



“Now is the Time”

2020 New Year’s Address by

Prime Minister Honourable Allen M. Chastanet

Sunday 12th January 2020

Good evening, fellow Saint Lucians, at home and abroad. A Happy New Year to you all. I pray that 2020 will bring you good health, peace, happiness and prosperity.

I thank you all for the spirit of giving and love which flowed throughout our island in December. It was a joy for my family and I to share in the festivities, especially in my constituency of Micoud South.

Saint Lucia, 2019 was a year of continuing on our journey to bring empowerment to all our people and to build a new Saint Lucia.

You will recall that on assuming office in 2016, and on other occasions thereafter, I indicated that our government would need about three years before we would really start seeing tangible results. Our task was not easy, in fact what we found was rather daunting - unemployment was at an alarming high of 25 percent, our country had gone through five years of zero or negative growth, we were facing crippling levels of debt and there was severe deterioration in our physical infrastructure, social services, particularly in health, education and in community services.

Most of our institutions, economic and social sectors were either in disarray or dysfunctional, from the police to the judiciary, from agriculture to education. Many projects which should have been completed by the former government such as the two hospitals, the desilting of the John Compton Dam, all critical projects, had either not started or were far from complete. In short, the fiscal and economic situation was dire and there was a general sense of hopelessness all over the country. This is the backdrop against which my party was elected.

Immediately, our team of workers rolled up our sleeves and got down to the business of turning this situation around.

There is little question that the visible improvements in the economy and new direction has restored our country's hope and confidence. Our policies are working and we are moving in the right direction.

One of our first actions was to fulfill our general election promise to ease the burdens on the entire population.

We immediately implemented "Five to Stay Alive":

- We reduced the 15% Value Added Tax (VAT)
- Put a freeze on property taxes
- Introduced an amnesty on hospital bills
- Reduced the vehicle licensing costs
- Doubled the allocations for the school feeding and transportation programmes.

Other measures included:

- Doubling the budgetary allocation for agriculture.
- Addressing deficiencies in the security and justice system.
- Starting the phased transition to the Owen King-EU Hospital.
- We have spent millions on improving infrastructure in almost every constituency creating economic benefits and employment - roads, community centres, sports facilities, primary healthcare services.
- We have improved water supply systems in the north and the south.

Today, 3 ½ years into our administration, Saint Lucians can see and feel the positive signs that we are moving in the right direction.

The most recent IMF assessment on Saint Lucia described our growth prospects in the near term as favourable and projected that the commencement of our imminent infrastructural projects will substantially boost growth in the 2020-2022 period.

Unemployment which was at 25 percent when we came in, has been reduced to 17 percent according to the most recent reports from the Statistics Department, and we anticipate a further reduction this year.

The undisputed fact is that our economy has recorded growth **in every single year** since we took office.

I make this point to emphasize the fact that history shows that Saint Lucia always prospers under a United Workers Party administration. We have a track record laid down by our founding father Sir John Compton of consistently developing this country.

When I addressed you at the start of 2019, I spoke to the implementation of a number our Government's plans. Several of our signature projects are underway especially in the southern part of the island.

We are excited about the airport redevelopment project, our first FBO Private Jet Facility is now operational and the rebuilding of St. Jude's Hospital continues at a rapid pace.

The Pearl of the Caribbean project had quite an auspicious start on National Day with our island's first international horse racing event which attracted media, investors and visitors from all over the world and has created an unprecedented buzz about Saint Lucia, regionally and internationally. The public showed their overwhelming support for the project by coming out in spectacular fashion for this day at the races – attendance was in excess of 7,500. Many had flown in from New York, Toronto, London and all over the Caribbean region to participate in the rebirth of the South. The next race is scheduled for mid-February just in time for our 41st Independence Anniversary.

Does anyone remember the 1970s when Vieux Fort was humming with industrial and manufacturing activity? It started with an event on May 1, 1970 that was billed as D-Day, - "D" for development, when Hewanorra International Airport was commissioned, Halcyon Days hotel was opened, as was Windward Island Packaging Company (WINERA). The United Workers Party government's plan back then was to make Vieux Fort the industrial capital of Saint Lucia -creating an industrial estate that attracted a host of manufacturers.

