

**Statement to the Permanent Council of the Organisation of American States  
on 20 April 2018  
reporting on the General Elections in Antigua and Barbuda  
held on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018  
by His Excellency, Sir Ronald Sanders, Ambassador and Permanent  
Representative to the Organisation of American States**

Mr President

The delegation of Antigua and Barbuda thanks you and member states of the Permanent Council for affording us the opportunity to report on the general elections held in Antigua and Barbuda on March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018.

Mr President,

Elections, organised and supervised by an Independent Electoral Commission, are held at regular intervals as required by the nation's Constitution.

This general election was the 8th in the 36 and a half years of my young country's status as a sovereign state.

We are proud of our record of adherence to democracy, constitutionality, and the rule of law in holding general elections and in the conduct of them.

For three and half decades, the electorate of Antigua and Barbuda has changed governments through the ballot box without violence or any major incident of civil strife.

This general election followed that revered pattern.

Political parties and their candidates have been free to campaign for elections without any hindrance.

They all have unrestricted access to the media for advertising and other advocacy of their positions; and they have the unfettered right to hold public meetings and

to erect billboards, posters and other material, including banners in their party colours.

In this regard, it can fairly be observed that over the recent election campaign period, the country witnessed a profusion of lively debate amid a vibrant display of political paraphernalia, espousing the merits of each party's candidates.

In this modern age, the parties and their candidates also have access to social media, including Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp for the widest distribution of their messages, and they utilised all of them; sometimes in satire, at other times in seriousness but at all times in a climate of complete freedom of expression.

Mr President

The general elections were vigorously contested by seven political parties and one independent candidate.

As usual, there was a relatively high voter participation.

76.32 per cent of the registered electorate turned out to cast their votes.

The two main political parties secured 96 per cent of the votes between them.

None of the remaining 5 parties and the single independent candidate managed to garner more than 1.6 per cent of the vote.

The Antigua and Barbuda Labour Party was re-elected to government by a popular vote of 59.39 per cent of the votes cast.

It increased its representation in the House of Representatives by one giving it an overwhelming majority in the legislature.

The United Progressive Party, that had formed the government for ten years between 2004 and 2014, managed to retain one seat, and the Barbuda Peoples' Movement won one seat.

The election result was fully and peacefully accepted by all the contending parties and the people, and the new Government was sworn-in and immediately began work in less than a week.

Mr President.

My delegation points out that, in addition to the elected House of Representatives, the Antigua and Barbuda Constitution requires an appointed Senate as a reviewing chamber for legislation emanating from the House of Representatives.

Appointments to the Senate are made by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition.

Antigua and Barbuda has always welcomed participation, in the parliamentary system, of parties representing government and opposition.

We regard the presence of an elected parliamentary opposition as enormously important and beneficial to democracy and to continuous debate and dialogue in the cause of our political, social and economic development.

It is a value that is cherished in our society and one that we jealously uphold within our own borders.

Mr President

There was one noticeable new and troubling development about the recent general election.

That was an attempt at interference from outside of Antigua and Barbuda.

The attempt to influence voter opinion became obvious and in the use of social media, and, in one case, traditional media outside of Antigua and Barbuda.

Countering such influences absorbed both time and scarce financial resources and caused deep concern about the possible outcome had the election campaign period been longer.

My delegation suggests that, In the future, it would be useful for this Organisation to maintain a watchful eye on developments of this kind that seek to frustrate the will of the electorate in general elections in any member state.

My delegation makes this suggestion out of deep concern for the protection of democracy and for the preservation of election processes that are free from external influences which seek to advance their own interests.

Mr President.

Despite the troubling development I just described, the general elections process in Antigua and Barbuda took place, generally, in an atmosphere of civility and in a state of calm.

The elections were observed by three groups of official Observers invited into our country by the Government.

The Observer Groups represented three organisations: The Commonwealth of Nations, the Caribbean Community and the Organisation of American States.

The CARICOM Observer mission stated that the results of the election reflected the will of the voters.

It also praised the “highly trained and efficient poll workers” for the well-organised conduct of the day’s activities and commended the voters for their high level of patience when waiting in queues.

Similarly, the Commonwealth Observers in their statement declared that: “The election was conducted in a peaceful environment and in accordance with the laws of the country and with the principles of democracy as enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter”.

The Commonwealth Group also declared that it witnessed openness in the expression of democracy in the election process.

As is normal, both groups have offered to make recommendations for the improvement of the electoral process and the Government as well as the political parties will welcome consideration of such recommendations.

One comment that my delegation would make to this Permanent Council about Observer missions to Caribbean countries, is that for 12 of them, there is a duplicative effort with CARICOM and the Commonwealth.

It might be useful for an initiative to be taken for the OAS, CARICOM and the Commonwealth to pool their resources to reduce costs to each of them while fielding a varied and co-ordinated team.

Mr President

My delegation thanks you and the Permanent Council for the opportunity to report on the Antigua and Barbuda general elections.

Democracy, the rule of law and civil, political and human rights, including free and fair elections, are values to which the Nation of Antigua and Barbuda and its political actors and civil society are committed as the general election of March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2018 has so manifestly demonstrated.

Thank you