



**His Excellency Sir Rodney Williams, KCMG**

**Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda**

**Delivers the 2022 Speech from the Throne**

**MANAGING THE COVID-19 CHALLENGES:**

**Growing the Economy and Building Resilience**

Thursday, January 20, 2022  
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 LOWER HOUSE, DISTINGUISHED LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:**

I wish each and everyone a healthy, safe and prosperous 2022.

1. In 2021, our nation was severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. This disease has wreaked havoc on economies worldwide, caused millions of workers to lose their jobs, pushed many into poverty around the world as economies collapsed, and caused the deaths of more than 5 million people worldwide. Vaccines have saved us from the worst ravages of the disease. Many developing nations have not been able to meet the vaccination-needs of their populations, clearly placing their people in grave danger.

2. My Government, on the other hand, has secured a sufficient supply of five different vaccines, enough to meet the needs of the adult population to be fully vaccinated. Our nation has managed to vaccinate more than 62% of our eligible population against Covid. That is quite remarkable, my Government believes, since no other Anglo-Caribbean state has achieved that percentage of compliance and that level of vaccination.

3. Yet, my Government yearns to reach the 75% to 80% vaccination rate in order to achieve community immunity. At least 10,000 more residents need to be vaccinated in order to save ourselves from future waves of infection. My Government pleads with the unvaccinated to do their national duty as soon as possible and to get their shots.

4. The ultimate achievement of “herd immunity” will be met when the additional booster shot is administered to those fully-vaccinated people who are most vulnerable. The third vaccine assures the recipient of longer-lasting immunity. Frontline workers and the most vulnerable are required to receive their booster shots in order to ward off misery and even death.

5. This disease has posed the biggest and the most trying challenge faced by human civilization and the Antigua and Barbuda nation, within our lifetime. While the actions taken domestically will have a significant impact on our well-being, long into the future, our highly integrated world requires appropriate policies by both our neighbours and by the developed world, if the victory over Covid is to be long-

lasting. Covid will be very much like the winter flu; it will be with us long into the future, generation after generation. The people of Antigua and Barbuda will learn to live with Covid and its many variants, requiring everyone to defend against its transmission by vaccinating. Mumps, measles, rubella, small pox and other diseases are gone because of vaccines.

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6. My Government recognized that, in 2020, while Covid threatened our nation's most important economic sector, a fitting response would be to stimulate more construction across Antigua and Barbuda. When tourism arrivals came to a halt because of border closures, the grounding of airlines and the mothballing of cruise ships, everything was done to complete unfinished construction projects, to build-out the infrastructure, to quickly distribute additional parcels of Crown land in order to encourage the building of new homes. Construction, my Government concluded, would be strategically very practical towards achieving economic sustainability, while tourism was forcibly put on hold. PLH in Barbuda, private homes on Jumby Bay and at Mill Reef, and at a myriad of other places, grew the economy. Construction did indeed grow by 13% and served to alleviate some of the pain which the shuttered tourism sector inflicted. The economy of Antigua and Barbuda grew by more than 4% in 2021, despite the persistence of Covid.

7. The shutdown came in March 2020; by 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020, Antigua and Barbuda opened up and the returns have been remarkable. In the past months, the hotels have experienced very high occupancy rates. Over the Yuletide Season, mid-December 2021 until early January 2022, the number of cruise vessels and the arrivals at V.C. Bird International Airport, have surpassed even my Government's high expectations.

8. Although the new Omicron-Covid variant threatens Antigua and Barbuda's source markets, those seeking respite from the disease came in droves to enjoy the safety and beauty of this destination. The country's very low infection rate before Christmas, the near absence of hospitalized Covid patients, and the training of those who would come into contact with visitors, built confidence in Antigua and Barbuda, my government finds. The country still needs all adults to be vaccinated.

9. Congratulations are in order for the Ministers of Health and of Tourism whose joint efforts have achieved outstandingly for the nation.

