



GOVERNMENT OF SAINT LUCIA

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**Address by Honourable Philip J. Pierre
Prime Minister of Saint Lucia
Observance of Emancipation Day
August 1, 2021**

My fellow Saint Lucians, today 1st August is the anniversary of one of the most significant, if not the most significant event in our history. It was on this date, in 1838, that slavery was abolished in the British Empire, and the persons of African descent who were enslaved on plantations in the British West Indies were granted their freedom. In Saint Lucia 13,285 persons from 384 plantations on the island were freed from slavery.

I believe that in the past, the commemoration of this momentous event has not received the importance that it deserves; and for many, Emancipation Day has been just another holiday in Saint Lucia – and not a day of reflection to the true meaning of the occasion. In our country, there are few organizations, like ICAR who over the years, have consistently observed this anniversary. Today, I salute them.

This message today from me, as Prime Minister is a signal that from now, this Government will make the 1st August a major event in our national calendar. Our self-esteem, our dignity, our respect for the lives and struggles of our forefathers demand this of us.

For while slavery was abolished in Saint Lucia and other British territories 183 years ago, the mindset and racial attitudes that brought African people to the Caribbean and the Americas as

slaves still lingers. In recent times, we have graphically witnessed in the USA the unwarranted killing of the African American George Floyd in Minnesota last year, that of our own Botham Jean the year before in Texas and that of so many other African Americans. These events have shocked the consciousness of the entire world resulting in a universal cry for racial equality, human rights and justice for all.

Even today, as we commemorate Emancipation, the war continues. The war against racial discrimination, poverty, disease, drug abuse, marginalization and inequality continue. We must as a people continue that resistance remembering the struggle of our forefathers. Emancipation Day calls for us to pay homage to the resistance of armed rebellions like the 1794-1798 Brigand Wars in Saint Lucia and the 1804 Haitian Revolution. The commemoration tells us that the resistance has not ended and we must power the development of our country through education, commitment, discipline, hard work and the determination to succeed. This was the heritage they left us and this is the heritage we must preserve and protect. As we recognize this occasion, we are to also remind ourselves that we have to fight against attitudes that belittle our patrimony and cultural heritage whenever and wherever they exist. As one people we are to respect our patrimony and observe our cultural heritage.

The Government of Saint Lucia will always support the preservation of our heritage and the importance of sustainable use of the environment. In this regard, the Government of Saint Lucia will immediately reinstate the government subvention to the Saint Lucia National Trust.

Our Government will also lend full support to the CARICOM Reparation Commission in its efforts to obtain reparatory justice from our former European colonial powers.

The commemoration of Emancipation will not however be confined to giving greater recognition to the 1st August. It has to be a process of continuous education; and so, this Government will take steps to ensure that the African Caribbean and Saint Lucian history is taught at all levels of our schools. We will also examine the possibility of making Kweyol an official language of our country.

My dear citizens of Saint. Lucia, you opened a new dawn in the Governance of our country when you elected the Saint Lucia Labour Party just one week before this anniversary of Emancipation Day. We pledge to fight against the mental, economic and social attitudes that remind us of the terrible days of slavery and fight for truly democratic society and equal opportunity for all.

I end with the words of the late Nelson Mandela

“True reconciliation does not consist of merely forgetting the past”.

A Happy Emancipation Day to all.