

THRONE SPEECH

BY
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ON THE OCCASION OF THE

**SECOND SESSION OF THE SEVENTH PARLIAMENT'
OF SAINT LUCIA**

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Mr. President and Members of the Senate

Mr. Speaker and Members of the the House of Assembly

We meet today at the confluence of hope and resilience. This second session of the Seventh Parliament, meeting in the late evening of the old Century undertakes its work in the intersecting light between indifference and possibility. Against the tide of national optimism and expectation we face the currents of international indifference and insensitivity. The new global order has lengthened the shadows of apathy and hardened the arteries of conscience in a world in which the people's impulse to compassion has found new expression.

A Time for Definition

The rapid pace of change in all spheres of life in the world today makes adaptation to change itself the major challenge of our times. This challenge is ,one that requires a strong and clear vision of where one needs to be, and a driving mission of how we come to be. A fractured and divided people cannot be responsive to the dynamic of international change. A government without vision will surely lead the nation to perish. Less than one year ago, we stood divided at home and defeated abroad. Our agricultural sector at war and in disarray, our social institutions tattered and frayed by indifference, our institutions of law and order in disorder and tainted by public lack of confidence.

The decisive expression of the people's unambiguous will on May 23rd was the first step in confronting these difficult realities. My Government embodied the national will to survive the odds and represented the affirmation of the option for change. It marked the almost universal recognition of our people that St. Lucia stood at a defining crossroad at which a new vision, a new direction and a new mission had to prevail. While this necessarily involved a change of national leadership, the imperative of change was not limited to the realm of things political. The defining crossroad stands in all walks of national life. At the level of our insertion in the global economy, serious decisions have to be made but the exercisable option is for competitiveness. At the level of our social institutions, the definition of change must inevitably take us away from the road of mediocrity to new standards of accountability, new levels of self-respect, and new platforms of compassion.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, in this evening of the old Century and I standing at the cusp of the new Millenium, we are all challenged - at every level and in every sphere of our individual and collective existence -to rise to new platforms of performance, adopt new axioms of accountability, and new statements of faith. As My Government has repeatedly stated, at this defining juncture, our choices are either to exude excellence or to remain mired in the morass of mediocrity.

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, My Government is firmly convinced that St. Lucians are ready for change. If provided with the mantle of opportunity, we can become a beacon of hope for the rest of the region. As the political expression of the people's sovereign will for change, My Government is committed to implementing a programme of change that reflects allegiance to the fundamental promises made in the electoral campaign.

A New Complexion of Governance

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, I wish to express my pride in the composition of this the Seventh Parliament of Saint Lucia. It is conspicuous by its youthful character and venerated by the representation of women. This Seventh Parliament is not only energised by the youngest member in the distinguished history of parliamentary government in Saint Lucia but it is also made exemplary by the largest number of elected females.

From many deserving sons and daughters, the honour of the first female Governor Generalship has fallen to me and I have already pledged to the Sovereign, my allegiance, and to My Government and my people, the exercise of those duties with fidelity, objectivity and impartiality. Just as Her Majesty in her considered wisdom is now leading the Royal Family through a process of managed change in consideration of the temper of our times, so too here in St. Lucia, My Government wishes to encourage such a process. The objective of these changes will be to associate this high office with positive and deserving social causes that empower civil society, reinforce role models in society, provide example and hope to the youth and to women. The authority of this high office must be aligned **in a non- partisan manner** with exemplary efforts to reinforce all that is positive, ennobling, and uplifting and reflective of the most transcendental impulse of the national spirit.

The Strategic Imperatives of the 1998/99 Budget

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, in the Budget that will be brought to the consideration of this Parliament, My Government will be building on the platform for stabilization of the economy and for the rectification of social problems. The stabilization and refocusing of the national economy to achieve sustainable levels of growth, provide continuous opportunities for investment and meaningful employment creation is the key to guaranteeing national prosperity and an acceptable quality of life for all, now and in the future.

My Government is determined to maintain a people-centered concept of development and to resolutely address the many pressing social concerns that continue to fetter the potential of St. Lucians. The actions already taken by My Government in response to the Government of St. Lucia-Caribbean Development Bank Study on Poverty in St. Lucia speak for themselves.

