

THRONE SPEECH

By

**HER EXCELLENCY DAME PEARLETTE LOUISY
GOVERNOR GENERAL OF ST. LUCIA**

on the Occasion of the

**OPENING OF THE FIRST SESSION
OF THE EIGHTH PARLIAMENT**

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Mr. President, Mr. Speaker

For most of us, the preceding three months have been fraught with sudden change and growing uncertainty. It is as if providence intended that the end of the year 2001 should be remembered as much for its stark and sobering events as for the euphoria which characterized the opening of the new millennium.

For us, as for much of the world, September Eleventh will remain an unforgettable moment in history when an entire planet stopped, held its breath and waited in deafening silence, for the aftershock which would send unprecedented economic and political ripples through the foundations of world peace and democracy.

Those events, coming at a time already marked by global recession in the major economies of the world, brought into harsh focus the fragility of global economic systems. It reminded us all of the interdependence of trading nations, and highlighted the vulnerability of small open economies such as ours.

Those events underlined a need to invest in our own self-reliance and so build economic resilience to buttress us in such difficult times. We are also reminded that while some external forces and global events remain indeed beyond our control, we must address those issues at home which are within our sphere of influence. Among them are internal economic stability, social equity and welfare maximization. These can only be achieved through the balanced and efficient development of our physical and human resources. My Government is determined to achieve this, even at the risk of some difficult and unpopular decisions which may have to be made in the long-term interests of our society.

We must therefore be resolutely determined to manage our internal affairs so as to build the best society possible given the resources at our disposal. These lessons must remain with us as we enter what can and should be a period of consolidation and renewal.

THE NOBILITY WITHIN US

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,

At this time when many countries and regions are racked by war, divided by religion, and alienated by ideology, there is much that is good and noble within us and within our communities. We are a people characterized by traditions of collective responsibility, social equity, and individual freedom. These are the hallmarks of a just society and we must cherish them above all else.

These ideals are reflected in the fact that despite difficult and challenging times, we have gone peacefully about the business of electing a new government. For the most part, we have conducted our political affairs with a sense of dignity, honour and mutual respect. This I trust, heralds a new chapter in our political evolution. Let us not take this lightly though, for many brave and honourable people have campaigned tirelessly and unapologetically, for the political, social, and economic liberation that we now take for granted.

In retrospect then, it has done this country good to bring the year 2001 to a finite close, and to start this challenging year afresh. Now, the festive season has come and gone and already it is a new month. The election season has come and gone and already it is a new year. But while we celebrated, time moved on, and now, so must we.

In this respect, it is my Government's hope and expectation that as a nation, a people and a government, we start this year and this new parliament with a strong sense of fresh beginnings; that we start with the full weight of our collective responsibility squarely on our shoulders. Now, more than ever, it is a time for harnessing the energies of our small nation. It is a time for strong and resolute leadership, for putting into practice the ideals which we espouse, and for embracing all St. Lucians in the task of moving our country confidently into the future.

Misyé Pwézidan, Misyé Speaker

Si nou pwan an konsidéwasyon sé kalité twistès-la sèten péyi oliwon latè-a ka soufè-a, nou kay apwésyé kalité bonté-a, kalité noblès-la nou ni an ti péyi Sent Lisi nou an. Wèspansabilité pou yonnalòt, libètè èk jistis sosyal – sa sé twadisyon nou an Sent Lisi, épi sé pou nou fè tout sa nou pé pou nou pa pèd se valè sala.

Paski sé gwas a sé valè sala, nou éwisi kondwi dènyé ilèksyon nou an san trop twen, sans twop twakasan, memn si nou tout apwésyé ki la té ni an chay bagay ki pa té plè nou. Mé nou kondwi kò nou épi dignité, lonnè èk wèspé pou yonnalòt. Mwen ka avoudwé ki nou kay kontiné an sa nou sa konsidiwé kon yon chapit nèf an lévolution politik péyi-a. Mé sé pou nou twété sa séwyésman, paski an chay moun ja twavay wèd, ja swé, pou nou sa jwi libèté politik, sosyal èk ékonomik-la nou ka pwan pou lajan kontan sé jou sala.

