



THRONE SPEECH

“SECURING OUR FUTURE TOGETHER”

Presented by

His Excellency Mr. Cyril Errol Melchiades Charles,

Acting Governor General of Saint Lucia

On the Occasion of the

Opening of the Second Session of the
Twelfth Parliament of Saint Lucia.

Tuesday 29 March 2022.

Parliament Building

Laborie Street, Castries.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, members of the Senate, members of the House, as I join you today at the start of this Second Session of the Thirteenth Parliament of Saint Lucia, it is my sincere wish that our citizens should unite and move forward with purpose, putting aside squabble and tempers, for the good of all citizens. Just over nine months ago, our nation asserted through the ballot box a new mandate. It was a decisive mandate; and one, which called for transformation.

It was a call for reform of our laws, systems, policies, and processes to ensure good governance of our island. We must learn from the past, including the folly of the past, lest we be cursed to repeat it. Across our land, a new light of consciousness has arisen and burns within our people.

They yearn for every person to receive their fair share of the nation's bread; they yearn for freedom; they yearn for justice. My government has given a pledge that it will put the interest of all the people first in the pursuit of Bread, Freedom, and Justice. This common space we share, Saint Lucia, is our joint responsibility to nurture and protect for ourselves and our children.

WE MUST BREAK WITH PAST

What we must achieve, therefore, is a country where corruption is not tolerated; a country that values its people and invests in their development, particularly their minds, bodies, and spirit; a country that is purpose-driven and unified; a country that pulls together; a country that is cooperative yet meritocratic.

This cannot be a time for doubting ourselves, nor a time for fighting ourselves. The self-hate of political tribalism, insularity, and myopia has to end. Otherwise, the top will continue to "spin" in the mud. We must break with the past.

We are living in a very unstable and uncertain social and economic world environment. The ravages of the Covid pandemic have exposed our economic and social vulnerabilities. The challenges we face are huge and require a nation to work together leveraging the talents of its people for the good of all.

The invasion of Ukraine by Russia has only added to these challenges and has driven up the global cost of energy. Just as we were about to experience some respite from a less threatening Covid-19 pandemic, energy prices are now on the up, with all its attendant negative consequences: higher fuel prices and higher food prices.

My government will work towards securing our people's future together as a nation and as a region. Measures will be taken to promote regional cooperation and security, securing our

democracy and our systems of administration, securing our access to healthcare, housing, food, and water.

ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, my government wishes to see our country thrive economically. Unleashing economic growth will require not merely knowledge but also aptitude. It will require both technology and temperament. It will require confidence balanced by calculus.

Our economic decisions must be driven by information and knowledge. An important measure that will drive this is by obtaining data from this year's National Census.

My government is mindful of the slow pace of uptake of technology, particularly in public services. Measures aimed at digitalization of the public service will be placed under greater care and scrutiny so that the public can see the results in a more conducive business environment.

My government, during this parliament, will reform the Income Tax System to allow for easier collection and payment of taxes. The disposable income of the lower-income taxpayer will be increased through the granting of higher allowances and the current burdensome imposition of interest and penalties on outstanding taxes will be reviewed.

My government will pursue the expansion of export-driven sectors including Manufacturing and Business Process Outsourcing. We shall continue to provide support to the Bureau of Standards and Export Saint Lucia and assist our local companies in finding new markets for new and existing viable products.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, my government's legislative agenda will also support the private sector. This year, we will ensure the passage of the Bankruptcy and Insolvency legislation that has been spoken of for so many years.

In addition, the Security Interests in Movable Properties Bill and the Credit Reporting Bill will be enacted this year. It is expected that these and other important legislation will strengthen the ease of doing business in Saint Lucia.

We must rethink the way we attract capital to build our economy. My government will therefore start the process of establishing a sovereign wealth fund.

CARIBBEAN COURT OF JUSTICE

My government is committed to addressing our destiny as an independent nation, both tacitly and tangibly. This year, Saint Lucia will take steps toward the accession to the appellate jurisdiction

of the Caribbean Court of Justice. We are thus expected to become the fifth CARICOM member state to replace the Privy Council with the CCJ.

To this end, my government has appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Justice Sir Dennis Byron to prepare the way for Saint Lucia's accession to the CCJ.

The draft legislation for the amendment of Saint Lucia's Constitution to allow for accession has been prepared and will soon be available for public scrutiny.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM

My government is committed to bettering our governance framework and promoting a more secure and accountable democratic system. Constitutional Reform has languished for way too long.

My government intends to reignite the discourse on what form and style our democracy should take, especially within the context of the technological era of ICT. The Parliamentary Committee created for this purpose will be revamped and mandated to consider specific areas such as prime ministerial term limits, a fixed date for General Elections, the appointment of a Deputy Speaker, and the matter of becoming a Republic.

STRENGTHENING REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS

In the Caribbean sphere, my government intends to strengthen functional cooperation and integration, particularly at the level of the Eastern Caribbean sub-region.

