

**STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS 2017**

**14 February 2017**

*by* President Danny Rollen Faure

Mr. Speaker,

Leader of the Opposition,

Leader of Government Business,

Dear Honourable Members of the National Assembly,

I gave the National Assembly my word on the 18th of October that we would work together. For the benefit of the Seychellois people and Seychelles, we are working together. Today, a different atmosphere exists in the country. Together, we are bringing a new working environment. One in which there is dialogue, there is conversation, one where we consult. And most importantly, one based on mutual respect. In the presence of mutual respect and trust, the country will progress.

Where Seychelles wins, the Seychellois people win.

Seychelles is greater than us all, the interest of our People always comes first.

Today, I thank you, all Members of the National Assembly, for the work that we have started together in the interest of the Seychellois People.

I thank the People of Seychelles for understanding the work that we are doing together, for Seychelles and the interest of our Nation.

Vice President,

President of the Court of Appeals,

Chief Justice,

Designated Minister,

Ministers,

Distinguished Guests,

Compatriots,

Brothers and Sisters,

To understand the state of our nation, it is important that we understand the state of our families, our communities, our society, and our democracy.

Let us start with the family. Today, our families are facing multiple social problems directly linked to housing issues and social ills.

Families form the foundation of our society, and we must go towards the family unit to address our challenges. We need to return to good moral and spiritual values early on so that our children have a much stronger foundation.

The younger parents out there need all of our support to instil these good values in our children.

We ought to value the work of religious organisations, and see it as something which complements the role and guidance of parents. Educational institutions should also join in, and open up to create the space for the learning and appreciation of spirituality and morality. This creates a need for a collaborative effort based on trust.

Our foundation today is being eroded by drugs. Drugs have become a societal problem. As representatives of our population, you see the havoc that this has wreaked in our communities. Our citizens also observe this problem, they are concerned by this issue, and they seek solutions.

The solution is a radical change in the way we approach the problem. A new approach which recognizes that we need to wage two wars – one to reduce the quantity of drugs entering the country; and one to reduce the demand for drug consumption in the country.

In line with this, we will adopt a new strategy which reflects:

* 1. Acceptance that addiction is a public health problem;
  2. Greater collaboration;
  3. Greater co-ordination;
  4. Increased capacity for rehabilitation and treatment;
  5. A much bigger role for our prevention program;
  6. An increase in the resources dedicated to prevention and rehabilitation; and finally
  7. Strengthen our regional partnerships to allow for better co-ordination in our fight against drugs, and more specifically the control of our borders.

The new Secretary of State, Dr. Patrick Herminie, will give further details on this tomorrow, the 15th of February.

The NDEA will be reformed and transformed as from the 1st of March to reflect this new strategy.

Mr. Speaker, it is social and economic conditions that are not addressed on time and in systematic fashion that brings a fraction of our population to live in a state that we call poverty. This is a fact. It is reality. We have programs and tools available to us today to reverse these social and economic conditions. Programs reflecting a social protection system based on four pillars –universal primary health care, universal education, an agency for social protection, and a universal pension.

From the moment a child is born, we have information on the child and his or her parents. When the child is at school, we have information on the child and the parents through the school. We have a primary health care system which is based on close interactions with the population. The Home Care system allows us to interact directly with the elderly population. The Agency for Social Protection provides us with information on the sector of the population that they are assisting.

In summary, we have a system which covers all categories of people. What we need to do now, is to co-ordinate our actions to ensure that our policies and strategies are coherent, and this is why we have a Secretary of State, Mr. Dick Esparon, who has the specific task of doing this co-ordination; of putting in place a plan and program targeting the families, with an aim of eliminating poverty and ensuring that none of our citizens are left behind. Government will provide the necessary resources to accomplish this mission.

Mr. Speaker, increased alcohol consumption is another serious problem also affecting our families. The quality of alcohol being consumed is affecting the health of our citizens. Our children are able to access alcohol far too easily.

I think that the National Assembly ought to have a frank debate on this subject, and to make some concrete recommendations. The time has come to depoliticize this problem.

