

## **National Day Address by President James Alix Michel 18th June 2011**

Dear People of Seychelles,  
Your Excellency Mr. Jakaya Kikwete, President of the United Republic of Tanzania,  
President Mancham,  
Your Excellencies,  
Distinguished guests,

A nation is born and is shaped by history and the achievements of its people. It goes through several stages in its history. It is with immense pride today that we mark a decisive step in the history of our country. It is with a deep sense of pride and accomplishment that we celebrate the 18th anniversary of our Third Republic. Eighteen years in the life of a person is a time of great importance, a solemn occasion. It signifies maturity. It signifies the transition from adolescence to adulthood, with new responsibilities, rights and obligations. It is the same for our small country. Today, we celebrate, with joy and in unity, the maturity of our Third Republic -- maturity in all its aspects. The New Seychelles is ready. With all its children of goodwill, it is calling on all Seychellois to overcome the new challenges we face. The New Seychelles is asking us to give ourselves, our families, our communities, a new commitment for the progress of our country.

On behalf of the people of Seychelles I would like to extend a very warm welcome to President and Mrs. Kikwete, who are our guests of honour for our National Day. Seychelles and Tanzania enjoy very close relations, not least because of our adherence to a number of continental and international organisations. But also because of a common vision that has characterised our relations since our struggle for independence. We thank you, Mr. President, for being with us on our National Day which is a celebration of our unity and harmony. Your presence is a powerful testimony to the importance we attach to our bilateral relations, to African solidarity and to the values we hold in common.

Dear people of Seychelles,

We are gathered today, proud of our values and anxious to preserve them, wishing to progress in unison towards the objectives of our aspirations that will earn us greater harmony, solidarity and wellbeing for all. Faced with multiple challenges that we might encounter, we remain fearless, conscious that together we will overcome all the difficulties, and anticipate every victory that will come mark our route. In the dynamics of our evolution we are not short of support from the international community. We thank all the friendly countries and regional and international partners for their support.

Dear people of Seychelles,

The New Seychelles is, of course, founded on the achievements that we, the Seychellois people, have accomplished so far. It is based on the hard work of those who were here before us. It is founded on our own work. The New Seychelles is achievable because of the experience our people have accumulated throughout their history. It is possible because of the growing maturity

of the Seychellois people. It is possible because we realize that for our small country to survive and blossom in this changing and difficult world environment, we have to bring together all our forces, all our talents, all our resources, all our goodwill. It is possible because the Seychellois people have the qualities, the values that promote unity, love and harmony. It is possible because Seychellois have the capacity to work, they are intelligent, and they are determined.

Recently we exercised our civic right in peace and serenity. The international community have acknowledged the good conduct of the election and its result. The majority of the Seychellois people have entrusted to me another five-year mandate as their President. Once again, I thank you for the display of your confidence in me. Let us make a commitment to our country to work even harder. Join me. Together, during the next five years, let us work so that our vision can become a reality.

The accomplishment of our vision depends on our determination, our commitment and hard work. There is no magic wand to help us overcome the challenges we face. We have to do it through our own sweat. God has given us the courage, strength and intelligence to do it. We can do it through our work. Let us do it so that Seychelles can improve and become better. Let us do it together, with a sense of patriotism, in the spirit of national unity, with innovation, for the New Seychelles.

In the New Seychelles I will take harsh measures against those who believe they can hold our country hostage. We will not tolerate xenophobia and systematic propaganda which sow hatred in the name of freedom of expression. We have to eliminate all bad practices which can hold us back in our development, and which can damage our international image. One example is corruption. I say it loudly that corruption in the New Seychelles, in both the public and private sectors, will not be tolerated. It is not a phenomenon that is widespread in our administration and our country in general, but I will cut its head off once and for all if and where it exists. Firm action, without pity, will be taken where we hear there is corruption undermining us, and where we have proof of it.

In my inauguration address I spoke of a moral, spiritual, cultural and social renaissance. Today, I want to go further. We have to deal with a host of social problems -- the trafficking and consumption of drugs, crime, delinquency, antisocial behaviour, prostitution, alcohol abuse, child abuse, and others. We have to fight these social scourges with courage and determination. Some of the crimes have been so shocking that some of us have been asking where our country is heading to. What has happened to the fabric of our society which has traditionally been characterized by our peaceful atmosphere and our sense of compassion?

