *The Pearn's Point* project has hired more than 50 workers to plant the necessary infrastructure and to construct the first of many luxury villas.

The Hodges Bay redevelopment project has stepped-up its activity and has hired additional workers to speed-up completion of the beachside housing.

The Harbour Island Project in Jolly Harbour has commenced its first phase construction and employed scores of workers. The island was purchased for more than US\$15 million dollars.

The lease of *the Halcyon Cove Hotel* was brought to a premature end in order to commence construction of a replacement luxury resort.

US\$23 million dollars have been deposited in an escrow account for the purchase of the 108-acre *Half Moon Bay Hotel* site. The long-awaited solution to a costly decision, which saw the on-again, off-again political support for the acquisition of Half Moon Bay, is only half-way there. My Government must still find US\$23 million dollars to cover the interest owed on the principal debt. My Government is certain that the entire debt will shortly be paid in full.

My Government has positive reports on other development projects. **Maiden Island and Pelican Island** have been purchased from the Stanford Receivers and more than \$100 million dollars are to be spent on transforming them into high end properties. My Government assures the Antigua and Barbudan people that tourism, the driver of the economy, will experience new life in the coming months and years.

A NEW PORT IS SOON TO BECOME A REALITY now that the China Export/Import Bank has provided my Government with the written assurance that it will provide full financing for the first phase of the US\$97 million-dollar port re-development project. The China Construction and Engineering Company, having built an air terminal to impress, will now be focusing upon the modernization of the Deepwater Harbour and the Heritage Quay ports.

The northern rim of the inner harbour will be developed with shops, restaurants, a museum, a hotel and other tourism amenities. The ultimate aim is to spend upwards of US\$200 million on making Antigua's port even more competitive than our neighbours'. By 2020, my Government's expectation is to grow the cruise tourism arrivals to more than 1,000,000 passengers, which is double the number arriving presently.

At the same time, the cargo port will be equipped to handle more cargo containers, and Antigua is to become a trans-shipment point for cargo destined for the Northern Leeward Islands.

The aim of my Government is to turn Antigua and Barbuda into an economic powerhouse in the Caribbean. Small size will not deter my Government from nurturing big ambitions.

The new air terminal at the Sir V.C. Bird International Airport is already welcoming five additional air carriers and, therefore, more passengers and more seats. My Government aims to grow arrivals to double our most prosperous days.

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

The services ancillary to tourism must also improve and expand, if a growing tourism product is to meet the needs of burgeoning numbers. The Antigua Public Utilities Authority (APUA) must be able to provide more electricity, more water and improved telecoms services. Therefore, my Government will be making greater investments in these services.

A three-megawatt solar energy plant has already been constructed on the northwestern rim of the perimeter of the Sir V.C. Bird International Airport by my Government in 2015. That plant has already begun to produce enough energy to replace the daily power requirements of the new terminal. It is my Government's intention in 2016 to increase the amount of energy produced by this renewable source by 10 megawatts.

In Barbuda, my Government intends to build a solar energy plant that will be sufficient to meet total consumption during the daylight hours. Codrington's reverse osmosis plant will also be driven by solar energy. Barbuda will become a green-energy island before the end of this year.

The Government's schools, offices, and other energy-consuming buildings will also be powered by green energy plants, reducing the costs which the Antigua

Public Utilities Authority (APUA) must absorb in supplying energy to the Government.

Two thousand additional street lights, to be introduced in the areas where more than 500 new homes are planned for construction, by my Government, will also be powered by solar energy. My Government thanks the Government of China for this very valuable lighting project.

The object of this exercise throughout the nation, as my Government sees it, is to reduce Antigua and Barbuda's carbon footprint by relying on renewable green-energy as the economy expands. Peak consumption in 2015 increased to 53 megawatts; the additional megawatts were produced by the new solar-powered plant. And so it shall be hereafter, my Government has declared.

More water is also required to meet the growth in hotels, in homes and businesses. In 2015, 8 million gallons of water were consumed daily. When the number of hotel rooms and homes is increased, and a larger number of tourists, cruise vessels, yachts and cargo ships begin arriving, more fresh water will inevitably be required. A reverse osmosis plant is being added in the Nelson's Dockyard area to provide nearly one million gallons daily to the water supply system, ensuring the residents in this very important yachting capital that sufficient water will be available at all times for their domestic use as well. A second reverse osmosis plant is to be installed this year, ensuring an additional two million gallons of potable water for residents of Antigua.

For two consecutive years, a severe drought has plagued Antigua and Barbuda. The forecast by the climatologists is that the global climate change phenomenon has begun to manifest itself with extreme weather events, including droughts and floods. There will be, my Government has been told by its experts in the Environmental Division, extreme weather events from time to time. APUA is therefore planning to produce all the potable water required, rather than plan for rainfall that may never arrive. My Government believes this to be the sensible course to take.

