August 12, 2020

Our Queen’s Chain and Beach Access Should be Kept as Traditional Rights for all Saint Lucians

The Saint Lucia National Trust expresses its profound disappointment over a recent decision by the Cabinet of Ministers to lease the Queen’s Chain along the north east coast to Cabot Saint Lucia for seventy-five (75) years.

“The object of the Queen’s Chain was to have land whereupon to establish, in the contour of the islands, towns, parishes, forts, entrenchments, batteries and other public and necessary works, as well as for their embellishment as for their defence”.

These conditions governing the Queen’s Chain are clear, specific and unambiguous and have never been altered or amended in any way, and still apply unchanged to this day. Thus, there are only three areas of use of the Queen’s Chain: public works, embellishment and defence.

The Queen’s Chain belongs to the state, and therefore to all of the people of this country. We expect the Cabinet of Ministers, as our elected representatives, to conscientiously manage these lands in the interest of the people they were elected to serve. This Cabinet decision does not demonstrate that the Cabinet of Ministers has acted as such.

Access to the Queen’s Chain and beaches is a traditional right of all Saint Lucians. It is an inheritance of all Saint Lucians that should not be denied. The particular sections Cabinet decided to lease to Cabot Saint Lucia and the adjacent beaches are used extensively by Saint Lucians and visitors to the island for sea bathing, beach picnics, walking/hiking and other fitness activities, camping, bird watching, fishing, wildlife and plant life conservation and study, safari tours, horseback riding, kite surfing, restaurants and bars, including Marjorie’s Beach Restaurant and Bar, which has become a staple in our tourism experience. The area is also a significant pre-Colombian archaeological site with an Amerindian burial ground, and relics and artefacts that tell the story of our past generations.
Much of the Queen’s Chain in this area was first leased to Cap Estate Ltd. in January 1973 for seventy-five years under conditions which, although not stated, did not hinder or prevent the enjoyment of the Queen’s Chain by Saint Lucians in any way. Cap Estate Ltd. assigned the lease to an individual in June 1984, who sold the lease assignment to Point Hardy Development Company in April, 2007. In all these transfers we are unable to find anything that prevents public enjoyment of the area. However, we understand that Cabot Saint Lucia will change this because their expressed intention is to curtail, obstruct and prevent vehicular and pedestrian access, and traditional use of the Queen’s Chain. They have already demonstrated this intent by blocking access to the area even before Cabinet decided to lease the property to them. Through Cabinet’s action, therefore, thousands of Saint Lucians and visitors to the island will no longer be allowed to enjoy the many ways in which this area is used on a daily basis, as was allowed by previous lessees of the property. This is unacceptable and ought to be remedied immediately.

For the avoidance of doubt, **we restate that we do not oppose this development.** In fact, when the Trust had the only meeting we were afforded with the developer on October 8, 2019, we offered to work with them to find ways to address our concerns and expressed the view that if this offer is accepted, the two parties could come up with a development plan that would serve as an example of how development and conservation could be balanced. This offer was declined and with it, the opportunity to fashion a development that will accrue economic benefits to the island while respecting and protecting the traditional rights of all Saint Lucians to their patrimony. We strongly contend that continued enjoyment of these lands by the public would not compromise the purpose for which Cabot Saint Lucia, as the owners of adjoining lands, intend to use their property. Stated differently, control by them of the adjoining Queen’s Chain is not a requirement for the success of their investment. Ownership of adjoining lands does not give any landowner an automatic or exclusive right to control the Queen’s Chain. The approach that has been taken by Cabot Saint Lucia and our Cabinet of Ministers ignores the importance of these lands to us, and does not acknowledge the value of the Queen’s Chain all across Saint Lucia, to local people, whether for recreation or livelihood.

We therefore urge the Cabinet of Ministers to reconsider their decision to lease the Queen’s Chain to Cabot Saint Lucia. This land is the traditional property of Saint Lucians and should not be confiscated for the enjoyment of Cabot’s guests only. Government has a duty to protect, preserve and promote the rights of the citizens who elected them to manage their affairs. This is a sacred trust passed on from the electorate to the Cabinet and Parliament and should never be trampled upon to meet the unreasonable and unnecessary demands of developers.
There could be no valid reason why Saint Lucians and Cabot’s guests cannot have equal access to our land. We are willing to share this access for the greater good.