10. Felicitations also go out to the frontline workers which include the nurses, doctors, orderlies and the administrative staff at the Sir Lester Bird Medical Center; the EMS, the Central Board of Health, the Royal Police Force, the Immigration Department, and those volunteers who worked at Port Health on making the vaccination process seamless on most days. The Antigua and Barbuda Aviation Authority, that manages the V.C. Bird International Airport, is to be congratulated, as is the Customs and Excise Division at our ports. Thanks also to the Ministry of Information whose timely news broadcasts, press conferences and interviews kept the nation informed and educated. The I.T. Division, whose production of the Covid I.D. cards have made Antigua and Barbuda a leader throughout the world, is to be applauded; wherever the cards have been presented, they are greeted with awe. Congratulations to the Minister who guided the process from start to finish.

11. On behalf of my Government, I express heartfelt thanks to all those who played a role in keeping the vast majority safe and Covid-free. Leadership has always mattered. The nation expresses thanks to the Cabinet and the Parliament of Antigua and Barbuda for the superb leadership which all have witnessed.

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12. Another global challenge faced by the people of Antigua and Barbuda is the earth's changing climate. It influences the fierceness and intensity of storms and hurricanes, the erosion of our shoreline from groundswells; it causes unwanted Sargassum to invade our beaches, and can be blamed for the reduction in rainfall, annually. My Government is fully aware that having a sufficient supply of fresh, potable water for our homes, our hotels, our businesses, schools and other institutions is an achievable goal which the APUA would have already overcome-- but for the Covid pandemic.

13. In 2014, when the current administration was first elected, the Sembcorp produced a maximum of 3.5 million gallons of potable water daily, and was owed more than \$22,000,000 by the APUA, which bought its output. Today, Sembcorp plants are owned by APUA and additional Reverse Osmosis Plants added to the mix,

produce more than 7,000,000 gallons of water daily. In 2016, the current administration bought and commissioned the Pigeon Point R/O Plant with a capacity of 300,000 gallons daily. This was done to save the yachting industry which was threatened by another long and harmful drought. The owners of the yachts were planning on moving next door; the Water Authority there was offering free water if they relocated from Antigua. Fourteen months after Pigeon Point was installed, my government bought and commissioned the Shell Beach R/O Plant with a production capacity of 1.7 million gallons per day. Suffering from continued drought and driven by an expanding economy, the water demand continued to rise from 6 million gallons per day in 2013 to 8 million gallons per day in 2020. Additional reverse osmosis plants had to be commissioned. A schedule of growth in potable water production had to be planned. First was the Japanese R/O Plant with a production capacity of 350,000 gallons per day. Ffryes Beach is to be completed by March 2022; delayed commissioning is due to the backlog in shipping, caused by Covid and a diminished labour force in the export state. That plant arrived Antigua in October 2020. The Fort James R/O Plant, with a capacity of 500,000 gallons per day will be commissioned by June 2022. The plant has been paid for and is presently being shipped. The Bethesda R/O Plant, with a capacity of 3.2 million gallons per day, will be commissioned in September 2022. With the addition of the several plants, APUA Water Division will be able to produce 10 million gallons of potable water per day, and will still have a reserve of 2 million gallons per day.

These new plants will add to Crabbes, Camp Blizzard, Barnacle Point, Pigeon Point and Ffryes Bay. My Government is aware that a few communities are still deprived of water on some days, and that a small number of households on higher elevations can sometimes suffer deprivation. The APUA Water Division will correct that deficiency. Our thankfulness to the APUA Water Division for addressing the persistent drought conditions that have left all surface-water storage-systems empty, increasing thereby our nation's reliance almost exclusively upon the science of reverse osmosis. Reverse Osmosis water is very precious and very expensive. My government's investments in water desalination is fitting and wise. Thank you, APUA, for trying real hard to reach every household in Antigua.

14. The decline in rainfall in recent years, leading to drought followed occasionally by torrential flooding, can be blamed entirely on the global climate change phenomenon. Global warming threatens to undermine civilization by disrupting the normalcy of weather, by rapid melting of ice on the frozen continents on the North and South Poles, by the expansion of the seas, and the erosion of shorelines

as millions of gallons of melted ice pour into the oceans. Our small island-state has joined forces with other low-lying coastal- and island-states, in every international forum in which islands have membership, to help to make our island-homes safer places on which to live for countless generations to come. Many of those multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations, the Organization of American States, the Commonwealth of Nations, are debating a set of measures put forward by the most vulnerable, to reduce the harmful effects of increases in global temperatures. Our diplomats and environmental experts, led by the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, have worked to rescue small islands from imminent destruction. They are to be applauded.

