



**GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SEYCHELLES**

**Second Cycle Universal Periodic Review**

**Opening Statement by Secretary of State in the Foreign Affairs Department, Ambassador Barry  
Faure**

**25 January 2016**

Mr President

Excellencies,

Representatives from member states and observers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

[Good morning].

I would like to begin by extending warm greetings from the Government and people of the Republic of Seychelles to the international community represented here by all of you. We welcome this opportunity to return to the auspicious premises of the Human Rights Council to participate in the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), and to engage in a constructive dialogue with

our fellow States in view of furthering the protection and promotion of human rights in our Small Island Nation.

Seychelles steadfastly supports the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism which, in recognizing the diverse human rights situations in the world, demonstrates that tailor made responses catering to specific socio-economic and political circumstances work more effectively than a 'one size fits all' approach. The UPR mechanism provides an invaluable platform for countries to exchange best practices, share ideas and collaborate, all towards the full realization of human rights for all persons.

Seychelles' delegation today also comprises of the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Seychelles to the UN Office and other International Organizations in Geneva, as well as senior officers drawn from the Ministry of Social Affairs, Community Development and Sports, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Transport, and the Chambers of the Attorney General.

Mr President,

Seychelles is a small island nation with a population of around 90,000 people. Due to our small size, Seychelles faces significant resource constraints, but our size is also our advantage, as it allows us to have a unique perspective on the world surrounding us.

Seychelles is a young Republic and a multi-party democracy, built upon the foundations of a strong culture of respect for human rights, social justice, equality and non discrimination. In our context, guaranteeing human rights for all is not a concept of radical change, but rather a part of everyday life, and present in the smallest of actions.

This is perhaps best reflected in Seychelles' Constitution which continues to be the country's supreme legal authority and primary object of implementation, with Chapter Three entitled 'Seychellois Charter of Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms' providing for the protection and promotion of human rights of all persons within the territory of Seychelles. Chapter Three's provisions reflect the

aspirations of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, as well as the eight core UN human rights treaties that Seychelles is a party to. I must make a specific reference to Article 27 of our Constitution, which provides for the equal protection of the law for all persons – *all persons*, regardless of any differentiating grounds, including gender, race, nationality, age, skin colour, sexual orientation or political beliefs.

Mr President,

As outlined in our National Report, Seychelles remains determined to improve and further human rights protection and promotion frameworks and mechanisms. Since our last appearance before the Working Group in 2011, significant strides have been made, some of which I will highlight:

**Children** remain one of the highest priorities of my country, being the foundation of our future. Seychelles is committed to ensuring that the rights of the child are fully respected, promoted and protected.

Children have a special place in our community, because of their inherent vulnerability and their special need for protection. Every child needs a safe, conducive and nourishing environment, in order to have the opportunity to learn and reach their full potentials.

In February 2015, my Government set up a dedicated Police Child Protection Team, which specializes in child protection cases and responds to instances of neglect and child abuse, allowing such cases to be processed by law enforcement in an efficient manner.

Numerous sensitization programmes continue to be held on preventing and combatting child abuse through the media, as well as in smaller sessions at community and school levels. A Juvenile Detention Center is also currently under development.

I am also pleased to note that Seychelles ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) on the Sale of Children, Child

Prostitution and Child Pornography, and also signed the Third Optional Protocol to the CRC on a Communications Procedure.

Mr President,

One of the most important sectors to my Government is the **Education Sector**, as we are determined to ensure that our children and youth receive the best possible start in life, and to provide them with the skills required to reach their highest potentials and contribute to the development of our country and the advanced march of humanity.

Seychelles continues to provide free primary and secondary education to all children. As of this year, compulsory education for children - which was previously ten years - has now been increased to eleven years, with the addition of a secondary school year.

Cognizant that the quality of education must be at the highest standard, my Government's 'Education Medium Term Strategy 2013 - 17 and beyond' seeks to ensure that necessary investments are made in the sector, focusing on overcoming existing challenges, and in view of providing children with the knowledge and skills to become fully productive citizens.

