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Antigua and Barbuda

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

I. Country background

A. The Constitution

1. Antigua and Barbuda was colonised by Great Britain from which it gained independence to become a sovereign nation on the 1st November 1981. The country has a Constitution which is the supreme law. A motion to amend the Constitution requires support of not less than two thirds majority of all members of the House. Moreover, Bills to amend specific provisions and schedules of the Constitution can only be done by way of a referendum of not less than two thirds of all votes solidly cast.

2. The fundamental human rights outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are entrenched in the preamble to the Constitution of Antigua and Barbuda. As the Supreme law of the twin island state, any law which is inconsistent with the Constitution is null and void. The Constitution preserves the dignity and worth of the human being, the entitlement of all persons to enjoy the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, the position of the family in a society of free men and women and free institutions.

B. The executive

3. Antigua and Barbuda is a Parliamentary democracy whose system of government is similar to that practised by its former colonial masters.

4. Parliament comprises two chambers; the Lower House is the House of Representatives while The Senate is the Upper House. The Lower House has 17 democratically elected representatives, the Attorney-General and the Speaker. While the Senate is equally made up of 17 members, these are appointed by the Governor-General on advice of various authorities. The Prime Minister makes a recommendation for ten (10) appointments, the leader of the Opposition recommends four (4) appointments, one (1) appointment is made on the advice of the Barbuda Council, one (1) inhabitant of Barbuda is appointed on the advice of the Prime Minister and one (1) appointment is made at the discretion of the Governor-General. The party or coalition of parties with the greatest number of elected representatives forms the Government headed by the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister appoints the Cabinet ministers to assist him in performing the executive functions of government. Constitutionally, the Cabinet is answerable to Parliament. The Constitution lays down the procedure to be followed by the Parliament in carrying out its legislative functions in order to ensure peace, order and good governance of the country.

C. The judiciary

5. The provisions in the Supreme Court Order governing the appointment, tenure and removal of members of the judiciary are designed to guard the independence and impartiality of the Judges of the Eastern Caribbean Supreme Court both as a first instance and appellate court. The judges of the Supreme Court consist of the High Court and the Court of Appeal and are appointed by the Judicial and Legal Services Commission of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States.

6. The citizens of the country can petition the court in respect of any perceived violation of civil liberties and rights granted by the Constitution. Any interested party may seek to challenge the validity of legislation or provisions of legislation for incompatibility with the Constitution. Judicial review of executive action is available where a citizen feels the action has infringed or infringes on their human rights.

7. Residents and citizens of Antigua and Barbuda can access the Magistrates Court which have both civil and criminal jurisdiction. In civil cases, magistrates can grant redress in a variety of matters including financial claims up to certain defined limits, domestic violence, maintenance and access to children, liquor licensing etc. The vast majority of criminal cases are commenced in the Magistrates Court. The Governor-General appoints magistrates on the advice of the Judicial and Legal Services Commission. The appointees are

qualified lawyers. These judicial officers now have security of tenure and are no longer under the supervision and authority of the Attorney General but the Chief Justice, who is the head of the Judicial and Legal Services Commission. This is a positive reform since they were previously the Attorney-General. This promotes the independence of the judiciary and ultimately, the rule of law.

8. The Caribbean Court of Justice has both original and appellate jurisdiction. It has original jurisdiction in matters requiring interpretation of the Treaty of Chaguaramas, which established the Caribbean Community and Common market, of which Antigua and Barbuda is a member. The apex court of appeal remains the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council of the United Kingdom. The right to file appeal to the Privy Council is governed by the Constitution. A referendum would be required for Antigua and Barbuda to adopt the Caribbean Court of Justice as its final appellate court.

II. Promotion and protection of human rights in Antigua and Barbuda

A. International human rights instruments

9. Antigua and Barbuda subscribes to the dualist legal school. Consequently, the international human rights instruments which Antigua and Barbuda has ratified have no legal effect and application in the domestic courts before domestication. Parliament must first enact legislation for the purpose of giving effect to the international instruments to which the country is a party.

