



2025 NEW YEAR'S ADDRESS

BY

HONOURABLE PHILIP J. PIERRE

**PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER FOR FINANCE, ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT AND YOUTH ECONOMY AND MINISTER FOR
JUSTICE AND NATIONAL SECURITY**

12 January, 2025

New Year Greetings. . .

Fellow Saint Lucians, let me start by wishing each and every Saint Lucian, both at home and abroad, a happy, healthy, productive and prosperous New Year. Let us pledge to build together a better Saint Lucia in 2025.

As we start this new year, it is an appropriate time to reflect on our lives, to recognize our shortcomings and to celebrate our gains. It is also the time to resolve to do better and commit to changes in our thoughts and actions so that we may contribute to the advancement of our country and humanity. As a people, we must think less of ourselves if we are to live truly fulfilling lives.

A Call for Unity

As we embark upon this moment of reflection and renewal, I urge you to commit to goodwill and unity in the year ahead and to extend love and kindness to each other, especially towards the most vulnerable in our midst.

In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, *“The true measure of a society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.”* Put another way, the strength of the societal chain is as strong as its weakest link. We, therefore, need to give special attention to the vulnerable and marginalized if we are to benefit from a strong and resilient society. It’s the only way to build a strong Saint Lucia.

In the exercise of our rights to freely associate with others, politically and otherwise, we must never lose our humanity and sense of fairness in the way we deal with each others who may be different. Let us always remember, we are one Saint Lucian people with a common destiny and a shared purpose to make our country a better place for ourselves, future generations, and visitors who come to our shores to enjoy the beauty of our island and its people.

2024 - A Year of Inspiration and Progress

The year 2024 was, in many respects, an inspirational and very productive year for our country, particularly in the fields of sports, economic performance, youth employment, tourism, healthcare, education, and infrastructure.

In 2024, we registered significant economic growth. We increased social support to the vulnerable population, expanded scholarship disbursements, enhanced health care services, facilitated youth development and provided financial support to small and medium-sized businesses; we expanded housing opportunities for public servants, and increased income to pensioners.

It was a year in which Saint Lucia accomplished considerable progress based on the solid performance of this Government. These achievements -powered by our mission of **putting people first-** will be the building blocks for even greater progress in 2025, as we work together towards continuous improvement.

The Economy in 2024

Despite imported global inflation, an unstable world environment, supply chain disruptions, and the impact of Hurricane Beryl on the agriculture and fisheries sectors, Saint Lucia experienced three (3) consecutive years of economic growth. Two (2) consecutive years of primary surpluses which enabled the government to service the interest component of its debt obligations. This is a testament to the sound economic policies of financial stabilization, debt sustainability, social relief and economic growth pursued by this government since July 2021.

Inflation

However, I am aware that the country is continuing to experience the effects of imported inflation as reflected in the rising costs of goods particularly in the supermarkets. In 2021, global inflation had risen to about 8% caused by the effects of the COVID 19 Pandemic, supply chain disruptions, and the war in Ukraine. While inflation has begun to subside in some major economies, it is still significantly above pre-pandemic levels for the majority of countries including Saint Lucia. We do not influence the cost of imported goods, but as a government that cares, we have taken measures to reduce the price of these goods to consumers.

We have implemented price control measures on basic goods and continue to subsidize flour, sugar, and rice, amounting to \$26.7 million from 2022 to 2024. Additionally, we have maintained subsidies on 20 lb. and 22 lb. cooking gas cylinders.

We increased the pensions for Government and NIC pensioners and introduced a new minimum wage, raising the salaries of lower-income workers.

We raised the tax threshold to \$24,000, increased the fuel rebate for fishers, and removed VAT on building materials and sanitary products.

In 2025, together with the business sector we will continue to explore a wide range of initiatives to further reduce the impact of inflation on our people.

Youth Economy

After just two (2) years in operation, the country is starting to feel the economic impact of the Youth Economy, as the eco-system created by the Youth Economy Agency (YEA) delivers on its mandate to provide finance, training, marketing and mentorship to our young people seeking self-sustainable employment. Our youth are continuing to turn their hobbies into entrepreneurship and skills into business, as envisioned by this government.

It is evident that the Youth Economy has had a positive impact on generating employment opportunities in the economy, in particular, on youth unemployment which has dropped from a high of 37% in 2021, to 17% in 2024. The economy recorded the lowest unemployment level in over a decade at 11.8% in October 2024. The unemployment rate dropped to below 12% for three consecutive quarters in a calendar year, the first time in Saint Lucia's history.

