



**PERMANENT MISSION OF SAINT LUCIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

STATEMENT BY

**THE HONOURABLE PHILIP J. PIERRE**

PRIME MINISTER OF SAINT LUCIA

AND

MINISTER FOR FINANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE YOUTH ECONOMY

TO THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE

78<sup>th</sup> SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

NEW YORK

FRIDAY, 22nd SEPTEMBER, 2023

Please check against delivery.

Mr. President, Distinguished Heads of State and Government, other Distinguished Heads of Delegations and Delegates, let me join in the congratulations to you Mr. President on your election as President of this august body. This is the first time that a national of your country, Trinidad and Tobago, has assumed this office and only the fourth occasion that a representative of a Caribbean Community State has been so elected. Let me therefore, not only wish you success as you preside over our deliberations, but also Mr. President, let me assure you of the fullest levels of respectful cooperation from Saint Lucia, as we work together to advance the collective interests of our common civilization.

Mr. President, there are many amongst us - the small and marginalized islands of our globe, surrounded by rising seas and scorched by rising temperatures – who are beginning to question this annual parade of flowery speeches and public pretense of brotherhood otherwise known as the UN Annual General Assembly. What is the point, we are beginning to ask, of meeting here every year when every time the international community is called upon to take the agreed collective actions on the critical issues affecting the poor and the powerless, there is always some hesitation and delay once we vacate this historic building?

And so, with just seven years left to the target year of 2030, we are gathered at this 78<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly, to discuss accelerating action towards the 2030 agenda because its Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) are in peril. We have been summoned here to rebuild trust and to reignite global solidarity for the 2023 Agenda, when trust and hope are the devalued currency of global dialogue. Despite our greatest efforts to maintain faith and belief in the principles of global engagement, our entire post-independence experience has been one of dashed expectations and institutional frustration.

In the 1990's we watched helplessly as powerful countries utilized the World Trade Organization (WTO) to dismantle Saint Lucia's marketing arrangements for bananas in Europe, forcing hundreds of our farmers into poverty, while these already rich countries provided huge subsidies to their own farmers. When some of our Caribbean countries successfully developed our financial services industries, we were black-listed and grey-listed like lepers and global undesirables. However, the Russia – Ukraine War has now clearly revealed to us which metropolitan capitals are the real tax havens and which are

the true pipelines for illicit money. And now today, Citizenship by Investment Programmes, which we have successfully pursued for decades, are being undermined while the Golden Passport and Golden Visa programmes of some OECD countries remain unquestioned, untouched and unmolested. We nonetheless remain committed to keeping our programmes transparent even whilst we strengthen our due diligence regime.

Mr. President, Saint Lucia has come to this 78<sup>th</sup> Session to say there must be justice in the relations between developed and developing countries and that we are no longer willing to come to this annual parade merely to lend our voice to support of this or that global conflict, or to condemn whoever, from year to year, is the new global enemy. No powerful nation's global agenda is more important than our own, and we insist that our legitimate concerns be listened to and acted upon.

## REPARATORY JUSTICE

Mr. President, the people of the Caribbean and Saint Lucia have been designated by the African Union as part of its Sixth Region which comprises people of African origin residing outside the Continent. We feel ourselves obliged to seek justice, through reparations, for the crimes against humanity that tore our ancestors from our African homeland and enslaved them in the lands of the Western hemisphere. It is laudable, that for the last decade and a half, the United Nations has been observing 23<sup>rd</sup> August as the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Slave Trade. The UN is also to be commended for proclaiming the International Decade for People of African Descent which ends in 2024 and we look forward to the proclamation of a Second Decade. However, the time has now come for the issue of reparations for the transatlantic slave trade and slavery in the Western Hemisphere to become a more central part of the global agenda and work of the UN, and not an issue only to be whispered about in the corridors and at the margins.

It was the 400 years of the enslavement of Africans and colonialism that has led to the need today for action to achieve the UN's sustainable development goals. The Secretary General of the United Nations made this *unambiguously* clear in his Message, this year, to mark the International Day of Remembrance of Slavery and the Slave Trade.

He said: *“We can draw a straight line from the centuries of colonial exploitation to the social and economic inequalities today.”*

Reparations for slavery, Mr. President, therefore mean that the countries which benefited and developed from four hundred years of free labour from enslaved humans should now pay back for that free labour. We urge that the UN embraces this principle as a central part of its work in the coming years, with set goals, timelines and programs of action.

