

THRONE SPEECH

By
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ON THE OCCASION OF THE

THIRD SESSION OF THE SEVENTH PARLIAMENT
OF SAINT LUCIA

March 23rd 1999

Mr. President and Members of the Senate,

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly,

This third session of the Seventh Parliament meets on the eve of our 21st Anniversary of National Independence. We have walked the long and painful road of history, we have endured the epic nightmare of slavery, and we have celebrated the art of memory. In this tunnel of time, the fever of anticipation and the excitement of our own possibilities have been tempered by the exhaustion of the challenges that confront us and the persistence of the battles that have had to be waged for survival.

In this chronicle of history, the substantive measure of our maturity is not the 21 years that we have spoken our own name on the international stage but the five hundred years during which this courageous people have kept the light aflame in this beloved land. Over these five hundred years, a nation and a people have emerged from conquest and decimation, from chattel transportation and degradation, from apprenticeship and indentureship. That is the historical resonance of our national motto: "*the land, the people, the light*".

As the sun sets on this final year of what has been a truly great century, we ought – as a people – to digest the lessons of history so that we are nourished and ennobled to face, with renovated resilience, the longer and more uncertain road ahead.

A New Age at the Moment of National Maturity

In the life of the individual the 21-year milestone is a marker of maturity. So too in the history of a nation, 21 years of Independence ought to mark a particular kind of coming of age. When that milestone synchronizes with the arrival of a new millennium, this coincidence of history and possibility must be imbued with special philosophical attention.

Individually and collectively we must ask ourselves how have we matured in this coming of age? Individually and collectively we must ask ourselves how competitive are we in this coming of millennium? Have the fires of history tempered our identity in ways that are solid

and resilient or have they melted our resolve into fluid identities that shape themselves into the convenience of the moment's form?

These are some of the questions that we must ponder as we age into the millennium. 1999 should be for us, a year of profound reflection: a time to think and assess. A time for reflection on what we have achieved and what we have failed to accomplish. A time for introspection about who we are and what we have become. 1999 should be, for us all, a time to put St. Lucia on exhibition every day of the year for the remainder of the year. A time for us to first of all remind ourselves of the positive and the potential and secondly to showcase that achievement and ability to the rest of the world.

Let us use 1999 as a springboard to elevate our sense of national pride by celebrating our country. My Government will ensure that our schools place special focus on national identity, on civic consciousness, on environmental awareness, on social responsibility throughout this year. Our communities should make 1999 a year of soul searching and spring cleaning – rediscovering the things that make for authentic community while redecorating our environment to reflect the pride in ourselves and in our spaces.

Dépi nou tout lévé, nou apwann ki, lè an moun wivé ventenyen lanné do laj, I pas timanmay ankò. I ni wèspansabilité pou kò'y. An menm mannyè-a, nou pé di ki, lè an péyi wivé sélébwé ventenyen lanné endépandans, péyi sala ni pou doubout asou kont kò'y. Lanné pochenn, lanné dé mil, Sent Lisi kay òbzèvé ventenyenm lannivèsè endépandans li. Lanné pochenn, lanné dé mil, sé koumansman yon lépòk nèf, yon millennyum nèf. Avan nou menm mété pyé nou douvan pou antanmé lépòk nèf sala, sé fo nou mandé kò nou dé o twa kèstyon:

Ki kalité pwépaasyon nou Sent Lisien ja fè pou endé nou tjenn tèt nou anlè dlo, pou éwisi pami lézòt an lépòk nèf sala ki ka vini an?

Tout sé pas-la nou ja pasé a, ès yo éwisi fè nou pli fo, pli détèminé, pli solid, ében ès nou kité yo démòwalizé nou, détwi lèspwi nou èk lam nou, jikatan nou vini moun ki pa sa katjilé pou kò yo? Es nou sé moun ki ka chanjé lidé nou silon mannyè van-an ka vanté?

Annou sèvi lanné sala, lanné mil nèf san katwiven nèf sala, pou wéfléchi, pou katjilé. Annou doubout épi pwan tan nou pou wéfléchi asou ki pwogwé nou ja fè; ki sa nou pòkò éwisi fè; ki kalité moun nou yè; ki diwèksyon nou vlé pwan an tan-an ki ka vini an. Pou lèstan lanné sala, annou mété Sent Lisi asou lèkzibisyon touléjou. Annou fè kò nou chonjé tout sa ki bon èk positif nou kapab fè. Annou moutwé lèstan latè-a nou ja éwisi fè épi sa nou kapab fè toujou. Annou sèvi lanné sala pou sélébwé Sent Lisi; pou wanfòsé tout sa ki bon pami nou; pou èzaminé konsyans nasyonal nou; pou anbéli èk dékowé péyi nou èk konminoté nou. Sé pa paski nou pa no mwoyen kon lézòt pou nou tjenn kò nou malfouti.

The Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International trade will be asked to work jointly to make the 21st Anniversary and the celebration of the year 2000 a

special homecoming for St. Lucians abroad. My Government will require both ministries to put in place all the necessary mechanisms to ensure a great reunion of St. Lucians here at home. All of St. Lucia's sons and daughters from wheresoever they may have roamed, the faithful and the prodigal, coming home for the year 2000. Let us all open our hearts and homes to them.

Culture & Identity

The confluence of 21st Independence Anniversary and arrival of Millennium also provides us with a unique window for cultural emphasis. 1999 will be a year in which my Government will seek to place culture and the creative arts within a new framework free of bureaucratic constraints. The creation of an autonomous National Institute of Culture simultaneously with the adoption of a national cultural policy should set the stage for the unfettered development of the arts. The imagination and the creative impulse have never been subordinated to bureaucratic decree and cultural development has never worked where the state has sought to regulate creative expression. My government expects that the Cultural Institute and the cultural policy will provide the umbrella of freedom and the cover of protection that local artists have always sought.

My Government has also established a Commission to review the options for expanded modalities of national recognition through a National Heroes Day and a broader system of national awards. As we examine and seek to re-define ourselves, the recognition of those on whose shoulders we stand must feed our national identity. My Government is also resolute in its determination that the celebration of Emancipation Day becomes a ritual of respect and remembrance of the epic pain and the monumental journey that we have undertaken. From the memory of the Holocaust the Jews have mined the fragments that they have shored against future ruin. From Emancipation Day let us cultivate the art of historical memory and celebrate the resilience that has fashioned a people out of that deep divided hurt.

The Global Conjecture

In its issue of February 15th 1999, Time Magazine, reporting on the world financial crisis and the role of US policy makers in averting worldwide meltdown, indicated "*in the past 18 months, 40% of the world's economies have been tugged from robust growth into recession or depression*".

The volatility of the world economy today constitutes the major challenge for small developing economies like ours. The emergence of seamless global markets and the impact of information technology on the reach and timing of these markets have made market reaction simultaneous. Small economies like ours have therefore even narrower options for maneuver on the global stage. In such a context my Government has sought to maintain a strict level of fiscal prudence in the management of the public purse to ensure that the local economy is – to the limit of the capacity afforded to us by global constraints – protected and kept on a sound footing. My Government is pleased to record that of the seven fiscal targets set for 1998/99, six were met. Real economic growth achieved was 2.87% as distinct from the target of 2 to 2.5%. To have managed economic growth in a period in which 40% of the world's economies

were hit by recession and in a context in which my Government inherited an economy that was in steady decline from 1994, speaks to the prudence of the fiscal and economic targets set by my Government.

The Legislative Agenda – the continued re-shaping of governance

Since assuming the mantle of responsibility, my Government has pursued a vigorous legislative agenda the philosophical underpinnings of which are focussed on the re-shaping of citizenship rights and responsibilities in the context of a greater accountability of government. This has involved the articulation of new regulatory frameworks providing clearer parameters for the rights of citizens in relation to their obligations to the state. The consistent approach of my Government in the execution of this agenda has been a consultative approach. Unprecedented opportunities have been opened for public consultation, debate and comment on draft legislation. Stakeholders in various sectors have been included in the circulation of draft legislation for comment and feedback, which has been followed by amendment in the light of comments and constructive suggestions received.

My government believes that such openness will ensure greater public awareness and attention to matters affecting the vital interests of the citizen. As the current temperature of the debate on the draft income tax bill reveals, public discussion, dissent, and argumentation, all contribute to the vitality of our democracy and heighten public participation in matters of governance. In the past 18 months, the draft Education Bill, the Legal Profession Bill, Financial Services legislation, the Cooperative Society Bill among others have been through such processes of consultation and the public recommendations that have been received have been invaluable in shaping more effective legislation. Since the assumption of public responsibility by my Government, a record twenty-seven (27) pieces of new legislation have been brought to Parliament.

My government will continue to subject new legislation to this level of critical public scrutiny and, consistent with its pledge for greater accountability, will continue to take full consideration of the concerns and recommendations made by various stakeholders.

In addition to the initiatives taken to strengthen and modernize our legislation, my Government will continue to strengthen the mechanisms and institutions for enforcement and maintenance of law and order. In this financial year, it is proposed that a new immigration department staffed by civilians be established. It is wasteful and unproductive to occupy the time and energy of highly trained Police to undertake what are essentially clerical assignments. Freeing the Police of these duties will refocus them on the more vital function of maintaining law and order. The draft legislation to facilitate this will be introduced in the last quarter of this financial year.

