



*Premier of Bermuda*

**Ministerial Statement**  
To the House of Assembly

BY

**The Hon Michael H. Dunkley JP, MP**  
Premier and Minister of National Security

**Official visit to The Autonomous Region of Azores and signing of a Memorandum of Understanding**

**Friday, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2016**

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**Mr. Speaker,**

This morning I am pleased to share with this Honourable House details of the successful historic visit to the Autonomous Region of Azores.

I was accompanied to the Azores by the Hon. Trevor G. Moniz, Attorney-General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Dr. Derrick Binns, Secretary to the Cabinet and Ms Kimberley Durrant, UK Representative.

An official invitation was extended by President Vasco Alves Cordeiro to visit the Azores during a visit last June of a delegation of the Azores Government to Bermuda. At our meeting in Bermuda, the Azores Government invited us to consider and sign a Memorandum of Understanding on the historic and cultural ties that unite Bermuda and the Azores.

**Mr. Speaker**

In 1849 Portuguese immigrants first arrived on Bermuda's shores from Madeira and the Azores. Since that time the Portuguese community has played a significant role towards the economic, political and social advancement of Bermuda.

The Azores is a strong viable partner to Bermuda and a Memorandum of Understanding will only strengthen that special relationship between both our communities.

**Mr. Speaker**

The Memorandum of Understanding, which I am pleased to lay before this House today, sets a framework for promoting:

1. Cooperation and mutual understanding between Bermuda and the Azores; and
2. The encouragement of closer ties between our peoples, institutions and public and private entities.

The Memorandum will enable our Governments to develop cooperation in the areas of:

1. Culture, history and popular traditions;
2. Sea, conservation of marine and land environments and sustainable development (Noting the Azores are a signatory to the Hamilton Declaration on the Collaboration for the Conservation of the Sargasso Sea);
3. Relations between training, research and teaching institutions and exchanges of students, teachers and researchers;
4. Community associations, especially in the culture and social areas

**Mr. Speaker,**

President Vasco Cordeiro, his Government officials and the people of the Azores welcomed the Bermuda delegation warmly. Their hospitality and attention to detail in the organization of our visit should be applauded.

Arriving in Ponta Delgada we were surprised and thrilled to be greeted at the airport by Bermudians of Portuguese descent, carrying a Bermuda Flag. Their presence demonstrated the sentimental connections between our two countries and confirmed the importance that the Azoreans placed on our visit.

**Mr. Speaker,**

1976 marked a significant year for the enhancement of the Azores' constitutional relationship with Portugal. A redefined constitution provided for an Autonomous Region with full political and administrative powers devolved to the Azorean Government. This paved the way for the Azores to establish economic and sustainable advancement with global partners. The relationship between the Azores and Portugal bears some similarity with our own relationship with the United Kingdom. In addition, as the Azores are an Outermost Region of the European Union and Bermuda is a signatory to the Overseas Association Decision, we can agree to equally explore areas of tourism, trade, foreign investment, and related programs within the European Union.

You would be keen to know that I was given the opportunity to pay a courtesy visit to the President of the Legislative Assembly of the Autonomous Region of Azores. There are now opportunities for partnerships between our Parliament and that of the Autonomous Region of the Azores. Such a relationship with a Parliament within Europe can only enhance Bermuda's visibility in the European Union.

**Mr. Speaker**

Agriculture is a fundamental part of the Azorean economy and we visited a number of agriculture businesses during the visit. One of these businesses was a tea plantation, which has been in operation since 1883 and takes pride as the only tea plantation in Europe. We had the pleasure to visit a dairy farm where it was of interest to note the owner maintains tourist accommodation on the farm.

In 2004 UNESCO recognized the Culture Landscape of the Pico Island Vineyard as a World Heritage Site, which we also had the opportunity to visit.

We were moved by a memorial to the eruption of Capelinhos Volcano, which occurred between 1957 – 1958 and that forced the evacuation of a number of villages on Faial Island. The volcanic eruption transformed the entire landscape of the portion of the island. To preserve the memory of event and its impact on the Azorean people, an Interpretive Centre was constructed to mark this significant moment in history. The Centre is the world's only scientific guide to an underwater volcanic eruption, and not only serves as a memorial but also contributes to the economic development of Faial Island through tourism.

