



# **THRONE SPEECH**

## **ENHANCING OUR INFRASTRUCTURE**

**Presented By**

**His Excellency Mr. Cyril Errol Melchiades Charles**

**Acting Governor General of Saint Lucia**

**On the Occasion of the  
Opening of the Fourth Session of the  
Twelfth Parliament of Saint Lucia**

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**Parliament Building  
Laborie Street, Castries**

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Senate and House of Assembly, fellow Saint Lucians, permit me to wish all of you perhaps belated a healthy, happy, and prosperous 2024.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, we have good reason to celebrate and to be proud. We have been able to call to the world's attention, and not for the first time, that we are good enough to be the best. The recent athletic achievement of Julien Alfred is a vindication of all those who believe in the ability and talent of our youth. This young lady of humble background has given us reasons to be proud Saint Lucians. Her tenacity and self-belief must be an inspiration to all of us. Her achievement is a reminder that talent and ability are not the preserve of those enabled by privilege and huge resources. And so, on behalf of the government and people of Saint Lucia, I congratulate Miss Julien Alfred upon winning the gold medal for the 60-metre sprint race at the recent indoor World Athletic Championship.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, the Saint Lucian economy continues to perform well despite the challenges posed by an uncertain global economic environment. Supply chain issues continue with their attendant negative impact on the prices of goods, while energy prices and interest rates remain high.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, my government's management of its public finances has allowed it to partly service its debt obligations after meeting all its recurrent expenditure.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, more importantly, the number of citizens able to work and seek work has increased, with the current unemployment rate now at its lowest since 2007. A significant part of this increase is in youth unemployment.

Tourism, the main driver of the Saint Lucian economy, is now almost back to the pre-COVID-19 level and growing. Investor confidence is up with growth in the Saint Lucian economy expected for a third consecutive year.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, with the increase in the number of planned physical public and private infrastructural projects for 2024-2025, it is expected that the government's fiscal position will improve while unemployment will continue to fall.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, since July 2021, my government has set our country on a path of stability and sustainable growth. Much ground has been covered in a relatively short period, but not enough for my government to ease up on the acceleration pedal for economic and social change.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, despite the significant social and economic strides that my government has made, it continues to give greater attention to enhancing the good governance of the country. The elements of accountability and transparency and the observance of the rule of law have become the staple of my government's governance practices. However, some of the supporting structures that are necessary to broaden the scope and quality of social and economic change need to be improved.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, my government has decided that in 2024-2025, it can and will do more with less. And in the spirit of enhancing its good governance practices, my government has decided to give special attention to raising the level of efficiency, and effectiveness across all its operations. Moreover, it has, also, decided that the supporting systems, I referred to earlier, should become more responsive to changes in risks and the needs of its end users.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, in pursuit of enhancing its good governance practices, my government has designated the fiscal year 2024-2025 as the Year of Infrastructure. In this period, my government intends to improve its delivery of services to the public by making its physical, social, and digital infrastructure more effective, efficient, and responsive. Greater effort will be made to speed up the process of digital transformation within and across government departments. An expected important outcome from this process is a reduction in the cost of doing business.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, the designation of 2024-2025 as the year of infrastructure is in no way intended to take away my government's focus on the two pillars of a desirable society: health and security. The year - on - year increases in the cost of health care are a concern and will require a re-think as to how we reverse this pattern. In seeking to reduce the cost of health care, my government will give support to promoting healthy lifestyles. In this regard, government will seek to work with like-minded groupings and agencies, so that there is a coordination of effort to bring about a cultural change that embraces and promotes healthy lifestyles. As it relates to St Jude

Hospital, work continues to ensure its completion and commissioning at the earliest.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, on the issue of crime, my government remains committed to doing all it can to assist law enforcement in the fight against it. In this fight, my government is also ensuring that the Judicial System is strengthened by providing a conducive working environment for court officials and judges. This process has already begun with the commencement of works for the construction of the Halls of Justice.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, efforts to abate the level of crime will require the collective effort of all law-abiding citizens. Crime fighting is a battle between those who want a safe and stable society and those who desire chaos and instability. My government stands with those who desire safety and stability and will provide the necessary resources to ensure that the safety of citizens and the stability of the country are preserved.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, while my address is essentially about my government's future programmes and plans for the fiscal year 2024/2025, there are two significant outcomes that occurred in the last fiscal year that are worth recalling.

In May 2023, Saint Lucia officially became the fifth member state of the Caribbean Community to accede to the Caribbean Court of Justice. This was a demonstration of our country's commitment to the ideals of CARICOM and

Saint Lucia's faith in the competence and independence of the region's best jurists.

In the latter part of 2023, the Government of Saint Lucia had developed sufficient respect and trust within the international community that it was able, through its diplomatic channels, to secure USD\$75million from the Saudi Fund for Development, for financing the completion of St Jude Hospital and the rehabilitation of the George Odlum Stadium.