Another related dimension of the nexus between the legislative agenda and institutional development, is the need to effect the complete restructuring of the Planning Department. My Government has received the Report of a consultancy from the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (including draft legislation) on the efficiency and operations of the department. My government is deeply concerned about the bottlenecks

to development created by a Physical Planning Department with complicated and inflexible approval procedures. On the one hand, physical planning application and approvals processes must be time sensitive to the investment costs incurred by unreasonable processing delay while on the other hand, planning codes must be strictly enforceable and fully respectful of environmental imperatives. Consistent with our approach, the draft act will be circulated to all stakeholders for comment and feedback.

The draft Education bill that was brought for first reading to this honourable House has been through an exhaustive process of consultation. The Minister for Education, Human Resource Development, Youth & Sports has before him a collation of all of the recommendations received through written submissions of stakeholders, the suggestions received through the newspaper inserts from the general public, and specific conclusions of the national consultation that was held by the Ministry. Additional discussions held with the St. Lucia Christian Council and the Catholic Educational Board of Management by the Minister for Education resulted in a consensual accommodation on those sections of the draft bill considered problematic by the Denominational Authorities.

Gouvèdman kay kontiné, tazantan, kwiyé asou moun péyi-a pou bay lopinyon yo asou législasyon i ni lantansyon fòmulé. I kay kwiyé asou yo pou patisipé adan sé diskisyon-an ki kay pwan kou o nivo nasyonal, pou asiwé ki tout moun ki konsèné ni lokasyon pou fè kontwibousyon yo. Sé pwésizman kalité konsiltasyon sala ki té pwan kou dènyèman an, asou pwojé lwa lendikasyon an. Tout sa ki té vlé, ében tout sa ki té pé, té ni lokasyon-an pou fè kontwibousyon yo. Chèf légliz katolik épi manm Konsit Kwétyen Sent Lisi ki té ni pwoblenm épi sèten pwopozisyon an pwojé lwa sala té ni lokasyon pou asiz èvèk lofisyé Ministè-a pou diskité, épi finalman pou dakò asou yon disisyon ki chaken touvé aksèptab.

In the life of this session of Parliament, My Government has a long legislative agenda before it that includes several bills that have already been drafted for the consideration of Cabinet. They include:

- Minimum Wages Bill
- Pensions (Consolidation) Bill
- Status, Recognition & Registration of Trade Unions & Employers Associations Bill
- Money Laundering Bill
- Sale of Produce Bill
- Saint Lucia Air & Seaports (Amendment) Bill
- Caribbean Investment Fund Bill
- Hotel Occupancy Tax (Amendment) Bill
- Cooperatives Society Bill

Additional legislation that will also be brought for consideration include:

- Equal Opportunity Bill
- International Business Companies Bill
- National Housing Corporation Bill

Liquor Licensing (Amendment) Bill
Legal Professions Bill
A package of five bills related to the Offshore financial centre (i.e. exempted trusts, captive insurance etc.)
National Heroes Bill
Predial Larceny Bill

The Budget as an Instrument of Reform

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, the budget that will be brought to this Parliament will continue the work of the preceding budgets presented by My Government by focussing on institutional reform, economic consolidation and social recovery. In other simpler words, government agencies and departments that work properly, jobs and a better way of living and a fight against poverty. With the advent of program budgeting, my Government has more consciously sought to utilize the budget as a policy instrument for the articulation of its medium and longer-term goals.

In the Budget that will shortly be brought for the consideration of this Parliament, my Government has sought to achieve a more rational use of the available resources and an emphasis on the priority areas of Education, Housing, Roads, Tourism and Economic Diversification (with our incursion into Financial Services).

Preparing our Children for the Third Millennium

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, our preparation for the Millennium must begin with those among us who are destined to fully inhabit the new age – our children. The task of this generation is simply to guarantee the passage of inheritance to the next and my Government has determined that the jewel of that inheritance must be to unlock the doors of cyberspace and provide the keys of information technology to our children. The Millennium Project will be started with the establishment of prototypes in selected schools and public libraries to lay the basis for the full provision of computer access in all schools, the training of teachers in the use of the technology, the incorporation of computer-aided instruction in all subject areas and in all schools early in the Millennium.

Through an incremental and systematic approach, my Government will be providing access to the Internet to all schools and libraries. The Ministry of Education has negotiated a special arrangement with Cable & Wireless that will provide telephone lines and Internet access at a fixed and reasonable rate of \$100,000 per annum. The Curriculum & Materials Development Unit of the Ministry has already commenced experimental work on the development of multi-media instructional material and computer-aided instructional packages for the schools. The vision of my Government is to establish an island-wide educational intranet that will be the gateway to the Internet for all educational institutions and within which will reside self-paced instructional material for use by students in all subject areas and at all levels.

