

State of the Nation Address for the Year 2012

by President James A. Michel

Mr Speaker,
Vice-President,
Chief Justice,
President of the of the Court of Appeal,
Ministers,
Leader of the Opposition,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Dear People of Seychelles,

We have travelled along the long road to freedom and progress. We have often experienced exceptional successes. We also have to admit that there have been times where we have erred, in spite of our best intentions. What is important is that we have remained resilient and strong as a nation, and we have lived a unity forged by the love for our motherland.

Today we are standing at the summit of the mountain, which we have struggled and worked hard to reach. We realize that our biggest challenge was not so much the journey to the top, but rather our ability to remain steadfast and to adapt to a world in full evolution. We realize we are not alone in this world and that from now on we have to be part of the new times, to build the New Seychelles.

The people of Seychelles elected me on the promise of a New Seychelles. During the 2012 State of the Nation address I will, above all, direct my message to the Seychellois people, irrespective of our differences. My message is one that is sincere and frank, and which I believe is the foundation of this New Seychelles. It is a message which calls for the elimination of obstacles that impede our progress and that harm Seychelles. We have done the talking, we've sung all the songs, we have listened, measured and weighed everything. Now is our moment. We now have to do things that are different, and good, for Seychelles.

What do we want to see in this New Seychelles?

A prosperous nation that is intelligent, united and harmonious. A society that is caring and compassionate. A responsible government leading a force of workers who are disciplined, motivated and serious, and also responsible citizens who are ready to take responsibility for their own future. A country that empowers its citizens, that provides them with adequate resources and the tools to enable them to earn a living, and to create wealth. A country that has zero tolerance for corruption, criminality and social delinquency. A country that is actively encouraging innovation and creativity. We can all see ourselves in the New Seychelles. Striving hard for our New Seychelles is not a slogan. They are not empty words. It is a necessity, an everyday way of life that is required if we are to protect what we have accomplished so far, and if we are to remain at the top of the mountain which took us many years to reach. A country where every drop of the sweat of our Seychellois workers is reflected in the smiles of our children, in the thoughts of our elderly and in the light of hope shining in the eyes of our young people. We have to work hard if we want to progress in the future, if we want to remain a Seychellois people who are healthy, well educated, and living in harmony, with our heads held high. A Seychellois people who know, and live, their dignity.

There are two conditions that are essential to enable us to progress even further.

Firstly, we have to ensure that we maintain what we have achieved so far. Secondly, we need to work hard, with intelligence and an enterprising spirit. There is no other way. And we have to be frank and realistic. There are many good things in our country. But there are also many things which need to be addressed and changed. And today, as we are talking about the state of the nation, we also have to speak about these things.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF 2011 AND PERSPECTIVES FOR 2012

2011 was a year when we demonstrated our resilience.

In spite of the world recession our economic indicators remained fundamentally strong. We were able to maintain a positive and encouraging economic growth of 5%. Again last year we succeeded in achieving the objectives of our economic reform programme. These included a budgetary surplus equivalent to more than 5% of our gross national product. This allowed us to continue reducing our public debt which now stands at 76% of our GDP.

We also increased our foreign exchange reserves, now reaching almost \$290 million. This brings us closer to achieving our objective of a minimum reserve of three months of imports, and enables us to repay our debt without putting pressure on the foreign exchange market in the future. These factors help to boost confidence in our economy.

In 2011 we were also able to keep the cost of living under control. Despite increases in the prices of petroleum products, the cost of public transport remained the same. Electricity tariffs and prices of essential commodities increased only slightly. Government absorbed certain increases in prices during a difficult period. At same time, reform of the welfare system rendered the processing of social assistance applications more flexible. It has come to the help of our brothers and sisters who were in need. We spent SR75.2M on welfare assistance alone. We received 12,979 applications for welfare assistance in 2011. A total of 9,932 cases were approved. This brings me to another point which I always talk about – work. There are employment opportunities in this country for all those who want to work. In partnership with the private sector last year we created more jobs. We continued to create employment opportunities. There were 2,139 people seeking employment in 2011. We succeeded in placing 1,277 people in formal employment. We must continue to seize all opportunities available to us. All work is noble.