15. The agricultural output of Antigua and Barbuda has been adversely impacted by the drought conditions, which have been severe during these past five years. While the absence of rain compelled many farmers to rely upon irrigation and modern technologies for the growing of food crops, drought has also resulted in a significant reduction of ruminants. My Government reports that nearly 100,000 sheep and goats have been slaughtered for food but have not been replaced; the populations of these quadrupeds—having been hampered by the shortage of edible leafy vegetation and rain water—have dwindled. In eggs production, however, there is no deficiency. Poultry farmers are able to meet market demand for eggs. Congratulations!

16. Agriculture continues to grow in economic importance as scientific methods, taught to our farmers by Chinese scientists, the Agricultural Institute for Latin America and the Caribbean (ILCA) and others, have begun to attract many youth into this challenging career. The Minister of Agriculture, having encouraged wide-scale back-yard farming and newer methods such as hydroponics, has caused an inordinate interest in growing food and seeking to achieve food security. In several secondary schools, Agricultural Science is being taught in order to inculcate a high regard for food sovereignty. My Government recognizes that its population of 100,000 souls, expands with the arrival of every vessel and aircraft. While we must cater for the tastes and likes of our visitors, my government acknowledges the noble ambition of achieving food sovereignty in our island-country.

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17. On numerous occasions, my government has repeated that Antigua and Barbuda has fashioned a foreign policy that makes us friends to all and an enemy to no state. As a small vulnerable state whose sovereignty was secured by our own initiatives and by international law, it is in the best interest of Antigua and Barbuda to seek to build bridges to countries that are within our region, within our hemisphere, and many on the other side of the globe.

18. The People's Republic of China has become an indispensable partner in my government's development drive. China's "Belt and Road Initiative" has made available inexpensive capital for major developmental and infrastructural projects. The V.C. Bird International Airport was financed by the China ExIm Bank; as was the near-completed Deepwater Cargo Port. My government is aware of the global campaign to discredit the victories of China in making friends around the globe. Although it does not possess the economic and fiscal capacity of the industrialized states, in every multilateral forum where it can be found, China joins with the developing world to move forward the pace of development. Thank you, China.

19. The great country of India, whose Independence in 1947 set the stage for the dismantling of colonial hegemony globally, and whose leaders inspired others to seek peaceful means to establish their sovereignty, India has become an extraordinary friend of the people and government of Antigua and Barbuda. India was the first to gift Antigua and Barbuda thousands of Covid-19 vaccines. Yet, India is on the other side of our planet, and is known to our region through mass migration in another era, and through international cricket. She is a remarkable friend and competitor.

20. The Republic of South Korea has maintained a steady connection with Antigua and Barbuda by making annual gifts of motorized transport to the state and its people, consistently for four decades. South Korea has been reliable in its technical cooperation by these annual gifts, which have benefited the young students who are required to be moved from village to school and back, daily. These government to government gifts by South Korea are highly appreciated, my government assures.

21. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and the Republic of Cuba are both within our region and hemisphere. These two good Caribbean friends of Antigua and

Barbuda have made significant contributions to our country and our region's development, my government recalls. Cuba has provided scholarships to hundreds of Antigua and Barbuda youth over the years, many choosing to become medical practitioners. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela established, 40 years ago, the Institute for Culture and Cooperation; the Institute teaches the Spanish language to hundreds of youth who wish to learn the language, at no cost, even during these difficult days. Venezuela has led in the establishment of the ALBA Bank, allowing my government limited access to fresh capital. At this moment, there is an on-going crisis with their neighbour to the North. My government's principled stand, divorced from convenience and fear, leads Antigua and Barbuda to embrace these Caribbean countries that have always showed several Antigua and Barbuda administrations true neighborliness. Venezuela and Cuba are our friends and Antigua and Barbuda is theirs, my government asserts.

