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Government Prepares Nation for new Reality

• As Oil Prices Rise in the Region

Prime Minister, Dr. Kenny D. Anthony in his second weekly radio address to the nation on June 7, 2004, "Conversations with the Nation" spoke on the continuing rise in oil prices on the international market and its implications for all St. Lucians, the rest of the Caribbean and the entire world.

Dr. Anthony said he was partly prompted to address the nation on the issue, not only because of the volatility in the price of fuel, but also because of a recent discussion with fishermen in his constituency.

"One fisherman told me the government should give to fishermen the same level of rebate on gas, which it provided to taxi drivers. I had great difficulty trying to convince him that the government did not subsidize the cost of fuel for taxi drivers. I explained that there was an arrangement for a rebate on gas purchases for minibus operators, who were members of cooperatives established by and for minibus owners and drivers. The government agreed to the rebate in order to avoid increases in bus fares to commuters. That agreement has now ended", said Dr. Anthony. He pointed out that fishermen, who were owners of boats received a 75-cents rebate on each gallon of gas up to 3,600 gallons as part of an arrangement that had been in place since 1972, and that this was so despite the fact that the price of fish was no longer controlled.

It is clear that the fisherman is not aware of just how much the government has been doing to keep the prices of fuel down at the gas pump for motorists and fishermen. He is unaware that gas prices today are 41% higher than they were at this same time last year; or that the same gallon of fuel is now 51% higher since May 2002, when petroleum prices were last adjusted in the local economy.

Dr. Anthony reminded the fishermen that for quite some time, he has been talking about the need for everyone to keep their eyes on the international oil market. Today, every single Caricom government, except Trinidad & Tobago which produces oil and natural gas has had to take or prepare to take measures to shield their economies against the effects of increasing oil prices.

Dominica has already raised its price per gallon to EC\$8.49 for the second time in six months. On Friday, June 4, the government of Barbados increased the price of gasoline by 18 cents a litre, diesel by 10 cents a litre, and kerosene by 10 cents per litre. It means therefore, that the price of a gallon of gas in Barbados will move from \$9.10 per gallon to \$9.80 per gallon.

Jamaica and Guyana have both announced that they will have to review or adjust local prices, and the Heads of Government of the OECS have all



Oil price rise: motorists and fishermen among those directly affected

indicated that should the current price rises continue, each country will have to review its pricing mechanism in order to safeguard economic growth or revival prospects.

"Here in St. Lucia, as you know the price of gas at the pump remains, for the time being, at \$7.75 per gallon", Dr. Anthony assured.

He said with prices on the world market reaching a high of US\$42.33 per barrel on June 1, 2004, windfall profits will be earned by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). However, these states have now promised to increase daily production by two million barrels per day for a world market that consumes 80 million barrels per day. This may have the effect of keeping prices from going higher, but it is not expected to decrease the price of gas at the pump significantly.

"Some of you may wonder why we have to be concerned about the world market price when we buy fuel from Trinidad & Tobago, a sister Caricom state. The fact is that we do not buy fuel from Trinidad & Tobago at lower or reduced prices. Instead, we have to buy it at the same world market price. So, if the world market price is US\$41 dollars per barrel we must pay exactly that amount to our suppliers and no less", Dr. Anthony said.

If the price of fuel increases on the world market, then one will have to expect that the price of imports will increase. Any increase in the price of fuel on the world market will result in an increase in the cost of production of goods, higher transportation costs and higher electricity costs. "We may well see movements in the prices of imported products because of the increases in the price of fuel. Indeed, the cost of worldwide travel has increased, because airlines have been forced to introduce a fuel surcharge, since they have to pay more for aviation fuel", he informed.

It is against this background that Dr. Anthony urged everyone to continue to monitor oil prices, because they can have grave consequences for the island's ability to continue to do today, as it has done for so long in the past. "How long we continue to protect the consumer at the gas pump depends, at this time, not on the good will of the government, but on our ability as a nation to continue to sustain losses of as much as several million dollars each year. You should, therefore, expect changes - more likely increases in the price of fuel in the near future - unless, of course, there is a dramatic reduction in the world market price".