When violence and crime reach even our homes, when criminal activities shake our communities, we have to better equip our institutions to deal with the alarming increase in crime. We often hear talk of making our police force more efficient, more professional, to fight crime. Yes, there are plenty of improvements to be made. Our forces of law and order must remain connected to the people. We also need to strengthen the culture of respect for the law, respect for State structures and institutions. And, of course, respect for others. We are all for a country that is clean and that functions well. A country where discipline is the norm. We will not tolerate crime, theft, banditry ... in our country. But we also have to be realistic. The Police catch

criminals --- they arrest many criminals. But if after the justice system remains cumbersome, slow and lethargic, we will continue to see a rise in crime in our country. It is the judiciary, and not the Police, that judges and sentences criminals. Therefore, things have to be fixed, if we are to win the fight against crime.

Those who break the law will have to face the consequences. And depending on the gravity of their crimes, they will serve their sentences far away from Mahe, far away from society, and where they will also have the possibilities to rehabilitate themselves.

Drug trafficking and drug abuse are often the reason for crime. Therefore, in the context of our policy of zero tolerance, we are preparing a new initiative which will target traffickers and consumers. We will be harsh and pitiless against traffickers. We will show compassion towards consumers and give them the opportunity to rehabilitate. The Police, NDEA, FIU, Judiciary and of course our communities in general, are all included in this new initiative. It consists of several components such as education and public sensitization, increased financing, more resources, additional training for the law and order agencies, the detention of traffickers on an outlying island, amendments to the laws to reinforce and speed up prosecution, the confiscation of the proceeds of crime, and a comprehensive rehabilitation programme for consumers in a special centre where they will also receive help to undergo detoxication and reintegration into society. I am proposing that one or two judges are appointed to deal specifically with drugs cases rapidly. It is not acceptable that hundreds of persons who have been arrested for drug trafficking and possession remain free and continue with their business of poisoning our nation. Our people have had enough of this drugs scourge. They are asking for decisive action and severe measures. We all have to join this fight.

Furthermore, our country is in need of a moral, spiritual, cultural and social REVOLUTION, for us to regain our traditional values, and to inculcate these values in our children. Those who are responsible for the education of our children, be they parents or teachers, have to make a serious and sincere commitment towards ensuring that our children are brought up with the values that we inherited from our grandparents. The perception that government is responsible for everything has to change. The New Seychelles, the new commitment, demands that that the time has come for you to become an active partner in your own personal development, and in the progress of our families, communities and country. The only way to ensure that we sustain our economic reform programme, which has brought us a lot of success, is to bring up strong men and women who have self-esteem and respect for their country. Soon I will launch a national dialogue which will include the participation of representatives of all districts and communities. We will hold debates and find the cure to the diseases gnawing away at our communities. This national debate is the first priority on my agenda for the next five years. It will provide the basis for all the decisions that government will take to enable all of us together to find strategies to fight the social ills in our country.

The national dialogue will also address the health service. I am fully aware that the majority of professionals in that sector are working with devotion and professionalism, often under difficult conditions. However, there remains a perception that our service delivery is not good enough, that the health care we provide is not at the level of expectations. What is clear to me is that we have to re-establish confidence in our health system. Where it is necessary to eliminate weaknesses, we shall do so. Where it is necessary to strengthen or replace existing structures,

we shall do so. We must, in particular, put in place a new management system for the health service. But we also have to assume our personal responsibility for our own health.

Public service has always been an issue of concern. A public service that is attentive, well prepared, compassionate, dynamic and efficient, is a reflection of the State and government. It is there to serve all citizens, without exception. It must remain connected with the people, always listening to what people have to say. In the New Seychelles, our public service has to be staffed by dynamic people who are professional and serious. They must be innovative, and have the interest of the people at heart. In the New Seychelles we must aim for excellence. I will not tolerate mediocrity and laissez-faire. It is important that we undertake positive changes that address public concerns. In the New Seychelles, we shall clean up wherever it is necessary. I have always said that I do not work for election only, rather all my decisions are based on what is good for Seychelles and thre Seychellois people.

At the first meeting of my new Cabinet of Ministers, I gave clear instructions that each Ministry should undertake an evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, and the opportunities and challenges that it faces. Each Ministry should present a document which not only notes these points, but also includes an implementation plan to improve its services and eliminate bad practice.

