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The convening of any people is significant, but the assembling our people under "Saint Lucian Homecoming 2010" will be a very proud, happy, momentous and historic occasion. The theme for this gathering 'Toute Sent Li Sen Se Yonn', encapsulates the significance with which this event is being planned. I hope that it will be recognized as a forward step in the building of relationships among St Lucians from around the globe. I am sure that it will also herald a new chapter and era of stronger, closer cooperation and collaboration among the many individuals, groups and organizations that are planning to be in St Lucia to witness and be part of the occasion.

For generations, St Lucians have travelled in search of better opportunities. They have settled predominantly in the United Kingdom and North America and today constitute a sizeable population in these areas. Yet, despite the geographical and generational differences, the vast majority remains committed to their homeland, its people and its culture. In a real sense, those who left the shores of St Lucia have never really left home and many of those who were born abroad regard St Lucia as their home, hence the notion that we have a 'heart with two homes'. This commitment is also reflected in so many ways - the frequency with which we return to St Lucia, the level of financial resources remitted for investment and to support our families and the passion with which we identify with and promote the cause of St Lucia. We are truly ambassadors of St Lucia and much of our strength and image is invested in those efforts.

The contribution of the Diaspora to the social and economic development of St Lucia has not entirely been publicly recognised, and I hope that this occasion will provide the means and opportunity to acknowledge for posterity, the vast input and role played by the Diaspora in our country's advancement. In addition, we also look forward to the opportunity for exchanging of ideas, for agreement on the key issues that affect our communities, and also on how the communities can influence national policy in St Lucia.

Let me warmly congratulate all those dedicated and hard-working persons who are continuing to selflessly give of their time and resources to ensuring that our Homecoming in 2010 will be a success. Let it be the start of

something new and a positive step in the recognition that ours is a nation that exceeds our island shores.

On behalf of the Union of St Lucian Overseas Associations (USLOA), I welcome this initiative of 'St Lucian Homecoming 2010' and look forward to seeing as many Lucians as possible at home. I also hope that this meeting will go a fair way in structuring our relationship, so that it can become the powerful developmental tool that it has so much potential to be.

I trust too, that the event will involve more than simply finding ways to tap into the vast resources held by St Lucians overseas. Every effort to encourage them to invest in St Lucia and to facilitate their contribution in every possible way must also be explored. More importantly, our country must develop an appropriate institutional framework in which we can be integrally involved in the social and political life of our country. The experiences that our Diaspora has acquired can be of immense value in improving the quality of governance and the relationships between the people and their government and among the people themselves.

We look forward to seeing you all in 2010.