Gwas a Dyé, nou fèmé lanné 2001 an lapé. Sézon ilèksyon-an ja pasé. Sézon Nwèl-la ja vini, i ja pasé. Mé paditan-an nou té ka fè fèt nou, lavi kontiné. Sé fo nou fè menm bagay-la. Sé pou nou kontiné épi lavi nou. Gouvèdman mwen ni lèspwa ki kon yon péyi, yon pèp, nou sa koumansé lanné nèf la épi Palman nèf la détèminé pou twavay ansanm pou dévloppé péyi-a. Tan-an ki ka vini an pa kay fasil; i pa kay

ésé. Sé pou wézon sala nou tout ni pou vini ansanm pou lévé Sent Lisi anlè. Nou ni bizwen moun ki ni vizyon, ki pa pè pwan disizyon difisil an lantéwé péyi-a – menm si délè i pa ésé pou valé wimèd-la yo kay bay la. Nou ni bizwen moun, gwan kon piti, ki kay mennen lilyon épi lamou pami tout St. Lisyen, isi kon lòt péyi, pou péyi-a sa fè pwogwé, épi konfyans, an sé tan-an ki ka vini an.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker

We are extremely fortunate to be starting this decisive year with a new government and a fresh mandate. No doubt, that mandate was given purposefully by the people of St. Lucia in their expectation of responsible and determined management of the affairs of this country. In so doing, they have communicated their desire for progress and prosperity and their willingness to work with those who will seek to deliver equity, opportunity and good governance. By inference, we may also assume that they will tolerate nothing less.

I say therefore, that this honourable House is the cradle of the democratic processes of this country, and I would urge the members thereof to view themselves as the principal custodians of that noble tradition. In offering congratulations and best wishes to new and returning representatives, I say also that ours is the collective responsibility of protecting and nurturing our own democracy. Accordingly, we must at all times conduct ourselves and our affairs in a manner worthy of the esteem conferred upon us by the people of this fair land.

It is our view that the results of the December elections manifest a certain resolve - that is, the resolve of a nation determined to renew itself by its own efforts. We see the results as a sign of growing enlightenment on the part of private citizens who understand that consistency, sustainability and sacrifice are critical to our survival.

My Government also recognizes these critical elements and will actively seek to embrace all citizens in the process of people-centred development. As I will shortly be addressing this Honourable House some three months hence, on the occasion of the presentation of the Annual Estimates of Expenditure for 2002/2003, this address will now focus primarily on the parliamentary agenda for the next three months. Nevertheless, during the full term of this administration, it is expected that our agenda will be driven by Government's continued emphasis on such priorities as investment in social infrastructure, poverty reduction, and the education of our upcoming generations.

ELEMENTS OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

To sustain our economic development programme, Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, we will embark early in the new year on a process of visioning and reasoning, aimed at determining the future direction of our economy and society, and the precise type and level of support that will move us in that direction. What is needed at this time, is a process of continuous dialogue among the Social Partners, with a view to reaching agreement on priority activities and policies.

Few will argue that the revival of the banana industry should not be a clear priority. The focus here must be on meeting our market quotas by ensuring the sustained supply of inputs to farmers, alongside technical and financial support to irrigate farmlands. The Banana Recovery Unit will therefore be established early in this new year.

Another clear priority must be strengthening the ability of our export sector - especially our Manufacturing and Service sectors - to compete internationally. The emphasis here must be on helping our firms to acquire the necessary process technology. At the same time, we must ensure that our education sector supplies the workforce that these firms will need, to maintain their competitive edge in the marketplace of the future.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker

The social and economic benefits derived from our actions at the national level will be short-lived, unless it is supported by a functioning CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME). The logic of the arguments supporting the creation of a single economic space, can no longer be ignored or denied. The longer we postpone the establishment of a CARICOM Single Market and Economy, the more difficult it will be for us to overcome the challenges of an increasingly competitive world.

Over the next year therefore, we will focus more of our efforts on implementing the policies that will bring this into existence. In addition, we will work with other Member States in the OECS to build on the comparative advantages provided by a single currency and Central Bank and other mature monetary policy arrangements.

Misyé Pwézidan, Misyé Speaker

Gouvèman kay konmansé toutswit konsilté épi sé lézòt enstitusyon sosyal péyi-a pou dakò asou sé démach-la ki nésésè a pou kontiné dévlopman péyi-a. I pa ni djè moun ki pa kay dakò ki lendustwi fig-la dwètèt pami lé pwèmyé. Sé pou nou wè ki péyi-a ni asé gwano épi lòt matwiyo pou planté fig sèvi lè yo bizwen'y. Sé pou nou sipoté pwojé irigasyon plantasyon fig. Nou ni lantasyon établi tout swit ki posib sa nou ka kwiyé "The Banana Recovery Unit" pou bay diwèksyon an démach sala.

Sé fo nou sipoté osi sé lézòt sèktè ékonomik-la – lendustwi Touris, télékominikasyon, manifakti – pou édé yo fè biznis an laplas entènasyonal-la. An menm ditan-an sé pou nou fè asiwé ki systemm édikasyon péyi-a sa founi sé biznis péyi-a épi kalité twavayè-a ki kay nésésè a pou endé yo éwisi an sé tan-an ki ka vini an.

