

**National Day Address
by President James Alix Michel**

18th June 2010

His Excellency Mr Kamalesh Sharma, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth

President René

President Mancham

Excellencies

Distinguished Guests

Dear Seychellois brothers and sisters,

What is it that makes us the Seychellois nation that we are?

The answer is all around us. We are a blessed nation, the descendants of people from different continents. We are a proud nation whose social, racial and religious cohesion is the solid foundation that guarantees our peace and stability. We are a people who are the keepers of a country that is small in land area but of immense natural beauty. We are a people whom the world describes as warm and welcoming.

Truly, these are what make us the proud Seychellois nation that we are.

On the occasion of our National Day today, let us once again celebrate our Seychellois pride and all that makes us this Seychellois nation.

Before proceeding further, I would like to extend a warm welcome on behalf of the Seychellois people, to Mr Kamalesh Sharma, Secretary General of the Commonwealth, and Mrs Sharma, our guests of honour at this year's celebrations. We are proud to have you here with us today, where on our National Day we also celebrate the ideals of the Commonwealth family -- peace, unity, harmony, tolerance, good governance and mutual respect.

The people of Seychelles also warmly welcome the representatives of armed forces of India, France and the United Kingdom. Our Seychellois men and women in uniform are proud to march by your side on this auspicious occasion. Your presence here today also bears testimony to your crucial support as we continue to battle against the scourge of piracy.

Our national day also reminds us that we belong to this expanse of Indian Ocean which we share with our island neighbours. On the eve of the year when we will be hosting the Indian Ocean Island Games, we are proud of the increasingly important role that Seychelles is playing in the region and on the international stage. June 18 therefore is a reminder that our history is similar to that of our brothers and sisters in the region. We are celebrating a shared history which gives us, as one region and as individual nations, added strength to overcome the challenges ahead.

Seychelles is today at a crossroads. We are a small country but have not been spared the effects of calamities or world crises. Our social, racial and religious cohesion has always been the assurance of

our prosperity and progress. It is our unity in diversity that in the most difficult times enabled us to remain strong and full of hope.

We are living in new times. We cannot afford to live in isolation. At this juncture in the life of our nation, you as the children of Seychelles and I, as your leader, have been offered the opportunity to continue ushering in real and meaningful changes in our country.

We are looking at a new generation of Seychellois, whose circumstances are different to the generation who struggled for independence and liberation, and worked hard but with passion, to build our country and bring about the transformation our country has gone through.

The new generation of Seychellois wants to build on our achievements and to see continual positive changes. This new generation is today ready to take our country onto its next level of development, aware at the same time of the world realities.

In order to achieve this we need to always have a new way of doing things, with an approach that is innovative and sincere. Our country has known much success. But we cannot simply remain where we are, say that we have done enough and that we don't need anybody anymore. The world changes, people change and we, too, have to remain abreast of the realities of the world.

Recently, I announced changes in several ministerial portfolios and appointed new government ministers. The measures represent a balance between continuity and change so that our country moves forward with the same momentum as the rest of the world, and of which the Seychellois people want to be part. All my decisions are founded on considerations that are in the interest of my people. The style of my work as President is to always remain close to my people and attentive to what they have to say. I also believe that a government has to be dynamic and serious in its work. I take the occasion of my address today to once again speak about the importance of teamwork. It is impossible to satisfy everybody and we witness this too often, we judge someone by perception. I am appealing to all civil servants to work as a team and turn their organisations into good models for others. The Minister alone, the director alone, the manager alone will not be able to do it.

So, what is it that we have to do to continue to be good examples for others and guarantee the progress and prosperity of our country?

Dear People of Seychelles,

We have spoken a lot about our economic reform and its success. We surprised ourselves and the world with our resilience during the time the economic crisis was hitting us hard. We confirmed to all our partners overseas how a small country whose people are united and determined can achieve what many others thought was impossible.

We have demonstrated our capacity as a people. And this is the basis of my policy of active economic diplomacy which we have pursued with all our partners.

In all my discussions with governments and institutions overseas I have given one strong and clear message -- that Seychelles is picking itself up and striving.

And while I am conveying the message with pride, I continue looking for ways to earn more support for the Seychellois people.

I will never hesitate to do whatever it takes to enable me to get more support for my people.

I feel proud and I salute the determination that the Seychellois people have demonstrated.

But economic reform alone is not enough to guarantee the progress and prosperity of our country. Although some of our policies are working well, and although we do not hear of complaints about certain services, we cannot just remain idle and say everything is alright. We have to be ready to take on new challenges. We have to be ready to do even better.

The guarantee of a better quality of life for the Seychellois people remains central in all that we do.

While we were implementing our reform programme, I have always made it my personal mission to always look for ways to improve our quality of life and also to give as much assistance as possible to the most vulnerable.

In the same context, reduction in the cost of living has all the time been a priority. I have always done everything possible to ensure that government provided the necessary support whenever it could.

