



**NEW CHALLENGES: NEW OPPORTUNITIES  
TO CONTINUE TO BUILD A STRONGER SAINT LUCIA TOGETHER**

**THRONE SPEECH**

By

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**of Saint Lucia**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Madam President, Mr. Speaker: as our nation confronts COVID 19, there are those to whom Saint Lucia is immensely grateful and whose contribution must be applauded:

- Our front liners and essential workers: Medical and health personnel, emergency staff and first responders
- Police and security personnel
- Hotel employees who assisted with those in administrative quarantine
- Shop, supermarket and gas station employees
- NEMO personnel and the volunteers who supported them

International partners, in particular, the Government of Cuba which provided a special brigade of 113, including doctors, nurses and biomedical engineers and the Republic of China (Taiwan) for the supply of personal protective equipment.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, while we have recorded no deaths here in Saint Lucia, some of our nationals overseas have passed

away as a result of COVID 19. We offer our deepest condolences and join in mourning with their families and loved ones.

## **THE AGENDA FOR 2020**

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, in 2016, with the signing of the Paris Agreement, the issue of climate change took center stage, and the world acknowledged and prepared for adverse changes in climate patterns. The year 2017 was unparalleled for the Caribbean, as we witnessed the utter destruction wrought by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The Bahamas is still recovering from the devastation of Hurricane Dorian in 2019. Each year, with climate change deemed the new normal, our tiny nation prepares for the worst, while praying for the best.

In 2020, as we have observed the rapid and devastating progression of the novel corona virus, are left to wonder whether this is yet another version of the new normal. In this configuration, hurricanes and droughts are more severe, sea levels and global temperatures rise, and a virus, indiscriminating and invisible to the

naked eye except for its effect, wages war on human beings the world over.

How do we face this challenge? By giving meaning to our theme for Independence 2020 – “Now is the time, Let’s do this together!”

Saint Lucia, we are an exceptional people. Not only must we survive the current circumstances, but we must develop the wherewithal to live with COVID19. To do this, we must seize the opportunity, accept this as our Kairos moment and create out of the crisis a stepping stone for building an even more resilient country.

This attitude will redefine my Government’s approach to such major strategic intervention areas, as our health system, agriculture and food security, education, citizen security and justice, the operation of the public service and the management of Saint Lucia’s borders.

## **THE YEAR OF HEALTH**

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, health is a main pillar of development and has been given suitable prominence in our country's Medium Term Development Strategy. In planning for the new fiscal year, my Government determined that 2020 should be dubbed, 'The Year of Health'. At the time, there was nothing to portend COVID 19 and the dramatic, devastating impact it would have on our society.

Significant resources have been allocated to respond to this new threat to global health. Victoria Hospital was re-designed and commissioned as a respiratory hospital and several community clinics were established throughout the island, to facilitate identification and treatment of infected persons. The transitioning from Victoria Hospital to the Owen King European Union (OKEU) Hospital was accelerated, and this modern institution is now fully operational. Madam President, Mr. Speaker, I wish to express on behalf of the entire community our profound gratitude to the

courageous and dedicated health professionals and other officials and volunteers from all the agencies who successfully executed the transition to the OKEU Hospital, while simultaneously managing the national response to COVID 19. This was no easy undertaking.

While we must continue to address COVID19, my Government will, simultaneously, promote other initiatives to develop the health sector. Among these, the St. Jude's Hospital is paramount, and work continues towards completion in 2021. Equally important is the implementation of the first phase of the National Health Insurance, which will ensure equitable access to a determined package of quality health services. In the course of this year, My Government will enact **legislation to define and effect the governance structure for National Health Insurance.**

My Government will tackle communicable diseases, by improving health facilities and laboratory capacity and strengthening public health surveillance and emergency management capabilities. In this way it will be possible to rapidly identify, control, and,

eventually eliminate re-emerging and emerging infectious diseases.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, in 2017, Cancers, Heart Diseases, Strokes and Diabetes Mellitus were the four leading causes of death in Saint Lucia. A primary health care approach - featuring promotion, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and palliative care - will be used in an attempt to reduce the incidence of these and other chronic diseases.

## **PROMOTING AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY**

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, we have all seen numerous memes on the internet relating to weight gain during COVID 19 quarantine. They bring levity to a difficult situation – laughter helps us to cope better – but they also convey the serious message of the value of healthy diets.

