



**SOWING THE SEEDS OF OPPORTUNITY**  
**THRONE SPEECH**

Delivered by

**Her Excellency**

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Governor General of Saint Lucia

On the Occasion of the

**State Opening of the**

**Third Session of the Tenth Parliament of Saint Lucia**

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## **TRANSIENCE AND RITUAL**

**Mr. President and members of the Senate,**

**Mr. Speaker and members of the House of Assembly,**

The unyielding drum beat of time, the transience of life's rituals bring us here, yet again, to this Chamber to mark the opening of the Third Session of this Tenth Parliament of Saint Lucia.

I am pleased, by God's Grace, to be here to share with you a few moments of reflection: that we may all resolve that our nation and its children shall prosper if we might act in unison, if we might act in good faith.

## **CROSSROADS IN TIME**

Although I do not mean to anchor the proceedings of this morning to a historical mooring, there are times when the story of Saint Lucia – our story of survival and success as a people – should be remembered, particularly when our paths seem uncertain and muddied.

This is because these chapters, long trapped in book and manuscript, affect the psyche of our people and at times even our outlook, whether of sorrow or of joy.

In April 1763, exactly two hundred and fifty years ago, on the plains of Vieux Fort, the first blades of cane of a sugar estate within our island sprung to life. For the colonizing power and its settlers, the early shoots ushered new economic opportunity; except that it was constructed on oppression, violence and inhumanity. Indeed, it was the beginning of a new era in our history, a defining period in our narrative. The outlook of the inhabitants then, was solely to Western Europe and its other immediate colonies to the north.

Beyond the new products of muscovado, molasses and rum which infused the delight and delirium of the wealthy in the North, there ensued the sordid, souring curse on an entire continent, as the complexion of our island transformed under the injustice of an enslaved people. Yet, even so, a people lived on, despite all the tribulations and hardships.

## **THE CEASING OF CANE AND CHATTEL**

By 1963, exactly fifty years ago, we witnessed another defining moment in this island. Two centuries of sweat and slashing in the cane fields faded to memory as the *DENROS* sugar factories closed. The chattel chains had been broken 125 years before that, and the enterprise of iniquity collapsed from competition from abroad. Its impact is now relegated to ruins of wind mill and water wheel and the subsidising of imported sugar.

Sugar and slavery, which built up fort and fortune for Europe, had come and gone. Its model was morally, environmentally and economically unsustainable. In its place was Green Gold, the banana industry that underpinned much of the development that occurred in our island in the glory years, spanning just over four decades. Sadly, the bounty of that banana boom has withered, no longer inflated by the protection of our traditional partners, but now trimmed by the realities of new world trade regulations, that care neither about poverty nor size.

We have since made another shift to new enterprises, capitalising on our island's charm, its beauty and its beaches, to become a tourism destination. However, even while we enjoy the benefits of tourism, there is a desire to move our survival beyond sea and sand to a prosperity determined by the state of our minds and our wills.

Today, **Mr. President, Mr. Speaker**, we decide our fates in the world. We decide what we shall plant, what economy we shall carve, what language we shall speak, what values we shall teach our children, what friends we shall keep. And so, if we are to see prosperity for ourselves, we must sow the seeds of opportunity so that our children might grow well in their land.

## **AN UNDIMINISHED LIGHT**

While our post-independence portrait is still being stroked and coloured by ever-shifting geo-political realities, we must believe that we can influence the finished painting by casting on it, our own undiminished light. So, we find ourselves again at a new crossroads in time, at which we must analyse where we came from, what formed our ways, what we are and where we want to go.

These times of endless challenge must become our new defining era. Let us not be preoccupied with divisions and disasters, with doubt and dithering. Rather, let us summon a collective vision, a coherent purpose, a coordinated drive to redefine ourselves, to repurpose our space, to repaint our portrait, to replant our nation's estate. We are still a land of light and of hope, even though we have been through a punishing age. Let us then never lose courage. We are a people without gold, and yet our treasured coastlines and towering mountains shimmer beautifully with every rising and setting of the sun. Our land is not endowed with mines filled with minerals nor metals. Yet, from the minds of our people we can bring forth our true creative treasures. This quality we do possess. This we must leverage.

**Misyé Pwézidan, Misyé Spika,** lagwas di Dyé mennen nou viwé ankò an kay Palman péyi-a pou wéfléchi asou léta santé péyi-a dépwé dènyé fwa-a nou té asanblé isi-a; pou désidé si nou bizwen an pij pou nétwayé tout sa ki pa bon an sistenm-li; ki médikanman nou ka pwopozé pou viwé bati santé'y; ében ki tizann nou ni pou pwan pou fòtifyé nou pou gwan twavay-la ki kay nésésè pou mété péyi-a asou an pwen d'apwi solid, pou mété'y annòd pou'y sa wésisté sé défi-a i kay wankonté-a.

La ni an pawòl ki di ki, ou pa sa sav ki koté ou ka alé si ou pa sav ki koté ou sòti. Konsa annou pwan an ti moman pou wéfléchi asou an mòso listwa péyi-a pou nou sa apwésyé kalité chanjman-an nou ni pou fè pou Sent Lisi sa floté an lanviwonman ékonomik entènasyonal-la an sé tan nèf sala.