## CLIMATE JUSTICE

In the same way, Mr. President, we cannot speak of accelerated action for the sustainable development goals for developing countries, when Developed Countries do not treat the climate challenges facing Developing countries, with the urgency and importance they deserve. These challenges not only negatively impact our economic growth but they threaten our very existence. Yet developed countries behave as though they are blameless and not responsible to repair and compensate for the damage they have inflicted on our planet. Have they not understood that climate change is a danger not only to the existence of small island states, but to the survival of all countries - **today**, and not tomorrow?

In just about two months, we shall be travelling yet again to another conference on climate change – COP 28 in Dubai. We will be doing so with the current extreme and extraordinary weather events graphically demonstrating the gravity of the climate crisis. On behalf of the people and Government of Saint Lucia, I extend sincere sympathies to the people and Governments of the Kingdom of Morocco, Libya and the other countries that have recently suffered the obvious ravages of climate change. The new manifestations of the crisis are signaling to us that the goal of 1.5°C to stay alive is now very much at risk. It is said that the Roman Emperor Nero fiddled while Rome burnt. We cannot continue to be like Nero talking away while the planet is literally burning and sometimes drowning.

If Cop 28 is to be transformational, and not another disappointing “Nero-like” conference, then it must deliver an ambitious global climate action plan to 2030 if it is to answer to the necessity for climate justice for developing countries like Saint Lucia.

Having said this, Mr. President, we wish to reiterate, however, that what is critically needed is a complete reform of the global financial system, to make development financing truly developmental and climate financing truly just. As has been said so many times before, and in so many different fora, by so many Small Island Developing States, the negotiations and the agreements for development assistance for these States, must take into account their peculiar vulnerabilities.

Consequently one area where accelerated action is certainly necessary is that of the adoption of a Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) for SIDS, in order to replace the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita as a primary measure for concessionary financing. Another measure that should be considered is the Recovery Duration Adjuster (RDA), as proposed by the Caribbean Development Bank, which measures the internal resilience capacity of a country after a shock or natural disaster. It is past time for the Multilateral Development Banks and International Financial Institutions to introduce these reforms.

But global financial reform has to be comprehensive and radical, as put forward in two recent proposals which I commend to this august body and to international financial institutions. The first is the Bridgetown Initiative presented last year by my CARICOM colleague, Prime Minister Mia Motley of Barbados, which argues for resilient finance mechanisms that will address both the climate and developmental crisis facing developing countries. The second is the UN Secretary General's SDG Stimulus to Deliver Agenda 2030, tabled in February this year.

Both plans are an appeal for immediate action and they provide a practical pathway to sustainable development and climate justice. There is therefore no deficit of ideas for reform of the international financial architecture. There is simply a dearth of good will.

## PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. President, in the Declaration issued in 2015 on the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development goals, it was said that, *"there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development"*. Today, fifteen years later we are in a world without peace and the sustainable development goals are in jeopardy.

How can trust and global solidarity for sustainable development be rebuilt when the unwarranted Russian war in Ukraine rages on with its collateral economic damage to other countries the world over, of biting inflation, particularly on food prices, high oil prices and shortage of food? If trust and global solidarity for sustainable development are to be rebuilt, the unjust, unilateral and inhumane economic embargo against the people of Cuba must immediately be withdrawn. The unmerited and cruel sanctions against the Government and people of Venezuela should cease.

The Palestinian people should have their own State alongside Israel, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions. The people of the Republic of China on Taiwan should be allowed the continued enjoyment of their right to self-determination and the exercise of their democratic freedoms without threats to their autonomy and with a place in international fora. There must be an end to the conflicts in Africa and a halt to all forms, whether old or new, of the neo – colonial exploitation of the Continent's resources, so that the African people can fully benefit from the riches of their lands and from greater unity among African nations.

## HAITI

In our Caribbean region, the Member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) remain gravely concerned over the deteriorating political, social, humanitarian and security crises in Haiti, their sister Member State. Haiti needs the urgent and dependable support of the international community. The response to date has been underwhelming. UN efforts of a few months ago to raise \$780m for humanitarian purposes have received low pledges. The need for robust security assistance to counter the murderous armed gangs is clear. Yet the decision to enable this is meandering slowly through the Security Council. The Caribbean Community hopes that the establishment of the multi-national force will be given full endorsement by the United Nations Security Council as a demonstration of the commitment of the international community to support restoration of law and order and improve the humanitarian conditions of the people of Haiti.

