



PRESS CONFERENCE NOVEMBER 28, 2019

Introductory Statement

The 43rd AGM of the Saint Lucia National Trust was held on November 16, and a new Council was sworn in at that meeting. The first meeting of Council was held on November 21, and decided that a press conference should be held to brief the media and the public on where the National Trust is today, and what we believe the future holds for us.

Today, the National Trust is at a very interesting juncture. It is no secret that we have been challenged over the last several years since the subvention that the Trust had always deserved and valued was withdrawn. The quantum of the subvention has varied over the years, and before it was stopped, it was at \$700,000 per annum, with \$200,000 of this earmarked for our proposed Pigeon Island National Landmark Development, which would have enabled us to generate additional revenues at this, our premiere site. Of course, the loss of financial support from the government forced the Trust to cut back on its planned programs and activities, and resulted in our operating over these last few years with a deficit budget. We have however, continued to prioritize maintenance and management of important sites across Saint Lucia including the PINL, the Morne sites, the Point Sables Environmental Protection Area, Married Women's Quarters at Vigie and Morne Pavilion at Cap Estate, in keeping with our mandate, and at an annual cost that exceeds the subvention we previously benefitted from.

Despite the constraints faced in recent years we have been able to reopen the Walcott House, and to improve products and services to secure revenue generated through PINL and other sites. We reopened our office in the south to allow for greater outreach and to improve natural resource management in the area. Following the successful completion of the OECS Protected Areas and Sustainable Livelihoods (OPAAL) project we have improved management of the Maria Islands and the Ma Kote mangrove, established a monitoring programme for the off shore islands, launched a turtle monitoring and protection programme and continue to work with surrounding communities to support and expand natural resource-based livelihood opportunities. Our work on the fer de lance project resulted in a protocol being established to treat victims of snake bites and this has seen a 100% success rate in preventing deaths or serious complications.

In the area of built heritage we started creating a list of historic buildings and will be expanding this to include landscapes and areas of natural beauty. We are working on antiquities legislation to provide legal protection to the sites and properties on the list as well as objects of historic significance. We created a Coalition of Civil Society Organisations and are now working with our partners to create an umbrella body for Heritage Conservation Organisations as well.

We have increased our presence on social media and engaged in information sharing through educational tours and turtle, dolphin and whale watching experiences, the Our Heritage Programme and Trust Pioneers Lectures, print advertising and other avenues. We have increased our advocacy

as well as outreach into the school population to raise awareness of issues relating to sea mammals, turtles, the white breasted thrasher and plastic pollution, among others, and engaged in capacity building in seamoss cultivation and honey production. The Trust has been raising awareness of the need for access to information, public participation and access to justice in environmental matters in Latin America and the Caribbean since 2012 under Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration. This evolved into the Escazú Agreement which was adopted in 2018, and Saint Lucia was one of the first signatories. We continue to raise awareness of this Agreement, which puts people at the centre of decision-making processes regarding our environment.

Many of these achievements have been with the support of scores of individuals, including our members, the local private sector and civil society organizations, inter-governmental organisations and foreign governments. We will continue to nurture these relationships with those who support our work. I take this opportunity to also commend Mr. Tulsie for his management of the Trust and its finances through these challenging times.

The loss of the much needed subvention thrust the Trust into the public limelight, and we believe, caused many Saint Lucians to think more deliberately about what the Trust was created to do, whether that mandate is useful, and whether in fact the Trust is delivering on its mandate. Although the Trust has always strived to economic sustainability, the abrupt loss of financial support coupled with the imperatives of the new environment in which we operate, has strongly influenced our new Strategic Plan for the period 2020 to 2030, that was approved by the 43rd AGM last week. The deeply introspective and broadly consultative process through which our new Strategic Plan has been developed over the last year resulted in a vision that acknowledges the value of all of our natural and cultural heritage, and the necessity for every citizen and institution to buy into the need to respect, manage and sustainably use our natural and cultural heritage. The Strategic Plan will be properly launched early in 2020. Today though, we stand on this threshold, cautiously optimistic about our future. Over the coming months, we will institute a new management structure to support the implementation of our Strategic Plan and associated business plan commencing in the 2020 fiscal year.

We take this opportunity to assure Saint Lucians that the Trust fully understands the need for responsible national economic development that improves the quality of lives of all our people. We hasten to add though, that this must be done in a way that:

- acknowledges the value of our natural and cultural heritage;
- recognises the uniqueness of what makes us Saint Lucians;
- uses natural and cultural heritage responsibly, in a manner that conserves it for the many generations to come;
- retains its authenticity; and
- acknowledges that we live in an era of climate change, that requires us all to adjust to this urgent existential crisis;

while optimizing the benefits and opportunities that can result, for us all.

In short, we advocate a development model that promotes economic interests with minimum social and environmental cost. The role of the Trust is therefore to endeavor to bargain for a healthy and sustainable equilibrium between development, livelihoods and conservation.

Development and heritage conservation are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, we must conserve our heritage if we are going to protect the core of our very unique Saint Lucian-ness, while growing a robust tourism product that sets us apart. Sometimes our commitment to this sustainable

development philosophy puts us at odds with the powers that be, but we must be mature in the way in which we manage these conflicts, while calling for compliance with national legislation and the application of best practice in our development approaches, raising awareness of why we exist, and inculcating public support for our actions, while also focusing on participatory approaches, and being sensitive to the needs of the public. In this context, notwithstanding our disappointment that we were unable to engage the Prime Minister, our membership was heartened by the Prime Minister's statement of commitment to the work of the Trust when he addressed the 43rd AGM, and we eagerly look forward to tangible manifestations of this support at the highest political level, and an approach to national development that is consistent with the sustainable development ethos that we all subscribe to.

I conclude by reiterating that, to successfully deliver on its mandate, the Trust needs the support and buy in of all of our people. We will, as we roll out the new Strategic Plan, continue to champion Saint Lucia's heritage, while seeking to increase collaboration with partners in areas of mutual interest and to mobilise membership across communities the length and breadth of Saint Lucia, and the diaspora.

Saint Lucia We Love.

Yours in TRUST.