Apart from WINERA, Windward and Leeward Brewery came, along with some unforgettable names like Milton Bradley, CARIMAN, Manumatics, Marstan Mills. For nearly two decades, Vieux Fort was booming, providing jobs for people not only from the town but from Laborie, Soufriere, Choiseul and Micoud. Many businesses in Castries opened branches in Vieux Fort. Regrettably, under the Labour Party much of what was achieved during that time was lost.

Today, salvation is coming to the south. Added to the Pearl of the Caribbean project, we have the airport, the cruise ship terminal, the redevelopment of Anse Des Sables and the Cannelles project. The free zone

at Hewanorra, that was under-performing when we came into office, is now 100 percent filled and, more importantly, we have a waiting list.

We have also invested significant resources in Soufriere, another town where there had been widespread neglect.

We opened the Hummingbird Beach Park, upgraded and redesigned the Soufriere Town Square, redeveloped the Old Trafford playing field and converted it into a farmers' market and bus terminal, upgraded the Sulphur Springs Park, and began work on two new sporting facilities. Roads are being attended to, a new hospital is being built and Soufriere has become the poster child for Village Tourism. Similar programmes are being implemented in Anse la Raye and Gros Islet and eventually rolled out islandwide.

To the north, we are making changes in Castries which includes the Market Redevelopment Project. The old structure had for years been the target of criticism and ridicule, mainly because it failed to offer proper shelter and conveniences to vendors and the general public. The newly built market is hurricane-resistant and enables the free flow goods and people. The goal here is to make the Castries market one of the best attractions for locals and visitors, a permanent home for authentic local arts and crafts, as well as agro-processing products. Our vendors must proudly sell what is ours.

We have on previous occasions, shared with you our plans and vision for uplifting the entire city with more green spaces and less congestion; some of which will unfold during this year.

Our tourism sector has grown steadily during the past year and we are truly defining Brand Saint Lucia.

Many hotels reported record occupancies especially during otherwise slow periods; a contributing factor being our summer festivals which also benefitted car rental companies, taxi drivers, tour operators and other local service providers throughout the summer.

I am so proud that our Tourism Minister Dominic Fedee was voted Caribbean Tourism Minister of the Year and Saint Lucia recaptured the award for World's Leading Honeymoon Destination at the prestigious World Travel Awards. We have also regained our position as the leading tourism destination in the OECS. Our cruise tourism arrivals have hit record numbers and stemming from the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) we signed with Carnival Corporation and Royal Caribbean Cruises we expect a visiting team to look at the proposed projects to improve the quality of Port Castries and a new cruise home port in Vieux Fort.

Meanwhile, we are substantially increasing our hotel room stock. Following negotiations and the securing of the several approvals, the physical hotel projects are set to start, among them: the Hyatt project in Choc Bay, a Dreams and Secrets Hotel at Cannelles and the highly-anticipated Cabot Saint Lucia, a game-changing project for the Caribbean golf industry.

Our discussions with international carriers have borne fruit and we have experienced an increase in airlift into the island, resulting in over 400,000 stayover arrivals for the first time. We were thrilled in December to welcome our new American Airlines flight from Chicago and indications are that we are headed for another excellent year for this industry.

As we continue to grow as a country, we are addressing our road infrastructure with an island-wide road rehabilitation programme, the upgrading of feeder roads, the rehabilitation of the West Coast highway and the building of an East Coast highway to more easily connect the north to the south; and thereby address the traffic congestion on the Gros Islet Highway. The financing of these projects is being provided by the Taiwanese, the CDB, and other developmental agencies with the loans supported by the fuel and airport tax.

Some of you have already seen the results with work on the Cas en Bas road in Gros Islet, the Forestierre road, the Ti Morne road in Union, the Saltibus

road in Choiseul, the Belair road in Castries South East. Work is imminent for the road in Dennery Village, the Blanchard and Spring roads in Micoud South and the New Development roads in Soufriere, just to name a few.

The Ministry of Infrastructure's Road Rehabilitation programme will cost - EC\$110 million, the Millennium Highway and West coast road - EC\$130 million, the Cul De Sac Bridge – EC\$30 million, Choc Bridge- EC\$22 million and the Feeder Roads – EC\$50 Million. Nearly 350 Million Dollars. Making this the largest such investment in Saint Lucia's history.

It is no secret that there was a mass exodus of farmers from the Agriculture sector during the reign of the Labour Party. Our farmers are too important to let this trend continue and thankfully with the support and incentives we are seeing a turnaround. In 2016, banana production increased despite the challenges from natural disasters. We are actively working on new markets and discussions remain underway with Winfresh to strengthen the company's operations and expand its export base.

