



PERMANENT MISSION OF SAINT LUCIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

STATEMENT BY

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TO THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE
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Distinguished Mr. President, I begin my address to the 79th Session of the UN General Assembly by invoking the authority of the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Quote: *“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there “is” such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action”* Unquote.

Mr. President, over the decades, we the representatives of Small Island Developing States have come to this hallowed chamber to state the case for fairer treatment of our developmental needs and our challenges by the international community. We have argued for special and differential treatment because we are indeed different, indeed special, and indeed unique in our sizes, our economies, our finances, our social circumstances, our vulnerabilities.

Mr. President, we are indeed severely disadvantaged by an unfair global financial system that has amplified its inequities by the measurements and standards it has employed to assess our development; and despite our best efforts, it seems that we were simply engaging in odes to the deaf because there has hardly been the type of concrete and fundamental responses and actions to change the rules and the systems that have been suppressing our developmental aspirations.

However, Mr. President we have persisted in our advocacy; we have not abandoned our faith in the strength and advantages of multilateralism. And so today we are pleased to applaud two recent decisions by the International Community that provide an expectation that the unique vulnerabilities and special circumstances of Saint Lucia and other *Small Island Developing States* will receive the particular attention they deserve.

I speak first of the *Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States* recently held in Antigua and Barbuda, which adopted a new ten-year plan of action for SIDS.

The Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS) is a bold new plan to give priority at the international level to the sustainable development needs of SIDS over the next ten years and maps out the nature of the support which the International Community must deliver in order to achieve them.

Through this Agenda the economies of SIDS can be transformed and so there must be absolutely no delay in its implementation and in delivering on the commitments made to bring life to its provisions. This cannot wait!

The second decision that we applaud is the recent adoption by the United Nations, of the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI).

While we note that that the resolution advancing the MVI calls for its voluntary adoption, Saint Lucia urges the international community to speedily adopt and implement the MVI.

It took the international Community thirty- two years to develop and adopt this vital and necessary tool for sustainable development and global equity. Let us not wait another thirty-two years to test and implement it. The MVI must be brought into use today. This cannot wait!

It is urgent Mr. President, because the challenges facing our small, open and vulnerable economies are quite complex. Caribbean economies have, over the past two decades, been plagued by a number of inter-related and inter-locking factors including persistent fiscal deficits and high debt, stubborn and persistent structural rigidities.

These inter-related factors, Mr. President, have been significantly exacerbated by external shocks, including frequent and major fluctuations in energy prices, financial crises, and more recently, the Covid Pandemic and the Russian-Ukraine war; not to mention the planet's greatest existential threat; climate change.

In this regard, Mr President, there is a pressing need for immediate action to halt and reverse the slow progress that is being made on the issue of climate change and climate justice. This General Assembly needs no reminders of the violent and destructive impact of climate change and the extent of the peril in which the world, particularly SIDS, finds itself as a result.

Saint Lucia is considerably dismayed and disappointed that after years of advocacy by SIDS, to establish the Loss and damage Fund at COP28, the fund, which should have been activated in July this year is yet to be operationalised.

Saint Lucia therefore urges those concerned to swiftly and urgently operationalise the Loss and Damage Fund so that SIDS can receive timely support and on the scale required to recover from the disastrous impact of climatic events on their small economies and

societies. Further, it is essential that at the forthcoming COP 29, the special circumstances of SIDS are protected and operationalised across the entire Climate Change Policy agenda. This cannot wait!

Mr President, in the same way the world must recompense SIDS for the injustice of the climate crisis that we are suffering, those countries, which propelled their economic development through the unholy and inhumane transatlantic slave trade and slavery of our African ancestors, must pay reparations for this crime against humanity which they inflicted upon the people they brought from Africa to the Caribbean and the Americas as well as on the indigenous peoples of those regions.

Mr. President, Saint Lucia therefore reiterates the call it made at the 78th session of the UNGA, that the UN should become seized of the question of reparations for the transatlantic slave trade and slavery in the western hemisphere. This is why, in part, our Caribbean civilization resents the current carnage in Gaza and the West Bank.

Because in Gaza, Mr. President, for the last year, over 41,000 persons- the majority being women and children - have been killed by an Israeli army in the name of self-defence occasioned by a terrorist attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 in which about 1200 persons were killed. Saint Lucia condemns terrorism in all its forms, by whomever and whatever commits it.

But, humanitarianism has been lost in the carnage. Since October last year, 289 aid workers, including 207 UNWRA team members, have been killed in Gaza. In addition, more than 110 journalists have been killed.

Mr. President, this war in Palestine, what some have referred to as genocide, whatever it is called, must be brought to an end today, for the world has no future with it.

