



ADDRESS

BY

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ON

SAINT LUCIA'S 46TH INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY

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My fellow Saint Lucians, both at home and in the diaspora, distinguished guests, and friends of Saint Lucia, I am honoured, gratified, and humbled to address you as we gather here today, unified in purpose, to celebrate 46 years of Saint Lucia's Independence.

This yearly moment of reflection provides an opportunity to honour our past, celebrate our achievements, and renew our shared commitment to our country's unity, resilience, and prosperity.

On February 22, 1979, we raised our flag and began our journey to independence. During this Independence journey, we have been enabled to shape our policies, develop our economy, and advocate our national interests on the world stage. We have freely engaged in regional and international cooperation and strengthened our democratic institutions while preserving our unique Saint Lucian identity.

Independence gives us the power to decide our path, the solemn responsibility to promote fairness, justice, and opportunity for all, as well as the preservation of the dignity of our people. With it also came with the challenges of building a Saint Lucia where future generations can enjoy a better standard of living and can be proud of.

As we reflect on progress, it is a time to remember the poor and suffering and the indignity that our forefathers suffered when they were forcibly taken here as slaves. We still seek reparations for these injustices.

After 46 years of independence, Saint Lucia has slowly carved a place in the hostile global community. As a nation, we believe in the rights of the individual, the pursuit of the common good and the respect for all, particularly the marginalized and differently abled.

We believe that every citizen must have the right to education, health care, employment, and the right of association and to live in an environment of peace and security.

This year's theme - "Forward Together: Health and Well-being for a Prosperous Nation," is a call to action for all of us. It is a reminder that true

prosperity is not measured only by economic gains but by the well-being of a nation. It is about ensuring that every Saint Lucian has the opportunity to live a healthy and fulfilling life, irrespective of the circumstances of their birth.

It embraces the notion that our greatest wealth is our people, and our nation is only as strong as the well-being of all its citizens. It further reminds us that our continued progress depends on the health of our people.

Notwithstanding the high healthcare costs, my government continues to invest in healthcare and has increased spending over the last three-plus years. However, fostering a nationwide culture of health consciousness is everyone's responsibility. We must engage in activities that reduce the pandemic of non-communicable diseases that overburden our health system.

I, therefore, invite all Saint Lucians to take personal responsibility for their health and to assist the government in its crusade to build a robust healthcare system and to reduce the high incidence of non-communicable diseases by engaging in physical activity, adopting proper nutrition, reducing stress in the workplace and at home, and participating in community initiatives. In recognition of the progress we have made thus far, I want to thank the nurses and doctors who care for our nation's healthcare.

Sadly, we are still faced with growing challenges of alcohol and drug disorders, with its negative consequences: mental health problems, loss of productivity, injury, and violence.

In recent years, we have had reforms regarding the use of Cannabis. The conversation around Cannabis continues to evolve, and as a government, our priority is that all decisions and actions about its use must protect the health and well-being of our people.

We recognize that young people may wish to be free to make decisions about their lives. However, we should take responsibility to protect them from very early exposure to this substance.

We must take action and take it now. As a government, we state our commitment to strengthen policies to address this crisis of drug abuse through education programs targeted at our youth. My government is committed to addressing this crisis through a multifaceted approach:

1. Strengthening Prevention
2. Expanding Treatment and Rehabilitation
3. Enforcing Stronger Regulations
4. Supporting Communities
5. Empowering youth and individuals with Higher Risk Vulnerabilities

This fight requires action by all of society to nurture our nation on its path to achieving health and well-being. I call upon parents, teachers, religious leaders, healthcare professionals, community groups and clubs, youth agencies, and law enforcement officers to work together. We must stand as one nation, united against behaviours harmful to our nation's health.

With regards to road safety, we must also be responsible in the way we drive, as drunk and reckless driving not only causes death, pain, and suffering but also diverts valuable resources away from critical areas in our health system. The government is considering revision and strengthening of the laws as they relate to speeding and reckless driving, particularly when under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

The world we seek to have for our nation requires the input of all of us. Our educators must inspire the next generation, our entrepreneurs must drive innovation, our farmers and fishers must feed our people, our workers, and businesses must increase productivity, and our young leaders must bring fresh game-changing ideas; it is this collective effort that will determine the strength of our nation.

My government will continue to provide an environment, which enables opportunities to improve individual well-being. This is a huge task considering the confused and uncertain world we live in, but with perseverance, honesty, truth, and righteousness, we will prevail.

I make a special call to you in the diaspora; we remain ready and welcoming to those of you who may wish to take up investment opportunities, assist in skills development programs, and collaborate with us in improving our healthcare and education systems. Let us bridge the gap between home and abroad, ensuring that our shared love for country translates into meaningful partnerships that drive national progress.

The concerns regarding citizen safety are being heard. The Saint Lucia government will continue to support law enforcement agencies, ensuring that they have the necessary tools and equipment to be effective in their duty to preserve the country's safety. We will continue to engage all well-meaning organizations in finding solutions to fight this crime pandemic gripping our country and region.

The government is committed to solving the problems of delayed justice caused by the limitations of court spaces in the justice system. Construction of the Halls of Justice will commence shortly.

In formulating plans and addressing the challenges we face, we must not forget the vulnerable groups in our country. Our society is as strong as its weakest social link. Recognizing this reality, we continue to increase assistance to organizations that care for vulnerable groups. We have increased pensions and enacted a minimum wage. The government will continue to enhance policies that improve workers' and citizens' quality of life, including a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.

I am aware of the challenges of this hostile world. Saint Lucia remains a relatively peaceful and desirable place to live and recreate. Not surprisingly, the number of visitors to our country keeps growing every year.

On this 46th year of Independence, it is heartening to know that despite being a small and relatively young nation, Saint Lucia continues to achieve remarkable success in academia, music and sports. Sir Arthur Lewis, Honourable Derek Walcott, Rick Wayne, Darren Sammy, Lavern Spencer, Johnson Charles, Julien Alfred, Ronald Boo Hinkson and Johann Deterville are reminders of Saint Lucian excellence that remains an inspiration to all of us and many others beyond our shores.

Today, we recognized three outstanding sports personalities: Darren Sammy, Lavern Spencer, and Julien Alfred, with one of the highest national awards – the Saint Lucia Cross.

Our youth must see these heroes as inspirational and understand that their discipline, hard work, and sacrifice caused them to excel and achieve global recognition.

We have much to celebrate. However, while we celebrate, let's not forget that we still have lots to achieve as a people.

We must not be distracted by the few who still doubt our ability to govern ourselves, believe that privilege should outweigh merit, or assume that local talent is inferior to foreign talent.

In this 46th year of independence, we must remain steadfast in the belief that we are as good as any and can take our country to higher levels of social, cultural, and economic development.

We were given this baton of independence 46 years ago; let's not drop it and leave future generations exposed to self-doubt, hatred, envy, greed, negativity, and misinformation.

Let's strive to make every generation better and all Saint Lucians wealthier spiritually and materially.

May you all have a happy 46th Independence celebration.

My government and I pledge to work with you in that journey of love for country and love for self.

Let's be comforted by the words of Peter:

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour".

1 Peter 5. 7-8