Under our Food Import Substitution Programme the Ministry of Agriculture is working closely with farmers to decrease on the food import bills by increasing our output of seven crops: cabbage, lettuce, watermelon, cantaloupe, bell pepper, pineapple and tomato. The intention is be fully self-sufficient in those crops.

We are also putting greater emphasis on our regional markets and exploring expansion with Export Saint Lucia to improve our agro-processing sector and two agro processing plants are now in operation at Anse Ger in Micoud and Fond Assau in Babonneau.

Young people, now is the time to explore the opportunities in this sector, especially when it comes to the production of cocoa, honey and livestock.

Addressing the needs of our education system has been multifaceted. We simultaneously have been tackling ageing infrastructure, outdated curriculums and the lack of innovation.

To date, we have already spent \$25 million to address deteriorating school infrastructure, which is in sharp contrast to the \$5 million spent by the Labour Party in five years. We have finally put doors on some classrooms where they never existed, repaired leaking roofs, fixed hazardous electrical and plumbing problems which had been festering for decades. The list goes on, but we will get it done; as we have allocated another 10 million for school repairs for 2020-21.

This month we begin construction work on three Primary schools under the Education Quality Improvement Programme (EQUIP). These schools are La Guerre Combined, Gordon Walcott Memorial Methodist and Vide Boutielle Primary.

In modernizing and innovating our schools we have already started teaching computer coding and robotics. Our next exciting venture is the introduction of e-books, as a pilot project for form threes. Unlike with the previous administration the new programme be supported by downloadable lessons, info-graphics and internet links.

This will significantly cost of books for parents. If we give our children tools such as laptops and e-books it must be supported with the proper programming and supervision for effective learning. We wish to say a special thanks to the Republic of China (Taiwan) for their commitment towards ICT in education over the next three-year period.

We are grateful to our diplomatic partners who continue and in some cases have increased scholarships for Saint Lucians to study abroad. These opportunities are even more accessible, if we as Saint Lucians become multi-lingual.

We are excited about the appointment of a new Principal at the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, Dr. Keith Nurse, who is recognized as one of the

experts on the Creative or Orange economy. We are looking forward to diversifying the programmes offered at SALCC, which will include converting Radio Saint Lucia into a recording studio to enhance Saint Lucia's expertise in the field of broadcasting and music production.

One of our biggest success stories has been in the manufacturing sector. In the last three and a half years we targeted this sector for employment and investment generation:

- Caribbean Quality Meats Ltd., a poultry processing plant is soon to begin operations in Dennery.
- Invest Saint Lucia has also partnered with a Jamaican company, "Itel-B-P-O Smart Solutions" in developing a 20,000 sq. ft. factory shell set to be operational by April at the Hewanorra Free Zone, which will create even more employment in the south.
- A US\$30 million expansion is currently underway at St. Lucia Distillers Limited. Similar expansion works are planned at the Windward and Leeward Brewery. Attention is also being paid to the restoration of the coconut factory in Soufriere.

Invest Saint Lucia has also been facilitating home ownership for all Saint Lucians. Two residential developments—one in Bois Jolie, in Dennery and the other in Beauchamp, Micoud are currently underway at prices that are accessible to working middle income Saint Lucians especially the youth. Our Government also has major Housing projects earmarked for La Clery, Rock Hall, Talvern, Belair, Anse Ger, La Ressource, River Doree and Canaries.

We continue to be inspired by the success of OJO Labs, the only artificial intelligence real estate company globally which began operations in Vieux Fort in 2017 and now provides meaningful employment for hundreds of young people.

These and more projects are designed to encourage entrepreneurship, ownership, create jobs and more importantly generate revenue.

We have not come to you with empty slogans like “Jobs, Jobs, Jobs” and “Better Days”. Rather we believe that once the hard work is done and the foundations laid, the jobs and the other benefits will follow. The evidence speaks for itself – and we still have 18 months to work.

Saint Lucia, we know that health care is an issue that impacts every single home and family. I reiterate our commitment to ensuring affordable, quality health care for all. You can expect the full commissioning of the Owen King-EU hospital as the majority of the faulty equipment has been fixed or is being replaced and we have set a deadline for us to move in by the first half of this year.

