



MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR BARBUDA

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Ref No. MP/Bo1.....

AUG 22<sup>nd</sup>.....2018

Dear Prime Minister,

I write on behalf of the people of Barbuda as their Parliamentary Representative and I also write as a citizen of Antigua and Barbuda. I know you will believe me when I say that my greatest wish is for the success of our twin island state and for the welfare and happiness of all our people of Antigua and Barbuda. For there to be happiness all the people must be happy, not just some.

Our state of Antigua and Barbuda is made up principally of two main islands, Antigua and Barbuda. The two islands have always had close but distinctly different cultures, the product of our separate historical pathways. That, in my very humble opinion, Sir, is one of the things that make us unique and strong; strong in our diversity and hence, stability.

We in Barbuda constitute the minority, but the very name of our state recognised our distinctness in that our state is called "Antigua and Barbuda", not '*Antigua, which includes Barbuda*', but "Antigua and Barbuda", separate, but conjoint and complimentary entities; each having its own unique contribution to make towards the sustainability of the whole.

Independence was an achievement for all Antiguan and Barbudans, All our people hoped for was to better themselves and their families, not worse. Barbudans are no exception. But losing our heritage, our culture, our relationship to the land, would be a devastating blow to us as a distinct minority within a unitary state. It was never envisaged at the independence discussions or indeed in the Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda, that Barbudans would end up being despoiled of land and heritage, indeed of a cultural existence. Hence provision was made for a local government structure in the form of the Barbuda Council, whose views at least would need to be sought in consideration of any measure which specially affected Barbudans and from which they could be losers. I believe that this is one of the basic tenets of democracy on which our Constitution rests.

I would like to believe, PM, that all Antiguan and Barbudans can agree with that. If that be the case, there is a real basis for us, as leaders of Antigua and Barbuda, to begin an honest conversation to make changes or adjustments to our Constitution to enable us to settle such vital issues as now confront us, in a spirit of open-hearted empathy towards one another.

In this spirit, I take the opportunity to warmly accept your recent public offer of discussions to redefine Barbuda's status in the Antigua and Barbuda state; ***I know that you made that offer in the context of possible secession***, but I believe that most Barbudans would prefer to explore the option of ***federalism***, which would preserve the unity of our state, while at the same time enabling Barbudans as the minority, to be assured that their vital aspirations will be respected, a pathway opened to resolving once and for all the underlying tensions that have, and could continue, to plague and poison our relationship.

We do have a precedent right on our doorstep in the St Kitts/Nevis constitution. I believe, PM, that now is a most opportune time for us as Antiguan and Barbudans to deal with the problems in our relationship in a mature, restrained and mutually sympathetic way.

Barbudans fully agree that there should be more development in Barbuda. But the real issue is the nature of that development. Let us begin discussions on a relationship that builds upon the positives of the past and make these the solid foundation for a sensible and dignified relationship for today and for the future.

There were nearly 2000 Barbudans living in Barbuda before the hurricane. Many more live outside of Barbuda. Strengthen Barbudan local government, not make it redundant, and help us take full advantage of the uniqueness of our history of cooperation and community solidarity; provide training for Council members and officers on the best way to manage our affairs, and use our communal land system to build an economy for Barbuda based on our excellent natural resources and potential for a different kind of tourism; make the people happy by sharing the proceeds of our endeavours equitably between all Barbudan residents, whether they originate in Barbuda or in our sister, Antigua - and you have the formula for a happy and harmonious state, in which Barbuda is transformed.

I am sure, PM, as citizens of Antigua and Barbuda, under the banner of "one state, two systems", we can ensure the happiness of all of our citizens, both those who live permanently in Barbuda as well as those who seek solace and relief from a world increasingly riven by stress, conflict and anxiety. At the same time, such an approach would strengthen the solidarity, resilience and resourcefulness of the people of the state of Antigua and Barbuda as a whole enabling it to adapt successfully to the challenge of climate change and external convulsions.

Respectfully



Hon. Trevor M. Walker  
MP for Barbuda