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St. Lucia Celebrates 41st Anniversary of Political Independence

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CASTRIES, St. Lucia, CMC – St. Lucia is celebrating its 41st anniversary of political independence from Britain with Prime Minister Allen Chastanet urging nationals “to shake the habits that continue to drown” the island.

In his Independence Day message, Chastanet said the developments over the past four decades, including building an economy no longer tied to or dependent on an agricultural monocrop, “we must continue to recognize the things that keep us back, the attitudes and modes of behaviour which hurt us and eliminate them once and for all.

“We need to apply equal effort to the development of values as we do to fiscal policy and infrastructure. But what are these values? I am speaking here about love and respect for each other

and for our country, respect for authority and the laws of our country, tolerance, honesty, discipline and so on.”

Chastanet said that the theme for this year’s Independence anniversary “Now is the time; let’s do this together” was well chosen and builds upon the previous year, insisting that as “independent nation we have responsibilities and while outside countries and institutions would give us a helping hand, in the final analysis the task of developing St. Lucia is ours”.

Prime Minister Chastanet said that St. Lucians must play a part in building a nation everyone can all be proud of now not later.

“As I have said before, St. Lucia it is our time but we must work together to shake the habits that continue to drown our sweet Helen,” he said, urging a change even in the driving habits of motorists and the murders which he said had occurred “because of personal differences and the inability to resolve conflicts peacefully.

“The senseless killings add up to significant number which is a great loss to our society. We have to develop the capacity to forgive and walk away,” he said, making reference to the situation in the United States where St. Lucian, Brandt Jean, “publicly and in open court” hugged and forgave a policewoman who had shot and killed his brother.

Chastanet said this ‘sent a powerful message of love and forgiveness to the entire world”

But he asked how many will heed that message and also condemned persons who refuse to pay taxes.

“There are other habits that do not put lives at risk but increase the cost of governance, like cheating on taxes, failure to collect taxes and dues owed to the government, whether it’s in our hospitals, Customs department or the Police Department.

“It cannot be right when 95 per cent of the traffic tickets issued by our police remain unpaid and uncollected. More and more the social problems confronting our country have their genesis in practices and habits that start early or small. We ignore them in our homes, in our schools, in our communities and the reality is it comes back to haunt us all.”

Chastanet said that the advent of social media, while it has given St. Lucia a great communication tool, it is being used to hurt each other, “spread gossip and sometimes even malign our own country without considering the consequences.

“It is time to change such habits. We have to understand that nation building never stops. It is time that we together identify the simple ways in which we can all pull up our socks and do our part to make St.

Lucia a better place. This is what togetherness means. “

Chastanet said he was using the observance of the independence anniversary to urge all St. Lucians to change their attitudes, adding “let us collectively take stock and recommit ourselves to St. Lucia, to take control of our destiny.

“There are a lot of things that we need to begin doing better and I am hoping that in the weeks ahead we can start a conversation in this country about this need for new attitudes among all our people as we continue marching forward.”

Meanwhile, the Secretary General of the Caribbean Community (CAICOM), Irwin LaRocque in a congratulatory message noted that over the past 41 years, St. Lucia has achieved a considerable level of socio-economic development.

The Secretary-General said CARICOM has benefitted from St. Lucia's invaluable contribution to the Community, especially in relation to its responsibility within the CARICOM Quasi-cabinet as lead Head of Government for Sustainable Development, in particular, its advocacy in the areas of climate change, disaster management and the need for concessional financing to enhance our resilience.

“The Community looks forward to St. Lucia's continued active participation in the work of its Organs and Institutions as we advance our integration process.

“CARICOM joins the government and people of St. Lucia in celebrating this Forty-First Anniversary of Independence and extends best wishes for the continued progress and sustainable development of the country,” he added.