



ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE ALVA BAPTISTE

**MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, INTERNATIONAL TRADE, CIVIL
AVIATION AND DIASPORA AFFAIRS OF SAINT LUCIA**

AT THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL

February 16, 2024

- Chair of the Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Argentina, His Excellency Daniel Raimondi
- Secretary General, Luis Almagro
- Permanent Representative of Saint Lucia to the OAS, Her Excellency Elizabeth Darius-Clarke
- Permanent Representatives
- Alternate Representatives
- Permanent Observers
- Staff of the OAS Secretariat
- Ladies and gentlemen

It always brings me immense pleasure to be in the House of the Americas. I feel as if it is my natural habitat.

As my country celebrates its 45th Anniversary of Independence next week, February 22, 2024, I bring to you a message which is charged with invaluable significance, and which is the cornerstone of the work of this Organization - the maintenance of democracy and peace in our hemisphere. We must guard them jealousy.



Chair, I have the unsurpassed glory of addressing this august body at time when truly we celebrate independence from alien rule under the theme “Douvan Ansanm - Building a Nation through Unity, Resilience and Creativity”. For those who are not familiar with the creole language, Douvan Ansanm translates to “moving forward together”, thus empathising the importance of unity of our people in navigating the turbulence of the contemporary global political environment in attaining a prosperous nation.

As many of you may be aware, Saint Lucia has a very colourful history. From the 1600s up until 1814 when the French ceded Saint Lucia to the British, Saint Lucia shifted ‘ownership” between French and British rule 14 times - the British won 7 times and the French, they won 7 times, and at the eleventh hour the French decided to cede Saint Lucia, this beautiful island, to the British. This is our colonial history. One characterized by persistent war over ownership of our fair Helen. Yet, in spite of this very troublesome history of bondage and exploitation, Saint Lucians stood in the breach, girded their loins, fought for and secured independence in 1979. Since then, we have managed to remain a peaceful and relatively successful country, whose economy and society continue to evolve in such a manner as to afford the opportunity to all our citizens a credible chance to strive for and achieve a high and sustainable quality of life.

This, and several other core national development objectives such as good public health and education services, access to clean water and sustainable energy, national and citizen security, community development and a balanced and equitable economic growth, have all been built on the platform of a respect for, and committed maintenance of the core aspects of democracy.

To be sure, the fact that Saint Lucia, and for that matter, all of the countries in the CARICOM region, are able to boast of our solid democratic records, is a testament to the fact that irrespective of the spectrum of challenges which we



face, we continue to invest in the sanctity of human and individual rights and freedoms. The right to individual choice and association, the freedom of speech and movement, to own and enjoy property; the important and unabridged responsibility to choose our governments and political managers of state as we deem fit through free and fair elections; and ultimately, the right to life and livelihood unencumbered by unfair, unreasonable and/or unconstitutional encroachment by the State, are but the core elements on which we continue to agree to construct a modern society and civilization.

In this regard, over the years, we have seen it as both necessary and strategic to join with other countries and indeed institutions at the regional and multilateral levels to build an international coalition of the like-minded in support of the noble objectives of promoting, entrenching and sustaining a robust and present practice of democracy in this hemisphere and elsewhere. I can boldly say, without any fear of contradiction, from this space and within these halls, that notwithstanding the numerous instances of challenge to the type of the perfect democracy we aspire to, (and there have been many), we the countries of this hemisphere, have been able to protect the basic tenet of freedom. For this and more, we should feel a sense of accomplishment as states whose commitment is to protecting the rights and freedoms of our respective peoples remain strong and abiding.

Ultimately of course, democracy is but a mere fleeting experience if it is not about the people from whom we as managers of the State get our authority. I dare say, fellow patriots, free and fair election is a mere symptom of democracy. True and real democracy is to test negative for the misuse and abuse of power or conversely, testing positive for the wise and frugal use of power given via the mandate of free and fair elections. Effective leadership and collective effort are the fuel of real democracies. Therefore, as policy makers we need to acknowledge



the critical role of the citizenry in the attainment of the democracy that we seek, as we strive to protect and defend the ideals and dynamism of democracy.

