

## **National Day speech**

Monday 18 June 2007 Unity Stadium, Mahé, Seychelles

**Your Excellency Mr Festus Mogae, President of the Republic of Botswana,  
President René, distinguished members of the diplomatic corps, distinguished  
guests, people of Seychelles,**

The 18 June is a date on our calendar when we gather together to celebrate our country, cradle of our identity as a nation, the land of our ancestors, these small islands which are our motherland, our country. It is a reminder that we indeed share one Seychelles. In spite of our differences, the spirit of unity always reigns amongst the diversity of opinions and beliefs.

In less than a year, we have participated in two elections, where the world had its eyes turned towards us. Once again on two consecutive occasions we have shown our wisdom and intelligence, exercising our rights in a calm and peaceful atmosphere. I thank the people of Seychelles for reinforcing our democracy peacefully. Yes, we are a young democracy, but we are also an example for many countries.

In all humility, I also take the opportunity to thank the people of Seychelles for the confidence they have expressed in my government and also for the confidence they have shown in their representatives in the National Assembly. The elections are now over and it is time for us to move on and work in national unity for the national benefit. Our different political opinions should now serve as constructive criticisms for the betterment of our country.

Above all, let us use our debates to promote progress and unity. Our National Day is a celebration of unity and solidarity, it is a time to share with friends and neighbours our successes and challenges which we have in common. On behalf of the Seychellois people I would like to express our sincere appreciation to H.E. Mr Festus Mogae, President of Botswana and Mrs Mogae, who are participating in this year's celebrations and reflections. Your presence is testimony to the importance of this day, not only in terms of our national history, but also in terms of the development of a community of successful African democracies. We are proud to have a pioneer of development, democracy and stability in the region share this special moment with us.

Strategy 2017 – our ambition as a nation

The 18 June marks the birth of our Third Republic as well as the adoption of our new Constitution. Our Constitution is a rich document. It is our supreme law, marking our rights and responsibilities and, equally important, it marks our aspirations as a nation. A nation's identity is based on its history but also on its ambition – how far we want our nation to go. Our constitution offers a commitment for us to always strive for a better life for all Seychellois. It is this ambition for the nation's betterment that has forged the process of gradual reforms in our economy. In various areas we have seen results. In others, the results are more long term, but in all these reforms we have placed, and will continue to place, the wellbeing of every Seychellois worker as the first priority.

Transforming the way Seychelles works: People of Seychelles, we are transforming the way we work. It implies a strategy which brings along transformations in various ways. Firstly, we are transforming the way the country works; where necessary, we will undertake several reforms in government departments. These changes will be announced next month and they aim at creating a more efficient civil service which brings government closer to the people. We are creating conditions for everybody to participate in wealth creation for themselves and their families. We are placing the economic tools in the hands of our workforce. Let us use these opportunities responsibly.

Empowering the districts – The focal point in our development: Secondly, as announced during my last State-of-the-Nation address, we are empowering the districts. We want our districts to be vibrant centres for our people's development. They need to have more power to be able to assist their people more efficiently and faster. The focal point for our national development is the district

and, where necessary, we will reinforce its role and responsibilities. This will, in turn, improve the quality of lives for our families. I wish to see better all-round participation, including increased participation in decision making.

Empowering our districts is also a key factor in our efforts to eliminate social ills in our country. We are all aware of the damage that substance abuse such as illegal drugs, does to its victims, especially the youth. It is sad to note that drug traffickers continue to rob our youth of their innocence and future. We need several weapons to combat these issues – including treatment, prevention and increased coordinated effort among the different law enforcement agencies. I call on all to join me in condemning these practices and banishing them from our communities.

We need to improve and promote the implementation of social programmes, including through the promotion of improved lifestyle choices, through sports, cultural activities as well as good neighbourliness. Our communities are our families. And families need the right support in our districts.

In last year's Budget address, I announced the construction of 10 new day-care centres in the districts. The construction of these day-care centres is due to start later this year. In addition, my government will establish a procedure to subsidise the cost for these daycare services. This will further enhance family life, help mothers who are in employment and also create employment in the districts.

In the context of increased support to families as the core of a community, I have also decided to increase maternity leave from 12 weeks to 14 weeks. This will take effect from 1 January 2008.

Businesses have a responsibility towards the community. Each development project should have a social corporate component to improve the lives of people in the community in which it is situated.

Allow me also to take a moment to speak briefly on the subject of cleanliness and the environment in our country. The Seychellois have always been known for being environmentally conscious, for their cleanliness, their sense of pride and simplicity of living. It is a sad reality that the beauty of our country is being scarred by the increasing amount of litter everywhere. Waste is being thrown away with no concern for its effect on our neighbourhoods or on public health. We must reverse this trend. The authorities concerned in the Department of Environment will be reorganised more efficiently. Measures will be taken to ensure that the law is

enforced. The police will ensure that those who do not respect the laws relating to littering are prosecuted. Serious action will also be taken against those who behave indecently in public. All citizens should take on their responsibility. Let us show the appropriate respect for ourselves and others.

