



PERMANENT MISSION OF SAINT LUCIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT BY

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AND

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Please check against delivery.

Mr. President, colleague Heads of Government and Foreign Ministers, Country Representatives, and members of country delegations, I bring you warm greetings from the most beautiful piece of territory on Earth, the sovereign state of Saint Lucia.

Mr. President, I am honoured to address this body for the first time, as the Prime Minister of Saint Lucia. It was my privilege to lead my party into general elections less than two months ago, and to have witnessed the people of my country continue to uphold and nurture the deep democratic traditions of our Caribbean by giving my party an overwhelming mandate to govern Saint Lucia for the next five (5) years. I wish to pledge to the international community, that under my leadership Saint Lucia's intention to uphold the highest traditions of universal brotherhood, the pursuit of mutually beneficial goals, respect for all peoples and cultures, and the recognition and respect of the sovereignty of all member states of the United Nations.

Mr. President, permit me to join other colleagues in extending congratulations to you, on your elevation to the Presidency of this vital and crucial catalyst of global development - the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). It is our sincere hope and our profound expectation that your tenure will be marked by thoughtful and tangible action, given the global challenges that confront us as UN Member States, and given that our very lives and continued existence as peoples and as a planet are directly threatened by the issues now confronting us.

Since Saint Lucia joined the United Nations in 1979, we have always prided ourselves on our principled positions in matters of foreign policy. If there were any recent doubts about St. Lucia's adherence to these basic principles, I am here to reassure you that Saint Lucia subscribes fully to, and stands firmly on, the principle of non-interference in the internal politics of nations. In pursuit of our Sustainable Development Goals, we shall be, in the words of Barbados' Independence pioneer and late Prime Minister - The Right Honourable Errol Walton Barrow - "friends of all but satellites of none." We shall as much as possible engage in foreign policy coordination with our CARICOM and OECS partners, and our relationships shall continue to be based on mutual respect. Saint Lucia will not sacrifice these principles on the altar of convenient, short-term, and temporary alliances with great powers whose shifting global stances may or may not coincide with Saint Lucia's permanent insistence on being a mutually respected regional development partner.

Mr. President, I must confess that our excitement at the opportunity to sensitise the global community to Saint Lucia's perspective on the issues confronting before this respected body, has been tempered by the frustrating realization that, if I may borrow an idiom from one of my fellow CARICOM Member States, "we are spinning top in mud or we are going around in circles." I say this Mr. President because, in perusing the contribution delivered to this body by Saint Lucia in 2015, I was struck by the similarity of the concerns raised then to the concerns confronting us today, in 2021. Mr. President, the date, the names, and the faces have changed, but the issues remain the same.

It is not my intention to question the modus operandi of this honourable institution, because the evidence confirming the good work of the United Nations, is undeniable. However, Mr. President, Saint Lucia cannot pretend to be unconcerned by the fact that Small Island Developing States (SIDS) like Saint Lucia continues to suffer from a number of challenges, arising out of our smallness, our island existence, and our vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change. However, while we struggle to formulate solutions for these ills, we have been confronted with the novel coronavirus COVID-19. While its novelty and evolving character are baffling, COVID-19 has enlarged and worsened the issues confronting SIDS. In this sense Mr. President we are now being inundated by the new, while still being overwhelmed by the old.

Mr. President, we continue to contend with the near-impossible balancing act of preserving lives and livelihoods. The insidious nature of the virus has allowed it to sneak across even the most heavily patrolled borders, and Saint Lucia has experienced waves of highs and lows in managing this pandemic. In that regard, we extend our deepest gratitude to international institutions such as the COVAX Facility, and our many bilateral partners such as India and the United States of America, for their commitment to ensuring that we in Saint Lucia and by extension the Caribbean region, were not further disadvantaged by our inability to access vaccines.

Mr. President, as we battle this pandemic, there is another global threat that runs parallel to it, by the name of "misinformation." The Government of Saint Lucia has embarked upon a robust education programme to encourage our population to get vaccinated, as realistically, this is the only way to reduce, eliminate and eradicate the risks and restrictions caused by this pandemic, and permit us to rebuild our economies and societies, stronger. However, we have witnessed in dismay the politics at play even in the midst of this pandemic, as various countries create their lists of recognized and unrecognized vaccines, with certain privileges awarded to global citizens who have opted for certain branded vaccines over others. We have witnessed vaccine apartheid in various forms and not only in terms of production and distribution. Some countries which have stockpiled vaccines are now in the middle of debates about third doses and boosters, while other countries watch helplessly as COVID-related deaths continue to rise for want of a jab.

Mr. President, in Saint Lucia, we recognize all vaccines that are endorsed and administered by a country's respective government, as we have entrusted sovereign states with the responsibility of following the science. In this regard, we call for standardization of vaccine privileges across the global community, as it relates to quarantine, isolation, and other related requirements.