Mé I fo apwésyé ki Sent Lisi pa sa fè tout sa i ni pou fè a pa koy sèlman. Nou kay ni pou twavay ansanm épi sé péyi OECS-la épi sé péyi CARICOM-la. Mé nou kay ni pou aksèpté ki an zafè entégwasyon wéjonal sala, nou kay ni pou bay èk pwan.

ELEMENTS OF OUR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker

As economic adjustment continues, it makes sense for us to provide a Social Safety Net for the more vulnerable segments of our workforce. The centrepiece of this Safety Net will be a programme of construction of highways, roads, bridges, schools and other public buildings. At the same time, we will expand the reach and impact of agencies like the Poverty Reduction Fund, the Small Enterprise Development Unit (SEDU), and the James Belgrave Fund, to better help those who want to help themselves.

Consistent with that approach Government will quickly proceed to examine the feasibility of setting up an Unemployment Insurance Scheme, a National Health Insurance Scheme, through the National Insurance Corporation and some form of insurance cover for banana farmers. In this regard, a committee will be appointed within the next few weeks to commence work on these initiatives.

THE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker

My Government is committed to continuing the aggressive programme of law reform which characterised the previous sessions of this Parliament.

During its full term, My Government intends to focus its legislative efforts in the areas of agriculture, health, tourism, electronic commerce, juveniles, the criminal justice system and small tenancies development. However, in the three months leading up to the presentation of a new budget and estimates of expenditure, My Government will focus its legislative efforts in the following areas:

1. Criminal Justice

The reform of the Criminal Code is almost complete, after many rounds of consultation with members of the Bar Association, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, the police and other relevant agencies. My Government intends to enact a new Criminal Code by March of this year.

This new Code will incorporate a number of new substantive offences and will also amend in certain respects, the procedure currently used in our courts. The new Code will also provide more realistic and up-to-date sentences for all offences.

My Government will, simultaneously with the passage of the new Criminal Code, enact, for the first time, an Evidence Bill for Saint Lucia. This Bill which has also been subject to intense consultation will provide a comprehensive set of rules of evidence for use in our courts.

The Bill has benefited from new developments in the law of evidence within the Commonwealth and incorporates many of the recommendations of the Commonwealth Expert Group on the

Law of Evidence, set up by the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

2. Public Integrity and Anti-Corruption

My Government has had an opportunity to reflect upon the current law regulating public integrity; that is, The Integrity Commission Act of 1997. My Government has also followed developments in the Americas and the wider international community in the area of anti-corruption. These reflections have resulted in a wide-ranging review of the Integrity Commission Act and the preparation of a new Bill, incorporating many of the elements of the existing Act but with some important new features. The legislation will define “acts of corruption” and will address not only acts of corruption by public persons such as politicians and civil servants, but also the private individuals who conspire with them to defraud the state or frustrate due process for their own selfish ends and private gain.

This new Bill, the Integrity in Public Life Bill will be brought before this Parliament for enactment into law during the month of February.

3. Regional Integration

Historically, Saint Lucia has always been a leader within the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and the wider CARICOM region on the issue of regional integration. However, on more than one occasion our enthusiasm to implement agreed initiatives has not been matched by that of some of our regional sister governments. This has however not dampened our zeal for and commitment to the idea of regional integration and My Government will continue to implement agreed initiatives in this respect.

During the next two weeks the Cabinet of Ministers will review for approval, a Bill designed to facilitate the free movement of nationals of some of the OECS within the territories of participating states. It is my expectation that this Bill will be enacted by March this year. I note specifically, that the recommendations on this initiative were received on December 7, 2001, and are to be considered by a prime ministerial sub-committee of the OECS Authority. Upon recommendation by that subcommittee, and subject to approval by this House, it is our intention that St. Lucia should be among the first member states to implement this vital legislation.

Additionally, My Government has begun a review of the Caribbean Community Skills Nationals Act, 1996 with a view to extending protection under this Act to qualified regional artists, cultural workers and members of the media.

4. Road Traffic

The rapid increase in the number of vehicles using our public roads and highways places a significant stress on the system designed to manage road traffic in Saint Lucia. Indeed, the present system, its administration, personnel and legislative underpinning, did not contemplate such a rapid explosion in road traffic in such a short time. The resultant effect can be seen

in the chaotic parking situation, especially in the City, and an equally chaotic public transportation system.

My Government will hold one further round of discussions with all relevant parties on the revised draft Road Traffic Bill with a view to enacting a more effective law for the regulation of road traffic by March of this year.

