



BUILDING RESILIENCE TODAY TO SECURE OUR FUTURE

THRONE SPEECH

By

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On the occasion of the Third Session of the

Eleventh Parliament

of Saint Lucia

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Madam President, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members...

By the grace of the Almighty God, we his children, are present here, today, to celebrate the opening of this Third Session of the Eleventh Parliament of our beloved country. For this we are thankful for His favour.

It has become the convention in the House of Assembly and in the Senate, that our first duty when assembled, is to show our obeisance to Him who made us to know Him, love Him and serve Him: that love to be shown equally by our love for one another.

Mindful of the terms of that Divine Ordinance, we, once again, this morning, invoke God's assistance, to knit together the hearts of every member, with a lively confidence in His readiness to grant a prayer faithfully made. Good morning, I therefore say to Saint Lucia, and to all here present, with the hope that every other would be better than the last.

When we became a nation in 1979, and, therefore, subordinate to no one, internally or externally, the Constitution that made us so was sanctified by that same type of invocation. It was, and is, a summons, divine.

On the question of Parliamentary budgets: it mandates that “the resources of the State shall be utilised in such a manner as to subserve the common good” and “that there should be adequate means of livelihood for all”. Given the poverty of our natural resources, what a challenge this must be for any Government!

It could only be that it was so designed to teach parliamentarians to manage the economy in a business-like manner, and with a seriousness, restlessness, resoluteness and resourcefulness that know no bounds. And statistics show, that when a business-like approach stimulates and activates the economic pendulum, it swings well for prosperity, especially in a free trade environment where public-private sector partnership has taken root.

Inherent in the constitutional provision that the resources be used for the good of all, is the warning that there be no victimization whatsoever, and that the needs of each constituency be attended to, even-handedly, irrespective of party allegiance.

By virtue, also, of that good Constitution which we have been called upon to uphold and maintain, (now hailed almost everywhere as “Mr. Democracy”) each person, individually, has duties towards every

other and to the community. It must be that we are obliged to plan for and secure not only this, but future generations.

Fellow Saint Lucians, my people: the call to '*Build Resilience Today to Secure our Future*', is an appeal to us all to reaffirm our commitment to this dear land we call our own; to do so unreservedly, because the challenges we face today are without precedent, and the blueprint for their solution must be the product of our collective endeavor. May God guide our every step, for our children's sake and theirs.

TRIBUTES

Mr. Speaker, Madame. President, as I preside over this Third Sitting of the Eleventh Parliament, I wish to recognize the presence of the Former Governor-General, her Excellency Dame Pearlette Louisy, to thank her for her 20 years of outstanding service to Saint Lucia and to pray for her continued health and prosperity.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: recently, Saint Lucia mourned the loss of two cultural icons - Ms Theresa Hall and Mr. Gandolph St. Clair - over the course of a few months. Ma Hall, as she was affectionately

known, and Mr St. Clair both made significant and lasting contributions to our national development through the Arts.

Saint Lucia also mourned the loss of Mr Lawrence James, a veteran journalist and the first and only journalist to have won four awards (print or electronic) at any one ceremony of the then Saint Lucia Media Workers Association (SLMWA) Journalism Awards Ceremony in 1992.

We bade farewell to Mr George “Mellow” Alfred, former national and Windward Islands opening batsman, who was involved in the formation of the Saint Lucia National Cricket Association, and later, the development of the National Women’s Cricket Team.

The tragic passing of young Nick Elibox will remain for some time in our collective memory. A national Under-19 cricketer, Nick had the potential, perhaps, to become one of Saint Lucia’s best cricketers. He will be greatly missed.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: while we celebrate these lives and mourn their passing, we must, simultaneously, focus on the future. In the course of the past year, we have celebrated the contribution and pioneering work of our people, particularly our youth, in the areas of sports, music and entrepreneurship. Among them are, Ms Julien

Alfred and the Beach Soccer team - both won gold medals at the Commonwealth Youth Games.

No doubt, they are following the path blazed by our Nobel Laureates and others who have caused the name of little Saint Lucia to be recognized at the farthest points of the globe. They are the spark plugs that ignite and drive our ambition to soar and scale the heights. Our Dr. Winston Parris, long recognized as the first among equals in the field of pain management, may also, some-day, take home to us, the Nobel Prize for medicine.