As I mentioned, work is also proceeding at the St Jude’s Hospital site. Many of you by now are fully aware of the major structural and safety issues which exist in the hodge-podge of structures built by the former administration. Our Government is committed to getting it right.

We are currently constructing a 90-bed facility that will cater for both inpatient and outpatient services. We will soon be able to put behind us the sad memories that have lingered since 2009 when the original structure was destroyed by fire. I want to thank the management and staff of St. Jude for their hard work and more importantly, patience in staying the course with their excellent service during those very trying years.

Though the Dennerly Polyclinic had to be redesigned because of inadequacies in the original plan, we anticipate work will start soon on the redesigned facility.

We have increased the operating hours of the Gros Islet polyclinic to improve the services offered to residents in the north. Also on the way is the construction of healthcare centres in Anse La Raye and Micoud, the contract for which was signed on Tuesday this week.

Of course, the biggest deficiency in our health care system is that tens of thousands of Saint Lucians are unable to afford health care. The Labour Party talked about universal health care but had no plan on how to pay for it. Now, in partnership with the World Bank we are strengthening Saint Lucia's public health care system by improving accessibility, efficiency and responsiveness of key health services.

In this year's Budget, I shall expand on our plans for a National Health Insurance Programme. We aim to ensure that all Saint Lucians have insurance and government will cover the vulnerable, elderly and unemployed.

In addition, 33 primary health care centres will be equipped to serve as the first point of detection for infectious diseases as well as emergencies. In partnership with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), a smart health care project is underway to make 17 health centres safer, greener and more resilient to natural disasters.

We cannot and will not deny that the crime situation continues to affect us deeply. We feel it every time a young person loses their life through violence. It not only impacts their families but we also lose what they may have contributed to the development of our society.

We cannot look at the crime situation without doing serious reflection about the way we lead our daily lives, raise our children, our interactions, the way we resolve conflict and how impulsive we may be to react or get retribution.

We must continuously work on this as a society, even as the Government implements measures to help prevent, detect and solve crime.

Internally, we have started a process of measuring the results on a weekly basis.

While we have not achieved the kind of success we would all want, we know that the effort we are making will begin to pay off. We remain committed to the multi-pronged strategy to significantly reduce crime.

We have already embarked on the following:

- Empowering and modernizing our police force with communications equipment, vehicles including motorcycles
- We now have 95 CCTV camera feeds in strategic areas and in 2020 will mount 525 additional camera feeds from Castries to Gros Islet, to Vieux Fort.
- We have recruited over 80 new officers with targeted patrols already resulting in a drop in assaults.
- We re-opened the Forensic lab.
- We started with 12 city police and are now up to 42.
- We restored the operations of our coastguard vessels and radar system which had been dysfunctional.
- The Director of Public Prosecutions has received increased resources for his office.
- We facilitated the strengthening of the judiciary with more magistrates and judges.

And despite attempts to derail plans to build a new Police Headquarters, we will move forward with the new structure at the old prison site in the first quarter of 2019.

Simultaneously, we are working towards tackling crime at its root with social programmes such as Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) which focuses on mitigating risk factors that trigger criminal and anti-social behaviours. There will be a special emphasis on young men, vulnerable groups, especially children, at-risk-youth and women in target communities. We also have after-school programmes intended to keep our kids meaningfully engaged. In 2019, we increased the number of social workers

and revised our incarceration and rehabilitation policies as part of the crime fighting strategy.

In the next few weeks, we will be making an announcement about impending changes intended to accelerate measures to bring crime under control and to strengthen the police force.

As we begin 2020, I must also address the issue of Climate Change and safeguarding the environment. I appeal to all Saint Lucians to be forever cognizant of these issues and to do our part to lessen our carbon footprint and take pride in our surroundings.

I refer here to the indiscriminate disposal of garbage that we see in many places and the clogging of gutters and sidewalks with debris, especially plastics and styrofoam products. The Government has made a steady effort to phase out the use of styrofoam and to continuously clear drains, but all this means nothing if we as citizens don't take personal responsibility and stop littering our beautiful island. In my budget, I will also be unveiling plans for new technologies to deal with the disposal of solid waste. I will continue on the international stage to champion Climate Change and its impact on Small Island Developing States like Saint Lucia.

Over the past 18 months, as a Government we have spent millions building and upgrading sports facilities in our country because we believe in our youth and we believe that sports can open many doors, builds character, teaches discipline and focus.

