



HIGH COMMISSION FOR ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA

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**40th ANNIVERSARY OF INDEPENDENCE 2021 STATEMENT
H.E. Karen-Mae Hill, High Commissioner of Antigua and
Barbuda to the United Kingdom**

It is my honour to bring you greetings from our Prime Minister and the Cabinet of Antigua and Barbuda.

On 1st November, Antigua and Barbuda will celebrate 40 years of Nationhood under the theme Resilience, Reflection and Recovery.

1981 was a moment and a time of great national pride for our people. It marked the moment that we assumed responsibility for our destiny, to make decisions in the best interest of our people and to command the controls of our economic, social and political lives as Antiguan and Barbudans, freed from the control of our former colonial masters.

In 1981, Princess Margaret visited and represented Britain in Independence celebrations.

Rt. Hon. Sir Vere Cornwall Bird became the first Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda.

Sir Wilfred Jacobs became the first Governor General of Antigua Barbuda.

Antigua Barbuda joined the United Nations as the 157th Nation.

Antigua and Barbuda also joined the OAS.

The Jolly Beach hotel re-opened as the largest hotel on the island setting the path to a period of growth defined by a high end tourism product.

There have been many developments over this 40 year period which have shaped much of who we are today as a people.

We saw devastating hurricanes like Hugo in 1989 and Irma in 2017.

We welcomed the first Virgin Atlantic flight in 1998.

Our famed Naval Dockyard achieved UNESCO World Heritage status in 2016 and we were privileged to witness 4 young Antiguan ladies enter that same dockyard having become the first all female, black team to row across the Atlantic in 2019.

We have also in this 40 years seen Antigua and Barbuda welcome the 4th landed campus of the University of the West Indies (UWI) to join Jamaica, Trinidad and Barbados as campus territories as the UWI Five Islands Campus now serves the people of the Eastern Caribbean.

We have developed universal education opportunities for our people which has resulted in a 99% literacy rate and access to Government funded education right up to a first degree.

I am mindful however that even as we celebrate 40 years, it is a time for sober reflection.

I suspect that not a single person here today has been unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic in some manner. We have lost loved ones. Some have lost jobs. Others live in a state of mental angst because of the feelings of loneliness and isolation that have accompanied each new wave of restrictions.

We have sadly in Antigua and Barbuda lost 102 persons to Covid-19. We have however fully vaccinated over 50,000 persons as we press towards achieving 75,000 by the end of the year. A huge task by any measure as our country as do all countries struggle with the reticence of anti-vaccination protesters.

This has not been an easy year from November last year to the present and the future ahead, although brimming with optimism still holds clouds of dark uncertainty. We have to rebuild our lives and our livelihoods and we have to do so in a way that ensures all persons, especially the most vulnerable, are not left behind.

I want to however celebrate our Nationals here in the UK.

- The Presidents and executives of our national associations whose work have been instrumental in keeping our identity alive and our communities connected.
- I think of our Windrush heroes who have helped to build modern Britain and who also with their remittances and barrels helped to build Antigua and Barbuda especially in those early years of Independence.

I celebrate the achievements of diaspora such as:

- boxers Maurice Bishop and Rocky Campbell
- footballer Emile Heskey
- the music virtuosity of the Kanneh-Masons
- the artistic successes of Alvin Kofi, Denize Leadeatte, Avril Horsford and Sharon Foster.
- our clergy such as Rev Rupert Kirby and Rev Canon Les Issac OBE who founded Street pastors which has become a worldwide movement for good
- I recognise the achievements of Baroness Patricia Scotland, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and Baroness Floella Benjamin, both of whom have Antiguan fathers.

These, and so many others, have helped to promote the image of Antigua and Barbuda on an international level.

I reflect that the family of Kelso Cochrane are still waiting for justice 62 years after his brutal murder. His murder was instrumental in forcing the issue of race and racism to the fore and directly influenced the passage of the first race relations act in this country. I am pleased to share that this year our Prime Minister and Foreign Minister have raised this matter of justice for Kelso Cochrane with the UK Government and we will continue to do so.

As we meet today our leaders gather in Glasgow to address the huge and increasing challenges caused by climate change. The Caribbean has long argued that we face the brunt of the consequences of climate change even though we are not responsible for it. I encourage you to join me in supporting all our leaders as they meet to deliberate and negotiate around matters which will affect successive generations.

Our Nation is firmly built on a belief in the sustaining power of God. In the final stanza of our anthem we call on God to bless our Nation, to send prosperity for all and to give us strength, faith and loyalty. These are virtues that our world has in many ways lost sight of but virtues we must keep alive as Antiguan and Barbudans.

As we look to the future let us strive for an Antigua and Barbuda that is fairer, brighter and better. Let us learn from the past as we plan for the future and chart our recovery from this pandemic. We will however only achieve lasting recovery by

Each endeavouring. All achieving.