



THRONE SPEECH

BY



**HER EXCELLENCY
DAME PEARLETTE LOUISY**

GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF SAINT LUCIA

ON THE OCCASION OF THE

FORMAL OPENING OF THE

**SECOND SESSION OF THE NINTH PARLIAMENT OF
SAINT LUCIA**

April 19, 2007

Madam President, Madam Speaker

I welcome this opportunity – the second since the events of December 11, 2006 – to address Honourable Members, and through them, the people of St Lucia and to outline the policies which my Government intends to pursue during this session of Parliament, and the legislative measures which will be introduced in furtherance of these objectives.

Less than two months ago the people of St Lucia celebrated the twenty-eighth anniversary of our country's Independence. The highlight of these celebrations was the National Rally during which our young people exhibited their talents. They are truly the product of our independence. Our hearts were filled with pride when they sang with such feeling, our National Anthem which contains the words, "Gone the times when nations battled for this Helen of the West." In the current political debate these words are pregnant with meaning and we may well ask ourselves the question, "Are these days really gone?"

Independence gives your Government the right to choose. The only guide should be what is in the best interest of the people of our country and the advancement of their good and welfare.

My Government offers the hand of friendship to all peoples and has no desire to be embroiled in diplomatic entanglements. All our relationships must be based on mutual respect, equality and mutual benefit. A small country like ours must navigate most carefully among the reefs and shoals of the diplomatic seas.

After Independence in 1979, Government had the opportunity to make choices in Saint Lucia's diplomatic relations with respect to the China policy. After the most careful examination of the issues, the decision was taken to establish full diplomatic relations with Taiwan. This relationship was cordial and mutually beneficial and lasted some thirteen (13) years. In 1997, there was a change of Government in St Lucia and these relations were severed. Taiwan was replaced by the People's Republic of China, but was invited to maintain commercial relations with Saint Lucia.

My Government is of the firm belief that a mere change of Government should not be reason enough to sever diplomatic ties with any country.

However, in my address to the Parliament of St Lucia on the 9th of January 2007, I had stated quite clearly that to ensure our people reaped the rewards of their electoral triumph, my Government would strain every muscle, knock on every door, pursue every lead, which could improve the public good and welfare.

It is in furtherance of this policy that my Government has sought to open dialogue with a number of countries as well as with Taiwan. So it was that Taiwan was invited to send a delegation to St Lucia to examine how, in the present circumstances, and recognizing the present diplomatic realities, the interests of both parties could be advanced.

My Government will therefore make a statement on this matter in due course.

Madanm Pwezidan, Madanm Speaker,

Pou li dezyenm fwa depi wonz desanm 2006, mwen ka sezi lokasyon-an pou adwese tout manm Parleman epi tout Sent Lisyen pou pwezante pwoje twavay Gouvedman peyi-a pou sesyon nef-la ki ka koumanse-a. Pwemye fwa-a, li nef janvyè lanne sala, mwen te ponmet ki Gouvedman te kay fe tout sa i te pe pou fe lavi pep peyi-a pli alez. Se pou wezon sala Gouvedman ja antanme diskisyon epi plisyè entewè lot peyi pou we ki mannye yo sa ende nou avanse pwogwam developman peyi nou-an.

Me, Madanm Pwezidan, Madanm Speaker

La ni anchay lot twavay ki ni pou fet an peyi-a. Se fo nou kontine pwan tout kalite demach pou devlope, epi avanse, pa egzanmp, sistenm lendikasyon epi sistenm sante peyi-a. Tout moun ka hele kont kalite movez disiplin epi kwim an sosyete-a. Me se pou nou koumanse atake se

pwoblenm sala an se lekòl peyi-a. Konsa se lantansyon Gouvèman pou wanfòse lwa-a ki ka wegle lendikasyon, pou bay met lekòl epi otowite legliz ki ka mennaje lekòl pli wespansabilite pou pwan se demach-la epi fe se chanjeman-an ki nesese.