The achievements of our athletes, not just in 2019, is further evidence that we can compete and thrive on an international level. We can build on the accomplishments of people like Daren Sammy in cricket and Lavern Spencer in athletics, who in 2019 won another Gold at the PanAm Games. At the same Games in Lima, javelin thrower Albert Reynolds brought home the bronze.

We continue to follow closely the success of sprinter Julien Alfred, who is already setting records so early in the season. We have two amazing Saint Lucians, Chris Boucher and Terrance Mann, now playing in the NBA.

Kimani Melius was named captain of the West Indies team for the Under-19 World Cup in South Africa. Our Under 15 boys team were crowned champs at CONCACAF. Victory was also ours at the 2019 Windward Island Schools Games.

These successes must inspire us to rally around our team for the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo.

It shows us that we must create the facilities for our youth to give them a chance to achieve greatness. We are currently working on upgrading our sports facilities with the lighting of the La Fargue Playing Field in Choiseul/Saltibus and improving the Soufriere Mini Stadium, the Ruby Cricket Ground, the Balata field and the Desruisseaux Football Field. It is why we have broken ground for the commencement of the upgrading of the Micoud Playing Field. Also to be upgraded are the Dennery Village football and cricket fields, just to name a few. The new National Sports Academy in Gros Islet, where over 50 students are currently enrolled, will also receive new facilities.

Not just in sports, in the Arts we are showing so much promise: The incredible theatrical production “A Little Folk Tale” written by amazingly 20 year old Monique Auguste and 19 year old Jessie Mayers, that formed part of our riveting cultural showcase at Carifesta 2019, our musicians and singers taking that authentic Lucian sound Global, a record year for our Carnival with young band leaders spearheading that growth. To the young comedians, *Dirv2Funny*, *Keidel Sonny*, *Noah Seas*, using our culture and social media to make people laugh, to the innovators, to the young influencers.

We see you. There is no stopping your shine.

Let’s face it, we have some amazing young people in this country. Next week we will announce young upcoming talent from Saint Lucia who will be

named Brand Ambassadors. We will also be naming Cultural Ambassadors who will leverage their celebrity status in the interest of our country.

In 2019, I have had the privilege to meet with many of them to exchange ideas and truly hear their voices. I look forward to more engagements in 2020 with Saint Lucians from all walks of life.

I must take a moment to assure Saint Lucians, that despite the empty accusations and spreading of false news that seems to pervade our society of late, our Government remains committed to Good Governance and Transparency.

In April 2017, we illustrated this by passing the landmark amendment to the Crown Proceedings Act, which was a recommendation of the 2009 Ramsahoye Commission of Inquiry. The Amendment allows for the recovery of public funds not to be statute bound. It is worth noting that during that particular sitting of Parliament, the Opposition chose not to remain in the House to discuss this critical matter.

Be also assured that the announced investigations into matters related to public projects and secret agreements are ongoing and I will provide the necessary updates in due course.

Our Government believes that all public officials should give full accounts of their stewardship, and be willing to engage the public. Hence, we have been very active spreading factual Government information via the bi-weekly publication “Our Saint Lucia”, our regular pre-Cabinet engagements with the press, regular appearances on talk shows and via the National Television Network which has recently launched a series of new and engaging programming featuring interviews with Government Ministers and Officials. You can also find out what is happening on my own schedule via the Prime Minister’s Weekly Diary which is posted on my facebook and Instagram pages.

During the past year we celebrated our 40th Independence anniversary with a range of successful activities. There is truly a sense of national pride beginning to re-emerge in our country.

It is the hope of our Government that we will continue to build on this and come together, united in a common purpose of empowering ourselves and developing our country, by taking advantage of the opportunities being created.

I wish to thank the members of my Cabinet for their continued hard work; knowing that there is still so much we have to do to keep Saint Lucia on this upward path.

I also want to thank my wife Raquel, my family, my support staff at the Office of the Prime Minister and my constituents in Micoud South, for their continued support and participation in helping in their own way to push this country forward.

My fellow Saint Lucians, I know you feel that our country is on the move. You feel Saint Lucia beginning to rise once more, as a leader and a nation unafraid to take bold choices. I know you feel the growing buzz in our country and that the region and the world is keeping an eye on us. We must not get distracted. We must remain inspired by the Saint Lucia we love.

We know and we can feel: “Now is the Time: Let’s do this together!”

May God bless you all and may God bless our beloved Saint Lucia.