



**“JON O HAS FOUND A NEW HOME”**

**REMARKS**

**BY**

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AT THE

**RENAMING OF THE MARIGOT SECONDARY  
SCHOOL TO THE  
JON ODLUM SECONDARY SCHOOL**

CASTRIES, SAINT LUCIA.

TUESDAY MARCH 1, 2016.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

Many of us present were here at this school just a week ago for the symbolic handover to every school on island over 3,800 laptops for the students of Form 3.

Today, we are here to celebrate the memory of Jon Odum, and to cast his name in stone to recognise him as another great Saint Lucian who has contributed to our development.

## **LONGEST SERVING REPRESENTATIVE**

Stanley Nicholas Jon Odlum would not be a name known by the many students of this school, as his retirement from active politics coincided with the opening of this school in the year 2006.

Our current Member of Parliament for Castries South and Minister for Education, Dr Robert K. Lewis, had just entered the political service, while Jon bowed out after twenty three years of political representation. This undoubtedly left him as the longest serving representative of Castries South.

## **BEYOND HIS INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS**

If he were still alive today, Jon would have been celebrating his eightieth birthday this year.

Jon's closeness to the people of this area is legendary. It started far beyond his involvement in politics.

In Saint Lucia's Pre-Independence era when Chief Minister George F.L. Charles, another representative of Castries South, led the country, Jon served as one of the first Labour and Social Welfare Officers.

He beat the pavement and the muddy paths of the Cul de Sac, Marigot, Barre St Joseph and Roseau Valleys, interacting with the people of these areas,

sharing their triumphs and failures, their tears and their pain, and their hopes and dreams.

He knew very well their plight, their deep poverty, their hand-to-mouth conditions. He always championed education as a means of lifting people out of the debilitating conditions of poverty.

He knew that education was the only answer to the poverty that had been cultivated from the days of the sugar plantations.

## **PINNACLE OF A DREAM**

As such, this school here at Marigot is effectively the tangible pinnacle of a dream, an institution which represents the zenith of Jon's belief that education was the key to the future of the downtrodden and dispossessed.

This school has a special place in our history.

It was, effectively, the last public secondary school constructed and opened on this island as we pursued at that time the achievement of Universal Secondary Education. USE, as it was dubbed, was an

important achievement of the Labour Party Administration I led in 2006.

## **EDUCATION FOR ALL**

And many at the time and perhaps some even now, believed that USE should not have been pursued. It was an incredibly myopic and an elitist view.

But it is the reality. Some people do not believe in the equity of education. They believe that there should exist an uneducated class upon which to construct an economy to benefit from low wages.

On the contrary, this Government, this Labour Party Government is resoundingly unapologetic in our belief that education is a basic right; that education is a ladder out of poverty; that education provides the knowledge and skills upon which society and economy are built upon; and that there must be equity and equality in education for all our children.

## **ACCESSIBLE TO THE MAJORITY**

This school to be renamed in Jon's honour and memory was situated here to strategically serve the



people of the two valleys but also the west coast communities of Anse la Raye and Canaries. While most of the students of Canaries would go to school at Soufriere, Anse la Raye always found itself sending its children to secondary schools in Castries.

As it was difficult finding a suitable location in Anse la Raye, and coupled with the fact that the population of the district of Anse la Raye also encompassed people of the Roseau Valley, this site was chosen as the most accessible for the majority of people across the constituencies of Anse la Raye, Castries South and Castries Southeast.

Of course, this was much to the chagrin of Anse la Raye MP at the time, Cyprian Lansiquot, who was hoping that the school would have fallen within the boundary of Anse la Raye! But even he would concede that it was the right decision.

And when you look at it, this school, given its facilities, is the best appointed in the entire Education District 4, if not one of the best in the country.

**BREATHE NEW LIFE**

By naming this school after Jon, I hope we can breathe new life, new meaning, and new purpose into this institution.

At the level of the school, to the students and teachers, I hope you see this naming as an opportunity to reinvigorate and re-define this institution.

## **EMBRACE THE NEW NAME**

Embrace the new name with pride and hope.

Jon was not merely a politician. He was a social activist, a man who understood compassion, a humanist, unapologetically committed to the emancipation of the dispossessed. He was a man of the people; he was never fazed no matter the challenge that he faced. He was always cheerful, always defined by a smile. He was a wonderful human being whose memories I will always honour.

He knew that even if one did not have much, that that was no excuse for being downtrodden, depressed and demotivated. He was the eternal

optimist and looked to the future with hope, confidence and conviction.

## **EMBRACE JON'S HUMANITARIAN INSTINCTS**

I ask that you embrace his eyes and his heart. I ask that you defend his name and make him proud. Let the humanitarian instincts that defined Jon Odlumfind its way into the spirit of this school as it shapes generations of our students.

*"Jon O"* has found a new home here and I am sure you will keep him smiling.

Ladies and gentlemen, students, I thank you.