Economic Outlook

It is projected that economic growth will continue in 2025 as most economic indicators in 2024 continued to trend upwards. In 2025, it is the government's aim to further reduce unemployment, particularly youth unemployment.

However, we must guard against downside risks, which could adversely impact the economy, such as Climate Change- induced weather events like tropical storms, hurricanes, droughts, as well as regional and global conflicts, which can cause inflation and economic downturns in the wider world economy and in Saint Lucia.

Tourism

Tourism continues to be the leading generator of revenue, economic activity and for capital investments in the economy. Community-Based Tourism has expanded across the country, bringing greater benefits to local communities. This trend is expected to intensify this year as government investments and access to resources, through the Community Tourism Agency (CTA), reach more rural and coastal communities.

2024 was a record-breaking year for tourism arrivals. In October 2024, Saint Lucia recorded stay-over tourist arrivals at 13% above pre-COVID 19 levels, and 15% above 2023 figures.

Cruise ship arrivals are expected to be over 800,000 by the end of the current cruise season.

Tourism contribution to the GDP is expected to continue to rise in 2025.

In the year 2024 a number of new tourism investments commenced and construction is expected to continue in 2025. Among these investments are the Rodney Bay Marina Development at the Pope Site, which began in April and construction on the various hotels continue across the country including, Secrets Resort and Spa, a 334-room renovation and refurbishment project, the Mount Pimard Hotels at Reduit, and the Dreams & Zoetry, Canelles Hotel Development.

It is the government's philosophical position that the benefits of tourism must accrue to as many as possible. Those who are able and desirous of participating in the economy should not be excluded once they meet the required standards. The new Tourism Development Act will ensure that incentives are more easily available and allow for increased rewards for investors that make extra contributions to the economy.

Concerns have been raised by Taxi operators about the unavailability of tours even when there are large numbers of cruise passengers. In the spirit of working together for the benefit of all, I hope that these concerns can be alleviated.

Agriculture

In 2025, the government working together with farmers of the country will implement measures to improve the country's food security and farmers' livelihoods. In 2024, farmers through the

UBEC Programme were provided with water tanks and other agricultural inputs to increase the yield from their farms. In 2025, the farm worker support programme will continue.

This year support for farmers will be intensified to reduce the food import bill and increase the production of locally grown fruits and vegetables for the citizens.

In 2024, the government increased the fuel rebate for registered fishers with cooperative societies from \$1.50 to \$2.50 per gallon, with a maximum allocation of 6,000 gallons per vessel and up to \$15,000 per quarter. This initiative aims to reduce the operational costs of fishers and improve their the livelihoods.

\$430,000 was provided to 38 registered fishers in Soufriere, who experienced loss and damage from the passage of Hurricane Beryl.

Citizen by Investment Program (CIP)

The CIP program continued to do well in 2024, notwithstanding efforts from the opposition in collaboration with hostile and badly motivated foreign sources to destabilize and destroy it, and cause reputational damage to Saint Lucia. We will continue to work closely with the UK, US, and EU authorities and with other OECS countries with similar programs to preserve and protect confidence in the program.

An interim regulatory authority has been established to enact the necessary regulation to monitor the activities of CIP programs operating within the Eastern Caribbean Union. The presence of this regulatory authority will enhance transparency and accountability and help protect the integrity of passports from the various territories. Meanwhile, Saint Lucia's due diligence processes remain one of the most rigid in the world, with our CIP program rated among the top three in the world by recognized international rating agencies.

HealthCare

Notwithstanding the challenges of the high cost of health care, the government's mission to provide accessible, quality, and affordable healthcare to all its citizens remains high on its agenda.

In December, last year, we opened Phase 1 of the Dr. Betty Wells Urban Polyclinic at the Dr. Winston Parris Medical Complex, formally Victoria Hospital. The polyclinic will provide a wide range of medical services, to serve the Castries basin and beyond. The National Eye Clinic was also opened during that month at the Medical Complex, offering general eye care, laser treatment, and diabetic retinopathy screening.

Emergency care continues to be a major challenge in our healthcare system. In response to this challenge, the government in 2025 will expand the emergency facilities at the Dr. Martin Didier Polyclinic in Gros Islet and retrofit and re-introduce services to the public at the former emergency ward at Victoria Hospital.

In 2025, work will commence on the fifth wing of the OKEU Hospital.

In 2021, we inherited a debt of over \$79 million due to local, and foreign healthcare providers, suppliers of medicines and other products, which has been compromising the delivery of quality healthcare in the country. Apart from increasing the financial allocation to healthcare in consecutive budgets from 2022. In 2024, an injection of \$15 million into OKEU was the government's latest response to alleviate some of the challenges being experienced by this institution.