Public service is a noble and satisfying task. Let us discharge our duties and responsibilities with compassion. I am also aware that if Government wishes to retain its best professionals to make the public service function, it must pay them well, and motivate them to stay and give of their best. I have asked the Department of Public Administration to work on an appropriate scheme of service.

At the same time, in order to achieve our aims and objectives, we have to make sure we put in place measures to improve the public service. I intend to propose major changes in the public service early next year. Such an exercise necessitates the allocation of a budget, changes in certain regulations and policy, in order to put in place facilities to guarantee the change in the public service. It is important that we make positive changes that reflect the concerns of the public.

We cannot treat the public service in isolation from the private sector. The private sector is also a privileged partner of Government in contributing to policy making and strategic planning. It is not Government's role to set up businesses; it is Government's role to create the platform upon which businesses can flourish. We create that environment that will bring greater prosperity and well-being for Seychelles. And today, businesses – large foreign investments as well as big Seychellois enterprises – are doing well. They have a duty to show social corporate responsibility to their communities. They could play a greater role in supporting the communities in which they have grown, or do business. Our country has given you the opportunities to succeed and thrive, so do not let Government alone shoulder the burden of supporting communities. Let us assume our responsibilities. For example, adopt a school in the district. Adopt a playground. Adopt a clinic. Get more involved in the community. In our New Seychelles, everyone has to make a contribution. And we count on you.

Another point which I think we must consider is the role of the Opposition in our country. The New Seychelles is characterised by a participative and evolving democracy. But now we need to go further in this direction. We have to aim higher, and always put the interests of Seychelles above all. We need an Opposition that is serious. That is clear for Seychellois who have expressed their opinion in the ballot box. We hope to see an Opposition that is loyal to the country. An Opposition that respects the integrity and intelligence of the people of Seychelles. An Opposition that is more mature, like our democracy. A constructive Opposition. People are asking for an Opposition which debates in the interests of Seychellois in the National Assembly, and corrects the Government where it is wrong. And I, and my Government, are ready to work with the Opposition if they follow these criteria. If they adopt these patriotic values. If they join us in building a new Seychelles. If they give us a new commitment. As for me, my arms are wide open. My heart is open. We need all the sons and daughters of Seychelles – without exception – in building this great enterprise. Let us, in this New Seychelles, promote more dialogue and consultation. There is no place for hatred, contempt, xenophobia, violence and insults.

Dear People of Seychelles,

This evolution towards our aspirations for a New Seychelles demands a radical transformation. A transformation in the way with think, in the way we act, and in the way we work. Above all, a structural and institutional transformation.

I have always believed in the devolution of power. That is to say, more power for the people. Reinforce power in the hands of our communities. It is the people who have brought us where we are today. We must listen to the people and to their aspirations. Remain engaged with them. My aim is to put more power in the hands of our communities. The best way to do this is through District Councils which will be elected by the inhabitants of each district. It is the elected representatives who will solve the problems that people bring to them. This too, will be addressed by the national dialogue which will decide on how to proceed with this proposal. We feel the great need to decentralize services. We have already made some starts towards decentralization. We have started, but we must ensure its efficiency.

We must continually sensitise our communities on the importance of getting up and striving for oneself, instead of depending on others or on the State. There is employment in the country, and we are continuing to create opportunities for more employment in line with the growth of the economy. Today, when the majority of people are fending for themselves, and when there are many opportunities for employment, let us encourage those who are without a job to find productive employment. For you the citizen who has not yet decided to get up and strive for yourself, the time has come for you to do so. We are living in a new Seychelles. I acknowledge, nevertheless, that there are certain weaknesses in the system of placing young people in employment. The Ministry concerned should address these weaknesses immediately. If there are many employment opportunities in the country, why then does it take a young unemployed person more than three months, and sometimes even longer, to get a job and start working? All work is noble. The fruits of all our labour contribute to the development and prosperity of our country. I appeal to all those who can work, and who are not working, especially the young, to seize the opportunities that exist. Let us do it for ourselves, our families, our communities, and our country. Let us get up and strive!