10. Antigua and Barbuda ratified a number of major human rights instruments notably, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD).

B. Trafficking in persons

11. In order to tackle the crime of trafficking in persons and support victims, the country enacted the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention) (Amendment) Act 2015. The 2015 Act increased fines and the length of sentences, and gives the Director of Public Prosecutions the power to determine whether or not a hybrid offence shall be tried summarily or on indictment. The Act also strengthens the administrative mechanism by providing for the appointment of a Trafficking in Persons Prevention Committee which has extensive powers to come up with policies and programmes for implementing the objects of the Act.

12. In 2019 the Trafficking in Person (Prevention)(Amendment) Act 2019 was passed. This Act strengthened the powers and responsibilities of the Trafficking in Persons Prevention Committee, and this Committee has been established since 2019. As a part of its mandate the Committee compiles and publishes an annual report on Trafficking Prevention. This annual report is shared with the Office set up to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons of the United States Government.

13. The Committee's key principles are prevention, protection, prosecution and partnering; prevention is achieved through creating awareness and educating the population about this crime and its effects. Protection deals with investigating reported cases, identifying, rescuing and supporting victims. The Committee partners with other key stakeholders and benefits from support by regional and international partners.

III. Achievements, best practices, challenges and complaints

A. Impact of Covid-19

14. Antigua and Barbuda had experienced steady economic growth in 2018 and 2019, despite the devastating impact of Hurricane Irma. However, the international tourism industry which is the main driver of growth, income and employment in Antigua and Barbuda was significantly adversely impacted by COVID-19 due to the collapse of the global travel industry following COVID-19 containment measures yet international arrivals accounted for 95% of tourism expenditure income. Owing to the significance of the international tourism sector, the Government has set up a multi-stakeholder tourism recovery task force to facilitate the revamping of tourism. The Government is providing support to businesses and workers in order to provide sustainable recovery of the tourism sector.

Impact on right to education

15. Covid-19 brought about school closures and a shift from face to face teaching to remote learning predominantly through an online platform. However, only 76% of the population has access to the internet, with the poorer sections of the population therefore unable to access online education. The gap in relation to access to computers and the internet was addressed by providing school teachers and students with subsidized access to the internet to facilitate online teaching and learning. Additionally, the Government distributed laptops and tablets for secondary school students and teachers in non-fee-paying public schools to further facilitate access to online learning and teaching.

Impact on health

16. As major efforts had to be refocused on combatting the pandemic, there was diversion of economic resources away from planned priority activities in the health sector, notably, the prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases such as hypertension and diabetes, which are a major concern to the country. This distortion of priorities has thereby delayed improvements in access to healthcare.

B. Efforts to mitigate the impact of COVID-19

17. The Government of Antigua and Barbuda has reflected on the recent pandemic, and therefore altered its priority to deliver a national recovery plan that provides a new working strategy that is stronger, sustainable and more prosperous than before.

18. Successes were made in the tourism sector where the Government has levelled up opportunities across all parts of this sector, supporting jobs, businesses, and economic growth.

19. Employment in the tourism sector is characterised by high levels of informality such as part-time, temporary, casual, seasonal, self-employed and independent work, workers carrying out essential tasks and frontline customer service employment have proven indispensable to the sector, but the crisis has also highlighted their vulnerability. Therefore, recovery plans have been based on the principle of decent work for all and measures were put in place like providing tax exemptions/extensions for payment of taxes for the tourism (and all sectors) during Antigua's first phase. While all businesses benefitted the tourism sector benefitted greatly since most hotels were closed for a period of several months.