This \$15 million was used to clear a mounting backlog of payables that was threatening OKEU's ability to secure medical supplies. Of this amount \$10 million came from the CIP programme and the balance of \$5 million from the consolidated fund. Notwithstanding this recent government intervention, there remains a significant amount owed to local and private suppliers and healthcare providers.

In 2025, we will continue to reduce this large debt in an effort to make medical supplies and equipment available in a timely manner to the public.

Despite the growing cost of healthcare, the enhancement of free medical services to registered citizens will be expanded in 2025 at Health & Wellness Centres. These services will include ultrasound screening for pregnant mothers. Testing for breast cancer and prostate cancer will also be made available.

The long overdue La Ressource Health & Wellness Centre has been completed with the official opening expected later this month. Improvements to Health Centers will continue during 2025.

Like the rest of the Caribbean region, Saint Lucia continues to suffer from the brain drain of its nurses to developed countries like the United Kingdom and United States. The government intends to do all it can to keep its locally trained nurses at home and committed to serving in our healthcare system.

While this government recognizes the need to provide for primary and secondary health care, the sustainable good health of our nation requires the adoption of a healthy lifestyle that embraces physical, mental, and emotional well-being. In 2020, 79.8% of deaths in Saint Lucia were attributed to chronic non-communicable diseases. This statistic speaks to the need for our population to adopt healthy lifestyle changes now, changes in our diet, social interaction, and physical exercise. We need to work together to implement strategies to reduce stress in the workplace, at home, and in the communities to maintain the mental wellness of our people.

I urge all of you to exercise greater care on our the roads to reduce the high rate of accidents and fatalities by driving less recklessly and having more regard for other road users. Accidents and violence are costly and divert resources that can be used to provide well needed healthcare in other areas.

St Jude Hospital

After securing the necessary funding from the Saudi Fund for Development, we are at the final stage of completion and commissioning of a new, modern, fully equipped St Jude Hospital at the original site. We are confident that the new St Jude Hospital will open its doors to the public in 2025. Once again, I want to thank the medical staff and workers at the Hospital for having to work under such challenging conditions at the Stadium for so many years. I want to assure you that the end to your ordeal is near.

Citizen Security

The issue of crime has been a concern for all governments in the region. In Saint Lucia, this administration remains resolute and unwavering in its commitment to making this country a more secure place. That is why we have adopted a multi-dimensional approach as we continue to fight this scourge in our communities.

One of the major elements of this approach has been strengthening the government agencies directly responsible for dealing with crime. In the last three years, the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force (RSLPF) has consistently been provided with the human, physical, legislative and operational resources to improve its capacity, with new legislative support, to deter, detect, and prosecute criminal activity.

In 2024, the Government continued to furnish the RSLPF with a range of vehicles and other equipment. Additionally, 79 new police recruits graduated in November 2024, bolstering the human- resource capacity of the RSLPF. By December 2025, 160 recruits will be added to the ranks of the Royal Saint Lucia Police Force.

The Government continues to improve the working environment for the Police. Work is advancing on the construction of critical facilities such as the Northern Divisional Police Headquarters. The Drug Unit and the Custody Suites demolished by the last administration will be opened in 2025. We have been providing the Police Force with the tools necessary to make it an efficient crime-fighting machine, and we will continue to do so in the year ahead.

As I said earlier, this Government is utilising a multi-faceted approach to crime suppression. We have, therefore, embarked upon a number of social intervention programs through the SSDF, the Ministry of Equity, and the Ministry of Crime Prevention. These include programmes targeted at young males and youth at risk in schools and communities. We will continue to expand these initiatives in 2025.

We will also continue to work in partnership with fellow CARICOM Member States, who have recognized that some aspects of the crime and violence that are plaguing Member States must be tackled regionally, including the adoption of a public health approach to crime.

However, together, as citizens, we must play our part in combating the scourge of crime in our country.

We must find ways to resolve our conflicts peacefully. We must take responsibility for our families and set better examples for our children, by instilling the values of respect and truth and showing more love and respect for each other.

Infrastructure

While the fiscal year 2024-2025 was dubbed the “Year of Infrastructure,” infrastructural development will continue beyond March 2025, and will be intensified throughout 2025, with significant investments in houses, seaports, airport and roads.

The congestion on the Sir Julian R. Hunte Highway, which should have been alleviated eight years ago had it not been for the cancellation in 2016 of the fully financed plans for its improvement. This congestion issue is of serious concern to this Government, and in 2025, there will be a number of initiatives to relieve it. Additionally, the Choc Bridge is to be replaced.