Nou ni twavay pou fe anko asou lendustwi fig-la. Pou eseye awive about adan se pwoblenm sala, Gouvèman kay entwodwi lwa pou mennan tout Konpanni fig viye ansanm pou ameliowe kalite sevis-la yo ka bay se plante fig-la. Epi pou ende pa selman moun ki an fig, me osi an lot tibisnis, Gouvèman kay viye etabli an Bank Devlopman.

Mwen te pale denyeman asou chanjeman ki bizwen fet asou Labour Code-la. Toutswit Gouvèman kay etabli an Konmite pou egzamine lwa-a epi pou pwopose se kalite chanjeman-an ki kay satisfè tout sekte ki ni lentewe an lwa sala – Gouvèman, Anplwaye, Twavay, Sendika.

Me Madanm Pwezidan, Madanm Speaker pou vini about tout se gwan twavay sala nou ni pou fe-a, nou kay ni pou depann asou labenediksyon, poteksyon epi mizewikod di Dye. Se li ki Met. Paski menm si nou, lonm, ka pwopose, se Dye, Gwan Met-la ki ka dispose.

Madam President, Madam Speaker

My Government continues to accord the highest priority to the reduction of crime in all its manifestations. To this end programmes of training and equipping the Royal Police Force will continue, and where necessary will be enhanced. Already the presence of the Police on patrol has begun to show results and there is now a measure of calm and a feeling of security in our land.

My Government is nevertheless concerned about the backlog of unheard cases which clutter our court system and the unacceptably long delays between charge and trial. Certain measures, including the establishment of a Night Court will be introduced with the aim of reducing, and ultimately of eliminating the problem. Changes in the laws relating to the admission and presentation of evidence will be introduced to shorten procedures in criminal trials and a Petty Claims Court for dealing with simple civil suits will be introduced.

In the pursuit of delivering justice to our people and to enhance their security, my Government will not act alone because the problems faced in St Lucia are common to all countries of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), particularly with respect to the transport and sale of illicit drugs and the laundering of money, which are both manifestations of the same problem. My Government has therefore proposed to the Secretariat of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States that certain

measures aimed at furthering co-operation in the legal and judicial areas be pursued.

In pursuance of this, my Government will request the OECS Authority to re-examine the feasibility of a unified legal and judicial system for all OECS countries, whereby persons entering the system will have promotional opportunities throughout the region, and will be subject to transfers by the Unified Judicial and Legal Commission established for this purpose. This will open horizons for young professionals seeking to make a career in the regional Judicial and Legal System.

My Government has also proposed a similar arrangement for the officers of Gazetted ranks of the respective Police Forces in the OECS region. Under this proposal, officers of Gazetted ranks will be freely transferable, whether by promotion or not, throughout the region, thus expanding the career opportunities of young professionals in the Regional Police Force. In support of this initiative, my Government will propose to the Authority the establishment of a Regional Police Training College. Financing for this College will be sought from donor agencies until responsibility can be assumed by Regional Governments.

My Government will continue to give priority to the education and health of our people and will continue to seek improvement to Universal Secondary Education and the Universal Health Care System to ensure that all our young people and our citizens have access to education and to health. To

this end, the training of Teachers and Health Personnel in St Lucia will continue and be intensified.

My Government recognizes the link between indiscipline and crime and is determined to tackle this problem, beginning with the schools. In this regard, there are some shortcomings in the Education Act of 1999 which need to be urgently addressed. The responsibility of Principals for the management of their schools and the maintenance of discipline in their schools will need to be strengthened, and Parent/Teacher Associations for every school will be vigorously encouraged.

The issue of Religious Education in schools will be re-examined with the view of making it an integral part of the curriculum. The relationship between Government and the Managers of denominational schools will be carefully defined and enshrined in a Concordat to be agreed between Government and the respective denominations, in order that any grey areas which can lead to misunderstanding may be eliminated. Co-operation between Church and State in this area is absolutely essential for social cohesion.

My Government, while grateful for assistance in the field of Education, accepts the primary responsibility for the training and education of our people. To this end, the capacity of the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College will be expanded to cope with the demand particularly in the field

of Nursing and study allowances for Student Nurses and Teachers will be considered as soon as the financial resources are available.