"Even though we are helpless in the face of the oil giants", he said, "There are some things we can do", pointing out that for one, "we can do more to conserve on our use of energy. We can do less of those things that make us use more fuel, gas or electricity. We can intensify our use of more efficient energy sources, such as solar energy versus electricity for hot water baths. And we must continue the search for more efficient energy sources such as the harnessing of solar, wind, water, geothermal and other forms of energy that may be in abundance in our part of the world.

Dr. Anthony assured that his government would continue to do all that was within its means to find the best solutions to the problems that may arise. Some things we will be able to do and some we may only be able to try. "But there are also those things we just simply can't do anything about, but to adjust to the new reality. One thing you can be sure of, however, is that our government will continue to do all it can to ensure that our people continue to enjoy the best in the circumstances, even while facing up to the new realities of a fast changing world.

The Prime Minister promised to reply to persons who e-mailed him questions for which they wanted answers.

Government Focuses on Development of the Environment



Area around one of St. Lucia's beaches

A reminder to the nation that the sea is a priceless resource for survival, with direct linkages to several important industries in St. Lucia, has been reiterated by Honourable Ferguson John, Minister for Physical Development, Environment and Housing. He further emphasized the need for environmental issues to be accorded a much higher profile by all sectors, so that members of the public can better appreciate the value and significance of coastal waters as a source of environmental sustainability, and as a generator of economic activity. The Minister noted that in the local context of economic activity, the sea, beaches and coastal waters should be even more cherished.

“The theme for World Environment Day is “Oceans and seas – Wanted Dead or Alive? This theme has special significance for St. Lucia since many of our economic activities whether they be tourism, fishing or maritime transportation depend directly on the state of our coastal and marine environment.”

The Minister noted that even land based practices, such as littering impacts seriously on coral reefs or bring about a decline in the quantity of fish available to the fishing industry.

“The debris, waste and sediment that are now strewn along our coastline as a result of the recent unseasonable rains can be attributed to littering and illegal waste disposal, deforestation and poor land use management practices including lack of sediment control measures for construction,” remarked minister John.

In his address marking World Environment Day observed which will be observed on Saturday June 5th, Honourable John also called for environmental management to be seen as a more integral component of sustainable development.

NEMO Engenders Community Empowerment and Participation for Development

The National Emergency Management Organisation as an affiliation of emergency services, public and private sector and the citizens of Saint Lucia strives constantly to achieve perfection in its work.

In keeping with its mandate to have the nation prepared, NEMO seeks collaboration with all agencies through a workshop on Community Empowerment and Participation for Integrated Development. The workshop was held recently at the Conference Room of the National Insurance Corporation (NIC).

The Ministry of Physical Development is currently implementing an “Integrated Planning for Sustainable Development” project with financial support from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). The project seeks to integrate government policies across sectors and levels, by building partnerships and encouraging the



NEMO Office in the Red Cross Building at Vigie, Castries

involvement of all citizens in the development process. The project will build upon the theme for Saint Lucia's 25th Anniversary of Independence, “Taking Responsibility for our Country's Development.”

One component of the project is capacity building of civil society through

partnership building among government and public sector agencies. To this end, the Ministry of Physical Development, Environment and Housing in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Transformation will be holding a national workshop to consider ways of strengthening the collaboration between government and civil society, and to begin to identify the role of civil society and local communities in the national integrated development process.

The objectives of the workshop include: Encouraging a sense of community ownership, civil pride and national responsibility; Formalizing the process of participation in national development by creating partnership among government and civil society groups; Establishing processes and structures that promote integration at the community and institutional levels; Improving citizens' understanding of the links between social, environment and economic issues in national development.

NIC: Dr. Kenny D a new emergi

The growth and development of all societies are always contingent on ideas, vision and imagination without which, no society can earn the right of passage from one historical era to the next, said Prime Minister, Honourable Dr. Kenny D. Anthony in a statement to Commemorate the twenty-first Anniversary of the National Insurance Corporation

Dr. Anthony postulates that each era brings with it increased complexity, challenges and changes, which can undermine the social stability and achievements of the previous period. Equally, he believes, a new era can offer solutions to problems which may have appeared difficult and impossible to resolve, because as society evolves, so too is its capacity to manage transition and change.