CARICOM welcomes the Government of Kenya's willingness to lead such a multi-national force. Member States of the Caribbean Community will contribute personnel as well. The Community will also continue its good offices efforts through its Eminent Persons Group to assist the Haitian stakeholders find a solution to the political crisis, a critical necessity to pave the way towards an improved future for the people of Haiti. I urge the various Haitian stakeholders to cooperate with CARICOM to find a political compromise for the sake of the Haitian people and in honour of their heroic and fabled ancestors whom they revere so much, for daring to break the chains of slavery two hundred years ago and bring freedom to the black people of the Caribbean.

## GLOBAL MILITARY EXPENDITURE AND THE ILLEGAL ARMS TRADE

Mr. President, the immorality of the suffering, the destruction and death that these conflicts are bringing to the world are not the only reasons for our appeals to end them. That immorality is only matched by the absurdity of the expenditure on the arms that sustain these wars and inhibit peace. This should be of grave concern to all of us.

What is of equal concern to States like Saint Lucia is the illicit trade in Small Arms and Light weapons which ran into billions of dollars in 2022. Not only do these arms and light weapons fuel lesser conflicts all over the world, but illegal small arms facilitate criminal activities in Saint Lucia and other CARICOM Member States. Illegal firearms were responsible for 70% of the homicides in the Caribbean Community in 2022; and in Saint Lucia, the majority of homicides are firearms related and involve young people, both as victims and perpetrators.

Yet Mr. President, neither Saint Lucia, nor its fellow CARICOM Member States, manufacture small arms, light weapons and ammunition. Their sources are our continental neighbours to the North and South of the Caribbean. Saint Lucia therefore continues to strongly support the international instruments aimed at preventing and curbing the illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons.

Mr. President, I welcome the announcement by the United States Administration, earlier this year, to provide technical assistance and support to combat illegal weapons smuggling into the Caribbean and in solving gun-related cases. Let us be reminded that SDG 16.4 aims at “significantly reducing” illicit arms flows.

#### HOPE FOR GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

There is, however, hope for global solidarity. In June this year the Intergovernmental Conference on Marine Biodiversity of areas Beyond National Jurisdiction adopted the historic Marine Diversity Treaty. For Saint Lucia, a small island developing state, the protection of the oceans is an imperative since the oceans and their resources do not belong to one country but are the heritage of all mankind. Saint Lucia signed the treaty this week and will move towards its ratification in the shortest possible time.

Mr. President, I offer my congratulations on the opening of the UN Youth office. As I said in my address last year the importance accorded to the Youth by the UN is in harmony with my Government’s policy of giving priority to youth affairs through the creation of a Youth Economy in which young people, with State assistance, can turn their talents, skills and hobbies into businesses that will provide sustainable self-employment. I am therefore pleased to report that our Youth Economy was formally launched in March this year and has been met with enthusiasm and success. To date, about 300 young persons in Saint Lucia have benefitted from funding and training from the Government to assist them with starting or supporting their businesses; and the numbers continue to grow. Once again, I invite the International Community to engage with us on mutually beneficial relationships and projects to promote the Youth Economy.

Though the Youth Economy we are responding to SDGs and with my government’s policy of “putting people first” we are addressing the other SDGs.



## CONCLUSION

Mr. President, after the destruction and ruin of the Twentieth Century's World wars and the Cold war one would have thought that the start of the Twenty first century would have ushered in a new era of global solidarity. It has not.

In conclusion, I ask these questions, for which we must all provide urgent responses as the fate of Agenda 2030, depends on our answers.

Is there the political will and commitment to divert financial resources away from destructive activities like wars and other conflicts?

Is there the political will to place these financial resources instead into the productive action of responding to the climate crisis?

Is there the political will to use these trillions of dollars to end starvation and underdevelopment in the world and provide the justice of reparations?

Is there the political will to put people first and not weapons first?

Is there the political will to develop trust and build a lasting peace that will rekindle our Sustainable Development Goals and lead towards prosperity, progress and sustainability for all?

For the sake of us all and for future generations, we must find it!

Mr. President, to quote Saint Lucian born Noble Laureate, Derek Walcott: "Hope is not a thing to be deferred, but a thing to be pursued with all hungry passion of our existence"

I thank you!