I understand perfectly the frustration of a worker, who contributes to social security and pays taxes regularly, when he complains that the welfare system encourages laziness. I also do not understand how a young person who is 18 years old and over, has no disabilities or health problems, who is full of energy, and yet is dependent on the welfare system. This New Seychelles demands that those who are able should stop being idle. They have to stop coming up with excuses for not getting a job. They have to be productive and stop depending on the welfare system. The welfare system exists to help those who are really in need, and not for the lazy ones. I insist that those who are able to work, but who are now living off welfare system, have to be in employment as soon as possible. I wish to point out clearly, however, that we shall continue to introduce efficient measures to help those who are truly in need and not able to work.

I want to reiterate a fact regarding the cost of living. The prices of commodities, petroleum products and services are completely beyond our control. Where possible, government will continue to look for ways to mitigate the impact of rising costs on the lives of the most vulnerable in our society. We will continue to do all we can to reduce, or at least not raise, the cost of living.

STC, SPTC and PUC have an essential role to play in this respect. The three agencies, in particular, also have a social role. They are not there just to generate profits, or to invest in projects that are outside their terms of reference. They have above all, a social vocation. The Government of the New Seychelles will see to it that these organisations remain at the service of the people, and remain true to their mission.

2011 was a year when many Seychellois families moved into their new homes or obtained their own plots of land. Since the last State of the Nation address, a total of 568 housing units and 176 plots of land have been allocated.

On the international scene we continued to make our voice heard, to promote the interests of the small island states, to fight for the protection of the environment, to raise world consciousness on climate change, to defend our national interests against piracy, and to strive for peace and international cooperation.

Finally, 2011 was a year we achieved even more victories for Seychelles. We witnessed four important events – the International Carnival of Victoria – which has gained recognition worldwide; the launching of Vision 2020, a key element in the construction of the New Seychelles; the Indian Ocean Islands Games in which our athletes earned glory and honour for Seychelles; and the presidential and legislative elections in which the Seychellois people made their choices freely, and enabled us to consolidate our young democracy. All these are achievements which make us proud and encourage us to face the challenges ahead of us with optimism and courage.

That, Mr Speaker, is a brief account of where we reached in 2011. I would now like to share with you some perspectives for the year 2012.

What does 2012 have in store for us?

One thing that is certain – and all experts agree on this – is that the global recession will not disappear overnight. It will be with us for a considerable time. And this is a major challenge we will have to cope with.

We need fiscal discipline to be able to reduce our public debt and allow us to continue investing in our country and our people. We need to maintain our monetary discipline to allow us to cope with the risks of inflation, to maintain a stable exchange rate, to build up our foreign exchange reserves, and to develop our financial sector.

Our target for budgetary surplus this year is 4.7%. It is an objective we must achieve, but which will be not be easy because we have to face several external factors such as the depreciation of the Euro against the US\$, a euro-zone that is weak, increases in the prices of fuel, increases in the prices of basic commodities, etc ...

All of these factors have contributed to the depreciation of our rupee. The exchange rate is now above SR14 per US\$. This situation is of great concern to me because unless it changes for the better, inflation and the cost of living will continue to go up. The Central Bank is in consultation with government and the IMF to look at measures to address the situation and prevent further depreciation.

It would help the situation if commercial banks would accord priority to loans for businesses and other important sectors such as housing. I will not stop asking the banks to do more. When will our bankers understand that without financing there will be no sustainable development? When will they understand that interests that are too high are detrimental to business, and frustrate people wanting to build house? The present situation stifles economic growth. This cannot continue in the New Seychelles. The Ministry of Finance will have to take measures to promote competition. In the same vein, Government will encourage wider investment in economic sectors where monopolies and cartels still exist.

