



ADDRESS TO THE NATION

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NEW YEAR'S ADDRESS

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Fellow Saint Lucians, here and in the diaspora, Happy New Year to you! I wish everyone divine blessings of good health, peace, love, happiness, and prosperity in 2024.

As we end the Festive Season, the start of a new year gives us cause for a moment of thoughtful reflection, resolution, and renewal.

We must muster the courage to put aside petty differences, recognise what binds us together, show consideration for each other, and compassion for the less fortunate amongst us.

Saint Lucians are often described by others as a very friendly people. Our characteristic friendliness should not extend only to visitors, but to ourselves as well. Let us resolve in 2024 to reach out to each other with a greater sense of charity, love, understanding, and friendship.

We must recognise that working together as one nation, one people, with a common purpose is the only viable pathway for our country to attain inclusive, meaningful, and sustainable development. We must resist the destructive forces of division, and embrace the uplifting spirit of unity, as we work together to build a more equitable and inclusive society.

Truth and Integrity in Public Life

As Saint Lucians, our nurturers, and mentors raised us to appreciate the value of speaking the truth. We were taught that truth is important because it forms the foundation for rational discourse, knowledge, and understanding. It is a cornerstone of good governance, credibility, and trust.

We will counter with the facts, the unfortunate and self-serving campaign of blatant lies and misinformation in our country that we have recently been witnesses. These disingenuous activities can have serious implications for our country.

Our government will continue to be the steward of accountability and integrity in public life. The people of Saint Lucia deserve nothing less from their government and from all those who present themselves for leadership positions of any kind in our beloved country.

The Economy and Our Progress

Our economic and social policies have positioned the economy on a solid path to sustained economic growth. Notwithstanding the impact and pressures of global inflation on our economy, 2023 has been a good year for our country.

The economy has been stabilised post-pandemic and, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), is projected to record economic growth in 2023.

The results of 2021- 2023 have shown that our fiscal policies are working well for the economy of Saint Lucia. My government pursued an economic policy of economic stabilisation, growth stimulation, and citizen empowerment which reversed the downward trends of 2018-2020, and registered positive growth in 2021-2023.

We recognised that financial responsibility is a prerequisite for sustained growth, job creation, and capital investments in tourism, education, health care, social services, and physical infrastructure.

In the Fiscal Year 2023, we generated sufficient revenue to cover recurrent expenditure and to service the interest component on our debt obligations. But equally important, in 2023 we

implemented a set of policy interventions which directly benefitted thousands of our citizens of all walks of life.

We increased social support to the less fortunate persons in our population, expanded educational opportunities, enhanced health care services, supported youth business development, and financed micro, small, and medium-sized businesses.

Through our prudent financial management and inclusive economic policies, we created the enabling environment to stimulate expansion in the productive sectors, particularly in tourism.

Outlook for 2024

We are very optimistic about the continued growth prospects for 2024.

However, we must proceed with caution as there are some downside risks. The most recent United Nations World Economic Situation and Prospects 2024 states that “Last year’s stronger than expected GDP growth marked short-term risk and structural vulnerabilities in the world economy”.

The UN’s flagship economic report predicts tighter credit conditions and higher borrowing costs.

Having achieved the necessary financial stability and growth milestones, in 2024 we will prioritise investments in Infrastructure, housing development, seaports, airport, and road rehabilitation.

Global Port Holdings

Global Ports Holdings (GPH) will soon start work on the redevelopment and modernisation of the Cruise Infrastructure of Port Castries and the Soufriere Waterfront on a 30-year concessionary agreement. The two ports have not been sold and remain national public assets owned by the

Government of Saint Lucia. The truth is that, on average 10% of SLASPA's revenue is generated directly from Cruise ship operations and it is this [10%] that will fund the development on a revenue-sharing agreement.

The Cargo Operations will continue to account for 90% of SLASPA's revenue and this will remain with SLASPA. SLASPA's cruise-related debt of approximately US\$20 million will be paid by GPH.

Road Infrastructure

We will allocate significant technical and financial resources to road rehabilitation and construction. We will commence remedial work on roads island wide including the Castries Gros Islet Highway. We expect significant progress on both Lots of the Millennium Highway Project as progress on Lot One has so far been unsatisfactory.

Housing Development

We expect major private and public investments in housing development with a special focus on providing affordable housing for low and middle-income earners while paying special attention to public servants.

Hewanorra International Airport Redevelopment

We will start construction of the Hewanorra International Airport Terminal Building in a responsible manner. Work is continuing on the Control Tower Building and work on the runway, airfield, and ground lighting system will commence this year.

St. Jude Hospital

We will continue work on the construction of St Jude Hospital to deliver a well-equipped hospital to the public. Work on four buildings is expected to be completed by June 2024. Work on the other buildings will commence shortly after.

