



**Address**

**by**

**Honourable Stephenson King**

**Prime Minister, Minister for Finance, Economic Affairs and National  
Development**

**on the occasion of Saint Lucia's  
31st Anniversary of Independence:**

**National Youth Rally**

**Theme: Promoting Excellence in Saint Lucian Youth**

**La Clery Playing Field**

**Monday, 22nd February 2010**

Your Excellency Dame Pearlette Louisy, Governor General; Hon. Arsene James, Minister for Education and Culture; Dr. The Honourable Kenny Anthony; Leader of the Opposition, Mrs. Rosemary Husbands-Mathurin; Speaker of the House, Justice Hugh Rawlins; Chief Justice, Colleague Members of Cabinet, Parliamentarians, Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps, Guests, Principals; Teachers, Students, fellow Saint Lucians; particularly residents of La Clery, good morning.

Permit me this opportunity; from the onset, to extend a blessed, peaceful and happy 31st anniversary of independence to all of you under God's care, protection and guidance. And as we celebrate, in observance of this great milestone in our Nation's history, let us stop for a moment – one single moment, to reflect on our past, our achievements, and our present situation in our history, and let us recommit ourselves to the ideals for which independence was sought.

When the journey towards independence was initiated in 1966/67 the dream then; like most West Indian brother and sister islands, was to liberate our country from Colonial rule and to clad ourselves with that responsible cloak of independence. Convincingly, the fathers of independence intimated that as a people we were mature enough to fend for ourselves, determine our own destiny and build a strong nation on the sound foundation of freedom and democracy.

Our journey through “Associated Statehood” in 1967 and eventually independence in 1979 gave us our constitutional entitlement to the fundamental rights and freedoms enjoyed in any civilised and democratic society. Our Constitution – that instrument of independence, guarantees each and every citizen the right to life, liberty, security, equality before the law and the protection of the law. In addition, we are guaranteed freedom of conscience, of expression, of assembly and association, of protection of the family, personal privacy, the privacy of one's home and other property and the deprivation of property without compensation. All of those are subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others. Yet still, after 31 years of accepting that instrument of independence, we are faced with challenges to those very rights and freedoms.

Today; though having attained much progress since independence, we stand at the cross roads of serious social and economic challenges that threaten our very survival as an independent nation. Our basic and fundamental right to life, liberty and security is under serious threat by a few who fail to respect the rights and freedoms of their fellowmen.

As Prime Minister of this beautiful “... land that gave us birth”, I shall not cower, neither fail, nor waiver in my responsibility to ensure the full entitlement of all Saint Lucians to the fundamental rights and freedoms guaranteed under our Constitution.

I feel obligated, particularly to you the youth, to protect these rights and freedoms and to give you hope of a better tomorrow and a brighter and prosperous future.

It is in this vein that I shall not allow our gains as a small developing nation; after 31 years of toil, to be evaporated by the growing trend of lawlessness and deviant behaviour, disregard to law and order, and criminality in our society. There is no room in our society for such alien attitudes and therefore this trend must stop now! In keeping with my recent announcement of a “zero tolerance” to this type of activity, the Police; supported by the judiciary, has been mandated to, and must undertake, their responsibility to protect the citizenry and bring the criminals to justice, without fear or favour to anyone whatsoever. Our society must be purified as an investment to preserve the prospects of a brighter future for our children – “the sons and daughters of Saint Lucia”.

Let me therefore reassure all, of government’s commitment to continuing our effort towards implementing appropriate social and economic policies, designed to safeguard the future of our young men and women of Saint Lucia. During the last twelve months this has not been an easy prospect, as our efforts were; and continue to be, challenged by the global economic crisis which has impacted negatively on Government’s earnings, thus reducing the availability of adequate resources, required to undertake critical national development programmes and initiatives. This, coupled with the growing trend in anti-social behaviour and criminality among a small segment of our youth, has placed even greater strain on our scarce resources.

Notwithstanding, Government will continue to develop sound policies geared toward ensuring that our youth are thoroughly engaged in positive activities; in their schools and communities, that promote team building, patriotism, civic responsibility and sound leadership. This will be done through a variety of programmes and activities that will promote the development of youth leadership; the engagement of youth in policy formulation, thus ensuring that youth are at the centre of our development thrust.

Last year I engaged a number of youth groups in dialogue on a number of issues of national, regional and international interest. Through such dialogue, I challenged the members of the Caribbean Youth Environmental Network and the youth of the National Trust, to develop a national project that will mobilize more Saint Lucian youth in the preservation of our environment, so that our country can be preserved for generations to come. I also included four young persons on Saint Lucia’s delegation to the Climate Change Meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark, last December. I urge more of you to come on board and become part of this movement and commit yourself to promoting the protection of our environment and the preservation of our beautiful country.

The engagement of youth in dialogue at the highest level, on national issues is essential to their assumption of leadership responsibility. Last month an historic Youth Video Conference was convened, involving young Saint Lucians in Toronto, Ottawa, New York, Washington, Tortola, Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Saint Lucia. Governor General, Dame Pearlette Louisy and I dialogued with them on the subject of “The role of the youth in developing Saint Lucia”. I must

admit that this was one of my greatest pleasures as Prime Minister, to listen to our youth as they articulated their hopes, their dreams and their aspirations for their beloved country.

The participation of young people in influencing the conditions of their own lives is very critical. That is why dialogue is important, because “Participation is more than involvement in institutions and decision making. Participation is a pattern of how one lives, it is relevant to work, housing, leisure, education and social relations. Participation is also a question of young people’s rights and obligations in shaping the future society.” {Council Europe (1997)}.

As we encourage our youth to dialogue and participate, youth unemployment is of particular concern to Government. Government; through the Ministries of Social Transformation, Youth and Sports, and Education and Culture, will continue its thrust to put in place policies and effective strategies which will enable young people to make right choices and ensure their participation in all spheres of civil and national development.

Consequently, in the search for a long term consensus based, integrated and cross-sectoral youth policy that empowers young people, a number of youth initiatives will be embarked upon:

- The Review of the National Youth Policy
- Capacity Building for District Youth and Sports Councils
- Establishment of After School Programmes,
- Reintroduction of social and uniformed groups at all schools
- Engaging Youth at the national level to allow their input in issues affecting our society
- Redevelopment of the School Sports Program to incorporate a more skewed development format.

In addition, a number of regional youth initiatives will be initiated through the Regional Integration Unit within the office of the Prime Minister, in conjunction with the relevant Ministries.

This year the United Nations has proclaimed the period 12 August 2010 - 11 August 2011 as the International Year of Youth on the theme “Dialogue and Mutual Understanding”.

We here in Saint Lucia must be proud, because we have already started our dialogue with the youth.

Let us therefore give them hope on the occasion of this 31st anniversary of our independence, by returning to our traditional values, by securing peace, love, unity and harmony, and most of all securing their fundamental rights and freedom guaranteed under our Constitution.

In conclusion, let me express my gratitude to the organisers of today’s activities for their excellent choice in selecting the beautiful and pristine community of La Clery, which I have the

honour and pleasure to represent in the Parliament. On behalf of the residents of La Clery and by extension the Constituency of Castries North, and on my own behalf, please accept our warm welcome, and our wishes for a happy, blessed and peaceful 31st anniversary of independence.

And as you all depart from this scenic venue, let me borrow a line from Max Ehrmann's inspirational poem the "Desiderata" – "Go placidly amid the noise and haste, and remember what peace there may be in silence.

I thank you.