Already My Government has secured parliamentary approval of a Poverty Reduction Fund to combat this scourge. The designation of particular areas of high poverty concentration as Special Development Zones with the concomitant concessions that would stimulate entrepreneurial activity by locals as well as investors is one example of My Government's commitment to poverty reduction and alleviation. Initiatives such as these are also predicated on the principle of equitable geographic development.

Ensuring that investment and job opportunity are evenly distributed to all parts of St. Lucia, is the surest way of preventing the emergence of new purgatories of poverty. My Government seeks to create enclaves of opportunity where zones of poverty now exist and thus restore the pride and dignity of every St. Lucian.

Access to Land -A Basic Citizenship Right

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, there is no opportunity more elemental to the pride, dignity and sense of belonging of a citizen than to own a piece of the land of his or her birth. The access of St. Lucians to land is a major concern of My Government. The persistent demand for access and the absence of an affordable policy has, over the years, contributed to the increasing occurrence of spontaneous settlements particularly in Vieux Fort, Anse La Raye and Canaries. We cannot allow the beautiful landscape of St. Lucia to disappear into squatter camps and slum dwellings. Instead, My Government will pursue a systematic and deliberate policy of providing affordable access to land and the prevention of the emergence of new spontaneous settlements.

Within the life of this parliamentary session, a policy paper will be circulated for public discussion and eventual consideration by this honourable house.

Mésyé Pwézidan, pa ni anyen moun kontan pasé lè yo ni sa ki sa yo. Pa ni yon moun ki pa ni éspwa ni yon popiété an peyi natal yo ki sa yo. Yonn sé bagay-la ki ka fè Gouvenman mwen lapenn, sé kantité moun an péyi-a ki pa ni moyen pou achte un mòso tè ki sa yo. Sé annékos di so, nou ka wè an chay ti cabé épi ti kay ka pawèt toupatou oliwon Sent Lisi asou sa moun ka kwiyé tè Gouvenman, sitou an Vyé Fò, Anslawé, épi Kanawi. Nou pa sa kité moun déglizé bèlté Sent Lisa konsa.

Alò, Gouvenman mwen ni lantansyon pwan démach cyan avwi lanne pochen, pou konmansé diskisyon asou sitwasyon sola, pou konsidéwasyon Kay Konsit péyi-a.

The Modernization of Society and Economy

In pursuance of these essential priorities, My Government's strategic objective in the presentation of this budget is to lay the basis for the modernization of the society and the economy.

This involves the modernization of the revenue base, the elimination of waste and corruption in government and the institution of greater accountability. Innovative as well as stringent measures have already been taken to initiate a new

culture of management in statal and parastatal bodies. My Government has for the first time utilized a programme budgeting approach that ensures that the expenditure of public funds is now directly linked to programme plans and defined outcomes. The determination of what value has been received by the public for what money that has been expended will now be possible. Earlier this month, My Government brought together all Statutory Boards to discuss issues surrounding financial viability, performance and accountability of these Boards. The clearly articulated policy of My Government is that Statutory Bodies ought not to be a drain on the public purse - they should be financially sustainable, while providing enhanced - and quality service to the public in their sphere of operation.

Role of the Private Sector

My Government has repeatedly acknowledged the vital role of the private sector in the construction of a vibrant modern economy. The initiative and creative energy of individual entrepreneurship is a catalytic element in economic growth and development. Having established new modalities of cooperation with the private sector, My Government now seeks to bring this relationship to a new structured and institutional level. In an effort to assist the local private sector to develop its investment capacity, My Government will designate certain private sector organizations as Special Development Organizations, providing a range of facilitatory concessions. For the first time, My Government will encourage and assist in the elaboration of a private sector development plan and the recently created office of Privatization and Private Sector Relations will provide a permanent point of contact with the private sector.

A Place for Small Business

In the perspective of My Government, the notion of the private sector also encompasses the small entrepreneur and small businessperson. Unsung and unheralded, small business activities have for many years catered to community service needs neglected by the dictates of profit and the economies of size. The small and micro-business sector has been an invaluable source of self-initiative, innovative competitiveness and job creation. That era of neglect of the small, the brave and the bold is thankfully over and My Government will be establishing an integrated framework for small and micro-business development. This will involve, among other initiatives, the passage of a Micro and Small Business Enterprise Act which will make provision for developmental support and financial relief to that sector., It will embrace the amendments already made to the Income Tax Ordinance that allow a further investment allowance of 10% on capital expenditure incurred in the provision of plant and equipment in the initial year of income and that is funded from non-local sources. It is anticipated that this will further encourage St. Lucians living abroad to invest their savings and expertise at home.

