

NATIONAL DAY SPEECH
Thursday 18 June 2009, Unity Stadium, Mahé, Seychelles

Dear Seychellois brothers and sisters,
Distinguished guests,
Great is our joy today.

We have come together, in large numbers and in the spirit of “Koste Seselwa” (Come together Seychellois), to celebrate our national day. The 18th of June is always a celebration of the Seychellois people and all that unites us.

Our joy would be ever more intense if our Seychellois brothers held hostage in Somalia were with us here today. The seven Seychellois hostages aboard the Indian Ocean Explorer were supposed to arrive in Seychelles today on a special IDC flight. Unfortunately, we had a last minute delay. Our negotiation team is in Kenya at the moment to finalise arrangements for their repatriation. I am certain that very soon we will be able to welcome them to our shores and share in their joy and happiness. We continue to pray that they return to us safe and sound.

Tonight it gives me great pleasure to see the members of their families here with us. I praise them for their courage.

Our thoughts also go to the other hostages from the boat “Serenity”. Unfortunately at the last minute, the group negotiating on behalf of the pirates broke off the agreement to release them. But we are continuing our efforts that ensure that they as well return as soon as possible.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all those who worked day and night to make sure our compatriots regain their freedom.

This hostage situation has awakened us to the challenges faced by our security forces. The evolution of the security situation sometimes leads some of us to question the capacity of the Police and the Defence Forces. Sometimes we doubt their ability to confront the new reality on the ground.

Let us not forget though that they are the ones who maintain law and order. They are the ones who defend and protect our sovereignty. They are the guardians of the freedom of every Seychellois. And there is nothing more sacred than freedom. We have worked hard and striven to achieve freedom. The work of the security forces must be recognised. Today – as is the case every year – they are here in front of us, on this solemn event, to express their loyalty to the motherland. I join the people of Seychelles in expressing our gratitude to them.

Our efforts to combat piracy and safeguard our territorial integrity and our resources are ongoing. Measures of surveillance with our foreign partners are being intensified.

Dear friends and representatives of foreign governments,

We take this opportunity to thank those who have responded to our call for assistance in combating the scourge of piracy. The Seychellois people join me in expressing our heartfelt appreciation for your support.

The presence of foreign contingents in this year’s national parade testifies to the desire of Seychelles and its partners to work together for the security of the region. We salute the presence of representatives of the armed forces of France and India in this year’s celebrations.

Dear friends of the region,

Seychelles, as an island-state, accords the greatest importance to the security of the Indian Ocean. Aware that no country, acting singly, can guarantee this security, we share the responsibility for this with our partners within the framework of an active

programme of bilateral and multilateral cooperation. We thank the friendly countries, the brotherly countries, which stand by us to show their solidarity and express their desire that the Indian Ocean remain a zone of peace and stability.

Dear people of Seychelles,

Our National Day is also the opportunity to reflect on recent developments and the new course that our country has embarked on.

Eight months ago, we committed ourselves to economic reform. This reform is one of the greatest challenges that our country has ever had to face. We have all felt its effects. We have all been hit by it, one way or the other

First of all, I am aware of the difficulties that some families are facing in making ends meet. Everybody has been hit. But the more vulnerable citizens are being hit the hardest. Even though we have put in place structures to provide relief, there are shortcomings in many cases. What is important, however, is that we find solutions to problems.

Discussions have been held and we are introducing changes where necessary, for example in the home-carer programme, the district health centres and the Welfare Agency. Our efforts are geared towards assisting those who really deserve assistance. We have to ensure that the social structures are there to support those who are most needy. Insofar as the provision of carers is concerned, we are reviewing the cases of those who have not been assisted. Nobody will be left behind: from the child who needs a snack to the elderly citizen who requires support for his comfort and dignity.