These achievements remind us, yet again, that small size is no impediment to greatness and that every penny spent to develop positive attributes and essential qualities in our people, especially ethics at school, is a productive and secure investment in education: for education is the chief defense of a nation. Thus forearmed, whatever we do, we will do nicely, and well, cutting the pie, and not biting it at the table.

HUMAN INFRASTRUCTURE

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: My Government is of the firm belief that people are the foundation stone on which a prosperous and resilient country is built. Consequently, our people must always be, and remain, at the heart and epicenter of every initiative taken in the name of development. In that respect, the protection of families and of the most vulnerable in our society are paramount. This being on the front burner of My Government's agenda, matters of equity, education, healthcare, justice and security will, through policies and laws, transform our country.

SOCIAL SAFETY NETS

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: human dignity is never to be compromised or ignored. Equity and justice demand that the economic and social wellbeing of every citizen be the concern and business of the State. Fully conscious of safety nets, My Government installed a Minister for Equity, to be the fountain of Equity, Social Justice, Empowerment and Human Services, to vivify what have been antiquated and ineffective. Though every Governor-General is the

conscience of the State, a Minister in action is an imperative and a blessing for all.

The Department of Equity, Social Justice, Empowerment and Human Services has spearheaded the review and reform of the public assistance programme. One of the notable achievements of the Social Safety Net Reform process, is the Review of the 1967 Public Assistance Act, which enhances St. Lucia's social protection landscape. The Department's initiatives, coupled with the invaluable contribution of stakeholders, have resulted in a modern **Social Protection Bill**.

It is envisaged, that once enacted the Bill will repeal the 1967 Act and provide the backbone and legislative base from which all social agencies will operate. My Government is wholeheartedly committed to this new Act in the coming fiscal year.

FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: in focusing on resilience to secure our future, we must, as a matter of priority, safeguard and fortify families and, particularly, our children. Mature societies understand that it is

their responsibility to nurture all children as equals, and Saint Lucia is a mature society. Various international agreements to which Saint Lucia is a party not only reflect this understanding, but also oblige countries to remove elements of discrimination in respect of the rights granted to children.

My Government intends to enact Family Law legislation, including that which will remove discriminatory provisions in existing laws relating to children, and will secure parental rights. These laws will also bring Saint Lucia into compliance with our international law obligations under the *Convention on the Rights of the Child, (CRC)* and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, (CEDAW)*.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: the **Child Care, Protection and Adoption Bill** underpins the policy direction of my Government, that if a child is temporarily or permanently deprived of his/her home or environment, or cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, in his/her best interest, the child is entitled to special protection and assistance from the State.

The Bill makes provision for protection and assistance by appropriate government agencies for children who may need to be removed from the home, in circumstances of abuse or neglect.

EDUCATION

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: modern education systems cater to the various needs of their constituents by accommodating administrators, teachers, students or parents.

By way of The Education Quality Improvement Project (EQUIP), my Government will seek to enhance the teaching/learning environment, as well as quality, relevance and instructional effectiveness. Resources will be directed at continuing professional development, and improvements will be sought in system leadership and operational effectiveness.

In an effort to deal with the difficult challenge of substance abuse by our young people, a strategy relating to alcohol and drug use will be developed.

Additionally, attention will be paid to those students with special needs, to facilitate their integration into the education system, and, ultimately, their ability to contribute fully as members of society.

Provision has also been made within the EQUIP Project, for a climate vulnerability assessment to be undertaken of a select number of school buildings and sites, consistent with my Government's goal to ensure that educational infrastructure can withstand adverse natural events, and with the strategy to build resilience in all our systems and structures .

The **Education Act** will be reviewed and amended to incorporate these system modifications, as well as to facilitate the incorporation of commitments set out in regional and international agreements. Regulations will also be made to support the primary legislation, and to give effect to modern management and leadership practices, address disciplinary offences, and the registration and appraisal of teachers.

A MORE MODERN, EQUITABLE HEALTH SERVICE

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: health and resilience are inextricably linked. My Government is committed to creating a more modern,

efficient health service, which guarantees equity of access and delivery. In this regard, matters of infrastructure development, as well as governance, will engage our attention.