An avwi mil sèt san swazant-twa, ègzaktanman dé san senkant lanné ki pasé, pwèmyé plantasyon kann twapé établi an Vyé Fò. Lendustwi kann-lan, épi sik, wonm èk go siwo, anwichi anchay go pitja lòt péyi, mé pou awèl-nou sété lèsklavaj épi mizè. Yo gwajé mizè, yo manjé mizè, mé kon nou ka di souvan, lavi kontiné. Pèp péyi-a tjenbé fò, jikatan lendoustwi sik-la twapé kò'y an désandan épi finalman i dispawèt. Senkant lanné ki pasé, an 1963 an lendustwi nèf antwé: Fig. Pou pwèskè kawant an fig sété mèt épi go pitja. Lò vè , nou tè ka kwiye'y (Green Gold). Mé fig-la, kon kann-la avan'y soufè menm sò-a. Konsa nou chanjé tak, nou chanjé pa, pou anbwasé lendustwi tourism. Bagay ka maché pyam pyam pou li moman, mési Bondyè, mé sé fo nou pa pwan sa pou lajan kontan. Sé pou nou fè pwépayasyon pou si antouléka.

Chanjman-an ki ni pou fèt-la sé an sèvèl-nou, an mannyè-nou. Pyès péyi pa ni anyen ka tjenbé ban nou. Sé nou ki nou pou désidé ki sa nou vlé planté, ki kalité ékonomi nou vlé établi, ki langaj nou vlé palé, ki valè nou vlé moutwé ich-nou, ki moun nou vlé pou jan-nou. Konsa si nou vlé fè pwogwé, si nou vlé siksé épi pòspèwité, sé pou nou mété bagay an plas an péyi-nou pou ich-nou sa éwityé. Péyi-nou-an pa ni lò, i pa ni lwi, i pa ni dianman. Sa nou ni sé sèvèl pèp-la. Sé sa ki twézò-nou. Sé sa nou ni pou chéwi épi sèvi pou bennéfis péyi-a. Pa kité pyès divizyon, ant ni nwè ni blan , ni blé ni vè, ni wouj ni jòn, anpéché nou fè sa ki ni pou fèt la.

## **A DUTY TO LEAD AND ENLIGHTEN**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** our Constitution says that the Parliament of Saint Lucia “shall consist of Her Majesty, a Senate and a House of Assembly”. We have been placed to lead a nation, to inspire a people, to maintain the good of all publics, and in so doing, maintain the peace, honour and character of our island, Saint Lucia. Our constitution also commands that Parliament “may make laws for the peace, order and good government of Saint Lucia.” Even those fatigued and wearied by delay, disappointment, and dearth of action, still look to this Chamber and to our political institutions for answers, for hope and for opportunity.

The yearning for opportunity does not know discrimination. From all sectors there is a strong desire to see clear direction and indomitable will in

the face of persistent unemployment, social anxiety and tightened fiscal spaces. And indeed, these times call for grit, courage, and generosity of will. Far beyond our Antillean shores there are states fighting to stave off the rocky shoals of debt and depression - Greece, Cyprus, Slovenia, Portugal, for example. In every regional capital, there is a search for economic luminance, while the ominous shadows of fiscal deficits, fleeing capital and high debt ratios darken our sunny skies. Woes abound, making opaque the futures of our nations and our region.

## **SHAPING A VISION**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** our country needs a vision. It needs a plan, a strategy, a coherence of minds, a consensus among all parties, public and private, on the way forward in expanding opportunities for all, through our economic, social and spatial development. Just as we can look back on time, we need also to envisage with clarity where we want to be in fifteen years, and further beyond that horizon, even fifty years, to 2063. We must be a nation of foresight, not of fear. The heritage of our people demands it. We must then decide carefully and purposefully the opportunities, the priorities, the timelines, the sacrifices, and the protection of what we value most, for the "Saint Lucia we love." I can hear, Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, echoes of "Mongstar" as he sings that refrain.

## **A NATIONAL VISION AND STRATEGY**

It is in this spirit that my Government wishes the entire country to be engaged in shaping its National Vision and Strategy.

My Government wishes to establish this year an inclusive National Vision Commission with the support and involvement of all State actors, including Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. This Commission will be charged with leading the dialogue for crafting a National Vision and Strategy. It will be selected through consultation with the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, multi-sectoral groups from throughout the country and my good office. The ensuing dialogue must be broad-reaching and timely. It must embrace all communities. However, more than anything, my Government wishes to stress that this must not be seen as just another project or *"talk-shop"*, but a process essential to nation building.

My Government believes that the country must not discard past and existing efforts, bodies of knowledge and contending ideas. Instead, this Commission must consider all the work done in the past by this and former governments, in the process of shaping a national vision. This National Vision and Strategy must be multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary, broad-ranging and far-reaching. It must capture the essence of the Saint Lucian dream. It must capture the practical and the achievable, while still being bold and innovative.