Of course, those who cannot work, for example the disabled, and – in some seasons – farmers, local fishermen and stevedores – the State will always protect you. We will continue to provide assistance through the Social Welfare Agency. This Agency is the subject of almost all my speeches. I speak often of the need to review procedures and help those who need assistance. I will continue to speak out on behalf of those who are disappointed with this Agency. I shall always say that it is wrong when a person in need has to wait over one month, or even longer, to get a reply to their application. We shall put an end to such frustrations. This Agency will have to fix what is not working. I challenge the Ministry concerned to review the efficiency and procedures of this Agency to provide needed assistance. Let us never allow a child to go to bed on an empty stomach because of weaknesses in a system set up specifically to assist the more vulnerable.

Another source of frustration and annoyance among our citizens is the slowness of procedure in the Planning Authority. There are too many complaints about its functioning. This ties the hands of our people. They become frustrated. It places obstacles in our development. This kind of mentality and unnecessary bureaucracy must stop at once. We shall review the functioning of the Planning Authority very quickly.

When we speak about structural and institutional transformation, there are a number of things we must do to consolidate and further our political maturity and democratic culture. You will recall that some time ago I set up a Constitutional Review Committee which included representatives of political parties and the civil society. That Committee had made certain recommendations which I have been considering. More recently, the recommendations of the presidential electoral observers reiterated the measures that I was already taking, to strengthen our democracy and remain engaged with the people.

Firstly, I shall establish an Electoral Commission. Its function will include a revision of all legislation concerning elections held in Seychelles, including the regulatory framework for political parties in line with Articles 117 and 118 of our Constitution, and regulations concerning the sources of funding and expenditures of political parties. The creation of an Electoral Commission will necessitate an amendment to our Constitution. The Bill for this amendment has already been submitted to the National Assembly.

Secondly, and again in line with the recommendations of the Constitutional Review Committee, we shall be amending the Public Order Act. The amendments will be presented to the National Assembly very shortly.

Thirdly, the Ministry of Finance & Trade will be reducing the licence fees for the operation of private radio and television stations. Their activities will continue to be governed by law. Again, in the context of reinforcing democracy, transparency and good governance in the New Seychelles, and modernising our society, there is an urgent need to review and update certain laws which have become archaic. For example, today the people who have built on land that they had inherited, but whose ownership has been contested, or has not been legally subdivided, cannot benefit from a bank loan to repair or rebuild their houses. This is not fair, and we must rectify this situation, and many others through legal means.

In our New Seychelles, we need a Defence Force which is ready to face any eventuality. They are guardians of our sovereignty, and the ultimate shield against all threats to our territorial

integrity. In recent times, they have proved their worth, their bravery, professionalism and loyalty toward the Republic. The threat of piracy will not disappear so soon; it will be a long struggle. And our Defence Forces are there to ensure that we pursue a battle without pity against this scourge. All Seychellois must give support to our Defence Forces. I am taking measures to bring the Defence Forces to new levels which reflect today's realities. Our armed forces must be well trained by good military leaders, well looked after and well equipped with the necessary skills to accomplish their mission.

Finally, dear Brothers and Sisters of Seychelles, the Flame of the Indian Ocean Island Games, which has just arrived on the Seychelles soil, and which I shall receive, in a few moments, on behalf of all Seychellois, reminds us that there are only 48 days left for this great sporting event which Seychelles will be hosting for the second time. We are ready for this great regional sporting encounter. Our athletes are ready to bring victory and glory for Seychelles. We all, in our patriotic fervor, shall accompany them on this mission. We count on you, and we wish you the best of luck.

Dear Brothers and Sisters of Seychelles,

Eighteen years ago, we adopted a new Constitution, new national symbols, new institutional structures, both legal and administrative, which have transformed us into what we are today: a modern, democratic, far-sighted State. We have undertaken this journey together. We cradled the Third Republic in its infancy. We have guided it through its adolescence. And we have brought it to maturity. We can be proud of the fruits of our labour. The results are here. This New Seychelles requires even more work. It requires excellence. I shall continue to dedicate myself to this New Seychelles, with all my courage and all my determination. I shall continue to remain at the service of the people for as long as they need me. I shall always be the President of all Seychellois. Seven years ago, we started to climb a mountain together. Today we have arrived at its summit. Our work and our paths have taken a new dimension. Let us now put our courage and energy together and build the New Seychelles. Each one of us must play our part. We shall do it together for our New Seychelles.

Long live Seychelles! Long live the Republic!

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

May God continue to bless and protect our beautiful Seychelles!

Thank You