The upcoming generation need to grow up in an environment where alcohol is not in abundance and where drugs are not a temptation. These problems will not be solved in the coming days, but if we truly want a Seychelles where the workforce is healthy and productive, it is essential that all of us, together, collectively, bring this battle against these two social ills that are eroding the base, or the foundations, of our society today.

It is a battle which is fair. It is a battle which is difficult. It is a battle which is worth the while. But, most importantly, it is a battle which is necessary for us to wage together, for the sake of Seychelles.

Mr. Speaker, today, in spite of all of this, a large number of families overcome social hurdles, and are able to keep their children intact. They ought to be an inspiration to our young parents, and to upcoming young families.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the National Assembly that after having listened to them, and discussions that I have had with Civil Society and SIFCO, I have decided that as from the 15th of March, there will be a new Ministry, called the Ministry of Family Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, another difficulty for our families today is the issue of housing. This is a serious problem. Despite having done a lot, it remains a major problem. The majority of letters that I receive from our citizens is about their hardship and sacrifice in their pursuit of a place they can call home. I even receive letters from children, who describe the deplorable situations in which they and their families live.

The approach we need to take must be on par with the magnitude of the task at hand. There are certain principles to which we must adhere.

Firstly, each family ought to be assisted in line with their genuine needs, and each family ought to contribute in line with their means. This is a rule which we should never break. We have limited resources, and consequently, Government must ensure that people contribute appropriately in order for more families to be assisted.

Secondly, the approach shall be one which uses different policies and/or mechanisms to assist different bands in our society.

There are families that are unable to pay for the maintenance of their homes;

There are families that are able to pay for the maintenance, but are unable to buy or build a house;

There are families that are able to pay for the construction and the maintenance of a house, but not for the land upon which to build it;

There are families that are able to pay for the land, the construction, and the maintenance of a house, subject to costs of financing;

There are couples who currently do not have children, but are also in need of their own place.

For each of these groups of people, Government is developing mechanisms to help them. It is through an approach addressing each of these bands that we can make a real difference in the solving our housing problems.

Thirdly, the financing for the housing sector will be sourced in a number of areas.

As is the case every year, we shall have financing directly from the Government budget – which will focus on the direct construction of units;

As has been announced, we have an agreement with the Seychelles Pension Fund whereby we will borrow SR 150 million which will go towards the housing sector;

We will increase our co-operation with the banks to increase the accessibility of house financing for families. We have reached an agreement with the banks whereby at least SR 200 million will be placed in a special fund towards this cause this year;

We want our public enterprises to also play a role in accelerating the rate of construction of houses. Accordingly, starting the 1st of January 2018, the CSR contribution of these public enterprises will go towards the housing sector. This will remain the case for the next 5 years.

We will also work on Public Private Partnerships to increase the stock of houses in the country.

Fourthly, the mechanism will be clear, and the qualifying criteria for each mechanism will also be clear. This will allow people to plan for themselves accordingly. On the 10th of March, the Minister responsible for Habitat, Mr. Charles Bastienne, will provide further details.

Mr. Speaker, the financial resources that we have mobilized will allow us to tackle three housing estates, which have been granted priority status by virtue of the existing state. These estates are:

* + 1. Foret Noire – Port Glaud;
    2. Lower Les Mammelles;
    3. Corgate Estate – Mont Fleuri

We will also build 24 units in 24 districts in the next 24 months. In Roche Caiman, where there is limited land, we shall build 10 new units. The program on Perseverance Island will continue.

We shall build houses on the new island of Aurore. We shall build higher than we have on Perseverance, which will allow us to optimize land and increase the number of families that can benefit. We foresee the construction of more than 1,500 units on the island, but first, we need to install the necessary infrastructure to support these units – in terms of water, electricity, sewerage, and others…

Our binding constraint today is financial resources, and it is for this reason that we need the afore-mentioned measures.

Finally, there is a practice which needs to stop as of today – and that is the practice of asking our citizens who have made a request for the purchase of land to go and find/identify the land themselves.