Existing institutions for small and micro business support such as the Small Enterprise Development Unit (SEDU) and the National Research & Development Foundation (NRDF) will be further strengthened by a variety of measures.

A Fair Wage for Workers

In all of its pronouncements, My Government has made firm commitments not only to the emergence of a new culture of free enterprise but equally to the institution of a new dispensation of equitable compensation. Just as we seek to facilitate acceptable returns on investment to investors, so too we seek to assure to workers the guarantee of a minimum and decent wage in all sectors. In the realm of workers' welfare, economic modernization is indistinguishable from social modernization. My Government intends to bring to this Parliament a Minimum Wage Bill that will provide protection to workers in sectors such as agriculture, domestic services and manufacturing who do not now enjoy the protection of trade union representation. A fair minimum wage provides a guarantee of social stability, it assures the dignity of one's labour, and introduces an element of greater equity in the fruits of economic progress.

My Government is unshakable in the belief that without social justice and fairness, genuine economic development is not possible and a better life for all, while being pursued, cannot be attained.

Financial Services

Yet another vital step in the diversification of our economy and the establishment of new options for competitiveness is the establishment of a financial services sector. My Government has already set up a Department of International Financial Services within the Ministry of Tourism, Civil Aviation and International Financial Services and preliminary work has started on the definition of an adequate legislative and regulatory framework for this. My Government is acutely conscious of the imperative of establishing an impeccable reputation and the integrity of this offshore sector must remain a paramount consideration.

Modernization of Society

In seeking the modernization of society, My Government will focus on the institutions of the state and of civil society to build new capacities for governance.

Reinventing government involves articulating new relations and forms of governance. It is about the restoration of faith by ordinary citizens in the functioning of the state, and the reconstruction of confidence in the extent of objectivity, transparency and equity exercised by the public service. My Government is committed to reestablishing the relative autonomy of the state. In other words, to restore the state as an impartial arbiter of contending forces and interests in society while balancing this authority with a stronger civil society. The ability of communities to manage their own affairs, to participate in the governance of their towns and villages, to build stronger and more vibrant social and religious organizations, and the capacity to function self-reliantly and free from crippling dependence on government are what we strive to develop.

Modernizing the electoral system

The General Elections of May 23rd, 1997 highlighted an urgent need for a review of our electoral system. For example the Castries Central Constituency has 2,104 electors. Two other contiguous constituencies, Castries East and Castries North East have 24,308 voters. The integrity of our democracy can only be sustained if the rules, procedures and processes associated with the election of our government are consistent with our Constitutional prescriptions. The current population and geographic disparities in the delimitation of our constituencies, the reliability of our voters' list, and the management of the electoral process will be subjected to review during this parliamentary session. My Government has enlisted the support of a Consultant from the Commonwealth Secretariat. Consistent with the approach of My Government to the conduct of public affairs, all concerned parties and social partners will be invited to meet the Consultant in this review in due course.

Strengthening Legal Institutions

My government has already turned its attention to and will intensify its efforts to modernize and strengthen our legal institutions. This is absolutely necessary if law and order is to be enhanced and uplifted.

It is the firm intention of My Government to ensure that the rule of Law and Order remains uncompromised. All of us must respect the law no matter who we are, no matter what we might have been, or no matter who our connections are. No one, whether friend or foe, rich man or poor man, local or foreigner is above the law. Enforcement must be resolute if we are to create a level playing field on which the wheels of justice can roll smoothly and without encumbrance.

My Government will ensure the appointment of a Law Revision Commission to set about revising the laws of St. Lucia. The last revision exercise took place in 1957. As we turn to the new Millennium we cannot continue to rely on a body of laws that is in some cases, archaic, dysfunctional and a hindrance to the modernization of our society and economy. As part of the revision exercise, My Government will be pursuing the systematic reform of our Civil Code. This Code which largely governs our private law is derived from the Civil Code of Quebec of 1879. It was revised and reformed in 1957 in a bid to anglicize several of its provisions. The challenge now is to modernise the Code reform and shape our social institutions.

