

Your Excellencies, Prime Minister, Ladies & Gentlemen

It could hardly give me greater pleasure to be with all of you here in Saint Lucia this evening and to play my part, however small, in helping you celebrate this fortieth anniversary of Saint Lucia's Independence.

Her Majesty The Queen specifically asked me to bring you her warmest greetings and congratulations. I realise, of course, that I am slightly late for the big day itself but I have to admit that I am rather glad to have given you all an excuse to continue the party!

Above all, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am delighted to return to Saint Lucia and to have this opportunity to see so many of you once again. My wife and I have particularly fondly memories of our last visit here, in 2008, as indeed I have from my time on the West Indies Station when I was serving in the Royal Navy back in 1973.

On this occasion, I am so pleased to be here, at Vieux Fort, and to have this opportunity to join the people of the South of the island for this special celebration.

Ladies and Gentlemen, if I may say so, for a small island, Saint Lucia has a big history, and the road that St. Lucia travelled to Independence in 1979 was long and took many turns. Four decades on, as you look back at the journey you have taken and look ahead to the future you are building, the people of Saint Lucia have so much of which they can be proud.

Today, the name of this land – the only country in the world to bear the name of a woman – is known the world over. 1.2 million international visitors flock to these shores each year; your sportsmen and women, and your musicians, are making a name for themselves internationally; as are young entrepreneurs such as Johanan Dujon, whom I met recently in London and whose company making organic fertiliser from toxic sargassum seaweed, the Caribbean's first indigenous agriculture biotech company, is just one example of St Lucia's abundant talent and creativity. Famously, of course, St. Lucia has more Nobel Laureates, per capita, than any other country on the planet.

Above all, Ladies and Gentlemen, it gives me particular pride that St. Lucia today is such a vital member of our Commonwealth family, which binds together 2.4 billion of us, across fifty-three countries on six continents, through our shared experience and common values. This year we celebrate the Commonwealth's seventieth birthday, making it, therefore, just a few months younger than I am myself. The Commonwealth has been a cornerstone of my life for as long as I can remember and, through all the unprecedented global change of these past seven decades, it seems to me that the Commonwealth remains as vital today as it has ever been. Importantly, the Commonwealth brings us together, and gives us the means to harness shared opportunities as well as to address common challenges.

There no greater challenge facing all of us, in my view, and indeed in that of The Prime Minister as we heard, than that of climate change, which I know poses nothing short of an existential threat to this island as it does to every part of this region. I saw for myself the devastation that Hurricanes Maria and Irma wrought in Dominica, Barbuda and the British

Virgin Islands when I visited those communities in November 2017. Tackling the truly alarming threat of climate change, and finding some ways of mitigating the risk it presents, is, and must continue to be, a top priority for the Commonwealth. I am particularly pleased to know, therefore, that through the Commonwealth Marine Economies Programme, the mapping of Saint Lucia's seabed will not only inform our understanding of the effects of climate change, but has the potential to help develop Saint Lucia's vital Blue Economy in significant and sustainable ways.

For this, and so many other reasons, I have great hope for the future of Saint Lucia and her people.

This is a strong society, I know, and one which places special emphasis on family and community. As you celebrate, this year, everything that Saint Lucia has achieved over these four decades of her Independence, I know that you also take pride in committing yourselves to building the strongest, brightest future for this country. For my part, I can only pray that Saint Lucia and her people continue to thrive and to flourish, and that prosperity, security and wellbeing might be the inheritance of many generations of Saint Lucians to come.

Thank you Ladies and Gentlemen and Happy Independence Day!