NEW EMERGING PHILOSOPHY

The attainment of political independence in 1979 represented the end of one historical era and the beginning of another. In this new beginning, there was a search for new directions underpinned by a philosophy of social inclusion and the need to create a more just, equitable and humane society. It became clear that society in partnership with the state had a responsibility to protect and care for the marginalized and vulnerable sectors of the population. Failure on the part of the society to do so would be tantamount to denying a significant portion of the population its most basic needs.

The state therefore had a pivotal role to play in changing the way that society viewed the disadvantaged and least fortunate in our midst. The prevailing view that the poor and the disadvantaged were principally responsible for, and were to be blamed for their own poverty resonated with large sections of the population. Such a view was counter-productive to the attainment of a holistic developmental approach, since it only served to deny the poor and the disadvantaged of their rights and entitlements to social provisioning, derived from their citizenship. It was through the evolution of social policy that the Government attempted to alter that perception and to dispel the notion that social welfare was the exclusive responsibility of individual charities rather than that of the society as a collective.

It became equally clear, that poverty reduction and social protection programmes could not be promoted as handouts which perpetuated social and economic dependence rather than fostering systems of self-reliance.

Consequently, society had an inescapable moral and ethical responsibility for social provisioning and the implementation of social policies from which it cannot divest itself. It stands to reason that if poverty and social vulnerability are socially constructed, then they can be socially deconstructed, although once created poverty is extremely difficult to abolish. Undeniably, the establishment of the National Provident Fund in 1970 and its successor institution, the National Insurance Scheme in 1979 was influenced by these moral and ethical imperatives.

Hence, the conceptualization and establishment of these social protection systems must not, and cannot be regarded as a coincidence of history. Rather, it was the product of the deliberate and conscious efforts of those at the vanguard of development, those entrusted with shaping and redesigning a kinder and more equitable society. From the very outset, the introduction of the NPF and its successor institution, the NIS was an integral part of a developmental approach, which sought to integrate concerns about economic growth, social policy, social development and social capital, governance and political development, institutional and organizational restructuring and human resource development as interdependent elements of development.

The NIS, now the NIC, therefore became a critical element in the overall government strategy to reevaluate and transform the role of the state and the society in the provision of safety nets to the poor and vulnerable. The NIS represented the first step in a process to meet the basic needs, rights, entitlements and citizenship in an emerging social welfare system. Essentially, the NIS became the mechanism through which the poor, vulnerable and marginalized were able to procure affordable safety nets and social security benefits.

HAS THE NIC LIVED UP TO EXPECTATIONS

As the NIC celebrates its Silver Jubilee Year, the question before us is whether the NIC has in any meaningful way lived up to its mandate and mission. Perhaps those who have existed at the margins and periphery of society are best placed to answer this question. For the marginalized and disadvantaged, the NIC has been a beacon of light and hope, which like a lighthouse perched on the hillside, has brought many a mariner ashore during their darkest hours. One cannot however understand the true impact of the contribution of the NIC over the past twenty-five years without first



Prime Minister Dr. Kenny D. Anthony

understanding how it has contributed to the general welfare of Saint Lucians and the role it has played in fostering the general development of the nation.

The passage of time and the observance of significant milestones always call for reflection. Historical junctures demand that we pause to take stock and to consider the past and present and to contemplate the future. The significant contribution that the NIC has made to the development of Saint Lucia is a testimony of how well it has withstood the test of time. From the noble idea that gave rise to the creation of National Provident Fund (NPF), mainly as provider of pension benefits to retirees, the NIC is today an indispensable partner in the overall developmental framework of Saint Lucia. When the NIC was first established as the National Provident Fund in 1970, it began operations with a modest capital base of thirty thousand dollars, in the form of a loan from the Central Government. During its existence as the National Provident Fund, the social services provided were both limited in scope and in nature and consisted mainly of age, invalidity and survivor benefits.