22. The Dominican Republic, once a country to which our people immigrated, is now witnessing a reversal of that historical trend, making Antigua and Barbuda a home for thousands of Dominicans. Following the devastation in Barbuda, caused by Hurricane Irma, this great Caribbean Island-Country has indicated its decision to build a Primary School on Barbuda. A change in administration there has slowed the process. The Dominican Republic is a true friend of Antigua and Barbuda.

23. There are two friends from our hemisphere that are more like family: The United States and Canada.

i. Governors dispatched to Antigua and Barbuda dating back to the early 1700s in colonial days sometimes came from British North American colonies, before the USA was born in 1776. Governors were also dispatched from Antigua to North Carolina and other British North American colonies, taking with them the enslaved Antiguans to serve as their cooks, household help, and servants. Private landholders who made significant profits from their estates, donated large sums to their sons' schools, such that Harvard Law School was endowed by the Royalls family who owned the Royalls Estate just east of Cedar Grove Village. My government has challenged Harvard University to make good on reparations and it has agreed to collaborate with U.W.I. Five Islands, no costs attached.

ii. The building of U.S. bases on our country's shores in 1941, meant the contribution to the Allies' victory in 1945. The USA emerged as the most powerful country on earth, militarily and economically, and spent enormous sums to rehabilitate a destroyed Europe; the USA is being urged to develop a Marshall Plan

for our Caribbean in light of the climate extremes which our Caribbean faces annually and the damages resulting.

iii. Our tourism had its beginning in 1952 with the passage of the Hotels Aid Ordinance Act. The commissioning of the military runway at Coolidge, into a civilian airport, was achieved by the grace of the U.S. Government in that same year. The luxury hotels first built in Antigua and Barbuda were financed by wealthy Americans who chose to invest in luxury hotels that formed the backbone of a fledgling tourism industry. The St. John's Deepwater Harbour, dredged and constructed over 17 months, ending on October 31, 1968, was achieved through financing of the Export Import Bank of the USA.

iv. So, the relationship between Antigua and Barbuda and the USA goes back 400 years, and should cause the current U.S. administration to be more generous to its Caribbean neighbour. My government has learned that a country does not get what it deserves; a country gets what it negotiates. Negotiating a settlement of the W.T.O. judgment is a good place to start, my government believes. My government also thanks the US Government for two sizeable contributions of Covid-19 vaccines, most recently, with more to come.

v. Canada was once British North America, and still acknowledges Queen Elizabeth as Head of State. Its relationship with the Anglo-Caribbean fits a pattern that involved enabling migration to Canada. The largest country in the world, recognized that it was better-off inviting trained personnel to migrate to Canada; by building schools and sending teachers to assist in enlarging literacy, Canada helped to make it possible for Antigua and Barbuda to score outstandingly on the UNDP's human development index. In 1994, Antigua and Barbuda was 29<sup>th</sup> of 157 participating states. That is a remarkable record for which Canada is applauded.

24. The United Kingdom, a nation with which Antigua and Barbuda has had the longest relations, remains a steadfast friend. The current Minister of Foreign Affairs along with the High Commissioner to London, have indeed nurtured a strong and enduring relationship since their tenure began. On the eve of Independence, 40 years ago, on November 1, 1981, Vere Cornwall Bird declared that a mature relationship with the U.K. would characterize the future. These 40 years of sovereignty, my Government asserts, have seen stronger bonds and closer friendship with this important ally. My Government notes the harm which Covid-19 and its recent variant have inflicted on the economy of this great country. Nonetheless, my Government will continue to pursue reparations, with the sure

knowledge that the U.K. treasures the friendship and will act to repair the painful years of history, without hurtful recriminations.

24.i. There are three multilateral institutions which are dear to the heart of my government and all previous administrations: **The United Nations, the Organization of American States, and the Commonwealth of Nations.**

ii. The United Nations adopted Resolution 1514/XV of 1960, declaring colonialism unlawful. That decision led to the creation of small island-states-members of the United Nations.

iii. Working along with a few coastal states, that now total 39, those states have created **The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)**. The AOSIS has successfully brought the climate issue to the very front of the U.N. agenda, and has urged those who pollute the planet, to live up to their responsibility by meeting the cost of damages to innocent others; polluting states are encouraged to shift to renewable energy and away from the intense use of fossil fuels. My Government applauds our Prime Minister for leading the AOSIS during these past twelve months, including the outstanding performance which he demonstrated in Glasgow, Scotland, during COP26; and, for furthering the cause of justice globally. The Permanent Representative and staff at the U.N. Mission of Antigua and Barbuda have been remarkable in their pursuit of a better world.

