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April 18, 2012

Her Excellency Dame Louise Lake-Tack
Governor-General of Antigua and Barbuda
Governor-General's Residence
St. John's, Antigua

Re: Request for A Commission of Inquiry on Fences Scandal and Wadadli Power Plant

Excellency,

I present my compliments and make reference to my letter of August 29, 2011, regarding the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry to examine the unplanned and unauthorized expenditure of more than EC\$45,000,000.00 (forty-five million East Caribbean dollars) on fences, bathrooms, viewing stands and sundry projects. That issue was discussed in the Parliament by the Minister of Finance only, in June 2011; he read from a report on the investigation that was submitted to him one year earlier. No Commission of Inquiry was ever established to make public the details of the unlawful expenditure, despite many requests made to the Government.

I make a plea today, Excellency, for a Commission Inquiry to be established under the *Commissions of Inquiry Act CAP 91:01* which authorizes you, Excellency, to act on her own discretion.

I now also make a request of you, Excellency, to establish another Commission of Inquiry to enquire into the expenditure of US\$47,000,000.00 (forty-seven million US dollars) on the new Wadadli Power Plant. The object of the Commission would be to determine the age of the engines and generators, to measure whether the Antigua Public Utilities Authority received value for the money spent, to report on the continuing maintenance challenges and other difficulties experienced by the same plant, to reveal the reason for an additional expenditure of US\$5,500,000.00 (five million, five hundred thousand US dollars) on transformers and other components to make the new plant fully operable.

The failure of the administration to lay on the table of the Parliament the relevant documentation, including and especially the forty-seven million US dollar loan agreement entered into by the Government, makes this request especially relevant. The Finance and Administration Act, passed in 2006, requires that the loan agreement be tabled in parliament for all to examine. More than four years following signature, that document remains a secret.

Given the recent letter of March 20, 2012, written by the Parliamentary Representative from St. Philip's South and a ~~ded~~ ~~alleging~~ ~~that~~ ~~he~~ ~~was~~ ~~told~~ ~~by~~ ~~the~~ ~~Prime~~ Ambassador to China that the engines are used, it is important that everyone in Antigua and Barbuda learn the truth. In the view of my parliamentary colleagues and me, nothing short of a Commission of Inquiry could achieve that end.

I ask that you, Excellency, acting under the powers conferred on the Governor General by the *Commissions of Inquiry Act CAP 91:01 Section 2* such a Commission with a view to exposing all the details of this commercial transaction that remain shrouded in secrecy.

The Government of Mr. Baldwin Spencer came to office promising transparency, accountability, openness. Three pieces of legislation evidencing the underlying philosophy were passed by the Parliament: The Freedom of Information Act, The Prevention of Corruption Act, and the Integrity in Public Life Act. This trilogy of legislation was the bedrock upon which the administration was elected and by which it promised to function. The requests to you, Excellency, are therefore very much in keeping with the promises made by Mr. Spencer and his United Progressive Party administration.

It is therefore my expectation, Excellency, that a Commission of Inquiry will be convened by May 8, 2012, the day after Labour Day 2012, given the significance of the expenditure to all workers and other consumers of electricity.

I take this opportunity, Excellency, to reiterate the assurances of my highest consideration.

Hon. Lester Bird M.P.
Leader of the Opposition &
Chairman, Public Accounts Committee