

**Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Economic Growth, Job Creation, External Affairs and the Public Service Honourable Allen Chastanet**

**Statement on the Motion to Parliament to extend the State of Emergency**

Mr. Speaker, as of Tuesday, May 26, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported the following with regard to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19):

• Number of Cases – 5,611,601

• Number of Deaths – 348,334

The world has seen a steady rise in COVID-19 cases and deaths since March 2020. There is still no cure, as humanity grapples with this killer and its impact on our way of life.

Despite Saint Lucia’s success in keeping the number of cases at 18, it is envisaged that Saint Lucia, like the rest of the world, will experience recurring waves of the virus as we delicately lift and adjust where necessary the public health and social measures that were implemented to contain and reduce transmission.

UN deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed said, “As the world wrestles with the unprecedented implications of the COVID-19, we are facing a human crisis unlike any we have experienced” and our “social fabric and cohesion is under stress. We have moved to a recession that will be worse than the one we experienced in 2008.”

These statements ring very true and echo the assertion in my April 8th Address to the Nation when I stated in summary:

“The Outbreak of COVID-19 has created two crises: one is a health crisis and the other is an economic crisis, the likes of which we have never seen. In attempting to deal with the health crisis, we are confronted with the realities of the way this disease spreads. These conditions have caused the complete shutdown of cities, countries and the world. In essence, this has humbled the entire Global Economy. Here in Saint Lucia we have seen it first-hand, with the almost complete shutdown of the country which has had a crippling effect on our tourism industry and by extension our economy. That in turn has impacted the activity of the ports, consumption of water and electricity, consumption of agricultural products and it has significantly impacted revenue to private businesses and to the Government.”

On January 30th 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. Since then, this triggered an immediate National Health Response in Saint Lucia. By January 31st, the Government of Saint Lucia activated the National Health Security Committee as an immediate response to the threat. By March 11th, the WHO declared COVID-19 a world health Pandemic. On March 13th 2020 Saint Lucia confirmed its first case of COVID-19.

As our government monitored the outbreak of COVID-19 in the world, we focused on our capacity to deal with a community outbreak. Our strategy was to delay a community outbreak for as long as possible and balance that with our economic capacity to do so.

We never thought for a minute that Saint Lucia would be spared from the spread of COVID-19 and so we carefully planned and prepared to minimise its impact on Saint Lucia.

To date the number of confirmed cases stands at 18. There have been no deaths in Saint Lucia due to COVID-19 and in the last 23 days Saint Lucia has recorded no new cases.

This success has much to do with the declaration of the State of Emergency.

Our Government’s early planning and preparation undertaken by the tireless efforts of our essential service workers and the willingness of our fellow Saint Lucians to adhere to the protocols put in place over the past few weeks also cemented our accomplishments.

Through consultation with industry and health experts, the Opposition, public and private sector; the Government of Saint Lucia carefully implemented various strategies in combatting the effects of COVID-19.

This took the form of the creation of a Command Centre, the declaration of a State of Emergency on March 23rd 2020, closing of our borders, the distribution of care packages to the vulnerable population, strengthening of security and health forces, the imposition of curfews, the closure of non-essential businesses, the identification and designation of adequate quarantine facilities, and, most importantly, the opening of the OK-EU hospital to facilitate the transformation of VH into our respiratory center.

It would be remiss of me if I did not take a minute to recognise and thank our essential service workers who made and continue to make a monumental sacrifice to ensure the health and safety of all Saint Lucians.

As a nation we remain extremely thankful for the dedication of our frontline workers. I commend and thank Corporate Saint Lucia and our friends overseas who have so generously donated towards the fight against COVID-19.

My government also wishes to thank the opposition for its support thus far and we encourage them to continue to engage and support the efforts of the government in this fight for our lives and livelihoods.

We must put aside political ties and decide right now that we are ALL IN for our country and united against COVID-19.

**STATUS REPORT**

By way of a report to this Parliament: once the WHO declared COVID-19 a public health emergency of international concern, the following key strategies have been implemented by the Government of Saint Lucia in the fight against COVID-19:

1. Jan 31st – the National Health Security Committee was activated

2. February 28th – We activated of National Emergency Management Advisory Committee (NEMAC)

3. March 16th – the 311 call centre was activated to receive calls on COVID-19

4. March 18th - we established the Command Centre for Operations and set up the Information Headquarters at GIS for Factual Information dissemination

5. March 20th– We began the processing of our quarantine facilities

6. March 23 – we had our 1st declaration of State of Emergency by the Governor General and the following day Parliament approved the extension of the SOE for a further period of 26 days. At the same time Parliament approved the Emergency Powers (Disasters) (COVID-19) Order. This allowed the competent authority to implement protective measures such as the closure of borders, cancellation of all mass crowd events and a curfew from 11 pm to 5 am.