Mr. Speaker, applicants will have to submit their details, and according to the criteria, it will be possible to identify which mechanism is most appropriate for them. In the event that the family is interested in the mechanism, they will be registered.

The fact that we are addressing the sector through various mechanisms for various bands of society will allow us to address the issue in a faster and more sustainable manner than before.

That is the hope that we are giving our citizens that for numerous years have been making their financial contributions, who have made an application, and who are waiting to realize their dream. I acknowledge your patience throughout this time. I understand you.

Mr. Speaker, the education system that we have today needs to reflect the new economy. It must impart new competencies and skills that the public and private sector need. It must also impart new skills that empower our citizens to embrace and be able to deal with today’s exigencies. This is a request emanating from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the tourism sector.

The Ministry of Education is taking the necessary measures to reorient our education system and that necessitates wider consultations with parents and teachers. We expect concrete measures emanating from these consultations to start being adopted in August this year.

Mr. Speaker, the Minstry of Education has some serious challenges. After more than 25 years, most of its infrastructure is aged. The fact that the country developed so quickly has meant that new opportunities were created in other economic sectors and numerous teachers moved. Social problems originating from homes and from the communities have spilled into the schools. Within the class, teachers are facing serious issues of indiscipline. Consequently, we have seen a drop in the exam results nationally. That is the challenge facing Education today.

We acknowledge our mistake in relation to the training of teachers with the closing down of NIE a few years ago. Its closure contributed to the lack of Seychellois teachers in our primary schools today. Teacher training remains a challenge and a priority.

I have a special message for our students. Seize this opportunity to learn. Study, study, and study. The efforts that you put into your studies today will impact hugely on your future and your contribution to our society.

Mr. Speaker, in 2012, Government introduced a Laptop Scheme for post-secondary students. In 2015, we made the scheme available to students from S4 onwards. From the start of the second semester of this year, we will make the scheme available to students from the class of S1 onwards.

A student who has used the scheme in secondary may access the scheme again after 5 years.

In an effort to help students and teachers have access to even more information and knowledge, we will introduce WiFi in schools by the start of the third semester of this year.

Despite a drop in results in the last few years, I know that our teachers give a lot. Their environment is not an easy one, and I would like to thank them for their efforts, and the energy that they put in towards their vocation of teaching.

There exists one area where I believe that all of us can be of help, and that is discipline. I would like to appeal to our various partners: schools, parents, the community; to come together to bring back discipline into our schools.

Mr Speaker, there exist criteria today that establish how a student qualifies for a scholarship for university studies. In line with the new policy on transparency, Government will propose a Bill which will give this policy its legal framework.

Starting from this year onwards, we will introduce a system ensuring that the 5 best students in each of the post-secondary institutions will be offered an opportunity to further their studies. This will apply to students who completed their post-secondary studies in December 2016.

This may be through an educational institution overseas, or an internship or placement in a commercial firm – domestic or overseas – where the student can gain exposure and experience which will help them once they join the world of work.

An economy needs workers in all sectors, and it needs good workers in all of those sectors. This initiative, which will be financed by Government is an effort to illustrate the fact that we value all jobs, be it academic, technical, vocational or otherwise. Hence, a student of the Agricultural School or the Art School will also get exposure and become empowered to be ever more productive, competitive and innovative. All jobs are important. All jobs are valued.

Mr. Speaker, the future of Seychelles also depends on the types and levels of support that we are able to give our small and medium enterprises. We already do a lot on this front, but we would like to do even more. It is for this reason that the Ministry of Finance will re-organise SBFA to allow it to continue playing its role in line with its mandate.

All new small businesses that meet certain criteria will benefit from seed capital of SR 25,000 and we have reached an agreement with the commercial banks that they will provide the remaining financing. The Minister of Finance, Dr. Peter Larose, will give more details on this on the 17th of February.

Mr. Speaker, following our consultative process on the employment law, Government will propose a new, comprehensive law which will allow a working environment which is in the interests of both the employee and the employer. The new economic climate necessitates policies and practices that reinforces our role as facilitator and regulator.