Social Re-alignment and Re-adjustment

In the course of this year, the budgetary provisions to be made by My Government will begin the process of social realignment and readjustment through a series of measures that include:

Creating special economic opportunities for persons in depressed areas through the creation of the James E. Belgrave Social Investment Fund to service the so-called ghetto communities and address poverty eradication.

Opening access to land to persons wanting to own property. My Government will be introducing a Five Year Low Income Housing programme that will provide unprecedented opportunities for lower and middle income families to own their homes.

Diwan lanné sala, Gouvèdman mwen kay koumansé pwan sèten démach pou adwésé plisyè pwoblenm sosyal ki ka kontiné afèkté lé pli maléwé pami nou.

- 1. Gouvèdman ni lantansyon établi an kèz spésyal ki yo kay kwiyé “The James E. Belgrave Social InvestmenFund” pou endé moun ki ka wété an sèten konminoté pòv pou établi ti antwépwis yo menm, pou wann yo\ mwens depandan asou lézòt pou bay yo twavay.**
- 2. Gouvèdman kay fè manèv pou fè’y pli ésé pou moun ki pa ka twavay pou anchay lajan pou achté an pwopyété pou bati kay yo. Avan mas lanné pochenn, Gouvèdman mwen kay lansé yon pwojé ki kay diwé senk an pou éséyé genyen about pwoblenm sala.**

My Government expects that these initiatives will collectively constitute a significant and concerted attack on poverty from many angles – from alleviation to eradication – and will provide new material meaning for thousands of St. Lucian families shackled by social deprivation. Only by a resolute assault on the causes of poverty can we expect to build a secure future and a safe society of opportunity for all.

Electoral Reform: the Consolidation of Our Democratic Framework

My Government is cognizant of the need to ensure that the coincidence of our 21st national birthday and the arrival of the Millennium do not find us lacking in the configuration of governance. As has been attempted in other spheres of governance, our electoral system is in dire need of review and modernization. Demographic changes have distorted the alignment of constituencies, information technology now makes possible the establishment of totally accurate geographic and demographic information systems to facilitate voter registration and electoral management. The stated commitment of my Government to re-introduce local government will further necessitate the modernization of the technology of our electoral system so that the democratic process can be accurate and fair.

Consistent with statements made to Parliament to ensure that the process of electoral reform is conducted in a fair and impartial manner, my Government sought and obtained the assistance of the Commonwealth Secretariat in undertaking an initial study of this need. My

Government has followed this with a request for assistance from the Organization of American States. The OAS Unit for the Promotion of Democracy will undertake a project for the reform of the St. Lucia electoral system involving the following key elements:

- A house to house enumeration;
- Modernization of civil and electoral registries, incorporating information obtained through the enumeration;
- Technical assistance and expertise to advise on the re-drawing of constituency boundaries;
- The design of a national identification card
- Provision of training and technical assistance to users of the integrated data system to be established.

The approach to be taken by my Government draws heavily on external expertise because it seeks to learn from electoral best practices worldwide and also to ensure that the process is politically consensual. My Government will ensure that, at every stage, the political opposition is consulted and appraised of the initiatives being undertaken.

A New Era, New Challenge, New Hope

As we stand at this intersection of the Millennia, facing the crossroads of our own future, let the words of our National Anthem inspire our thoughts and direct our feet, pointing us in the direction of national progress, and social unity.

Lanné sala nou ka touvé kò nou adan an kat chimen. Dèyè nou, sé listwa nou; douvan nou sé yon lépòk toutafè nèf. Annou pwan lokasyon sala pou wéfléchi asou pawòl chanson nasyonal nou, pou gidé nou asou mannyè pou nou konpòté kò nou an tan-an ki ka vini an. Sé lajistis, lavéwité èk lachawité ki kay endé nou wéalizé sa nou ka swété yonnalòt – sa vlé di, pwogwé nasyonal épi linyon sosyal.

While gone might be the days when nations battled for this Helen of the West, the necessity for our continued struggle for survival endures. While strife and discord might not have been banished from our shining shores, there is every reason for every St. Lucian to work towards that national harmony and accord so that her children – past and present – will not have toiled in vain or their rest restrained. Only this resolve will make it possible for us to enter the morning of the new millennium singing truthfully *“dawns at last a brighter day, stretches out a glad new way.”*

Elected as it has been on a surge of expectation and desire of our people for a different way of doing things, my Government will continue to work feverishly for the attainment of that better life for all and having done so, can only fervently hope that the Good Lord may *“bless our island, guard her sons [and daughters] from woe and harm”*, that our people may *“live united, strong in soul and strong in arm.”* Behind the financial provisions of this budget and the programmatic directions that they map, is nothing less than the effort to ensure that *“Justice, Truth and Charity, our ideal forever be.”*

I now declare open this third session of our Seventh Parliament of Saint Lucia.