**Embargoed until Friday 23 December 2016**

**Christmas Message 2016**

Once again, we are approaching another wonderful Christmas season in the Cayman Islands. I am very much looking forward to spending Christmas here with my grown up children, and I hope that you will also be with family or friends at this special time.

Christmas is a good time for all of us to reflect on the past year, and to count our many blessings.

There has been so much violence and uncertainly in the world this year. We only need to reflect on the appalling situation of the people of Syria and on the numerous shocking terrorist attacks in countries such as Turkey and Egypt, to appreciate how safe and secure we are compared to many citizens of the world. Christmas is an opportunity for us to pause and give thanks for this.

Closer to home, this year the Cayman Islands, and particularly the Sister Islands, were under threat from Hurricane Matthew. Fortunately, the Cayman Islands were spared, but the excellent work of civil servants and many, many others, ensured we were well prepared should the storm have hit.

It was also very heartening to see the kindness of Cayman Islanders come to the fore as the community rallied around to help our neighbours in Haiti. Hurricane Matthew devastated the south of Haiti, where more than one thousand people lost their lives and many, many more lost their homes. In the Cayman Islands, you know only too well the destruction such powerful storms can cause. Your resilience in such times of need is a testament to the strength and compassion of the people here.

Christmas is a time for family and friends to celebrate together, but also to reach out to those less fortunate than ourselves. I know that you will continue to look after the vulnerable, elderly and young people in our community.

I never fail to be impressed by the generosity of the Cayman Island people towards others, and this year is no exception. The scale and variety of your charitable and voluntary work has been truly extraordinary, and demonstrates the very special character of the people of these Islands.

This work has helped so many people in the Cayman Islands, for example, the Heart Fund has just presented the HAS with a brand new ambulance which will be of huge benefit to the community. Charitable work has also helped others beyond our shores that are less fortunate than we are.

I am very proud to be Patron for the Cayman Islands supporters of the Have a Heart Foundation, which enables children from the Caribbean, and Central and South America, to travel to the Cayman Islands for urgently needed heart surgery. So far, nearly one hundred and fifty children – including four from the Cayman Islands- have benefited from treatment at Cayman Health City. The Cayman Islands have given these children the gift of life.

Another highlight of the year for me, and I know for many others, was the Cayman Islands sending five of our finest athletes to the Olympic games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The accomplishments of our Olympians this summer showed what great heights our small Islands can reach. The athletes individual achievements were hugely impressive, but so also was the tremendous team effort, from all the coaches, volunteers and families, that enabled them to compete.

Once again, on behalf of everybody, I would like to thank all those who worked hard throughout the year to keep us safe and well. This group includes the emergency services, who work unstintingly on our behalf, as well as civil servants, churches, clubs and charities. These people often work quietly behind the scenes and very much deserve our thanks and appreciation - especially those who will be working over Christmas.

Being here in the Cayman Islands for my last Christmas as Governor makes this a very special occasion for me. Three years have passed by in a flash, but this short time has given me many wonderful memories.

But my lasting memories of the Cayman Islands will be of the people I have met here, and of the strong sense of community and continuity you have shared with me, and that will stay with me forever.

Thank you. Happy Christmas to everyone and very best wishes for a safe, healthy, and prosperous new year.