REGIONAL TRADE & TRAVEL

My government believes that the present system of regional air and sea transportation is a disincentive to trade travel and tourism. My government is desirous of pushing forward long talked about the dream of regional air and ferry service as well as the review of shipping operations.

GOOD GOVERNANCE & ANTI-CORRUPTION

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, a matter which featured repeatedly on the minds of Saint Lucians during the run-up to the 2021 General Elections was that of corruption.

Corruption creates waste and inefficiency in the delivery of vital services. It therefore must be stamped out of our public affairs with due haste and vigour.

A government can have the best of plans but if it does not govern well, if corruption abounds, every plan will be rotten from the inside.

My government invites the nation to adopt a zero-tolerance approach to corruption.

My government will review and strengthen the Integrity in Public Life Act to hold public officials accountable to the people.

My government will continue to strengthen the management of its public finances through the finalisation of the Regulations for the recently approved public finance management and procurement legislation.

In addition, a new Debt Bill will be brought to Parliament that will seek to amalgamate all the existing pieces of legislation that deal with debt into one comprehensive law and this will provide a more effective and cohesive framework for the management of our debts and liabilities.

My government will appoint a Special Prosecutor and enact the supporting relevant legislation necessary to conduct investigations into acts of alleged public corruption. It is the intention of my government that these investigations will be completed during the life of this Parliament.

My government is aware of the public's impatience regarding this matter and has been working assiduously so that the right mechanisms are in place to ensure investigations will be done in a legal, transparent and fair manner.

CITIZEN SECURITY

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, all our economic efforts would come to naught if there is not a sense of peace and safety amongst our people. This unprecedented scourge of crime, particularly violent crime caused by illegal firearms, serves only to scar families, loved ones, communities and tarnish the reputation of our island.

My government believes that Crime must be tackled scientifically and as a public health concern. While my government intends to equip the police even more and expand their resource base to fight crime, a multi-disciplinary approach must be sought to see long-term, sustainable abatement of crime and anti-social behaviour.

My government will reactivate the National Security Council to provide general oversight on all matters of security. Additionally, a National Crime Management Centre will be established to coordinate our response to crime across multiple agencies, not just the police.

My government will introduce legislation to cause for stiffer penalties for illegal firearm and ammunition possession.

HEALTH & SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, my government will take steps to secure a better quality of life for all. How we achieve this requires that we make optimum use of our resources, even as we promote economic growth.

My government will initiate a discussion on a respectable living wage that promotes fair compensation for workers.

In particular, our seniors, persons with disabilities, and single-parent households will be targeted for such measures.

Consistent with the desire to protect persons from sudden shocks due to unemployment, as had been witnessed during the COVID-19 Pandemic, my government will task the National Insurance Corporation with analysing the feasibility of unemployment benefits.

My government believes that healthcare must be kept on the front burner of priorities, despite the waning impact of the Pandemic. My government will pursue improved public infrastructure at the primary and secondary levels. My government advises that work on St. Jude Hospital will recommence during this session of Parliament.

My government remains committed to the goal of Universal Health Care, underpinned by the principles of universality, accessibility, affordability, and equity. A special unit will be established to refocus efforts in this regard.

TOURISM & CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

My government intends to place special emphasis on transforming the tourism industry to ensure that more Saint Lucians can participate in and own the industry. My government recently passed the Community Tourism Bill which provides for the creation of authentic Saint Lucian experiences through accommodation, attractions, and gastronomy. This year, my government intends to review and revise the incentives and legislative framework that guides the development of the tourism industry by enacting a Tourism Development Bill. It is hoped that this will restructure the industry to move from a focus on accommodation to include the growth and development of other sectors and will define the role and place of Saint Lucians in the industry.

In the area of Creative Industries, my government will review the Cultural Development Act to create a new enabling institutional and legislative framework that will formalize the cultural industries in Saint Lucia. My government believes that the cultural and creative industries are the new economic frontiers and that the time has arrived for deliberate and concentrated focus on nurturing and enabling that sector. The creativity of our people is beyond the mere constraints of geographic space and population and it must be allowed to blossom.

CLIMATE CHANGE

It is a fact that the disastrous effect of climate change has affected small island states like St. Lucia disproportionately. My government believes that it has a moral responsibility to support the commitment to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Our survival as an Island Nation depends on that commitment and so my government will play its part by being less reliant on fossil fuels, embracing the use of renewable energy, and building climate resilience infrastructure. We call on international agencies to accelerate the pace and delivery of funding promised at different international forums.

EDUCATION AND SPORTS

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Education will continue to be given priority. My government has already made good on its promises to resume the Laptop programme, payment of facilities fees, and CXC examination fees in Mathematics and English.

Modernisation of the school plant continues and by the end of this session of Parliament, fifty smart classes would have been installed across the island's schools.