Today, the NIC has not only increased its asset base but has also broadened the scope and the nature of the services that it provides. At this juncture it provides a number of benefits including sickness benefits, maternity benefits and grants, employment injury benefits, retirement benefits, funeral grants, survivor's benefits and invalidity benefits. At the same time its asset base has increased to over seven hundred and seventy five million dollars,

of which ninety six percent is in the form of investment. As of December 30th, 2003, the NIC held two hundred and thirty-six million dollars in fixed deposits with the commercial banks. This amount represents more than fifteen percent of the money supply in Saint Lucia. This makes the National Insurance Corporation the largest single contributor to domestic saving.

A STABILISER OF DOMESTIC SAVINGS

According to a survey conducted by the International Monetary Fund, the percentage of national saving attributable to the NIC increased steadily from 2.6 percent of Gross Domestic Product in 1997/1998 to 3.2 percent in 2001/2002. By comparison, Central Government and public enterprises together averaged -0.6 percent. This reality has therefore permitted the NIC to play a lead role as a stabilizer of domestic savings. Hence, the NIC has emerged not only as a provider of a supplementary source of income for retirement and other social benefits but also as a pool of long term savings that can be utilized to finance socio-economic development. In order words, the NIC contributes significantly to the quantity of money in circulation within the domestic economy and functions as a major engine of growth and development.

STRATEGIC ALLIANCE WITH COMMERCIAL SECTOR

The NIC through its use of the deposit facilities available at the commercial banks contributed significantly to the financial resources that commercial banks have at

Anthony speaks of ing Philosophy

their disposal. As a result of the increased money supply within the banking sector, commercial banks have been able to expand their development activities into areas such as housing, education, tourism, the fishing industry, professional services and agriculture. NIC has played a vital role in propelling the development of the capital market in the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). It has invested in regional instruments such as bonds and notes both within the OECS sub-regional grouping, as well as outside the sub-regional grouping.

A HELPING HAND IN HOUSING

The NIC in addition to facilitating development through the institutional framework provided by the commercial banks, has itself played a direct role in the promotion of national development. Recognizing the existence of a shortage of affordable housing on the island, the NIC, through its subsidiary, Saint Lucia Mortgage Finance Company Limited has made an invaluable contribution towards the alleviation of this problem. The Saint Lucia Mortgage Finance Company has been the recipient of low cost funds from the NIC for the purposes of financing lower middle-income residential housing. The net effect has been reduced rates on mortgages for lower middle-income families.

Other institutions have also been able to procure loans from NIC to undertake major projects of a developmental nature which have benefited the population both socially and economically. NIC has made loans available to the Saint Lucia Air and Sea Ports Authority for the infrastructural development of the nation's ports. The Saint Lucia Electricity Services with the assistance of loans from the NIC was able to embark upon its rural electrification programme, while the Housing Authority was able to make low cost housing available to low and middle income earners. Other institutions which have benefited from NIC funding include the Urban Development Corporation, National Research and Development Foundation, Financial Investment and Consultancy Services Ltd, to name a few. On the social security front, the NIC between the period of July 2002 to June 2003 paid over ten thousand short and long term benefit claims costing approximately EC\$28.61 million.

Given the scale and scope of the activities that the NIC has been engaged in, it is fair to conclude that it has made a sterling contribution to national development. Clearly, there is no other institution that has impacted on the economic and social development of Saint Lucia during the independent era as has

the NIC. Suffice it to say, the NIC has been a prime agent of change and modernization. Certainly, the NIC has lived up to its Mission Statement, which is **“to ensure that every Saint Lucian enjoys social and financial protection and to assist in the development of our nation through the efficient collection of contributions, payment of relevant benefits, prudent management of assets, use of cutting edge technology, and a cadre of highly skilled staff.”** I am certain that today many of those who viewed the creation of the NIC with skepticism, ambivalence and indifference would agree that our society would be a lot poorer and more vulnerable if the NIC was never created.

For much of this journey down the path of independence, the NIC has nurtured the development of this nation. It has played a prominent part in fostering society's acceptance of its role in providing safety nets for the vulnerable in our midst. On the observance of the NIC's Silver Jubilee year, a grateful nation salutes its achievements and recognizes its contribution. The strides and achievements that it has made as an institution hold out hope that with the right institutional mix, indigenous development is not only possible but attainable. Although the Nation acknowledges and accepts that the NIC has come a long way, the nation also concedes that its work is far from over.