Secondly, this reform has compelled everyone, including Government, to review their priorities and reflect deeply on the manner in which we manage our resources. Difficult decisions need to be taken because we have many commitments and our resources are limited. This is where we need to communicate and need to explain. We need to take time to explain what our priorities are. This does not mean that we have abandoned our commitments. Rather, we have to review the time-frame for their implementation.

Thirdly, it has been said that this reform could have been politically risky. It could have represented an opportunity for those seeking power at all costs to capitalise on the difficulties that our people would have to face.

For my part, I undertook this reform because I was convinced that the long-term prosperity of our country depended on it.

On 31st October 2008, when I announced the reform, I knew that it was going to be difficult for all of us. I asked the people to put their trust in me. To put their trust in me, for in spite of the magnitude of the challenges ahead, we were bound to succeed as a people. I had this conviction because I believe in the Seychellois people. I had this conviction because I believe in the unity of the people of Seychelles. With your courage, we have been able to achieve a lot in a short space of time. I thank you for your trust.

With your trust and courage, we have taken a new course. And we are in the right direction. The results are being felt already. Interest rates have been reduced to more or less pre-reform levels. The value of the rupee has stabilised against major foreign currencies and it continues to appreciate. The problem of availability of foreign exchange is a thing of the past. There are goods in shops.

Admittedly, we continue to face certain difficulties.

But there is an overall improvement. If we maintain our reform we shall succeed.

You can count on me. You can count on me to put the people first and to lead us in

this new course.

It is my wish to see a people which are more hardworking, more responsible and more realistic in a country which is ready to face the currents of globalisation. Eight months into this reform programme, I hail the Seychellois people, today, for their resilience and understanding. Congratulations!

Dear Seychellois brothers and sisters,

Circumstances dictate that I go to the people and listen to them. We have already visited ten districts. The ongoing consultations will provide for a better outlook on the future of our country. But, already, three important issues have emerged from those consultations:

- The reinforcement of law and order;
- A better public service;
- A new way to conduct politics and a new political discourse.

Law and Order

The reform of the Police started last year and it is progressing. But much remains to be done. The Police needs to improve its services to the public, especially in the management of its resources.

I am confident though that there are capable and competent people within the Force who are able to make a difference. I am confident that the Police are following this new course. Very often, the threat to the security of our citizens is linked to drug abuse. I am heartened that much headway has been made in the fight against drugs. The NDEA has confiscated several consignments of drugs. Their efforts are being intensified in the districts with the collaboration of the Police. I am also happy to note that the Seychellois people are united against this scourge. People are coming together to deny shelter to dealers. Legislation was adopted last year providing for the seizure of ill-acquired assets by the State. Several criminals who have been fronting legitimate activities are now being prosecuted. Every person in Seychelles deserves to feel safe at home. Recently, our safety and peace have been threatened by escaped convicts. This situation can no longer be tolerated. There are many shortcomings in the administration of the prison. In the next few days, I intend to put in place a new administrative structure which will be headed by a Commissioner of Prisons. This new administration will be tasked with eliminating all the inadequacies of the system.

Reform of the Judiciary is also an important element in the new course we have adopted. To continue with the same approach in the prevailing circumstances is out of the question. Our economy is moving rapidly. Our country is moving rapidly. We need a Judiciary which moves rapidly. When the new Chief Justice takes up his appointment in the next month or so, we need to seize the opportunity to bring a new lease of life to our judicial system. I know we can do it, if we put our differences aside, if we put everything which is personal aside and work together. We have to remove politics from the courts. The law is the law. Society is being afflicted by the comportment of idle and disorderly people. We are fed up seeing them hanging around shops, by the roadside and in public places, consuming alcohol and drugs, swearing and provoking law-abiding citizens, behaving indecently, disturbing the peace ... We have had enough of those loiterers who refuse to work. Strict action will be taken against them, as provided for by the Penal Code.

As regards the Defence Forces, we have started a process of renewal to better equip them to face the new challenges. Our youth are key to this new course.