C. Hurricane Irma and Barbuda

20. In 2017 Hurricane Irma, devastated the island of Barbuda when it hit in September that year as a category 5 hurricane. The damage was horrendous, 90% of buildings were flattened. But with the help of UN agencies and support from international partners the rebuilding effort has been underway and successful for the most part. Barbuda is still not at 100% but majority of the population has returned to normalcy within the island. The

rebuilding efforts were made with little to no personal costs being expended by the Barbudans.

21. As a result of the devastating hurricane, Antigua has committed to environmental protection, research, and action as we are aware that there is a direct link between the protection of the marine and coastal environment and the mitigation of harmful effects of strong hurricanes.

D. Her Majesty's prison

22. The prison was designed to hold approximately 150 prisoners. The prison is overcrowded, the present population is 241 inmates. This number includes remanded and convicted combined. However, mechanisms have been put in place to address overcrowding:

- There is a remand center under construction that is being made of 36 custom build housing containers. At the time of this report, it is 40% completed.
- The Superintendent of Prisons has made requests that prisoners who have less than 12 months remaining and are deemed low risk are given early release. That request is under consideration by the Minister of Legal Affairs and the Governor General.
- Additionally, the judiciary within Antigua and Barbuda are now encouraged to consider what is termed a "COVID-19 discount" in their deliberations relating to sentencing. In effect this has reduced sentences as much as 2 years which is helping to reduce the overcrowding in the prisons.
- There is also a separate facility located at Crabbes Peninsula in the North East of the island specifically established to house inmates who have contracted the novel coronavirus.

23. As shown the Government is taking its obligation to protect persons from the spread and harmful effects of the COVID-19 virus even in the exercise of its function of administering the prison. Unfortunately, this has negatively affected the rehabilitation programmes that were established.

24. Prior to the pandemic, there were several rehabilitation programmes that the inmates were able to engage with. Such as an animal husbandry and agriculture programme where inmates raise chickens, pigs, ducks and rabbits. The farm was located off of the prison site and as such this has discontinued for the foreseeable future. Additionally, there was the HAPI programme, which allowed prisoners to learn trade skills involved with construction of homes i.e. carpentry, stone masonry, plumbing and electrical work. The main tutors under this program also happened to be current inmates who had such skills and the homes that were being repaired were homes belonging to the indigent.

25. Several educational programmes were also put on pause so as to avoid the risk of spreading of COVID-19. These classes ranged from primary level to secondary level and covered English, science, Spanish and even computer technology. In fact, the last graduating class in 2019 proudly boasted 15 persons graduating from the inmate population with certificates in introduction to computer classes.

26. The Government is of the opinion that the prison will benefit tremendously from technical assistance with a view more towards skill-based training of inmates and creating a classification database for the inmates in Antigua and Barbuda. Some partnerships already exist, through the U.S. State Department, with correctional facilities in Colorado, however, that focus has been capacity building of prison guards. It is the Government's view that supplementing this technical assistance can only prove to benefit our population.

27. There are four male juvenile offenders who are unfortunately being housed at the prison due to a covid outbreak at their normal housing facility. All efforts are being made to keep them separate from the general prison population and they are set to follow a tailored education system planned for them based on their age and education level.

E. Gender issues

28. The Directorate of Gender Affairs (DOGA) is a division within the Ministry of Social Transformation. The DOGA is responsible primarily for promoting the advancement of women in Antigua and Barbuda. The DOGA is seeking to achieve gender equality and their services are also open to men. The Directorate of Gender Affairs works to promote gender equality and the full participation of women in the social, economic and political life of the country. The DOGA spearheads programmes and projects for the development of women in Antigua and Barbuda through education and training, advocacy, personal development and empowerment. The DOGA collaborates, with regional and international agencies and partners with local groups in developing projects, workshops, seminars and programmes. The DOGA promotes gender awareness through workshops, conferences, seminars etc and lobbies for reform in areas that may discriminate against women.

29. The DOGA works closely with other Government ministries including the Department of Youth, Ministries of Health, Labour, Agriculture, the AIDS Secretariat, the Welfare Division, the Royal Police Force of Antigua and Barbuda: to promote gender awareness and lobbies for reform in areas that may discriminate against women.