FUTURE ROLE OF THE NIC

Although the NIC is taking into the future a legacy of achievement, there can be no room for complacency. Complacency is an enemy of success and the bedfellow of failure. Therefore, it is imperative that the NIC learn and build from the successes of the past twenty-five as it seeks to increase the scope and quality of services that it provide to a nation whose demand for social services is constantly on the rise. To satisfy the increase demand for social provisioning, the Government is envisaging an expanded role for the NIC in the evolving social protection system. Furthermore, the Government intends to retool the organization so as to increase the range of services provided and in the process make it more relevant to the challenges ahead. To this end, the Government is in the process of consultation in order to determine the best approach to implementing a Universal Health Care Plan for Saint Lucia. The threat posed by HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases are projected to place enormous stress on the nation's health care services. Furthermore, changes in the labour market as a consequence of economic

transformation is likely to leave a large percentage of our population vulnerable and unable to afford health care. Being acutely aware that the development of a nation is contingent on having a healthy population, the Government will embark on the establishment of a Universal Health Care System which is affordable and within the reach of the most vulnerable elements of our population. The NIC will therefore be at the forefront of this initiative and will be charged with operating the nation's Universal Health Care system.

The Government is also exploring the possibility of establishing unemployment insurance to assist those, who have fallen victim to unemployment arising out of economic transformation, structural and seasonal changes in the labour market. This is critical in Government's strategy to combat poverty and to ensure that the unemployed within the society lead a dignified and meaningful existence. Chances are if unemployment insurance becomes a reality, the implementing agency will be the NIC.

On Monday, March 29, the NIC in an attempt to increase the range of services and benefits provided to our senior citizens launched a Gold Card. This Gold Card is an initiative specifically designed to provide a degree of relief to pensioners and to provide them with some preferential purchasing regime. Such an initiative on

the part of the NIC is to be commended and applauded since it is in keeping with the philosophy of social provisioning.

CONCLUSION

For the past quarter of a century, the NIC has been part of the solution to many of the challenges that have confronted our society and the nation, and for the next quarter of a century and beyond, it will remain an integral part of the solutions to the problems that we will encounter.

So today as the NIC celebrates this historic and important milestone, a grateful nation rise in salute. The NIC has certainly played its part and therefore should be immensely proud of its contributions. What the NIC has achieved, it has achieved against great odds and within a context of a skeptical nation that initially distrusted its motives. Its sterling contribution to national development has earned for it, the admiration of many a skeptic.

It would be remiss of me however, if I did not pay tribute to the architects of the NIC and to the cadre of committed, dedicated, devoted and hard working men and women who have worked tirelessly to make the NIC the success that it is today. Your hard work and dedication have given life to a philosophy and vision. I extend to all who have been associated with the NIC a successful twenty-fifth anniversary celebration and I invite the nation to join the NIC in the celebration of this milestone. Thank You.



Prime Minister addressing launch of Golden Citizens Card by NIC

Residents of Conway Cry for Help

The need for persons to desist from engaging in unplanned development has received another clarion call, this time from Chief Fire Officer, Mr. Augustin Gaspard. Commenting on a fire which gutted the Barnard Hill Community on Sunday, June 6, 2004, destroying 13 houses and leaving five partially damaged, the Fire Chief said persons ought to adhere to building regulations as stipulated by the Development Control Authority (DCA).

"Here in lies the difficulties that we, as fire fighters, have to face, when we have a situation in such fire areas and you would appreciate this area in Barnard Hill is not the only area in Saint Lucia that will pose such a problem for the fire service to operate in," Mr. Gaspard explained.

The fire is believed to have started by a lighted candle left unattended. As a result, 25 persons have been made homeless. The cost of the damage, according to the Fire Chief has not yet been ascertained. "I have made the point before, that you do not put candles in plastic recep-



PM meets with fire victims

tacles or containers, they burn the plastic and eventually burn the wood and start the fire; you always put the candle in ceramic or glass containers and that's something you need to remember, and you do not

leave candles unattended or near curtains or with children, these are the situations that can help start a fire."