The priority focus areas set out in the Agricultural Policy Framework and Strategy (2016-2021) include the enhancement of

national food and nutrition security, as well as agricultural diversification and reduction of the food import bill. The value of these priorities has been thrown into sharp relief over the past months with reductions in trade flows as countries closed their borders to reduce COVID 19 transmission. My Government intends to continue to emphasize these areas, together with the Resuscitation of the Banana Industry and Building Resilience to Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction.

The **Plant Protection Act** will be revised to prevent and control the entry of pests into Saint Lucia, adhere to the International Plant Protection Convention and facilitate trade in plants and plant products.

## **TOURISM**

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the current shutdown of the tourism industry as a consequence of the corona virus pandemic, Saint Lucia's tourism sector has performed



admirably over the past years, and, as we look to the future, my Government intends to implement the National Tourism Strategy and Action plan, which charts a practical and sustainable course for the development of the tourism sector for the 2019-2023 period. Tourism initiatives will improve governance and provide the platform to spread the economic benefits of tourism to an increased number of local communities.

It is our firm conviction that the institutional architecture for tourism must be transformed in order to maximize the sector's contribution to national development. To this end, the functions of the Tourism Authority have been streamlined, and the role of the Ministry of Tourism redefined and limited to matters which include administration, policy formulation, licensing and certification.

My Government will, in the coming year, enact legislation to provide for a state-owned company to administer **Village Tourism** in Saint Lucia and to govern the **Saint Lucia Tourism Council**, the entity

which will spearhead such areas as advocacy, policy identification, research and product development.

The **Tourism Incentives Act** is to be revised and its scope broadened to ensure that it is applicable to new niche tourism segments, reflects international best practice and creates a more favourable investment climate.

## **INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, my Government believes that inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning are the most assured pathway to attaining one's full human potential.

We must, therefore, remain steadfast in transforming the education system so that it reflects the demands of today's technologically advanced world and serves, ultimately to enhance the wellbeing of every citizen.

With this in mind, my Government intends to promote the project for integration of information and technology in Education, which

involves smart classrooms initiatives, the continuation of digital literacy programmes and the introduction of electronic books.

As we endeavor to reach all citizens and to ensure no child is left behind, my Government will continue the Education Quality Improvement Project (EQUIP) and the CARE programme, ensuring that adequate support is available to those with special needs. In addition, our Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme will be bolstered by certain key projects designed to improve responsiveness to changing labour market conditions; integrate safety nets with skills acquisition strategies; specifically target disadvantaged youth and better protect the poor and vulnerable from aftershocks and crises in the context of climate change impacts.

## **ENHANCING SECURITY AND JUSTICE**

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, as my Government seeks to secure the health and wellbeing of our nation, we are not blind to

the fact that criminal activity does not lend itself to quarantine or isolation, nor is it easily daunted by national borders. Consequently, in the upcoming year my Government will intensify efforts to reduce serious crime through the full implementation of the Safe City Closed-Circuit Television initiative and continued implementation of the community policing strategy. The Royal Saint Lucia Police Force will be restructured to improve efficiency and efficacy.

Further, given the vital role of forensic evidence in solving crime, the Plan to Transform Forensic Services in Saint Lucia by 2022 will continue, with specific focus on the enactment of the **Criminal Investigations (Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA)) Bill**, which will provide for DNA analysis and testing in the investigation and prosecution of offences.

Further, it is imperative that we protect our borders even while participating fully in the international arena. In this regard, the Saint Lucia Border Control Agency will be created, comprising Customs

and Excise, Immigration, the Police Marine unit and Quarantine functions. The **Saint Lucia Border Control Agency Act** will establish the agency and set out related governance arrangements. A modern border management system which will be an integral element of the Agency's operations, will permit a more efficient flow of people and goods, while enhancing risk assessment and border control.

## **ENSURING EQUITY**

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, if all Saint Lucians are to act together, then the differently abled must be integrated fully in our national programmes. Saint Lucia signed on to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in September 2011. This treaty seeks to protect equal inalienable rights of persons with disabilities.

