

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

18th June 2012

Dear People of Seychelles,

Your Excellency Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, Prime Minister of Mauritius,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests

A people who are united are a people who can confront adversity with determination. They are a people who are not afraid of challenges. They are a people who shape their destiny through hard work. They are a people who have a place – with pride – in the international community.

When we raise our flag, we do it with great pride. When we sing our National Anthem, a surge of patriotism and solidarity fills our hearts. Today, on the occasion of our National Day, through the sacred symbols of our Republic, I invite us all to reaffirm our love for our motherland, and to rededicate ourselves to work together, with greater effort for our New Seychelles, and to live always in harmony, joy, love and peace.

Our National Day is always a joyful occasion. But today our joy is tempered by the absence of our two compatriots, Rolly Tambara and Marc Songoire who are still being held hostage in Somalia. We have a special thought for them. I want to reassure the families of Rolly and Marc that we will pursue all our efforts to have them freed. Let us continue to pray for their return to our country safe and sound, to their families.

Dear Seychellois people,

We are honoured to have among us today a highly distinguished guest and a great friend of Seychelles. It gives me great pleasure to welcome the Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius, Dr Navin Ramgoolam. Prime Minister, you are as much at home here as you are in your own country. It is an honour and a pleasure to have you with us. We appreciate your presence which is a testimony of the friendship and renewal of the strong links – very strong ties – that exist between our two countries and our peoples.

The bonds forged over time by what Mauritius and Seychelles share together – our history, our language and many cultural aspects, our democratic and human values, our ocean, and, in a world that is increasingly complex and in turmoil, we have a strong desire to work together for the wellbeing and prosperity of our two peoples and of our Indian Ocean region, for the interests of small island states, and for a world economic and political order that is more just and harmonious. It is my wish – and I know it is yours too – that Mauritius and Seychelles strengthen their links even further, in many fields. Together we will continue to strive to bring sustainable and dynamic development to our region. Together, and especially through the Indian Ocean Commission, we will continue to work to bring the peoples of the Indian

Ocean closer together. Thank you for your solidarity and friendship, and for sharing this moment with us.

Dear people of Seychelles,

The commemoration of our National Day is also the occasion to appreciate and celebrate our work and our accomplishments. For a nation with a population of less than 90,000 and a history of a little over 200 years, we have come a long way. We have achieved a lot, especially in the last four decades. We know the successes we have achieved in different sectors, including those of the youth. And we should be proud of what we have accomplished as a people.

There are many other achievements which distinguish us as a nation. As examples, we are the first in Africa and 52nd in the world on the United Nations Human Development Index. Again according to the United Nations we are top in Africa regarding E-government. The whole world acknowledges our leadership role in sustainable development and environmental protection. We have also earned worldwide recognition for our empowerment of women and the youth. Among our other achievements that make us proud are our macro-economic reform programme, our University, our Young Leaders training programme, and our successes and our sustained fight against piracy.

I take this occasion to commend all Seychellois who have worked hard, who have scored successes great and small.

Our achievements are our pride. These are proof that we can progress further, and they motivate us to continually give of our best always. As individuals or as a nation, we cannot rest on our laurels.

We live in a complex world where changes occur fast and where there is increasing uncertainty. We were used to seeing difficulties and problems in developing countries. But recently we see that even developed nations, those countries we considered as some of the most influential in political and economic terms, are also facing hardships.

We just have to take a look around us, in this huge global village. Everyone has access to television and radio. Let us look at Europe.

In Spain the rate of unemployment has reached 25%. More than 50% of its youth, who are well educated, are unemployed. The situation in Greece is worse. People are getting poor. There is no social security. A large number of people are without insurance which means that they have no funding for medical care. People are unable to repay their loans and the banks are repossessing their houses. Unemployment is on the rise. Salaries and pensions are being reduced. Businesses are going bankrupt. Government services, such as education and health care, are being affected.

The situation in several countries is really hard, and may get even worse. There is no immediate solution. Austerity, less spending, sacrifices and more sacrifices – these are the only remedies they can think of.