**Mr. Speaker**

As an island community, the Azores shares an interest in maintaining the islands' sustainability. One key component of this is the provision of power. Unlike Bermuda, the Azores have access to sustainable, clean geothermal power. Included in our visits was a tour of the Vermelho Geothermal Power Station. Through a hot water reservoir under one of the many active volcanoes, heat exchange is utilised to produce electricity, which will enable the Azores to achieve 60% of its power from renewable sources.

The Azores has developed highly advanced Research Centres such as the Department of Oceanography and Fisheries of the University of Azores. We immediately were able to identify parallels with Bermuda institutions such as BIOS and acknowledged that partnerships between marine researchers had already been established. Indeed, the Director of the Department was directly involved in our own Sargasso Sea Commission.

One of the developments that inspired us was a visit to the Sao Miguel Science and Technology Park. The Technology Park allows emerging businesses to work in a capacity-building environment with other like-minded companies and to be provided with the necessary tools for creativity. Some of the entrepreneurs I met were Connect All a start up company developing smart systems for hospitals; Cereal Games looked at measures to develop intellectually and progressively challenging games for mobile phones.

A Technology Park such as this would benefit Bermuda and something that we should aspire to implement. Innovation has the ability to enhance our sustainable development and to provide economic diversification, thereby further enhancing our global competitiveness.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Portuguese community would know of the festival of Senhor Santo Cristo des Milagres (Lord Holy Christ of Miracles), which attracts hundreds of Azorean emigrants to the island of Sao Miguel on the fifth Sunday after Easter. Once a year the image is seen moving from the lower chancel to the high altar of the Holy Shrine in a procession that proceeds in front of thousands of people. It was important that we paid our respects to the image following the festival to symbolize the admiration and respect Bermuda has for the Azorean culture and its influence on our own culture.

**Mr. Speaker**

A highlight of our visit was the State Dinner hosted by President Vasco Alves Cordeiro at the Palacio de Santana in our honour. The occasion provided the Bermuda delegation with an opportunity to interact with the wider Azorean community in business, Government and political affairs. I was pleased to have met Mayors of several Municipalities within the Azores and to learn of their personal connections to Bermuda.

**Mr. Speaker**

We could not help but notice that Azorean Airlines has a direct flight between the Azores and San Francisco. Mr. Speaker, just imagine if en route to San Francisco that flight stopped over in Bermuda. May Bermudians and persons with Azorean connections would undoubtedly take advantage of a direct route between our islands. This is an opportunity that we will pursue with vigour.

**Mr. Speaker**

This is just the beginning of an enhanced friendship with the Azores. We have much in common and there are many areas we can share our areas of expertise.

**Mr. Speaker**

While overseas I had the privilege of participating in the Louis Vuitton America's Cup World Series events in New York. With the assistance of our partners, ACBDA, the America's Cup Event Authority and the Bermuda Tourism Authority, we were able to conduct a number of meetings designed to enhance tourism opportunities for Bermuda.

Bermuda had a remarkable presence in New York, and the hundreds of thousands of people that lined the shore line along New York Harbour were exposed to a host of messages and activities promoting Bermuda.

We conducted interviews within the America's Cup Media Centre and at other locations as part of our continual efforts to revitalize interest in Bermuda as a tourism and financial services destination. One aspect of keen interest to the media is the potential for Bermuda to remake itself as a Super Yacht destination. The America's Cup finals in 2017 provides an excellent opportunity to showcase all that we have to offer to the owners and managers of Super Yachts.

Dr. Gibbons, who at the time was the Acting Minister of Tourism Development and Transport, and I were privileged to participate in the Prize Giving Ceremony at the conclusion of the New York series. Dr. Gibbons presented the medals to the runners up, while I was afforded the honour of presenting the Trophy to the winners, Emirates Team New Zealand. This offered us a platform to remind the world that the entire series of races in locations across the globe all serve as the Race to Bermuda, the hosts of the 2017 America's Cup.

**Thank you, Mr. Speaker**