

Antigua and Barbuda plans referendum to become republic

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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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