Let us also join forces to enhance the beauty of our small capital. We are actually in the process of working on a new plan for the development of Victoria. We should protect and promote its heritage while also ensuring that it becomes the modern commercial centre that we need for our future development.

Better services – efficiency above all: The third transformation that we are witnessing is in our approach regarding services in general. We are developing our resources in such a way as to bring services closer to our people — a government at the service of the people. Our commitment is to efficiency above all.

We have made a commitment to build 5,000 houses in the next five years. We are making it happen! We have given a commitment to improve health services at all levels. We are making it happen!

Economic empowerment: Our fourth transformation, and possibly the most visible one, is in our economy. It's a transformation already underway, but with still a long road ahead. Our strategy for 2017 has given the commitment of my government to double GDP in the next 10 years. This may seem to be a great challenge. But looking at our economic performance, we can see the road being mapped out. In 2005 we were able to achieve growth of 1.2%, consolidated in 2006 at a rate of 5.3%. The reforms introduced in the last three years are ensuring that our economy continues to grow. We are working hard to bring about a sustained annual growth rate of 8%, which will ensure we meet our objective of doubling GDP. Direct investment continues to rise – the 2006 figures are 48% above those of 2005, and we expect a further rise of 40% in 2007. Less than 3% of the population are unemployed. These successes enable us to put more emphasis at this point on participation in wealth creation. All Seychellois are getting opportunities to work for their share of the wealth our country generates.

The tourism sector is performing well – to date arrivals are up 17% over 2006. The revenue generated by tourism is also rising and we are expecting an annual rise of 10% in tourism earnings. However, we need to work hard to increase the stakeholding of Seychellois businesses in the sector. Reforms will be undertaken soon to ensure that all investment concessions are applied across the board, and in the same way. This means that small Seychellois-owned hotels are set to benefit in the same way as a large five-star hotel.

A fishing and seafaring tradition is in our blood. And we can build further on this tradition. We can develop new products and research new markets. Our fish is among the best in the world in terms of quality, and we are positioning ourselves on quality. We are developing a Seychelles brand to enhance its value. We are constantly improving our small regional ports to encourage the rise of entrepreneur fishermen. Yes, we can sail much further in terms of our fisheries.

Financial services are the third pillar of our economy which are continuing to grow. We have true potential to be a regional financial and banking centre. We have already established our reputation as a dependable jurisdiction in the offshore sector. We also intend soon to develop an institute for training in the banking sector to improve the participation of young Seychellois in the expansion of this sector. We aim to further develop the entrepreneurial spirit in our country, and to do so we need to give attention to our small business roots. Small businesses are coming

up all over our country. But there are also many more opportunities to be taken. We are developing several measures to facilitate this, for example:

1. The same benefits for all companies - no matter what size;
2. SIB to take all application procedures under its umbrella – eliminating the need for days spent traipsing around Victoria between the various authorities;
3. Certain categories of business reserved only for Seychellois;
4. Reducing the cost of doing business.

Currently in Victoria, many opportunities exist for business development, but rents are often exorbitant. This is a barrier for the development of small businesses. We need innovative business models in our capital to make it more vibrant.

It is my government's intention to build, in collaboration with the Pension Fund, several buildings in Victoria and other strategic locations, to provide business spaces at affordable rents. Let us give Victoria the full commercial scope it deserves! Small businesses are the motor that will enable our economy to continue to grow, and accelerate its rate. They can also ensure the participation rate that is so essential to the success of our strategy.

Through the cottage industries project, we have seen a lot of the creativity and the entrepreneurial spirit that exist in our country, but which do not always show themselves. The women of Seychelles, particularly, have been pioneers in this area, and they have created new openings and opportunities. I salute them today in their efforts to improve the lives of their families and fellow countrymen. The structure of the disbursement of concessionary loans is also being reviewed to enhance its effectiveness and rapidity in disbursement – this includes YES loans, small businesses and cottage industries. The money available in this fund will be increased, allowing the cottage industry start-up loan to be increased from R10,000 to R25,000.

I can also see great potential in the arts in our country. We are seeing an explosion of music, culture, art and dance that has taken over our country. Our music and culture are truly alive! Our cultural industries can also take their place on our economic platform. Many of our artistes have already made an impact internationally. Many more have the potential and the talent. A special credit facility will also be made available for all artistes (with loans up to R50,000) under the auspices of the National Arts Council.

