



PERMANENT MISSION OF SAINT LUCIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT BY

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Madame President,

Allow me, to begin by congratulating you on your election to the presidency of the Seventy Third Session of the General Assembly. Your assumption of this important office contributes to our progress in breaking down the barriers of inequality – with you one of only four women to have held this position in seventy-three years.

As the first woman from our Latin America and Caribbean region to have been elected President of the General Assembly, we are especially proud of your achievement. Saint Lucia is a staunch advocate for gender equality evidenced by the large percentage of Saint Lucian women who hold senior positions in and out of government, including the four female Ministers in my cabinet. Rest assured that you have my delegation's full support in the upcoming session.

Madame President,

I stand before you today as a leader of a Small Island Developing State – a SIDS, which is also a Middle Income Country – a MIC. Saint Lucia's engagement in the international system is framed by acronyms that represent designations and categorizations that have been globally accepted. That SIDS are more vulnerable to natural hazards than other countries, has become accepted. That the resulting damage from natural disasters has a greater overall impact on our economies by virtue of our small size has also become widely accepted. That SIDS which are also Middle Income Countries face additional challenges because of the assumptions regarding the capabilities of countries carrying that designation has been acknowledged.

We all know these truths – they are self-evident. These halls echo with the words of SIDS and MICs leaders year after year making plain and clear the challenges we face. Yet global policies, programs and strategies remain unfairly un-accommodating to these very real and true challenges. The world acknowledges our "acronyms" but little or nothing changes. Saint Lucia remains economically vulnerable to de-risking and the loss of correspondent banking relations. We remain out of reach of any access to concessionary finance. Our reputations are unfairly tarnished by tax labels. We continue to struggle under the weight of international frameworks that do not provide an enabling environment for my country to chart an effective sustainable development path, or even to be able to take control of our own destiny.

Madame President, despite the fact that the odds remain stacked against us, Saint Lucia must still persist. I have an obligation to the people of my country, and so I must find new and innovative ways to keep my economy growing and ensure and enhance environmental and

social protections. I do not have the luxury to wait for the international system to adjust to the special needs of countries like my own, while natural disasters continue to threaten and erode the gains we make. In preparation for this hurricane season, Saint Lucia has had to spend three times the amount of money than we did last season. In order to meet those costs, we have had to impose new taxes to facilitate this preparedness.

For example, a water tax to assist with the de-silting of our dam, a gas tax to assist with road rehabilitation and slope stabilization and an airport tax to assist with the development of a new terminal, highway and flood mitigation around the airport. I cannot delay or ignore critical infrastructure projects, therefore have no choice but to increase my debt burden, I cannot leave my country and its citizens exposed, I must find ways to move forward.

The President of the World Bank has acknowledged that "good health is the foundation of a country's human capital, and no country can afford low-quality or unsafe healthcare." The challenge of providing adequate and affordable healthcare is another area of focus for Saint Lucia. We understand that preventative and affordable healthcare is critical for the social development of any nation, more so a small island state with a small population. We are plagued with incidents of individuals who delay seeking early medical assistance due to the high cost, only to be saddled with a serious diagnosis later – a burden to the state and the individual that becomes far more expensive than the earlier cost.

We have therefore taken steps to address the issue from multiple angles. We are working with partners like the European Union and the World Bank, with a goal of implementing the necessary policies and legislation to give life to a National Health Insurance scheme. We are also looking into preventive approaches, such as the imposition of appropriate labeling and a sugar tax, as we grapple with the high prevalence of Non Communicable Diseases. We are also expanding our after school programmes that focus on building healthy lifestyles through physical activity and diet. We are establishing sports academies complete with nutritionists who will be community based so that their expertise can be shared.

Madame President,

Saint Lucia has worked hard to grow and develop, within the context of an international system that acknowledges our existence and needs, only theoretically, because the practical and tangible manifestation of this acknowledgement is rarely seen or felt.

We have seen the disastrous impact of natural disasters brought on by the changes in our climate. As I speak my country is suffering from the ravages of Kirk, which was on a projected course north of Saint Lucia but changed direction overnight and moved directly over our island. This morning Saint Lucia also suffered from an earthquake. Early reports indicate damage to

our utilities that remain above ground and extensive damage to the agricultural sector - once again my heart goes out to the hard working men and women and to the communities who depend on agriculture. But be assured regardless of the difficulties, we will provide the necessary support to help them recover as quickly as possible. My thoughts and prayers are with Government and people of Barbados who have also been impacted and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and who now lie in the path of the storm.

Our resilience as a people and our ability to pick ourselves up should never be used against us. I applaud Japan, India and the numerous states within the United States of America who have the capacity to effectively respond to natural disasters, I envy that they have the necessary fiscal and policy space to enable them to recover and rebuild effectively, but we as SIDS are continually denied this ability.