A comprehensive proposal for the revision of the entire body of law in St. Lucia is currently being considered by the Attorney General's Chambers and discussions have already been held between the Attorney General and potential funding sources. It is expected that within the next month the process of securing funding for the exercise will intensify.

Consistent with the objective of comprehensive law reform, My Government will be introducing for the consideration of Parliament, a new Legal Profession Act that, among other things, will define the boundaries of ethical practice in the profession. Lawyers as the custodians of ethical procedure and just practice in the country must be seen to be operating within acceptable parameters.

CARICOM 25th Anniversary & Regional Unity

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, this year signifies the 25th Anniversary of CARICOM. St. Lucia has always played a prominent role in the regional integration movement and the honour of hosting the upcoming Heads of Government is ours. My Government will seek to make this occasion a time for celebration of the best that is Caribbean. It will be a moment for recognition of those on whose shoulders we stand today -our succession of leaders deceased and alive, local and regional whose efforts have kept alive the dream of a united Caribbean. On the occasion of this meeting we must embrace our Caribbean brothers and sisters in warmth and celebration. We must make this moment one of reaffirmation of our Common Destiny.

My Government has spoken unequivocally in favor of the inclusion of Barbados in the OECS family, as it believes that every effort must be made to deepen the regional integration movement at all levels. My Government's approach is based on the conviction that the foundation of the future must stand on the consolidation of those mechanisms that have worked well in the past.

Developing a National Personality

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, concomitant with the modernisation of our society is the development of a national personality. No matter where we may be stationed in life, there must be the display of civic conscience, love of God and community, the virtues of discipline, and the exercise of tolerance for each other's views. This necessitates the reshaping of social mentalities as well as paying concerted attention to the aesthetics of our environment. Our country must become in the mind of every citizen an extension of his or her home. The same impulse to peace and contentment, to unity and togetherness and to cleanliness and order that characterizes our dream of a happy home must infuse our civic, consciousness.

Tan fé tan, tan kité tan. Chanjman pa janmen fasil. Si sé pou nou éwisi kont sé dimann tan-an ki ka apwoché-a, sé pou nou twavay pou mòdènizé sosiyété nou-an, pou kiltivé an santiman nasyonal, an lanmou pou péyi nou. Nenpòt ki moun nou yé, nenpòt ki pozisyon sosyal nou, sé

fo nou moutwé an manyè nou ka viv an konsyans sivik, an lanmou di Dyé é di peri, li veti di disiplin, épi tolowans pou lopinyon yonnalot. Sé pou nou kiltivé an mantalité sosyal nèf, an lògey an bèlté péri nou, konminoté nou, lanviwonman nou. Sé pou nou pwan menn lògey an péyi nou kon nau ka pwan an kay nou, an °mezon nou. Menm lapé-a, menm kontantman-an, menm linyan-an, menm pwopté-a, menm lòd-la nau voudwé ni pou kò nau an mézon nou, sé menm -lan nou ni pou ni an péyi nou.

Over the past few weeks, many people have been engaged --some through paid employment, some through voluntary spirit --in the cleaning of our roads and the beautification of our environment. Many parts of our country are beginning to look cleaner and more attractive. My Government extends its thanks to those citizens who have extended to public spaces the sanctity that they uphold to their private spaces. My Government also extends its thanks

to those who in the past, sought without official recognition or success to stem the indifference of litter that threatened to choke our pride and the beauty of this island.

New Thrusts in Education

In spite of the valiant efforts being made to articulate clear policies focussing on the schools as the essential unit of the education system, My Government has been saddened by recent events in the sphere of education. Our schools, in times long past sacred places of learning, have for many years been imperilled by the decline in discipline, the indifference to the ingress of drugs, and the breakdown in family and social morality. The results of that incremental neglect is the clear and present danger of their being transformed into houses of dread. The zero tolerance policy of the government in general against criminality and of the Ministry of Education in respect of indiscipline, drugs and violence in schools is essential to the restoration of relief in the public mind and the reestablishment of a climate conducive to learning in our schools. There is an unconditional need for resolute measures to stem the tide before the deluge of lawlessness threatens to sweep all before it. We cannot surrender to the forces of iniquity. My Government whilst cognizant of the rights and freedoms of the individual will never hesitate to be swift and decisive in safeguarding the treasured ethos and valued morality of our society.