Other Areas of Development

Business Support & Job Creation

We will continue to implement policy measures to give birth to a new generation of entrepreneurs through our Youth Economy and MSME Facility.

These programmes have demonstrated the innovative capacity of our people to generate sustainable employment and wealth in the future.

We will continue to nurture a conducive business environment, through the digital transformation of government services, and improvement to the ease of doing business. Our aim is to provide to the private sector an environment where impediments to business start-up and expansion are lessened.

We will continue to grow the economy by empowering all sectors. Our tax reform and tax amnesty policies will be reviewed so that more disposable income will be placed in the hands of businesses and individuals.

Macro Investment Legislation

During 2024 government intends to pass new legislation, that encourages large local and foreign businesses to invest across all sectors of the economy. That legislation will include enhanced incentives and improvement in the granting of approvals and other processes.

We will introduce legislation to encourage our residents in the diaspora to return to open business ventures in our country.

Social Policies

The pressing social needs of our population will remain a priority as we will continue to pursue people-centered policies to ensure that no one is left behind in our developmental thrust. We will continue to create more educational opportunities for our students. We remain deeply committed to creating opportunities for all Saint Lucians to realise their full potential and to protect the less fortunate and marginalised in our county. We are also strongly committed to preserving and protecting our national patrimony, and the environment, for the enjoyment of the present and future generations.

Minimum & Equal Wage Livable Legislation

The Minimum & Equal Wage Committee has submitted a draft report to the Cabinet of Ministers. We expect to have further consultations with the private sector on the report. We expect to be able to implement a livable wage for workers across sectors in Saint Lucia later this year.

Food & Nutrition Security

Ensuring food and nutrition security for all citizens will continue to be an important priority for this government. We will intensify the import substitution strategy through the expansion of vegetable and livestock production.

New sectors like seamoss and cocoa production will be encouraged while our exploration of opportunities in the Blue Economy will be enhanced.

Crime Reduction & Citizens Security

In 2023, we witnessed an alarming increase in gun-related homicides particularly among some young males fueled by an imported gang culture. We are committed to attacking that problem with all available resources and call on the support of the public, and all social and Non-Government Organizations.

We will continue to empower the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force with the technical, physical, and human resources they need to detect and solve criminal activity.

The timely dispensation of Justice will be improved with the commencement of the construction of the new **Halls of Justice** during this fiscal year providing a suitable working environment for Judicial Officers.

The society as a whole must encourage values that will steer our youth from the false hope and gains of a life of crime to productive pursuits that will redound to the benefit of everyone.

Government pledges its support and availability to constructive dialogue on the improvement of citizen security in our country.

Health

Our goal of Universal Health Coverage, to provide affordable, accessible, and equality in health coverage for the population will be intensified in 2024. We call on all Saint Lucians to observe healthy lifestyles to reduce the alarming increases in Non-Communicable Diseases plaguing our country.

Conclusion

Fellow Saint Lucians, since July 2021, the government focused on critical issues of poverty reduction, crime and security, social justice, economic empowerment, education, health care, food security, and infrastructure. We will continue to address those pressing issues of great importance to our people.

However, in 2024, we need to broaden our national discourse to include financial literacy, global economic events, national pride and identity, healthy lifestyles, reparations, and climate change which is now viewed as an existential threat to human existence.

We need to adopt mitigation and adaptation policies to reduce the risks to our population even if it has been accepted that Small Island Developing States are not the cause of these destructive weather changes.

Society must keep these issues in the national focus as they are vital and impact the individual aspirations and overall national development goals.

I want to thank the people of Castries East for their unwavering support over the past 27 years. You have been my inspiration and my source of strength throughout my journey in public service. You have never forsaken me, and I will never let you down. You have been patient while I attend to the affairs of the state. I will continue to serve and respect you.

I want to thank all the people of Saint Lucia, my Cabinet of Ministers, my family, all members of the public service, NGOs, and friendly countries for their support in 2023, as we look forward to working together in 2024. The Government and People of Taiwan have continued to provide useful assistance to the People of Saint Lucia for which we are grateful.

Let us have confidence and trust in ourselves and our ability as a people.

Let us be positive, and disciplined and move forward with pride and dignity.

I thank you and end with an excerpt.

Ring out false pride in place and blood,

The civic slander and the spite;

Ring in the love of truth and right,

Ring in the common love of good.

Ring out old shapes of foul disease,

Ring out the narrowing lust of gold;

Ring out the thousand wars of old,

Ring in the thousand years of peace.

Ring in the valiant man and free,

The larger heart, the kindlier hand;

Ring out the darkness of the land,

Ring in the Christ that is to be.

Excerpt by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
"Ring Out, Wild Bells"