We are aware that Dominica, the British Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico among others are still recovering one year on. Yet little has changed. The CARICOM-UN High Level pledging conference to support reconstruction efforts in the region following hurricanes Irma and Maria, received pledges of over US\$1.3 billion but there remains a significant gap between the pledges made and the actual amounts that have been disbursed. While well intended, we have been let down again.

My delegation welcomes the initiative to convene a High Level meeting on the challenges of Middle Income Countries during this 73rd session of the General Assembly. Saint Lucia has continued to place our concerns about debt sustainability on the global agenda. We have joined the call for the creation of a Highly Indebted Middle Income Country (HIMIC) initiative; based not only on the urgent need for debt relief, but also on the need to acknowledge and highlight the negative implications of the challenges that Middle Income Countries face in accessing concessionary financing so vital to building resilience in our countries. We fear a business as usual approach to this meeting, but remain hopeful that it produces substantive outputs with actionable solutions.

Madame President,

Multilateralism is under threat. We have heard the cries from leaders this week. The winds of nationalism that threaten to blow us away from our collective endeavours here at the United Nations are growing. But Saint Lucia believes that it is only within a strong, functioning multilateral system that the guarantees of world peace and security can be provided. To borrow from our distinguished Secretary General Antonio Guterres: "In a world in which all problems are global, there is no way countries can handle issues by themselves; we need global responses."

The ongoing reform of the United Nations system is critical. The increasingly chaotic world requires an organization that is responsive and efficient and that reflects the political and economic reality of a changing world and of all its member states. We can no longer operate within a framework of ideologies, policies, institutions and patterns of behavior that were established in a time long past to deal with circumstances long gone.

We must be willing to challenge discrimination and exclusion if we endeavour to create an equal and just world for all. Every country has a role to play in this global environment. We know this. Saint Lucia joins the other voices calling for an end to the over half century-old embargo imposed on our neighbor, Cuba and for an end to all restrictions on the rights of the Cuban people, to liberty, security and advancement. Similarly we call for an end to the restrictions placed on the legitimate aspirations of Taiwan to participate as an observer in key international institutions, such as the WHO, ICAO and the UNFCCC. This is as much for us as it is for them.

In our hemisphere where confrontations and disagreements exist, I reaffirm Saint Lucia's position that all conflicts must be resolved through diplomatic channels. As we work toward reform of this institution we must ensure that no one is left behind, we must find the political will and courage to ensure that the evolved United Nations not only acknowledge the challenges of its membership, but that it provides adequate solutions for all.

Madame President,

Notwithstanding the myriad challenges that frame our engagement in the international system, Saint Lucia remains committed to the objectives of multilateralism. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development was a triumph of multilateral cooperation, but it is the successful implementation of the agenda, the fulfillment of the promise of its purpose that will define the true measure of our collective will to transform and develop as a global community.

It is within this context that Saint Lucia has committed to present our voluntary national review of our progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda at the 2019 High Level Political Forum. I am also pleased to report that Saint Lucia will be depositing the required instrument to ratify the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol, before the start of COP 24. This week Saint Lucia also reaffirmed our commitment to international law by signing on to the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

In order to build peaceful, equitable and sustainable societies, SIDS and SIDS who are MICs have to look to different courses of action in order to arrive at more immediate solutions to our

development challenges, while we continue to call for changes in the international system. Saint Lucia has recorded two successive years of consistent economic growth, we have grown our tax revenue and are on pace to attract record foreign direct investment. We are still competing, having to find new ways to ensure our growth and development, but imagine how much better we could do with building economic and social resilience to further enhance our ability to meet our sustainable development goals and improve the quality of life of our citizens, if a fair and just international enabling environment was made available to us.

Madame President,

Let us not forget that we come together here as nations united, to build institutions, norms and rules to advance shared interests – interests of all, not of a select few. The enormous challenges of our moment in history require a renewed social contract, one based on shared responsibility and the space to achieve this global compact is right here at the United Nations. Let us draw on the inspiration of Nelson Mandela and his incredible ability to forgive and find solutions for the greater human good.

There is a Buddhist proverb that reads: “to know and not do, is not yet to know”. If we claim to know and accept the special circumstances and vulnerabilities of the SIDS, and yet we do nothing to remedy the systems and frameworks that exacerbate our vulnerability, do we really know? Have we truly accepted? While the answers to these questions may not be readily available, countries like my own have to chart a development path through this changing and volatile world. It is my hope that as multilateralism evolves, and with it this institution, we arrive at “knowing” and at doing what must be done.