We need to work together – work hard – to overcome these difficulties. We must remain positive and never accept defeat. We have to remain vigilant and resilient, seek and seize new opportunities. The new partnership between Air Seychelles and Etihad Airways sends a strong signal in that direction.

This strategic partnership will, amongst other objectives, help to open up new tourism markets, increase the number of visitors to Seychelles, diversify our sources of visitors, and provide our country with better access to the world. We need to intensify our marketing efforts, especially in new and emerging markets. Operators in the tourism industry have to become more proactive and innovative. We have to adapt ourselves to the new economic environment, maximize our potentials, attract more visitors, be more competitive, in order to derive higher yields from this industry. We anticipate a growth of 5% in the tourism sector this year, but that will depend on our ability to withstand the consequences of global recession.

Mr Speaker

In spite of international efforts and our own endeavours, piracy will continue to be a serious threat for as long as no lasting solution is found to the problems of Somalia. Piracy is a constant threat to our tourism industry, fisheries and maritime transport. Seychelles will continue to act firmly against this threat. I have just attended a major conference in London where we debated the piracy issue extensively. Seychelles' leadership role was widely acknowledged and applauded. We also received a commitment for the transfer of foreign pirates in detention here to be repatriated to their country of origin. We will never give up the battles against the scourge of piracy. We will continue to take strong measures against those bandits who are threatening our sovereignty and livelihood.

I am confident in the future of our country in the medium term. The huge improvement in communications, anticipated to follow the installation of a submarine fibre-optic cable, will bring growth and economic diversification. This project is expected to become operational during the third quarter of 2012 and will generate further economic activities.

We will continue to consolidate the successes of our economic reform. We will continue to ensure that the state of our nation remains solid – very solid, whilst respecting our commitments towards our creditors. In this context, the latest credit rating from Fitch is very encouraging. The B+ rating will contribute to the strengthening of investor confidence and attract more capital, local as well as foreign, into our economy.

We will continue to empower our small and medium enterprises. If we are to realize the vision for the flourishing of small Seychellois enterprises we must pay attention to our small entrepreneurs in a more visionary and realistic way. In our country today, apart from major foreign investments, we see that the big Seychellois businesses are doing well. There are not very many of them, but they are around. I am happy to see that they are making a contribution and I encourage them to do even better. But we also have the small businesses that are trying, striving, to also grow and achieve as much success. But it is not easy for them. Limited access to credit, limited access to facilities such as land, training and development of appropriate skills, an obstructive bureaucracy, these are all obstacles preventing them from growing and reaching important positions in the economy of our country ... We need to do things differently.

We have to accelerate our effort to eliminate bureaucracy which adversely impacts on the development of small businesses. Where necessary, policies should be reviewed More importantly access by entrepreneurs to affordable financing should remain a priority. It is important that we find solutions to untie the hands of small businessmen.

In order to attract more investments in 2012, Seychelles must address those issues that hold back businesses and investment. These include the time it takes to establish a business; the time it takes to obtain permission to build, the time it takes to register a property or a business; the time it takes to get electricity and water connections, and access to finance and credit, and the time it takes for cases to be resolved under the legal and judiciary system.

All of these constraints are tarnishing our image and putting the brakes on our development. But we have the power to eliminate them. It requires concerted action. More importantly, there is the need for a profound change, and an acceptance of change.

It demands that we work hard for our Seychelles.

The world we are living in is dynamic. If we do not accept changes that are positive, innovative, and adapted with intelligence, we will lag behind. We will crash.

THE FOUNDATION FOR OUR NEW SEYCHELLES

Mr Speaker, and dear people of Seychelles,

The vision for A New Seychelles is clearly presented in the Parti Lepep Manifesto – *My Plans for You*.

Vision 2020 further elaborates the path we are drawing towards the New Seychelles. And this was vividly illustrated by Expo 2020 we held last year, and where our people could envisage the opportunities in housing, businesses, and financial, commercial, technological and administrative space that would be created.