Mr. President, year-in year-out, since its independence, Saint Lucia has been calling for the recognition and establishment of a Palestinian State. However, to date there continues to be needless impediments to this accomplishment. Mr. President, I respectfully submit that this unnecessary undermining of Palestinian statehood is, to a large extent, the root cause of the current Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

Mr. President Israelis and Palestinians deserve to live side-by-side in peace. However, peace for Israel must not come at the expense of the Palestinian people; nor can a

permanent ceasefire be based on the whims and fancies of Israel. Mr. President it must be predicated upon meaningful and honest negotiations – utilizing the tools of diplomacy. Hence, no state should become material accomplices to aggression against the Israeli and Palestinian people; because the solution is not far-fetched or unreachable.

The Palestinians must be allowed to exercise their right to self-determination, to have their own state and full membership of the United Nations alongside the State of Israel, in accordance with UN Resolutions that go back to 181 of 1947 and include Resolution 3236 of 1974 which reaffirmed the unassailable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty, and the right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and property.

Mr. President, the only way to secure a just and peaceful future in the Middle East and for Israel to have secure borders is for the Palestinian people to live in their own internationally recognised homeland. The right to self-determination is a universal right. And the Palestinians are no exception! The people of Palestine cannot wait!

It is this same right which says that the people of Ukraine must be allowed to choose their own destiny and that Russia must end this unwarranted war against Ukraine and restore and respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

It is this same right of self-determination which dictates that the heroic people of Cuba have a right to determine their own path to political, economic and social development and that the economic embargo imposed on Cuba for the last sixty-four years by the United States is illegal, unjust, and inhumane. It must be ended forthwith, in accordance with the many resolutions of the UN General Assembly from 1992, which have rejected that embargo totally and overwhelmingly. The people of Cuba cannot wait!

Further, Cuba's emphasis on Medical Internationalism as its central foreign policy objective as well as its non-involvement in armed conflicts abroad invalidate Cuba's inclusion on the US's list of countries sponsoring terrorism. Instead, Mr. President, given that it is well established that Cuba's alternative model of development has provided important social benefits to the Cuban people coupled with its emphasis on Medical Internationalism it should be on a list of countries *acting together for the advancement of peace, sustainable development and human dignity for present and future generations*. No one must be left behind!

It is this same right to self-determination that says that the 23.5 million people of the Republic of China on Taiwan have the right to be a member of the UN and other international organisations and that the UN resolution 2758 of 1971 does not preclude Taiwan's inclusion and participation in the United Nations system. We believe that Taiwan, with the 20th largest economy in the world and with its important role in technological development and world trade has much to offer from which the international community can benefit. No one Must be left Behind!

It is this same right to self-determination that says that the People and Government of the Bolivian Republic of Venezuela must be allowed to conduct their internal affairs without sanctions imposed upon them by other States.

Mr. President, in Haiti the situation remains unstable and deeply concerning although some political advances have been registered through the efforts of CARICOM's Eminent Persons Group of three former Prime Ministers.

However, the International Community has only provided 14% of the resources required for the Multilateral Security Support Mission for Haiti (MSS). We welcome the announcement from the President of Kenya this week that it will deploy 600 more security forces to Haiti by November and we thank the Government of Kenya for its support of the Haitian people. The funding required for humanitarian assistance in Haiti is also woefully short of its target. We therefore call upon all other countries which had pledged to assist Haiti to urgently and immediately fulfil their commitments to do so. Haiti Cannot Wait!

In view of the foregoing, to safeguard the future, we have to be prepared to take action now, this moment, this very minute, at this time, on certain issues that are essential for a peaceful and sustainable future; and we cannot and must not be selective about which declarations of the Pact or of the principles of the Charter of the UN that we will respect and when we will do so.

Mr. President, in the convening of the Summit of the Future this week and in the theme that is guiding the deliberations of this 79th Session of the General Assembly, the international community has seemingly come to understand that it can no longer procrastinate, no longer delay, the actions needed to secure a better future for mankind.

Let us for once therefore turn our words into actions. The time for action is now!

The time to make multilateralism truly work, not just for SIDS, but for all of us, is now!

The time for reform of the Security Council is now!

The time for Climate Justice for SIDS is now!

The time to end the conflicts, the genocides, the wars is now!

The time to give the youth of this planet, who are the people of tomorrow, the hope and the opportunities to better themselves is now!

The time to put humanity first is, is now!

If we act together now, today, for peace, for sustainable development, for justice, no one will be left behind and there will be a better tomorrow!

Consequently, Mr. President, if we do not act with the fierce urgency of now our UN speeches and resolutions, in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. *“will end up as a meaningless drama on the stage of history...shrouded with ugly garments of shame”*.

Mr. President I thank you and yield the floor.