Mr. Speaker, our citizens are living longer nowadays. 74 years on average. In another 3 or 4 years, we will have more than 10% of our population above the age of 63. It will be the first time that the fraction of the elderly will be in double digits. This is a significant demographic change, which merits national reflection and for us to prepare adequately with respect to the necessary strategies and policies on sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, one new policy is that employers will no longer need to seek permission to keep an employee past the age of 63. Employers will now be able to keep the employee until the age of 65 years.

The retirement age remains 63, and if you are staying on in employment, you will have receive your salary as well your statutory pension.

This decision will necessitate a change in the law to reflect this policy.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Habitat will identify four plots of land in various regions, including one on Praslin, upon which the private sector will be invited to build homes for the elderly. We are encouraging the private sector to play a role in this sector.

Mr. Speaker, for our elderly citizens in search of a loan from commercial banks to repair their homes – and whom are having difficulty to do so today – Government, through the Ministry of Finance, will guarantee their loan. This will be done in a similar fashion to the scheme that exists with HFC, and up to a maximum amount of SR 75,000. This will start as from the 15th of April.

Let us give our elderly citizens care and affection wherever they are. Let us treat them with respect, compassion, and love. Let us remember that if it were not for them, we would not be here today.

Mr. Speaker, considering our population is less than 95,000, I find it alarming that in 2015, we had more than 340,000 doctors’ consultations. If we are to continue along this path, the country will not be able to sustain our health system. The time has come for us to make drastic changes to our lifestyle. We need to become more conscious about the food that we eat. We need more information and education. We need to encourage more physical exercise. And we need to do more prevention.

It is for this reason that Government is making it mandatory from this year onwards that all students entering S1 will go through a National Screening Program. And prior to finishing their last year of mandatory schooling, which is S5, students will undergo another screening. This is in a bid to help the Ministry with its prevention program.

The Ministry will continue to focus its district level services on prevention and continue its improvements of the conditions of the facilities in which the service is being given.

Mr. Speaker, whilst the Ministry of Health is progressing towards a comprehensive Health Information System, the Ministry will introduce a mechanism before the end of this year which will allow patients who have chronic diseases to obtain their regular medication from any clinic or health centre. For example, for a diabetes patient working in Victoria, will be able to collect their diabetes medication from the main hospital at Mont Fleuri or the English River Health Centre, rather than their Regional Health Center of Anse Boileau regularly to collect their medication, if that happens to be more convenient. Our aim is to increasingly make things easier and more convenient for our citizens.

Mr. Speaker, today we have a program whereby we send Seychellois for overseas treatment. In line with our policy on transparency, we will propose a Bill which will create the legal framework for this policy.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the doctors, nurses, and all the workers in the Health sector for their hard work and continued devotion towards our health system.

Mr. Speaker, for a society such as Seychelles to continue developing its social sector, bearing in mind the various challenges I have mentioned, it is important that we give a lot of thought to the sustainability of our programs. This is why we need to continue developing our economy, making it much stronger than it already is, more diversified, more efficient, and more responsive with the aim of sustaining our social development.

Mr. Speaker, Government will start a process of national consultations on a new National Development Plan during the month of April this year. This process will be spear-headed by the Department of Economic Planning. I invite all the sectors to participate actively in the process. It will be an opportunity to appreciate, together, our progress thus far, and how we can optimize traditional sectors such as agriculture and fisheries, and identify other sectors that will play a key role in our future.

Mr. Speaker, next year will be exactly ten years since Seychelles started the implementation of its macro-economic program. It is clear that together we have put in place a strong macro-economic framework which has allowed us to reach our current point. We have a solid base from which to launch ourselves into the next decade from an economic and financial perspective.

Mr. Speaker, the national Budget is still under discussion. There was one measure which Government had announced regarding the implementation of a comprehensive Progressive Income Tax starting on the 1st of July this year. I would like to inform the National Assembly that given that more preparation is needed before the introduction of this new tax, Government has decided that the implementation of Progressive Income Tax shall occur on the 1st of January 2018.