We have been working endlessly to prepare all the necessary plans for these developments. Work has already started on Eve. Soon Ile Soleil will be open to all Seychellois, beginning with those who had declared their interest, during the expo, in applying for a plot on the island.

After that it will be the turn of Ile Aurore, to be followed by the Waterfront. All of these are projects that will be financed largely by private Seychellois capital.

Expo-2020 also presented the ambitions of the Seychellois in the environment sector. We have already taken the first step in that direction, with the "Wind Farm" project on Romainville island which will start becoming a reality this week.

Strengthening Democracy and Good Governance

Mr Speaker,

The New Seychelles we are creating together can function only in a democratic environment where the three branches of government – the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary – each has its distinct and complementary role to play.

We continue to strengthen these institutions through, for example, elections, reforms, dialogues, consultations, and the promulgation of, or amendments to, legislation. The people of Seychelles expressed themselves freely and firmly last year. People made their choice and they entrusted me with a new mandate. I believe in an open government that remains connected with the people. I believe in dialogue and consultation, as essential elements of good governance. I will remain connected with the people. What is important is the interest of Seychelles. You elected me to deliver, and I will do it for you. I will do it for our New Seychelles.

The second elections of 2012 were for a new National Assembly. Once again the Seychellois people demonstrated their maturity and wisdom. They made their choices freely and voted into the Assembly the party and people that can best represent their interests. That is democracy. That is the choice of the people. We have to accept their choices. We have to work with the new assembly. My wish – of which I am convinced – is that it will continue to promote dialogue, patriotic and democratic values, and also support legislation that responds to the aspirations of the people and those of the New Seychelles.

I support the ongoing electoral reform process which involves consultations with the people of Seychelles. The outcome of this exercise will take the form of a Bill that will be presented to the Government which will then forward it to the National Assembly for approval. Once approved and ratified, it will serve as the legal basis for all future elections.

Regarding the judiciary, there remains a perception that the dispensation of justice is slow and cumbersome. We have to recognize, however, that the judiciary is operating under many constraints, especially with regard to human and financial resources. There has to be a will from all those involved with the system of justice to continue addressing these weakness. Things have to move faster.

Order, peace and security

Mr Speaker, People of Seychelles,

A fundamental task of government is to create an environment in which citizens feel they

During meetings at community level we often hear residents pointing out that community life is no longer enjoyable. There are thieves, drug addicts, alcoholics and other anti-social elements which have taken the communities hostage. What they are saying is true.

It is no longer enjoyable. In the New Seychelles we have to reclaim our communities from the hands of delinquents and bandits. I will vigorously continue the relentless fight against crime and anti-social behavior.

Criminality, delinquency and anti-social behavior take many forms, but at the root of them all is drugs. The consumption of and trafficking in drugs encourage crime, destroys people's lives and tear families apart. We have to intensify the fight against those criminals, give them a good correction, and rehabilitate them wherever possible.

During my speech on the occasion of National Day last year I said that we would have to isolate the drug traffickers from the rest of the prison population. This is a reality today. We have just transferred 20 convicted drug traffickers to the outlying island of Marie-Louise. As many, if not more, will be transferred to the island during the coming weeks. We do not have any compassion for them. They have committed horrible crimes. They will serve their sentences far away from the people they have poisoned and other people they would have come into contact with had they remained incarcerated at Montagne Posée prison. This sends another warning to all traffickers: when you are caught you will be punished severely. On the outer islands they will learn to do productive work.

Regarding rehabilitation of prisoners, the system in place on Coetivy is functioning well. Detainees sent there are acquiring new vocational skills that will be useful to them after they have served their sentences. They are also contributing to the upkeep of the island.

I take the opportunity today to once again warn drug traffickers that Seychelles has declared war on them. Watch out! One by one they will go to Marie Louise.