30. The DOGA has developed programmes and provided training in the areas of domestic violence and sexual violence for law enforcement officers. The programmes have sought to make law enforcement officers sensitive to the needs of the victim and the trauma they experience. The DOGA has also been active in helping and advising victims of human trafficking; the department provides practical support and counselling to all victims. The DOGA in conjunction with another agency operates a Crisis Line for person who are being abused, the service is open to all males and female.

31. The DOGA has embarked on public campaigns to raise awareness about violence against women with a view to changing the attitude of society. The department has been very active in dealing with issues involving women and children. Government is in the process of developing a National Gender Policy which strengthens the Government's commitment to Gender Equality.

32. The DOGA in conjunction with another agency operates a Crisis Line for person who are being abused, the service is open to all males and females. Generally, the practices of the Government and other public institutions do not discriminate against women. The laws do not discriminate against women, as the constitution clearly and boldly states that persons should not be discriminated against based on their sex, religion, class etc. However, in practice this may not always be the case, for example young girls who become pregnant at school often have to leave school and that often leads to them not completing their education. Often this is due to cultural norms, practices and finances rather than the legal reasons. The reality is that the law provides education is compulsory from age 3-16 years, but the reality is that teen mothers have traditionally been disenfranchised from continuing their education. The DOGA has started initiatives to help teenage mothers finish their secondary school education, at classes that can accommodate the unique challenges of being a young single mother.

33. The DOGA is also in talks with the Caribbean Development Bank to secure funding for consultation on a National Gender Policy for the country.

34. The Domestic Violence Act 2015 has shown to have improved the ability of the courts to protect persons involved in domestic violence situations. The statistics show that more persons are becoming aware of the effects of the Bill and are relying on it. In 2016, 19 cases were recorded with the use of the new Act. In 2020, however 40 cases were recorded.

35. There is a CARICOM proposed bill on sexual harassment that was developed by the CARICOM Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS). While the draft exists, Antigua is of the belief that the general public needs to be sensitized as to what is and is not considered sexual harassment before such an Act can be imposed. As it stands now there is a lot of misinformation and ambiguity on the subject and that leads to scepticism by the public.

F. The Ombudsman

36. The Ombudsman is an independent constitutional person who is mandated to investigate complaints from persons aggrieved by the actions of Government officials and statutory authorities. The Ombudsman has no coercive powers but seeks to resolve problems through a process of investigation and reconciliation. The Ombudsman presents a report to Parliament every year outlining the cases dealt with throughout the year and the outcomes.

G. The Information Commissioner

37. The office of the Information Commissioner was established by the Freedom of Information Act 2004. Citizens can seek the assistance of the Information Commissioner as a last resort to obtain information from a Government department when they have been unsuccessful in their attempts to get information. Government departments are to give the Information Commissioner any information requested, provided that the information is not in a category exempted by the Act. Personal information, commercial and confidential, health safety, defence and security, public economic interest, legal privilege are amongst the exempted provisions, their non-disclosure is limited to situations where it is likely to cause serious prejudice.

H. Persons with disabilities

38. The Government of Antigua and Barbuda has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. COVID-19 posed challenges with the implementation of some of the obligations under the regime.

39. The Antigua and Barbuda Association for Persons with Disabilities (ABAPD) is a vibrant NGO which campaigns to end stigmatization and discrimination against persons with disabilities.

40. The Government policy for the education of children with disability is grounded in the practice of “inclusive education”. Children with visual disability are main streamed from Preschool, while children who are deaf and those with intellectual disability are served through special programs with a goal towards main streaming. ABAPD and persons with disabilities receives support and assistance from several Government departments and divisions namely, the Ministry of Health, Social Transformation and Department of National Vocational and Rehabilitation Centre for Disabilities gives help to eligible disabled persons and young adults who are disabled can access vocational training conducted by the centre for disabilities.

