



ADDRESS TO THE NATION BY

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“A Time to Decide”

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Citizens of Saint Lucia, our country is at a critical juncture in its development. Despite the complicated global challenges that confront us including climate change, inflation, supply chain issues and the Ukraine-Russia war, we have registered many successes during our short time as a government.

These successes are a result of prudent financial management, policies that put you the people first, the confidence of the private sector, and the cooperation of civil society groups and trade unions. Your resilience allowed us to cushion the COVID-19 onslaught on families, businesses and our way of life. It is because of that resilience, that survival nature which captures our spirit as Saint Lucians. A business survey conducted by the Chamber of Commerce has registered improved business performances. NIC has reported for the first time in its history a record number of contributors to the fund. Investor confidence is back as evidenced by the number of investment projects which will take off next year. We are recording some of the best tourism figures and we continue to be recognised globally for our unique product offerings.

However, we risk losing all of these gains by the persistently high incidence of homicides which we have been recording, especially over the last six (6) years. We have been nurturing an environment over the years of tolerance for corruption where crime thrives. Our crime situation is not a sudden phenomenon; we did not just get here. Successive Governments have grappled with this situation, it has hurt us, caused pain to families and threatens the fabric of our society. But crime has continued to plague us for too long, we must fight back and take our communities.

We must fight this scourge of crime individually and collectively as a country.

To achieve this, we need you the citizens to promote a zero tolerance towards criminality of all forms. Small infractions of the law, not speaking the truth, threats

malicious gossip, envy, peddling lies and hatred on the internet and airwaves, domestic violence, and child abuse may appear small in comparison to homicides but we know how seemingly small issues snowball into larger societal problems.

The underlying causes of crime make it a complex issue that cannot be left to only the Police and the government to solve. The fundamental question is: what type of citizen do we wish to create in Saint Lucia and the world? Until we know the answer to this question, can we effectively overcome the crime challenges that beset us? An answer to this question is that we need to create empathetic citizens who respect the rule of law and value and respect human life and rights.

Forming this type of citizen requires input from all sectors of society: the family, the schools, our churches, other civil society groups, businesses, and the government.

It has been said before that crime is every citizen's business, and we must all play our part in stemming its increase. Our neighbourhood watch groups must be reactivated along with organized sports clubs and wholesome community activities. – in short, we must return to being our neighbour's keeper.

The government continues within its limited resources to assist the Police to fulfill its mandate of ensuring law and order.

Yes, the Police must play their part in upholding and enforcing the rule of law. They must be examples of good governance in the conduct of their duties, obedient to the oath, and have a zero tolerance for corruption among their ranks.

Over the last 16 months the government has:

1. Signed contracts for the construction of the National Divisional Headquarters to replace the Gros Islet Police Station.
2. Signed a contract for extensive repairs to the Vieux Fort Police Headquarters.
3. Purchased nineteen (19) new vehicles for the RSLPF
4. In July 2022, the Firearms (Amendment) Act was enacted in the House of Assembly increasing the penalties for Firearm offences. There were the inclusion of new clauses including fines that can extend to \$250,000 or to imprisonment for terms which may extend to life.
5. Allowed operational independence to the Police Commissioner and High Command of the Police
6. Recruited new special police constables
7. Provided the customs department with improved equipment for the detection of guns at the ports of entry.
8. Enacted legislation to ensure protection for women through the Domestic Violence Bill
9. Provided the Special Branch Unit with new office accommodation
10. Enhanced crime detection capabilities by achieving accreditation for the National Forensic Laboratory
11. Provided the police with two additional vehicles for patrol and quick response purposes.

In the coming months, the government will:

1. Formalize an Inter-Agency Intelligence Committee to adopt an Inter-agency collaborative approach within law enforcement agencies to work collectively with a common goal of combating serious and organized crime.
2. Purchase twenty (20) more vehicles for the police force

3. Continue repairs to Police Stations and provide much-needed equipment at these stations
4. Conduct repairs and enhance security at the Bordelais Correctional Institution
5. Increase the police Training Vote to ensure that our police are trained in modern police techniques of crime detection including human rights.
6. Review the Promotion Policy for the Police
7. Commence construction of a new Halls of Justice
8. Operationalize the Swift Justice Project to reduce the backlog of cases and to inspire confidence in our judicial system.
9. Intensify efforts to detect and eliminate corruption among members of the Police Force and other law enforcement agencies
10. Introduce drones to assist in crime detection
11. Strengthen and increase Community Policing and mobile and foot patrol by the police
12. Commence the re-construction of the Custody Suites which was inadvisable and hastily demolished in 2021.
13. Provide the police with new crime-fighting devices and special training
14. Installation of cameras at strategic locations around the island

In addition to law enforcement, the Government has instituted several social interventions.

1. We continue to provide safety nets for our vulnerable citizens within our tight fiscal space. These include enhanced social projects and food and gas subsidies including rehabilitation programmes for released offenders. Only on Tuesday, we borrowed from the Caribbean Development Bank \$5MUS to assist the vulnerable in our country. Over 8000 citizens will be impacted.

2. Launch an islandwide clean-up campaign starting next week to clear verges, roadside hedges and overhanging branches to increase visibility to pedestrians and motorists and have them maintained.
3. Cabinet has agreed to convert the George Charles Secondary School compound to a facility for the rehabilitation of young offenders

These are just a few social interventions which commence within the next few months. Very shortly, I will be announcing a comprehensive social intervention programme to complement the law enforcement measures previously mentioned.

The challenges we face are demanding but not insurmountable. I call on all Saint Lucians to play their part in rebuilding our country and to recognise that the issue of crime is for all of us to tackle. I take the opportunity to advise citizens to avoid the temptation of spreading graphic scenes of dead and mutilated bodies out of respect for those who have suffered the loss of loved ones. We do not want to be a society that has become accustomed to scenes of mutilated bodies and blood-spilling.

In the coming weeks as the police will intensify searches and roadblocks; there will be some inconvenience. I urge the public to be understanding and cooperate with the police during these trying times.

The police are expected to make maximum use of the powers conferred upon them by the law to bring an end to that upsurge of homicides in our country.

I can assure the police that they have the full support of the government as they continue to battle the criminal elements who insist on causing mayhem and havoc in our country.

We must offer no encouragement in word or deed to criminal behaviour and the government will be relentless in supporting the police in that battle.

The majority of Saint Lucians are hospitable, peaceful, law-abiding and loving people. We cannot allow the criminal minority to compromise our way of life. Our island must remain a desirable place for us to live, work and recreate and a welcoming country for the thousands who visit us every year.

Collectively, we need to confront these criminals that seem to be creating an atmosphere of fear and trepidation. As a people, we must not allow criminality to overcome us. Let's all play our part as we continue to fight together, as Prime Minister, you have my full support and commitment in this battle.

May God guide our island at this time.

I thank you.