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## LIAT International Airline Formed With Public-Private Partnership; Carrier to Provide Regional and International Routes

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A memorandum of understanding between the government of Antigua & Barbuda and a private company has paved the way for a new regional air carrier with a familiar name.

Antiguan press are reporting that a new LIAT is one step closer to fruition, after the government signed the MOU with Chartered Financial Analyst Global, a subdivision of the Caribbean tourism group, which describes itself as a regional entity with investment interest in travel, tourism and aviation.

The agreement was signed on September 30th between the country's Works and Finance Minister Lennox Weston, and CTG Chair Ma Chao, and is intended to facilitate LIAT International, a new

Antigua-based airline which will deploy a fleet of various models and sizes of aircraft.

Under the MOU, there are plans to expand LIAT's traditional intra-regional flight routes to include international travel to South America and Europe, as well as to create a travel channel for visitors from Asia, using Antigua & Barbuda as a gateway to the rest of the region.

One planned route is a flight from Frankfurt Germany to Antigua. The thinking is that it could serve as a connector for visitors from China, who would be further facilitated by a visa-waiver agreement, currently in the works between China and Antigua & Barbuda. This would remove significant administrative barriers to travel for Chinese citizens wishing to travel to Antigua and the rest of the region.

The newly-signed MOU falls in line with the Antiguan government's commitment to restructuring LIAT under a new commercial entity, thereby restoring the Caribbean's most robust network of commercial air travel routes. LIAT 2020 was formed after Antigua's Prime Minister Gaston Browne announced the liquidation of LIAT 1974 limited in late June 2020, following the cessation of air travel caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

While the Antigua & Barbuda government forges ahead with its promise to revive the failed regional air carrier, the fate of the hundreds of employees who were rendered jobless after the original LIAT's collapse remains more uncertain.

Although some former LIAT employees have been offered some assistance by their respective governments, as in the case for Saint Lucia and to a lesser extent Barbados, others remain uncompensated for their years of service to the defunct airline.

Mr. Browne has long held that the liquidated company had no legal liability to pay the severance earned by the workers, and had instead proffered what he termed a "compassionate offer" in the form of cash, bonds, and lands totaling approximately 2 million EC dollars.

On August 20th, local publication Antigua Newsroom reported that almost half of that amount had not been collected, as the former employees rejected the offer, which was for up to half of the severance they had accumulated commercial services of the regional carrier.

To this day, more than 100 former workers remain uncompensated. There was no discussion surrounding the MOU signing on whether any provisions — either for monetary compensation, first priority in hiring decisions or otherwise — have been made for that cohort.