## **CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** with respect to our political development, citizens in Saint Lucia and overseas had the opportunity over several years to participate in contributing towards the Report of the Constitutional Reform Commission. My Government has finally laid the report before this august Chamber. It has also been made available for public review on the Government's Web Portal. My Government, will, in time, initiate debate in Parliament on it; the merits and spirit of its one hundred and ninety recommendations, as well as all other contending views.

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** it is apparent that the Commission believed that a new model of governance is needed, not merely symbolic amendments. Any process of constitutional reform will require courage, boldness and deep consciousness of the economic, social, cultural, legal and political implications. It will also need consensus and common purpose. Without the shared consensus of our political parties, reforms are unlikely to succeed. The opportunity to reflect on the Report will allow us to demonstrate that we have come of age, that we are a mature society that is willing to take full ownership of our progress and our processes.

## **EMBRACING A NEW, CHANGING WORLD**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** the strength and character of our global friendships and alliances matter today just as much as they did centuries

ago. While we are now independent, we know that *no island stands alone*, and so, with this adage in mind, my Government undertook a review of the global affairs and international relations of our state. The report of this review has recently been made public and will form a guide for moving forward with Saint Lucia's relations with the rest of the world.

Foreign policy is crucial to our economic and social development, particularly in these times. One of the changing realities faced by small states such as ours is graduation to middle income country status. This has justified in the minds of many development partners the right to reduce aid flows on the grounds that we are no longer a country mired in poverty, want or indigence. We have been warned by the European Union that it is likely to take that approach in determining aid to our region and other states within the African, Caribbean and Pacific Family, the ACP. This means that, grant assistance which, in any event, has been hindered over the years, will face further cuts and reductions.

This notwithstanding, my Government continues to be immensely grateful for development assistance from Governments all over the world. These include our traditional partners such as the United States, Canada, Cuba, France, the United Kingdom and the European Union, but also newer partners such as Australia, Brazil, Chile, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Kuwait, Mexico, Morocco and the Republic of China (Taiwan).

My Government's foreign policy and international relations thrusts, as anchored in its *Review of the External Relations Policy*, will centre around the following areas.

First, we will continue to be committed to sub-regional and regional integration, particularly through the OECS Economic Union and the institutions of the Caribbean Community, CARICOM, soon to enter its fortieth year.

Secondly, my Government will leverage our international relations efforts towards investment promotion and facilitation, so as to increase foreign direct investment flows.

Thirdly, my Government will continue to search out development assistance, particularly from non-traditional partners and through the opportunities of funding for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Fourthly, in our foreign policy representation my Government will promote the better understanding of the plight of small states so that, globally, there can be acknowledgement and agreement that such states require special treatment and delineation, given their openness and vulnerability.

Finally, my Government will align foreign policy initiatives to tourism, trade and export facilitation, consistent with national economic development objectives.

My Government recognises the importance of Diaspora groups in linking Saint Lucians abroad to their homeland. On this occasion, we salute the Saint Lucian Association of London on its fiftieth anniversary of keeping Saint Lucians connected to the homeland and our culture across the waters.

My Government continues to believe that there lies substantial opportunity to improve links with the French overseas departments of Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana. It continues to see Martinique as our sister island, a partner so to speak, and so will intensify efforts to induce investment, travel, and cultural exchanges. In equal measure, we will deepen our engagement with the citizens of French Guiana, focusing particularly on our nationals and their descendants, if only to re-affirm our ties of family and friendship.

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker**, our hemisphere is predominantly Hispanic. Thus, my Government will give priority to deepening and strengthening its relationship with Latin America whether through established hemispheric institutions such as the Organisation of American States (OAS) or the newly

created "Community for Latin America and the Caribbean", known by the acronym CELAC.

My Government continues to stand in solidarity with the people of Cuba who have made an invaluable contribution to the development of our country. We remain grateful to them for the many Saint Lucians who have been trained as doctors, engineers, and more recently, nurses, all at their expense. Many among us continue to give thanks for the Cuban Eye Care Programme which helped to restore defective eyesight. Cuba has asked us for nothing in return, no favours, no commitment, no cause to champion.

Likewise, we re-affirm our friendship with the Government and people of Venezuela. It must never be forgotten that Venezuela stood at our side at our Independence in 1979, and that it was the first Latin American country to establish diplomatic relations with Saint Lucia. Venezuelan investors have stood with us in good times and in bad times. For example, WINERA, a company jointly owned by the Governments of the Windward Islands and Venezuelan interests, was established to produce boxes for the export of bananas. With the decline of the banana industry, it has had to diversify its production and export. Despite the challenges, WINERA has opted to remain with us.

My Government plans to explore air links with Latin America, particularly Brazil and Panama. It will look to appoint a non-resident Ambassador to Brazil and the Latin American countries. We hope to thaw the glacial perceptions of Central America which were formed during the era of bananas, so that we may dialogue to promote mutual understanding of each other's cause.