41. Children are also now being tested within their first two years for early signs of auditory or visual impairments, so that the knowledge of such impediment can be received by parents at an earlier stage so that the education aspect of the child’s life is not inhibited.

42. A further point on education is that adult persons living with disabilities also had educational classes, specifically geared for the deaf and blind. However, due to the pandemic, those classes have been on hold.

43. Disabilities and Equal Opportunities Act was passed in 2017 to allow for strengthening of the rights that persons living with disabilities have. It also allows for the protection of law for persons living with disabilities not to be discriminated against in certain scenarios. One such achievement of the Act has been to require that all buildings constructed after the passing of the Act must have access for persons living with disabilities in order to get their construction plans approved prior to building. This has been strictly enforced and has been a success since 2017.

44. One shortfall is that the Act while giving policy guidance still requires Regulations to be drafted to clarify some of the details. The drafting unit of the Ministry of Legal Affairs is already underway with a solution to this.

45. The Ministry of Social Transformation and the Ministry of Health caters for the special needs of disabled persons by providing practical assistance for the acquisition of assistive devices and medical treatment. Recently the Government sourced four buses to begin a Para-transit service to address the mobility and transportation need of persons with disability.

46. Another big achievement is the passing of the Social Protection Act in 2020 in which a Social Protection Board is established allowing for administration of a Social Protection Fund to assist in urgent cases.

I. The lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgendered community (LBGT)

47. Persons from the LBGT are generally not discriminated against in Antigua and Barbuda and there are several well-known personalities from the LBGT community who live freely and in peace like any citizen. Buggery between two consenting adults is illegal under the Provisions of the Sexual Offence Act 1993; consenting adults are not prosecuted however if the act is committed against juveniles or without consent it will be prosecuted. One of the Senators in the Gaston Browne administration also identifies openly a member of the LBGT community.

48. In 2021 March there was also a challenge to the buggery law, claiming the law is unconstitutional. The matter has not been litigated as yet. However, it has been mentioned because if the claim is successful the effect will be to declare that the buggery law is unconstitutional in Antigua and Barbuda and is therefore, null and void.

J. Rights of children

49. The Education Act (Cap 145) provides that children are required to attend school from age 5 of 16. The Government provides free education; there are many primary and secondary school provided by the State. Vocational and technical training is also provided by the Government for secondary school children who wish to acquire practical skills.

50. There are several private institutions which provide education for a fee, whilst those schools are not under the direct control of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Education does have a supervisory role over private schools and can close them if they fall below the required standard.

51. There is an Early Childhood Development division in the Ministry of Education which is responsible for the day care and pre-school facilities in the island and has supervisory powers over these facilities. A recent achievement is that the Government has now started to provide pre-school facilities that fall under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and, as such, are provided by the state free of cost.

52. Antigua and Barbuda in 2015 underwent major reform as it relates to the rights of children. The OECS in partnership with UNICEF pioneered the Juvenile Justice program in Antigua and Barbuda. Four Acts were passed in 2015 to start this project namely The Domestic Violence Act, the Child Justice Act, the Status of the Child Act and the Child (Care and Adoption) Act.

53. In September 2021, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda took a further step. The Government unveiled a National Child Protection Policy in September 2021 which outlines the Government's policy as it relates to the importance of the rights of children and the Commitment the Government has to strengthen its capacity for protecting the rights of children within the country. The importance of stakeholders being aware of the fact that the best interest of the children will always be at the paramount of actions involving children in Antigua and Barbuda. Another outcome from this project will be that the community and family are aware of their role in supporting their children and that aspect of mandatory reporting of discrepancies or breaches of the law will increase where their interests are not being met. The Policy is non-discriminatory and includes migrant children and children with disabilities and mental health challenges.