Madam President, Madam Speaker,

These social measures require appropriate support from the economic sector. Re-organisation of the Banana Industry, particularly in the export sector is imperative if St Lucia is to meet the challenges of the World Trade Organisation and globalization of the markets. To this end legislation will be introduced to merge the various banana exporting companies to permit them to offer efficient and economical services to farmers.

The marketing of non-traditional export crops will be addressed as a matter of urgency, and expert advice will be sought for the creation of a Marketing Corporation to assist farmers with the grading and packaging of their products to meet the standard of Supermarkets and Hotels. A Development Bank will be re-established to offer financial support not only to farmers but also to small businesses whether in the service or production sectors.

In order to diversify our economy my Government will seek to utilise every advantage our country possesses. One such advantage is the resources of the sea and the attraction of our bays and harbours to yachtsmen. Already expansions are taking place at Rodney Bay and Marigot and increasing attention is being paid to Vieux Fort, Soufriere and other bays. In order to take full advantage of this interest, my Government will give priority to the

establishment of a St Lucia Ship Registry, and recognize yachts and yachting as an approved tourism product with all the accompanying incentives, and with full encouragement for local participation.

Madam President, Madam Speaker,

In this age of globalization and in the face of rapid changes in our economy, our laws, and in particular the laws relating to property, financing and the economy must keep pace with the needs of economic and monetary changes in the world with which we must interface. This situation demands an urgent review of our Civil Code as it relates to property rights and obligations, the sale, lease and hypothecation of lands, and the laws relating to the acquisition of land and rights in land by Aliens. The present laws relating to these matters are antiquated and should be revised to meet the needs of a modern economy. Legislation relating to these matters will be placed before Honourable Members at this session for their consideration.

Recent changes in the Finance (Administration) Act intended to facilitate Government's business threaten to undermine the authority of Parliament for review of expenditure, and the powers of the Tenders Board for the award of contracts. This has led to what appears to be abuse of authority and presents opportunities for what may be considered corrupt practices. In order to restore the control of Parliament over expenditure, appropriate amendments to the Finance (Administration) Act will be presented to the Honourable House for its urgent consideration.

So widespread is the perception that Governmental authority has been abused, particularly in the award of contracts, and the creation of companies to deal with matters which should be more appropriately dealt with by Statutory Authorities, that my Government is compelled to formally consider that these allegations be inquired into by a Commission of Inquiry, the terms of reference of which will be announced at a later date. In the meantime, Cabinet has appointed a Forensic Audit into certain contracts including the Soufriere-Vieux Fort Highway. The result of this audit will be made public as soon as it is available.

Madam President, Madam Speaker

These and other measures, which will be presented to Honourable Members for their consideration, have as their primary objective the improvement of the quality of life and the standard of living of our people. They are aimed at removing the scourges of ignorance, poverty and disease from our midst. Unemployment, particularly among the young, is currently at an unacceptably high rate. To reduce this, there must be a partnership between Government, the private sector and the Unions – a partnership which is entrusted to create the environment in which the necessary investment could be made to provide jobs needed to remove the scourge.

In my last address to Parliament, I reminded Honourable Members that as the economy changes from the production of goods to the delivery of services, so too should our methods of solving industrial relations problems

which will inevitably arise. This should change from confrontation and conflict to conciliation and compromise.

The body of laws which should guide our conduct in this area should be one which has the general approval of all stakeholders. The Labour Code in its present form does not satisfy this criteria nor does it satisfy the undertaking given to the International Labour Organisation when this Code was first contemplated. In its present form, the Code contains seeds of conflict which should be avoided.

As indicated in my last address in Parliament a new Committee comprising stakeholders in Government, employers and employees will be shortly convened with the mandate to remove all areas of possible dispute and give to this country a body of laws which is in harmony with the words of our Anthem "Gone the days when strife and discord dimmed our children's toil and rest".

These therefore are the general directions in which my Government will direct our dear land, as we accept the challenges of this new century, with all its hopes and fears, but also with its glorious opportunities, if we but prepare our country to accept them.

Madam President, Madam Speaker, in dealing with the challenges ahead, I pray that God may always be our guide. This is my wish as I declare open the Second Session of the Ninth Parliament of St Lucia.