**Mr. President, Mr Speaker**, the central message of the report on our external relations is that Saint Lucia cannot remain in splendid isolation from the rest of the world. We have few resources to expend on diplomatic initiatives. We have little to leverage except our integrity, honour, sagacity and of course, the vote that our sovereignty confers in regional and international fora. In everything we do, we must be strategic and choose wisely. In order to survive in a world that hardly knows the value of friendship, be it historical or otherwise, we have no choice but to widen our circles of solidarity and friendship to secure support for our efforts to develop our island. In that context, my Government believes that the time has come for Saint Lucia to join its sister states of Antigua and Barbuda, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Dominica and become a full member of the *Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America*, ALBA.

My Government welcomes the keen interest of many in society to engage in functional cooperation and fraternity with our ancestral home, Africa. We have spoken clearly at the United Nations General Assembly that the

world cannot afford to ignore the rights of a continent of one billion Africans. What is more, Africa is now home to countries with great growth potential. Furthermore, my Government knows that people who are descendants of Africa including us here in the New World are still suffering from injustices around the world. We are therefore committed to finding new modes of reconnecting our African brothers and sisters across the Atlantic. To this end, the Ministry of External Affairs will be charged with the responsibility of deepening diplomatic and bilateral ties in trade, education, the creative industries and good governance.

Further, we will also have to review our current visa arrangements so that they align with our thrust to promote travel to our shores. The External Relations Review Report has also advised that Saint Lucia should make greater use of its system of Honorary Consuls to promote its agenda of commercial diplomacy.

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** this expansive external affairs agenda will call for active cooperation across Ministries and the private sector. Importantly, it will also require the strengthening and re-organisation of the Ministry of External Affairs. This will be done as soon as our financial resources permit.

## **BUSINESS COMPETITIVENESS & MODERNISATION**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** I wish to move to the matter of reforms to promote business competitiveness. Saint Lucia has for many years held the distinction of the best place in the Caribbean to do business. Over the years, however, we have slowed in our rate of implementing business reforms. The result is that our overall world ranking has dropped as other countries pursue a vigorous reform agenda. We, therefore, cannot remain stagnant any longer.

My Government will continue to make the company registration process simpler, and will pursue the timely implementation of an online registry, allowing corporate information to be searched and registered from anywhere in the world. The introduction of a Commercial Court is also on stream, and my Government hopes that this initiative will assist in issues of contract enforcement and bring greater confidence to doing business. We have already seen the introduction of card payment options in many Government agencies. These will be expanded, while my Government also looks at opportunities to introduce online transactions.

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** my Government shares the anxiety of the private sector to quicken the pace of implementation of reforms to strengthen the "Ease of Doing Business". We welcome the suggestion of the Chamber of Commerce to create a National Forum comprising key

Government agencies and the private sector, to monitor and review the ease of doing business, identify and remove bottlenecks, and to recommend changes in procedures that hinder business activity.

**Misyè Pwèzidan, Misyè Spika,** byen dèfwa nou ja tann di “Chouval chanjè mèt, i chanjé pa.” Mè si nou dakò pou machè ansanm pou awivè a an sèten dèstinasyon, menm si nou ni pou chanjè mèt asou lawout, nou pa obligè chanjé pa si bagay ka alé byen. Sé pou wézon-sala nou bizwen an kat nasyonal pou gidé nou, pou ban nou diwèksyon pou swiv twajé-a nou kay désidé asou-a ansanm. Lè ou kay tann palé di National Vision and Strategy an sé jou-a ki ka vini-an, sé sa sa vlé di. Ou kay tann palé osi di an National Forum, an Konsit Nasyonal Asosyasyon jan biznis ka pwoposé pou endé péyi-a fè pwogwé an ling di biznis, pou viwé mété Sent Lisi pwèmyé pami sé lézòt péyi Kawaib-la an sa ki ka konsèné mannyè nou ka fasilité biznis.

Dènyèman, Gouvèdman piblié an wapò asou mannyè i pwopozé kondwi wilasyon ant Sent Lisi épi lòt péyi latè-a, paski sé wilasyon sala enpòtan pou dévèlòpman ékonomik èk sosyal péyi-a. Nou kay wanfòsé sé wilasyon-an nou ni déjà épi péyi kon Langlité, Laméwik, Kanada, la Fwans, Lilyon Uropéen, Cuba, Japon épi Vennizwèl, mé nou ja koumansé palé sèwèzman épi lot péyi kon Ostrali, Brézil, Kuwait, Chili, Taiwan épi Mèksik. Nou entéwésé osi pou pousé diskisyon èk dialog épi Lafwik, péyi gwan awèl-nou.

Dènyèman osi, Gouvèdman piblié an lòt wapò asou gwan konsiltasyon-an ki té koumansé konmen lanné ki pasé-a asou chanjman nou té kay vlé fè an Konstitusyon péyi-a. Wapò-a ka pwopozé yon san katwiven dis (190) wékonmandasyon épi anchay lòt katjil Sent Lisyen toupatou vlé mété douvan pou konsidéwasyon Palman péyi-a.