Meanwhile, Prime Minister, Honourable Dr. Kenny D. Anthony on Monday, June

7 dispatched a team to Barnard Hill to hold discussion with the affected families. The team comprised Minister for Housing, Honourable Ferguson John; Minister for Tourism, Honourable Philip J. Pierre; and Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Ignatius Jean. Prime Minister, Dr. Anthony has also announced the launch of an appeal fund.

"Meanwhile the Cabinet Secretary will be launching an appeal not only to our employees here in this building, but otherwise to ensure that we can get much clothing and other necessities for the families. We have always had a fairly close relationship with them. Every year, with the exception of last year we treat the children of the area at Christmas. The community is our neighbour and we live well together."

Prime Minister, Dr. Anthony on Tuesday met with the affected residents in his office on the 5th Floor of the Greaham Louisy Building, The Waterfront, Castries.

OECS Court Denies Francois Appeal in Rochamel Case

The OECS Court of Appeal has denied an appeal by lawyer Martinus Francois for leave to go to the Privy Council to appeal the recent decision against him in the Rochamel matter. The court, comprising Justices of Appeal Adrian Saunders and Brian Alleyne, and Acting Justice Michael Gordon, dismissed the appeal as having no merit.

The Justices said that in considering whether to grant leave they had to "put sentimental considerations aside." They said they "couldn't grant leave to appeal merely because a significant section of the people of St. Lucia might think the court to be wrong and would like an opportunity to see the error corrected."

The justices noted that "the Constitution that binds everyone, including the Court of Appeal, states that the court must only grant leave to appeal in defined circumstances." The Justices said they were "constrained to refuse leave unless they were persuaded that the application for leave properly fell within the parameters of the Constitution."

According to Justice Saunders, "for an appellate court to come to the unanimous view that a litigant's case was entirely lacking in merit but nonetheless still turn around and conclude that the case raised an issue of great importance, would represent an unacceptable leap in logic."

The three Justices said: "Perhaps the most critical aspect of the instant case was whether the Minister of Finance was entitled to have Parliament consider for approval and whether Parliament could validly approve, pursuant to Section 39 (1) of the Finance (Administration) Act 1997, a loan for the purpose of refinancing the government's obligations to the former Hyatt Hotel. If that question were answered in the affirmative, as it was by all the members of this court, then this was a hopeless case."

They stated that "the rationale for this court's positive answer to that question has emphatically been stated in several previous decisions" and proceeded to cite three cases.

The Justices concluded: "At least, so far as this court is concerned, this is an area of law that is so well settled that further litigation on the subject will not be regarded by this court as being of great importance."

"In all the circumstances," said the Justices, "leave to appeal to her Majesty must be refused."

The Court of Appeal not only denied the appeal but also ordered that costs should be made against Mr Francois on this application in the sum of \$2,500.

This is not the first time that the OECS Court of Appeal has denied leave to apply to the Privy Council. The Court also denied leave to appeal to the Privy Council

in the case arising out of the Vaughan Lewis inquiry and the Privy Council also agreed with the court.

Meanwhile, observers here note that while the judgement was delivered yesterday, June 7, Mr Francois is quoted in today's (June 8) issue of the Voice newspaper as accusing the Appeal Court of "inviting speculation that it is being deliberately dilatory and obstructionist..." in their deliberations on his Appeal.

Parry Husbands Q.C., former Attorney General and Director of Public Prosecution and Dr. Nicholas Frederick appeared for the applicant, while Anthony Astaphan Q.C. appeared for the respondent, along with Miss Jan Drysdale and Dwight Lay of the Attorney General's Office.



Attorney General Petrus Compton

Tourism Sector seeks greater international competitiveness

It has been suggested that St. Lucia change its tourism pattern so as to become more internationally competitive. The suggestion came from internationally renowned brand expert, Wally Orlins on Monday, June 7, 2004, during a seminar for local tourism and business sectors, at the Sandals Regency, La Toc.

The seminar was organized by the St. Lucia Tourist Board with a view to providing tourism and business organisations an insight into marketing, packaging and branding. It also provided basic information to stakeholders in these sectors, which can assist in positioning and promoting their businesses.

According to Mr. Orlins, it is essential that whatever product, tourism or otherwise it ought to be one that has been embraced nationally and also within the region, before it is give international exposure.