I have never hesitated to place my trust in the youth. They are a source of inspiration and hope to me. I am convinced that they have an even more important role to play in the renewal of the Police and the Defence Forces. It is for this reason that I shall be launching, in the near future, a “Young Leaders” programme within the Police and the Defence Forces to allow our young people with potential access to the highest level of training.

In the face of new threats, we are reviewing the organisation of the Coastguards and the Defence Forces in general. A special intervention force – “Special Forces” – will be created within the Defence Forces to counter piracy, terrorism, illegal fishing and other threats.

All young people with the proper motivation are invited to join the Defence Forces and the Police. There are many opportunities for developing their potential.

The Public Service

I would like to take this opportunity to talk yet again of the public service. We need to address continually the shortcomings and provide encouragement where necessary. There has been much improvement in certain cases. Many public servants are continually giving the best of themselves. They are working hard and efficiently to steer our country in the new course we have chosen. We have much to learn from them. I congratulate them!

But there are still many complaints about service delivery in Government. I am not the only one to state this; it is a recurring subject whenever I meet people in the districts. Sitting idly by in the office and waiting for four o’clock. We have to be more professional. We have to work with integrity and honesty. A complaint has to be considered as a way of improving the service that we provide and not as a personal criticism. This is not to deny that clients cannot be difficult at times. But we have to equip ourselves to face such situations.

The audit exercise which is ongoing within Government will allow us to identify weaknesses and put in place adequate structures to provide for better service delivery.

The new course which our country has embarked upon precludes all negative attitudes in our work. Those who cannot deliver will have to cede their place to those who are willing and can deliver.

In this new course, competition in employment is becoming increasingly intense. Nobody is indispensable.

I wish to reiterate here that work is available for everyone who so wishes. Our aim is to localise, to the extent possible, all posts in our country. To this end, we shall continue to insist that Seychellois understudy foreigners and receive the appropriate training and expertise to replace them eventually.

A new political discourse

The conduct of politics in our country is a subject which I cannot avoid. We can all attest as to how gutter politics is dividing us. In a democracy it is right that people should express their views. It is right that we should have an opinion. It is right that we should participate in the political discourse. This is what democracy is all about. But we have to act responsibly and with respect for state institutions. We need to conduct politics in a different way in our country.

Nowadays, everybody wants to do politics in Seychelles. But politics is an art, a skill and a vocation. Those who dedicate themselves to politics should be prepared to set aside their personal agenda. They should be prepared to put their people and their country before self. Politics ought to be conducted with responsibility, sincerity and honesty. People are tired of politics conducted by the roadside and

which hinders the progress of our country.

The Seychellois people are tired of the intrusion of politics in everything.

- The Seychellois are tired of certain taxi drivers who constantly run down their country with tourists and local clients;
- The Seychellois are tired of certain fishermen who mix politics with the sale of fish in the market;

- The Seychellois are tired of certain irresponsible journalists who write whatever they please, knowing full well that what they write is not true;
- The Seychellois are tired of certain merchants who continually hike the price of their goods claiming that they are from previous stocks and blaming their exorbitant prices on politics ...

Gutter politics in the workplace, in the waiting rooms of clinics, at bus stations, on the misfortunes of people... will not take us far. It leads to disorder. It prevents us from making a break with the past and looking to the future. We have to conduct politics in a responsible manner and avoid creating divisions. I appeal today to all the leaders of our country. Let us come together and denounce the practice of gutter politics. Let us together rally this blessed people.

Seychellois sisters and brothers,

In this new course that we have embarked upon, only unity and our patriotic duty will lead us to progress and prosperity.

Our Seychelles is too fragile, too small for us to do as we please. Our Seychelles is too precious to succumb to the destruction of division.

In good times, we need to come together and provide encouragement. In bad times, we have to come together and work together to find solutions. We are in a new era. We have embarked on a new course.

The people of Seychelles are following this new course.

Thank you and may God continue to bless the Seychellois people.

I wish every Seychellois, here, and throughout the world a happy National Day.