



PERMANENT MISSION OF SAINT LUCIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT BY

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TO THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE

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Mr. President

Saint Lucia congratulates you on your assumption of the Presidency of the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly, and assures you of the full support and cooperation of our delegation during your tenure.

We thank your predecessor H.E. Ambassador Peter Thompson of Fiji for his able stewardship of this Assembly during the past year.

Mr. President

For Small Island States like my own in the Caribbean region, the promise of the United Nations is being tested today more than ever. The world is experiencing extraordinary change at a breathtaking pace - change that is reshaping the way we live, the way we work, our planet and the very nature of peace and security.

I arrived in New York earlier this week after a tour of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Irma on islands in the Caribbean and for the entire week I have been engaged in discussions focused on the region's recovery efforts. I have also watched from afar and with a heavy heart, further destruction to my region - with Hurricane Maria's crushing blow to the sister Isle of Dominica - there claiming over 15 lives so far, and saddling that country with hundreds of millions in damage. And in the case of Puerto Rico, leaving that island diminished.

I have also listened in dismay to the silence of many and the weak acknowledgment by others, on the crisis in our region. It has awakened in me the fear that we may be on our own to chart a path forward for our region.

Mr. President

While some continue to doubt and deny the assessments of science, it is impossible to avoid the facts of climate change. In less than a month - Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Cuba, the British Virgin Islands, Anguilla, the Dominican Republic, St. Barts, St. John, St. Thomas, the Turks and Caicos, St Maarten, St. Martin, Puerto Rico, Houston and Florida - have all been victim to the ravages of Hurricanes that have left death and carnage in their wake. The impact has been without discrimination, impacting independent and non-independent countries alike.

Let us acknowledge the fact that Small Island Developing States have repeatedly warned the international community that the failure to adequately respond to climate change would betray our children and condemn future generations to certain doom. I daresay that we do not have the luxury to be silent on this front anymore – we must act.

The future is now and the challenges are profound. What is fast becoming the “new normal” is the intensification of extreme weather events, which demands from us real solutions in real time. No longer can we depend on old mechanisms with dense bureaucracies that delay or limit a nation’s ability to safeguard its citizens during a crisis and slow the rebuilding effort.

I remind all here that Saint Lucia along with most of our sister CARICOM member states are anchored at the heart of hurricane alley, with our people on the front line, and too often the first to endure the ravages of mother nature’s fury when the storms come off the Atlantic Ocean. Today, as we look to the world for leadership and partnership, we welcome the commitment to a climate change agenda by the leaders of France and China.

The Government and people of Saint Lucia offer their most sincere condolences and whatever support that we can to those in need. The ties that bind our people run deep; the pain of one is the pain of all. We ask that the global community follow this ethos – never forget that we are all in a symbiotic relationship, we should all be our brothers keeper.

Our Nobel Laureate Sir Derek Walcott speaks to the sense of responsibility to one’s neighbor that is rooted in our cultural DNA and the imperative of helping that is not duty. This Mr. President was most poignantly exemplified in a message sent through our OECS Heads WhatsApp group by Premier Dr. Orlando Smith of the British Virgin Islands when hurricane Maria was tunneling towards Dominica. Dr. Smith whose own island had already been brutalized by hurricane Irma told Prime Minister Skerrit “the people of the BVI are in solidarity with the people of Dominica and will assist in any way we can”. Even in our destitution we open our hearts and means.

I pause here to also share our condolences to others in our hemisphere, notably Mexico, who has long been of support to us, but now faces a mounting death toll from earthquakes that have struck that country.

Mr. President,

I stand here and ask that we revisit many of our lofty goals, as we see inequity as the heart of all of our discussions and seek to address it. That all multilateral discussions on

development, on resilience and the sustainable development of our countries – be equitable and just.

We must acknowledge that the UN will never succeed when few do well and a growing many do not.

- How can we, when the progress we make is fragile and unequal;
- How can we when we indulge our differences to the exclusion of the work we must do together;
- How can we, when inequity remains the driving force of our international system - propelling some forward and leaving too many behind;
- How can we, as leaders talk about sustainable development goals when the people of our countries are stuck in a quagmire, every day struggling to survive

Fundamentally, our global reality is an increasingly integrated one. No one is spared the perils of the convulsions in our world. Our economies, natural environment and people are all connected. We in this hemisphere are not impervious to the impact of war and starvation in the Middle East and Africa; of persecution in Asia; and of the rise of nationalistic tendencies in Europe. We are stacked in a global row of dominoes, where a disruptive event in one country begets similar or worse events in neighboring countries, and spreads, impacting us all and testing our social, political and economic systems.