7. March 23rd – we commenced testing for COVID-19

8. March 26th – 113 Cuban Medical professionals arrived in Saint Lucia

9. March 27th – We fully transitioned OK-EU hospital and designated VH as a Respiratory Center

10. April 01st – A 24-hr curfew was implemented and NEMO began immediate mobilization for the distribution of care packages

11. April 29th – Our government announced our Social stabilization Programme

These necessary steps are why we are still standing here today.

However, we cannot become complacent, we cannot afford to drop our guard or return to our previous way of life.

COVID-19 continues to ravage the world with new cases and deaths being recorded every day. World developments of the past week reveal the uncomfortable reality that we have to confront COVID-19.

We can no longer continue to exist in a bubble. Safety, hygiene and economic stability will be even more important in designing the post-lockdown world.

The reality is that expectations of life and business as usual will no longer apply. With major economic centres around the world being classified as red zones, business activity is expected to take time to recover. Many predict that the worst is yet to come. We must therefore prepare adequately and be responsible in our approach.

WHO emergencies director Dr. Mike Ryan has warned against trying to predict when the virus would disappear. He stated that the coronavirus “may never go away.” He added that even if a vaccine is found, controlling the virus will require a “massive effort and that this virus may become just another endemic virus in our communities….”

Speaking also at the same briefing, the WHO Director-General stressed it was still possible to control the virus, with effort but warned that there was no guaranteed way of easing restrictions without triggering a second wave of infections. He added, “Many countries would like to get out of the different measures but the WHO recommendation is still that the alert of every country should be at the highest level possible.”

Mr Speaker - THE ALL CLEAR HAS NOT BEEN GIVEN.

Our strategy has now shifted and in the words of our Chief Medical Officer – Dr. Sharon Belmar-George – “Although at this point, we have flattened our curve, as we lift the public health and social measures that were implemented to contain and reduce transmission, we anticipate the resurgence of cases with the opening of the borders, as most countries remain in active infection. Also, our population remains susceptible to COVID-19 so the risk of transmission once introduction occurs is likely.

Our CMO further advises that based on the current evidence, it is envisaged that as we progress and move from one phase to another, we will experience recurring epidemic waves with continuous low-level transmission. Therefore, our efforts must ensure we maintain the waves as low and manageable as possible, so as not to overwhelm our healthcare system.

The CMO went further to advise that, “This would require an efficient system to ensure the rapid implementation of measures which the “state of emergency” allows. This includes the curfew, use of zones if necessary, or any scale back measures . . .”

Governments across the region are working to balance public health protection with the need to protect jobs and our economies. To this end Saint Lucia has adopted a phased approach to a new normal.

Much of it is fluid and requires quick and sound decisions.

It is evident that much of the progress we have made thus far was effectively achieved through a state of emergency.

Mr Speaker, all our actions under the state of emergency thus far has been to preserve lives and livelihood. Under the SOE we implemented a 24 hour curfew, we instituted a partial scale back of business operations and restricted to only essential services, we implemented a series of quarantine facilities, and were able to facilitate speedily the registration of Cuban nurses and doctors to assist us in our fight against COVID-19.

Mr Speaker, the evidence for the necessity for the State of Emergency is clear. This Government has been responsible in our actions under the Emergency Powers Act. Every time we amended or adjusted any part of the Act, every single time we put a new measure in place, we reported and informed the people of Saint Lucia. We explained why, every step of the way. The recordings, videos and constant reporting is available for all to see.

The simple fact is the State of Emergency allows us to move swiftly between phases especially as the virus evolves. This would not be possible under normal circumstances.

We can plan and be prepared for COVID-19 but all of us who watch the international news will observe that this virus is ever changing and we need to adapt accordingly. Therefore our state of readiness today may be very different next week depending on the effects of its impact.

Mr Speaker, our Government has confidence in the 5-phase approach to reopening our society. The simplicity of this plan is that it is designed to remain fluid to allow government to respond to COVID-19 and its impact in a very methodical way. The foundation of this phased approach is structured on the preservation of our physical and mental health, safety and the general wellbeing of our people through robust social, healthcare, security and economic measures.

For example, moving from one phase to another or reverting to a previous phase would depend on key identifiable triggers. Through the state of emergency powers this would allow the government to adequately implement measures and protocols under each phase. Currently, we are at cycle 3 of phase 3, our metrics are to be reviewed this week to finally determine whether we are on track to move into phase 4. The metrics developed by the Ministry of Health and Wellness include our in-country testing, our contact tracing, our quarantine facilities and our PPE capacities to name a few of the categories. In total there are approximately 15 triggers and 9 public health monitoring indicators which form a solid foundation for us to monitor our state of readiness.