But even in light of all of this Mr. Chair, it must be repeated that the practice of democracy requires our continuous attention. And much like any ideal, ideology, or dream, it will not survive if it is not maintained, nourished and jealously guarded.

When we as an organization stand united in our quest to towards defending democracy, there is nothing that cannot be accomplished. In this light, I must recognize all representatives here for the leadership shown in guiding Guatemala out of what could have been “democratic turmoil”. The work that member states have done towards the peaceful transition of power in Guatemala must be commended. It is always within our sphere of competence to address issues in a mature and cerebral fashion.

The famous British philosopher John Locke, whose classical treaties underwrites the modern day system of representative government we currently practice, though himself a self-confessed idealist, nonetheless recognized that democracy could claim an existence in perpetuity. Rather, he and other exponents opined that a constant and dedicated guardianship of democracy and representative government requires all citizens and institutions to not only practice, but ultimately protect the very system of freedoms we cherish.

In this regard, it is not without credibility to say, as we come to this place to renew our commitment to our democratic traditions, that democracy across this hemisphere and the world as a whole is under severe threat. Yes, you might say that threat and challenges to the practice of democracy are nothing new; and surely history is replete with examples of where we as a people have been able to face down and defeat such threats.



But you, like me can also concede that today the very foundations of democracy are being challenged not only from within as has mostly been the case in the past, but now also from without due to the seeming inattentiveness of global policymakers and institutions to boldly and definitively address some of the biggest crises we face.

And of what crises do I speak? I speak of the crisis at the international level, where the failure of the powerful nations among us to accept responsibility to correct both historical and current global socio-economic imbalances between states threatens to create a chasm between developed and developing countries and their peoples. Whether it is in determining how to treat to dealing with the issues of fall-out from the climate crisis, the uneven distribution of investment, job creation, and economic accumulation between nations; or in correcting historical imbalances caused by the blight of slavery and colonialism and apartheid through a system of justice, of those whose ancestors suffered mightily under that yoke; to ensuring that a level and fair playing field is created and maintained between countries such that each citizen of the world can exercise their right to exist and live in peace and security, then democracy I say is moving from a state of challenge to a position of crisis.

I speak of a crisis that is revealing its ugly presence in our midst either due to political convenience or worse insensitivity, because we the leaders of this global system of democracy choose to turn a blind eye to the tyranny unfolding, and we must give careful and sensible treatment to issues that we believe are far away from our hemisphere, like the developments in Gaza, and of course the morbid scenario in Haiti.

I speak of a crisis of confidence in a system of multilateralism, that once held up such hope of cooperation and commitment to advancement of the global commons, but is now found wanting even as fortunes of poor and vulnerable



developing countries sink under the weight of high debt, low growth, lack of access to concessional financing, high unemployment, mass migration, uncontrolled crime and violence and even potential physical extinction from sea level rise and global warming. We all can see, year in year out, the decimating effects of the climate crisis across the social, economic, and environmental fabric of our countries.

I speak surely of regional and hemispheric system of institutions that having done so very well during the past decades in managing the bargain of democracy between, among and within nations in our region, now seemingly stand paralyzed by their own inability to stand firmly behind the very democracy they exist to protect.

Mr. Chair, I need not go into any detail on this last observation because the facts are patently obvious. That while we remain hesitant to speak and afraid to act, right in our own backyard, we are letting slip a solemn responsibility to gird our loins and intervene in the most critical crises of our generation. And while we fiddle, Haiti gets worse, Venezuela remains unresolved, and our other brothers and sisters across the Americas are facing a future of uncertainty, fear and potential abuse that undermine the character of the democratic tradition of this great region.