25. **The Organization of American States (the O.A.S.)** has escaped being labeled the footstool of any one state, in part because of the strong and independent policy decisions of several small member-states, my government concludes. The principled approach to the treatment of Venezuela, whence Antigua and Barbuda refuses to be dragged into the internal affairs of a resisting state, stands as testimony to the dignity of our country's self-determination. The principled stand on Haiti, a CARICOM member State, also demonstrates the high level of competence which our representation in Washington affords. Our nation's OAS policy is brilliant.

26. The disagreement over the choice of a General Secretary of the Commonwealth of Nations remains an embarrassment, for all the resulting maneuverings it has generated. It cannot be that by starving an institution of financial resources, wealthier states can always command the outcome they desire. A case study in the notion of "equality of states" is being played out in London, and across several

capitals of Commonwealth countries. Posturing of that sort has never occurred in our most highly-prized regional institution, the CARICOM.

27. Having served as the Chairperson of CARICOM during these past six months, my Government applauds the Prime Minister for the exuberance, competence and exemplary leadership which he brought to the undertaking. Despite Heads of Government not being able to travel, the CARICOM held its schedule of meetings by reliance on modern technology. The CARICOM played a crucial role in coordinating some vaccine acquisition for the region; brought strength to the Climate Conference in Glasgow when unity was absolutely necessary; enjoined the United Nations in the struggle to keep our climate safe; and, sought uniform approaches to other challenges, including the use of GNP per capita to determine development status, despite varying interests. CARICOM remains an important part of the matrix of foreign policy initiatives that yield substantial returns for our country.

**28. The Organization of East Caribbean States (the OECS)** continues to be one of the strongest institutions that arranges for its members to function frequently as a “regional state”. Despite our separate sovereignties, the six independent states, the non-independent members and the Associate Members of the OECS, frequently join together to achieve what could not be successfully undertaken by a single entity; my government describes this arrangement as “regional statehood.” The Honourable Sir Lester Bird, an originator and architect of the OECS, is to be credited for envisioning these multiple, joint roles, thereby making the OECS a significant partner in development. Whether that partnership is found in the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court, the Eastern Caribbean Central Bank, the Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority, the OECS Economic Treaty, the Regional Security System, the OECS Pharmaceutical Procurement Services and other regional efforts, this generation applauds the 1980 founders of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States for their foresight and brilliance.

29. My government’s view is that the foreign policy of this nation, forty years old and counting, has been superbly conducted principally by remaining committed to the underlying creed of making no enemies and embracing all as friends.

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30.i. My government will bring to Parliament the Telecommunications Bill 2022. Although the new law will be all-encompassing, the time has come to separate out the competitors from the regulator and allow improvements in telecommunications that are objectively managed.

ii. The ability of customers to change their telephone carriers while keeping their existing numbers, called number portability, will soon be a reality. And, the provision of fiber-optic to the home will also be completed in the New Year; APUA is investing more than \$100 million in an undersea cable, and improved broadband services that will move Antigua and Barbuda to a developed-country status. Covid has caused many plans to be shelved temporarily. The Minister responsible for Technology has been very aggressively pursuing these important objectives with the APUA as an indispensable partner.

iii. As Minister of Information, congratulations are in order for the sea change which he has brought to the Antigua and Barbuda Broadcasting Service (A.B.S.). The transformation has won the station critical acclaim, and its growing reach and audience--regionally and internationally--is evidence of its superb coverage. Throughout the travails of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Minister has ensured that A.B.S. provides superb coverage of Cabinet's weekly output, buttressing the transparency which characterizes my Government.

31. During the two years of Covid and the decline in tourism, my Government sought to make construction play an even more significant role than before. The Development Control Authority made the issuance of start-up permits and licenses a means of increasing home-building and to spur other construction projects. That plan worked exceedingly well, my government agrees. Nearly one thousand parcels of land have also been identified for homeowner distribution, and CHAPA has built more than one hundred homes. National Housing has also constructed hundreds of new homes to meet the demands for new housing. The Ministry of Housing has worked exceedingly hard to make a success of the housing construction demand. Led by a Minister who is determined to succeed, my government extends congratulations to her for a job well done.