In the effort to render our communities safer, and more enjoyable to live in, I am posing the following questions which I wish we shall reflect on, and which could be debated in the National Assembly:

- Is it not time to impose time restrictions on the sale of alcohol in our country? Often, quite early in the morning you see people, who are strong and able to work, drinking near shops. The same applies to canteens or brewing houses we call *lakanbiz*.
- Isn't it time to impose stricter sanctions on shopkeepers who sell alcohol and cigarettes to under-age youth?
- Is it not time to take severe actions against those undesirable persons who are a nuisance to their communities because of their behavior, and to take more severe action against prostitution?
- Should we encourage a certain culture that devalues our own way of life, our sensibilities, and our dignity as a nation, by using the national media for its promotion?

Social renaissance

Mr Speaker, people of Seychelles,

The evolution of our society sometimes results in us losing our "moral compass". We are losing some of the good moral, spiritual and cultural values our grandparents inculcated in us.

Last year I made an appeal for social renaissance in our country. Consultations held at all levels have highlighted many important issues such as education and the protection of our children and young people; parent responsibility; the importance of hard work; respect for oneself and for others; discipline, respect for the authorities and for law and order. I want to address two points in particular – education and the protection of our children and our young people; and parent's responsibility.

Everything begins with education. And education begins at home. It is reinforced by formal education in schools. I have noted that there is not enough civics education in our schools. It is through civics education that we inculcate good moral, spiritual and cultural values in our children and youth; they develop their sense of patriotism and loyalty towards their country; they learn the values of discipline and hard work; they know their rights, responsibilities and duties. In a way, we are doing this, but it is not enough. In the New Seychelles the Ministry of Education should review its curriculum to give a greater importance to civics education. It should also relook at the contents of the geography and history curriculum which should include local components. This will enable our children to better appreciate and know about their own country.

It is our duty to protect our children and our young people against bad influences and abuse. An adult who betrays the trust of a child, abuse their innocence and abuse them sexually, commit a great crime which deserves severe punishment without pity. Should they also not be sent to Marie-Louise?

Parents have the primary responsibility for their children. But it happens that there are parents who totally abdicate their responsibilities. Contrary to many countries special homes exist to provide shelter for orphans, here in Seychelles we have social orphans, meaning they are abandoned children. I have taken note, with sadness, and as a parent, that there are 77 children in the care of the state in several homes. They are in the President's Village, Foyer de Nazareth and Foyer de la Providence. There is not a single true orphan among them. Their parents have abandoned them. They had neither the love nor the care of their parents. Some among them have even been abused.

This situation cannot continue. A man and a woman cannot just bring a child into the world without thinking of the consequences, without accepting the shared responsibility for the innocent child. Shouldn't we take severe actions against irresponsible parents who neglect their children? Shouldn't we reinforce the power and the competence of the Family Tribunal? I think it is time to take punitive action against irresponsible parents.

The youth

Mr Speaker, dear brothers and sisters,

The Youth represents one of the most important pillars of our New Seychelles.

The National Youth Council will this year focus on integrated youth development programmes. These will focus on education, health, entrepreneurship, the environment, community service, and spiritual, cultural and recreational activities at all levels. These activities and services will further consolidate the programme of social renaissance.

Our success in the 8th Indian Ocean Islands Games have raised general expectations with regard to the development of sports. We shall make a special effort to consolidate our achievements and to create the right conditions to improve our performance. This year, we shall place a lot of emphasis on identifying and developing new talents from a very young age, with a view to preparing future champions of international standard. We shall also focus on the Olympic Games and the CJSOI Games. We are certain that our athletes will work even harder for Seychelles and win even victories for the New Seychelles. We wish them good luck.

GOVERNMENT RESTRUCTURING FOR THE NEW SEYCHELLES

Mr Speaker, People of Seychelles,

At the stage we have reached, and considering all that I have said about earlier on the evolution of our development, the New Seychelles will require major Government restructuring. I have reflected at length on the best structure that can satisfy the expectations of our people - so that Government remains connected with the people.

The structure of a government follows its functions; meaning that government institutions must be organized in such a way that they can deliver their services or functions in the most effective manner possible.

