

Antigua and Barbuda plans referendum to become republic



Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister Gaston Browne speaks during the Leaders' Second Plenary Session during the Ninth Summit of the Americas in Los Angeles

Saint John's, September 12 (RHC)-- Antigua and Barbuda plans to decide on whether to become a republic within the next three years, the Caribbean nation's prime minister has said, in a move that would see Britain's new King Charles III removed as its head of state.

"This is a matter that has to be taken to a referendum ... within the next, probably, three years," Prime Minister Gaston Browne told ITV News shortly after a local ceremony confirmed Charles III as the

country's king following Queen Elizabeth II's death.

The 100,000-member nation gained independence from Britain in 1981, but is one of the 15 nations part of the Commonwealth – a political association that includes mostly former territories of the British empire – that still share the United Kingdom's monarch as their head of state.

Brown said becoming a republic was “a final step to complete the circle of independence to ensure we are truly a sovereign nation,” but stressed a referendum was “not an act of hostility” and would not involve retiring Commonwealth membership.

Browne's pledge comes amid a growing republican push across the Caribbean region, with Barbados voting to remove the UK monarchy last year, and the ruling party in Jamaica having signalled it may follow.

Nonetheless, Browne – who is up for re-election next year – said he was not responding to a widespread push from Antiguan to hold a vote. “I think most people haven't even bothered to think about it,” he told ITV.

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