54. The suite of legislation has had the most beneficial effect in juvenile justice reform. Juveniles are no longer housed in the prison with adults as a general rule. Unfortunately, as mentioned above due to a COVID-19 outbreak, four male juveniles are being housed within the prison but these children are still being kept separate and protected from exposure and they are still engaged in education regiments specific to their needs.

K. Poverty alleviation

55. The Ministry of Social Transformation (MST) is the ministry with the primary responsibility for social and economic development of the country. The Government has implemented many social programmes to help reduce poverty. The Board of Guardians, a division of the MST has the responsibility for providing a fortnightly stipend to the poor and destitute. These persons also receive limited financial assistance to effect repairs to their homes through Home Improvement Grant and the indigent receive a small funeral grant.

56. The Government has implemented policies and plans for the social and economic development of the country and for the reduction and alleviation of poverty. There are several projects which are aimed directly at poverty alleviation and helping the poor and destitute.

57. The Government has a School Meals Programme for children in State owned schools; meals are provided at a cost of \$1 EC per day. The project provides hot nutritious meals for all primary school children who take part in the initiative. The project is not means tested and is heavily subsidized by the Government. It has also subsisted throughout the pandemic, once the Government allowed for schools to have face to face teaching.

58. The Government has implemented the School Uniform Grant Programme which is available to all citizens, and is not means-tested and all citizens who have children at school whether it is a private or State school can benefit from the programme.

PDV Caribe Antigua and Barbuda Ltd

59. PDV Caribe Antigua and Barbuda Ltd (PDV CAB) is a wholly owned Government company which was incorporated in 2005 in connection with the operation of the PetroCaribe initiative. The initiative was created in June 2005 with the Government of Venezuela for the people of Latin America and the Caribbean. Petro-Caribe promotes the socio-economic development of the region affording participating countries the opportunity to purchase fuel from Venezuela at concessionary terms and to utilize the 'savings' to fund social programmes designed to improve the quality of life with particular emphasis on the vulnerable. The PDV Caribe has been involved in a number of social programmes.

The Senior Citizens Utility Subsidy Programme

60. The Senior Citizens Utility Subsidy Programme is one of the PDV Caribe social projects. The programme was started in 2008 and is open to all pensioners with the Antigua and Barbuda Social Security Scheme. It consists of a monthly subsidy of \$100 which is applied to utility bills. There are currently over 4600 beneficiaries on this programme. Registration for the programme is done twice a year in May and November.

The Peoples Benefit Programme

61. The Peoples Benefit Programme is also a PDV Caribe social programme which was started in 2009. A debit card is utilized to provide a food subsidy to the economically disadvantaged and persons with disabilities. There is no age limit; the scheme is designed to help persons with limited or no income that are living below the poverty level. Persons who are desirous of receiving the means-tested benefit have to submit an application which is reviewed for approval. In order to qualify, persons are required to provide proof of citizenship, income or lack thereof and proof disability or medical incapacity etc. Beneficiaries receive a sum of \$250 each month which is used to purchase food and selected personal items from the Central Marketing Corporation and supermarkets in town and rural areas. Since its inception over 2000 Antiguan and Barbuda's have benefitted.

62. Persons who are 80 and over and living on limited income are entitled to an allowance of \$100 per month on their water bill and \$250 per month on their electricity bill, if their utility bill goes above the set figure, they will have to pay for the excess. The effect of these generous allowances is that most persons over 80 receive free electricity and water.

63. The Citizen's Welfare Division through GRACE the Government Residential Assistance and Care of the Elderly and Eligible (GRACE) Programme provides care to the housebound and disabled elderly in the form of domestic services, meals and social activities.

The GARD Centre

64. The Gilbert Agricultural and Rural Development Centre (GARD) is a leading training facility providing positive entrepreneurial and employment alternatives. The facility is targeted at helping youth and women.