### **Vulnerable Groups**

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, my government has been steadfast in its commitment to supporting the vulnerable groups of our society. In this fiscal year 2024-2025, my government will be addressing the issue of a minimum livable wage for workers. It is my government's position that the rewards for work must allow every worker to have a dignified existence. My government is pleased that the private sector has lent support to the implementation of a livable living wage. Further details will be made regarding the quantum and timing of the implementation within the first quarter of this fiscal year 2024-2025. This is a progressive step and indicates the awakening of the country's social consciousness. The timing of this initiative is most welcomed, given the rising cost of living, driven mainly by higher imported food prices.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, In the same spirit, my government will be working with the National Insurance Corporation (NIC) during this fiscal year to explore opportunities for assisting contributors who become

temporarily unemployed. We shall, also, collaborate with the NIC to encourage more self-employed people to become contributors to the fund. Moreover, the legislation governing the NIC will be reviewed during the fiscal year to ensure that it is better able to meet the needs of its contributors.

## **Legislative Agenda**

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, as it relates to legislative changes, my government will be updating the following Acts:

1. The Companies Act- to regulate the operations of companies wishing to operate in the financial services sector and to empower the Financial Services Regulatory Authority (FSRA) with the discretion to grant approval to those entities prior to becoming incorporated.
2. Patent Act- to enact a new Patent Act to replace the old Act of 2001 which never came into force. This Act will provide for the administration of the Patent System, the protection of inventions, and the inclusion of international conventions on patents into local law.
3. Registration of Business Names Act- this Act is to be amended to allow the Financial Services Regulatory Authority to approve words used in business names only when they are consistent with the nature of the operations as they relate to lending or financial institutions and insurance companies.

4. Public Debt Management Act of 2022- this is slated to be amended to strengthen shortcomings in the system as it relates to the administration of public debt management.
5. Legislative changes to a Bill to address the disproportionate size of certain electoral constituencies.
6. Granting of citizenship by descent to the grandchildren of persons who are Saint Lucian by birth.
7. Amend existing legislation for the effective curtailment of noise pollution.

These legislative changes are intended to provide greater clarity and legal guidance within the respective sectors.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, while my government continues to do all it can to improve the legal framework within which businesses operate, international institutions, responsible for the financial global architecture, continue to demand the implementation of burdensome and costly compliance procedures. In many cases, those procedures are not applicable in the jurisdictions of the member countries of these international institutions. Those international institutions continue to unfairly perceive small-developing states like Saint Lucia as high risk, never mind they are unable to have any impact on the stability of the global financial system. Although those procedures are burdensome and costly, the government of



Saint Lucia and local financial institutions are required to comply if they are to remain integrated into the global financial system.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, following Saint Lucia's accession to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), it is now time for Saint Lucia to consider constitutional changes that will better reflect the culture and aspirations of our people.

The recommendations for these changes have been left with a Cabinet-selected committee made up of members from the two main political parties, former and existing parliamentarians, including the leader of the opposition, practicing attorneys, and members from civil society. This Committee has been selected and is expected to make final recommendations to the government on constitutional changes during this year. This committee is only expected to review the recommendations coming from the Justice Suzie D'auvergne's Constitutional Reform Committee before making its own final recommendation.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, it is a concern of my government that the level of civility and respect for each other continue to decline. The glue of mutual respect, a social imperative, especially in the absence of agreement, is the only way we can keep communities and the wider society together. Our children should be allowed to grow up in an environment where there is respect for those in authority- parents, teachers, police, civil and religious leaders. Equally, those in authority should live up to their responsibilities as leaders by being good examples to follow.

This deterioration in mutual respect is at the root of the scourge of crime and indiscipline that we are facing in our country today. We can do better. And so, I call upon all Saint Lucians to do more to reverse this deterioration. Because if we do, our quality of life will improve. We should not give up our natural joy as a people to despair, anger, greed, and envy.

## **Conclusion**

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, while the global challenges ahead appear no less than those last year, my government continues to provide hope to the people, especially among those who are most vulnerable. My government's commitment to building the society from the bottom up is a clear indication of its respect for the dignity of the human person. This respect, thankfully, continues to manifest itself in word and deed.

Our respect for each other, Madame President and Mr. Speaker, provides our country with the best chance of building strong communities and a resilient country. And so, I call on all Saint Lucians to play their part in the building of a better country for themselves and their children.

Madame President, Mr. Speaker, we must be mindful that the government's best efforts can come to nothing if we do not commit to improving the level of civility in our day - to - day engagements with each other. In short, we need as a nation to foster mutual respect at all levels within society. I remain hopeful that together we can build a better Saint Lucia.

In this year of infrastructure in which we seek to be more effective, efficient, and responsive in the way our country is governed and in anticipation of a

brighter future for our country, I call upon God's richest blessings on our nation and declare the 4<sup>th</sup> Session of the 12<sup>th</sup> Parliament officially opened.