A Clear Commitment to Human Rights

During this parliamentary session, My Government intends to give greater recognition to the Charter of Civil Society for the Caribbean Community. My Government is anxious to endorse the enshrined principles of good governance and respect for the fundamental rights of all citizen. My Government will activate a National Committee required in this Charter for monitoring and ensuring implementation of the provisions of the Charter. This Charter seeks principally to establish a binding covenant by Government to the promotion of human rights consistent with the UN Charter on Human Rights and extends the safeguards of our Constitutions in the protection of these fundamental rights and freedoms. Commitment to the provisions of the Charter will be a reaffirmation of confidence in the process of accountability, morality in public affairs, the safeguarding of democracy, and securing the human rights of the individual as the basis for any modern society.

Developing Our Rich Intellectual Tradition

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, St. Lucia has a rich and proud intellectual tradition which has found its highest expression of Glory in the twin Nobel prizes awarded to native sons. It is the intention of my Government to host a Conference of St. Lucian thinkers, writers, scholars and activists in the course of the coming year as part of the celebrations of Independence. Saint Lucia can only benefit from bringing our best minds together from at home and abroad to reflect on the potential of this country.

The intellectual tradition, of which Derek and Sir Arthur are the most luminary expressions, must be nurtured and strengthened. We hope that this will provide some stimulus to the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College as it seeks to fashion an intellectual tradition that is unique. The potential of the St. Lucian and Caribbean mind and imagination is a too often

unrecognized part of our national patrimony. As we move into the new and infinitely more competitive Century in which knowledge is a decisive factor of production, it is the quality of mind that will determine whether we soar among the best or sink with the rest

It is in recognition of this reality that My Government is placing tremendous emphasis on education and the development of the human resource capacity of St. Lucia. In this budgetary year. I this commitment will be demonstrated by an unswerving focus on the schools, and on our youth. The dramatic expansion of secondary educational opportunity will be accompanied by strong diagnosis of the weaknesses of primary education to be followed by appropriate remedial and corrective action. The establishment of Minimum Standards Testing is a first step in this direction and the process of extensive public: and parental consultation which led to the experimental exam this month is indicative of the new participatory and inclusive modus operandi of My Government.

Consistent with My Government's emphasis on putting proper legislative and policy frameworks in place that will provide new parameters of governance, the new Education Bill has already been subject to extensive discussion among key stakeholders. This Bill will be further subjected to a national consultation in the very near future before being brought to this august body for consideration. Through the passage of this legislation, My Government will provide a new platform of modern governance and management to our educational enterprise.

Mr.. President, Mr. Speaker, all around the world we hear it repeatedly stressed that the 21st Century is the age of information and that the fundamental tool for turning knowledge into opportunity is the computer. My Government has already started work on a project designed to drive our children and our schools on the information superhighway. The Millennium Project as it is called, will provide computers in all schools, provide training and orientation to teachers in the use of the technology, and develop the capacity for curriculum development in computer aided instruction. Indications of interest and financial support for this seminal initiative have already been obtained from external sources and My Government expects to move to full I implementation by the year 2002.

A Place, Role and Challenge for Everyone

In this country each and every one of us is important. Each and every one of us has a unique contribution to make to the rest of us. The hotel worker, the taxi driver, the banana farmer are not foot soldiers but vanguard fighters in this collective battle for quality, for excellence, for survival. Our communities and our country are diminished by the loss of one. Our standards and our reputation are lowered by the mediocrity of any. Whenever hope falters, possibility is weakened. Whenever resolve fades, capacity is diminished. Whenever vision weakens, direction is lost and the nation begins to perish. My Government expects that the optimism of expectation that galvanized St. Lucians in May 1997 will find renewed expression in the dynamism of action. The great Caribbean political thinker Franz Fanon once said that the challenge of every generation is to discover its historical mission and having done so to fulfill it. The historical mission of My Government is to establish new platforms of performance, define new echelons of excellence, new frameworks of fortitude. And having done so, to allow St. Lucians to fulfill themselves. It is now for all of us to assume, without reservation, that challenge.