We live in a world of imperfect choices - choices between clinging to the old systems that do not serve us, and rethinking new ways to secure a better future. We must not turn away from the hard choices; we must not fear change. Our challenges are real, serious and many. We, the United Nations must get better at the policies that strike at the root of the problem and ground our 17 Sustainable Development Goals in one word - equity.

I must reiterate a point stated earlier, that in a time where inequity pervades every aspect of our international order, what hope do we have to successfully implement the SDGs when the deck is stacked against many of our people. How do we ensure that every one of our citizens have the most basic needs like food on their plate when we struggle from crisis to crisis. I remind us all, that -

- o We have not been able to agree on a minimum standard of living for each and every one of our citizens;
- o We fail to maintain base standards that provide adequate healthcare, education, housing, security and economic opportunity for every citizen in our countries much less every individual in every country of the world;

This is not a philosophical question as it is the focus on the individual needs of each in our populations, that will allow us to deliver solutions and hope;

- o This is what will stem the flow of migration;
- o This is what will keep our children in school and offer opportunities for them to be productive members of society;
- o That is what will dull the urge that drives some to crime and others into the arms of groups that foment evil

Equity is the word that comes to mind when I think of and welcome the overhaul of the UN system. Without equity as a foundation, sustainable development goals are dreams that go away when we open our eyes to our constant state of crisis.

Mr. President

I take this moment to assure the Secretary General of my country's support in the necessary effort to reform this institution to address a new era of responsibility.

At the heart of any reform of this nature, we must all - nations large and small play our role to protect the rights of individuals everywhere. In the face of mounting challenges, we must seek the courage and wisdom to act boldly and collectively - to revise outmoded programs that are so glaringly inadequate to the needs of our time.

We have to harness new ideas and technology, and invest in the individuals and the generations that will build our future. We must see more in terms of outcomes as less in terms of bureaucracy. We must come here to make a difference; and be able to return to our homes delivering on the promises that we make. The mobilization of the leadership of the world to come here is all for naught if we don't deliver. We must come here to make a difference and not get carried away by name calling but instead, ground our discourse in common respect and a commitment to deliver to those we lead.

Mr. President

We must understand and acknowledge that when times change, so must we. Our claims to the fidelity to the words of the Charter mean nothing if we do not create new responses to old and new challenges.

We must be the source of hope to the poor, the sick, the marginalized, to ensure peace and a decent life for all our citizens on a sustainable planet. This requires the constant advance of the principles our Charter prescribes. The commitments we make to each other must be honoured, thereby strengthening our trust.

Within and beyond this organization, we must look more honestly on how we categorize each other, and how the development and donor community rank us. How can we call a country a middle income one today based on its per capita GDP, when we know that its location means it likely that at some point within a decade or two, it will be impacted by a natural disaster which will bring it and its people to their knees.

It is unconscionable to see our peers have to beg and plead for goodwill, and to have to depend on commercial rates to rebuild broken economies – all because the traditional system is so unyielding, archaic in its design, and at times heartless.

This model must to change to one that allows small and developing nations the real opportunity to survive and thrive in an increasingly cold global environment. The model has to change to allow us all the opportunity to build back stronger and more resilient, the infrastructure that can secure our futures and that of our people.

Mr. President

In closing, the people of my region are resilient, we have gone through this before and will go through this again. We are a people and region committed to working together and rebuild stronger and better. We have come time and time to each other's aid and have provided to each other the scarce resources – truly being our brother's keeper.

We have also been very fortunate to receive support from friends near and far, as we seek to make a better world for those who will follow us. In our case, friendships like those that we have with Taiwan, Cuba and Mexico amongst others, allow us to envision a positive future.

I ask that while we may come from different places, and with different priorities, we must never forget that we share a common future - a future that will only be secure if we meet threats, challenges and opportunities together, with greater cooperation and understanding.

Our generation's task is to engage in a common effort and towards a common purpose to answer the call of our times. Let it be said by our children's children that we were tested and we did not fail, but we delivered to future generations a better world.

We have that obligation to our people and to our world.

Thank you