Saint Lucia, like many other countries, is grappling with a decline in investment, trade, remittances, and growing debt burdens. There is an urgent need to accelerate global momentum towards the ambitious targets across various international agreements and development agendas. A common thread across these instruments is the need to address the unique vulnerabilities and special circumstances of SIDS. Saint Lucia and all SIDS, continue to face huge spending needs to finance the immediate health responses, that are well beyond our capacities. Such a shift of focus will reverse achievements in Sustainable Development

Goals (SDG) implementation and in building climate resilience.

Therefore, Saint Lucia stands in solidarity with all SIDS, in calling for an abolition of current classical economics criteria for accessing concessional development finance. These indicators erroneously paint a picture of “national prosperity” that lies in stark contrast to existing realities.

Mr. President, Saint Lucia is calling for the adoption of a global vulnerability index by international institutions. This index should include variables such as vulnerability to adverse weather systems and natural disasters, historical disadvantages arising out of plunder, colonialism and exploitation, and the vagaries of the economic activities which such states depend for survival. Such a global vulnerability index would ensure that access to concessional development finance is granted based on criteria that consider the true contexts of our fragile economies, which are constantly under threat of regression, due to natural, man-made or political disasters.

Saint Lucia also calls for immediate measures to safeguard the solvency of SIDS - which have been disproportionately affected during the pandemic. These measures must include debt restructuring and write-off, support to strengthen health systems, more equitable distribution and access to vaccines, and assistance for recovery that meets the demands of the development model adopted in the beneficiary country, and is consistent with our current socio-economic environment.

Mr. President, the pandemic seems to have slowed down everything but the deterioration of our beloved planet earth. Climate change continues to wreak havoc across all areas of the globe. While COVID-19 now grabs the headlines, it is a fact that the pandemic emerged at a time when the World was already on an unsustainable path towards the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. With less than a decade left to achieve the 2030 Agenda, the UN’s Decade of Delivery requires urgent and adequate solutions towards salvaging our global living quarters. The resilience we need, and the adaptations required system-wide to respond to Covid-19; are directly relevant to the resilience and adaptation required for climate change. It can be argued that the Covid-19 pandemic and the climate change challenge confronts us with an intermeshed problem of symptom as cause and cause as symptom. It provides us with a harsh and timely reminder that human health and planetary health are linked.

Sadly, Mr. President, the cost of meeting these challenges and undertaking the resilience activities, whether it be for health or climate, is way beyond the financial reach of our small islands. We, therefore, appeal to all, especially those ablest financially, to contribute towards our recovery efforts, and to pay their commitments to the Adaptation and Mitigation Funds, so that SIDS can benefit.

On the eve of COP26, we encourage the larger economies, the often-major contributors to greenhouse gases, to honour their financial pledges. This would allow us, the smaller vulnerable economies, whose contributions to greenhouse gases are often negligible, the fiscal room to build climate-resilient societies.

Mr. President, as we maneuver the turmoil of these unprecedented times, the young people must be brought into the mainstream of national development. Too often, the Youth are placed on the back burner

when things get rough, and the belt used for economic tightening is strung around their very necks. Such an approach fails to consider the immense energy, enthusiasm, and creativity which young people bring to the development table. It is for this reason, that Saint Lucia has prioritized the implementation of "The Youth Economy," as the new frontier of our economic development, formalized in a new Government Department under the purview of the Prime Minister, with the mandate of propelling our young people to turn their talents, skills and hobbies into economic enterprises for their own empowerment. We see our young people as a resource to be molded and optimized, not as problems to be managed or solved. We believe that a country must consider the aspirations of its young citizens and turn them into concrete and practical assets, purposes and goals.

Mr. President, we are committed to improving the lives of our young people, especially the most vulnerable, and we are working with all citizens to assist them in transforming their lives and to make viable contributions to the economy. In this regard, Saint Lucia invites the International Community to discuss and engage with us strategically, on mutually beneficial relationships and projects to promote The Youth Economy, as we seek to build a better and more sustainable future for all.

Mr. President, Saint Lucia remains among a handful of countries that maintain official relations with the Government of the Republic of China (Taiwan). We continue to plead the case to advance their cause to be accepted as a legitimate participant in the global decision-making process.

Mr. President, the development of Saint Lucia will continue to be compromised, as long as the development of our sister nation of Cuba continues to be frustrated by global political considerations. In this regard, Mr. President, Saint Lucia encourages a revisiting of the chapter in history not too long ago, where diplomatic reconciliation had commenced between the United States of America and the Republic of Cuba, under the Obama-Biden administration. In fact, then-Vice President Biden was the chief envoy of the United States to Cuba, and it would be a signal achievement, if as President of the Biden-Harris administration, he was to bring his work on Cuba to its logical conclusion, with the normalization of relations.