Tout sé démach sala kay fè pati go kat nasyon-al-la mwen té mansyonnen toutalè-a. Nou ka envité tout sa ki sa pou patisipé an sé diskisyon-an ki kay pwan kou-a. Toulézanné, an diskou sala mwen ka pwézanaté an Kay Konsit péyi-a manm Gouvèdman asou tou lé dé fasad ka kwiyé asou yonnalòt épi asou tout pep péyi pou mété diféwans-yo asou koté, pou vini ansanm, pou twavay ansanm pou lapéti péyi-a. Mé i pa sanm nou ka éwisi. Nou pa ka wè djè klè.

Mé, Misyé Pwézidan, Misyé Spika, la ni an konmézasyon ki ni pou pwan kou an péyi-a atjwèlman avan'y twò ta. An konmézasyon asou lendikasyon, santé, sékouwité, lénègi, produktivité, asou lanviwonman, pami dót. Sé pa pou nou èspéwé lè tout disizyon ja fini fèt pou adan di nou koumansé kwititjé yo. Nou ni labitid-la, malèwèzman, pou èspéwé jis lè chouval-la ja galopé épi i ka désann chimen-an a gwan kòd, a gwan galo, pou nou vlé fèmé lapòt létjiwi-a. Diwan sèsyon Palman sala, Gouvèdman kay pwan démach pou enkouwajé tout sé kalité diskisyon sala tout oliwon péyi-a. Nou vlé tann vwa tout moun.

## **INVESTING IN INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** the vast majority of reforms that can be made quickest require introduction of Information and Communications Technologies to provide for electronic processing and automation of services. This we shall do. Under Public Sector Modernisation, we will begin roll-out of client-centred services, the digitisation of Government data to make it more accessible, the commissioning of a modern, integrated government communications network and the phased implementation of island-wide Wi-Fi.

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** information is power. This is particularly so in a world where every country is trying to attract investment. The best way to sell our country is to provide accurate information about its prospects and opportunities. Investors and businesses, planners and decision makers need information. We all need an accurate and reliable information framework on which to make sensible determinations.

We should, as a state, be more open to providing figures and facts regarding our economic indicators, employment, trade, and finances. My Government believes that publishing timely, accurate and reliable quarterly reports of key economic and fiscal performance, whether positive or negative, is critical to boosting the confidence of business, investment and

the wider society. There is also a need to improve the ability of Government agencies to communicate policies effectively so that all may know the rules, regulations and opportunities.

Consequently, my Government will also take steps to increase the statistical and data collection capacities in critical areas, particularly in tax administration, labour market systems, land administration and tourism.

## **PRODUCTIVITY & EMPLOYABILITY**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** all over the world, Governments are becoming concerned with the state of public finances. While the private sector is seen as the engine for growth, the public sector must be seen as a reliable and efficient partner responding to the needs of the citizenry. In all sectors, we must manage better, do more with what we have, and in some instances, with even less than we had before. We must become more productive. Our pursuit of productivity should be embraced, not invoke fear, anxiety or trepidation. Gains in productivity should be seen as a national want, a national good, a necessary means by which our country becomes prosperous. And so, if we are to be prosperous, we must produce.

My Government has therefore committed to the establishment of the National Productivity and Competitiveness Council to aid in this national

thrust. Being more productive means managing resources more efficiently; making smarter, calculated decisions every day, every step of the process; having the courage and confidence to question the effectiveness of the very way we do things. It will also take cutting back on waste where we can, adopting new technologies and processes.

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker**, wanting to do better does not mean that what we are doing now is not necessarily good. However, it may in fact not be good enough for a world that is increasingly competitive and demanding of the highest standards and reliability. My Government knows that greater productivity speaks directly to quality human development. It recognises the long standing need for the education system to be synergized with the real needs of the labour market and the workplace.

A highly skilled workforce is the principal need of a knowledge economy, and if we are to attract viable businesses that can pay well, we need to train our people properly. The promotion of employable citizens must, therefore, be a fundamental outcome of our education system. A determined effort must be made to give our people skills for a new economy, skills that make our country competitive and attract new, well-paying jobs.

## **SCHOOLS SHOULD BELONG TO THE COMMUNITY**

One of the challenges we have long faced in delivering education services to our population is to ensure that everyone has equal access not just to education, but quality education. We achieved this partially by the introduction of new secondary schools, which ensured that every child had a place to move on from primary into secondary education. However, the problem which persists is that even though we now have twenty three secondary schools located throughout the island, students are assigned almost purely on grades and no consideration is given to where a child lives, unless through their own deliberate choice. The time has come when we must change such an inefficient system of placement, which puts the burden on parents and on the state to transport students for many miles to schools outside of their communities.

Therefore, **Mr. President, Mr. Speaker**, my Government intends to begin in the new academic year, the partial zoning of entry into secondary schools through the Common Entrance Examination. This method will still allow students choices of schools outside of their assigned district, but will ensure that there is greater equity in distribution of students. My Government wishes to make it clear that it will continue the policy of subsidizing those students who are assigned to attend selected schools beyond their home communities. This will ultimately mean that students will be spread more by geography than by grade, thus creating more equitable schools in all communities. Of course, there will be consultation

on the particulars of this strategic reform to ensure smooth and effective implementation.