The difficulties of large economies have become global problems whose consequences impact us. The cost of commodities is rising. Tourist arrivals from certain countries have dropped. Our hotels have to lower their rates and there is a consequent decrease in revenue.

Maritime piracy makes things more difficult. We have to spend more to defend ourselves. There are increases in the costs of transportation, insurance and goods.

In this situation we have to remain vigilant and not slide backward. We have to ensure that we preserve the social and economic gains we have earned with much effort. We cannot regress.

In this uncertain world we have to tackle the difficulties we face with determination. No one will gift us anything. We have to take our responsibilities. We have to work hard, even harder, for our families, for our children. We have to strive for Seychelles, this New Seychelles that we want to take forward.

Work hard!

This is what we should all be doing, as good citizens of Seychelles.

This is what we should all be doing, as true patriots.

This is what I always ask my government and all public sector workers to do.

This is what I always encourage the private sector to do.

This is what all Seychellois should be doing – working hard for the wellbeing of our families and our Seychelles.

And there is no shortage of work in our country. Yes, there is work. Work is waiting for workers. Let us work to produce, to create wealth, to avoid falling into need, and to avoid becoming dependent on the state.

This is the first condition for us to not lose our gains and to ensure that we continue to progress.

Another condition is for us to know our priorities well.

We have to be realistic and live according to our means. We cannot have everything that we desire all at once. It is important that we avoid wastage, and plan our budget, balance our expenditure with the revenue we earn through our work. And it would be good if we are able to put a little aside for the hard times.

It is important that we use our resources, our money, wisely.

In the context of the free market and an open economy like ours – where anybody can import goods, and where there is no price control – competition is supposed to be a principal factor in price regulation. And this is where STC has a critical role to play. I have instructed STC to diversify its sources of supplies overseas in order to get better value for its imports and as a means to bring more competition in the local market, bring down prices as far as possible and give all Seychellois a better deal.

I have also instructed it to publish the prices of goods in the media to allow the public to judge for themselves, and make their choices.

Dear people of Seychelles,

The issues of cost of living, inflation, the need to control public spending, are realities facing governments all over the world. The present economic crisis will be around for quite a while.

I cannot pretend that things are easy. I cannot make false promises. We all know that no one has a magic wand. We have to be realistic.

My government is determined to do everything possible to stabilize the situation and mitigate the negative impact of these problems.

We have to pursue our efforts to stimulate economic growth, and encourage businesses, including small enterprises. It is important that we create and innovate. Let us make effective use of the potential of enhanced ICT connectivity that the new submarine fibre-optic cable has brought. This represents a new pillar of our economy, a pillar of our development in many fields.

We have already set up the Small Business Financing Agency which pools the resources of the commercial banks and Government to facilitate the funding of small businesses on more favourable terms. Government also offers partial guarantees in certain cases.

I take this opportunity to wish the owners of small businesses success and encourage them to manage their businesses well, to plan well, to repay their loans on time and to eventually invest further so that their enterprises will flourish and help to strengthen our national economy.

Through consultations, Government and the private sector will strengthen their cooperation to promote growth of the national economy.

With regards to our principal industry – tourism – we have to continue our efforts to develop and expand the new markets, while not neglecting our traditional sources of visitors. We have to ensure, at all levels and in all areas, that we welcome our visitors well and offer them the best service possible, so that they enjoy a good holiday here, and will want to return. They will also talk well about Seychelles as a holiday destination.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Finance, Trade & Investment, and all partners must take measures to improve the foreign exchange yield generated by the Tourism industry and which should all be entering the country but is presently not, and also to address the problem of foreign exchange flight.

With the objective of facilitating the good performance of the private sector and to stimulate the economy during this period, Government has decided not to introduce the system of VAT this July as planned. We shall continue consultations and analysis on this matter.

With the aim of alleviating the difficulties which some people may be encountering in repaying their housing loans, I have asked banks in which Government is a shareholder to review the terms of repayment. This will be of help to families in need.