Mr. Speaker, as previously announced, Government is continuing with its endeavours to reduce the cost of living. In its effort to reduce the cost of living, Government will revise the list of goods which will not be subject to VAT. I would like to inform the Assembly that the revised list, which will include new products, will be published as from the 1st of March this year.

The Central Bank will also establish a system making it faster and simpler for the processing of local bank cards. The use of this technology here in Seychelles will ensure that the paying process in shops will be faster and more importantly, the process will become cheaper, which will help reduce the cost of living.

On the monetary side, and our financial infrastructure, the Central Bank has collected more than two thirds of the old notes and coins that were in circulation. The last day for the circulation of these old notes and coins is the 30th of June, 2017.

Mr. Speaker, we also need to ensure that our infrastructure is addressed. Infrastructure is important for the growth of an economy.

There are a number of projects that we need to start in order for the country to be able to continue on its path of development. These are huge projects that will take years to implement. They are:

* Expansion of the Port. As has been previously mentioned, the Port needs to be expanded in a bid to facilitate trade.
* Reclamation. This is required with the aim of creating more land for future economic activity.
* Second submarine cable. The quantity of data that we consume today is extremely high. Since the commissioning of our first submarine fibre-optic cable in 2012, our consumption has increased by more than 420%. This increased consumption has made the installation of a second cable necessary to provide an alternative route in case there is an accident. This is a strategic decision. The second cable should also bring commercial opportunities.
* Finally, another project which could really catalyse our economic growth is a tunnel. A tunnel will connect our two coasts. One connecting Cascade to Grand Anse Mahé, and another connecting Beau Vallon and English River. Government will carry out a feasibility study in 2017. The presence of a tunnel will yield numerous benefits;

It will effectively bring our agricultural land in the West of Mahé much closer to the areas where the majority of trade and commerce occurs. This will reduce the costs of these products, making them more competitive.

It will reduce the amount of time and fuel it takes for people to move around. This facilitates movement and increases the allure of a higher number of districts as potential places of employment.

It will reduce the cost of transporting electricity from Roche Caiman to the houses on the West coast. In the future, it may even create opportunities for the transportation of water, given many of our rivers are situated in the West of Mahé.

We anticipate high rates of growth in the population of Perseverance and Aurore, which combined with economic activity in the Northern region, will necessitate a very efficient transportation system between those two nodes. A tunnel will help on this front.

We need to see this new concept as a means of catalyzing growth in other sectors. If it is feasible, it will be a good thing for Seychelles.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank are working on the possibilities to create opportunities for citizens and local companies to invest in these infrastructure projects. This will democratize shares in these entities, and everyone will have the possibility of benefitting through these projects.

When we provide our Seychellois the opportunity to invest in local infrastructure, tomorrow’s economic growth will bring more benefits in a more direct manner for many more people.

Mr. Speaker, whilst I am on the subject of shares that Seychellois can own in companies, I would like to announce that Government has decided to offer 49% of the shares in L’Union Estate to the residents of La Digue. The process to buy shares will be undertaken this year.

On Mahé, Government will create a company, 51% Government and 49% private, with the aim of developing a lodge based on the concept of sustainability and renewable energy at Cape Ternay. The process to buy shares will be undertaken this year.

On Praslin, we will revive the Praslin Development Fund. As from the 1st of March this year, we will ban the exportation of the Coco de Mer kernel as a raw material. Government wishes to create value addition industries associated with the Coco De Mer, and the taxes generated by the industry will go directly to the Praslin Development Fund. The National Institute for Science, Technology and Innovation will take the leading role in the promotion of this new industry.

Mr. Speaker, another policy that I would like to announce is the opening up of air transportation between Mahé, Praslin and the inner islands for any Seychellois investors.

Mr. Speaker, with the new economic environment in the country, Government’s policy is to allow Seychellois entities to participate in economic activity on our outer islands – in sectors such as agriculture and fishing. This will also apply for maritime and air transport. However, the management of the islands shall remain the responsibility of IDC.