In my National Day Address of 2011, I announced my intention to make major changes in the public service early in 2012. The aim of these changes, generally, is for government and the public sector to give a better service to the Seychellois, and to increase our efficiency, discipline and transparency. The Government must remain connected with the people. I want to see this new team more often out there with the people. All ministers and public servants must remain connected with the people and serve the people. As President, I will ensure that this principle is respected; and I will be the first to set the example.

Before sharing my decisions on government restructuring with you, I would like to insist on a few points:

- The people of Seychelles elected me to serve them. And I shall continue working for them, as I always have. In this task, I shall need faithful, loyal and competent collaborators. These collaborators will be principally the Ministers whom I appoint. When they accept this position, they accept the responsibilities attached to it. They must agree to set aside their personal interests and ambitions. They should not use their positions to raise their status or for personal gain. They have been placed there to work hard and for a period of time. They are not appointed for life. They are above all, at the service of the people, and they remain in their posts for as long as their services are required. The same principle applies for civil servants.
- Government restructuring is not a game of musical chairs. The rotation of a minister to a new ministerial post is not only normal, but it is often a necessity. Another minister will continue the work and prove himself/herself.
- The decisions I have made on government restructuring have been taken after much reflection and they have been taken solely in the interest of the Seychellois people.
- In the new Seychelles, we will not tolerate the creation of empires.
- We will not tolerate corruption, in whatever form or from whatever origin. There is often a perception that corruption exists only in government. This is not the case. We will not make any distinctions between those who have let themselves be bought and those who have done the buying. They are both guilty and will be severely sanctioned.
- We will value meritocracy rather than just the number of years of service in Government. We will then truly value the hard work and efforts of our devoted workers.
- We recognize the potential of our young people. We put our faith in the future leaders of this country. My decision to put young people and new faces, and to promote women to key positions, is one that I sincerely believe in. Let us give them our support instead of burning them out even before they have had a chance to prove themselves.
- A person is appointed to a Board depending on his or her competence, expertise, and according to the position in the agency or department represented. This is the reason why in some cases the same people may appear simultaneously on different boards.
- A high level officer can be relocated to another post, for example, as special advisor. In the same way, a minister can be named ambassador tomorrow, to help to promote our policy of proactive diplomacy. In both cases, their new roles are as important and carry as much responsibility as their preceding roles, and this must be recognized in the new government structure. It is their expertise and experience that are being valued in the interests of the New Seychelles.

I would now like to share with you, my decisions regarding the restructuring of my Government:

Finance

Today, our economy is on the right track. We have made remarkable progress which has been recognized worldwide. However, another economic crisis is emerging on the international scene, and we must take the necessary measures to protect our country and our people from the adverse effects this can have on the progress we have already made. We must also work hard to encourage more investment in our country.

It is in this context that I have decided that the portfolios for Finance, Commerce and Investment must be put together under one minister for full-time attention.

Internal Affairs and Transport

Another area where I have found it necessary to place certain portfolios under one Minister concerns those of Home Affairs and Transport. The Home Affairs portfolio includes the Police Department, Immigration and Civil Status Department, and the Prison Services Department.

The workload in the Police Department and Prison Services has greatly increased following the intensification of the fight against serious crime, drugs, delinquency, anti-social behavior and piracy. These problems destabilize our country, our economy and our communities. A concentrated effort is required to deal with these scourges. Our people want results and we have to deliver.

I have decided to place the Transport portfolio with Home Affairs because there is an important link between the systems of transport and security.

Environment and Energy

Our environment is our most important asset. Our tourism industry depends on it. Our fishing industry depends on its management and preservation. Seychelles is considered as model of development integrated with its environment. We must continue to build on our success. We must ensure that our efforts to generate more development do not threaten our environment.

Climate change is another challenge, together with the effects that this can have on our physical environment and our way of life. We must develop new, sources of long-term and sustainable energy. All this requires a lot of research and dynamism.