In the pursuit of equitable, lifelong education, measures at building capacity in Technical and Vocational Education & Training (TVET) and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) will continue.

Curriculum reform will proceed and include the teaching of Saint Lucian and African History.

My government remains committed to expanding access to tertiary education. The goal is one university graduate per household.

My government will continue to broaden sporting facilities across the island including the construction of a National Aquatic Centre which will provide our swimmers with the facilities to compete regionally and internationally.

YOUTH ECONOMY

My government has already begun the rollout of the Youth Economy Programme, which will see an expansion of opportunities for young entrepreneurs through skills development, access to finance, and business support. Measures will target at-risk and unemployed youth.

The Youth Economy will be structured with its own agency and Board to provide greater autonomy and flexibility in decision-making.

The Youth Economy will create special areas in the economic system for young people to develop, grow their ideas and create generational wealth. It is intended to create a new enterprise culture and reduce the constraints that our youth face in accessing business finance, training, and support services to succeed in business ventures. My government, through the Youth Economy framework, will provide special incentives to support the integration of young people in employment-generating and wealth-creating business activities.

Measures will be targeted at the digital economy, green economy, blue economy, orange economy as well as traditional sectors.

Additionally, through the Ministry of Youth and Sports, our young people will be given the facility to upload their skills and talents onto a virtual platform, which can be accessed by local, regional, and international employers.

HOUSING & URBANISATION

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, My government recognizes that our scarce land resources and growing demand for housing have led to unacceptable housing conditions for thousands. This housing deficit requires state intervention, particularly with respect to the need for creating affordable homes in safe, livable, accessible, and green communities.

My government will introduce measures to promote affordable housing that meets the demands of our people and consolidate and rationalize where possible existing communities through better urban design and amenities.

LOCAL EMPOWERMENT

My government is mindful of the need to provide greater control of resources at the level of the constituency. In this regard, my Government will ensure that all Members of Parliament and Constituency Councils will be afforded resources for local development.

My government will ensure that the outstanding Constituency Boundaries matter is resolved so that the aberrations that exist with the disparity of sizes of constituencies are resolved in accordance with the Constitution.

My government will continue efforts to bring greater investment to deprived communities. The recently passed Community Tourism Act is expected to catalyse the growth of authentic Saint Lucian experiences in accommodation, attractions, and gastronomy.

FOOD SECURITY

The need for a secure food supply for our people has become ever more apparent given the fragility of imports to supply chain glitches and delays, and the rise in prices due to the Pandemic and now War.

My government will continue to provide support to the Food & Agribusiness sector including the expansion of opportunities to access credit to youth and women. Recent amendments to the agricultural incentives act will encourage greater diversification and quality of products. A total of nineteen new crops have been identified to receive support.

Saint Lucian ingenuity is being seen in areas such as the production of mushrooms, value-added sea moss products, honey, specialty gluten-free flour, and a variety of products. Measures will be taken to support these and many other growth opportunities.

My government will adopt the recommendations of the Task Force on the Banana Industry to chart a way forward. An industry that was the lifeblood of our economy since the 1950s has sadly in recent years fallen prey to false promises and then indifference. This has led to the collapse and dismantling of the very trading infrastructure that made it possible to export to the United Kingdom.

My government will examine the possibility of recommencing the export of bananas to the United Kingdom and expand regional opportunities for banana exports.

My government notes and encourages the recent efforts to spur the use of bananas in the culinary offerings of our country.

ENERGY SECURITY

Like the entire public, my government is wary of the continued impact of the War on energy costs. The knock-on effects are already being witnessed with significant inflationary pressure on goods and services.

My government has taken measures to cushion the blow on the transport sector with considerable loss of revenue to the state. Whereas the stated excise tax on fuel was set at \$4.00 per gallon, today the Government collects about 7% of that.

My government will move forward with the Electricity Supply Bill and Regulations for review, revision, and amendment.

My government will continue to encourage renewable energy use at both the distributed and grid level. My government's decision for exploratory drilling for geothermal energy will commence during this session of Parliament. Measures at promoting the use of electric and hybrid vehicles as well as LED street lighting will continue.

CONCLUSION

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, now is the time to secure our future together. Not divided over trivialities but united in a tremendous desire to see each other do well.

Let our minds be positive, transformational, and purpose-driven.

I invite every Saint Lucian to value this land that gave us birth. I urge each to respect the other. I urge each to appreciate their country, its beauty, its history, its successes.

I urge each to aspire to do more. I urge Saint Lucians at home and in the Diaspora to continue their contributions to our land.

I commend the Saint Lucians who continue to make us proud in sport, in music and entertainment, in science and innovation, in academia, in business, in the law, in every human endeavour.

I salute and thank the many St. Lucians who continue to fight in the battle against the Covid pandemic.

My government thanks those countries which we can call friends and partners in development for their continued support and commitment to assisting with Saint Lucia's development.

I now declare open this second session of the twelfth Parliament of Saint Lucia.

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.