Yes, we do face challenges. The New Seychelles which we are creating together demands a shared responsibility on the part of all its citizens. It requires, above all, a realignment of our values as a nation. It is within the reach of all of us. But it comes with a price, a commitment, a responsibility. And with hard work.

Many are asking today: where are our responsibilities as parents, as citizens? I spoke about it in my State-of-the-Nation address in the framework of the important Social Renaissance movement. I asked many questions. I proposed, among other things, that action be taken against parents who neglect their children. I asked that the Family Tribunal's powers and competence be strengthened. I pressed for harsh penalties against abuse of a child's innocence. And I called for more severe actions against drug traffickers. Following Cabinet instructions, the Attorney General's Office has drafted two Bills: one against child abuse, and the other against the production and trafficking of drugs. Both are proposing stiffer sentences, including life imprisonment in certain cases, for these crimes. Very soon the National Assembly will hold debates on these critical issues. I hope that we will soon have the new laws that will strengthen our legal and moral standards in our society.

Dear people of Seychelles,

The state of affairs, for us in Seychelles and for many countries, is not easy. But I am convinced that if we all do our bit, if are realistic, if we work hard, and if we take our responsibilities, we will not slide backward. We will continue to move forward to ensure our success today, tomorrow and in the future.

And, speaking of the future, I have a special thought for the youth.

I have said it before that this country belongs to us all, but in a certain perspective it belongs more to the children and the youth who are coming up. They have a bigger stake in the future than those of us in the older generation. The future is fully theirs. We will continue to do our best so that our country and society is one which will make us be proud and happy for them to inherit.

At the same time they have a duty to prepare themselves to become capable people who will assume all the responsibilities in society. It is important that they grow up and develop well; that they develop their full potential.

It is for this reason that I feel sad when I see young people, too many of them, who have fallen by the wayside of life, on the road of their development, and who are victims of drug abuse, and sometimes involved in criminality because of drugs.

Our society needs to redouble its efforts to address this problem.

Where it concerns drug traffickers, we are determined to take tough action. We will continue to transfer them to prison at Marie-Louise to serve their sentence. There, they will certainly learn the meaning of work!

As for young persons who have fallen victim to this scourge, we as a society must have compassion and help them to get themselves out of this problem. It is important that the rehabilitation of these young victims is a joint effort involving all government agencies concerned, the churches and civil society in general.

Of course, the image of our youth does not show only problems. It contains many good things, many successes, a lot that makes us proud.

And today I salute all Seychellois youth. I call on them to look ahead, see your future. Remember that your lives are precious; that you have potential to develop. Never before in this country have there been so many opportunities for your development. Seize them!

Dear people of Seychelles,

Our Seychelles has come a long way. We are a small country which for a long time had been isolated from the rest of the world, which does not have many natural resources, but we have achieved a high standard of living for all our people. Of course we want to preserve what we have, and move forward. We want to realize, together, the vision of the New Seychelles.

Together, we will get there.

Dear people of Seychelles,

Today we stand proud as a people that have their place in the world, a people that have matured, a people that have achieved a high level of development. The currents and circumstances of globalization bring new challenges for Seychelles. Some are advantageous to us, others are less favourable. Regardless, we have to face the challenges with determination, realism and discipline. In everything that we do, we must bear in mind that we live in a new era, and we must remain relevant.

We have to remain connected with ourselves as a people, and with the rest of the world. It is a responsible future that we are creating together. It requires a great effort on the part of all of us. It requires love and loyalty towards our motherland. It requires peace, harmony and unity. It requires hard work. It demands that we all take and accept our responsibilities. Today, on the occasion of our National Day, let us not only celebrate but let us also reflect deeply on the journey we have accomplished. We have to acknowledge the hard work and sacrifices of our compatriots who helped push for the principles we have struggled to promote –unity, human dignity, and justice. Let us say thank you to them. Let us also celebrate the achievements of devoted workers. It is the moment now to build the bridge that will take us closer to those values, such as tolerance and compassion, that bind us together as a nation.

I wish all Seychellois here and overseas a Happy National Day. Let us strive for our Seychelles!

May God continue to bless and protect Seychelles.

Thank you.