

Uber still operating in St Lucia despite warnings by govt

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THE St Lucia government says the American multinational transportation company, Uber, is continuing to operate on the island, despite two official warnings being sent to it to cease its illegal operations there.

'We want to be very clear that any player that comes into that space fulfils all the requirements set out by legislation,' Tourism Minister Dr Ernest Hilaire told reporters.

'At this point, we are waiting on a follow-up meeting and for us to have some clear indications as to what exactly Uber would want to do and so far as I have heard they continue to offer their services in St Lucia and up to yesterday I sent them a second letter reminding them that they are operating illegally in St Lucia,' Hilaire said.

Earlier this month the Phillip J Pierre administration said it had not in 'any way approved, sanctioned or encouraged Uber to operate any service in St Lucia' amid mounting public debate over the ride-hailing company's recent launch.

Hilaire said Uber first made contact with the government last December, indicating that it was interested in setting up a service on the island, adding that they had described themselves as a technology platform that offers transportation for people who want to move from point A to point B.

'We indicated to them then that we would be reviewing their intention and that we shall have discussions with them.

'They sent in a second note indicating that there has been substantial interest in St Lucia from taxi associations and individual taxi drivers. So they were going to move ahead, and again we told them that we would want to discuss the matter with the stakeholders and with Uber itself'.

Hilaire said that the government had earlier received a notice from Uber saying 'they were launching their service' in St Lucia.

But the Tourism Minister, who said he held discussions with the various stakeholders within the transportation sector on the issue, noted that in order for Uber to operate here, there were certain requirements it must meet.

'I indicated to them that our position, as expressed in a letter which I sent to Uber, was that they were not fulfilling our regulatory requirements for them to operate in St Lucia and that we pointed out to them the regulatory requirements were.

'One, they needed to, in our view, obtain a trade licence before they can operate in St Lucia. Two, that they needed to register with the Inland Revenue Department for the purpose of payment of taxes owed to the government by operating a business in St Lucia, and, thirdly, they are required to be certified under the Tourism Development Act'.

Hilaire said that these requirements were outlined to the stakeholders as the 'government's position and that we are willing to talk with Uber about their interest in St Lucia.

'We met with Uber and expressed those sentiments ..and we indicated to them that in our view they were operating illegally in St Lucia. They had not met the requirements to operate in St Lucia and we indicated to them that we believe that they needed to re-set and that they could not continue to operate as they are operating'.

He said Uber has promised to have a follow-up meeting to 'discuss our concerns in greater details'.

'We asked them to suspend their operations in St Lucia until they had cleared the way forward. We are awaiting from them a date for our follow-up meeting and for us to decide how we move forward,' Hilaire said.