“You cannot do this. You cannot construct a national brand, unless your

own people believe in it. You cannot create anything that is artificial. That does not mean a thing to people who live with you,” He said.

Mr. Orlins has also advised strongly in favour of coordinating messages that are sent to other countries, preferably about the tourism product, using the website, brochures and other channels of communications. According to him, whether the messages are of tourism, cultural or a political nature, they have to be coordinated.

Mr. Orlins stated that unless one coordinates these messages in one way or another, they will not be mutually supportive. He added that a nation that is relatively small and does not have a great deal of money to spend, like St. Lucia, must be spending millions and millions of dollars on messages every year, many of which, because they are uncoordinated are not mutually supportive.

He stated that the situation requires immediate attention and also indicated that



Seminar participants

the messages must be managed so as to be coherent and comprehensible. A number of individuals from the tourism, commercial, financial, NGO's and

government sectors attended the one day seminar which was conducted under the theme “The Nation and the brand and the Nation as a brand”.

Safer Food to Enhance Economic Competitiveness

Another step in the region's march towards the modernization of its legislative framework on food safety has been made, as representatives prepare to move into day two of a five-day risks analysis workshop.

Taking place at the Bay Gardens Inn located in Rodney Bay, the initiative targets representatives of the Bureau of Standards, regional Ministries of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and Environmental Health officers. Organizing agencies are the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), in collaboration with USAID, Tuskegee University in the United States and the University of the West Indies (UWI).

Participants have begun examining the risks posed to health and trade and by extension, the economies of small island states. In the process the hope is to evaluate and refine the legislative framework for human, animal and plant health, while improving the economic competitiveness of member states through enhanced trade in safer food.

Public Health Advisor to PAHO Dr. Lloyd Webb says, “We recognize that improved enforceable food laws are essential components of a modern food control system. They provide the necessary legal powers on prescriptions to ensure food safety, by allowing our competent authorities to use precaution and adopt provisional measures for unacceptable health risk.”



Health officials from the various lead agencies sit at Head Table

The workshop will provide member states with the capacity to detect, analyse, and manage food risks that can affect the health of citizens and visitors alike, as well as the economic stability of the region.

“The issue of food safety is now firmly on the agenda of the mass media and consumers of major trading partners, who are sensitive to those issues. We can

therefore imagine the impact on our tourism sector if St. Lucia was to experience a serious outbreak of food-borne disease of any kind”, lamented Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Health, Human Services, Family Affairs and Gender Relations Mr. Fidelis Williams.

Participants will also be placing much emphasis on infectious diseases like

SARS, Foot and Mouth disease, Mad Cow disease and Avian Flu, as just some of the health and trade related issues, which must be factored into the equation, in light of increase growth in the region's number one industry, tourism, and St. Lucia's ability to host major events like the Jazz Festival and international cricket.

Banana Bits Consistent with Government's thrust to Educate Farmers

On May 6, 2004, the Windward Islands Banana Development and Exporting Company Ltd. developed a talk show on bananas, broadcast live on NTN Television in St. Lucia and simulcast via radio throughout the Windward Islands. The hour-long programme, dubbed 'Banana Bits' airs on the first Thursday of every month.

The programme is consistent with the Government's thrust to educate farmers on the latest developments regarding the marketing of bananas, and to dispel any notion that what is happening to bananas today is political. The programme sits well with the views expressed by Prime Minister, Dr. Kenny D. Anthony that all farmers in St. Lucia and the region ought to be fully aware of the problems facing the banana industry and the measures being put in place to address those problems.

Produced at the television studios of the Government Information Service of St. Lucia, Banana Bits brings together audiences of Radio St. Lucia and Radio Caribbean International in St. Lucia, NBC Radio and WEFM in St. Vincent, DBS Radio and Kairi FM in Dominica, and GBN in Grenada into one community to deliberate on issues facing the regional banana industry.

The programme's host and producer, Bernard Frampton, says, "At WIBDECO, we recognised that we needed a forum to engage the banana farmers and general public in debate on the banana industry. We wanted a single stage where everyone could voice their ideas and concerns."