Mr President,

Likewise, the issue of **gender equality and empowerment** cannot be overemphasized, and it is one that my Government treats with great seriousness. Twenty years ago, leaders from all over the world came together in Beijing and made commitments to further the rights of women. Significant progress has been made since then, but the ultimate goal - equality of rights and opportunities for men and women - remains some distance away, but most certainly within our reach.

We also remain fully committed to fighting violence against women - through prevention, protection and prosecution.

In this view, the 'National Action Plan for Gender Based Violence (GBV) 2011-15' focused on a review and harmonization of existing laws on GBV, sensitization of front line enforcement officials, public education campaigns, and the mainstreaming of gender perspectives into national development plans. A 'GBV Working Together Manual' is also being developed to allow for various agencies addressing the issue to do so cohesively and effectively in favour of victims. My Government is also in the process of developing specific legislation on domestic violence, towards which wide consultation is taking place.

Seychelles is proud to note its high number of women in decision making and influential positions, and this is perhaps most reflective in the current composition of our National Assembly, 43.8% of which is made up of women – a goal which has been achieved without a gender quota system. Also noteworthy is Seychelles' recent appointments of its first female judge on the Supreme Court, and the first female Chief Justice.

Mr President,

Seychelles has refused to remain blind, mute and deaf to the atrocious crime of **trafficking in persons**. The Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons Act was enacted in April 2014, formalizing legislative and administrative measures to effectively combat this heinous crime. A National Coordination Committee on Trafficking in Persons, composed of senior officials in relevant governmental departments as well as civil society organizations was established under this legislation, in recognition of the cooperative and multi-sectoral approach that is required to identify and investigate crimes of trafficking, whilst providing protection to victims and vulnerable groups. Seychelles remains determined not to allow this crime to fester within its borders, and looks forward to cooperating with its partners to ensure that this modern form of slavery is eradicated within our times.

Mr President,

As you may know, Seychelles underwent free, fair and peaceful Presidential Elections last month, whereby the incumbent President, Mr James Alix Michel, was re-elected. Seychelles underwent two rounds of voting for its Presidential Election, as in the first round, no political party received more than 50% of votes cast as required by our Constitution. The Elections were observed by local, regional and international organizations.

The Elections followed a period of significant **electoral reforms** in Seychelles. Shortly following Seychelles' first UPR cycle, our Office of the Electoral Commissioner was replaced by a fully-fledged Electoral Commission comprising of five members. This was shortly followed by an Electoral Reform Forum, which identified necessary changes required to enhance the principles of democracy in Seychelles' electoral system. This has led to amendments to our Elections Act and Political Parties Act which took effect in 2015, covering issues such as voter registration; campaign financing and disclosure; campaigning and broadcasting policies; nomination procedures and registration of political parties.

Mr President,

One of the signs of a true democracy is of course having the participation of an active and vigilant media. In order to encourage the diversification of media in Seychelles and further enable the **right of freedom of expression**, license fees to operate media establishments have been significantly reduced through legislative amendments. For radio broadcasting, the fees are now one-eighth of the previous cost; for television broadcasting, the fee is now about one quarter of the previous requirements; and newspapers are now charged the same fee for a license for five years, as they were previously being charged for one year. Seychelles has seen a significant increase in the number of newspaper outlets in Seychelles, a new radio station has opened, and a new Internet Protocol TV is in operation.

I am also proud to note that Seychelles is starting to work on legislation on **access to information**, a right that is already provided for in our Constitution. We are well aware that freedom of information is an underpinning of democracy, and a key component of a transparent and accountable government. A National Stakeholder session was held in May 2015 to discuss the legislation, and a widely consultative approach is expected in moving forward with its development. Model laws and best practices from other States are also being actively studied.

Mr President,

The **drug problem** is a constantly changing phenomenon, one that my Government is battling on many fronts. Drug addiction affects all demographics – rich, poor, young and old.

Seychelles launched its third 'National Drug Control Master Plan' in 2014, which was developed in recognition of the need for a coherent and holistic national response in order to address the worrying trends of drug abuse, and other crimes that arise due to substance abuse.

Prevention is of course always better than a cure, and it is for this purpose that numerous public campaigns have been carried out, including the 'Crying Out' campaign, whereby primary school children designed posters about the effect of drug and alcohol abuse, which were used as part of awareness raising campaigns.