## **RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker**, energy has long been a defining ingredient of economic growth. Throughout the world, forests were first felled for wood and industry, then the mountains and hills were mined for coal, and then the deserts, seas and sands were breached for oil and natural gas. Today, we see the effects of these actions in environmental degradation and climate variability. Climate Change is no longer a figment of the imagination or an esoteric subject for academic debate. It is our reality. It comes fiercely by wind and by rain, by the rising of the sea and drying of the land. Our small island is a prime and vulnerable victim. Therefore, we must mitigate the impacts where practicable and adapt to the effects where possible. One of the areas in which this is possible is through the pursuit of a sustainable energy agenda.

Caribbean states are all seeking ways to maximize the opportunities presented by renewable energy and energy efficiency, not just because this is good for the environment, but because it makes good economic sense to reduce our need to import barrels of expensive oil when we can put to good use the sun over our heads, the currents in our oceans, the winds that blow across our land and the heat in our volcano. My Government will

lead the way in creating the environment to make investment in renewables attractive to companies large and small, and to households.

We will this year implement major initiatives in introducing renewable energy use in public buildings, while extending our programme to replace energy-hungry, high pressure sodium street light bulbs with longer-lasting, energy-efficient LED bulbs. We will also promote the use of renewable energy in the agricultural sector through the use of biogas digesters and solar dryers.

## **SECURING LIFE & LIBERTIES**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** the principal function of the State will forever be the maintenance of law and order. We take this to mean that justice and equity should prevail in our land, and that the State should enable this. Yet again, we are left to continue our lamentations about crime and violence. My Government is saddened that we must be preoccupied yet again with such malice and mayhem. In fact, the actions of some can be seen as attempts at economic suicide, particularly when they threaten our very national livelihoods.

We cannot be supine towards the scourge of crime in our land. In all ways, crime, and particularly violent crime, enervates our souls and our substance. My Government renews its commitment to fight crime and

promote citizen security, because a safe state is a successful state. The cries from young and old say the same things: let us not have to bury another daughter, another son, or another loved one not yet greyed or wrinkled.

Over the past decade, we have had to suffer nearly four hundred persons to homicide. While we appear for the year to be experiencing a reduction, we still would not be at a point where we could boast a low homicide rate. Saint Lucia, a country of 175,000 should not have to consider that it has a higher gross number of homicides a year than Norway, a country of five million. Let us turn a new page, not with more police officers, but with a respect for life, a respect for each other, a respect for human dignity.

My Government commends the efforts of the Commissioner of Police and the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force in their crime prevention and management efforts and further renews its commitment and support for other members of the disciplined services, particularly the Correctional Service, once they are engaged in the lawful execution of their duties in accordance with the law.

Though we note modest improvements in the time taken to address complaints and the overall professional approach taken by police officers, we shall continue reforming the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force to ensure

greater efficiency and accountability in policing. My Government is committed to following through with modern legislation to advance this process. In that regard, work is continuing on the drafting of a modern Police Bill. Legislation to address serious crimes and to protect witnesses will soon be brought to Parliament.

In the coming year, my Government will also continue its project to reform and modernise juvenile justice. I urge communities to take steps, not only when a crisis arises, but to take action now – for we all know the adage, *it takes a village to raise a child*.

In passing, **Mr. President, Mr. Speaker**, I wish to advise Honourable Members that my Government will take the first steps to reform the law governing the sentencing of those afflicted with drug addiction. New legislation will make treatment an option in the sentencing regime, in whole or in part.

## **PROTECTING THE VULNERABLE**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker**, another matter which speaks directly to human dignity is mental wellbeing. The affairs of the mind are invariably not understood by many, but yet it is its wellbeing that dictates our paths in life. I must, therefore, lament the apparent rise in suicides in our country. There are many persons who live in a state of depression and

who feel that their woes are insufferable. Indeed, there are many, as well, who suffer from psychiatric disorders who are not being treated, nor wish to be treated due to the stigma attached to mental illness. We should scorn the actions of casting to the streets family members who need help. We cannot consider ourselves to be an enlightened land if we are not a land of love and compassion.

My Government commits itself to playing its part in dealing with the issues of mental health and wellness. Indeed, such matters should be discussed at the highest levels of the state, of which this Parliament is not exempted. Government will review the state of mental wellness and its impact on society as a core part of its agenda for Universal Healthcare.

## **GROWTH AND MATURITY**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** while my Government will speak more to its economic agenda and fiscal policies in the submission of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure and the Budget Statement, I wish to underscore that economic growth requires both calculated risks and careful restraint. Government cannot borrow *ad infinitum*. We are not in this alone. Our fate is tied strongly to that of our sister islands of the Eastern Caribbean Currency Union, many of whom have been facing depressed fiscal situations. It therefore means that Saint Lucia must show maturity and leadership in the region.