Mr. Speaker, in 2015, Government introduced a moratorium on big hotels, defined as hotels having 25 rooms or more, for a period of two years. Government has decided to prolong this moratorium until the end of 2020.

The Ministry of Tourism will publish the list of all pojects that had been approved before the moratorium came into force. This will be done on the 1st of March.

Mr. Speaker, this moratorium does not include small establishments of 15 rooms or less. This category, small hotels, is reserved for Seychellois and remains open.

Tourism remains the principal pillar, or contributor, of our economy. It is also the biggest employer. As Government, we remain vigilant on sustainable and reasonable methods to ensure that the benefits of tourism are well distributed. One of the initiatives to help this is a new classification system which will be implemented from January 2018. The prevalence of our culture in these establishments is included in the criteria which influences the rank of an establishment – in terms of artwork, paintings, music, cuisine, etc… All with an aim of increasing value addition in Seychelles and helping the development of other sectors of the economy and improving the quality of service in the sector.

Mr. Speaker, the beauty of our environment is our wealth. It is our future. It is the reason that hundreds of thousands of tourists continue to visit this wonder of the World that we call ours. And without realizing it, each one of us is the guardian of this paradise, called Seychelles, here on Earth.

On the subject of environment, it is important that I inform the National Assembly that I have met with the representative of the district of Grand Anse Mahé, Honourable Waven William, accompanied by Honourable Nicolas Prea and Honourable Bernard Georges regarding the problem of water pollution which occurred at La Misere.

In one of these instances, Government was at fault, and I formally present an apology to the families that were affected. The other instance, which concerns fuel entering the environment, it was the fault of the contractor. I sympathize with the affected families, and Government will facilitate the process to allow us to reach a conclusion in this matter.

Mr. Speaker, access to beaches by members of the public remains a challenge. As you all know, beaches are classified as public domain in the law, meaning it is property which all our citizens can have the pleasure to enjoy. However, there are a number of instances whereby there is private property between the beaches and the nearest public road, and consequently access by the public to the beach is severely restricted, especially when development on these private properties are such that the access that the public had used in the past has been affected.

The law gives the public the right to be on the beach, but it is less clear on the means by which the public will exercise their right if a public or private land owner restricts their right by either blocking or severely restricting their access to the public beach.

For this reason, I have asked the Attorney General’s Office and the ministries concerned to draft a Bill which will make it compulsory that there is public access from a main road to reach all beaches in the Seychelles. This will apply to public or private properties, now or in the future.

In instances where the owners have built on the beach, and these structures are restricting access and the ability of the public to enjoy the beach, I have given an instruction to the Minister responsible for Habitat to ensure that all proprietors remove these structures before the end of June this year.

In the case of private islands, we already have a law on access to private islands in specific instances prescribed in the law, on which we need to sensitize the property owners.

However, we also need to be sensible on the subject of nuisance, and bear in mind that these beaches are being used jointly with other citizens, and our right to spend some leisure time on the beach needs to be exercised without affecting others or depriving others of that same right.

Mr. Speaker, the country continues to progress. Together, as a Nation, we will work harder to overcome our challenges. The key is for each and every one of us to have respect; respect for the supreme laws of our country, and respect for all the laws that exist. As citizens, where we feel our rights are being violated, we must seek recourse from our legal and justice system. The Police must continue to be increasingly professional and act more swiftly when citizens seek assistance. Our system of prevention, detection and prosecution, must all accelerate the efforts to improve efforts and we much review the level of support that they receive. In this context, I am reviewing the mandate of the FIU. A new Bill on the creation of a National Intelligence Agency on security will also be presented to the National Assembly in May this year.

Mr. Speaker, our reforms of the prisons will continue. There are certain bad practices going on in the Montagne Posée Prison which must stop, and the prison authorities will take appropriate action to address those.