Greater impetus will be given to the commissioning of the new national hospital, continuing the transitioning of the Victoria Hospital to the Owen King EU Hospital in a phased manner. It is My Government's goal to complete this exercise within the coming fiscal year.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: while My Government continues to invest heavily in health care, many of our people are suffering poor health because of their inability to pay for essential health services. **The National Health Insurance Scheme** which my Government envisions, will assist in establishing a balance between sustainable financing of the health sector and providing our people an avenue for accessing health care services, without having to pay at the point of use.

Proposed legislation for the **Central Regulatory Agency** will give power to this Agency to oversee the implementation and regulation of the National Health Insurance. **The National Health Insurance Bill** will

mandate health insurance coverage for all eligible persons, and will set out such matters as, eligibility for coverage, levels and payment of contributions, health services covered, and governmental responsibility for specified population groups.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: a proposed **Health Records and Reporting Bill** will make new provisions to regulate the obtaining, holding, use or disclosure of health-related information of individuals. It seeks to simplify reporting and improve access to timely and reliable data that can inform decision- and policy making. The Bill will ensure the continuity of care across the lifespan and across public and private sector providers, and facilitate coordination between clinical providers, pharmacies and laboratories.

The **Public Health Act and Regulations** will also be considered for amendment, following broad consultation. The amendment will address, in particular, new and re-emerging infectious diseases and the need to protect the public from hazardous chemicals and events.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: My Government has been working assiduously to prepare Amendments and Regulations related to the **Health Practitioners Act**, in a manner which reflects continued

commitment to upholding best practice standards in medicine, dentistry and other health professions. These Amendments are expected to be passed in this Parliamentary session.

In order to ensure pharmacy practice meets internal standards, the **Pharmacy Act** will be amended to include the Registration of Pharmacy Technicians, wholesale distributors and importers of drugs. Amendments will also govern the importation of drugs for personal use and donation and classification of controlled substances.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: My Government will take measures to strengthen primary health care services, as a strategy to reduce the burden on Victoria Hospital, as well as on the new hospital, when commissioned. My Government will also enhance the provision of critical dialysis service in the south of Saint Lucia, by ensuring the provision of additional dialysis machines to augment and replace the existing ones, which have run beyond their useful lives.

JUSTICE AND SECURITY

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: criminality undermines societies. We must confront crimes which, today, run the gamut, from trade in illicit drugs and arms, to domestic abuse and electronic crimes. Our response must encompass policy, legislative and strategic action.

My Government salutes the dedicated men and women of our police force and other law enforcement agencies who strive to maintain order against tremendous odds. This is no mean feat, in these times.

In the course of this year, a more strategic approach to combatting crime will be adopted, including improvements in internal communication, the incorporation of more modern technology, increases in foot, mobile and maritime patrols throughout the island, and the introduction of a new Crime Management System which will assist in monitoring and recording crime, statistics being an indispensable ingredient in managing our affairs.

In order to bolster the strategic approach and increase the potential for success, training of our police will continue, and will cover such areas as interviewing and investigative techniques, the approach to sexual offences, evidence and the treatment of witnesses.

Further, My Government anticipates that by the end of this fiscal year a Use of Force Policy, a Code of Ethics, a Succession Plan and a Five-Year Strategic Plan would have been introduced within the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force (RSPF) with a view to improving police administration.

Crime is a national concern and responsibility, and communities are a critical part of the solution. Therefore, a full-fledged community policing programme will be rolled out and we urge all citizens and residents of Saint Lucia to support this endeavor for the sake of Saint Lucia, the only home we have.

Not only will physical conditions be improved by the upgrading of police stations, but welfare concerns will be addressed, and a chaplaincy will be provided to cater to the spiritual needs of our police men and women and enhance their moral and ethical growth.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: My Government recognizes, that despite our best efforts, children, on occasion, run afoul of the law. **The Child Justice Bill** will establish the judicial process for a child who is in conflict with the law. It will allow for the designation of a place of assessment and, where necessary, a secure residential facility during

the judicial process. The Bill will also ensure that the child is provided with an attorney, that the process is expeditious and that the child is given an opportunity to respond before decisions are taken which affect him or her.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: My Government will be revising the **Criminal Code** to incorporate stiffer penalties for persons convicted of all forms of exploitation, such as human trafficking, sexual offences and gender-based violence. In addition to this, laws regarding the protection of the vulnerable persons in our society, including the elderly and the young, will also be reviewed.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: a country that is truly independent demonstrates this status through laws which have intrinsic meaning and value, for a country is known by its laws. **Codes of Practice** governing the detention, treatment, questioning and identification of persons by police officers will be introduced to supplement the Evidence Act, and employ procedures which accord with our country's socio-cultural and legal environment.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: sustainable development implies that resilience is streamlined and infused into economic, environmental and social policies, laws and programmes. The global sustainable development agenda to which Saint Lucia committed in 2015, demands, that attention be paid to people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.