Having established the National Commission for Human Rights in 2019, my Government will now enact laws consistent with the

Convention, the CARICOM Charter of Civil Society (1997) and the Declaration of Pétion Ville, Haiti (2013). In so doing, my Government will undertake to create a more inclusive and enabling environment for persons with disabilities, consistent with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

## **MODERNIZING THE PUBLIC SERVICE**

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, as our country seeks to build resilience, my Government has established a “Digital Government Integrated eServices Platform (DigiGov)” in order to enhance the delivery of timely, efficient and transparent Government to Citizen and Government to Business services. This digital transformation project when fully operational, will facilitate the provision of 154 services, across 8 ministries via a single window platform. Through this initiative, citizens, businesses, investors and other government agencies can apply and make payments online for services such as renewal of drivers licence, passport, and national ID, as well as

application for birth certificates, registration of business and import licences, to name a few.

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, the physical distancing protocols and related restrictions in business operations imposed as a consequence of the COVID 19 pandemic, provide compelling added impetus to move forward even more aggressively with the DigiGov initiative during the coming financial year.

To this end, my Government will determine the commencement date for the **Electronic Transactions Act** in order to ensure there is legislation to support the Government Digital Platform. Meanwhile, a new **Electronic Transactions Bill** will be considered, to reflect technological changes that have occurred since 2011 when the original legislation was prepared.

The **Data Protection Act** will also be commenced. Additionally, the **Electronic Data Interchange Act** will support information exchange and the integration of functions of key public service agencies such as the National Insurance Corporation, Inland

Revenue Department, Registry of Businesses and Civil Status Registry.

## **RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE**

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, my Government has set itself the goal of providing accessible, secure, quality infrastructure, which is resilient to climate change. National infrastructure must be so designed as to support Saint Lucia's economic development thrust, by facilitating access to new lands for commercial, residential and touristic development and ensuring there is sufficient capacity for future expansion.

Significant emphasis will be placed on upgrading and expanding targeted sections of the road network, including, where feasible, the construction of alternative routes. The rehabilitation of feeder and agricultural roads will continue, as will the maintenance of bridges and culverts, and the desilting of rivers, ravines and drains island wide.



Madam President, Mr. Speaker, my Government will make every endeavour to improve the strength and general condition of the island's roads, maintain and improve the safety of road users, minimize maintenance costs to commuters and farmers and reduce commuting time. Further, our people will benefit from the stimulation of the Construction Sector, increased opportunities for small contractors, the reduction in unemployment and the decrease in Saint Lucia's foreign exchange deficit.

## **INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, over the past few months, as the world has confronted COVID 19, many countries have responded by closing their borders and some by adopting selfish, insular, positions. For our Caribbean, it has been a time when our resolve as a community has been tested and our countries have risen to the challenge.

CARICOM has benefited tremendously from the work of our regional institutions. The Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) is to be especially commended for its leadership role and for so ably supporting our national health services. The CARICOM Secretariat has been crucial in coordinating the response of regional security, disaster management, health and education agencies, among others. At the sub-regional level, the OECS Commission has, similarly, assisted with resource mobilization, joint procurement and coordinating Member States' international interface.

As is the case in other spheres, however, work proceeds on parallel tracks. In order to promote the CARICOM and OECS integration agendas, my Government will ratify outstanding treaties and enact legislation to give effect to those treaties and other obligations relating to such matters as security, justice, education, air services, disaster emergency management and the free movement of people and goods.

In the wider international context, our national agencies continue to engage our European Union partners to bring closure to the vexing issue of blacklisting.

## **CONCLUSION**

Madam President, Mr. Speaker, When I first addressed the Senate and the House on the 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2018, I reverently opined that our First duty, when assembled, was “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”. And in my second address on the 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2019, I prayerfully, as it were, urged those of us lost in ourselves that for Saint Lucia to be truly great, each and all of us should “show a little kindness.... to those fallen by the wayside”.

Since January, we have been witnesses to a stillness that is portentous as everyone leans forward in prayer to the Almighty God “to intermit this plague” which, apparently, his wrath has

brought upon an unkind and cold world. Never before have we seen such stillness: even leaves seem not to stir in the wind.

But we must never forget that “God helps those who help themselves, and, therefore, to save lives, we must observe all instructions given by the authorities.

Let us see this Corona virus as a lesson, create from it a pathway of hope, and advance together; one nation, buoyed by our love of country and our steadfast faith in God’s enduring protection and mercy.