Mr. Speaker, last week Monday, having satisfied ourselves that Saint Lucia had met all the triggers for moving to the next phase of reopening the country, all businesses were allowed to resume and the necessary protocols were put in place.

After much deliberation, consultation, and review of available data; a decision has been taken to open our borders come June 4th 2020. Our Government is currently in discussions with key stakeholders as it relates to the repatriation of Saint Lucians from overseas, in particular the United States of America. I must take this opportunity, however, to reassure Saint Lucians locally that the decision to open our borders and to repatriate Saint Lucians from overseas has many conditions attached to it. We have engaged the airlines and are relying heavily on them to be very robust partners to ensure that there is a contaminant-free corridor between when a passenger leaves their country of origin to their arrival in Saint Lucia. All people coming into Saint Lucia will be required to show proof of a negative COVID-19 test result within 48 hours of travel and strict measures of physical distancing will be enforced. Further, there will be enhanced monitoring at our ports as well as mandatory quarantine measures for people arriving.

We, however, remain cautious that with such a reopening comes the dangers of possible spread of the virus. The entire world is grappling with how best to reopen. Economies are crashing, businesses are closing, thousands have become unemployed.

Saint Lucia has not been spared from this economic fallout. We cannot remain stagnant. We must be vigilant in our preparation for a new normal but must also be cognizant of the risks that lie ahead. We must have the capacity to trigger quick and appropriate responses in the implementation of new protocols and guidelines of operation within all sectors of society. To achieve this, we need to have effective monitoring and enforcement capabilities.

Mr. Speaker, As a nation, we must ask ourselves

1. What are we trying to achieve? – To save lives and livelihoods. Hence we must adequately manage our health care system to ensure it is not overwhelmed and rebuild our economy at the same time.

2. How are we going to achieve this – the plan of our 5 -hased approach with the necessary goals in each phase and the triggers to move forward and triggers to revert. This plan only works if we are under a State of Emergency.

3. How will we know we are on track – constant monitoring and evaluation of our 15 triggers and the 9 public health monitoring indicators.

4. If we are not on track what are we going to do about it – our weekly routines will keep us focused on what is important, allow for small incremental steps and/or changes where necessary. At this stage a State of Emergency becomes critical to allow for flexibility to pull back and make changes where necessary.

Having examined the actions of our neighbours in the region and internationally, it is clear that a State of Emergency is the best mechanism in securing timely and seamless execution of protocols and guidelines.

Mr. Speaker, a State of Emergency is no small matter.

A State of Emergency comes as a result of a declaration by government in response to an extraordinary situation posing a fundamental threat to the country. In our case, we face two fundamental threats; a pandemic and secondly the risk of a financial/economic crisis.

It remains one of the most, if not the most effective mechanisms in dealing with events which pose a fundamental threat to a country and it reminds us all to remain vigilant.

If I were to make an analogy Mr Speaker, I would say that COVID-19 is a hurricane like no other that we have faced in this region. It has the potential to wipe out entire nations and cripple economies if not managed properly. Like a hurricane, the best chance of survival is to prepare. A state of emergency for the next 4 months will allow us to continue to implement and adequately monitor the effectiveness of the measures we have put in place, and to make quick adjustments as required.

Mr. Speaker some may ask why 4 months?

As we strive to reopen Saint Lucia under a phased approach we are guided by the rest of the world. With many countries in the world moving to reopen their borders and the waves of recurring infections, it is important that Saint Lucia is able to react quickly by implementing the necessary measures to reduce and contain the spread of this virus. Essentially time to implement, review and react is of the essence.

Despite our success thus far, and Saint Lucia standing out as a leader in the region and the world, we cannot rest easy. As we look toward the future and our ‘new normal,’ we must remember what was effective in getting us to this point and what is needed to continue to stay the course to keep our communities and our loved ones safe.

By extending the State of Emergency, this will allow for the competent authority to act with immediate dispatch on the advisement of our health officials, resulting in the need to declare operational necessary measures.

As a result, Mr. Speaker, this further extension of the State of Emergency is being sought to facilitate a quick response if another outbreak of COVID-19 occurs. The extension will also permit the continuance of the assistance provided by the Cuban Medical Team who is authorized to work only during the state of emergency, thereby strengthening the personnel capacities of the health sector during this volatile period. On this basis, the state of emergency is proposed to continue from 1 June, 2020 to 30 September, 2020.

As a government, we reassure the people of Saint Lucia that we will constantly scrutinize the situation and our performance with the view to reducing the time frame if we continue to see positive trends. As we have been doing throughout this crisis, we will keep you informed always of any amendments.

With God’s guidance, this government is committed to remaining on the right path in the weeks and months ahead for the survival and prosperity of our nation.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you and look forward to the support of my fellow Parliamentarians.

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