Misyé Pwézidan, Misyé Speaker

Pou byen menajé dévlopman ékonomik èk sosyal nenpòt péyi, pou tjenn tout bagay an òd, pou pwotèjè lentèwè tout jan péyi-a, sè pou'y ni lwa an plas, èpi sè pou sè lwa sala chanjè tansantan kon situasyon péyi-a ka chanjè. Gouvèdman kay kontinè twavay asou sé chanjman sala diwan lavi Paleman sala mé disi Mas, nou ni lantansyon mété an plas kat (4) lwa nèf:

- 1. Lwa Jistis Kwiminèl pou wéglé manyè péyi-a ka kondwi zafè kwim èpi kalité pinisyon-an lalwa ka bay sé moun-lan ki ka konmèt kwim-lan.**
- 2. An lwa nou kay kwiyé “The Integrity in Public Life” –”L’Honnèté an Lavi Piblik” – ki kay wéglé manyè system-lan kay twété moun ki konmèt pasdwa ében sa nou ka kwiyé an langaj popoulè moun – bóból- kont péyi-a. E la nou ka palé pa sèlman di politisyen èpi moun ki ka twavay bay Gouvèdman, mè osi lòt moun an péyi-a ki ka fè konplo èpi yo pou vòlè lajan ében pwopwiété péyi-a, ében pou anpèché jistis fèt, pou lentéwé yo menm.**
- 3. Yon lòt lwa ki kay fè'y pli ésé pou jan sé péyi OECS-la alé vini an péyi an péyi yonnalòt, èpi osi pou sèten jounalis èk twavayè kiltiwèl an sé péyi CARICOM-lan.**
- 4. E finalman, an lwa pou wéglé system trafik péyi-a, autan pou vwati pwivé kon pou twanspò piblik.**

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker

These legislative changes will be consistent with the realisation that Government's role as development partner must continue to evolve. The task of any new government regulation will be to create an expanding economic space, to facilitate not frustrate private investment, to encourage enterprise, and to provide opportunity for as many St. Lucians as possible.

REFORM IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

I now turn my attention, Mr. President, Mr. Speaker to the issue of reform in the private sector. We are encouraged indeed by the signs of fundamental reform sweeping through the private sector. If nothing else, the global economic crunch that we are witnessing, has forced businesses to make radical reforms in order to compete, survive, and prosper. We acknowledge that such restructuring is unavoidable in our current domestic economic circumstances; that marginal businesses are experiencing financial difficulties and that this has meant painful downsizing and, in some cases, layoffs, and redundancies. We recognize that some of our people are out of work as a result of these adjustments. We sympathize with the displaced and the unemployed. We believe however, that the restructuring process will in the long run create new efficiencies, and generate savings that will inevitably fuel new expansion and new

employment. Indeed if our economy is to rebuild on a stronger foundation, this process cannot be denied.

For these reasons we remain optimistic when we see new investments in the modernization of retail spaces, the renovation and expansion of the tourism plant, growth in the service sector, and even new plant and equipment in certain parts of the manufacturing sector. My Government welcomes these initiatives as part of the adjustment process that we must endure in anticipation of higher returns in the future.

We are also convinced that if we continue to rationalize our productive sectors, our social infrastructure and systems of governance, we will in fact make a quantum leap toward our own sustainability as a nation. My Government believes that this economy can and must be reformed to make it more productive. Moreover, in so doing, St. Lucia can send an important signal to the international community: that we are ready, willing and able to take difficult but necessary decisions to prepare ourselves to do business with the world. Thus, our own determination may well be our best defence. Our sacrifice, dedication and hard work may well be our most effective advertisement to the international community of investors, donors and multilateral development institutions.

Misyé Pwèzidan, Misyé Speaker

Situasyon ékonomik entènasyonal-la ka afèkté séwèsman biznis èk jan biznis péyi-a. Epi pwèskè tout, go kon piti, oblijé pwan démach pou pwotéjé lentéwé yo. Nou konpwann situasyon yo. Adan sé démach sala annékòs moun pèd twavay yo épi salè yo. Sa ka fè nou lapenn. Mé nou ni lèspwa ki nou kay sa twavay ansanm pou vini about adan sé difikilté sala. Mé nou kay ni pou fè anchay sakwifis; nou kay ni pou twavay wèd pou moutwé konminoté entènasyonal-la ki nou pawé pou endé kò nou épi pou pwan sé kalité disizyon-an ki nésésè a pou fè biznis épi yo. Epi lafwa, dédikasyon èk lilyon nou sa gwenyen about sé tan difisil sala. Péyi nou-an, épi jénéwasyon-an ki ka vini an, kay wimésyé nou pou léfò nou épi détèminasyon nou.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker

With these thoughts I trust I have both touched and reflected the pulse of the people of St. Lucia in these challenging times. For my own part, I offer you my abiding faith in the collective wisdom of the St. Lucian people and our ability, even in the face of daunting circumstances, to work together, to persevere and to prosper.

I therefore now declare open this First Session of the Eighth Parliament.