As a country and community, we are unwavering in our goal to not see more families broken and lives destroyed as a result of drugs. It is an ongoing fight, and we cannot afford to be complacent at any point.

Mr President,

The **HIV/AIDS** epidemic remains one of the major public health and developmental challenges in Seychelles. The need to promote and pursue policies in the most efficient and best targeted manner in order to effectively

address this disease is acknowledged. In this line, Seychelles has put in place a National AIDS Council to improve upon the national response to HIV/AIDS. The 'Test and Treat' Policy was also put in place in 2014, as part of the global strategy to reach zero deaths from HIV and AIDS infection by the year 2030.

**Health** education continues to be provided to children in school, and includes sex education. Sensitization sessions are organized by the Ministry of Health for young people on various topics, such as contraceptives, sexually transmitted diseases, together with screening opportunities.

Seychelles is also currently in the process of finalizing two documents – namely the 'National policy on Sexual and Reproductive Health' and the 'National Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health Policy', which aim to respond effectively to the various sexual health challenges of the country.

Mr President,

Seychelles remains committed to fostering non-discrimination and equality for **persons with disabilities**. For instance, our National Employment Policy put in place in 2014 promotes employment without discrimination, including for persons with disabilities. Job placement programmes, ensuring that workplaces are accessible, and that persons with disabilities receive equal pay for equal work are a few of the goals under this Policy.

My Government is also in the final stages of approving the 'National Policy and Strategic Framework for Disability', which seeks to empower persons with disabilities to claim their rights as citizens, and to change stereotypes regarding them.

We recognize that persons with disabilities cannot be hailed simply as heroes, nor as victims. That disabled does not mean unable. That their victories and challenges are our very own, and it is only by working together on an equal footing that we can address present shortcomings, and further the development of our nation.



Mr President,

Seychelles is well aware of the important role that an independent and effective **National Human Rights Institution** has to play, even in a democratic society such as ours which has great respect for the rule of law. As actors of positive change, such institutions are well placed to prevent and address potential human rights violations, and will complement our country's own efforts to improve rights of all persons.

In this view, my Government is currently in the process of reviewing the National Human Rights Commission and the Ombudsman Office of Seychelles, in order to strengthen both institutions. Seychelles looks forward to having a National Human Rights Institution which is fully Paris Principles compliant, and being 'A' accredited to the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

Mr President,

As Nelson Mandela famously said, "... no one truly knows a nation until one has been inside its jails. A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones". Seychelles' **penitentiary system** has made proud improvements, Mr President, and is a testament for the country's respect for human rights and dignity.

Refurbishments have been conducted on our main Prison, which now includes a medical facility, dental clinic, physiotherapy room, counseling and therapy room, auditorium, IT room, classroom, library, recording studio, gymnasium, bakery and laundry room. A mother-baby unit has been recently built, allowing mothers to keep their children with them at the prison until the age of eighteen months. A unit for vulnerable prisoners – such as those who are at risk of harm, persons with disabilities and elderly persons – is also under construction.

The ultimate aim of the prison system must be to return prisoners to society as people who are less likely to commit crime. Numerous measures have been put in place for this, including the 'Resettlement Day Release Programme', whereby

prisoners nearing their release date are allowed to work with screened companies for remuneration, which provides them with job experience and an employment reference. An 'Outreach Programme' also exists, whereby prisoners are allowed to leave the prison to do voluntary work in the community.

Mr President,

The Government of Seychelles is a strong supporter of the UN Human Rights mechanisms, and remains fully cooperative and committed to its processes.

Following recommendations received in our 2011 review under the UPR, I am proud to report that Seychelles issued a standing invitation to the **Special Procedures mechanism** of the UN in 2012. Since then, Seychelles received requests from two Special Rapporteurs to conduct a country visit, both of which Seychelles welcomed. In 2013, Seychelles hosted the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Mr Kishore Singh, and in 2014, Seychelles welcomes Ms Ngozi Ezeilo, Special Rapportuer on Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children. Both rapporteurs – whilst noting the high level of political will in the furthering of human rights – brought out the areas of concern and challenges that Seychelles should address, many recommendations which my Government is in the process of implementing.

