



Ministerial Statement
To the House of Assembly

BY

The Hon E. David Burt JP, MP
Premier

Official Visit to the Azores
Friday, July 17th, 2026

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will be aware of my recent official visit to the Autonomous Region of the Azores, undertaken from the 12th to the 14th of July at the invitation of His Excellency José Manuel Bolieiro, President of the Regional Government of the Azores. This visit returned the courtesy of President Bolieiro's visit to Bermuda in October 2024, and that of his predecessor, President Vasco Cordeiro, in 2019; occasions on which successive Presidents extended their invitation for such a visit.

Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to be accompanied by the Honourable Member the Minister of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport, whose portfolio speaks directly to the themes of this visit.

Mr. Speaker, the ties between Bermuda and the Azores are ties of family. Since the first Portuguese immigrants arrived aboard the *Golden Rule* in 1849, generations of Azoreans have crossed the Atlantic to build lives in Bermuda, and today roughly 20% of Bermudians carry that heritage; the highest proportion of Azorean descendants of any community in the worldwide Azorean diaspora. Their contribution runs through every field of Bermudian life: our agriculture, our construction, our businesses, our churches, our sport and our culture.

Mr. Speaker, the programme opened with an official audience with President Bolieiro at Sant'Ana Palace in Ponta Delgada, where I signed the Book of Honour on behalf of the people of Bermuda. The President's warmth, and the generosity of the welcome extended throughout the visit, reflected the genuine affection in which Bermuda is held in the Azores. Our discussions with the President ranged across the breadth of the relationship and confirmed a shared determination on both sides to convert nearly 180 years of shared history into practical cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, a centrepiece of the visit was the Regional Government's presentation of the Blue Azores Programme. In October 2024, the Azores legislated the largest network of marine protected areas in the North Atlantic, protecting thirty percent of the Azorean Sea across some 287,000 square kilometres; a world-leading achievement, delivered through a science-based process built on consensus.

Honourable Members will recognise in that description the very approach this Government has taken through the Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme. Indeed, the two programmes share a founding partner in the Waitt Institute, and our two archipelagos share the waters of the Sargasso Sea. I therefore proposed, and the Regional Government welcomed, a structured technical exchange between our jurisdictions - covering marine protected area implementation, enforcement and monitoring, the sustainable fisheries transition, and long-term conservation financing - so that as two mid-Atlantic island neighbours, we can continue to lead together in ocean governance.

Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to attend a working session on the Azorean community in Bermuda, convened by the Regional Secretary for Parliamentary Affairs and Communities, Dr. Paulo Estêvão. I wish to place on record this Government's kind acknowledgement of the tireless advocacy of the Honorary Consul and of Bermuda's Portuguese community organisations, whose work sustains this relationship day by day.

Mr. Speaker, I can advise this Honourable House of several matters arising from that session.

(i) The year 2027 will mark 600 years since the discovery of the Azores. The Regional Government has made clear that Bermuda; home to the largest Azorean-descended community, per capita, anywhere in the world; will be a key part of these historic observances.

(ii) On the recognition of Bermuda driving licences, I expressed this Government's undertaking in the 2024 Speech from the Throne to pursue structured reciprocity under the 1949 Geneva Convention on Road Traffic, and I reaffirmed that Bermuda is progressing that framework with the United Kingdom so that Bermudian visitors to the Azores, and indeed internationally, may drive with confidence.

(iii) On air connectivity, both sides affirmed the value of the direct link between Bermuda and the Azores. I paid tribute to the community-brokered charter programme which has preserved that vital artery, and this Government will remain engaged with all partners as commercial arrangements for the route continue to develop.

(iv) On language and culture, I was pleased to note the work of the Portuguese Cultural Association towards the development of a GCSE in Portuguese available to Bermuda's students. The teaching of Portuguese to a new generation of Bermudians is among the most meaningful legacies this relationship can leave. My Government applauds this initiative and stands ready to lend its encouragement as this work progresses.

Mr. Speaker, I also met with Professor Susana Mira Leal, Rector of the University of the Azores, whom I congratulated on her commencing a second term and on the University's fiftieth anniversary this year.

This meeting produced concrete outcomes. First, we agreed to initiate a workstream connecting the University's oceanographic research institute in the Azores with the Bermuda's own experts, given the world-leading marine programmes of our two jurisdictions. Secondly, we agreed to explore synergies between Bermuda College and the University of the Azores, discovering pathways for Bermudian students - building on the College's established model of transfer agreements with overseas institutions. Thirdly, the Rector and I proposed a practical mechanism for the transfer of agricultural expertise to Bermuda, through the University's highly respected School of Environmental and Agrarian Sciences.

Mr. Speaker, I was proud to note that at this very moment, two young Bermudians of Azorean descent; Ms. Sydney Rego and Ms. Catrina Furtado; are studying in the Azores as the first-ever Bermudian participants in the FLAD Summer Programme, an academic and cultural programme of the Luso-American Development Foundation in partnership with the University of the Azores and the Regional Government. Their participation, sponsored by the Portuguese Cultural Association working with the Azorean Diaspora Council, is living proof of what these educational links can deliver, and I extend to both young women the congratulations of this Honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, the wider programme highlighted Azorean life and innovation. We visited the Azores Autonomy Museum Centre at the Conceição Palace and the Azorean Emigration Museum in Ribeira Grande, which tells the story of the departures that helped shape communities like ours. We toured the Ribeira Grand Geothermal Power Station, where the Azores generate a substantial share of their electricity from the earth itself, and the NONAGON Science and Technology Park in Lagoa, a hub for technology companies and innovation.

Mr. Speaker, at the Azores Centre for Manufacturing, I met with Mr. Luís Estrela, Regional Director for Agriculture, Veterinary and Food, and received a presentation on the remarkable capability of Azorean manufacturers in the production of domestic food products, from dairy to preserved goods. Our discussions focused on how Bermuda might benefit from the Azores' expertise in this field, especially in dairy production.

Mr. Speaker, the measure of any such visit lies in what follows. I have asked technical officers from the Government of Bermuda to pursue follow-up discussions with their Azorean counterparts in the areas with clear potential for cooperation including; agriculture and food security, energy, cultural and digital connectivity, and academic and technical collaboration with the University of the Azores.

Mr. Speaker, for 177 years the story of Bermuda and the Azores has been written by families - by those who left, those who arrived, and those who kept faith on both shores. This visit honoured that story and set a course for its next chapter: one in which two mid-Atlantic archipelagos work together on the challenges and opportunities we share - from the health of our oceans to the education of our young people, from food security to the energy transition. This visit is evidence that the Bermuda-Azores relationship now reaches beyond our historic ties towards a shared future.

Mr. Speaker, I extend the sincere thanks of the Government and people of Bermuda to His Excellency President Bolieiro, to the Regional Government of the Azores, and to the people of the Azores for a welcome worthy of the deep and enduring friendship between our islands

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.