I have therefore decided to create a new and separate ministry for Environment and Energy.

Tourism and Culture

Tourism is the main pillar of our economy. Up to now, our main source of visitors has been Europe; however, with the current financial crisis in that part of the world, we have to diversify our welcome towards other parts of the world as well. We have to do this with greater dynamism. The restructuring of Air Seychelles will allow us to explore these markets.

Our culture is unique. It is an opening to the world. There is the need to continue developing the Seychelles Brand to allow us to promote our cultural heritage in all its dimension and maximize our tourism potential and revenue.

I have thus decided to establish a Ministry of Tourism and Culture to bring about a new dynamism in this key sector, and combine the advantages of both portfolios to further benefit Seychelles.

Social Affairs, Community Development and Sports

The social renaissance initiative that I launched in 2011 is something that has touched every segment of our society. The issues raised during the district meetings we organized have shown us that there is a close link between social problems and community development.

An enormous amount of work remains to be done to empower the districts even more. This includes the setting up of district councils that will enable citizens to have a bigger role in the everyday lives of their communities and to assume greater responsibilities. Accordingly, I have decided to bring these two portfolios together under one Ministry of Social Affairs, Community Development and Sports.

Employment and Human Resources

Two portfolios that are already combined are those of Employment and Human Resources. Currently, these two important portfolios are also combined with that of Education, which is already a very important portfolio.

We have to look for ways to reduce our reliance on expatriate labour, especially through skills acquisition programmes for our workers. Much research and follow-up work needs to be done on employment profiles in this country so that school programmes and other educational institutions can be aligned with our future human resources needs for national development.

We must equally modernize our employment laws to create a more favourable climate to encourage people to be gainfully instead of abusing our welfare system.

I believe it is time to create a ministry that will be responsible for Employment and Human Resources only, to give the minister responsible for these portfolios enough time to undertake detailed studies and solve the problems in this sector.

Education

The education portfolio is so important, and at this point in time, it requires so much attention that I have decided it must have a minister dedicated to it to ensure its positive development.

A good education, especially in the first years of a child's life, is what will put the children on the right path; and with the guidance and care of parents and teachers, they can avoid falling into bad company and acquiring undesirable habits. It is those formative years that are the key to success. I sincerely believe that if we want to see real social renaissance in our country, we have to start with our children. Our education system has to make this happen. Education is the key to our future.

Health

When we speak on the state of the nation we have to talk also about the state of health of the Seychellois nation. The expectations of the public and the patients are very high, and the Ministry of Health must find innovative solutions to the problems that exist there.

We must at the same time, each take responsibility for our personal health. Let us appreciate life. Let us appreciate and value the health care that the state provides for us.

Just as in Education, the Health system is an area where we cannot fail to provide a good service.

Foreign Affairs

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will continue to have an important role in promoting our policy of proactive diplomacy and to reinforce friendly and cooperative ties with other countries in the region as well as on the international stage; this, in order to seek help and support for Seychelles where necessary and also continue to play a leading role in important areas, particularly in our region, but also at international level. These include areas such as actions vis-à-vis climate change, protection of the environment, the struggle against piracy, the struggle for social and economic justice.

Lands and Housing

I will reinforce the capacity of the Ministry of Lands and Housing for the better planning of our land use, territories and resources in general, and thus be in a better position to address the needs of citizens who are need housing or land for development.

Our housing development programme will continue and we will also create new mechanisms that will allow the private sector to play a bigger role in this domain.

I will create a new Agency for Planning and Projects Implementation that will bring together all professionals in the field of civil engineering in the public sector, so that there will be a more efficient use of expertise in this key area. This agency will be responsible for all government projects.

The role of the Housing Finance Company (HFC) will also be reviewed to transform into a financial institution.

A new agency, the Property Management Company, will be responsible for the management of government properties.