Cuba continues to punch above its weight with its humanitarian efforts, playing its part in the global Covid-19 response, despite its disadvantaged position in the International Community. Saint Lucia joins CARICOM and the global community in renewing calls to the United States to normalize its relations with Cuba, and for the abolition of the existing embargo, which only serves as a hindrance to economic growth in Cuba, and an obstacle to realizing full regional economic integration in the Caribbean. Given Cuba's role in health, education, sports, and social development in our region, the normalisation of relations with Cuba, means the advancement of development in our entire Caribbean region. As we make this annual call for the normalisation of relations with Cuba, Saint Lucia wants it to be known that we are speaking to our own development in as much as we are speaking about the betterment of the lives of the Cuban people.

At a time when we are experiencing global turmoil, it is important for good sense to prevail, and for the

world to fully embrace the immense expertise and resources which the Cuban people have to offer. It is more than overdue for us to make right this grave injustice to Cuba that has deliberately cut them off from the global supply chain. The continuation of this embargo in 2021 is unconscionable.

Mr. President, the situation in Venezuela concerns Saint Lucia tremendously. As one of the first nations to establish diplomatic relations with Saint Lucia after we gained Independence in 1979, and as a beneficiary of Venezuelan economic cooperation, Saint Lucia considers Venezuela a loyal and legitimate friend and partner. The virtual economic blockade which has been imposed on the democratically elected government of Venezuela by a few big and powerful countries is unacceptable in this international system. It is even more outrageous, that prominent members of this international system, who pride themselves on their democratic traditions, have sought to recognize an alternative President who did not even contest elections, and who has no political legitimacy whatsoever. Further, the act of seizing and freezing Venezuelan Government gold, cash, and assets, while preventing access by the Venezuelan people to basic food, medicines, and supplies during this pandemic, could quite conceivably qualify as modern-day piracy, economic terrorism, and crimes against humanity. Saint Lucia and CARICOM cannot in good conscience continue to be part of this unjust attack against the Venezuelan people.

Mr. President, as I conclude, I again call for urgent consideration of the harsh reality and the many and continuing challenges confronting SIDS like Saint Lucia. Mr. President, now is the time for a change, the time to act, the time to overcome our challenges through global solidarity and mutual assistance. The future of every nation and country is at risk, we need the global economy to work for the 99% and not just the wealthy and powerful 1%.

Mr. President, I appeal to the International community to remain focused on working in partnership with SIDS like Saint Lucia. For the balanced development of the global community, we need the powerful to behave responsibly and cooperate more effectively to enable a more inclusive and sustainable humanity for all, and to ensure that no one is left behind.

Caribbean countries like ours which were exploited and underdeveloped to finance the development of Europe, have put forward a case for reparations for slavery and native genocide, and we expect that case to be treated with the seriousness and urgency it deserves. There should be no double-standards in the international system in recognizing acknowledging and compensating victims of crimes against humanity. And so, Saint Lucia urges that the principles which have applied to other victims of mass slavery and such forms of exploitation, be applied with equal force and sincerity and seriousness of purpose to Caribbean nations who suffered more than three centuries of slavery and native genocide between 1492 and 1838, by the colonizing powers of Europe. Saint Lucia fully endorses the stance of the CARICOM's reparations Commission that our:

“Reparations Movement is a moral, legal and political response to the crimes against humanity committed during the European imperial project – specifically the genocide against the native population and the trading and enslavement of enchained bodies of Africans.”

Mr. President, as one of our Local Laureates – Robert Lee penned – *Saint Lucia is a State, Not a real estate, Not plantation estate.*

This is an open wound crying out for justice, healing, compassion, and closure, and it continues to fester with every decree or decision of the OECD and such other groupings. If the international system is to work fairly for all nations, wrong cannot continue to be strong and might cannot continue to be right. Let us, therefore, return to our core principles of peace, harmony, fairness, tolerance, and non-interference in the internal politics of sovereign states. Let us be guided by the golden chord of mutual respect and universal fraternity, particularly in these perilous times which demand that we recognise our common humanity above anything else.

Mr. President, I continue to believe in dialogue, inclusion, fairness, and a common humanity. Saint Lucia is confident in your leadership of this august body, and Saint Lucia is assured, that under our joint effort, we can transform the words of the theme of our meeting, into our lived reality and we will successfully build resilience through hope to recover from COVID-19, we will rebuild sustainably by responding appropriately to the needs of the planet, we will respect the rights of all peoples, and we will revitalise the United Nations, so that it can reflect the highest and most noble principles upon which it was founded.

Mr, President, I end with a verse from **Love After Love** by Nobel Laureate and Saint Lucian son, Sir Derek Walcott –

*“The time will come
when, with elation
you will greet yourself arriving
at your own door, in your own mirror
and each will smile at the other’s welcome”*

We work towards this goal.

I Thank You.