Several new roads were built across the island in 2024. Noteworthy was the construction of the \$10 million Majomel Road in Laborie. Work will continue this year on the Chaussee Road, and roads in Vieux Fort South and Vieux Fort North among others. We expect the Millennium Highway and East Coast Road to be completed in 2025.

In 2025, a new potholing patcher truck will be commissioned to improve the road surfaces on the island.

In 2024, we opened the newly constructed Piaye Bridge in Choiseul- first conceptualized under a Labour Administration from 2015. We also built and opened the new Jetty and Convenience Facilities for fishers in Micoud North significantly improving the working environment for the fisher-folk of the Micoud Village.

In 2024, improvements were made to the Choiseul fishing facility, which should, hopefully, reduce sedimentation at the pond.

New Human Resource Development Centres (HRDCs) will be opened this year in Grande Rivière, Gros Islet, Barre St. Joseph in Castries South, and Cul De Sac in Castries South East, and repairs will be undertaken to HRDCs in several communities including Anse la Raye, Dennery South and Micoud South. Repairs to the Praslin Early Childhood Development Centre will be completed.

Construction of the Halls of Justice, a project conceived over a decade ago will be take place. A Public-Private Partnership (PPP), has commenced under a BOLT Agreement, and the Government, in keeping with its consensus approach to governance, will work together, in good faith, with the Catholic Church to address the church's concerns.

Throughout last year, significant progress was made on other major projects, such as the Laborie Market & Square and Serenity Park in Sans Souci.

A new building was acquired for conversion into the West Coast Fire Service Sub-station, to provide essential services to the communities of Anse La Raye, Canaries, and its environs.

The Rock Hall Housing Development will continue this year, aimed at improving housing conditions and accessibility in the island.

Seaports Development

The Castries Cruise Port Development project undertaken by Global Ports Holdings (GPH) has commenced. The compromised Customs Building has been demolished, and DCA approval is expected in 2025 for the construction of a new building and the other aspects of the project to allow for full commencement in 2025.

In the case of Port Soufriere, due to the damage caused by Hurricane Beryl, temporary repairs have been completed on the existing jetties. Extensive investigative work is being conducted to rehabilitate the existing jetties into the master plan for the development of the area. Construction is expected to commence this year.

Hewanorra International Airport

The redevelopment of Hewanorra International Airport will continue in a prudent and responsible way. The Government could not have allowed the largest infrastructural project in the country to go ahead without a completed bill of quantities and a competitive tendering process.

In addition, financing for the project would have incurred financial costs as high as 13% at certain stages of the project, where payments made to the contractor, required an additional 8% transaction cost, added to the 5% interest rate.

Work on the Air Traffic Control Tower has been stopped and the contractor discharged in 2024. A new contractor will be selected through a tendering process to complete the facility in 2025.

As it pertains to the Terminal Building a complete bill of quantities has been prepared and construction will commence in 2025 after a competitive tendering process has been conducted by SLASPA.

Work on the runway and other ancillary facilities financed by the World Bank will continue in 2025.

Education

Education also received significant attention in 2024. We expanded the One Laptop per Student and the One University per Household programs by strengthening our collaboration with Monroe University, Sir Arthur Lewis Community College, and scholarship donor countries like Cuba, Taiwan, and Morocco.

In September 2024, four new Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) schools in Marigot, Anse Ger, Dennery, and Piaye were commissioned. A \$1 million grant was made to the Sir Arthur Lewis Community College (SALCC) for critical repairs to the science block in 2025.

There were also critical interventions in early childhood education including a \$2,500 grant to each privately registered center. In 2025, Three Thousand Four Hundred and Nine (3409) Children at these centers will receive a \$50 subsidy to assist in the payment of their school fees.

The government hired 24 new Principal Assistants to enhance the administration of schools.

In 2025, major rehabilitation will take place in Entrepot, Grande Riviere, Pierrot, and Plain View Combined Schools, and major repairs in other schools.

There will be continued investment in digitization and procurement of ICT equipment to help in the teaching of science and technology.

The government will continue to enhance the teaching environment for students and teachers by increasing the number of Principal Assistants at primary schools.

In 2025, together with the private sector, the government will continue to seek to match employment skills with the needs of the private sector.

Putting People First

In 2024, Saint Lucia took a historic step by appointing Hon. Jeremiah Norbert as the first-ever Minister for Persons with Disabilities, reflecting a transformative policy shift in addressing the needs of individuals living with disabilities.

In the 2025 fiscal year, the administrative structure for the Department for Disabilities will be implemented, and the Government will continue to cooperate with NGO's to ameliorate the circumstances of those challenged by disabilities.