Mr Frampton, who is WIBDECO's Communication Controller adds, "We knew we had to be creative and bold in developing a strategy, so we developed Banana Bits." The program has definitely tested the temperature of regional broadcasting vogue. Mr. Frampton and his assistant Theresa Jn. Baptiste employ a refreshing hosting style. While Frampton leads, Jn. Baptiste is more passive, interjecting with the odd question, creating a light and conversational ambience. The set's theme and design are assertive, yet

warm, reflecting the program's mood and tone.

Banana Bits has also challenged the technical limitations of regional broadcasting. Initially, the program intended on linking television stations throughout the region, but its plans were thwarted by technical and financial hurdles. It therefore settled for becoming the first media magazine program to link the publics of the sub region through a radio simulcast via telephone link up.

The program is also historic, because it provides its audience in the islands with a toll free number to contribute to the discussions. So far, this aspect of the program has been slow to gain momentum due to hitches in the telephone service. Mr Frampton believes this problem is temporary. "When you become innovative and trod waters never before trodden, you expect a few teething problems. This is just one of them", he says with a convincing smile.

Mr. Frampton definitely has something to smile about. The program has so far been well received. As one caller to the program put it, "I think this is a great program. Thank you for educating us on such important issues in the banana industry".

So far, the program has dealt with two major topics.

The premier program of Banana Bits focused on Eurepgap, a set of standards developed by the European Retailers for all suppliers providing produce for sale on the European market. WIBDECO's Director of Technical Services Errol Reid, and Certification Manager Eardley Barrett, provided an overview of the banana industry's efforts to achieve Eurepgap certification. The WIBDECO officials offered a detailed explanation of the protocol and explored the challenges facing the region in its effort to meet the standards. Callers to the program were curious about the assistance available to farmers in their quest to become certified.

The second production of Banana Bits addressed the current quality problems affecting Windward Islands bananas. Tessa Boland, Product Manager and Stephen Shingleton-Smith, Purchasing Manager, both of WIBDECO, took the audience through the major quality issues. They highlighted Latex Stains, Mechanical Damage, and Contaminants as the major culprits influencing poor quality fruit.

Upcoming Banana Bits topics are expected to range from technical assessments, market analyses, to industry developments. The program audiences can

soon look out for information on WIBDECO's structure and operations. The current international market dynamics and regulations will undoubtedly stimulate debate on future programs. Banana Bits offers the Windward Islands a forum for discussing issues facing the bananas industry. The ensuing dialogue between banana officials and the public will undoubtedly assist with efforts to the sustenance of one of the region's major income earners.

THIS WEEK ON NTN

June 11th – June 20th, 2004
26 Years of Kaiso – Composers and Critics – Fri. June 11th, 8p.m.

- **The GIS speaks with members of the Youth arm of the CSA** - Monday June 14th, 6:15 p.m.
- **The GIS speaks with the Minister of Physical Development, Housing and the Environment Landmark** – Monday June 14th, 8:00 p.m.
- **Reflections @ 25 with Sir John Compton** – Tues. June 15th, 7:30 p.m.
- **AGRIFOCUS (Ministry of Agriculture) News and Feature** - Wed. June 16th, 8:00 p.m.
- **Carnival Vibes** – Thursday June 17th, 7:10 p.m.
- **KiddiCrew.com**– Thursday June 17th, 8:00 p.m.
- **Year in Review 2003** – Friday June 18th, 9 p.m.
- **Che Campeche Production** – "In My Neighbourhood" – Sunday June 20th, 7:30 p.m.

Remember to tune in for:

- **GIS News Breaks and Kweyol News daily from 6:30 p.m.**
- **Issues & Answers/Mondays** at 8:00pm:
- **Interview/Tuesdays** at 6:15pm :
- **Konsit Kweyol/Tuesdays** at 8:00pm (Kweyol Discussion):
- **Your Right to Know/Thursdays** at 6:15 p.m. (Min. of Ed. Prog).
- **Take 2/Fridays** at 6:15pm (Week in Review)
- **Weflechi/Fridays** at 6:40pm - (Week in Review—Kweyol)

For the complete programme guide, log on to our website at www.stlucia.gov.lc and then click on the NTN icon.



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Panelists on Banana Bits' first programme

www.stlucia.gov.lc

Saint Lucia NATIONWIDE is published every fortnight by the Department of Information Services.

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