We should, always, find the balance between the level of assistance and the realities in the world economy. We have to always act in a responsible and realistic manner.

This is what we have done regarding the electricity tariffs, which would have been higher when taking into account the costs of fuel and the investments necessary in this energy sector. We engaged in intensive efforts with our partners in order to ease the impact on Seychellois consumers.

I kept saying that as the reform brings results Seychellois would get the benefits. It is therefore with great satisfaction that today I am announcing a reduction in bus fares, from R7 to R5. The new fare which comes into effect on 1st July, reflects the intense work we have been doing for over a year to have a pricing structure that renders this fare reduction possible.

We have the reduction thanks to a donation from a friendly country and also as a result of improvements in the efficiency of SPTC operations. We will continue to work for more improvement in the bus service. We must remain conscious of the fact that the bus fare is inevitably determined by the price of fuel on the international market. We always pray that the world does not suffer from the kinds of fuel crises that it experienced in 2008.

Dear people of Seychelles,

Reduction of the cost of living is the responsibility of the entire society.

As I have stated on many occasions it is very important for the success of our economic reform that all stakeholders in our economy take their responsibilities.

One issue that continues to preoccupy me is the reticence of the commercial banks to bring down their rates of interest on credit.

Our government has opted to play the role of facilitator as we redynamise our economy and to accelerate growth. We would rather wish that this role of facilitator could be a passive one.

But I cannot wait anymore, and I am taking actions to inject oxygen into our economy.

Financial institutions in which government is the majority shareholder are reducing interests on loans at all levels.

DBS (Development Bank of Seychelles) will reduce its rate of interest from 10% to 8.5% as from 1st September. This will be made possible because of two new bonds to be issued by DBS. These offer innovative options for investors. There are many advantages. These bonds are guaranteed by government.

HFC (Housing Finance Corporation) will lower its interest rate from 7% to 6%. As is the case with DBS, government will also guarantee HFC loans.

In addition to what DBS and HFC will be doing, I have also taken measures to ensure that interest rates at Savings Bank and Nouvobanq go down, too. The principal rate of interest, which is also known as the "Prime Rate" will be reduced to 6%. Housing loans will come down to 7% on average. All other loans will be offered at interest rates not exceeding 10%.

I am very confident that this initiative will help individuals, as well as businesses, big and small, to have access to credit facilities that offer more favourable terms. And this is what will enable our economy to continue growing.

In the social sectors, education and health remain our priority.

There is a saying in French that goes:

Are you preparing for the future?

For one day? Sow a seed.

For a year? Plant a tree.

For one hundred years? Educate your people.

The earlier we are able to give our children access to educational opportunities, the more we will develop as a nation. It has often been said that the best investment is in education. I totally agree with that!

It has always been my wish to facilitate access by our children to more advanced information technology. For several years now my government has prepared a plan of investment and improvement of resources in schools but because of the lack of funds there have been delays in the realisation of the programme. As a result of an active partnership with a friendly country, we will now be able to speed up the implementation of the programme in all schools. We will start the programme in primary schools which will receive new information technology facilities and be provided with access to modern and efficient equipment.

In the health sector, we are putting in place a special project to upgrade the hospitals and health services in general. This project is estimated to cost over SR30 million this year, and will continue into next year.

The investment will complement the gradual reform in the health sector and is part of our overall vision to ensure that the Seychellois people enjoy a higher quality of life from the level of services they receive. In this context, I repeat again that our most important resource is our human resource. We continue to give our full support to the health employees who are on duty day and night, working for the wellbeing of their compatriots.

Dear People of Seychelles,

I have today shared with you some of the things we are doing to enable all of us to enjoy a better quality of life.

I will always look at the future of our country with sincerity. I do all I can to protect and promote the interest of my country and my people.

And our National Day reminds us of the most important values we need to have -- unity and harmony -- in order to enjoy a higher quality of life.

When the first inhabitants coming from different continents landed on our islands, they started the foundation of the nation that we are today. During all the years, generation after generation, we struggled and toiled. When we look around us today, when we hoist the colours of our flag and sing our national anthem, let us remind ourselves of the distance we have travelled, and look at the future. Seychelles is moving forward fast. Our country is undergoing a transformation. We are seeing a Seychelles that is more open and a society that is more diverse. We are seeing a lot of consultations and debate at all levels. We will continue to create the conditions that will enable our young democracy to develop further. Together let us keep our focus on finding solutions for our challenges. Let us continue to build the Seychellois nation and consolidate the pillars of our society that make us stand tall. We may have our differences but we must always share the vision of a brighter future for our country.

Together, we will continue to transform Seychelles!

Together, we are making Seychelles progress!

Together, we are ready for the future!

I wish all Seychellois, here and overseas, a happy National Day.

May God continue to bless our country and the Seychellois nation.

Thank you.