In 2024, the Insolvency Act allowed citizens facing financial challenges with the means to renegotiate loan terms with creditors and pause foreclosures, while retaining their investments. This legislation is designed to offer relief and support for individuals navigating economic hardships.

In 2025, the Control Substances Bill will be enacted providing the framework for a commercial Cannabis Industry.

The government after consultations with the private sector demonstrated its commitment to improving the living standard of workers by implementing the Minimum Livable Wage on 1st October, guaranteeing a minimum monthly salary of \$1,131 for all workers. Over 13,000 low-income earners benefited from this initiative.

Furthermore, we increased the government minimum pension to \$750 per month and raised the NIC minimum pension to \$500 from a low of \$300, positively impacting more than 3,400 pensioners.

In 2025, first-time homeowners will benefit from a \$20 Million loan facility established at the Saint Lucia Development Bank. A waiver of stamp duty for mortgages up to \$400,000 will further assist loan beneficiaries.

Public Servants will be eligible for a \$1,000 contribution towards legal costs associated with these mortgages.

To strengthen the delivery of community services, four new ambulances were provided to the Saint Lucia Fire Services. Significant funds were allocated for the procurement of additional fire equipment and ambulances, to ensure improved emergency response capabilities across the island in 2025.

I wish to thank the men and women of the Saint Lucia Fire Services for their hard work and their commitment to their duties.

The Environment

A clean environment is very important to the well-being of a neighborhood, a community, and a country. The presence of garbage, especially derelict vehicles on roadside curbs, provides the breeding conditions for disease-carrying mosquitoes, rodents, germs, and soil and water contaminants. This is unacceptable and must be remedied to protect our people and their environment and our tourism product.

As a country, we must work together to protect and preserve our landscape by practicing proper garbage disposal habits for a clean and pristine environment.

In 2025 the government, working with community groups, the Saint Lucia Social Development Fund, and the Solid Waste Management Authority will intensify efforts to create a cleaner and more enjoyable environment, and ensuring a healthier Saint Lucia for all.

Highlights in Sports

In August, our sense of national pride was ignited by the historic performance of Julien Alfred at the Paris Summer Olympics. By capturing Saint Lucia's first-ever Olympic gold and silver medals in the women's 100 & 200-meter races respectively, she brought the world's spotlight on our country. In so doing, she provided exceptional exposure and promotion for the country, as millions of international viewers instantly discovered our beautiful country and its unique tourism product. It was indeed very gratifying, to witness the tremendous appreciation shown to Ms. Alfred by the Government and People of Saint Lucia on her return to the country in September. She has made us proud and the entire country is thankful.

2024 was a successful year for sports in Saint Lucia.

1. The Saint Lucia Kings captured their first Caribbean Premier League (CPL) T20 Cricket title;
2. Saint Lucia retained the OECS Boxing Championships in 2024;
3. Three Saint Lucian female cricketers were included in the West Indies Team T20 World Cup and One-Day International Squads;
4. Saint Lucia was victorious in the 2024 Windward Islands Under-15 Cricket Tournament;
5. Saint Lucia led Group B in the CONCACAF Nations Football League and is going into the next round.

To all the sportsmen and women who represented our country in 2024, we extend our heartfelt gratitude for your hard work and commitment to national duty. You remain an inspiration to all of us.

In 2025, Daren Sammy will become the West Indies Cricket Coach for all formats of the game. On behalf of the government and people of Saint Lucia, we offer our congratulations and wish him well.

In 2025, infrastructure work aimed at improving the conditions of several playing facilities around the island will commence.

Our government has allocated over \$1million for the design and site preparation of the George Odlum Stadium, as a first step to restoring and transferring this facility to the sports community.

Conclusion

As we welcome 2025, it is evident that our nation stands on a foundation of significant progress across various sectors. From the strides made in sports and tourism to the impactful policies in labor, education, and healthcare, Saint Lucia continues to demonstrate resilience and vision. The government's commitment to improving the lives of our citizens is reflected in the reduction of unemployment, the strengthening of community infrastructure, and investments in social and physical infrastructure. The achievements of 2024 serve both as a testament to and an inspiration for what we can accomplish together as a united people. As we embark on this new year, let us continue to build on these successes, foster unity, and work collectively toward a brighter and more prosperous Saint Lucia. Together, we can ensure a future filled with opportunities, progress, and lasting development, for all. We have good reasons to be proud of this place we call home. Let us come together to make our country a better place for ourselves, our children, and future generations.

In the prayerful words of St. Teresa of Avila, “Let nothing disturb you; let nothing frighten you; all things are passing; God never changes; patience obtains everything; he who has God lacks nothing; God alone suffices.”

I thank you.