My Government is highly attentive to the fact that the attainment of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals is critical to the success of our country's development. Consequently, in the course of this fiscal year, we will address, with renewed vigour, the realization of the 2030 target, by supporting the work of the Sustainable Development National Coordinating Committee, and buttressing our vision with suitable legislation.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: the climate change phenomenon is no longer new to us. The year 2017 brought home the stark reality of our human frailty in the face of nature's indiscriminate wrath. We

empathized with our brothers and sisters in Antigua and Barbuda, the British Virgin Islands, Cuba, Dominica, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Saint Martin, US Virgin Islands and mourned the loss of life when hurricanes Irma, Katia and Maria, swept through our region. We extended hands and hearts in support, but our duty goes much further. Our obligation to this world is to act to reduce human-induced climate change and to convince others to do likewise.

In this respect, my Government will intensify efforts to fulfil our obligation to climate action under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Paris Agreement and ratify and implement the Doha Amendment which establishes the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol. The Disaster Vulnerability Reduction Project will be advanced, as will resource mobilization to support renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable transport solutions, sustainable water management, agriculture and forestry, and building resilience and adaptation.

My Government will ensure that the policy and legislative environments exist to facilitate environmental management and our response to climate change. To this end, the process of reviewing draft environmental legislation will continue apace, taking account of

Renewable Energy, Chemicals Management, Biodiversity, Coastal Zone and Protected Areas Management and Climate Change.

PHYSICAL PLANNING

In light of the developmental agenda being undertaken by my Government, it has become necessary to review and improve the planning approval process. As a consequence, my Government will embark on an assessment and evaluation of the physical planning approvals process, in order to achieve greater efficiency and responsiveness in support of the national development thrust. This initiative will include the establishment of mechanisms to assist the Development Control Authority in providing a one-stop type service to all developers and investors.

In order to accomplish this vital task, my Government will evaluate the current legislative framework, governing the Development Control Authority as to strengthen the physical planning process, in keeping with our overall national goal. The review will also be aimed at developing appropriate procedures and systems to reduce time lines for approval, without compromising compliance requirements, as well

as to enhance the ancillary support needed to implement new developments.

MODERNIZATION OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE

In the coming fiscal year, My Government will consider avenues for modernization of the public service, through the restructuring of public sector organizations and systems. The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and, specifically, the harmonization of the administration's ICT infrastructure to enable improvements in service delivery, will be key areas of focus.

These initiatives have the potential to make the interface between administration and customers less burdensome, and result in greater efficiency and improvement in service delivery. My Government urges all citizens to participate in consultation exercises when invited, so that processes and procedures which are introduced are relevant and particular to Saint Lucia's needs.

My Government will complete the process to enact a **Public Service Management Bill**, which will provide for a governance framework to support a 'whole-of-government' approach to the delivery of services

in the public sector. The Bill will promote the basic values and principles governing public administration, provide for the transfer and secondment of employees, capacity development, training and the use of ICT in public administration.

Further, in an effort to support the business community, facilitate efficient and productive administration and improve Saint Lucia's position on the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Ranking, my Government will give consideration to certain E-government legislation.

As part of My Government's drive towards Public Sector modernization, focused attention will be directed toward the review and commencement of the following pieces of legislation which have been enacted but are pending commencement dates:

The Electronic Transaction Act will give legal effect to and provide for the regulation of electronic communication.

The Data Privacy and Protection Act is expected to regulate the collection, processing, use and disclosure of personal data in a manner that safeguards the right of privacy of an individual personal

information. This legislation is also critical to the implementation of the Health Information Management System.