My Government applauds the people of Saint Lucia for the generally smooth implementation of the Value Added Tax as a replacement tax for a wide suite of other taxes including Consumption Tax, Environmental Levy, Hotel Accommodation Tax and Cellular Phone Tax. It shows that despite the rancor, our people concluded that our country must move forward and modernise its tax system. Saint Lucia must pay its own way. We must pay our own fare today. This is certainly a time when we will have to let go of the *wants* of a few so that the *needs* of the many may be satisfied.

## **LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMME**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** I now move to advise Honourable Members of the legislative initiatives planned by my Government for this ensuring session. We will focus on legislation that impacts on our economic sectors, on the health sector and our electoral process.

### **New Tourism Incentives Legislation**

**Mr. Speaker, Mr. President,** there are crises worldwide. The world has changed around us dramatically, and we must now revisit what in the past we may have resisted or even denounced. Therefore, enticing the investor must be the bulwark of our growth agenda. Without new investment, our growth agenda has little hope of success.

One such initiative is the intention of my Government to enact a Tourism Stabilization and Investment Bill which will incorporate a range of new incentives aimed at expanding our island's tourism accommodation plant. These incentives will exist for a period of five years only and will be similar to the sunset provisions enacted in the run up to Cricket World Cup 2007. This Bill will grant a special Tax Holiday of twenty-five years, and possibly thirty years, in the areas designated for special development. It will also grant some of the incentives that are allowable under the Special Development Areas Act, Cap. 15:29, but which are not currently available under the Tourism Incentives Act, Cap. 15:30.

These incentives will be provided solely for investment into new room expansion and new properties. The underlying intention is to expand our room base. We must prepare for the future uptake in visitor arrivals when the world economy regains its momentum.

An area requiring greater attention is the need to develop our yachting sector. This sector is growing rapidly and it requires definition, clarity, and encouragement. My Government proposes to introduce a Yacht Services Bill in the course of this Parliamentary Session.

## **Intervention in the Energy Sector**

In the energy sector, my Government will undertake a review and modernisation of the Electricity Supply Act, Cap. 9:02. This review is long overdue. Among other things, it will allow for the entry of independent power producers in the renewable energy sector and for the establishment of a new independent regulator for the energy sector.

## **Health Sector Reforms**

Considerable attention will be paid to the Health Sector.

My Government will move aggressively to enact new legislation to prepare for the inevitable modernization of our health services. Already, a Draft Bill to establish a governance structure for the new national hospital is in circulation. My Government proposes to invite Parliament to consider a wide range of legislation, including a Health Records Bill, a Mental Health Bill and crucially, a Nursing Practitioners Bill to govern the qualifications and registration of nurse practitioners.

## **Stronger Elections Legislation**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** legislation governing our electoral process should not be left for enactment on the eve of a General Election. This only induces suspicion and cynicism. Government therefore intends to proceed with the several amendments to the Elections Act, Cap 18:04,

Revised Laws of Saint Lucia, 2006, as recommended by the Electoral Commission. Additionally, my Government is desirous to keep its commitment to the electorate and will enact new legislation to:

- (a) Render it unlawful for individuals who have committed crimes from participating in Elections without frank and full disclosure of their criminal record to the electorate;
- (b) Make it necessary for all intending candidates to declare whether they are in possession of a passport issued by another country or state and if so hold allegiance to another state contrary to the Constitution of Saint Lucia; and
- (c) Stiffen penalties for those persons who engage in bribing voters on elections day and otherwise.

**Misyé Pwézidan, Misyé Spika**, anchay pawòl ja palé isi-a bon maten-an, an langlé épi an kwéyòl. Mwen pa kay di “Sa ki tann, tann”. Plito, mwen ka plédé tout moun “Kouté byen, pa kasé bwa an zòwèy-ou” Nou bizwen tout moun mété lanmen an gwan koudmen nasyonal-la ki kay endé péyi-a pousé douvan lè sé mové tan ékonomik entènasyonal-la éklèsi. Sé pa pou di nou pa ni modèl ében ègzanmp pou swiv: moun ki ja fouyé fondasyon épi mété pilotwi pou twavay-la ki ni pou fèt-la. Si la ni yon lison tout sé moun-sala ja moutwé nou, sé ki pa tout bagay ki sa fèt tout swit; gwan twavay pa ka fèt an dé jou. Sé pasyans ki fo. Chonjé la pawoli ansèt-nou. “Epi pasyans, ou sa awivé tiwé boyo bètwouj”. Pa ni anyen ki pa posib épi détèminasyon, bon konpwann èk lagwas di Dyé.

## **VOICES BEYOND THIS CHAMBER**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker,** a lot has been said this morning, and rightfully so. Yet the cause of nation building does not reside in my voice alone nor the voice of this Parliament. We must therefore listen closely to the voices beyond this Chamber. No one of us can be devolved from our everyday responsibilities towards each other. This is true for every community, every family and every individual.

We cannot cast aside the strength and wisdom of all of our citizens, no matter their station in life. Equally, we must not diminish the ability of all Saint Lucians to act. Community action which is the banding together whether through Church, mothers' and fathers' groups, charity or service organisations or even simply coming out to help a neighbour in *koudmen* - must then be consummated with a deep commitment to personal, individual, community and national cause.