Following the report from the Prison Authority and the Ministry of Home Affairs, and most recently a report from the Speaker of the National Assembly, Mr. Patrick Pillay, Government has decided to close the prison that is located on the island of Marie-Louise. This will be done before September this year.

Mr. Speaker, next year, on the 18th of June, the Day of our Constitution, Seychelles will celebrate the 25th anniversary of our Third Republic. The 18th of June shall remain our Constitution Day. And on the 30th of July next year, the National Assembly will celebrate the 25th year of its existence.

As from next year, the National Athletic Championships will no longer be held on the 18th of June. The Ministry of Education shall choose an appropriate date for the Championship, which will form part of the School Calendar.

Mr. Speaker, we are still a young nation, our democracy continues to evolve, in line with the aspirations and desires of our population. Today, we are all witnessing, together, how this co-habitation exists.

The National Assembly is the voice of the People of Seychelles. The National Assembly is playing its role in line with its constitutional mandate. It is having debates on topics which concern the Seychellois People and its future. The National Assembly is also examining the actions of Government. Be it the expenditure of public funds, or the impact of its policies, strategies and programs on our population.

Any constructive criticism which will improve the system of Government, our Administration will take the necessary measures to implement it where possible, in the interest of the population. Any proposals that the National Assembly puts forth which will improve living conditions of the Seychellois People, our administration will act on it. In return, legal Bills that Government present before the National Assembly, it is the National Assembly’s role to ensure that we have good laws which benefit the Seychellois People. It is my wish that the National Assembly acts on them.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my support for the committees that the National Assembly has established and the work that they are doing; in particular the new Committee on Victimization, and the other on Truth and National Reconciliation.

Mr. Speaker, Government will be submitting numerous Bills for the approval of the National Assembly this year, including certain amendments to the Constitution.

Mr. Speaker, the new Right to Information Bill which will be submitted to the National Assembly very soon will bring a new protocol for which Government puts information in the public domain. It will also support the work and responsibilities that the media in Seychelles have fought to obtain.

Amendments on the SBC law will be presented to the National Assembly in March of this year. This will reinforce the independence of the SBC.

Mr. Speaker, democracy also encompasses giving the population a voice. Giving them space. Giving them a structure for them to administer their communities. Next year, we will have elections for the District Councils.

Mr. Speaker, Seychelles needs to move to a new level where community development is inclusive. Where the needs of the residents, the private sector, and civil society in the district are incorporated. All of them work together. It is true that in the past two decades, numerous public agencies have met at district levels in consultative meetings. The time has come to see our communities in a new perspective. This will also help Government to better plan and ensure we have regional economic development that is more balanced, distributed more evenly, and where no district is left behind.

A youth survey has shown that a number of activities that the youth require for their development remains centralized in certain regions. They also feel that other services and programs do not reach them. It is important that in the development of our districts that we pay attention to the new needs and desires of the Seychellois youth.

Mr. Speaker, as from the 1st of July this year, we will introduce a new scheme for “Animateurs” at a national scale, with the aim of supporting various clubs that are formed at district level. This scheme will facilitate the establishment of an allowance for the “Animateurs” that meet the criteria. It will really help create the support structure that our youth need. This scheme will be managed by the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture.

Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the Seychellois People. I have listened to you, members of the National Assembly. Throughout my visits and travels through the district, I consult and I discuss. I meet members of the general public every Tuesday afternoon. I receive numerous letters from our citizens. And today, I have presented to you the State of Our Nation.

The proposals that we have presented, the decisions that we have taken, and the work that we are going to do together over the course of this year is based on the principles I shared with you on the 18th of October, 2016. These principles are: fairness; equality of opportunity; social justice; and distribution of wealth. We shall continue on the path of good governance, transparency, and accountability, and we shall continue to work in the interests of Seychelles and the well-being of all Seychellois.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I would like to thank the People of Seychelles, for their devotion and hard work. I thank them for their contribution in bringing Seychelles to where it is today. It is my sincere desire that we continue on this path for the good of Seychelles.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your attention, and I wish all of you the best for the rest of the year.

Thank you!