32. The Ministry of Social Transformation has been challenged from its very creation, attempting to meet the needs of many indigent-elderly or single-parent head of households. Its function is to meet the needs of those who are less capable of providing for themselves. The Ministry was conceived as the restorer of the breach. Given the resource restraints, the Minister of Social Transformation is to be congratulated for growing a mustard seed into a giant oak. Nearly every challenged household whose residence is badly deteriorating or burnt to the ground, whose income is fixed, and whose savings have been depleted, can count on the Ministry of Social Transformation to help fill the breach. Thank you, Minister.

33.i. My Government applauds the Minister of Education and Sports for addressing frontally many of the Covid-19 challenges which faced our school plants, and which continue to pose a problem for parents and teachers and students. A responsibility to protect the youth is imposed on every adult in Antigua and Barbuda. That responsibility in the face of Covid is not a simple task. When the Cabinet required all teachers and other staff on school compounds to be inoculated, there appeared to be much opposition. Wisdom, however, was the winner; over 90% of students, 12 to 18 years and older, and nearly 95% of teaching staff regarded it their duty to keep their charges safe from infections—the restorers of the paths have acted. Today, inoculation of the school population can be considered an inimitable success, and the Minister of Education has to be applauded for securing a high level of cooperation.

ii. My government recognizes that competitive school sports have not yet made their way back to the playing fields; despite that, all is being done to ensure that when re-started, the infrastructure to achieve will be repaired and in place.

iii. Applause is also forthcoming for the completion of the new science wing of the Sir Novelle Richards Academy. Another of Antigua and Barbuda's wealthy friends is thanked for this important gift.

iv. The school meals program has been extended to cater for all, and no payment is required of either student or teachers. The school uniform program has also continued. The University of the West Indies at Five Islands continues to grow its student body, despite the discouraging political commentaries aimed at denying the Five Islands Campus a reality. My Government is very pleased that the Vice Chancellor won re-appointment despite the public effort to humiliate this outstanding West Indian.

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34. My government welcomes the achievements of the Ministry of Works. It has become a revenue-earning Ministry with resources that allowed it to respond meaningfully to the hundreds of demands made of it for better roads and bridges, healthier buildings in which to work, and improved infrastructure for the growth of the expanding economy. On all government-building projects, the Ministry of Works has provided many of the non-imported building materials required to finish the project. The ADOMS Building, for example, renamed justifiably the Sir John E. St. Luce Finance and Conference Center, was a Ministry of Works completion-project that did not require the millions which the previous management team was requesting for completion. That building, intended originally to cost EC\$17 million to construct, was plagued with inherited cost overruns that would have enabled government to construct two such buildings using the monies expended. The removal of the old management team was actually carried out by the Cabinet, since the Board refused to act, despite the evidence of inflated costs, my government reports.

35. The floods of November 8 and 9, 2020, that dumped 21 inches of rain on Antigua in two days, undermined many of the poorly-built roads inherited from a previous administration. Potholes appeared almost everywhere, following the downpours. The cost of those repairs exceeded the budgeted allocation that was set aside; and, the Covid pandemic, having impacted the economy, impaired revenue collection significantly, in the months following. Yet, my government has persisted and has achieved outstandingly because of excellent leadership. Congrats to the Minister of Works and his team.

36. The Attorney General, the Ministry of Legal Affairs, Justice and Public Safety are applauded for the remarkable achievements they registered in 2021. The Parliament met at least once each month and sittings frequently consumed two days, in several busy calendar months. The timely amendments to the Laws of Antigua and Barbuda, and the passage of new laws as the circumstances required, made the Attorney General's Office one of the busiest Ministries within the government. New lawyers were hired in order to meet the demand for draft legislation. New circumstances such as Stem Cell Research and Application,

Medicinal Cannabis, Crypto Currency, and Digitalization by many government and private entities required completely new laws, contemplated by my Government. The Attorney General rose to the task.