Mr. Chair, the question therefore is, are we the practitioners of state craft, the elected guardians of this fragile ideal of democracy, going to stand idly by and watch as the challenges which confront us become the crises that destroy us?

The Government and People of Saint Lucia on whose behalf I have the distinct honour to speak in this honourable Council, believe that it is our solemn responsibility to fight for the cause of justice and peace, not just in our region, but in this hemisphere and across the entire world.



The Guatemalan human rights activist, feminist and Noble Peace Prize Laureate Rigobeta Menchu Tum once said, and I quote:

“Peace cannot exist without justice, justice cannot exist without fairness, fairness cannot exist without development, development cannot exist without democracy, democracy cannot exist without respect for the identity and worth of cultures and peoples.”

We subscribe to and support this view to the extent that as the descendants of a people who have suffered the indignities of bondage, but who are equally the inheritors of the fruits of many decades of struggle, know only too well that what we enjoy today can easily be lost if we fail to protect, nourish and jealously guard what we have.

And the bedrock of what we have, the platform on which the political, social and economic gains on which a modern Saint Lucia has been built is that of a strong and unshakable commitment to the practice of democracy.

Throughout the years since Independence, Saint Lucia has had to balance its socio-economic development and prosperity against the onslaught of numerous external demands, external shocks and existential threats. From the unbalanced yoke of globalization in which the spectrum of benefits seemingly go to the more advanced economies and the fall out to the vulnerable economies, to the impact of a climate crisis to which our contribution is minimal but the fall-out maximum, or the clearly disproportionate impact of the wars, pandemics and global economic readjustments that have triggered our countries and citizens, we continue to manage in difficult and dangerous times. We continue to navigate a global political environment which is pregnant with the seeds of our country’s continued marginalization.



But manage we have, and today, we continue to stand strong in the breach. Why? Because we have chosen and sworn a solemn commitment to the protection and advancement of democracy within our country and across the world. And just as we have done for ourselves, so too must we for and with our brothers and sisters in this hemisphere.

As such, today Saint Lucia reaffirms its commitment to the Inter-American System. To those institutions which we have together worked with so diligently over the years to build up, expand and entrench as the practice of democracy in this region. We are the guardians of the rights and freedoms of all our people.

Sir, we absolutely reconfirm our support for this Organization of American States, its councils and committees as the agents and agencies which operate on the frontline of the struggle to ensure that all of our citizens can live a life free of the fear of tyranny, abuse and disposition and build societies in which equity, good governance and sustainable livelihoods are seen as the rule rather than the exception.

Mr. Chair, in recommitting to these causes, we believe that it is absolutely critical that this organization, with its long and rich history as a broker for peace and a champion for justice in this hemisphere, stands up and lead the regional effort to nip any and all challenges to the sustainability of our democratic system in the bud.

The time for fence sitting, wishing for the best outcome or just turning a blind eye to the presence of action and actors who do not wish our democracies well, is over. We must all recommit ourselves to fight for the rights and freedoms of our people, just as we must, out of necessity, lead the efforts at ensuring citizen security and safety, free and fair elections, freedom of speech, the enjoyment of private property and the press, the elimination of corruption, and the equitable distribution of the gains of national output.



Nothing worth having is won without a fight or without effort. We in Saint Lucia know this only too well. We are also well aware that any system or organism left unattended and undernourished will fall into disrepair and ultimately disappear from existence as it withers and dies.

I close with the words of the poet, Nikolai Ostrovsky, and I quote:

“Man's dearest possession is life. It is given to him but once, and he must live it so as to feel no torturing regrets for wasted years, never know the burning shame of a mean and petty past; so live that, dying, he might say: all my life, all my strength were given to the finest cause in all the world—the fight for the Liberation of Mankind”

Let it not be said that we who are now charged with the responsibility of maintaining our fragile systems of democracy and development failed our people in their greatest hour of need. A threat to ONE remains a threat to ALL.

Muchas Gracias, Merci, Thank you very much