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**ADDRESS BY
HON. JON ODLUM
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF HEALTH,
HUMAN SERVICES, FAMILY AFFAIRS & GENDER RELATIONS
AT THE
COUNTRY REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE
CHILD AT ITS 39TH SESSION SCHEDULED FOR MAY 17, 2005
IN GENEVA**

Friends,

Maybe, the best way to describe SAINT LUCIA to you, is to invite you to visit that 238 sq. miles of lush lands, floating in the blue Caribbean sea, alongside its neighbouring islands, of slightly lesser beauty.

If perchance you respond to my advice, you will encounter the warmth and humanity of its 160,000 inhabitants.

However, in every placid ocean, there is a ripple, which, if agitated, can form a Tsunami, to the detriment of many.

Our children, even in our smaller islands, are all exposed to much defective knowledge over Television Programmes, and the ill-effects of migration.

The miniscule amount of female prisoners in our prison, comprises 50% ex-patriates – five (5) out of ten (10) females.

On the other hand our young males constitute 75% of our male community at the prisons; which was the opposite, only a few years ago.

In recent years we have experienced a radical change in the habits of our youth, which have repercussions in every sector of our society.

The depreciation of our male youth has created quite an appreciation for the females, who now are the more vibrant and progressive gender.

However, among the most serious of our problems in St. Lucia, is the fact that our under 13's have become an endangered species, via the child abuse, incest and carnal knowledge routes – with little evidence of abatement.

I am however comforted, by the situation in some African countries, where the carnage is unbelievably ~~bad~~ our islands.

These problems we believe are fostered by the increase in single parent families, run by mothers, most times young

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inexperience^d mothers. Our society has failed to grapple with the fast pace of these changing realities, and as a consequence we have failed to provide the support systems to enable the society to appropriately metamorphose.

Cognizant of these problems, and our financial limitations, strong and concerted efforts are being put in place, to target these issues, and the drivers of these issues. Saint Lucia has embarked, on strong legislative and operational management, aimed at providing a legislative framework on which a strong policy change can sit.

You have before you, Saint Lucia's report covering the period 1993-2003 which has itemized aspects on the convention, and has pointed out how we have, albeit in an ad hoc way, sought to implement and give effect to international conventions and assisting guidelines.

Since 2003, there has been rapid legislative development in family law in the Caribbean sub region, which has had a direct impact on the rights of the child. The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States of which Saint Lucia is a part, has sought through 2003 and 2004 to undertake consultations, educating its people on the limitations of existing domestic family law legislation, and through these consultations, have sought the views of

our communities on the process of change to adopt, in order to map our way forward, in harmonizing our domestic legislation, with our international obligations.

In Saint Lucia these consultations were strategic and purposeful. Community meetings targeting all our towns and villages were held, in an effort to engage the community in the process of change. At the local level, the Government of Saint Lucia has continued the process of change, by continuing the consultation and engaging the NGO's in dialogue, designed to ensure that what finally emerges as our domestic legislation, is truly reflective of the needs of our people and harmonized with our international obligations.

The reforms to our family law, specifically address the concerns of children, as it relates to their maintenance, status, care and participation, in the division of property. It is expected, now that the consultations are complete, that this legislation will be implemented before the end of 2005.

In the area of Criminal law, the Criminal Code No.9 of 2004, which came into effect in January 2005 from sections 167 to 175, have created more stringent and harsh, clear and concise penalties, for the offences of child abandonment, exposure, stealing, and the concealment of children. To compliment the provisions of the Code, the Ministry of Human Services has

established, an at-risk and child abuse database, for the monitoring of children, subject to abuse, and potentially subject to abuse. Funds have also been sourced, and the Government of Saint Lucia has committed itself to an in-transit home for abused and at-risk children.

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The Government is aggressively working towards the implementation of Universal Health Care. This will improve the quality of health to mothers and children.

Increasingly young children are being diagnosed with mental health and emotional disorders. By 2006, a new psychiatry facility will be constructed with financial and technical assistance from the People's Republic of China. This will improve the quality of care to adolescents as the present facility at Golden Hope needs some repairs.

My Government has just released the budget for the new Financial Year 2005-2006. A book scheme will be introduced making books available to every secondary school child. This will enhance the educational potential of our children.

There has been an increase in truancy and school drop outs. The Ministry of Education is presently designing a study to scientifically assess the gravity of the situation.

The Honourable Prime Minister of Saint Lucia Dr. Kenny Anthony is the Chairman of the National Council of a five year World Bank Project to combat the Hiv/Aids problem. Prior to this project, the Honourable Prime Minister had made financial allocation of \$200.00 Eastern Caribbean Currency, as a monthly allowance to every child living with the virus as well as to children whose parents have died with the virus.

Beginning in the academic year 2004 a total of 30 school counsellors were appointed. Thus children whose present behavioral and emotional problems can be identified will receive the required attention.

The Ministry of Health is at present working on developing a child and adolescent health policy. Meanwhile the draft protocols for child abuse management have been completed. Thanks to financial assistance from Unicef, very soon a national child abuse management training scheme shall be

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implemented. The training will target all mandatory reporters of child abuse.

Saint Lucia is at present conducting a child study with support from Unicef. This is a research exercise which seeks information on children, their parents, caregivers and services available for their optimum growth and development.

Essentially the study will inform about child vulnerabilities in St. Lucia. The result of the study will inform policy and help design suitable social services and programmes to improve the quality of life of all children.

The government of Saint Lucia, wishes to express its profound gratitude to Unicef., the European Union and other financial and local organizations for all its financial and technical assistance over the ten years in review.

Ladies and gentlemen our demonstrated commitment is evident and it is sound, and we are not in doubt, that with our continued methodical approach, and with your assistance and support, we will make significant strides, in the protection and secured welfare, of our nations children.