It is also very sensible to move our Internet and Web services into the 21st century. Antigua and Barbuda's I.T. services are among the slowest in the region. The APUA recognizes this inherited failure as one ripe for a solution. The Ministry with responsibility for Information Technology (or, all things I.T.) is already

moving to ensure that the APUA step-up to the challenge and move to increase the speed of the Internet and Web services.

Within the first quarter of 2016, when a new Telecoms Bill is presented to Parliament for its second and third readings, my Government hopes that this will be the beginning of a new IT transformation in Antigua and Barbuda.

My Government wishes to assure the students, the bankers, the homeowners, the I.T. specialists and all those who rely upon the Internet and the World Wide Web for business or pleasure that the speed with which information and data are accessed is about to improve significantly.

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

As my Government moves to enable the universities, the banks, the lawyers, the many offices and homes to be better able to maximize the data services offered by providers, the offices of the Government that are essential to the success of enterprise must also upgrade. **The Ease Of Doing Business (World Bank) Report** must record an increase in Antigua and Barbuda's standing in 2016.

In 2016, the digitization of many Government records and archived materials shall take place. The Office of Intellectual Property and Commerce is expected to complete registration of a newly incorporated company in less than 24 hours. The Land Registry shall also be able to provide print-outs on-line, for the payment of a fee. Records relating to births, marriages and deaths for a certain period have already been digitized and can be acquired in less than one hour, in many cases. This is the model which my Government expects to duplicate short order.

The plethora of historical records at the National Archives will also be digitized, to enable researchers to access information that remain only on fragile paper. My Government has already repaired the roof of this important repository, and will turn next to completing the ceiling and upgrading the technology which the system employs to reach records. My Government gives praises and thanks to the several curators that have preserved the nation's written history for the benefit of future generations.

My Government expresses its thankfulness to the National Housing and Urban Development Corporation for its swift action in repairing the roof at the National Archives which had been leaking for more than five years, threatening to destroy the country's past.

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

As the nation reflects on its past, the present looms large in healthcare. The numbers who become sick and then die, each year, from non-communicable diseases or NCDs is a threat to our development. More than 40,000 people are on prescription drugs; those suffering from NCDs are being treated for diabetes, hypertension, cancer and cardiovascular diseases that draw heavily upon the Medical Benefits System (MBS) and the resources of the state.

My Government is determined to reduce these circumstances significantly by lending full support to **The Wellness Program** articulated by the MBS. A regimen of exercise, changes in diet, early diagnosis and treatment are well within the competence of the MBS to implement.

Nonetheless, the number of patients requiring dialysis to treat kidney failure is exploding. There are 69 patients requiring dialysis at the Mount St. John Medical Center, and 20 are added each year. The average cost to maintain a single patient is approximately \$70,000 annually, and the consumption of water, medicines, supplies of all sorts, and the professionals serving the patients' needs are costly.

My Government has therefore decided that by June 2016, Antigua and Barbuda and the MSJMC will experience its first kidney transplant operation. The cost of maintaining a healthy transplant patient is far less—and the convenience is far greater for the patient—than dialysis. For there to be transplants, there must be healthy living donors. My Government encourages healthy relatives and friends to give consideration to giving up a kidney to a relative or friend in need. It is one of the kindest gifts that can be made to the ones we love.

My Government has also purchased diagnostic equipment that cost more than \$5 million dollars to equip the MSJMC.

The quality of healthcare in the nation is set to increase and the service at the MSJMC is about to become First World. The purpose-built hospital is the finest of its kind in the Eastern Caribbean and so also must be the services offered. The trauma unit has just hired a specialist to treat accident victims and those who suffer severe injuries that could be life threatening. My Government thanks the Government of Cuba for its generosity.

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

Our nation's roads are not racetracks. The Royal Antigua and Barbuda Police Force is reporting that there were 1,867 accidents in 2015. Thirteen were fatal and speed was a contributing factor in 9 of those deaths. My Government may utilize the resources that are to be provided by the British Government in 2016 to upgrade the road system. But the purpose is not to enable more speed and more deaths.

My Government gave tangible support to the Antigua and Barbuda Automobile Racing Association, acquiring land contiguous to the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium and commencing repair of the racetrack for the sportspersons' use. Speeding is to be confined to this controlled space, and is not to take place on the nation's highways. The racetrack's placement next to the Stadium is not an accident.

In July 2016, when the West Indies and India face-off against each other in a Test Match, at the Sir Vivian Richards Stadium, my Government's expectation is that the spirit of the magnificent cricketer, after whom the stadium is named, will prevail. The performance of the West Indies team cannot magically improve; but the history of support by the fans in Antigua and Barbuda has virtually always led to outstanding performances. My Government foresees the same in July.