Our general programme for the promotion of business is based on simplicity and efficiency. The same principle applies in the creation of the new revenue authority in charge of collecting government dues. Tax reform through this authority will also allow us to take certain measures relating to the cost of living.

A more efficient revenue system will allow us to reduce the social security contribution by each individual. This means more money in the pockets of each Seychellois at the end of the month!

Seychellois brothers and sisters, a small liberalised economy can always lead to risks of rises in costs of living when there is a lack of competition. Consumers deserve good-quality products at reasonable prices. It is my hope that increased competition will continue to improve conditions for our consumers and, in this light, we will continue to promote the establishment of more supermarkets in our country.

Our strategy for the next 10 years is founded on the principle of work. We have been blessed with one of the most beautiful countries on earth. But it is only through our hard work that we will be able to derive benefits from our good fortune. My government and I will continue to provide opportunities for

Seychellois to work to create wealth for themselves and their country. I believe in Seychelles.

Recently we have learnt of the possibility of our natural beauty being complemented by possible reserves of oil and natural gas. Our potential as an oil exporter is there. We are not in the habit, however, of counting chickens before they are hatched! Seypec has worked hard over the last 10 years to establish itself as a force in the region with a net value estimated in millions of dollars. We have to continue to look at the sector as a whole and reinforce the development of our tanker fleet, increase our possibilities for stocking, bunkering and re-export. We will not simply allow our potential to remain dormant.

Building a knowledge-based society: All the transformations I have mentioned will allow us to achieve our goal. But we need to drive those transformations. It will happen only with the development of our most important resource – our human resource. We need to have continuous training for the young generation that will take our country forward, both in the private sector and in government. That is why I have decided to launch a scheme of Young Leaders in order to identify young graduates with the potential to become leaders and innovators. Under the scheme, which will be in the President's Office, young graduates who are identified as

having the right potential will receive mentoring and training. They will acquire the necessary experience to prepare themselves to take up key positions in our country. Youth of Seychelles, we are entrusting the future of our people into your hands. And the future starts today! Our country has to become a knowledge-based society. The process will increase productivity and add value to the work of the Seychellois. We see already that the rate of employment creation is outpacing our capacity to fill all the job vacancies. In our country today we have employment opportunities for all Seychellois who want to work.

The Seychelles Strategy 2017 will require a lot more manpower, and even more qualified personnel. As a consequence, we have to implement a shift in our tertiary education system. We have to facilitate advanced studies for a larger number of our people. Our ambition is to train our people, for them to become modern professionals and to assume their responsibilities at all levels, in the technical as well as in the management areas. We today have one of the most educated workforces in the region. Our ambition is to do better still.

We have reached the stage in our development where we have to take bold and daring decisions to take Seychelles and the Seychellois to the next level. The times have changed from when we said that Seychelles was too small to have a university. Our Seychelles may be small in size, but we have grown. We have grown in maturity, we have grown as a people, and we have grown in our capacity. Today, we resolve to develop this capacity further. We will set up a foundation to create a Seychelles university. The foundation will comprise local and international partners to develop a high-level institution of training for Seychellois, as well as foreigners. Our university will develop centres of excellence, for example, for studies in the environmental, tourism, maritime and financial services sectors. This is what I want to achieve for the people of Seychelles. This is my wish for our people. I call on all our people to rally behind this cause. Young people of Seychelles, this is the future I am offering you!

People of Seychelles, on the occasion of the celebration of our National Day today, let us spare one moment to appreciate this blessed country which God has given us. Let us continue to safeguard and promote the peace and stability which have

allowed us to attain the level of human and economic development which, in several aspects, is becoming a model for the world. Peace and stability are vital for the realisation of our aspirations.

My biggest wish, during the mandate which you have given me as your President, is to see the fulfillment of the potential of our people and their prosperity. Let us strengthen our moral and spiritual values. We have to bear in mind that when we are working to improve our standard of living, we need also to enrich our culture and way of life. Let us not forget the spirit of sharing which is very much part of our culture and in the heart of our community. Our country is increasingly open to influences from all corners of the world. These can bring a lot of benefits, but also challenges. Together, we can protect ourselves against the bad influences and, where appropriate, benefit from global trends.

Dear people of Seychelles, join me and together let us promote “One Seychelles”. I’ve always been the President of One Seychelles. I have dedicated my life to One Seychelles. I work for One Seychelles, and for as long as I am President, there will always be One Seychelles. I have confidence in the people of Seychelles. Confidence that they will go a long way, as long as we share the same ambition to see our small country prosper.

Happy National Day to all Seychellois who are here tonight, as well as those who are overseas, who are following the event on television, radio and the internet.

Thank you and may God continue to guide us in making the right choices for the future of our children and country.

**Let us celebrate together, for the love of Seychelles!**