

THE OECS AT TWENTY FIVE

BY

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This year the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary. On June 21, 1981, at Basseterre, St. Kitts, the founding-fathers of the OECS fashioned an integration entity centred around twenty one wide-ranging areas of functional cooperation covering centrally the economy, social services (including health and education), the judiciary, maritime boundaries, law and order, and security. The Treaty of Basseterre envisaged, too, an integration enterprise which went beyond functional cooperation and embraced an authority structure which was essentially quasi-confederal. Indeed, a careful reading of the Treaty shows it at once to be both a finished product in itself and a work-in-progress to a deeper, more profound integration.

The smaller States of the Eastern Caribbean came upon the OECS through a long history of regional cooperation, sometimes painful, but mainly joyous.

Specifically, the OECS grew out of the West Indies Associated States (WISA) Secretariat and was grounded in a monetary union with a single currency and a unified judicial system. These critical elements continue to mark out the OECS as the most tightly-drawn of the current regional integration efforts on display.

The OECS was born in a domestic, regional and international setting very different, and less challenging, than today. Historians and observers of the contemporary situation have written extensively on this theme; it thus requires no further comment here. Suffice it to say that these more challenging and complex times demand of the OECS member-states the forging of a deeper and more perfect union as integral to their strategic focus to improve markedly the overall quality of their people's many-sided lives.

Accordingly, the OECS has embarked upon a quest to craft a viable economic union while not standing askance from the wider process of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) through the auspices of the wider Caribbean Community (CARICOM). To this end an "Economic Union" Treaty has been drafted as a planned replacement of the Treaty of Basseterre. This is currently on the front-burner of the OECS agenda. Indeed, a deepening and broadening of the integration of the

integration of the OECS member-states would necessarily involve corresponding attention in the structures of governance in the OECS Authority.

Over the past twenty-five years, the OECS member-states have advanced materially, politically, and socially. The OECS has played a major role in this process of advancement. But there is much more to be done, as always. This “more” relates not only to the traditional or even formal categories of development or progress. We must address satisfactorily a growing poverty of the spirit, evidenced in part by a debasing criminality among sections of our people and a parallel, debilitating learned helplessness which has unnecessarily infected so many in public discourse.

Our people in our Caribbean, in our OECS, have triumphed over adversity in the past. We have been triumphant, thankfully without being triumphalist, over genocide, slavery, indentureship, colonialism and imperialism. So there is no urge for revenge, only a worth historical reclamation. Our nation-states in the OECS are thriving democracies, tolerant and harmonious societies, modern and sophisticated entities, and middle-income developing lands. We have done well, but there is much better to be done, as always.

Our forebears, our distinguished leaders and our international friends have brought us to this juncture of achievement, hope and optimism. There is much to celebrate on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the OECS. I am confident that there is much more for us to achieve, Together Now!

As the current Chairman of the OECS Authority I commend our people and our leaders, past and present, for their contributions on this our remarkable journey of progress and humanisation. I thank and glorify Almighty God for His mercies and blessings on a grateful, obedient people. Forward to another twenty-five years, and more of positive achievements in the OECS!