Mr President,

In order to ensure that Seychelles' human rights treaty obligations, including its **reporting commitments**, are implemented effectively, the 'Seychelles Treaty Committee on Human Rights' was established in 2012. This coordinative Committee, composed of Governmental and non-governmental agencies, is primarily tasked to assist in the preparation of treaty reports, ensure the dissemination of treaties and treaty body recommendations, as well to promote the conformity of national laws with accepted human rights standards.

I am pleased to note that since our last review, Seychelles has submitted reports under the 'Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women', the 'Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities', and the

'Convention on the Protection of the rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families'. Reports under other treaty bodies are also being finalized.

The Committee is also charged with overseeing the development of a five year **National Action Plan on Human Rights**. Wide consultations with diverse stakeholders were held during the drafting of the Action Plan, and the Government of Seychelles is enthusiastic to have a roadmap on human rights that is specifically responsive to Seychelles context, needs and challenges. The development of the Plan has taken longer than expected, and the Government looks forward to its imminent adoption and implementation.

Mr President,

For a Small Island Nation made up of more blue ocean than brown and green earth, it is difficult for us to speak about human rights without making reference to the adverse impacts of **climate change** on our very right to exist.

In having the privilege to address you and all the distinguished delegations on this floor, I take the opportunity to present our most frantic call for the world to pay attention to the issue of the protection of the environment and especially the reduction of gas emissions, which is destroying the ecosystem of the world. This is a matter that must continue being formally and urgently addressed under the legal frameworks of the UN and the Human Rights Council.

The link between the environment, climate change and human rights is irrefutable. Climate change is a borderless issue, affecting the whole world – but SIDS, as well as cities and communities settled in low coastal areas, remain particularly vulnerable. We are drowning, Mr President, from the consequences arising out of a world that is not making climate change the highest priority that it must be. These are not metaphors, but a reality that the people of my country face. My Government will continue in its international campaign to bring awareness to the plight of climate change on our world and our precious islands.

As we assess and discuss fundamental human rights in forums such as the UPR,

as fragile human beings we must remember that the on-going destruction of our planet also needs critical attention. Nature will not wait for us, she is following her own course and her degradation will inevitably lead to the destruction of human society as we know it.

We have been proactive at the national level, creating a new governmental department for 'Climate Change and Energy', as well as putting in place numerous measures and projects to mitigate the effects of climate change in Seychelles, which include flood mitigation, increased drainage, and recharging sandbanks.

In recognizing our vast ocean territory and in order to realize the optimal potential of Seychelles' oceanic territory, Seychelles has been advocating the concept of the 'Blue Economy', which refers to those economic activities that directly or indirectly take place in the ocean and coastal areas, use outputs from the ocean, place goods and services into activities, and the contribution of those activities to economic growth, and social, cultural and environmental well-being. A new 'Blue Economy' Department has been established under the Governmental Structure to implement this goal.

Mr President,

As a country, we are incredibly proud of the significant strides that Seychelles has made in its aim towards the full realization of human rights for all persons. It is however recognized that genuine challenges remain. We remain dedicated to progress and improvement, which is the very reason we have been fully engaged with the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism. Frank and constructive dialogues with our fellow States are essential for our growth.

Such dialogues are also invaluable at the national level. We are very pleased to note that the National Human Rights Commission and Ombudsman's Office of Seychelles, as well as the Civil Engagement Platform Seychelles have made submissions in this UPR cycle. The Seychelles Government continues to encourage a balanced human rights discussion and debate in Seychelles, and

intends to continue working together with civil society and the National Human Rights Commission in Seychelles in the follow-up to today's dialogue.

Mr President,

I would like to conclude my remarks by extending our gratitude towards the UPR Secretariat and yourself, for the invaluable support provided to my delegation in the run-up towards this session.

I wish to also express our gratitude to the States who have submitted advance questions for our consideration, answers to which will be provided during our further interventions at this session.

I am looking forward to additional questions by all delegations and to the recommendations, of which we certainly hope to accept as many as possible. We are here to listen, learn, respond and, hopefully, contribute.

I thank you and look forward to our discussion.