65. The centre is a rural development and training centre, which has offered agricultural and enterprise training to youth between the ages of 16 and 30 since 1993. The training which the centre provides is focused on life skills and entrepreneurial skills with a specific emphasis in the use of natural resources in agriculture and other forms of rural enterprises. The programmes and courses offered at the centre targets youth and women in an effort to improve their welfare and standard of living and to address and ensure their continued development and sustainability.

66. The GARD Centre is an ecumenical programme of the Methodist Church and receives assistance and support from the Government of Antigua and Barbuda who contributes utilities, technical staff from the Ministry of Agriculture and provision of lands for the graduates of the programme. The centre provides a wide variety of training courses in agriculture, basic cookery, business management, customer service, food and beverage, weaving textiles, yacht maintenance and ICT evening course. The centre is very adept at responding to the needs of citizens.

Right to adequate standard of living

67. The Government through its executing agencies, the Ministry of Lands, the National Housing and Urban Development Company and the Central Housing and Planning Authority, has continued to ensure that citizens have access to decent, safe and affordable housing as well as security of tenure.

68. The Government has therefore developed a number of low income projects aimed at facilitating home ownership with a large percentage of applicants being women. There have been three major housing projects in the last four years with the construction of 240 homes with 30 homes presently under construction. In addition, the National Housing and Urban Development Company has constructed 85 homes on the 'build on your own land' program. These initiatives have been employed and continue despite the challenges brought about by Covid-19.

69. The Ministry of Public Works has facilitated the relocation of residents from Booby Alley. The aim of the project is to eradicate slum conditions and to provide residents of the area with an adequate standard of living. The first phase of the project involves the relocation of residents into temporary accommodation with a view in the second phase to construct homes to provide free social housing in the long term. Additionally, the Social Protection Board facilitates funds to assist vulnerable groups while the HAPI program which is an initiative undertaken by the prison, provides homes for the indigent. Following the devastating impact of Hurricane Irma in Barbuda, the Government in collaboration with the UN system and other international partners is committed to repairing and rebuilding homes in Barbuda.

70. The Antigua Public Utilities Authority has improved its water distribution network by changing the distribution pipes. This upgrade minimises leaks throughout the water distribution network and therefore improved access to clean water.

71. The Government has made improvements to the electricity network with the ongoing construction of a Liquefied Natural Gas power plant scheduled to be completed in 2022, and

the completion of two solar power plants. The Antigua Public Utilities Authority also has an interconnection policy that facilitates the supply of solar energy to households.

72. As a clean environment is integral to a good standard of living Antigua and Barbuda is pleased to announce its successes in the area of environmental commitments:

- Antigua has placed a ban on single use plastics since 2018, being the first country in the region so to do.
- We have also made a commitment to eliminating our net emissions to 0 by 2050.

L. Health care services

73. The Sir Lester Bird Medical Centre (SLBMC) formerly known as the Mount St. John Medical Centre is the main hospital in Antigua and Barbuda and comes under the auspices of the Ministry of Health. The SLBMC is managed by a State owned corporation. The hospital has 185 beds and offers a wide range of services to residents. Residents, who are members of the Medical Benefit Scheme receive their care free of charge and pay a nominal fee for some diagnostics services and tests.

74. Along with the main public hospital, the country has a total of 26 community facilities to assist with the administration of healthcare services island wide.

75. The Medical Benefit Scheme is a medical health insurance scheme operated by a statutory corporation. Citizens who contribute to the scheme by paying a monthly or weekly contribution receive free medical services for illness covered by the scheme. The Medical Benefit Scheme has many initiatives designed to inform the public of healthy habits and practices, including competitions and fun walks etc.

76. COVID -19 has also caused severe strain on our healthcare system, while there have been advancements a lot of resource management has occurred causing some programs to be delayed in some areas and halted completely for the time being in others.