My Government looks forward to the dispatching of a team to the Rio Olympics in August 2016, and encourages the Antigua and Barbuda athletes to strive for excellence. It is the expectation of the people of Antigua and Barbuda that several athletes will be medaling at this hemispheric venue. Latin America and the Caribbean share much in common, including the Pan American Games.

In 1958, Sir Lester Bryant Bird medaled at the Pan American Games, under the flag of the West Indies Federation. My Government believes the time is ripe for the Antigua and Barbuda team to stand on the Olympic podium.

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

My Government is of the view that the Ministry of Social Transformation deserves a medal. The effort required to save vulnerable families and those dwelling on the edge is reflective of the compassion that is central to the thinking of my Government. Compassion is represented by the flame that burns within the heart.

My Government has come to the rescue of the weakest and the most vulnerable in our society. Three pieces of legislation, passed by the Antigua and Barbuda Parliament, capture the determination of my Government.

The Children (Care and Adoption) Act, the Child Justice Act, The Domestic Violence Act, adopted in October 2015, mark the beginning of a new era in protection of the most vulnerable in society. My Government believes that providing more formal education is one of many ways to help to uplift the less fortunate.

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

In pursuing tertiary education, the sources of funding remain virtually fixed while the demand for more scholarships has increased. In the past year, the budget of the several scholarship funds was exceeded in aggregate by more than \$10 million dollars. This extraordinary investment in our youth is intended to pay benefits in the long term, since a high degree of specialization usually follows after years of practice at any trade or profession. More university exposure is a prerequisite for our youth if they will compete successfully with their counterparts globally.

My Government is certain that by placing a University College of Antigua and Barbuda here on our soil, the number of men and women among us who will pursue higher learning will increase.

Tertiary education is a significant plank in creating the intelligent society which the Father of the Nation envisaged more than seven decades ago. The idea of our own university, whether it becomes a University of the West Indies Antigua Campus, or a stand-alone national institution, will largely be determined by the accreditation process.

My Government will strengthen the Antigua and Barbuda International Institute of Technology (ABIIT) in preparation for it becoming an integral part of the new University College. The School of Nursing will be absorbed into the University; so will the Antigua State College—forty years old next year. The pursuit of knowledge is deeply rooted in the Antigua and Barbuda psyche; so also is the pursuit of excellence.

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

In agriculture, my Government expects to introduce new scientific methods that will result in attracting many more youth to the profession. Hydroponics and drip irrigation give greater control over the food crops that are to be harvested, and represent improved scientific methods of production. Growing talapia and other species of fish under controlled circumstances also attract the entrepreneurial and the very intelligent.

My Government will therefore provide additional opportunities to those willing to employ new technologies in expanding our food production.

One project that has been approved, under the Citizenship By Investment Program, is the growing of pelagic species in huge tanks on the sea shelf in very deep waters. A nursery on shore will re-supply the tanks with stocks that will be harvested when sufficiently grown. Tuna and other pelagic species can fetch very healthy returns, as the wild stock continues to be depleted by improved and effective fishing technologies.

My Government intends to grow our export of food products, in order to earn significantly more foreign exchange from food than in years past.

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

There is one program that has already delivered outstandingly for the Antigua and Barbuda people, in the past two and one-half years. **The Citizenship By Investment Program** has yielded more than \$200 million dollars in non-tax revenue since its inception, my Government reports. These earnings have been spent on a variety of very useful measures that have reduced the national debt, met unpaid salaries and wages—especially over the Christmas holidays—and ensured a cleaner nation.

My Government will continue to maximize the earnings that will come from the CIP, knowing that this windfall will probably last for five or more years before declining sharply. The Antigua Department of Marine Services and Merchant Shipping also contributes to the non-tax revenue which helps to expand our resource base. The added income will continuously be applied to meaningful developmental projects that will have long-lasting effects on the well-being of the Antigua and Barbuda people.

The expenditure from the CIP to pay the company that provided the computerized immigration and border systems, and the identification cards and systems utilized by the Antigua and Barbuda Electoral Commission (ABEC), was very well spent. The ABEC will be conducting a referendum on acceptance of the **Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ)** later this year; the people eligible to participate in the referendum will be drawn from the list of voters in each constituency on the ABEC Registers.

My Government has made it very clear that the acceptance of the CCJ as the final Court of Appeal for Antigua and Barbuda, replacing the Privy Council in London, cannot and should never be determined on the basis of partisan politics. If it appears that any political party seeks to turn the referendum into a measure of political support, then my Government will signal that the referendum will have to await another day. My Government believes that the utilization of a truly democratic process would result in the best outcome in our fair land.

Justice was also served when more than one thousand non-nationals, primarily CARICOM citizens living in our midst, were made citizens of Antigua and Barbuda under an amnesty law adopted by my Government last year.