This is an age where our hands must be strongly clasped together in unity, so that the weight of the weak can be supported by the sinews of the nation. This is a time to build a nation, brick by brick, pillar by pillar, not a time to tear down our brothers and sisters or pillage their property. This is a time to exercise discipline and restraint of our own wants, in light of the obvious thirst of others.

## **LAND OF LEGENDS AND LAUREATES**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker**, we should never forget that we are a land of legends and of laureates, the land of Lewis, Walcott and Alexander. Our identity has often been shaped by many great heroes, nationally, and in the community. I therefore call on Parliament and the nation to celebrate figures such as the recently departed Robert Devaux, who as a historian, founder and director of the Saint Lucia National Trust was so instrumental in conserving for generations to come our nation's patrimony. We also remember Ione Erlinger-Ford, whose heart and soul worked tirelessly for women, victims of abuse, and the men and women of the Ex-Service League here at home. Indeed, there are many heroes who have gone on and we must find a fitting way to celebrate them.

My Government has initiated a National Heroes Commission, and has also begun an exercise for the naming of public buildings and infrastructure. We will this year be establishing three monuments, including one for former Prime Minister, Sir John Compton, commissioned by the former Government. This exercise of memorial will also be extended to the naming of our streets and thoroughfares. I hope that other fitting means of tribute will be found throughout our society.

## **YOU PLANT IT**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker**, the South American Poet and Nobel Prize Winner for Literature in 1945, Gabriela Mistral, said the following:

*"If there is a tree to be planted, you plant it. If there is an error to be amended, you amend it. If there is a task that all avoid, you do it."*

Last year, as part of the Diamond Jubilee celebrating sixty years of Her Majesty on the throne, we in Saint Lucia planted nearly five thousand trees. There are many more trees to be planted. You must plant them. For in every way, symbolically and literally, we must protect our island, conserve and honour our land. At this time we want everything instantly, and yet trees remind us that not all things are instant. Mythical seeds with overnight beanstalks do not yet exist. Good things take time. They take nurturing, they take patience. In planting a national tree, the same too can be said.

## **NURTURING THE NATIONAL TREE**

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker**, in our onward emergence as a people, in building our nation, in nurturing our tree, we must all share in the responsibility of planting and caring if we are to share in the victory of reaping. And so, in parting, I leave with you seven tenets for progress:

We must have a common goal for, like a body, all parts must work in consonance to amplify the greatest output.

We must share our vision and see the same pathways, whether we are at the top or at the bottom, on the sides or in the centre.

We must be humble, admit failings and recognise mistakes, provided that we learn from them.

We must empower our people to be leaders, to be part of decision making, to share the gifts, talents and skills for the greater good.

We must celebrate achievements and great performances. We should certainly do this for our heroes while they are in the realm of the living.

We should support each other during difficult times so that we can all succeed, including those who are weaker, more vulnerable than us. In troubled times, those who can sacrifice more, should do so without expectation of reward.

And finally, we should not stray from our values and our sense of purpose. At the heart of the desire for Government is to provide service to the state that is efficient. Though the stratagems may change from one term to the other, there must be national consensus on the core fundamentals of the Saint Lucian people and our purpose.

Mr. President and Honourable members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Honourable members of the House of Assembly, Saint Lucia has seen challenging times in the past and we have overcome them. However, I

wish to comfort and calm my fellow country men and women, that there is no doubt in the mind of my Government that we shall manoeuvre our national barque away from all perils be they of stagnated, isolated waters or the inundation of economic storms, and into safe harbour.

**Mr. President, Mr. Speaker**, resolve must be our calling, responsibility must be our character; reticence in being bold, though, would be our folly. It is a time for us to find ourselves, find our Saint Lucian identity, to define our Saint Lucian willpower and tenacity, to find our innate human ability to come together, to work together, to overcome adversity hand in hand. It is certainly better that we plant the seeds of change today so that our children might reap the fruits of a bountiful heritage in the years to come.

Misyé Pwézidan, Misyé Spika, I lé pou nou touvé kòy-nou; pou touvé lidantité Sent Lisyen-nou; pou touvé bon natiwèl-la nou ni an fon tjè-nou-an ki kay endé nou vini ansanm, pou twavay ansanm, pou vini about difikilté-nou ansanm, kon yon pèp. I kay bokou pli mèyè pou nou chanjé sa sa ki bizwen chanjé atjwèlman, a sézè isi, plito nou èspéwé pou denmen, pou an lòt jou, an lòt tan. Si pa sa, nou pa kay ni anyen ki vo valè pou ich-nou éwityé. Sé pou nou anbwassé wèspansabilité-nou. Nou pa sa kité lapèwèz anpéché nou pwan sé disizyon-an nou ni pou pwan-an. Sé pou nou pwan towo-a pa kòn-li épi lité épi'y jikatan mété'y atè.

And with this Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Senate and the House of Assembly I now formally declare open this third Session of the Tenth Parliament of Saint Lucia. I thank you.