37. Rising to the occasion, the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda has performed admirably during the year just ended, keeping us safe from criminal activity aimed at the person and property. The curfew which was imposed to curb Covid seemed to have had a diminishing impact on criminal behaviour. For this reason, the 16 murders that occurred last year shocked us all, my government believes; they are sixteen too many. We strive to create a society that has the capability of settling differences peacefully, teaching us to appreciate the value of human life and human dignity. Violence against women—one of the plagues of an evolving society—continues to be addressed by state and non-state actors, seeking to isolate the violent types from victims, and bringing the guilty to face the law. The mentally ill have also become a part of the mix, becoming both perpetrator and victim of murder in the year just ended. “Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream,” my government intones.

38. The Organization for Drug Control and Money Laundering Policy (ONDCP) is one of the police agencies upon which my government relies in order to curb the drug trade and to take the profits out from the money-laundering which inevitably follows. The ONDCP has kept Antigua and Barbuda relatively free from organized crime and the data indicate that it is the most accomplished of similar organizations in the Anglo-Caribbean. Its systems are precise, its members are all highly trained, and it has prevented the spread of the corrupting influence of illicit drugs. The ONDCP is applauded for its successes and its superb leadership.

39. The Financial Services Regulatory Commission (the FSRC) has also kept our small offshore financial-services-sector free from criminal elements, my government is assured. The sector has been significantly reduced by the hostile action of the OECD and the punitive measures that can impact domestic banking and the movement of capital.

40. The Ministry of Finance is to be congratulated for the sterling tasks it undertook to meet the demands of an undiminished public sector whose salaries and wages were paid on-time each month and each week, despite the Covid pandemic; and, all government pensioners were also paid on-time. Again, there were no lay-offs of

public servants, payments serving to keep the economy afloat. The Social Security Board, whose monthly payments to recipients are always predicated on a growing workforce contributing to meeting its obligations, was severely challenged as Covid brought on massive unemployment in the private sector and diminished worker-contributions. The central government stepped-in monthly with resources from the Citizenship by Investment progra (CIP). In early December 2021, my government provided the Social Security Board with \$10 million dollars and filled the gaps, such that every Social Security recipient was paid in full by 31 December 2021. As the economy begins to recover, the burden of meeting the shortfall is likely to lessen, and on-time payments are expected to continue in 2022. My government has never borrowed any money from Social Security, and is the only administration to provide timely contributions consistent with and exceeding its financial obligations; no other government in the 48-year history of Social Security can boast that achievement. A further \$1,000,000 have been dispatched to Social Security this past week in order to ensure on-time payments before 31 January 2022. The Citizenship by Investment Program has been one reliable source of non-tax revenue; a significant fraction of its resources has gone to the Social Security Board for payment to the recipients. There were several figures who publicly called on my government to “suspend” CIP operations so that misery could stalk the land, my government recalls. The CIP, under indigenous management, has been remarkable in its turn-around of applications, its delivery of revenue, and the multiple useful purposes to which its earnings have been put. Congratulations to the CIP!

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41. I end by noting that the challenges generated by Covid-19 have severely impacted every aspect of life in Antigua and Barbuda. The manner in which my government has had to provide leadership during the crises which Covid spawned, demonstrated outstanding management among the political directorate. A State of Emergency was ended just before Christmas Day, and a curfew brought to an end simultaneously. Because of the uncertainties wrought by the new Covid variant called Omicron, my government cannot now declare victory over the virus. However, given the record of achievement during the early days of the pandemic and up until today, the management--by the Cabinet and the medical professionals--of this new phenomenon wins my government applause for its

foresight, its calculation of likely outcomes, and by putting the people and our country first, always. These past 21 months have been undoubtedly challenging. Yet, the resilience and remarkable strength of the Antigua and Barbuda people were tested and made manifest. Congratulations! Self-regulation will now play a greater part, as the lessons learned are widespread.

42. We can all agree that the future is unknowable; yet, based on the experience garnered during these past twenty-one months, my government demonstrated that it is a superb management team that has shown its competence and resilience in the face of an existential threat. Its sterling service to the people of this great little country deserves unending applause. Congratulations! May God continue to bless us all during this New Year that is sure to be filled with new challenges and new surprises. I thank you!