The **Electronic Crime Act** seeks to protect the integrity of computer systems and the confidentiality, integrity and availability of data, to prevent abuse of computer systems. It will also facilitate the gathering and use of electronic evidence in relation to criminal activities perpetrated through computer systems.

FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: this past year, in promoting our foreign policy agenda, My Government continued to engage traditional partners, while welcoming new friends. We have expanded areas of cooperation and established or reinforced the links between our diplomatic relations and the attainment of national development goals, while emphasizing democracy, justice and the rule of law, as non-negotiable principles.

My Government wishes to express our deep gratitude to our diplomatic partners for their friendship, their genuine interest in our wellbeing, and in supporting the growth and development agenda of

Saint Lucia, in very tangible ways. Agriculture, tourism, renewable energy, security, climate change and disaster risk reduction are but a few of the areas in which our partners have made distinct marks. My Government and the people of Saint Lucia heartily thank you.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: the attainment of the internationally recognized Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be a significant focus of our foreign policy agenda. My Government is convinced that these goals, which touch critical human, social and economic development needs - such as reduction of poverty and hunger, the provision of quality education, clean water and energy, the assurance of decent work, peace, justice and strong institutions - are, in fact, keys to building prosperous communities and countries. It is our intention, therefore, to create the internal and external networks and synergies so as to give impetus to our efforts in this respect.

High on the SDG agenda is the matter of climate change, which has forced the world to acknowledge that our very existence depends on deliberate, concerted action by all, to combat the effects of this

phenomenon. My Government will continue to be at the forefront of the response on the regional and international stage, to urge finalisation of the Paris Agreement Work Programme, to encourage ratification of the amendments relating to the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, the international emissions reduction treaty and to maximize the outcomes of the 24th Meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP 24) which is scheduled for Poland later this year.

Regional Integration is another major pillar of my Government's foreign policy thrust. Saint Lucia will, this year, pass on the baton of Chairmanship of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, but my Government will be no less engaged in pressing for the realization of the vital OECS Economic Union, and for citizens of this region to derive real value from our membership. In the case of CARICOM, as my Government fulfils our responsibility for the Sustainable Development portfolio, we will continue to champion the cause for resilience-building to be infused into integration initiatives wherever this is feasible.

My Government intends, also, to participate fully in wider Caribbean fora, to seek to influence the direction of the Association of Caribbean

States or the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC).

Madam President, Mr. Speaker! My Government's outreach takes full cognizance of the value of commercial diplomacy in economic development. The reform of our Foreign Service will include, therefore, according re-orientation in the deployment of our diplomatic and consular agents, and the incorporation of such agencies as Invest St. Lucia, the Tourism Authority, and the CIP Unit. By the same token, efforts will be redoubled to ensure the integration of our diaspora in national development.

CONCERNING PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: It cannot be doubted that without Party, Parliamentary government is impossible. It is a most wonderful device that makes for peace and good government, not tribalism and warfare. Every five years, the people choose from competing parties, a Government, and a watchdog. The successful candidates are referred to as "My Government" at every Throne Speech.

While the Government sets out to implement the policies in its manifesto, the Opposition's duty, on the other hand, is to show, the superior quality of theirs. Thanks to technology, the respective strengths and weaknesses are exposed, registering, instantaneously, who is more worthy to govern.

Questions put to Ministers in the House is the most effective way of shaking the ground under their feet, for a minister cannot lie to Parliament. Another important tool in the hand of the Opposition is Resolutions for debate which bear on policies in their manifesto. "Parliament is the grand inquest of the nation", and every meeting of the House, every Throne Speech and every Budget, where competing policies come forcefully to the fore, foretells whether the Government would be returned or replaced. The mark is missed when one substitutes such refinements as Questions and Resolutions for javelins of slander and knives of lies.

For the sake of our children and their generation, let us, therefore, as people who have suffered, always rise, nicely to the occasion, Government and Opposition, for Saint Lucia has talent, and the world knows it too.

Let every Parliamentary meal be delicately prepared and elegantly served: and remember that “where there is patience and humility, there is neither anger nor worry, that all power comes from above, and “as a man makes his bed, so shall he lie”.

One word more: Saint Lucia is beautiful, Saint Lucia has a big heart. Saint Lucia has talent. We can make Saint Lucia the best of all possible worlds.