In addition to those who ordinarily satisfied the requirement of residence in Antigua and Barbuda, those who had gaps in their continuous residence had those gaps forgiven and thus met the eligibility requirements under the amnesty law.

My Government congratulates the Immigration Department and the Passport Division for working assiduously to achieve the outstanding results in so short a period of time. The Parliament of Antigua and Barbuda, by a vote of the majority, eliminated an injustice that was purposely created. Antigua and Barbuda is a cosmopolitan nation, peopled by men and women from more than 80 countries. This diversity has strengthened the nation, multiplied its resilience, enlarged the gene pool, and brought new energy and drive to the population, my Government believes.

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

The diversity of the Antigua and Barbuda population has also impacted the foreign policy of our small island-developing state, my Government asserts. We are friends to all, enemies of none.

At the United Nations, the delegation of Antigua and Barbuda has stood with the Republic of Cuba to call for the lifting of a fifty-year embargo. Antigua and Barbuda also called for a new beginning between Cuba and the USA. Shortly thereafter, the US President announced the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between both countries. The voices calling for this first step were many. The Antigua and Barbuda voice was nevertheless most helpful.

Antigua and Barbuda has supported the Venezuelan Government in its bid to reduce hostilities between this generous South American state and the giant to the North. The success of the initiatives proposed by Antigua and Barbuda will in due course yield the desired results.

Very good relations exist between Antigua and Barbuda and the People's Republic of China. China has become one of the most important developmental partners of our small island developing state. Despite the differences in size, our Chinese friends have always related to us as equals in sovereignty.

The European Union has been very generous in its relations with the Government of Antigua and Barbuda. Technical cooperation has always been a useful measurement that reflect the historical bond between ourselves.

The USAID has also chosen to be very helpful. Although the WTO ruling in Antigua and Barbuda's favour continues to be a thorny issue between our two states, and has not yet been resolved, the United States has been negotiating in good faith, my Government believes. The conclusion of this issue is hoped-for in 2016. All the energy and interest required by my Government will be invested in finding a solution within the next 12 months.

In our regional relations, December 15, 2015, marks exactly 50 years since CARIFTA came into being, right here at Dickenson Bay. That Agreement led subsequently to the creation of the CARICOM and never has the leadership shirked its responsibility.

Yet, Antigua and Barbuda failed to make good on its financial obligations to the CARICOM. The nation failed to pay its obligations to the OECS. It failed to pay the East Caribbean Supreme Court. It failed to pay its obligations to the East Caribbean Central Bank. It failed to meet its obligations to the University of the West Indies (Mona). It failed to meet its obligations to the Association of Caribbean States. And, Antigua and Barbuda did not pay its subventions to LIAT. This was the state of affairs which my Government confronted on June 13, 2014.

My Government has made significant payments to all these regional institutions in an effort to demonstrate that there is pride in regional collaboration, which is matched by paying our obligations with scarce financial resources. My Government has been true to the spirit of Sir Vere Cornwall Bird, the progenitor of regional integration, dating back to 1947.

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

The future of Antigua and Barbuda is bright. My Government forecasts that the growth in the economy in 2016 will surpass 6%. Antigua and Barbuda's leadership is well respected for its phenomenal strides in 18 short months. The crime that plagued our streets has been conquered. The home invasions have been virtually ended. The Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda has done a magnificent job in fighting crime, and the results are reflected in the greater security which businesses and homes now experience. My Government applauds the Police Force for a job well done. The ONDCP (the Organization for National Drug Control Policy) has had a very successful year. In no other year in its history has the ONDCP seized so many pounds of marijuana, so many kilos of cocaine, and confiscated so much cash from those involved in criminal activity, as in 2015.

The Police Force, the ONDCP and the ABDF, working in concert, have performed outstandingly in 2015. They deserve our applause and the provision of even more resources to ensure continued success. My Government pledges to increase resources for these bodies.

My Government's pledge to build 500 homes is to be honoured. Sixty-two new homes will be ready for occupancy at Dredge Bay by mid-2016. That home-building project continues to occupy the highest priority on my Government's agenda for 2016. Building has commenced at Denfields and at Paynters, while construction continues at Dredge Bay. More building sites will be open for construction during the year in pursuit of the pledge.

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

When the history of this period is written, the performance of this economic powerhouse will be studied in Caribbean universities and college classrooms. The scholars and students will conclude that "leadership matters." The future is bright because the nation's leadership is outstanding, the historians will agree.

The people were rescued from an abyss because the new leadership had the courage to pluck a failing nation from the precipice. The country is now being **re-positioned to advance the rebuilding process.**

Long live Antigua and Barbuda. May the New Year bring us joy, happiness, prosperity, jobs in abundance, and good health. May God continue to bless us.

I thank you.