

Statement by the Saint Lucia National Trust to its Members and the General Public

Members of the Saint Lucia National Trust may have heard recent news items in which the Honourable Minister of Tourism made an unwarranted attack on the Trust for advocating the conservation and sustainable use of Saint Lucia's beaches and the Queen's Chain for Saint Lucians. The Minister's comments were apparently in response to an interview given by the Director of the Trust on development pressures on the coastline in the context of sea level rise, as well as the social implications of the declining public access to the island's beaches.

In his reaction the Honourable Minister intimated that the Trust has no business speaking about heritage protection as this was the business of Government. He even accused the Trust of having no moral authority to speak about unrestricted beach access because the organisation has enclosed the beaches at Pigeon Island with a wall and charges for the use of those beaches.

The Honourable Minister's comments left us in shock and awe over the narrow view he has about national development generally, and the scant regard he has for the rights of Saint Lucians to enjoy their patrimony. He seems to be unaware that the Trust was created by Government to do the very things he now claims is not the business of the Trust, including to act in an advisory capacity to Government on matters of heritage conservation. As far as the matter of the Trust surrounding the beaches at Pigeon Island with a wall and charging for the use of those beaches, we are unable to accept that the Honourable Minister could be this ill informed, and assume that he was misquoted. Otherwise, such a glaring misrepresentation of fact by the Tourism Minister would be a matter of grave concern.

However, there is a deeper and perhaps more sinister message in the Minister's comment that "(he) keeps hearing these interjections by the Trust..." We know that public sector natural resource management experts are constrained by the Civil Service Regulations in terms of public statements they can make, leaving the Trust as perhaps the only organization which speaks out publicly on these matters. This is our mandate. However, the Honourable Minister's classification of our advocacy efforts as "interjections" suggests that he considers the Trust's comments to be trivial, and the organisation is a lone voice to be ignored. Perhaps the Minister is right. The Trust Secretariat often laments the lack of publicly communicated support from our members and the general public on issues of heritage conservation. We know that the support is there because comments come to us directly. The Minister has now challenged you, the members of the Trust, as well as the general public, to take a stand on heritage conservation in ways that will let our leaders know the value we place on our heritage. These concerns should not be considered as mere interjections.

We therefore invite members of the Trust and the public at large to take a stand on the protection of our patrimony. Some of the issues we need to consider include:

- Public access to beaches;
- Sale of the Queen's Chain to private developers;

- Compulsory acquisition of private lands for the benefit of private developers;
- Approval of major development projects prior to the completion of Environmental Impact Assessments;
- Lack of public review of, and consultations on Environmental Impact Assessments;
- The explosion in the number of golf courses being considered for construction;
- Unnecessary destruction of pristine landscapes and wild life habitats to support development projects;
- Loss of livelihood opportunities due to terrestrial and marine resource degradation;
- Threats to the PMA World heritage Site;
- Planning and authorization of large scale development projects using state lands without public consultation and /review.

There are opportunities for, and examples of development being pursued elsewhere in ways that balance conservation, heritage conservation and development.

This implied challenge from the Minister has nothing to do with politics. Rather it is about a choice between sacrificing our patrimony for the promise of elusive large scale developments on the one hand, and protecting that patrimony by encouraging responsible developments which respect the rights of citizens to their patrimony and maintain the value of our environment as a common good.

The Trust falls in the portfolio of the Honourable Prime Minister, and not the Minister of Tourism. We therefore encourage our members and the general public to convey their thoughts and feelings on these matters to the Honourable Prime Minister through any means they are comfortable with, including calling the talk shows, Andre Paul's "What Makes Me Mad" on Radio 100, The Agenda on Radio St. Lucia (Friday programme) or writing articles for the local media. In addition we invite you to visit our blog at <http://slunationaltrust.blogspot.com/> to post your thoughts on these matters.

Chairman
Saint Lucia National Trust