77. For example the Government has recently constructed two new polyclinics which are far larger than the normal community clinics. The hope was that these larger buildings will greatly assist with the dispensation of health services especially outside of the urban area. The reality however has been that these buildings had to be used instead as vaccination centers for the period of the last several months. Similarly, because of our most recent covid spike a separate facility located on Nugent Ave in St. John's was temporarily opened to house additional covid patients. The efforts are necessary, however, these necessary actions translate to more stress on the general healthcare system.

78. Despite the challenges that the pandemic poses, there are positives to report:

- A private Dialysis Center opened in Antigua on the 4th of October 2021. This will help in treatment of dialysis on an island wide basis since the strain on SLBMC is reduced.
- The Social Protection Act 2020 allows for funds to be allocated where necessary for medical care where the Board of Guardians deems it necessary so to do.
- The community clinics are still offering dental, nutritional, early childhood, environmental and outpatient health services despite the reduced staff that is available to the clinics.
- A new program has begun where screening for hearing and speech impediments for young children occur, in the hopes of spotting any problems earlier so they can be addressed sooner.
- Sickle cell testing now occurs via placenta tests, which allows for earlier detection of the disease.

79. The Government is also working diligently to advance tertiary medical healthcare facilities in the island through public efforts and/or public private partnerships.

M. Education

80. The Education sector has also been hard hit during this pandemic. The majority of the 2020/2021 Academic year was taught island wide via online means. This has placed a strain on the Government providing access to all persons, as this online method of teaching is heavily reliant on access to the internet and to devices such as computers or lap tops and a quiet space to engage in class.

81. To address this, the academic year 2020/2021 was extended into the summer months to allow for teaching to occur with smaller groups of students in person, in the hopes that no student gets left behind. Additionally, students and teachers were given incentive packages from an internet service provider that is majority owned by the Government to allow for reduced prices on data.

82. A recent achievement is that the Government has now started to provide pre-school facilities that fall under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and, as such, are provided by the state free of cost.

N. Labour/Employment

83. The Antigua and Barbuda Labour Code sets out the minimum standards employers must meet with regard to labour practices in the country to include the terms of employment, health and safety issues, the right to join a trade union, collective bargaining etc. The Antigua and Barbuda Labour Code protects workers fundamental human right of freedom and assembly and association and to form trade unions. Trade unions are free to conduct their activities without interference. The Labour code allows trade unions to organize and bargain collectively without inference. The legislation also prohibits retaliation against individuals who take industrial action.

84. The Government has several programmes geared towards assisting young persons to train and acquire work skills. The New Work Experience Programme which is administered by the Labour Department finds work placements for persons for up to 6 months. During the six months they acquire real work experience and receive a stipend. The work experience program continues to provide avenues for persons to gain work experience that will prepare them for the labour market and eventually permanent full time employment both in the private as well as the public sector.

85. The Government of Antigua and Barbuda with the assistance of the ILO, the World Food Program and UNICEF have embarked on an entrepreneurial and employability training program which was implemented as a response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the labour market. The program which is facilitated by the UWI open campus began in August 2021 and is an eight-week training program.

86. The Government is also in negotiations to begin a Technical and Vocational Education Training in the areas of carpentry, electrical wiring, masonry and plumbing. The hope is that as the program expands the training shall expand to include turf management, motor mechanics, marine mechanics and hospitality services. This is a private public partnership to increase the skilled worker capacity within the country and provide on the job training at the new development project that is underway in Barbuda.

The One Stop Employment Centre

87. The One Stop Employment Centre which is administered by the Labour department facilitates the placement of suitably qualified nationals seeking employment in available positions. The unit seeks to help persons find employment and assists with all aspects of

O. Capacity building and technical assistance

88. To date Antigua and Barbuda does not have a dedicated organisation to monitor the Governments compliance with its various human rights obligations. There is no

comprehensive data system capable of generating the information necessary for compiling human rights reports.

89. Assistance is needed in creating a specific unit staffed by trained personnel whose responsibility would include public dissemination of information concerning the human rights obligations of the State, investigating human rights issues for the purpose of creating a data bank and generating reports as and when required.