Natural Resources and Industry

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Industry will continue to ensure the good management of fishing and agricultural sectors, to guarantee food security for every Seychellois. It will also ensure that where our marine resources are exploited by foreign vessels, Seychelles will gain what it deserves from those activities. There are lots of policy development to be implemented in the areas of agriculture and fishing, and we shall pursue these through consultations with our professionals in the fields.

Small and medium industries contribute towards the creation of wealth and employment. The Ministry will be tasked with creating the most favourable conditions for their development. The Ministry will also be responsible for oversight of a new Agency for the management of industrial estates.

The Vice-President's portfolio

The Vice-President has done a remarkable job in managing our macro-economic reform, and the management of our national budget and economy. I congratulate him for this. We have discussed and agreed that as our economy is now on a solid base, we can place this portfolio in the hands of another minister who will be responsible for it full time, and the Vice-President will give me an even bigger helping hand in the management of the New Seychelles. At the same time, he will dedicate even more energy to the management of the other portfolios that will remain under his direction.

The Vice-President will continue to keep the portfolio for Information Technology & Communications. This central portfolio is very important for the modernization of our information technology systems, especially with the anticipated arrival this year of the fibre optic submarine cables that will bring us internet services at a speed that will radically transform the architecture of our systems of communication, information, leisure and business.

The Vice-President will also keep the Public Administration portfolio which is central to the effective administration of government services and its agencies.

The President's portfolio

As President, I will keep the portfolios for Defence, Legal Affairs, Information, and hydrocarbons, the last of which comprises petroleum exploration.

I have equally decided to keep the Youth portfolio, in view of my personal commitment and devotion to the young people, and the work that I wish to continue doing with them, as well as my involvement in various programmes such as the Young Leaders Programme. In this area, I will count on the support of the National Youth Council, which will remain an autonomous institution.

Mr Speaker,

This, in brief, is the government restructuring which I intend to put in place during the coming days. Of course, it is not this restructuring alone that will improve this government. Without the devotion, commitment and perseverance of all workers, we will never be able to achieve our objectives.

I raise my hat to all public service workers who are exemplary in their work, are productive, and always try their best to give a service delivery that is timely, of the best possible quality, and who take a compassionate approach to the needs of their clients.

There is no place in this 'New Seychelles' for a public service that is not interested in giving a good service, hard work, productivity and innovation.

Ministers and chief executives who are responsible for public organizations will ensure that the performance of their staff will be closely monitored. They will ensure that hard work is rewarded and that appropriate measures are taken against those whose performance or conduct is not acceptable.

Mr. Speaker

Dear Seychellois brothers and sisters,

We are standing on the peak of the mountain. We are standing proud in this New Seychelles. We are looking back on the road we have already travelled, we are taking note of how far we have come. We are enjoying our freedom and all our accomplishments so far. We are conscious, however, of the responsibilities and obligations that come with these. We are enjoying the fruit of our labour; the potential to do even better is there within our reach.

We have a youth filled with the hope of opportunity. Our workers live in hope that their hard work will also be recognized. Our children are being educated; our elderly live in dignity. It is no longer the time for mediocrity and a laissez-faire attitude. We want to do better, much better. Together, we are creating a brilliant future. It requires an enormous effort on the part of all of us. It requires love and loyalty towards our motherland. It requires peace, harmony and unity. I am calling on all Seychellois to come together for the continued progress of our country. I am ready to work alongside you all; to work for a New Seychelles.

A great Seychellois artiste, Patrick Victor, expresses this message that is deep in meaning, and which touches the heart of every patriot: *"O Seselwa ... leve e sant lespwar pour sa later ki pour ou. O Seselwa ozordi pouvwar i pour ou. Ser lanmen e mars ver ou desten En nasyon pour menm glwar e menm viktwar ..."*

There you are, dear people of Seychelles. Let this message inspire us towards the beauty of the future that we can realise together, if we all work together, work hard and create together – the future of our New Seychelles.

Thank you

May God continue to bless and protect our Seychelles.

A copy of this speech, and its original Kreol version, may be accessed on the State House web site at <http://www.statehouse.gov.sc>