

Statement made to the National Environmental Commission  
On accepting the election of the Saint Lucia National Trust  
to the position of Vice Chair of the Commission.

Mr. Chairman, colleagues,

The Saint Lucia National Trust is honoured and humbled by the confidence you place in the organisation by electing it to serve as the Vice Chair of the Commission. As Mr. d'Auvergne pointed out at the opening ceremony, the idea of creating a National Environmental Commission (NEC) was born in the minds of a small group of concerned persons, among whom were Mr. Robert Devaux and Mr. Gabriel Charles, founding members of the Trust. In this regard, the Trust feels that it has an organic relationship with the NEC.

Mr. Chairman, it will be remiss of me not to share at this early stage of the life of the Commission, how I see the challenges we face. In this regard, I am reminded of the following two lines of our National Anthem:

Gone the Days when nations battle  
For this Helen of the West.

Mr. Chairman, we feel that whereas the players may have changed, the battle for Fair Helen is very much enjoined. This battle is between those of us who see the bigger picture of what the progressive loss of key components of our heritage will cause and those who seek to exploit those resources for narrower interests. In his address, the Minister of Physical Development lamented that key resources are being irreversibly lost, including beaches, coral cover, forest cover, shoreline etc. When we consider this statement along with the observation made at the opening ceremony by Senator Tessa Mangal, that the influences of power and self interests have combined to erode our ability to protect our environment, we come to understand the scale of the battle and against whom it must be fought.

At the opening ceremony both the Minister for Physical Development and you, Mr. Chairman cautioned that there must be balance in what we do – a balance between development and environmental conservation. The Trust agrees, because this is a bedrock policy of the Trust. However, we must be clear about the meaning of balance. As we see it, the scale is tilted in the direction of physical and infrastructural development at the expense of environmental conservation. This is what both Ministers alluded to, and this development path cannot be sustainable. Even of greater concern is government's pursuit of a development agenda which places physical and infrastructural development at the centre. We feel that for development to be sustainable in our environment of limited resources, a change of direction is needed away from the current approach to one that places people at the centre of the development agenda. Then only can we aspire to sustainable development, which is central to the mandate of this Commission. Mr. Chairman, these sentiments will shape our input into the work of this Commission.

I once again thank the members for the honour of electing the Trust to the vice chairmanship and look forward to working with all members in pursuit of our mandate.